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In her recent study of the “Indian ghosts” that, she argues, haunt the American literary tradition, Renée L. Berglund proposes that “all stories are ghost stories,” if only insofar as all stories are told in words, and all words conjure something that is no longer present—and possibly never was. Perhaps because its object is so often language, much recent literary and cultural criticism invokes the notion of haunting to describe pasts that make themselves forcibly felt in the present, absences that still seem somehow present, things supposedly past but apparently still and endlessly insist upon mixing their business with that of the living.

In the shadow of the First World War, Sigmund Freud pioneered the underlying notion of the so-called return of the repressed. For Freud, this return initially occurred primarily within the individual mind—that of the subject, in 1917’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” who remains ambivalent toward the dead, or of the one who, in Freud’s later essay “The Uncanny” (1918), has never fully come to terms with forbidden desires. But the repressed also returns at the level of whole cultures, like the ones that Freud later depicted in *Totem and Taboo* (1918) which make enemies of their dead and thus doom themselves to be visited by those dead again and again in perpetuity. Freud’s distinctions between psychological and cultural models of haunting charted a theoretical divide that persists even now.

Common to both models—about which more anon—is a revenant of a stock ghost story formula, one in which the spirits of the dead return to impart the whereabouts of buried treasure, or to bring guilt to light. And yet the notion that ghosts turn up to expose what has been hidden is a distinctively modern one which goes hand in hand with the enlightened conviction that ghosts as such do not exist except figuratively. This conjunction shapes two influential efforts to account for modern conceptions of the apparition by the literary critics Stephen Greenblatt and Terry Castle. Greenblatt’s 2002 study *Hamlet in Purgatory* examined the figure of Hamlet’s dead father that literally stalks the wings of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Greenblatt found that the kind of ghost that he embodies (or does not)—the riddling specter who arouses tormenting ambivalence, stirs a sense of personal guilt, and simply will not be gone—came along at exactly the point where a longstanding relationship between the living and the dead collapsed. Roman Catholic theology and an accompanying, communal set of mourning practices and death rituals allowed it to be criterion...
“If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of ‘sublimity’ misses the mark. For it is not the ‘greatness,’ the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.”

T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
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editors’ note

Sitting down with last year’s editors-in-chief, we were quickly inducted by a speedy review of the bare necessities of Journal Publishing 101. This introduction included the conferral of the Criterion email account password—bonnechance. (Don’t worry, we have already changed the Criterion account’s password.) As we began, it certainly felt like we were going to need every last ounce of good luck as we faced the task of recruiting a completely new staff and soliciting submissions to continue the tradition of excellence that had been established in preceding years’ issues. Though what began with feeling like a journal that was going to take buckets-full of luck to publish, the successful publication of Criterion’s sixth edition materialized thanks to the personal efforts of our staff and authors.

Criterion is a volunteer journal. Staff and authors are neither fiscally compensated nor rewarded with college credit. Throughout the course of one semester, our staff has tirelessly spent hours every week in the reviewing, substantive editing, copyediting, and layout phases of the journal while juggling their own busy schedules of classes, work obligations, and other meaningful extracurricular activities. Beyond our staff, we owe a great deal of gratitude to our authors who have worked hard to meet deadlines and revise their work. This issue could not have happened without their and our staff’s dedicated efforts.

The bonnechance that Criterion first relied on as a fledgling journal in 2007 has since been transformed by previous editors’ investment into a foundation of success upon which we have built this issue. Thanks to their diligent efforts, this year has been one marked with growth. Criterion’s 2013 issue includes our
first author from outside of North America. The journal has grown so much that we plan to see Criterion’s annual issue turn into a biannual issue in the near future. We would like to extend thanks to last year’s editors-in-chief who created a fifty-page handbook on how successfully to publish a volume. We would also like to express our special thanks to Dr. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis from UC-Irvine for providing our forum prompt on haunted subjects and to Peter Leman for his advice and for his support in giving us free reign of the journal. A special thanks is owed especially to Joseph, for his expertise and rigorous effort in the copyediting and design phases of publication.

Brice Peterson and Joseph Post
The deterioration of the relationships between the members of the Bundren family in *As I Lay Dying* demonstrates that even those with much in common can become profoundly detached from one another. Beyond whatever cohesion that being a family would imply, the Bundrens are in close physical proximity throughout the majority of the novel and generally experience the same events and challenges. Instead of capitalizing on these similarities and drawing closer to each other for support, they become progressively estranged from one another. Ultimately, the relationships within the Bundren family, if not necessarily characterized by outright enmity, are certainly devoid of sympathy. Their reaction is paradoxical: if “sympathy” is “the quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other;” then one would expect that these corresponding conditions would produce feelings of sympathy between them (“sympathy,” def 3b). But such is not the case with the Bundrens, who find
themselves all but estranged from each other at the close of the novel. Their dysfunctional relationships are a product of an interesting psychological paradox: shared experience may but does not always foster sympathy; traumatic experience, when combined with repression, poor communication, and conflicting psychological states, can render individuals less capable of feeling sympathy even for those who share their plight.

**Repression**

Psychological research indicates that trauma that is shared between people may result in their alienation from each other rather than increased sympathy and connection. A study published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* indicates that at times, such as in the wake of the death of a family member, “marital relationships are strained beyond repair . . . and that family stability is deleteriously affected by bereavement. . . . High rates of marital breakup are reported following childhood cancer fatalities . . . as well as the sudden death of a child by drowning” (Sorenson et al.).

Cases where relationships worsen do so in spite of the fact that each party supposedly experiences similar circumstantial grief. The article, however, also indicates that many relationships actually strengthen in the face of trauma and that at times “the death or serious illness of a family member may enhance communication and closeness among surviving members” (Sorenson et al.). The enhanced closeness supported by Sorenson stems in part from the phenomenon of sympathy, as people are drawn together by “similar or corresponding” feelings due to their mutual condition (“Sympathy,” def 3b). This study indicates that the loss of a child apparently causes marital relationships “to polarize, that is, improve or worsen considerably” (Sorenson et al.). What, then, are the factors that alternatively cause both increases and decreases in sympathy? A closer look at the Bundrens—who epitomize dysfunction and lack of sympathy, as will later be shown—suggests some answers.

The Bundrens, faced with polarizing pressures, gravitate towards dysfunction in the face of traumatic experience, in part because of the phenomenon of “repression,” one of Sigmund Freud’s psychological theories. Though Faulkner himself denies Freud’s influence, Freudian theory cannot be ignored in the reading of Faulkner’s work. John T. Irwin maintains that Faulkner’s denial only proves that “at some point the similarities in their work seemed great
enough (either to Faulkner himself or to readers who questioned him about those similarities) to make a denial of that influence seem worthwhile” (Irwin 5). He further lists more than a dozen Freudian ideas that crop up in Faulkner’s work (Irwin 6). Included on this list is the theory of repression, a Freudian coping mechanism, which is seen repeatedly throughout As I Lay Dying. This psychological phenomenon becomes a factor that helps destroy the Bundrens’ sympathy.

To understand the connection between repression and sympathy, one must understand the ostensible effects of repression. Alvin F. Poussaint, a former Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, published an article in Ebony magazine with the intent of instructing the magazine’s lay readership on how to healthily cope with tragedy. The first of his suggestions is to avoid “hold[ing] back all emotion,” or to avoid emotional repression (Poussaint 98). His article opens with a description of two families who experienced the unexpected death of a family member. Again, this has a polarizing effect: in one case, Poussaint reports increased mutual love and support; in another case, their grief sparked hostility, violence, and divorce. “Paradoxically,” he states, “a disaster that draws one family closer together may tear another family apart” (Poussaint 95). This is because a repressive coping strategy inhibits sympathy. Denying, ignoring, or avoiding one’s emotions will prevent one from acknowledging that others share those feelings; alternately, when people misrepresents their emotions, it can be hard for others to recognize that they each have feelings in common. Among the examples of repression in the text, Cash Bundren proves the most extreme. Shortly after the death of his mother, Addie, Cash is afforded the opportunity to take a chapter into his own hands; he may narrate the story, describe his feelings, or explain his thoughts freely. Indeed, previous chapters give the reader a basis to expect such helpful exposition. His contribution begins with one summarizing declaration of his thoughts and feelings: “I made it on the bevel.” This is followed by an equally unenlightening enumeration of reasons why he made his mother’s coffin “on the bevel” (Faulkner 82). This phrase, with its personal pronoun, its emphasis on the pedestrian aspects of his work, and its absence of descriptors of emotion, points to emotional repression. His list-like exposition demonstrates a mind being methodically trained away from grief and towards neutral, non-emotional facts.

A later chapter again demonstrates Cash’s repressive tendencies. Following both his near-drowning and the breaking of his leg, Cash provides us only with this fragmented thought: “It wasn’t on a balance. I told them that if they wanted
it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to” (Faulkner 165). The tone is reminiscent of a parent vindicated by some minor and predicted misfortune that befalls a heedless child. Again we see the pattern of obvious and immediate pain being consciously ignored and repressed in favor of trifling details. This comes through apparent mental effort, as indicated by the repetitive, deliberate nature of his explanation. Anger and frustration find no expression in Cash’s chapter—much less the excruciating pain of breaking a leg. The intense trauma of these two events rules out the possibility that Cash is simply unaffected emotionally by them; rather, he is repressing his emotions.

Dysfunctional Communication

Another factor that contributes to the absence of sympathy is an inability to communicate functionally and openly. If sympathy consists of recognizing that others share one’s feelings, then the ability to communicate emotion becomes critical; if feelings and perspectives are not communicated, they cannot be recognized as sympathetic. The dearth of sympathy between the Bundrens stems in part from a failure to accomplish the exchange of emotion that is necessary when facing a traumatic experience. Early in the novel, Darl and Dewey Dell have a brief dialogue that demonstrates the scarcity of emotion in their communication:

“What do you want, Darl?” I say.
“She is going to die,” he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.
“When is she going to die?” I say.
“Before we get back,” he says.
“Then why are you taking Jewel?” I say.
“I want him to help me load,” he says. (Faulkner 27–28)

Note the repetition of the verb “to say,” which implies no emotion whatsoever, and the absence of descriptors—whether applied to the characters and their state, how they “say” the lines, or their reactions to what is said. Furthermore, Darl’s response to Dewey Dell’s question evades being an actual answer. Where Dewey Dell wants to know why Darl would rob his brother of his last moments with his mother, Darl answers as if she only wanted to know what he needed him for. These instances of miscommunication illuminate the
isolation that the Bundrens experience in the latter end of the novel; their failure to communicate emotions makes sympathetic connection difficult.

Indeed, the Bundrens are scarcely capable of meaningful communication whatsoever. Later in the novel, Dewey Dell records the following dialogue, which reveals the Bundrens’ mental remoteness:

“Why didn’t we go to New Hope, pa? Vardaman says. “Mr. Samson said we was, but we done passed the road.”

Darl says, “Look, Jewel.” But he is not looking at me. He is looking at the sky. The buzzard is as still as if he were nailed to it. . . .

“Look, Jewel,” Darl says. Jewel sits on his horse like they were both made out of wood, looking straight ahead.

I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God. (Faulkner 122)

None of these statements are even acknowledged by the intended listener. If these words and thoughts were read in turn by actors, it would sound more like a radio flipping through stations than a coherent conversation. Vardaman’s question goes unanswered and unacknowledged. Darl asks Jewel to look, and Jewel does not look. Dewey Dell herself betrays total mental disengagement from the conversation: her invoking the name of God comes as a random and desperate interjection against a calm backdrop. These characters’ inability to communicate even functional ideas isolates them from one another. Effective communication especially binds together traumatized individuals, for if their communication reveals common ground, they become better able to find the sympathetic support that trauma leaves them seeking. The passage above displays the Bundrens’ unfortunate struggle to communicate anything at all. While John Earl Basset identifies “the isolation of the individual [and] human communication” as two of the major themes of the novel (125), one could argue that it is in fact the Bundrens’ poor communication that causes such isolation.

Conflicting Psychological States

But the root of the Bundrens’ sympathy deficiency goes deeper than either the theory of repression or even struggles of communication—even if the Bundrens had been able to communicate, sympathy requires communication of corresponding emotions, and the Bundrens have little by way of common
emotional ground. Faulkner employs the technique of multiple narration to accentuate the differences between each character’s emotional state. Early in the novel, just before Addie’s death, Faulkner allows the reader a rare glimpse into the mind of Jewel. His bitterness and anger have a flame-like intensity, so hot that his mental and emotional foundations begin to melt. He becomes irrational, deciding that his mother will die “because [Cash] stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that [expletive] box” (Faulkner 14). Here, Jewel demonstrates a reversal of cause and effect—he is convinced that somehow Addie is dying only for the sake of filling the coffin Cash is making. This backwards logic results from and attests to the strength of Jewel’s emotions, which overpowers his capacity for rational thought. His language, which features hammers, saws, and curse words, is violent and vindictive. This violence surfaces again in his fantasy about “rolling the rocks down the hill at [his family’s] faces,” which displays the cataclysmic impact of his mother’s state on his psyche; to destroy his family’s faces is to violently destroy all that is recognizable and familiar in a world that has become so painful for him (Faulkner 15). Addie’s impending demise affects Jewel’s emotions with all the subtlety of a hurricane.

Dewey Dell, on the other hand, demonstrates an antithetical reaction to Addie’s death. In Jewel’s brief turn as narrator, he mentions that Dewey Dell is stationed beside her dying mother to fan her. Though her mother’s death rapidly approaches and despite her physical proximity to her mother, Dewey’s thoughts could not be further from her mother or her illness. Her first internal monologue mentions the fact that her mother was nearing death only in passing, and her narration instead focuses on a memory of a sexual encounter with a man named Lafe (Faulkner 26). The critical aspect of the chapter lies in what is notably absent: any hint that she is emotionally affected by her mother’s imminent death. This appears to be not so much repression as apathy. While Dewey Dell and Jewel share a circumstance—the death of their mother—their feelings and perspectives are in stark contrast. The psychological states of Jewel and Dewey Dell are too different to allow them to sympathize with each other. Sympathy would require them to be experiencing and communicating “similar or corresponding” feelings, feelings that do not exist between the two of them. Because their perspectives are so disparate, perhaps irreconcilably so, the momentous experiences they have together do not lead to compatible feelings between them.
Absence of Sympathy

While the Bundrens are by no means a model functional family at the beginning of the novel, the tension caused by each successive traumatic event—Addie’s illness, her death, the disastrous river crossing, the barn fire caused by Darl—even further exacerbates these differences. More trauma creates more negative feelings, which leads in turn to higher levels of repression in those individuals with repressive tendencies. Greater difficulties require greater cooperation and communication to resolve, and since the Bundrens communicate so poorly, each problem only increases the difference between the needed and the actual communication. Similarly, as the Bundrens tend to display incongruous perspectives, each unfortunate twist in their fate adds another layer to the barrier of perspective that secludes them. Thus, instead of providing the family with material with which to forge a sympathetic understanding and unity, their traumatic experiences only pull them further apart.

This effect culminates in the disturbing lack of sympathy that the Bundrens display in the closing scenes of the novel. The Bundrens undergo a complete deterioration of family ties. When Darl is overtaken by the men who will institutionalize him, he is actually subdued by his family rather than protected. Though Cash attempts to rationalize that this is necessary in order to prevent their being sued, his later statement that the loss of his brother to a distant institution is “a shame, in a way,” speaks volumes of his and his family’s lack of sympathy (Faulkner 234). His diction suggests a tragedy of the same magnitude of a picnic getting rained on; applying the same diction to the insanity and irretrievable loss of a sibling is chilling in its inhumanity.

Anse is another prime example of the absence of sympathy. In his dealings with Cash and Dewey Dell late in the novel, Anse earns his reputation as “one of Faulkner’s most accomplished villains” (Brooks 154). He is perhaps the least capable of sympathy of the Bundrens. His decision to treat Cash’s leg with concrete saves a few dollars for Anse, and costs Cash “sixty-odd square inches of skin” (Faulkner 240). He disregards the passionate pleas of Dewey Dell that he should not take the money given to her by Lafe to pay for an abortion. Her desperate refrain of “Pa. Pa,” is ignored each of the four times it is uttered, and Anse takes the money. With it, he purchases himself false teeth, a symbol of his self-absorption (Faulkner 256–257). Brooks’ opinion that Anse’s “callousness and cruelty” is “essential,” or part of his very character, is problematic (155). Anse’s examples of cruelty come in the middle and later stages of the novel,
indicating that Anse is a dynamic character who becomes less sympathetic—as much toward others as in the eyes of the reader—as he experiences the various traumatic events in the novel. This viewpoint is supported by Rita Rippetoe, who maintains that Anse “has been distorted by the effects of [his] specific afflictions” (314). Indeed, each member of the Bundren family becomes distorted by their afflictions, leading ultimately to apathy, cruelty, and even insanity—but never sympathy.

Conclusion

As I Lay Dying demonstrates the fact that shared conditions do not always have the effect of attracting or pulling people towards each other. Thus, even though experiencing a tragedy with another person generally increases the sympathy between the parties, traumatic events may also do the opposite. If an absence of interpersonal affinity exists between two or more people, such occurrences and conditions will more than likely drive them apart from each other rather than unify them. The Bundrens’ repression, poor communication, and inharmonious psychological states ultimately lead them to states of great isolation and apathy towards each other. The colloquial expression “make or break” aptly describes the effect that great adversity has on groups of people: either the relationships will be made more unified due to greater measures of sympathy and understanding, or they will be broken apart—like the Bundrens—as their differences become too great to reconcile.
Works Cited


“artes that been curious”

Questions of Magic and Morality in Chaucer’s “The Franklin’s Tale”

Kaitlin Coats

Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Franklin’s Tale” treats its magical events at one moment with unquestioning faith in their reality and at the next with insistent doubt, at one moment as “artes that been curious” and at the next as “nat worth a flye” (1120, 1132). The tale’s events repeatedly cause us to question magic’s validity: after her husband, Arveragus, leaves to pursue honor abroad, Dorigen snubs the pining Aurelius by invoking the absolute nonexistence of magic. She’ll love him, she tells Aurelius facetiously, if he can make the black rocks off the Breton coast disappear and thus ensure the safe return of Arveragus’s ship. Yet the plot’s climax, in which the rocks do actually disappear from view, attests that Aurelius’s literal interpretation of Dorigen’s comment does not accept the possibility of the occult without reason. The rocks vanish, but the means by which they do so is unclear: Aurelius calls upon the gods and their astrological powers while his brother asks a scholar for help. Neither the Franklin nor Chaucer himself ever indicates whether either of these magical methods proves effective. Although magic drives the plot, Chaucer never lets us
know the nature of the magic in the tale. In the case of the disappearing rocks, is what we see what we get?

Many have attempted to explain the rocks’ disappearance, but the question has not yet been put to rest by any semblance of critical consensus. J. S. P. Tatlock, one of the first to look carefully at the magic of “The Franklin’s Tale,” dedicates himself to the astrological details of the rocks’ disappearance without bothering to prove the act legitimately magical to begin with. Later critics hesitate to validate the magical disappearance so quickly: D. W. Robertson (276) and Chauncey Wood (245–59) believe that Aurelius’s prayer for the rocks to be covered by a high tide (1055–61) is what actually causes the rocks to disappear, while Anthony Luengo goes so far as to brand the magic a mechanically engineered stage performance. No theory has yet had the clarity to settle the problem of the vanishing rocks. In fact, medieval Europeans themselves could not easily solve magical problems. Historian Richard Kieckhefer holds that the nuances in the various classifications of magic were complex enough to produce a general hesitation among the lettered class either to support or to condemn magic completely (16–17). Medieval Europe hardly knew what to make of a practice defined by mystery, and Chaucer, ever the trickster, does more to aggravate that frustration than to put it to rest.

The range of answers in both medieval and modern scholarship ought to cause us to reconsider the nature of Chaucer’s treatment of the magical question. It seems to me that Chaucer’s magic is self-consciously confusing. Examining the turbulent collection of medieval attitudes toward magic and the various types of magic that elicited those attitudes will illuminate Chaucer’s magical confusion as a purposefully organic rendering of his world. Therefore, I will begin with a brief historical analysis of medieval magic before moving to its fictional analogue in “The Franklin’s Tale.” After establishing Chaucer’s indistinct treatment of magic, I will examine how it generates a mistrust of supposed natural reality, which lends itself to the questioning of another assumed reality, namely, the tale’s ethical scheme. Thus, I argue, Chaucer transplants magical dichotomies from his social milieu into the setting, characters, and action of “The Franklin’s Tale,” deliberately vacillating between belief and skepticism, truth and illusion, and nature and sorcery; with that vacillation, Chaucer creates a divide between perception and reality, which in turn undermines the tale’s purported moral system.

The root of the tale’s moral and magical questions is its tangled cultural backdrop, for magic was unstable and difficult to define and a major source
of questioning in Chaucer's world. Kieckhefer conceives of medieval magic as a series of “crossroads” between religion and science, popular culture and learned culture, and fiction and reality (1), a scheme that suggests the scope of magical influence. Perhaps medieval magic’s most central polarity, though, was that between good and evil. Good magic was commonly termed “magyk natureel” since it aligned itself with the natural world. In this scheme, the spheres of the universe were thought to impart healing and other constructive powers on certain natural objects. Scientifically and astrologically inclined types of “magyk natureel” might rely on God as nothing more than the coincidental mover of the spheres. Other varieties leaned on divine power more directly: many incantations were expressed in prayer, or at least in magical mixes of religious-sounding language. The Wolfsthurn handbook, a medieval household management guide, includes this chant for removing a speck from someone’s eye, adopted from a legend of Saint Nicasius: “Thus I adjure you, O speck, by the living God and the holy God, to disappear from the eyes of the servant of God N., whether you are black, red, or white. May Christ make you go away. Amen” (qtd. in Kieckhefer 3). Evidently, the line between magic and miracle was blurry, at best. In such innocent practices of magic, people could remedy their problems in harmony with God, science, and nature. Yet just as God had the spiritual power to produce good in conjunction with people's magical practices, so did evil forces have the power to derail that system and influence nature themselves. The practitioner of evil magic—who, in theory, could be anyone at all—had only to invoke a demon correctly in order to make it do his or her bidding. The so-called Munich handbook contains sinister formulae for practices such as obtaining a woman’s love or sparking hatred among friends, both of which rely on the conjuring of demons in elaborate and sometimes gory procedures (Kieckhefer 7). Two relatively similar magical guides, then, could invoke drastically different powers, all of which fall under the realm of medieval magic.

Medieval Europeans called the differences between these powers into question much more than they did the reality of supernatural events. There were, of course, mechanical tricks and staged productions of magic, but in the medieval mind the truly suspect magical act had the possibility of being not deceptive, but demonic. While ceremonies like those of the Wolfsthurn and Munich handbooks made their involvement with God or demons explicit, others identified directly with neither; more often than not, people simply guessed whether a supernatural event was good or evil. The ambiguity of some magical
practices left many people unsure how to tap into the opportunities that “magyk natureel” afforded without risking demonic magic along the way. In the early Middle Ages, magic was almost exclusively associated with demons (Flint 13). Even for St. Augustine, whose conversion to Christianity centered around a supernatural voice telling him to “take up and read” scripture (Confessions 152), all magic was demonic:

For people attempt to make some sort of a distinction between practitioners of illicit arts, who are to be condemned, classing those as “sorcerers” (the popular name for this kind of thing is “black magic”) and others whom they are prepared to regard as praiseworthy, attributing to them the practice of “theurgy.” In fact both types are engaged in the fraudulent rites of demons, wrongly called angels. (City of God 383)

For Augustine, in other words, there was no good magic, only evil magic; any unnatural and unexplainable act by humans was pure witchcraft rather than a miracle, a supernatural event explainable by the fact that it originated solely from God. Most followed Augustine’s views in the early Middle Ages; slowly, however, as scientific knowledge amassed, people began to shed their skepticism in favor of curiosity. As they wondered what sorts of benevolent divine powers could be tapped into via human interactions with the created world, medieval Europeans began to accept that “magyk natureel,” supernatural events occurring at the hands of humans rather than directly from God, could be valid (Kieckhefer 12). Gradually, magic made its way into areas of religious practice and even academic study, but its demonic shades never completely departed. While popular consensus allowed for belief in “magyk natureel,” intellectuals agreed only begrudgingly, cautious not to overlook any danger of demonic influence (Kieckhefer 16–17). Medieval Europeans considered every supernatural event explainable—by God, by demons, or, occasionally, by trickery—but the trouble was working out the specifics of explanation. The divide between divine and demonic in the magical framework left most confused.

This uncertainty about magic surfaces in “The Franklin’s Tale” even at a simple scan of the plot. Aurelius raises the issue of magic versus miracle by pleading to the gods; his brother introduces the issue of actual disappearance versus illusion by hiring a clerk; the gods and the clerk present the issue of divine versus demonic by being dual forces. Chaucer strives to prove that the rocks disappear through “magyk natureel,” but he leaves none of these proofs unmatched by hints of illegitimacy. Language, character, setting, astrology, and
Chaucer’s language manifests the magical question within the magician’s identity. Consider, for example, his epithets: some are decidedly negative, particularly Aurelius’s brother’s reference to magicians as “tregetoures” (1141), which reduces the clerk’s magic to mere courtly entertainment: “For ofte at feestes have I wel herd seye / That tregetours withinne an halle large / Have maad come in a water and a barge” (1142–1144). If the magic is just an amusing trick, the magician is just a jester. Yet, repeatedly calling him a “philosophre” and a “clerk” (1561, 1119), the Franklin gives the magician a subtle association with learning and theological knowledge. From such a trustworthy character, how could the magic disappearance of the rocks be perceived as either counterfeit or demonic? Luengo finds a way. He claims that the terms “philosophre” and “clerk,” when placed alongside the term “magicien” (1184, 1241), “reflect the Franklin’s inability to distinguish between scientific and supernatural skills” (4). Considering the sheer number of times these titles are used, it seems clear that they are Chaucer’s means of drawing attention to the academic tone of the magic. However, Luengo’s analysis indicates the range of interpretive possibility implicit in the tale. We have here an example of the confusion that the dichotomies in medieval magic caused and, evidently, still cause. We cannot be sure whether the Franklin believes the magician to be a knowledgeable practitioner of his supernatural art, a misguided student dabbling in science, or a mere entertainer.

Chaucer further aggravates the question of the magician’s character by giving him a position at the university at Orléans, a major fourteenth-century center for the study of astronomy (1118, n.). The university provides the perfect setting for hiring the clerk: it links to the controlled, sanctioned astrological study of “magyk natureel,” but not to its demonic underbelly. Furthermore, the magician is not alone in his endeavors, nor does he embark upon those endeavors with less-than-noble intent: “yonge clerkes that been lykerous / To reden artes that been curious / Seken in every halke and every herne / Particuler sciences for to lerne” (1119–1122). Whether magic is among the “sciences” that the university has officially sanctioned, however, is not so clear after all, for Aurelius’s brother recalls that his old classmate “Al were he there to lerne another craft, / Hadde prively upon his desk ylaft [a book of magic]” (1127–1128). The image of a young
man secretly hunched over something like the Munich handbook by night is not reassuring, whether he is the same clerk who executes the disappearance of the rocks or not. The university’s location, too, incriminates it. According to Kathryn L. Lynch, “The Franklin’s Tale” has something of the exotic unknown in its far-away setting: “[I]n this tale Orleans to the south comes to represent a world not that far from the Muslim world of the more distant Middle East, a source of relativism and illusion—of ‘monstre’ or ‘merveille’ (line 1344) that can temporarily obscure even the most solid rocks of home” (547). By its invocation of the unnatural and menacing picture of the non-Christian East that was so common to the medieval English mind, the university at Orléans devolves from a solid institution of learning to a source of the darkly mysterious.

Just as we may question whether Orléans actually aligns itself with the Christian God, we may likewise feel theological pause from the circumstances leading up to the moment the rocks disappear. The tale’s pagan setting prevents it from working entirely within Christianity, but the way in which Aurelius beseeches Phoebus to influence the planets suggests that Aurelius adheres to a theological system almost identical to medieval England’s. We need only to substitute “God” for “Apollo” and “Phoebus” in order to see that Aurelius’s prayer is perfectly devout:

He seyde, “Appollo, god and governour
Of every plaunte, herbe, tree, and flour,
That yevest, after thy declinacion,
To ech of hem his tyme and his seson,
As thyn herberwe chaungeth lowe or heighe,
Lord Phebus, cast thy merciable eighe
On wrecche Aurelie, which that am but lorn.” (1031–1037)

Aurelius’s prayer cites divine control over the earth, a tenet central to “magyk natureel.” The very fact that the prayer comes to fruition by the end of the tale suggests to an audience of medieval European Christians that the true power behind the action is the Christian God, thinly veiled under the name “Apollo,” but veiled nonetheless. Again, the setting is pagan, which would have produced some discomfort in a medieval European audience. In a cultural context in which people were nervous to engage in magic before being certain of its position within the Christian God’s control, the total lack of the Christian God in Aurelius’s plea is wildly uncomfortable. Most disturbingly, his request is not
granted until a magician enters the process; the prayer does not see fulfillment without human aid.

Note that every assuring magical detail has its carefully matched correlative doubt. At this point, it is clear that “The Franklin’s Tale” presents the magical problem without a solution. Chaucer provides us with this magical question as a lens through which to view the moral choices of his characters. Chaucer’s brand of magic is volatile; it teaches us never to trust what we see in the world. Just as in the case of magic, morality in “The Franklin’s Tale” is designed to provoke an endless strain of questions that destabilize the world of reality that is physical and reality that is contingent on promises. Through the language of magic, illusion, and perception, Chaucer draws our attention to the ethical implications of a landscape in which rocks can disappear by uncertain means.

The major ethical decisions of the characters in “The Franklin’s Tale” elevate “gentilesse,” or nobility and graciousness, and the keeping of one’s “trouthe,” or promise, as the figureheads of the tale’s moral scheme. Dorigen and Arveragus begin the tale with their marriage vows, pledging their “trouthe” that they will be equally dominant over and subservient to each other—Aurelius will be her master in appearance, but nothing more (744–759). Dorigen fulfills her role as a dutiful spouse by lamenting her husband’s departure to seek honor abroad and worrying about his safe return (806–821). When Aurelius approaches as a supplicant for her love, Dorigen spurns him with her promise that she will love him provided that he remove the “grisly feendly rokkes blake” (868) that threaten the safe return of her husband. Albeit facetiously, Dorigen has pledged her “trouthe” (998), and Aurelius takes this offer seriously; hence, the disappearance of the rocks. Dorigen finds herself caught between two “trouthes,” sworn to both marriage and adultery. Arveragus tells his wife to follow through with her promise to Aurelius—for “Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” (1479)—but forbids her from letting anyone find out what she has done (1472–1486). Aurelius, however, desiring to act with the same level of “gentilesse” that he sees in Arveragus’s actions and in Dorigen’s commitment to her promise to Aurelius, pledges his “trouthe” not to hold Dorigen to her word (1526–1544); with a parallel act of “gentilesse” the magician forgives Aurelius of his debt for the rocks’ disappearance (1607–1619). Thus, each character contributes to the ethical makeup of “The Franklin’s Tale” by upholding its pillars of “trouthe”-keeping and “gentilesse.”

But in a world in which even solid, sturdy rocks can disappear, how much do promises mean? And when magic’s theological inclination is suspect, how
can an act be deemed moral or immoral with any confidence? In light of the uncertainty of magic, then, the tale’s moral “reality” comes into question. In their adherence to their pledges of “trouthe,” the characters of “The Franklin’s Tale” give heed only to the surface-level words of a promise and not to the intentions behind it; they give heed, in other words, to a promise’s appearance rather than to its reality. The Franklin’s brand of “gentilesse” similarly embodies the magical ethos of perception versus reality. Each character that performs a “gentil” act does so solely in order to be perceived as “gentil”—in fact, the whole incident of the tale’s telling is born of a desire to assert “gentilesse,” for Chaucer himself, in “The Squires Tale,” has just been challenged by the Host of the pilgrimage to Canterbury, “Straw for youre gentilesse!” (695) Thus “trouthe” and “gentilesse” seem to be deeply concerned with appearances, but, as the characters have learned through their experiences with the disappearing rocks, appearance often has very little to do with reality.

Dorigen’s moral reality crumbles most significantly under the question of magic. In her over-fastidious “trouthe”-keeping, she shows a tendency to relate only to what is immediate; it is by this literal reading of the world that she allows her marriage to suffer for a joke and her happiness to dwindle at the sight of the rocks. Because she reacts to what is nearest to her, she relies on her perception of the external world for her contentment. The rocks form both the center of her despair, as physical manifestations of the danger that might threaten Arveragus, and the foundation of her trust, as the objects on which her flippant promise relies. Lamenting the creation of the rocks, Dorigen accuses God in “The Franklin’s Tale,” saying, “Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde [the creation of rocks] destroyeth?” (876), expecting divine purpose to be manifest in her physical surroundings. Dorigen attempts, as Carolyn Collette notes, “to project her world view, literally her sublunar perception of the nature of things, into the realm of eternal stability” (398). Later, when the disappearance of the rocks proves the world illusory, Dorigen’s reality unravels. Her reliance on her perception makes her as unstable as the disappearing rocks on which she fixates.

With linguistic delicacy, Chaucer solidifies Dorigen’s ethics as a question of perception versus reality. Collette observes a heavy dose of perception-related words highlighting Dorigen’s too-literal reading of the world. For example, it is the sight of the rocks and the ships—not the abstract thought of her husband in danger—that leads her to lament:

Another tyme ther wolde she sitte and thynke,
And caste hir eye dounward fro the brynke.
But whan she saugh the grisly rokkes blake,
For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake
That on hire feet she myghte hire noght sustene.
Thanne wolde she sitte adoun upon the grene,
And pitously into the see biholde. (857–863, emphasis added)

When Dorigen sets her eyes on the “rokkes blake,” her sorrow starts anew. Although Arveragus has already been absent for a time, only the physical perception of the rocks, the sign of the potential dangers her husband may encounter, consummates her fear.

W. Bryant Bachman, Jr. attributes Dorigen’s sight-based cares to her connection to Boethian philosophy, a fitting analysis, since her speech in lines 865 to 892 harks directly to Book 4 of the *Consolation of Philosophy* (865–893, n.). Boethius, who believes we must find happiness internally rather than from the outside world, provides an alternative to Dorigen’s sorrow that she simply cannot grasp. Bachman sees the entire external world as an illusion in Boethian philosophy: one may never trust that what appears to be reality is, in fact, reality, for Fortune may redirect her course at any time. So, to Bachman, “the narrative’s action, the emotional force of Dorigen’s fear for her husband’s safety, and its philosophical Boethian demand to transcend the very limitations that define man as man, to disbelieve, if necessary, the evidence of one’s own senses” (60) create the ethical tension in “The Franklin’s Tale.” Because Dorigen’s grief depends on how the rocks appear physically, fearing that the rocks may eventually vanish causes her not to trust quickly in whatever happens to be before her eyes.

It is significant that the central image of the magical dichotomy is also the center of Dorigen’s dilemma: Chaucer uses the rocks as a passage between the worlds of magical and moral instability. In light of Bachman’s argument, a transformation occurs when Dorigen discovers that the rocks have disappeared, contrary to her reliance on the illusion of the physical world. Chaucer uses an intentionally magical phrase to convey the irony of the episode: “she astoned stood” (1339). Thus, in a way, Dorigen herself becomes “stone”. Dorigen has turned into her own hindrance, as the black rocks were before. This magical transfer of stone from the rocks to Dorigen herself mirrors Dorigen’s recognition of the shift of moral responsibility from the rocks to her own character. When Aurelius brings news of the rocks’ disappearance and Dorigen’s belief in physical stability is thereby shattered, she is forced to realize the Boethian
criterion

philosophy that only one’s own attitude, not the external world, can give—or limit—happiness. Fittingly, Dorigen at this moment does not actually see the clear coast with her eyes or rely on her view of the world to understand the truth. She is now the “monstre” and “mervaylle”; she is the one “agayns the proces of nature” (ll.1344–1345). In one ironic moment, the responsibility has shifted onto her shoulders. The “astoned” pun situates what Dorigen considers the cause of her sadness within her personal agency. Thus, the language of the tale’s magical event unravels Dorigen’s seemingly virtuous actions.

Arveragus, like his wife, draws heavily on perception rather than reality for his contentment. In Arveragus’s case, though, he relies on others’ perception of him. When Arveragus decides to leave in order “[t]o seke in armes worship and honour,” the Franklin tells us that “al his lust he sette in swich labour” (ll.811–812); evidently, for Arveragus, reputation comes first. So it is that Arveragus keeps “the name of soveraynetee,” despite his promise of subservience to his wife, “for shame of his degree” (ll.751–752) and that, when Dorigen’s rash promise puts their marriage in jeopardy later, Arveragus pairs her “trouthe”-keeping with secret-keeping:

I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,
That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
To no wight telle thou of this aventure—
As I may best, I wol my wo endure—
Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,
That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse. (ll. 1481–1486)

Through this threat of death to his wife, should she let anyone know of her forced relationship with Aurelius, Arveragus reveals just how important it is to him that his cuckoldry stay secret. His attention is too focused on his public appearance, allowing his decisions to revolve around the reputation his marriage gives him rather than his private interactions with his wife. Arveragus’s commitment to his wife’s “trouthe,” although holding to the tale’s apparent moral system, therefore involves little character or dedication to ethics.

Arveragus attempts to solve the moral dilemma of his wife’s double promise by executing a sort of magic trick of his own, making the blemish in his marriage disappear from public view. The theme of perception versus reality, so prevalent in the language of magic, makes its way into the marriage narrative as well. The pact in the beginning, in which Arveragus promises Dorigen that he will treat her as an equal, seems—only seems—in the best interest of the
husband and wife. The Franklin unconsciously brings in the language of sight to point out that this marriage may not be quite what it seems: “Heere may men seen an humble, wys accord” (791). What the public cannot see is the discord that comes from the later breaking of this agreement. In Aurelius’s mind, the marriage pact is designed to seem stable; but the rocks seemed stable, too, and they have disappeared. Through magic, Chaucer shows us that the “gentilesse” of an honor-seeking knight cannot be the full makeup of moral truth.

In “The Franklin’s Tale,” Chaucer brings us to a morality whose definition is as elusive as that of magic. The characters’ decisions, just as magical acts, might be genuine or feigned, good or evil. The uncertainty of magic brings moral depth to each character’s situation, showing that the first layer of perception is not always the truest or most upright. We may also come to this realization through the act itself of reading the tale. Its narration and ending presents a cheery veneer that suggests that all is well. But the tale is not quite as simple as it proclaims itself to be. Rather, it presents a complex chain of contradictions, designed specifically to lurk threateningly underneath the surface. If we aren’t looking closely, we might miss the uncomfortable details, such as Arveragus’s death threat to his wife. By the end, in which every character experiences an unnatural and hastily-constructed happy ending, we have learned, like Dorigen, to trust ourselves, rather than the artificial resolution of the tale, for moral reality.
Works Cited


To consider the poetry of William Wordsworth alongside photography first comes off as a mismatched proposal since Wordsworth wrote the bulk of his material several decades before Daguerre formally introduced the photographic process to the public. Beyond being bound historically, the bulk of Wordsworth’s poems, with their emphasis on imagination and the central role of nature appear to share none of the qualities typically attributed to the photograph. Moreover, the consideration of photography as a scientific art makes it seem further removed from the conceptual handiwork of the Romantics. Despite these barriers to bridging the photographic with the poetic, Wordsworth elicits profound connections to the pre-photographic desire to arrest images from life that pervaded the late eighteenth century. As I will explain, Wordsworth’s selecting and fixing of images in his poetry shares more than
just the complicated subjective stance of the photographic medium. It also shares many of the same epistemological concerns, such as fetishizing memory, abstracting visual experience, and evading stylized subject matter in favor of telling human spectacles. Furthermore, I plan to proceed in a more focused direction by looking at two texts, “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” and The Prelude, and how these scene-capturing poems represent an appropriative act prompted by the photographic impulse. I will also examine how the photographic processes that Wordsworth uses in each poem lead to a visually-prompted transcendence of the self, or, in some cases within The Prelude, the failure to transcend when the visual memories, or “phantoms of conceit,” defy complete mastery via the medium of words.

The Photographic Impulse and Its Processes

One of the challenges that arises with placing Wordsworth photographically, is the tendency of critics to place him alongside painting and its picturesque proponents, such as William Gilpin and J. M. W. Turner. While Wordsworth’s critics tend to be divided about the influence that the picturesque movement held over his early poetic ideologies, many agree that the rugged picturesque landscapes—which became pictorial emblems of the Burkean sublime and the beautiful—played a substantial part in forming his notions of the visual (Smith). But the correlations between Wordsworth and the picturesque movement in painting run much deeper. Biographical studies of Wordsworth are replete with meetings of the painters John Constable, Benjamin Robert Haydon, and William Hazlitt (Wu 36). Interestingly, in one of three meetings with Constable in 1806 that Constable’s friend, Joseph Farington, recorded in his diary, Wordsworth discloses an anecdote about his intoxicating relationship to images that began to take root in childhood: “He told Constable that while he was a boy going to Hawkeshead school, his mind was so often possessed with images, so lost in extraordinary conceptions, that he was held by a wall not knowing but he was part of it” (Farington 3044). Farington here focuses upon what he views as an exaggerated self-perception on the part of the poet, but the point that emerges is the trancelike quality that images held for Wordsworth
in conjunction with the imaginative workings of his mind, a wrestling with the visual that he attempts to temper in his maturity.

With the interactions between Wordsworth and his painter contemporaries aside, Wordsworth’s view of painting comes across as conceptually affirmative, but the medium itself is found wanting. For Wordsworth, painting exists as an intermediary of poetry capable of expressing a similar perspective of nature. In several instances in his poetry, Wordsworth directly refers to paintings of his day as an analogy for his own mental workings with the visual. For example, Wordsworth slips into ekphrasis in “Elegiac Stanzas,” which is a meditation on his brother’s fatal shipwreck as catalyzed by Beaumont’s 1806 work, A Storm: Peele Castle (Wu 248). Beyond reflecting on Beaumont’s painting, Wordsworth expresses a desire tinged with sarcasm to enter the same creative position as that of Beaumont himself: “Ah then, if mine had been the painter’s hand / To express what then I saw, and add the gleam, / The light that never was” (13–15). Based on these lines, the latent poet-as-painter hints at painting’s tendency to gloss over and add touches to scenes from life. Wordsworth’s narrator of the “Elegiac Stanzas” gains insight into his loss, thanks to the visual power of Beaumont’s painting, but Wordsworth suggests that Beaumont’s work is not seen from the same stance as the poet—it is not an adequate picture that has captured lived experience, but a visual foundation for thinking through that experience.

Wordsworth aligns himself with the pre-photographic impulse—the desire to permanently fix images from lived ocular experience upon a surface—in those instances where the correlation to painting fails to provide the adequate vehicle for his visually-centered works. Rather than aligning Wordsworth’s photographic qualities with the earliest picturesque technologies that led to photography as other critics have often suggested, I believe that Wordsworth lingers in the visual turn of painting beginning to give way to, though not necessarily dissipate under, the photographic medium. Or, to put it another way, Wordsworth writes as one on the cusp of a great transition that has yet to happen in the visual arts. Subsequently, Wordsworth reflects numerous ties with painting, such as his use of ekphrasis in a handful of his poems, but he inadvertently accomplishes aesthetic ends that are more akin to photography, though decades before because of his repeated coming back to stationed views like an individual returning to a photograph. In short, by emphasizing the various impressions that the image incites in the viewer upon each revisitation and by his authoring of, or putting into words, these memory-laden scenes through his
poetry, he is an unknowing partaker in the pre-photographic desire to capture an image from life.

Before looking at further instances of this turn towards the photographic medium, let me explore the pre-photographic as woven into Wordsworth’s poetry. Joseph Niépce and Louis Daguerre, Geoffrey Batchen’s *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* states that the desire to fix the images of the *camera obscura* was a shared desire of several dozen Europeans in the years 1790–1839 and not a singular fantasy. In seeking a Foucauldian “regular discursive practice” for photography, Batchen removes the medium from scientific origins, allowing it “to coincide as much with its conceptual and metaphoric as with its technological production,” including the poetics of the day (36). Batchen references Romantic poetry chiefly to focus on how Coleridge’s views of nature, which are inseparable from subjectivity and human culture, are echoed in the discourses of the proto-photographers. Nonetheless, Batchen acknowledges that this same “active and constitutive mode of self-consciousness” that is grounded in nature is shared with other Romantics, such as Wordsworth (62).

To enter the pre-photographic sensibilities of Wordsworth’s poetry is likewise to enter a discourse on the epistemological concerns the poet has about the senses, directed most notably towards the eye, which also serves as an analogy for the “seeing” photographic lens. Wordsworth typically expresses a kind of resistance to the visual world in favor of the imagination that finds its vehicle in the articulation of words, especially those not freighted by illustrations. In “Visible Language: Blake’s Art of Writing,” W. J. T. Mitchell explains that most of the Romantics showed evidence of favoring phonocentric tendencies that centered around the ear and voice because of their distaste for the printed word. One certainly gains a sense of this privileging of the aural in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* when Wordsworth makes the claim that the poet is an individual “speaking” to, rather than writing to, men. To reach their audiences, Wordsworth and the other Romantics must nonetheless succumb to the “vulgar necessity” that rests in articulating their words via the printed, materialized word (Mitchell 117). The Romantics’ anti-pictorialist stance towards the visual lingers not as a purely negative one, however, but as one that is as unavoidable as sight itself.

Wordsworth is caught in a paradoxical divide over the iconophobic perception of sight, what he deems “the most despotic of the senses,” and yet many of his transformative experiences would not be possible without the visual (*The Prelude* XII, 121–31). William Galperin’s *The Return of the Visible in British
Romanticism makes a further distinction of Wordsworth’s conflicting concerns of sight, noting that his concerns are divided not just between the visible, but between “the visible and the visionary,” or the “responsiveness to the visible or material world” and “a world no sooner seen than imaginatively appropriated” (3). These qualities—the responsiveness to and the appropriation of the visible—parallel the work of the photographic medium in a way that bespeaks an increased pathos towards the visible and the recording of the object for reflection. As the title of Galperin’s book suggests, Galperin finds that vision is repressed beneath the Romantic imagination, though it constantly re-erupts as a sense that refuses complete mastery, or rather, it succumbs to a tempering that aligns it with the imagination. Wordsworth likewise expresses the need to gain control over “the tyranny of the eye,” to temper what he experiences and gathers through the sense of sight (The Prelude XI, 179). In sublimating the visual, Wordsworth processes imagery in the same way as an early photographic camera, with his eye serving as the receiving lens, and his mature mental subjectivity acting like the chemical vat where the blank surface develops the finalized image.

Galperin explores the paradoxical nature of dependency and opposition that Wordsworth exudes with the spectacles of The Prelude, and he finds that, despite the supplanting of the eye by the Romantic “I” as “the prime agent of perception,” the very inclusion of such spectacles discloses an arbitrariness towards subject matter that is prophetic of the unbiased photographic medium (31). Viewing Wordsworth’s ruling imaginative framing to be deflated, Galperin finds that the accidental quality that emerges from the spectacles devolves to “some other way of seeing,” most notably an objectification of privatized experience (111). Such scenes allow one to lift Wordsworth out of painterly readings and center him with subject matter that the photograph documented so well, even at the expense of a near sensationalism that contradicts Wordsworth’s seeming distaste for the spectacular.

To better emphasize Wordsworth’s leaning towards the photographic arts, let me draw a few comparisons to validate his place aesthetically. While painting and photography share correlations with memory and the development of the image via the darkroom or buildup of paint layers, photography stands as unique in that an image has to be fixed, or halted at a critical moment in its development in order to prevent a transformative fogging of the image. For Wordsworth, this metaphorical fixing of an image serves as an attempt to articulate the image at the precise moment when it both records the past and
provides an ideal catalyst for his future imaginings. Unlike the multiple layers of a painting that eventually amass into a final image, the photographic image as a whole gradually develops in the darkroom bath with an almost ghostly effect. Additionally, if the paints of an oil painter, for example, have the advantage of being workable for a generous span, then the equipment of the photographer is inextricably bound to the enemy of time during the shooting of the image and the processing of that same image. Similarly, Wordsworth develops his latent imagery from the shaded refines of memory as well as from the span of time that those images have steeped since their initial occurrence.

With the aforementioned in mind, I find that Wordsworth’s poetry, with its references to formulations as the “picture of the mind,” “spots of time,” and “phantoms of conceit,” includes strikingly similar structures to that of the photograph. While these three terms by no means establish an all-inclusive list, examining them side-by-side provides not only a sense that these temporal concepts are pervasive throughout Wordsworth’s work, but also that they arise from an array of experiences with import. Coming from “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth’s “picture of the mind,” which originates from a former view of the run-down abbey, serves as a visual storehouse that enables him to restore himself to the fond view again mentally and physically. In a sense, Wordsworth’s “picture of the mind” equates to a photograph that one can gaze upon at will to evoke a similar reaction as before or even a desire to return to that place. If the picture of “Tintern Abbey” marks an image of focused clarity that has been captured for pleasant revisiting, then the “spots of time” and “phantoms of conceit” from The Prelude present poignant scenes that have been tinged by time that the poet struggles to overcome via putting them in words. To posit these concepts photographically, Wordsworth risks overexposing these critical signposts of his imagination in his internal darkroom by revisiting them continuously through his authorship and revision and failing to fix them before the inevitable fogging of memory affects them.

“Tintern Abbey”

Published in 1798, “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” gives a succinct overview of Wordsworth’s patterned treatment of the visual—of its capture, revisitation, and connotative treatment—that serves as a trying on of ideas that would later be amplified in The Prelude. The name of the poem alone
garners an important insight, as the poet composed it, not while actively gazing upon the dilapidated cloister and surrounds, but afterwards, during the course of “a ramble of four or five days” (357). Thus, readers enter the poem with a sense that Wordsworth has meditated on the scene post-travel, his mind saturated with its forms, much like the lengthy earliest exposures in photography (Daguerre 11). The poem serves less as a revisitation of the scene and more as a reaffirmation of it, as it has remained fixed in the narrator’s mind since he last witnessed it: “Though absent long / These forms of beauty have not been to me / As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye” (23–25). By reentering the same subjective vantage, the narrator avoids an amplified version of the scene, for Wordsworth provides only the barest descriptive details. Instead, he reflects on the abstracted scene in his mind to which he can return to at will “in hours of weariness” and gain a “tranquil restoration,” even when such a sight is not physically possible (28, 31). Wordsworth returns to, in the language of cultural critic Susan Sontag, an “experience captured,” though one captured with the mind instead of that uncreated “ideal arm of consciousness,” the camera (3).

The return to the scene post-capture in “Tintern Abbey” serves not only as a way of reviving the potency of the mentally-held scene, but the narrative that emerges as a result also enables the narrator to satiate the desire of the visual and gain a mastery over it by superseding his initial experience with the visionary power of his words. Wordsworth articulates this transcendence of the self in the lines

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things. (45–49)

During this moment of pure internalized seeing, the narrator becomes an instrument of sight. The resulting transcendence is two-fold: the pacification of the potentially intoxicating relation to the visual, and the indication that the new sensation is one of suprahuman perception like that of the photograph. Sontag echoes a similar need to augment or permanently bestill the visual when she outlines the following: “Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still. Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote” (163). Returning to the notion stated earlier in Farington’s diary of the boyish
Wordsworth lost in the trance of the flickering images in his mind upon the blank wall, one gains the sense of growth and matured focus, a glimpse of the mind that has brought the stilled image into revived imaginative clarity, and indeed, that has created a new experience out of the original scene.

In “William Wordsworth and Photographic Subjectivity,” Scott Hess locates Wordsworth’s visual positioning with the European traveling viewer, an earlier version of the modern day tourist, who commodifies visual experience. Hess suggests a consideration of Wordsworth’s photographic ties as a continuation of the picturesque movement that espoused new structures of perception that were popular with tourists of the day. By associating Wordsworth with early framing technologies like the Claude glass and the camera obscura, Hess crafts a historically-validated account of the poet’s disembodied subjectivity that is akin to the photographic one where the device “isolates vision from the other senses and ... removes the observer from its field of representation.” Nonetheless, Hess turns less to the notion of transcendence and more to that of tourism because he concludes that the natural end for Wordsworth is to have his poetry grace photographically-illustrated volumes, whose featured locales, like the Lake District, later turn into popular flocking places. In arguing against Hess’s likening of Wordsworth’s narration to that of “a quintessential modern tourist,” Wordsworth instead functions as a prototypical tourist whose visual experiences, which include connotative interpretation and human spectacles, defy such categorizations, while still retaining their photographic qualities and gaining interpretation at the whiles of human memory (291).

Wordsworth escapes the tourist perspective by creating an ongoing narrative that evolves from the scene proper, rather than packaging the scene for consumption. His narrator resorts to a photo-like capturing of the visual, but he avoids a literal framing by allowing the maturation of the scene in his mind to preside over the poem. Semiotician Roland Barthes describes a similar layering of denoted and connoted meanings pertaining to photography in “The Photographic Message.” Describing the photographic image as one of the perceptive modes because it is “exclusively constituted and occupied by a ‘denoted’ message,” Barthes finds that the connoted, or second-order message, emerges from the cognitive mode that engages personal experiences, cultural ideologies, and historical ideas (18). The first mode of denotative meaning aligns with Wordsworth’s half-perceiving reception of the visual, while the later mode of connotative meaning aligns with his “half-creat[ing]” of a new scene from
cognition of the visual (107, 108). Interestingly, Wordsworth deems this ability to reconceptualize the fixed scene to be restorative:

The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. ("Tintern Abbey," 62–66)

This act of making permanent lived visual experience so that it may be continually returned to at a later time aligns with the quality of fetishized memory for which photography would be both praised and feared.

Serving as more than poetic equivalents to the photographic, the fetishized moments revisited by Wordsworth allow one to trace the growth of the poet’s mind while still providing a telling snapshot of his former self. For example, further along in “Tintern Abbey,” the narrator speaks of feeling no reason to mourn his former boyish treatment of the visual which, consisting of “aching joys” and “dizzying raptures,” made him unable to find appreciation for “any interest / Unborrowed from the eye,” i.e., an interest not limited to the immediate response to the visual (83–84, 85, 86). Let me elaborate on this notion of Wordsworth’s former instantaneous reception of the visual by centering it in the realm of cognition, or more specifically, in the cognition of a child entering the world. John Berger emphasizes the role that sight plays for the growth of the human mind in his treatise *Ways of Seeing*, and he finds the two inseparable: “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. ... It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it” (7). Such an encompassed act of seeing would verge on a mechanical response without a key subjective quality that is acquired with a heightened response to the visual: the act of selectivity that comes with seeing, especially with the tempered form of seeing that is evident in the photograph. This tempered quality of the photograph rests not only in the ability to select a stilled image from life, but also in the continual revisitation that the photograph beckons.

Just as the photograph embodies a “photographer’s way of seeing” and the stylization that comes with “the choice of subject,” Wordsworth enacts a comparable selectivity of specific temporal moments of seeing that prevents poems of locality like “Tintern Abbey” from being read as late eighteenth-century
tourist reactions (Berger 10). Compare the narrator’s complex relationship with the scene held in the mind in “Tintern Abbey” to the sense of immediate viewing gained in William Gilpin’s 1782 *Observations of the River Wye*, a popular guidebook that Wordsworth would have been familiar with.

A more pleasing retreat could not be easily found. The woods and glades intermixed; the winding of the river; the variety of the ground; the splendid ruin contrasted with the objects of nature; and the elegant line formed by the summits of the hills, which include the whole; make all together a very enchanting piece of scenery. (qtd. in Bohls and Duncan 137)

While Gilpin’s account helps to illustrate the picturesque sensibilities that would reign over English landscape aesthetics for decades, it scarcely transcends the scenery of travel to yield any deeper reflection. Resorting to an idealized visual composition, Gilpin reproduces the scene via words and invites readers to add interpretive gloss privately. By contrast, Wordsworth’s account gains potency in the stationed return to the scene—the “picture of the mind” that “revives again”—and in the eruption of a personal narrative akin to the kind photographs solicited (62).

**The Prelude**

Spanning from Wordsworth’s childhood through his residence in London and beyond, the semiautobiographical *Prelude* provides an extensive opportunity to chart the arrested treatment of the visual. While “Tintern Abbey” reads as the return to a fixed scene after seeing it only days prior, *The Prelude* presents a more complicated stance as it is narrated through the adult poet recollecting images of youth that have been transformed with time, almost like an individual returning to memories instilled by photographs. Thus, *The Prelude* allows one to see a Wordsworth who still attempts to contain the visual in the imaginative frame. By entering *The Prelude* with Berger’s idea of maturated cognition through seeing, one finds that the narrator expresses growth largely through the sense of sight—a sense that captures would-be tourist locales like Snowden, etc., but also more psychologically jolting scenes that appear in photographic records. Appearing in Book I, the first substantial passage hinting at the temporal “spots of time” confesses the photographic impulse to put into the visible
permanence of words images that remain in the narrator’s mind long after he has experienced them:

...I had hopes
Still higher, that with a frame of outward life
I might endure, might fix in a visible home,
Some portion of those phantoms of conceit,
That had been floating loose about so long. (127–31)

Beyond aligning with the pre-photographic notions explored earlier with “Tintern Abbey,” this impulse indicates the poet’s continual struggle with his self-authoring, for these images cannot ripen in the immediacy of youth. Instead, they stand as unassimilated parts, albeit altered ones, that must ultimately remain a part of his personal narrative.

Let me draw this distinction of the poet acting like the photographic process further by exploring Hess’s concept of the “series of internalized photographs” that are devoid of photographic detail, but that employ similar structures (319). While not automatized like the camera, the poet’s articulation of the visual rests in a sensitivity to the fleeting image that the camera captures so well. Given a photographic slant, the oft-quoted “[p]oetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” echoes the poet receiving visual impressions happening in immediacy, but then “[that] takes it origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” speaks of the transformative work that occurs post-capture when the image runs through the workings of the mind (307). Hess expands on this metaphor of the perceiving poetic mind and the processing photographic camera when he suggests that the “Wordsworthian darkroom of memory and imagination” is where Wordsworth’s images, having been returned to, fully achieve the meditative significance one sees in the text (301). Thus, Wordsworth frames several major works from the stance of a mature narrator reflecting on past, even boyish, experiences as an act of transfiguration for his present self. I wish to both acknowledge and diverge from the central ideas laid down by Hess, such as his reading of Wordsworth’s “spots of time” photographically.

Without retracing Hess’s description of Wordsworth’s stylization in The Prelude exhibiting “a kind of album or scrapbook of memory,” it should be noted that the “spots of time” metaphor garners the greatest attention photographically (304–5). The passage from the “Two Part Prelude reads as follows: “There are in our existence spots of time, / That with distant pre-eminence retain /A renovating virtue”. While there are varied opinions about what the metaphor
“spots of time” articulate, typically critics consider them to be repetitive temporal patterns that constitute the narrator’s imagination applied to a revisited scene (Hess, Authoring 216). The patterning of the “spots of time,” however, fails to follow Hess’s demarcation of the middle-aged poet returning to the mastered images of youth, especially when comparing passages of the earliest versions of the poem. Though the “Two-Part Prelude” includes the “spots of time” passage as early as line 288, that same passage does not emerge until Book XI of the 1805 Prelude, which reads,

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will. (268–73)

The quality of the mind mastering the imagery of the “spots” is completely missing from the earlier version of this passage. Additionally, the later version of the poem expresses childhood as the starting point of the lifelong “spots,” while the “Two-Part Prelude” emphasizes that “[s]uch moments chiefly seem to have their date / In our first childhood” (295–96). When considering such an alteration, one senses that Wordsworth creates the impression of a more mature mastery of the visual than he held previously, or draws attention to those passages where he transcends his physical self and abstracts vision.

Despite the theme that the 1805 Prelude embraces, even the later version presents interruptions in the sequencing that defy the same mastery seen with “Tintern Abbey.” What these scenes prophesy is a darker side of the photographic medium: the imposition of trauma and psychological resistance. Additionally, Hess articulates Wordsworth’s deliberately subjective stationing of the “spots” that allow the appropriation of landscapes like the Lake District and Snowdon, but he provides no mention of those scenes that flash as spectacles of sublime terror. For example, the “Drowned Man of Esthwaite” scene fails to adhere to a standard picturesque formulation, succumbing instead to morbid details juxtaposed by natural surrounds: “At length the dead man, ’mid that beauteous scene / Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face” (Book V, 470–72). In this instance, Wordsworth jolts readers from any casual reading and confronts them with a veritable snapshot of mortality. Diverging from the idealization of Wordsworth’s experiences, Peter Larkin outlines the enigmatic complexities that weigh upon such a visual reading in “Wordsworth’s
Maculate Exception”: “[the spots] occupy a fault-line between trauma and aspiration, between the struggles of existence and the pathos of any wishing to be . . . [they] assume process, but also resist it as the precipitates of experience are reassembled” (30). Such an explanation of the “spots” makes Hess’s association of them with the Wordsworthian “scrapbook of memory” seem like a understatement of their psychological weight (306). Thus, the imagery in The Prelude, while positioning images in a sequence like a scrapbook, lacks the conventional material associated with one.

If Larkin finds that the “spots” embody vignettes of failed imaginative transformation, then an etymological approach reveals similar complications. According to the OED, the word “spot” around Wordsworth’s time of may refer to either “a moral stain, blot, or blemish,” or to “a small piece, amount, or quantity,” especially of an interval of time, or locality (“spot”). Even though critics approach the “spots” as crowning moments in the transformative Wordsworthian imagination, the spots force readers to wrestle conceptually with this darker meaning that implies a happening that creates notable impressions in the epistemological fabric. Thus, the “spots” engage the horrors of ephemerality as much as they enact a fixation of the visual, and acknowledging their potency of interruption helps to create a fuller view of The Prelude. If the arrested moments that encompass the poem correlate with the structures of the photograph, the “spots” can likewise be classified according to Barthes’s photographic theory of the studium and punctum that are based on the intensity of reactions that photographs evoke in their viewers. If, on one end, the studium equates with an intermediate interest in the image that chiefly informs or describes its subject in a manner consistent with the narrative, then the punctum represents the poignant “accident which pricks,” “bruises,” or unexpectedly interrupts the attentions of the spectator in ways that are both meaningful and disquieting (26–27).

I would like to stress that some of the “spots” in The Prelude leap out as instances of punctum that garner moments of lingering on the scene because of their unexpectedness and defiance of mastery, while the surrounding passages call to mind the average interest invested with the studium. These moments of the punctum-like “spots” not only serve to disturb the flow of the poem, but they also present moments of arrest that defy explanation, or, as Barthes explains, they are universally uncodeable: “What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance” (51). While the punctum detail for Barthes can range from the minutest out-of-place pose to
the realization of a condemned man’s mortality, the Wordsworthian punctum exists in moments of reactions to sublime landscapes or human spectacles that stand outside the normative codes of narration, where mastery is blemished. With human spectacles like the drowned man, the scene punctuates sensitivity to details such as the man’s clothes laid empty on the shore, a detail heightened in the narration of the adult poet that aligns the “spots” well with the camera’s telling capture and dependence on the visual. Sontag speaks of this quality of all photos to produce crystalline memento mori by capturing moments sliced out of time, and she further explains that this act of capturing results in the participation “in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability”—a sense gained with the scene of Esthwaite (15).

Interestingly, the meditation on the drowned man expresses different responses to the corpse, depending on which variant one interprets. The “Two-Part Prelude,” for instance, offers the narrative of a boy witnessing a corporeally-jolting scene and a somber memorializing of what he has seen, though it remains fixed in his mind as one of the “[d]istresses and disasters, tragic facts / Of rural history” (282–83). Here, the narrator resorts to an abstract cataloging of the event, but the drowned man’s mortality still impresses the mind with a segue to the “spots of time” description because of its impact. By contrast, the later version of 1805 exposes an attempt to transform the drowned man via the Romantic imagination into something no longer arresting, for he immediately recasts the man as “a spectre shape,” claiming to have seen “[s]uch sights before among the shining streams / Of fairyland, the forests of romance” (475–76). As Susan G. Wolfson points out in “The Illusion of Mastery,” however, such revisions reveal, not a mastery of the incident’s imaginative framing through the fixed space of the poem, but a failure to mask the shock of his recollection, though much of the emotional charge is lost (917). Sontag notes a similar tendency of photographic images to anesthetize: “An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs ... But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real” (20). Just as an individual returns to what was once a stirring photograph and finds himself or herself less shocked than before, Wordsworth attempts to distance himself from past experiences by constantly revisiting (and revising) them; however, sometimes his results muddle the clarity of the original image rather than mask it, like an image that has been left too long in a developer.
The question remains one of what expression Wordsworth ultimately achieves as he pursues this continuous revisiting of mentally recorded images. Borrowing from Sarah Kofman's *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, a reflection on the metaphors of the *camera obscura* as employed by twentieth-century philosophers, I find that the still images that populate Wordsworth's poems tend to have a two-fold function. On one hand, they express the revisitation of experience via the Freudian concept of the unconscious to conscious processes, and, on the other hand, the selecting and editing of those experiences that are beneficial for the present and future through the Nietzschean metaphor for forgetting. As with “Tintern Abbey,” the maturation of visual impressions captured by the senses, but held by the unconscious, echoes the Freudian negative and positive phases of the psyche, where the past repeats itself like the images produced by the camera. Kofman describes the past’s engrossing compulsion of a double made from the negative as “duplicating itself within representation . . . because the event has never been lived in the fullness of its meaning, in the positivity of its presence,” because the child was yet unable to fully endow the impressions with meaning (24). As I have explored, these two-fold functions of maturation and forgetting with the Wordsworthian camera exist as much in conflict as in accord with one another. For instance, *The Prelude* exhibits the same tendencies to emphasize the maturation of past images as “Tintern Abbey,” but the Nietzschean metaphor of selective recollection *The Prelude*'s constant revision of the scenes evidences, or “spots,” often edges in and complicates the initial import of these scenes.

This tendency to mask the original sensations created by stilled images, while indicative of Wordsworth’s mission to fix the “phantoms of conceit,” reveals his inability to fully dismiss them from his history. Even in the later versions of *The Prelude*, many of the same scenes appear reframed with slight alterations, such as his father’s death and the murderer’s gibbet-mast. Indeed, an entire proliferation of human spectacles fall outside the range of sublime landscapes: the bird-mimicking boy of Winander, the quixotic Arab, the masses of the London streets, the revolutionary ousting of the French monarchy, and the blind beggar. Despite this inability to transcend the voyeurism of the spectacle, Wordsworth nonetheless participates in that humanizing side of the photographic image.

Let me close my photographic comparison of Wordsworth by turning, not to Mount Snowden, the “perfect image of a mighty mind” that usually towers over the images in the final books of *The Prelude*, but the equally complex scene
of the blind beggar (69). If the London spectacle of Book VII has a tendency to resort to a dizzying overabundance of images that leads to an aversion of the real, the imposition of the blind beggar “amid the moving pageant” serves as one of those instances of punctum whereby the poet realizes his failure to maintain a complete imaginative distancing of himself from the scene before him (610). The scene of the blind man wearing a sign describing his condition only flashes on the narrator’s eyes momentarily, but the permanent ripples it creates epistemologically makes the poet all too aware of his inability to escape fully his own physical senses, particularly that of sight:

My mind did at this spectacle turn round
As with the might of waters, and it seemed
To me that this label was a type
Or emblem of the utmost that we know
Both of ourselves and of the universe. (616–20)

Although Galperin defines the blind man as an individual existing “independent of ... subjective controls,” the humanity of the blind beggar must also be realized amongst the moving crowd around him that serves as a symbol of the majority that is bound to the visible world, including the poet himself (120–21). Indeed, the stark figure of the blind beggar that is part, but also apart from, the swarm of Londoners may be read as emblematic of a longing for that same pure transcendence, though the beggar remains to readers an image of pity because of humanity’s own natural dependence on the agency of sight.

While The Prelude, with its human spectacles, presents an altogether different relation to the visual than that of “Tintern Abbey,” one cannot deny that both represent the poet’s fixing of images that aligns prophetically with photography, including its fetishization of memory, its abstracting of experience, and its evasion of tourist landscapes. Wordsworth’s failure to consistently transcend the outward forms of sight, rather than resulting in a seeming weakness in the poet’s imaginative prowess, reveals his complicated ties, like those of the photographic medium, with the visual realm. More specifically, those punctum-like images in The Prelude, where Wordsworth struggles to fix experiences in the imaginative frame of words, add unexpected qualities that prevent the poem from falling into scenic formulization. Furthermore, the tendency to transform cognitively experiences that have been primarily captured through the instrument of sight as lens not only releases the Romantics from their iconophobic tendencies, but also allows one to recuperate poets like Wordsworth as capable
of interpretation through other mediums than that of painting. Thus, the pre-
photographic impulse, which arguably supersedes painting as a more fit vehicle
to carry the interactions with lived experience that are so characteristic of the
semiautobiographical Wordsworth, opens up a valuable area in both visual and
Wordsworth studies that deserves further exploration.
Works Cited


Bertrand Russell, one of the founders of Analytic Philosophy and mentor to Ludwig Josef Wittgenstein, called Wittgenstein “the most perfect example I have ever known of genius as traditionally conceived, passionate, profound, intense, and dominating” (Russell 329). Wittgenstein’s early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* forever changed the field of analytic philosophy, and the Baruch Poll ranked his posthumously published work *Philosophical Investigations* as the most important book of twentieth-century philosophy (Lackey 331). Wittgenstein’s work is divided into two clear periods, referred to simply as his early work and his later work. His early work focused on the tradition of Analytic Philosophy of his time, which encouraged a view of language as a series of symbols and signs with absolute, clearly defined meanings and referents that could be summarized, described, and put together in pieces like a math equation. His later work rebelled dramatically against his early work and began to encourage a relativistic, pragmatic view of language
in which meaning was not absolute, but dictated by its use and consequences within a society. Under this new view, many philosophical problems Analytic Philosophy had attempted to address became mere grammatical misunderstandings, stemming from philosophers redefining terms outside of society and using words abstractly and out of context. Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* addresses many of the same issues that concerned Wittgenstein, including naming, reference, descriptors, and the pragmatic use of language. Although Auster never explicitly mentions Wittgenstein or his theories in *City of Glass*, he highlights the flaws in Wittgenstein’s early work in mathematizing language by giving examples of names with multiple possible referents, referents with multiple possible names, and ambiguous and pseudonymous allusions. Additionally, Auster portrays two characters whose attempts to find meaning in language through mathematical methods and without the aid of society incur severe consequences.

Wittgenstein’s ties to postmodernism and Paul Auster’s work, particularly *City of Glass*, are well supported. An important characteristic of postmodern literature is its interest in dissecting language and meaning. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the term “postmodern” became widespread after its use in an article by Jean-François Lyotard which applied one of Wittgenstein’s theories from his later work to modern art and philosophy (Aylesworth). In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Paul Auster states,

> As a young student at Columbia in the ’60s, I read Wittgenstein’s work very carefully and very avidly. I didn’t always fully understand it. But I was always intrigued and inspired by it. Definitely the later work interests me more than the early work, particularly the philosophical investigations. (Auster, “Off the Page”)

Auster mentions Wittgenstein explicitly in two of his works of fiction: in *The Book of Illusions*, among a list of authors of books meant to show “wide-ranging tastes in literature,” and in *The Brooklyn Follies*, as a character remembers reading in a biography about Wittgenstein’s nervous breakdown and subsequent recovery (283). Additionally, Wittgenstein posthumously published *The Blue and Brown Books*, a compilation of notes and dictations of lectures he gave at Cambridge. The similarities between these books and Daniel Quinn’s red notebook are striking, as is the nominal connection to Private Investigators Blue and Brown introduced later in the New York Trilogy. Perhaps the most
indicative piece of evidence supporting a Wittgensteinian reading of *City of Glass* is Auster’s statement about the book’s epigraph:

> At one point, as I was writing *City of Glass* many years ago, I was considering using a phrase from Wittgenstein’s *Zettel* as an epigraph for the book. The sentence is this: “And it also *means* something to speak of ‘living in the pages of a book.’” (Auster, “Off the Page,” emphasis added)

The idea of living in a book is clearly applicable to Quinn’s own travels as both an author of books and a character within a book, but the more important part of this dedication is the idea of a phrase *meaning* something, actually communicating a sense of some idea even if the phrase, like the phrase “living in a book,” is literally impractical. Auster appears somewhat obsessed with Wittgenstein and his ideas about the importance of language and meaning.

The philosophical discussion Wittgenstein entered into in the 1920s and 1930s was preoccupied with treating language as a mathematical equation, in which every word could be broken down into its meaningful parts. This so-called Analytic Philosophy used elements of predicate logic, also known as predicate calculus, to divide the overall meanings of words and sentences into their meaningful parts. Believing that philosophy’s job was to clarify how language could best be used, philosophers, Russell and Wittgenstein in particular, attempted to classify existing language into a mappable, definable system with clear rules and elements. They dedicated a large part of their efforts to determining how mere names (e.g. “Aristotle”) and descriptors (e.g. “the teacher of Alexander the Great”) refer to objects in the real world when used in abstract language. Many philosophers believed that the meaning of names and descriptors was solely their physical referent. However, Wittgenstein later decided that meaning could not be so mundanely articulated through a perfect theory of reference, a view which Auster supported as well.

When considering Wittgenstein’s theories of language and meaning, *City of Glass* can easily be read as a dramatization of the ways in which language as math breaks down in use, particularly in the view of language as a mathematical function. Functions are the “central objects of investigation” in most modern fields of mathematics and are “undoubtedly the most important concept in all of mathematics” (Spivak 39). In math, a function is defined as a mathematical relationship that assigns exactly one element of one set to each element of the same or another set. In other words, every value input into a function has exactly one output. A function fails when a single input is put into a function
and, at different times, produces different outputs. For example, in the function $f(x) = x+1$; $f(4)$ will always equal 5, no matter how many times or under what circumstances 4 is put into the function. If a function were to provide a different output for the same input, it would no longer be a function; it would show no mathematical significance, have no meaning.

If one extends the metaphor of language as a function to view names and descriptors as inputs and their physical referents as outputs, we may begin to see examples of language as math breaking down in the ways Auster and Wittgenstein believed it would. The most obvious example of a name being used to refer to different people at different times is the name of Paul Auster. The language function of naming should map all names to the object of reference. When first read in the novel, the name “Paul Auster” refers in the reader’s mind to the author of *City of Glass*, a flesh and blood person in the world of the reader. However, within the first chapter, a second Paul Auster is introduced into the story, a mysterious detective someone is trying to reach via telephone. Soon after, Daniel Quinn adopts the name Paul Auster as a pseudonym. In chapter ten, Quinn meets another Paul Auster, a writer from the world of *City of Glass*, whose wife and child share names with the wife and child of Paul Auster, the book’s author. By chapter eleven, any time the name “Paul Auster” is mentioned, the reader must guess which of the possible referents the author intends and grapple with the fact that, for experiment’s sake, the author might not have clearly intended any specific referent. In this case, the input “Paul Auster” returns any number of different outputs depending on the circumstances at any given moment. There is no purely logical way to deduce which referent is intended just through the words, revealing one of the issues with which philosophers of language had to struggle.

Auster also explores the idea of descriptors as unclear referents that break down the mathematical function of language through many of the allusions involving authorship in *City of Glass*. The most obvious example of this is the descriptor “the author of *Don Quixote*,” whose complex possible identities are discussed in the latter section of *City of Glass*. The writer Paul Auster in the novel points out that most people would claim Miguel de Cervantes as the author of *Don Quixote*, even though in the novel the author is claimed to be Cid Hamete Benengeli. Character Auster goes on to lead the reader through a list of possible authors, from Sancho Panza who was the only one to witness all the events of the novel, to the barber and the priest who must have written down Sacho’s words, all the way back to Don Quixote himself, who orchestrated the
whole story himself to test the gullibility of the human race. In lieu of this discussion, the descriptor “the author of *Don Quixote*,” when input into a function, can produce multiple outputs, both real and fictional. Similar issues are seen in Auster’s reference to Marco Polo’s *Travels*, which are of disputed authorship, and Haydn’s opera “Il mondo della luna,” which had two co-authors but a history of one author being favored over another.

Another problematic feature of the language function of naming is that it is non-invertible; it has no inverse function. An inverse function is a mathematical function that undoes the effect of another function. For example, there is a function that will convert Celsius temperatures to Fahrenheit temperatures (i.e. Celsius is the input, and Fahrenheit is the output). There is also an equation that will do the opposite: convert Fahrenheit temperatures to Celsius temperatures (i.e. Fahrenheit is the input, and Celsius is the output). In this way, one is able to determine the input of the original function by inputting the original output into a new, inverse function.

However, some functions are not invertible, and this property causes some difficulty and ambiguity in other mathematical processes. A good example of a non-invertible function is the case of the function \( f(x) = x^2 \). The inverse of this square function, as it is called, is the square root function, or \( f(x) = \sqrt{x} \). In this case, there are always two inputs that will produce the same output (e.g. \(-2^2 \) and \( 2^2 \) both equal 4). This is not a problem for the original function, but makes the function non-invertible because, by observing the original output of 4, one can never be sure which of the two possible inputs was the original input. By nature of the original square function, we lose any information that could tell us whether the negative or the positive answer is correct.

Auster also gives examples of characters with multiple names or identities that show the inverse language function failing to match names to their correct referents. In the original function, names are input and return physical referents; in the inverse function, physical referents are input and return names. For example, throughout the novel, Daniel Quinn assumes several names or identities, including Daniel Quinn, Paul Auster, Max Work, William Wilson, and Peter Stillman Jr. If one were to submit the physical person of Daniel Quinn into the inverse language function, there are several possible outputs of names and no way to tell which of the answers is correct (just like the square root function). Another case of this is Peter Stillman Jr. who, in his first conversation with Daniel Quinn, provides several of the names by which he knows himself: Peter Stillman Jr., Peter Nobody, Mr. Sad, Peter Rabbit, Mr. White, and Mr. Green.
One must also consider the first nine years of his life, in which he had no name at all to speak of. Using the person of Peter Stillman Jr. as an input in the inverse function may produce any one of his many names, or non-names, so to speak, again with no way to determine the correct one. There is no perfectly binary relationship in the regular or inverse language function of naming.

Having drawn out the similarities between language and math, it is also significant to note the differences between them, particularly that mathematical knowledge can be determined *a priori*, but knowledge pertaining to language and meaning cannot. When faced with a non-invertible function, mathematicians in some cases are able to compensate for the errors in the function and determine the original output through secondary means. For example, once a mathematician realizes that the square root function does not allow for possible negative answers, he can test both the positive and negative versions of the answer that a square root function returns in the larger context of the equation. However, language does not allow for its speakers, merely by thinking harder, to test all possible solutions and determine the correct one. While in the case of the square root function, there are only two possible answers in any given situation (the positive and the negative), in the case of language functions there are infinite possibilities and no purely logical way to deduce the function’s original input.

There are ways in language to determine correct meanings and referents, but this can only be achieved by active social interaction between members of a society and an exchange of information. For example, when employing a pronoun-creating language function, a person may use a noun and then, through clear syntax, substitute a shorter pronoun. For example, if I say, “I enjoyed the soufflé; it was delicious,” those listening will understand to what I am referring with the pronoun “it.” In this use of the pronoun-creating language function, I have input the word “soufflé” and received the word “it”; meaning is transferred, signaling an effective language function. However, this pronoun-creating language function is not invertible. If someone were to enter the conversation having only heard the phrase “it was delicious” (with the pronoun “it” being the inverse input), it would be impossible for them to deduce logically the original noun (i.e. the inverse output) and therefore the referent of the pronoun “it.” They could not possibly test all of the possible nouns to which that pronoun could refer, even by eliminating possibilities through the context of the conversation. The listener must instead exchange information with the speaker. In effect, the listener will provide the information, “I did not understand the
meaning of this word” to the speaker, and the speaker will in exchange supply the listener with the intended noun or referent.

As with the previous example, Wittgenstein’s later work claims that society is necessary to provide avenues for interaction between people to clarify meaning. Just as Wittgenstein’s work began to progress the work of Analytic Philosophy and treating language as math, he began to believe it mistaken in its methods and assumptions. In response to it, he crafted a new theory dubbed “Ordinary Language Philosophy” that gained momentum in the 1930s and 1940s. This new philosophy determined that language finds its meaning solely through its use in society, rather than through predetermined and definable meanings that accompany each word. According to Wittgenstein, “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” and can only be decided upon by observing the functioning consensus of members of a society (Philosophical Investigations xxiii). Essentially, Wittgenstein decided that “ordinary language is all right” and that it can “take care of itself” (The Blue and Brown Books 28; Tractatus 127). To compensate for language’s shortcomings, society has adjusted, and will continue to adjust, to determine meaning in language and preserve the meaning-bearing mechanism of language. However, this act requires the implicit agreement of an entire society on what language means, not a few philosophers attempting to logic language out.

Auster uses several characters in City of Glass, most notably Peter Stillman Sr., as examples of the extremely negative consequences of treating language mathematically. One of Peter Stillman Sr.’s interesting theories about language is that things should be named according to their function. However, Stillman observes that the physical objects of the world break, becoming unable to fulfill their function, yet they are still named according to their previous function. In explaining this referential problem to Quinn, Stillman uses the example of a broken umbrella, which is still called an umbrella even when it can no longer be used to keep a person dry. In this way, Stillman claims, “our words no longer correspond to the world” (121). Stillman travels around New York City, where “brokenness is everywhere,” to collect items, “from the chipped to the smashed, from the dented to the squashed, from the pulverized to the putrid,” and give them names (121, 123). At their core, Stillman’s actions seem to be a compulsive need to try and compensate for the failures of language as a function. Stillman has understood that the naming function of language will produce multiple physical referents as outputs; both the functioning umbrella and the broken umbrella are returned by the name “umbrella.”
This attempt to fix the function of language reveals a second underlying way in which Peter Stillman Sr. treats language as math: he believes that there are absolute, right-or-wrong definitions or meanings to words reachable by empirical study. While following Stillman, Quinn observes him “poring over” bits of junk that he finds, examining them intently, and then writing something down in a small, red notebook. Quinn has apparently witnessed Stillman’s scientific process of naming. When Quinn asks Stillman how he can be sure if he’s found the right word for broken objects, Stillman replies simply, “I never make a mistake. It’s a function of my genius” (123). Stillman clearly views language as math, in which a name is either right or wrong a priori, regardless of societal input. We can see this belief in the extreme in Stillman’s belief in an Adamic language, or language of God. As Peter Stillman Jr. says of his father, “He wanted to know if God had a language. . . . The father thought that a baby might speak it if the baby saw no people” (33). To test his theory, Stillman Sr. locks his son in a room, “cover[s] up the windows, and ke[eps] him there for nine years,” giving him “an entire childhood spent in darkness, isolated from the world, with no human contact except the occasional beating” (44–45). With this cruel experiment, Peter Stillman Sr. shows his dedication to the belief that a better language can be discovered through empirical methods, stumbled upon like a mathematical proof. However, this dedication permanently ruins his son’s ability to communicate normally with others even after years of normal exposure to society.

In his self-assigned work of deciphering the meaning of language, Peter Stillman Sr. dooms himself by ignoring the most powerful voice in deciding pragmatic meaning: society. He accepts his task of creating a new language solitarily and precociously, claiming that “he can’t be bothered by the stupidity of others” (121). He plans only to share his work with the rest of the world when he has completed his research and renaming. Stillman, in his arrogance, overlooks the fact that language’s first purpose and function is to communicate meaning within a society. There is no absolute right or wrong to reference; there is only what members of a society accept and agree has meaning. There must be an implied social acceptance of any language if it is meant to achieve its function of transferring meaning between members of a society. Can a language which can no longer achieve its function of communication truly be called a language? One man attempting to rewrite human language will never be able to communicate with others without reverting to the common human language that they do share.
The negative effects of Peter Stillman Sr.’s treatment of language as math with absolute meaning are far-reaching and severe and affect both himself and those closest to him. His “monstrous” treatment of his son ensures that his son will never be able to function properly in society (45). He spends years in jail being punished by society for so completely ignoring them and mistreating his son. He himself cannot function properly in society, as noted by Daniel Quinn when he follows Stillman’s meanderings around the city as he picks up and intensely studies other people’s discarded garbage. Finally, Stillman commits suicide by jumping off of the Brooklyn Bridge, a notable piece of news reported in all the local newspapers. Paul Auster highlights the problems that accompany viewing meaning in language as math by dramatizing and sensationalizing extreme, negative consequences that stem from such a view.

Auster also uses the character of Daniel Quinn to emphasize the negative consequences of mathematically treating the components of language as discrete, meaning-bearing units. As a detective writer, Quinn is used to adopting the persona of a detective, “one who looks, who listens . . . in search of the thought, the idea that will pull . . . things together and make sense of them” (15). In this search for sense, Quinn is burdened by the belief that life amounts to a good detective novel, and “in the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing” (14). This then leads Quinn to believe that, “since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked” (15). This creates an obsession in Quinn to record every detail of Peter Stillman Sr.’s doings, convinced that the answers lie within every piece of evidence. This idea of every piece being vitally important applies quite well to a math equation, in which every number affects the answer, no matter how slightly, and no part may be left out. However, in language, this is not the case. A contemporary to Wittgenstein, philosopher of language W. V. O. Quine (quite possibly a namesake for Quinn) voiced his opinion that words and sentences can only find meaning in the larger context of the entire language, a fact which Quinn completely ignores (From a Logical 42–46). The holistic meaning of language must be considered to understand its parts; the gestalt is more important than the pieces that comprise it. However, Quinn continues to interpret words and actions as isolated entities, ignoring any larger context or interpretation that might allow him to solve his “case.”
Quinn, like Peter Stillman Sr., also errs in his tendency to ignore society in his search for meaning. From the first chapter of the novel, Quinn's self-imposed social isolation is emphasized. The reader learns that “he had once been married, had once been a father, and that both his wife and son were now dead” (7). Quinn himself acknowledges that “he no longer had any friends,” and throughout the novel, he remains emotionally isolated. Quinn is still able to navigate the social sphere, meeting new people and carrying out meaningful conversations, but he maintains an element of aloofness, most obviously by adopting the identity of Detective Paul Auster. However, by the novel’s end, Quinn becomes completely socially dysfunctional. The ambiguous narrator acknowledges Quinn falling off the social radar by stating of Quinn’s isolated stakeout, “We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip” (173). Quinn spends months not talking to anyone, living in the alley outside of Peter Stillman Jr.’s empty apartment, ignoring all opinions of society. This isolation causes him to miss society’s direct interpretation of his “case,” after Peter Stillman Sr.’s suicide is reported in the newspapers as the final act of a desperate madman. In this isolation, he begins to lose his ability to transfer meaning with words, for, in W. V. O. Quine’s words, “language is a social art” (*Word and Order* ix).

The consequences of Quinn's mathematical and isolative treatment of language are not as severe as Peter Stillman Sr.’s but are much more interesting. Daniel Quinn seems to personify what happens to a word which loses its pragmatic use in a language: it becomes meaningless and displaced. Quinn loses even the minor place he formerly held in society after his isolated stakeout. He returns to what he thought was his apartment to find all of his things gone and someone else occupying his previous living space. The apartment in no sense belongs to him anymore; the descriptors “resident” or “occupant” now apply more directly to someone else. He has no money to start a new life and, almost as if he has forgotten how to function, returns to the apartment of Peter Stillman Jr. to wear out his words in the red notebook before mysteriously disappearing for good. These tangible consequences of Quinn’s philosophical belief underscores the importance of society in meaningful language to both Wittgenstein and Auster.

In their second meeting, Peter Stillman Sr. tells Daniel Quinn of a “prophet,” a “man who spoke truths the world was not ready for”: Lewis Carroll’s representation of Humpty Dumpty. Peter Stillman Sr. does not go any deeper into the lore and philosophy of Carroll’s character, but a closer look at Carroll’s *Through
the Looking Glass reveals an interesting conversation between Humpty Dumpty and Alice:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master.” (297)

In City of Glass, Auster confronts the same question: “Can man ever truly be the master of language?” Both Auster and Wittgenstein would seem to at once agree with and disagree with Humpty Dumpty, answering, “Collectively, man is certainly master; individually, he is certainly not.” Society as a whole determines meaning in language; philosophers of language shut up in offices or postmodern authors absorbed in notebooks can no more control the meaning of language or isolate its meaning-bearing parts than Peter Stillman Sr. could rename every item in the world and expect to communicate any meaning to others by using his new words. Auster’s exploration of language in City of Glass seems on the surface to keep the post-modern tradition of fretting about how language can mean what we intend it to, but ultimately supports Wittgenstein in his belief that “the aim of philosophy [of language] is to erect a wall at the point where language stops anyway” (Philosophical Occasions 187). Society as a whole gives its unspoken approval of language with every word spoken and conversation had, and although language does break down under mathematical pressure, it still manages to run the pragmatics of the world all on its own.
Works Cited


by the waters of the susquehanna, i laid down and wept

The Trauma of Removal in Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*

Aaron Graham

Current theorizations of a traumatic experience’s construction describe the traumatic event as that which, with unusual force, impinges upon or ruptures a boundary, demarcating either psychological or physical identity. This description of trauma is analogous with the physical process of wounding and derives from the etymology “trauma”, from the Greek ττρώσκω: to wound. However, as Judith Butler reminds us, “even the body is not a being but a variable boundary” (171). As such, restricting our consideration of traumatic events to those events that rupture or impinge upon the boundaries of the physical or psychical body is to ignore the larger question of how—as a result of a traumatic event—the boundaries informing one’s identity may be brought down entirely. By considering the manner in which identity is constructed and constantly reformed by the ever-shifting boundaries of the temporal and geographical space one occupies, this paper interrogates how
trauma may be constructed as a removal outside the boundaries that inform one’s identity.

By considering the structure of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* as constructing her traumatic experience as a process of removal, this project seeks to enlarge our understanding of the multiple potential formulations of traumatic experience. Through examining how Mary Rowlandson’s traumatic experience becomes encoded in her own narrative account of her captivity, this paper will show the viability of structuring traumatic experience as not only an impingement or wounding, but also as a removal.

The formulation of trauma-as-removal profoundly affects Rowlandson’s narrative as her identity becomes continually reconstructed— informs by the ever-shifting temporal and geographical space she occupies. This paper examines her narrative’s attempt to codify a stable identity when the boundaries informing and delineating “Self” from “Other” have not merely been impinged upon, but fallen away entirely, thus being replaced by structures that previously signified otherness and alterity.

This paper begins by examining the structure of Rowlandson’s narrative as indicative of the traumatic events it contains by considering the series of “Removals” from the socio-political and religious center of Rowlandson’s Puritan identity, Lancaster, Massachusetts. I focus on how, during the first half of the narrative, Rowlandson’s discourse characterizes the Indians in brutish, inhuman, and often bestial terms in order to establish a strict dichotomy between her captors and her Puritan identity. As will be seen, this strict binary is adopted and acts as a substitute for the binaries of civilization/savage, home/wilderness, and Christian space/Pagan space upon which Rowlandson’s Puritan identity had been dependent and which had been lost in her subsequent removal. It is asserted that the vehemence with which Rowlandson demonizes the Indians indicates her traumatic experience by returning to affective intensity of the originary traumatic event—the siege of Lancaster. As Rowlandson is removed further from this center of her Puritan identity, even the binaries she erects to function as a new set of boundaries between her identity and the constructed alterity of her captors deteriorate. Understanding this process as inherently traumatic can help elucidate the manner in which trauma can alter the way in which victims of trauma perceive and construct their own identity.

Throughout Rowlandson’s account, there are segments of narrative that periodically appear jarringly disconnected from the text’s title, *The Sovereignty*
Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* begins to develop the narrative of trauma-as-removal in her initial characterization of the Indian raid on the Puritan settlement of Lancaster. The language of her description begins the narrative and constructs the pervasively traumatic tone of the work, establishing a series of stable, normative identities demarcated by—and anchored in—the geographic boundaries of the Puritan settlement. As the story begins, the traumatic impingement of these boundaries takes center stage. On the first page of her narrative, Rowlandson writes,

> On the tenth of February 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster: their first coming was about sunrising; hearing the noise of some guns, we looked out; several houses were burning, and the smoke ascending to Heaven. There were five persons taken in one house; the father, and the mother and a sucking child, they knocked on the head; the other two they took and carried away alive. (167–68)

The essential construction of identity that occurs in the first few pages of the work focuses on establishing a fundamental Puritan basis for Rowlandson’s identity, centered in her home in Lancaster. The significance of the traumatic impingement of these boundaries relies a great deal on an othering of the Indian attackers that parallels Rowlandson’s description of their penetrating the perimeter of the town.

*and Goodness of God.* Portions of the narrative detail actions committed by Rowlandson, which one would assume she would omit. This paper argues that these sections are of key importance to analyzing the traumatic status of Rowlandson’s “Removal” from Puritan society. Viewing them as Cathy Caruth’s theoretical position suggests—as flashbacks to the traumatic events themselves, which have been etched or imprinted on her mind below the level of conscious thought—provides a palpable explanation. By this reasoning, Rowlandson cannot help but include the troubling and often damning segments from her narrative, as these experiences have not yet risen entirely to the level of cognitive thought. As such, they cannot be manipulated to the extent that allows for narrative reconstruction or selective omission. By beginning analysis with the attack on Lancaster—and noting how the frequency of these damning asides increase as Rowlandson is moved farther away from Lancaster in the proves of her captivity—these moments are evaluated as narrative markers that are indicative of the progression of Rowlandson’s trauma.
During the siege of Lancaster, but before the Indians captured her, Rowlandson expressed the traumatic impingement of the Puritan boarders as inextricably tied to her underlying construction of their alterity. Rowlandson writes, “It is a solemn sight to see so many Christians lying in their own blood, some here, and some there, like a company of sheep torn up by wolves, all of them stripped naked by a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranting, and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out” (169). The binary’s basis for Rowlandson’s configuration of identity becomes clear by the manner in which she describes the Christians in this scene. The Christians are “lying in their own blood,” slaughtered like sheep during the onslaught of ravenous wolves. Her description portrays people who share her familial identity in terms of their victimization by the Other. In the same passage, the Indians’ character becomes othered by Rowlandson’s use of a metaphor, allowing her to interpret their identity as inhuman. By calling the Indians “a company of hell-hounds” and giving their voices an unearthly, unnatural quality, she further separates the Indian aggressors’ identity from that of their Puritan victims. In Rowlandson’s description, “roaring, singing, and chanting” become characteristic of the Indians’ voices; this depiction assigns it an identity diametrically opposed to the civilized humanity that is represented by the suffering Puritans.

The ahistoricity of Rowlandson’s account of the Indian attack and her subsequent captivity further complicates her narrative by further resisting the boundaries imposed, giving the event a historical locus. As we know, and as Rowlandson would have been acutely aware, the assault on Lancaster occurred during the final stages of King Philip’s War. Rowlandson elides the backdrop of anxieties and hostilities between the English Puritans and the savage heathens, which frame the narrative’s problematic trajectory. The attack itself enters a space of alterity because of its ahistoricity; according to Rowlandson, the assault is not part of an ongoing campaign that included violent and inhumane acts on both sides, but is a singular act of aggression on the part of the violent savages. The notion of alterity as being a space occupied by everything that is not congruent with one’s own identity typifies these binary constructions and pervades Rowlandson’s account. As her captivity begins, the Indian is vengeful, violent, and diabolical. Conversely, the English Puritan must be civilized, empathetic, forgiving, charitable, pious, patient, loyal, and elect. Removing the Indian’s raid on Lancaster from its historical location—in the midst of a war characterized by mutual and reciprocal acts of aggression—Rowlandson reorients the reader by crafting a moral geography controlled by her narrative frame.
To Rowlandson’s reader, the Indian assault on Lancaster appears to be a startlingly hostile, unprovoked, and unanswered act of violence which both allows for and justifies Rowlandson’s depiction of the Indians’ alterity as demonic and reifies her Puritan identity’s value.

In addition to establishing the moral geography of her narrative frame, Rowlandson’s account of the raid on Lancaster and its bestial description of her soon-to-be-captors needs to be considered as a—perhaps unconscious—memorialization and mythologization of her personal trauma. By beginning her account of Lancaster’s siege and her capture with the precise date, circumstances, and time of day the attack was perpetrated, Rowlandson’s narrative functions as what theorist Cathy Caruth calls “memorializing the traumatic event” (5). Rowlandson’s framing of the Indian attack erects a textual monument to mark both her own capture and the beginning of her removal from Puritan society. Additionally, this constructs a textual headstone for those individuals killed or separated from their families during the siege. This attempt to commemorate the losses that resulted from the Indians’ attack on the Puritan settlement is held in tension with Rowlandson’s language, which seems intent on transcending the representational boundaries of history and moving into myth.

In her analysis of the representation of historical trauma, Kali Tal suggests that one of the most common ways in which traumatic events are incorporated into conventional historical texts is through the process of “mythologization.” This “works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives turning it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable narrative” (6). Rowlandson’s use of biblical imagery and archetype in the description of the assault in Lancaster begins the process of mythologization in Rowlandson’s narrative. The setting of the attack: at sunrise where “several houses were burning, and the smoke ascending to Heaven” reminds her Puritan readers of biblical descriptions of Hell, as opposed to the sleepy Puritan settlement of Lancaster. The shadowy figures of Indians violently murdering nearly everyone in sight, and lighting all the hallmarks of civilization afire with their torches, resonates with demonic intent, rather than reflecting the historical context of the siege—as one in a number of ongoing military skirmishes. Her description of the Puritans as “a company of sheep torn up by wolves” adds to the siege’s biblical reference and associates Rowlandson and her people with the sinless, humble flock of God’s Elect—eliding the settler’s own offensive actions against Indians during King Philip’s War. Finally,
Rowlandson’s description of the Indians as “a company of hell-hounds” whose “roaring, singing, ranting, and insulting” emphasizes their fiendish intent to vivisect the defenseless Puritans.

Rowlandson describes, in brutal detail, the demonic whirlwind of the Indian hell-hounds rampaging through the defenseless Puritan settlement, raising buildings, and slaughtering men, women, and children without discrimination or affect. However, as the Indians encircle Rowlandson’s house and light fire to the dwelling’s roof, a startling shift in the narrator’s tone calls the reader’s attention.

I had often before this said that if the Indian should come, I should choose rather to be killed by them than taken alive, but when it came to the trial, my mind changed. Their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit, that I chose rather to go along with those (as I may say) ravenous beasts, than that moment to end my days; and that I may the better declare what happened to me during that grievous captivity, I shall particularly speak of the several removes we had up and down the wilderness. (169)

As the demonic, lupine Indians are at the threshold of Rowlandson’s own house, Rowlandson justifies her decision to be taken prisoner. While her description of the Indians as “ravenous beasts” remains consistent with the discourse of the alterity characteristic of her narrative thus far, her own actions seem to fight against everything the reader has come to know as integral to Puritan identity.

The appearance of ideological dissonance in a narrative told by the survivor of traumatic experience may be indicative of the traumatogenic pathology of the events described. Prior to the assault on Lancaster, Rowlandson believed she would rather be killed by the Indians than taken alive. Though she refers—at this point—to the captivity itself as “grievous,” its characterization is dependent on its relation to Puritan life. Therefore, the occurrences that happen in captivity exhibit the opposite characteristics of her life as a free Puritan woman, and wife of the minister. However, the apparent lack of strength demonstrated by Rowlandson’s unwillingness to yield her life and apparent preference to risk dishonor at the hands of the demonically portrayed Indians belie a problematic dimension of her narrative. The breakdown of Rowlandson’s narrative frame allows for the admission of this essential weakness in character. This is consistent with Caruth’s claim that the proximity of a victim to the originary traumatic experience can prevent her restructuring or omitting elements of the traumatic narrative, thus creating a coherent tale (149). For Caruth, a trauma
victim’s ability to change her traumatic narrative and “tell a different story” (129) is evidence of her working through the traumatic experience. In Rowlandson’s case, this break in her narrative voice—to include the unflatteringly honest description of her decision to live in captivity, rather than forfeit her life at the hands of the Indians—provides evidence for the ongoing traumatogenic status of her capture.

Rowlandson’s movement beyond the boundaries of Lancaster in the “First Remove” is representational of the demarcation of the spatial limits of her Puritan identity. Moreover, her removal from the social body of her congregation in Lancaster represents and captures the importance of this traumatic rupture of social identity. Rowlandson details her first remove: “About a mile we went that night, up upon a hill within sight of the town, where they intended to lodge. There was hard by a vacant house (deserted by the English before, for fear of the Indians). I asked them whether I might not lodge in the house that night, to which they answered, ‘What, will you love Englishmen still?’” (169). Despite being dislocated from the hub which informs her Puritan identity, Rowlandson remains in sufficient proximity to this cultural nexus, “upon a hill within sight of the town,” to feel hopeful that she may spatially redefine her identity and confirm the Indian’s alterity. Her request to lodge within the abandoned English house represents an attempt to demarcate a white, Puritan space within Indian captivity. Were Rowlandson’s request granted, she would be able to seek refuge inside a structure that possesses the definitive characteristic of being not Indian. Thus, her identity could be temporarily stabilized because the borders of this house mimic those of Lancaster; everything within the house would be safely familiar, and the Indians outside its walls would be othered.

Judith Butler’s observation that “the body is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary” (67) shows that Rowlandson’s plea to live in the abandoned English house is an attempt to reaffirm her Puritan identity by resituating herself within the boundaries of her English ancestry. This attempt is aided by reinscribing the Indians’ barbarity: placing them in diametric opposition to English civilization, as symbolized by the specific “English” dwelling. The Indians’ response to her request helps reveal the problematic nature of Rowlandson’s attempt to restructure the boundaries of her cultural body. By teasing Rowlandson, “What, will you love Englishmen still?” the Indian emphasizes Rowlandson’s removal from the boundaries that inform her cultural identity. By making light of her eagerness to identify with an English past upon which her status as an New
England Puritan was based, the Indian forces her to realize this flimsy attempt to re-establish a structure for her identity only reinforces her loss of Lancaster, the fundamental emblem for her English subjectivity.

As Rowlandson’s removals distance her from the cultural center of her identity, Rowlandson’s portrayal of her Indian captors shifts away from a strict reliance on binary characterization and towards what can best be called a hybrid identity. Rowlandson’s early depictions of the Indians’ speech and vocal inflections as barbarous, bestial, and demonic, becomes replaced with an insightful understanding and even an identification colored by compassion. In the “Eighth Remove,” Rowlandson writes, “Now the Indians gather their forces to go against Northampton. Over night one went about yelling and hooting to give notice of the design. Whereupon they fell to boiling of ground nuts, and parching of corn for their provision” (181). As opposed to the earlier descriptions of the Indians’ speech as demonic and indiscernible—a narrative tool, which previously served to other the Indians by making them appear bestial and inhuman—this depiction shows how Rowlandson has grown capable of understanding their language and even gleaning hopeful insight from their discourse. Rather than speaking harshly or in condemnation of the Indians’ planned assault on Northampton, Rowlandson describes “their design” in a factual and even-handed tone. Even after the Indians return from their raid of the settlement, Rowlandson is elated at the spoils they have returned with and her potential to barter with the returning warriors. This decided shift away from the inclination to other the Indians based on their linguistic differences and opposition to the interests of English settlements is a result of Rowlandson’s further removal from Puritan society. Her identification with the stakes of the Indian raid on Northampton, in conjunction with her elation at their successful return, indicates a hybridization of Rowlandson’s identity, as she is no longer inclined to co-opt a discourse of alterity to distance her identity from that of her captors.

Near the middle of her narrative, Rowlandson begins to confuse personal pronouns within her narrative and disassociate linguistically from her previously concrete identity as an English Puritan. Particularly in the “Eighteenth Remove,” the Other is described familiarly by Rowlandson, thus calling her English identity into question. On this occasion, Rowlandson recounts the events precipitated by an Indian woman’s effort to feed the group by the boiling of horses’ hooves.
Then I went to another wigwam, where there were two of the English children; the squaw was boiling horses feet; then she cut me off a little piece, and gave one of the English children a piece also. Being very hungry I had quickly eat up mine, but the child could not bite it, it was so tough and sinewy, but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing, and slabbering of it in the mouth and hand. Then I took it of the child, and eat it myself, and savory it was to my taste. (194–95)

Rowlandson’s actions in this scene are startling. She literally pries the food from a child’s mouth and devours it herself, without apology or remorse. However, her account of the event is even more startling than its contents. The use of the adjective “English” to describe the children others them, diametrically opposing them to the identity of the Squaw that is cooking the horses’ feet. More troublingly, this also signifies that the children are distinct from Rowlandson’s own identity. The children have ceased to be part of the collective Puritan “ours,” have been deprived of any spiritual kinship and are now merely “English.” This begins the bifurcation necessary to associate the English children with the Other. The particularly devastating impact this dissociation has upon the binary construction of identity can be seen because actions of this sort are associated in the Puritan mind with the uncivilized, savage, inhuman, and uncaring Indian. However, in this instance, Rowlandson’s actions transpose the alterity normally ascribed to the Indian onto herself—as the one preying upon the innocent, English child. This makes the Englishness of the child a distancing and othering trait when—according to the binaries—the opposite should be true. Here, rather than refer to herself and the child as members of the same group, or even to define the child as “Other” without mentioning its specific nationality or race, Rowlandson attempts to construct a narrative space within which the child is the Other, and thus her actions against it become either defensible or, at least, their inhumanity becomes mitigated. In order to achieve this, Rowlandson dissociates with her own English identity and the civilized, charitable actions she formerly associated with it.

Moreover, her description of the food that she stole from the child’s mouth, as well her mentioning the kindness of the woman boiling the hooves, associate attributes that were previously reserved to describe the English. Rather than unclean, revolting, and uncivilized, the horse hoof is “savory to [her] taste.” These terms are hallmarks of the familiar, civilized preparation of food. The charity of the woman who provided the meal for the captives constitutes what was, at the beginning of the narrative, an inherently English and Puritan trait,
but again associates it with an Indian body. At this point, the binary system of Rowlandson’s preconceptions as the basis for determining alterity become hybridized. Terms that should apply to the society she was removed from now apply equally to her captors. The Englishness of the child now stands in opposition to Rowlandson’s identity, which becomes further alienated from its Englishness as it remains both unmentioned and unincorporated with the child’s. The traits, which established the binary by aligning themselves with either the specifically English Puritan or the specifically Indian, have begun to escape from these groups and become equally associated with the Other.

Relatively near the beginning of her captivity, Rowlandson finds that despite being removed from the location and relationships she associates with being free, she has an increasing amount of agency. An agency that was unknown to her in her freedom. She realizes that that the Indians value her ability to make and mend articles of clothing. This translates into her acquisition of personal agency and economic utility. In the “Eighth Remove,” she explains “During my abode in this place, Philip spake to me to make a shirt for his boy, which I did, for which he gave me a shilling. I offered it to my master, but he bade me keep it; and with it I bought a piece of horse flesh” (182). While not explicitly stated, the implications of Rowlandson’s elation at discovering a skill she possesses that will not only be beneficial to the community, but profitable for her as an individual, indicates that this structure was not present in her Puritan life. Moreover, it is one of the few experiences in which she does not attempt to relate to a counterpart from Lancaster, thus verifying its binary difference from her present state. This indicates that though she is a captive, she experiences the free agency that she never knew while free.

During the conclusion of Rowlandson’s narrative, and despite being returned to her community and husband, Rowlandson cannot return to her previous way of life. Her previous world-view was based on these preconceived, binary oppositions and the Puritan identity that they supported. There is constantly friction between her desires—which in Puritan society she is unable to act upon and is even restricted from giving any voice to—and the demands of the religious patriarchy. She remarks,

I was not before so much hemmed in as with merciless and cruel heathen, but now as much with the pitiful, tenderhearted, and compassionate Christians. In that poor, and distressed, and beggarly condition I was received in; I was kindly entertained in several houses. . . . We were now in the midst of love, yet not without much and frequent heaviness of heart. . . . About this time
the council ordered a day of public thanksgiving. Though I thought I had still cause of mourning, and being unsettled in our minds, we thought we would ride toward the eastwood, to see if we could hear anything concerning our children. (209)

This shows that the binary of freedom and captivity have dissolved entirely. Rowlandson feels more hemmed in now than she ever did while in captivity. Her actions are restricted by social power structures and the general distaste for emotional expression in Puritan society.

In *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, Rowlandson expresses numerous preconceived binaries that inform her Puritan identity and influence how she relates to the world around her. However, her account shows that through the course of her captivity, these binaries fail to account for her experiences and become problematized, complicated, or overturned. By examining the traumatic narrative of Rowlandson’s removal beyond the boundaries that inform her Puritan identity, a further understanding of how the ever-shifting boundaries of the temporal and geographical space can contribute to traumatic experience is gained, especially with regards to trauma victims’ changed perception of their own identity.
Endnotes

1 For further discussion of trauma as a literal, veridical representation of the originary traumatic event as well as the stakes of this view within literary criticism see Cathy Caruth’s *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, *Trauma: the Unclaimed Experience*, and Rachel Ley’s *Trauma: a Genealogy*.

2 For a detailed discussion of the propensity for trauma to be mythologized as an originary cultural event see Dominick LeCapra’s *Writing History*, *Writing Trauma*, and Kali Tal’s *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*.

Works Cited


Thomas Malory closes the account of King Arthur’s death by giving the inscription on his tomb: “Rex quondam rexque futurus” (517). This phrase has figured prominently in Arthurian legend—in use as early as 1125; it surfaces in medieval and modern tellings alike, notably furnishing the title for T. H. White’s The Once and Future King (Lacy 381). Though so often parroted, the epitaph is infrequently analyzed. However, this epitaph deserves closer examination since it establishes Arthur’s past and future, but completely ignores his present, and it even inscribes Arthur in a chronology that has abandoned linear time for a cyclical alternative, while simultaneously creating a King who never reigns uniquely in the present moment. Of course, taken alone, the inscription is merely an interesting descriptor. Read, however, within the total context of Le Morte d’Artur, “rex quondam rexque futurus” assumes a special significance. It becomes indicative of larger narrative trends, a kind of motto for the chronology of Camelot. Examining the peculiar qualities of time in Le Morte d’Artur, this paper will argue that the work employs a multi-temporal narrative structure—that is, a structure in which a character’s past, present, and future coexist. It will explore examples of this chronology on a textual level, noting particularly the role of rhetorical device, prophesy, supernatural
objects, and dreams. Extensively unpacking these mechanisms of temporality, it will then assign them a fuller meaning within the context of Malory's total project. Finally, using passages from Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy as a lens through which to interpret the chronological construction of the work, the paper will suggest that the unique temporality of Le Morte creates coherence in a chaotic text.

A Prophetic Text: Prolepsis and Analepsis

The epitaph “rex quondam rexque futurus” employs two rhetorical devices, prolepsis and analepsis. Prolepsis describes the assumption of Arthur’s return, and analepsis, the past fact of his reign. These devices, which would typically achieve contradictory effects, work to confound the reader’s experience of narrative chronology. The phrase asks the reader to inhabit two times simultaneously, yet, more confusing still, neither of these moments occurs in the present. This is not a unique sentence construction in Le Morte, for Malory often introduces characters with such descriptions.

One such moment occurs in Book I when Arthur meets King Pellinore questing in the wood. Having exhausted his own horse, Pellinore asks to borrow Arthur’s steed, and Malory follows this request immediately with a sentence summarizing Pellinore’s entire life: “His name was King Pellinore that that time followed the Questing Beast, and after his death Sir Palomides followed it” (22). Apparently, Pellinore exists simultaneously in the past and the future, or, that is to say, the text presents the major facts of his life without concern for chronological disruption; it is of little importance that the present and future coexist, for the essential facts of Pellinore’s identity exist outside of the present. Like Arthur, who embodies “rex quondam rexque futurus,” Pellinore is a character whose whole history unfolds all at once. This history of Pellinore’s also engages strangely with time when it predicts the outcome of his quest, and then follows that quest as it becomes the errand of other knights. In a sense, the text prophesies its own conclusion, rejecting a linear representation of time for a complex chronology of interrelation.

This sentence-level chronology surfaces in Malory’s introductions of other characters as well. After Arthur returns from his coronation in Rome, many
knights present themselves at Camelot, and the first among these warriors is Sir Lancelot du Lake. By prefacing Lancelot’s adventures as a knight of the Round Table, the text does not limit itself to Lancelot’s past and present but also focuses on his future. Readers learn within the first paragraph of the “Noble Tale” that “in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms . . . he passed all other knights . . . wherefore Queen Guenivere had him in great favour above all other knights, and so he loved the Queen again above all other ladies all the days of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry” (Malory 95). The sentence thoroughly rehearses Lancelot’s prospects and gives readers a lens with which to interpret all of his future deeds, for we, as readers, never fear that he will succumb to a temptress, or doubt his courage in seeking adventure. But this prolepsis also augurs more sinister events. Even in this great moment of flourishing, when Knights pledge themselves by the hundreds to chivalrous service, collapse haunts Camelot. Consequently, the future influences the reading of the present, inviting readers both to make early judgments about the characters they encounter and to wonder about the unlikely fates assigned to these men and this woman.

Lancelot and Guenivere are not the only “multi-temporal” lovers of Le Morte; the text introduces the romance between Sir Tristram and La Belle Isolde by simply suggesting its conclusion: making “good cheer” one night, “either drank to other freely . . . and they loved each other so well that never their love departed, for weal nor for woe . . . and thus it happened first the love betwixt Sir Tristram and La Belle Isolde, the which never departed all the days of their life” (Malory 195). Here, Malory insists on the endurance of the couple’s love not once, but twice. Isolde and Tristram will love each other until the day they die, and this unassailable fact about the future informs the reader’s experience of their entire romance. Like Lancelot and Guenivere, the couple becomes timeless; they live in a world where the future exists alongside the present.

Similarly, we can see that this same type of sentence-level prophecy treats events, just as it does characters. After Balin wounds King Pellam, Malory ruptures the present action of the narrative to tell us that “King Pellam lay many years sore wounded, and might never be whole till that Galahad the haut prince healed him in the quest of the Sangrail” (Malory 45). This particular prolepsis appears in the “Tale of Balin and Balan” long before readers meet the full complement of Arthur’s court. Lancelot has yet to enter Le Morte and his son, Galahad “the haut prince” has not been conceived. In short, this scene forecasts the grail quest before its major players have even been introduced. In dealing
with the Sangrail, Le Morte looks not only to the future but also to the past. Five books after the “Tale of Balin and Balan,” Galahad is following rumors of the Sangrail from court to court when he happens on a city tyrannized by seven brothers. Here, a priest gives Galahad a prophecy made by the daughter of the city’s duke to the seven brothers: “Ye have done great wrong to slay my father and my brother . . . ye shall not hold this castle for many years, for by one knight ye shall all be overcome.” The priest concludes, “Thus she prophesied seven years ago” (Malory 325). This analeptic construction recalls a moment occurring after the “Tale of Balin and Balan” but before Galahad arrives at Camelot. More than any other sequence in Le Morte, the “Tale of the Sangrail” constantly connects episodes, disregarding the laws of time in order to construct a narrative that reflects both forward and backward on itself.

Real Prophecy

If these proleptic and analeptic portions of text confuse Camelot’s chronology, then real prophecies disrupt the court’s temporality entirely. One scholar estimates that Le Morte’s first book alone contains 55 prophecies (Kapelle 69), and thus so saturated with future events, the present seems to coexist with its subsequent results. In places within Le Morte, time conflates entirely. One such moment occurs just after Arthur’s encounter with King Pellinore, during which, “like a child of fourteen years of age,” Merlin comes to Arthur and, beginning an extended prophecy, exclaims, “I know what thou art, and who was thy father, and of whom thou were begotten; for King Uther was thy father, and begot thee on Igraine” (Malory 22). Arthur reacts badly to this announcement, responding, “I will not believe thee . . . for thou art not so old of years to know my father” (Malory 23). In many ways, this exchange epitomizes the complicated temporality of Le Morte. Opposite a youth with pretensions to the knowledge of old age, Arthur faces the non-linear chronology of his world, and like a reader questioning the meaning of a textural “flashback” (an analeptic sentence), Arthur asks how the past fact of his conception could present itself now in the form of a boy younger than himself.

Discouraged by Arthur’s reaction, Merlin returns a moment later “in the likeness of an old man of fourscore years of age,” to finish the prophecy. He warns Arthur: “ye have done a thing late that God is displeased with you, for ye have lain by your sister, and on her ye have begotten a child that shall destroy
you and all the knights of your realm” (Malory 23). Merlin predicts Camelot’s collapse before its formation—unmarried in this scene, Arthur lacks even the Round Table that will embody his chivalric fellowship. From a man who can be at once young and old, Arthur learns the facts of both his birth and death; knowing these details, he confronts a chronology that is more cyclical than linear.

In such an organization, Merlin’s knowledge of the future gives him the power to shape the present. Through his prophesy, he claims a kind of authorial omniscience, and so like an author, he instigates events, explores their causes, and knows their outcomes. During Arthur’s battle with King Nero, Merlin holds “[King Lot] with a tale of prophecy, till Nero and his people were destroyed,” which exemplifies the influence of the future over the present in Malory’s work. Captivated by stories of events still distant, King Lot forgets about the war that rages around him, and, as a result, Arthur wins a battle he would have otherwise lost. It is a mark of the future’s importance to characters in Le Morte that King Lot overlooks his duties to listen to Merlin. Lot later confesses himself “ashamed . . . for this faitor with his prophecy hath mocked me” (Malory 40), and while describing Merlin as a “faitor,” or imposter, Lot recognizes he has been tempted in the present by a false future. In other words, Merlin has lied to Lot and given him a prediction that will never come to pass. By doing so, Merlin uses true foreknowledge to secure Arthur’s success and false foreknowledge to ensure Lot’s failure.

In addition to Merlin, many other characters in Le Morte d’Artur prophesy: holy men, hermits, damsels and witches who all occasionally see the shape of things to come. However, readers expect the foresight of these supernaturally skilled men and women because their abilities align with the cyclical model of time proposed above. Thus, more remarkably, regular couriers also predict the future. Consoling La Belle Isolde after Tristram’s marriage to another woman, Guenivere tells Isolde that she “[shall] have joy after sorrow,” writing, “He shall hate her and love you better than ever he did” (Malory 208). Guinevere’s assertion arguably exceeds the terms of feminine intuition addressed, as it is, toward Tristram’s new wife, a woman the Queen has never met. King Pelles displays a similar prescience when he knows “well that Sir Lancelot should beget a pucel upon his daughter, which should be called Sir Galahad . . . and by him the Holy Grail should be achieved” (Malory 283). This knowledge surpasses any human intuition in its specificity, for Arthur and Lancelot also foresee precise details of the Quest of the Sangrail. In fact, Lancelot predicts the exact date on which
the quest will begin (Malory 308), and Arthur calculates that the endeavor will take the lives of many of his best knights (Malory 318). Bliss characterizes these predictions as “places where prophecy proper blurs at its edges,” and she highlights the difficulty of determining whether they stem from natural, or supernatural impulses (Bliss 7); thus Bliss rightly notes the obscure distinction between prophecy and intuition—the two conflate completely in the world of Le Morte. This overlap indicates the looseness of Camelot’s chronology. In a narrative that gives the past, present and future simultaneously, regular men and women possess extraordinary prescience, and so they therefore participate in the temporality of their story.

But the characters also practice another sort of quasi-prophecy by including the phrase, “Ye shall see.” When Merlin says that Uther “shall have his intent and desire,” he could be either prophesying or planning; perhaps he is doing both (Malory 4). However, Merlin warns Arthur not to joust with King Pellinore, explaining, “Ye shall see that day in short space that ye shall be right glad to give him your sister to wed for his good service” (Malory 30). This phrase could reflect the thinking of either a political strategist or a prophet—perhaps Merlin makes no distinction between the roles. The knights of Camelot actually often employ the same phrase during tournaments in order to forecast the outcome of a particular match. During one example of such a forecast, discussing Sir Gaheris’s prospects with Arthur, Lancelot says, “Ye shall see him do marvelously” (Malory 263). Similarly, in another example, Tristram predicts, “Ye shall if that I enforce myself, that the noise shall be left that is now upon him” (Malory 264). Thus, from these two examples, far from being an idle boast, the expression “ye shall see,” appears only with reference to sure outcomes since Arthur’s knights accurately judge skill at arms through combat experience; however, their precise knowledge of tournament results may actually also stem from their loose placement in a legible chronology. In conclusion, the tense’s usual sense is called into question by the multiple temporalities of the text in which it appears.

Prophetic Objects

We’ve seen how Le Morte Darthur engages with time through prophecy and rhetorical device; however, it also does so through a number of remarkable objects—the most notable of these being the Round Table that King
Lodegreance gives Arthur as Guenivere’s dowry. The chairs of this magic table give the names of Camelot’s current knights and, more interestingly, the names of knights still to come. When Tristram arrives at Camelot for this first time, “the King [sees] . . . letters that say, ‘This is the siege of the noble knight Sir Tristram.’ And then King Arthur makes Sir Tristram a Knight of the Round Table” (Malory 232). Predicting the future, the Round Table shapes the present, for it gives Arthur confidence in his decision to knight Tristram, confirming and sanctioning his current plans through physical assertion of their future realization. In addition, the table changes to reflect the changing future it represents. Returning from services one Pentecost, Arthur and his knights enter the hall and discover fresh inscriptions: “Four hundred winters and four fifty accomplished after the Passion of Our Lord Jesu Christ ought this siege to be fulfilled” (Malory 311). Later on during the feast, Galahad arrives at Camelot, announces his intention to follow the Grail quest, and, as predicted, fills the Siege Perilous. Even as it disrupts the laws of linear time, the table also situates Camelot in a historical chronology, for it is the only moment in Le Morte that dates Arthur’s reign relative to real events. As a 5th century king, Arthur rules, nevertheless, in a world without linear time.

Other objects in Le Morte also exhibit certain prophetic qualities, such as several swords that identify the knight who will wield them. For example, Arthur wins his kingdom when he finds a sword that reads: “whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all of England” (Malory 8). Like Tristram’s seat, Arthur’s sword both predicts and makes possible his kingship; it presages his rule at the same exact time that it endorses it. Yet another example of this is when Galahad reveals himself as the Grail knight once he retrieves a sword with an inscription that has been reserving it for the use of the “best knight in the world” (Malory 312). One last example that does not actually include a sword is when, visiting King Pellis, Lancelot discovers a tomb that predicts: “Here shall come a leopard of kings’ blood, and he shall slay this serpent; and this leopard shall engender a lion in this foreign country, which lion shall pass all other knights” (Malory 282). Readers can readily interpret the symbolism of this passage—Lancelot is the leopard who slays the serpent and fathers the lion, Galahad—because although this passage appears in the middle of Le Morte, it the future events it describes have already been rehearsed in previous prophecies. Therefore, it is a mark of the looseness of the work’s chronology that readers can identify characters they have yet to meet.
Objects, then, join with characters in anticipating the future and remembering the past, for they partake in Le Morte’s cyclical vision of Arthurian history.

**Dreams**

Many characters dream (though this is not a phenomenon limited to the supernaturally gifted), but Arthur’s dreams in particular influence the way time unfolds in Le Morte. Immediately after he fathers Mordred with his half-sister, Arthur dreams of a “land of griffins and serpents, and he thought they burnt and slew all the people in the land; and then he thought he fought with them and they did him great harm and wounded him full sore, but at the last he slew them” (Malory 21). Like the beasts on the tomb found by Lancelot, the griffins and serpents of Arthur’s vision clearly signify the armies that Mordred will raise against his father. This dream, following so closely on Mordred’s conception, explores the consequences of the King’s sin before he knows he has committed it. The dream seamlessly bridges past and present to show relationships between actions and their results.

Much later, just before the fateful battle with Mordred, Arthur has another dream. Sleeping, he dreams “that he sat on upon a chaftlet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made.” Strangely, Arthur dissociates himself from the King of his dream; he does not say, “I sat in the richest cloth of gold.” From this distanced perspective, he surveys the totality of his life, not in the mortal manner proposed by Boethius, but rather in its divinely omniscient opposite. “Under him, far from him,” the King notices “a hideous deep black water, and therein was all manner of serpents and worms and wild beasts, foul and horrible. And suddenly the King thought that the wheel turned upside down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb” (Malory 510). This disturbing image reprises a popular medieval metaphor for Fortune, which was also first conceived in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. In this metaphor, during her visit to Boethius in his prison, Fortune explains, “Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top” (Boethius 25). Arthur then watches the future decrease of his fortunes, as he looks back on past moments of kingly glory, all while he sleeps through his final night on Earth in the present.
Further pieces of evidence complicate this first, obvious interpretation. For example, Arthur envisions a cyclical imagery for the chronology of his life, and since a turning wheel suggests the possibility of regeneration and return, Arthur’s vision signifies that, although now low, he may once again rise high. After all, he is the “rex quondam rexque futurus.” Thus, inscribed in a cyclical temporality, Arthur takes part in an eternal vision of time. Dissociated from himself, he enjoys the kind of atemporal omniscience Boethius describes when he explains, “What may properly be said to be eternal . . . lacks nothing of the future and has lost nothing of the past” (134). Like God, Arthur comprehends his past, present, and future simultaneously, but Malory and readers enjoy this same perspective, when, surveying the many prophecies of Le Morte in all their forms, they understand the work in its total temporality. Therefore, this dream serves as a metaphor not only for the chronology of Camelot, but also for the experience of the reader and author.

Timeless Ideals

Malory’s interest in chivalric ideals may also be an important cause of the timeless quality of Le Morte d’Artur. Critic Jane Gilbert astutely observes that “the Arthurian scene is never now,” but rather, “its chivalry always lies in a past discontinuous from the present or in some fantastical otherwhere, contemplated at a distance by a consciously ‘modern’ commentator” (155). This is not exactly the summation of time proposed above; Gilbert does not explicitly suggest that the reader surveys Malory’s project from a multi-temporal perspective. Instead, she recognizes that, in the process of articulating chivalric ideals, Malory creates a world out of time—a place lacking a clear chronological situation, which captures something of Malory’s present and also something of the history he’s recounting. Gilbert insightfully recognizes distance between the reader and the events of the narrative (155–167), which occurs when the reader comprehends Le Morte from a Godlike temporality and creates moral patterns from on high. In other words, Le Morte’s function as a kind of fable elevates the reader to a position from which he can discern the 15th century political and social ideals in which Malory interests himself. The following sections of the paper will explore the significance of such a perspective.
Why This Chronology?

We have seen how Malory interrupts the linear progression of time to flash forward and backward through his narrative. Through proleptic and analeptic descriptions, his text exits a traditional chronology to give context to a character or episode. Merlin’s prophecies conflate the past, present, and future of Le Morte. Speaking with prophetic certainty about the outcome of future events, regular men and women show their awareness of this simultaneous vision of time, for even the everyday objects of courtly life manifest the exigencies of Le Morte’s particular temporality as they anticipate the adventures of their future owners. Arthur’s dreams, occurring at the beginning and end of the work, reinforce this cyclical temporality while also predicting the future and rehearsing the past. Finally, we’ve seen how Malory’s commitment to a moral message elevates the reader’s perspective to the point where he can discern the larger ethical movements of the text. The reader then enjoys a privileged view of Arthurian history; Le Morte’s narrative places author and audience in role of divine witness. We will now concern ourselves with the reasons for this multi-temporal construction, asking why it appealed to Malory and how it engages the particular challenges of the Arthurian project.

Many scholars note a certain amount of “randomness” in the organization and presentation of events in Le Morte d’Artur (Kapelle 75 and Bliss 1). Characters ride in and out of the narrative, seemingly without reason, while simultaneously beginning quests that lack conclusions and forming fellowships with knights they do not know. One suspects that the recurrent randomness of the narrative results from its conception as an interpretive project that synthesizes many sources to fashion a foundational account of Arthur’s history. In her article, “Back to the Future: Malory’s Genres,” Ruth Morse explains that Malory “amalgamated, compressed, and reinterpreted a series of already-existing tales, an epic, a history, a long prose fiction, a novel, a redaction of French sources, a romance, a tragedy [and] a translation” (100). Malory often concludes an adventure with something like, “Here endeth this tale, as the French book saith,” as if to cite his source and draw upon its corroborative authority (81). Of course, this French book means not one text but a variety of earlier medieval romances, and Malory actually drew from a host of English sources as well. In fact, at the time, he was writing in 1460 when tales of Camelot appeared in languages ranging from Norse to Hebrew and Portuguese (Cooper viii). Caxton himself remarks that “Arthur is spoken of beyond the sea,” where “books made
of his noble acts . . . be . . . in Dutch, Italian, Spanish [and] French” (Malory 529). This is not to say that Malory used or even knew of all these texts, but only to show that a terrific variety of sources were available to him. Naturally, these sources contain conflicting descriptions of events and characters; moreover, the different genres reprise Arthur’s story with very different aims. No single telling presents exactly the same set of stories that Malory does, so he’s clearly interpreted and integrated a variety of Arthurian accounts.

Much of the seeming “randomness” of the text stems from this integration of accounts. In her introduction to Le Morte, Helen Cooper suggests that Gawain’s unpredictable personality results from the blending of French and English sources. For example, although the hero of English verse, Gawain also appears the “antitype of knightliness” in the French prose Tristan, and so his character in Malory’s Le Morte d’Artur varies from scene to scene, according to the source interesting Malory at the time (Cooper xvi). Thus, Gawain’s actions appear like those of two, or even three, different characters; though sometimes chivalrous and noble, Gawain can also be vengeful, dishonest, and unruly. In the end, his fluctuating conduct makes him a difficult man to trace throughout the narrative.

Therefore, one of the greatest challenges of Malory’s project is to create coherence from chaos. In her article “Prophecy in the Morte Darthur,” Jane Bliss discusses the role of cyclical organization in this attempt, stating “readers and critics want to find unity in Malory’s work, partly because it is a ‘brief prose cycle’ whose tragic ending is clearly signaled by prophesy near the beginning. In this it is like a single-cut from a fall-of-Britain history, predicting and mirroring nothing but itself” (3). Thus, Bliss proposes that prophecy creates a temporality in which the past predicts the future and the future reflects the past. She rightly suggests that this structure gives a kind of unity to the work; jumping forward and backward in time, readers perceive relationships between characters and events that might have otherwise remained obscure.

The multi-temporal narrative serves Malory well in this endeavor because it allows him to present a character’s entire story at once, revealing the consequences of an apparently senseless episode. For example, during the wedding celebration of Arthur and Guenivere, a white hart enters the great hall, leading a whole hunting party, complete with dogs and a lady on a white palfrey. Initially causing great havoc among the plates of feasting knights, the hart suddenly disappears from the narrative. Apparently without reason, a knight steals the hunting dog of the lady on the white palfrey and departs from the hall
criterion

(Malory 54–55). None of the actors in the scene appear in later moments in Le Morte, and so readers naturally might wonder, Who are these characters, and why are they significant? As in so many already-mentioned instances, Merlin’s omniscience gives significance to these events, framing them in a broader context while also motivating Arthur to lead the Pentecost chivalry oath (Malory 57). For “Merlin did make King Arthur that Sir Gawain was sworn to tell of his adventure, and how he slew the lady, and how he would give no mercy unto the knight” (Malory 56). Merlin’s compulsion offers the offense requisite to inspire an explicit statement of Arthurian chivalric code. In this way, prophetic vision transforms a random narrative thread into the inspiration for Camelot’s foundational vision of knighthood, and a seemingly incidental detail becomes an important piece of the text’s total pattern.

Noticing such episodes, critics Jane Bliss and Rachel Kapelle both propose that Malory uses prophecy to probe the relationships between events in a chaotic narrative. They see prophecy as a means by which they can elicit meaning from a superficially random text; as in the case of the white hart, prophecy allows readers access to “the inner workings of a narrative world” by situating a portion of text in a broader context (Kapelle 59). But this paper has shown that prophecy is not the only means by which Malory provides his readers with a broader view of events because we’ve seen, for example, that mundane objects like swords and tombs may also contribute to this multi-temporal perspective. Similarly, character’s dreams and speech patterns do, too. Even certain rhetorical constructions allow readers to simultaneously glimpse past, present, and future. This “prophetic effect” is then a much more pervasive phenomenon than either Bliss or Kapelle suspect—it’s truly encompassing scope allows readers to escape the limited perspective of linear and mortal time and to instead glimpse the broader narrative significance of events in every aspect of their encounter with the text.

In other words, Malory, his readers, and even sometimes his characters, witness the Christian cause-and-effect logic of the Arthurian world. Our “encompassing vision” affords us the distanced perspective crucial to understanding the reasonable relationships between events, as they unfold according to Christian moral logic. Arthur, for example, falls at the hand of the son he incestuously engendered; Lancelot fails during the Grail Quest as a result of his adulterous affair with Queen Guenivere; and Galahad takes the Grail to heaven because God ordains that he should. From the viewpoint of a divine observer, the relations of action and result crystallize into several general categories:
events result from divine will, human impulse, or chance; sometimes it is a combination of the three. Interestingly, Boethius proposes a similar theory of cause and effect in his Consolation of Philosophy:

If Providence sees something as present, it is necessary for it to happen, even though it has no necessity in its own nature. God sees those future events which happen of free will as present events, so that these things when considered with reference to God’s sight of them do happen necessarily as a result of the condition of divine knowledge; but when considered as themselves they do not lose the absolute freedom of their nature. (136)

Thus, Boethius suggests that free will and Divine foreknowledge compatibly coexist. Perceiving the broad patterns of human life, God determines the outcome of events without depriving men of freedom of choice. Events may seem random to mortals inscribed in linear time because divine time alone possess the perspective required to discern over-arching meaning. The patterns of life require from their interpreters a simultaneous comprehension of past, present, and future. Malory appropriates this model in order to give coherence to a complicated and chaotic narrative; he and his reader become like God in their comprehension of narrative relationships.

Conclusion

_Le Morte d’Artur_ tells a history that transcends the timeline. Treating past, present, and future simultaneously, Malory weaves a coherent history from a diversity of conflicting sources. In his preface, Caxton instructs, “Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown” (Malory 530). He has interpreted the moral implications of _Le Morte_’s multi-temporal structure and enjoins his readers to take advantage of their divine perspective and learn about the cause-and-effect morality that governs the Christian life. Surveying the rich tapestry of Malory’s text, readers discern moral patterns of cause and effect as they emerge in the diverse relations between events and characters. In short, _Le Morte d’Artur_’s complicated chronology is not utilized simply for organizational purposes; instead, it also allows the book to participate in the wider Christian moral tradition defined by scholars like Boethius. Understanding the profound ethical patterns of the narrative, readers may more readily interpret events within their own lives.
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“the most fatal thing a man can do is try to stand alone”

Collective Individualism in Carson McCullers’s *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*

*Rebecca Peterson*

In her novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), Carson McCullers depicts fragmented characters who struggle to connect and communicate with their community—a struggle which hinders their ability to establish their identities and feel whole. Set in a 1930s Southern town, *Heart* follows deaf-mute John Singer who, through sign language, speaks freely with his deaf-mute friend Antonapoulos. After Antonapoulos leaves town, a group of misfits begins visiting Singer, divulging their lives to him. One of these is Mick, a tomboy aspiring to become a musician. Another is Biff, a gender-neutral man who owns the local diner. Though these characters idolize Singer, Singer feels no connection to them and eventually commits suicide. While Singer, Biff, and Mick struggle to articulate who they are, they present a range of ways to cope
with their fragmented selves. Engaging with Hegel’s and Feurbach’s explorations of how the self relates to others offer a better understanding as to how these characters navigate their fragmentation, as well as why Biff, Mick, and Singer feel isolated. Particularly, Hegel’s and Feurbach’s theories elucidate why communication is vital for these three to understand their ipseity and feel connected to those around them. In context of Hegel’s and Feurbach’s theories and my analysis of identity and communication in *Heart*, I contend that only by learning to “commune” will Biff, Mick, and Singer feel a part of their community and be able to reconcile their “fragmentation,” discovering their identity and escaping the fatal consequences of standing alone.

In *Heart*, the term “identity” is formed by integrating the multiple aspects of an individual’s self. It is a “multiety in unity,” in which the different and sometimes contradictory aspects of a person create a unified and whole individual. In simple terms, a person is typically not wholly mean or nice. The individual may identify more with one trait or the other but still possesses a portion of both. This unity of different traits, experiences, ideas, and principles creates a complete, dynamic, and whole individual. Biff, Mick, and Singer, however, struggle to recognize that complete identity encompasses different and sometimes conflicting aspects of a self. Marshall Berman explains this concept of unified differences as he argues that the modern condition is “pregnant with its contrary” and is a universe full of “fragments,” “paradox,” and “disunity” (23, 15). He further states that “in the modern world ‘Either/Or’ is replaced by ‘Both/And’” (24). Berman’s paradigm is present in Biff’s, Mick’s, and Singer’s being—they are full of contradictions and paradoxes but do not need to choose a single aspect of their selfhood. As the three deny their multiplicity or attempt to hide it, they are caught by the “Either/Or,” believing only a single aspect or portion of their being should make up their identities. Berman states, though, that it is only through embracing the “Both/And,” and the fragmented self that we can progress and “see that there is more depth in our lives than we thought” (36). In acknowledging and articulating their multiplicity, Biff, Mick, and Singer can reconcile their fragmentation and be whole, thus establishing their identity. *Identity* conveys the idea of having “sameness; oneness” (“identity”). Thus, paradoxically, they can have a cohesive and single identity, or a “whole” identity as they reconcile the fragments of their character to allow themselves to be “both/and.”

Biff, Mick, and Singer deny their ability to be “both/and” by withholding their identities and selves from their communities and thus restrict their
growth. Hegel engages with these ideas of the self and community, arguing that people experience self-division, much like the fragmentation Mick, Biff, and Singer experience, because they are unable to reconcile different parts of their identity. Hegel argues that while the self-consciousness will attempt to exist wholly for itself as it recognizes this split, the self-consciousness cannot exist merely for itself or merely for others (Phenomenology 50). He argues that everything must exist in a duality of for itself and for another because identity’s very existence depends upon recognition by the community (Hegel, 17; Forster 83). Recognition requires both a transmitter and receiver to understand each other. McCullers similarly advocates the idea that community is necessary for a being to exist by using Dr. Copeland, who states, “The most fatal thing a man can do is stand alone” (Heart 302). By isolating one’s self from the community, a person cannot fully realize his or her identity but must remain fragmented, in a state of either/or, and unable to reconcile seemingly contrary aspects of his or her identity. While Hegel argues that this recognition comes through language, language’s function to communicate with others demonstrates that besides voicing a concept, one must make it understandable for others.

Language is the means to convey self; however, if the person receiving a speaker’s message does not understand, identity cannot be expressed. Ultimately, a transmitter must understand another person well enough to communicate a message in a way that the receiver will understand. Hegel writes, “[The power of speech] is the real existence of the pure self as self; in speech, self consciousness’s autonomous individuality comes into existence as such, so that it exists for other. Otherwise, the ‘I’ . . . is non-existent, is not there. . . . Language contains [the ‘I’] in its purity, it alone expresses the ‘I’” (qtd. in Forster 84, emphasis in original). According to Hegel’s discussion, there are two reasons why speech is powerful. First, the autonomous self only exists as far as it can be expressed. Second, language “exists for others” and for the purpose of connecting to others. While communication implies transmission of ideas, identity cannot be articulated or recognized without reception. In Hegel’s words, two people must recognize, and thereby, understand each other; therefore, two-way communication extends beyond language and words to understanding and communion. The word “commune” comes from the root “common”: “to make common with others to oneself; to communicate, impart, share” (“common”). Language is insufficient to communicate self if the communicator has no commonality with the speaker. Thus, if a transmitter wishes to be recognized, the transmitter must first recognize the receiver.
Biff’s, Mick’s, and Singer’s struggles to communicate demonstrates that they must be concerned with both conveying their own identity while receiving another’s self. They must be aware of the person to whom they are communicating and allow for two-way reception. By withholding aspects of their being from others, they deny themselves the ability to understand their own identities and simultaneously deny recognition to those close to them so that neither they nor those with whom they speak develop their being. The three are imposing “either/or” on their beings and are not allowing themselves to be “both/and” and to experience the depth of uniting their variegated self.

Biff struggles to understand his wife and express himself to her, which indicates that just as identity can be fragmented, community can be fragmented, requiring reconciliation for both. In order to communicate with his wife, Alice, Biff must reconcile his opposing masculine and feminine sides. However, Biff rejects the paradox of releasing part of himself to understand an “other” in order to both build himself and build his community. Biff allows shame to prevent him from communicating both sides of his being. While Alice is alive, Biff vacillates between his masculinity and femininity and largely hides his feminine side. At times, Biff attempts to communicate with Alice. However, Biff “was sorry he had talked to Alice. With her silence was better. Being around that woman always made him different from his real self” (Heart 15). Perhaps Biff concedes to Alice and does not wish to bother attempting to speak with her or to help her understand him. Conversely, he possibly does not attempt to understand Alice. As Alice falls asleep, Biff “watched her with detachment” (Heart 15). Because he does not feel invested in Alice, Biff does not attempt to find commonalities between them. Ultimately, the rift in their community prevents Biff from understanding himself and feeling comfortable with himself.

As Biff struggles to speak in a hostile community, Mick’s strained relationships with her family members also indicates that communication cannot be selfish. While Mick attempts to communicate with her family, they do not listen to her. Their failure to listen complicates Mick’s attempts to share her self with her family, demonstrating that Mick must learn to take part in two-sided conversations. Such conversation requires Mick to look outside of her music as a means to identify her self. Mick separates herself into an “inside” and “outside” room, and hides herself in her “inside” room. Music is an essential part of her “inside” room, and Mick contemplates, “It was a funny thing—but nearly all the time there was some kind of . . . music going on in the back of her mind” (Heart 35). Music works as a language and articulates the person Mick aspires
to become, a person diametric of her “outside” room self. Because Mick thinks her rooms oppose each other, she struggles to express both sides to her family. Mick seeks her own recognition whether by listening to music alone or by transmitting only her self when speaking to her family without receiving an “other.” Mick feels closer to her older brother Bill than to other members of her family, but he largely ignores her. When she attempts to speak to him, “Bill [goes] on reading” (Heart 43). As she tries to commune with him about her violin—an attempt to share the music of her inside room—Bill gives noncommittal replies: “He was still reading—‘Yeah—?’” (Heart 45). Because there is no one to listen, Mick cannot fully express herself and is unable to share her “inside” room with others and reconcile her “inside” and “outside” selves. Hegel writes that consciousness “flees from the universal and seeks its mere existence-for-self”; however, “a singular ego may not exist through its own recognition” (Phenomenology 14, 27). While Mick wants to articulate herself and exist-for-self by listening to music alone, she cannot exist as a singular ego, hiding from the difficult task of learning how to overcome conversation barriers with her family and learning to listen to them. It seems easier to isolate herself, but Mick cannot reconcile her inside and outside room without the help of others. Singer ultimately struggles because he relies solely on Antonapoulos, suggesting that a sense of community and recognition can be created, even when the two parties are completely dissimilar. Singer is “quick,” “intelligent,” “immaculate,” and “sober,” while Antonapoulos is “sloppy,” “shapeless,” “dreamy,” and “stupid” (Heart 3). Though he has nothing in common with Antonapoulos, Singer talks only with Antonapoulos and secludes himself from everyone else. Though he allows his “followers” to visit, Singer does not engage with them and usually does not understand what they tell him. Though Singer believes that Antonapoulos, polar opposite from Singer, understands everything Singer tells him, Antonapoulos’s apathy suggests Singer imposes understanding and reception on his friend. For instance, as Singer’s “hands shaped the words in a swift series of designs” and “told Antonapoulos all that had happened during the day,” the novel reads that “it was seldom that [Antonapoulos] ever moved his hands to speak at all” (Heart 4). Thus, considering Antonapoulos’s silence, Singer does not connect with an “other,” nor does he truly attempt to understand an “other.” Unconcerned with communing, which entails discovering commonalities by sharing ideas and self, Singer simply wraps his entire self in Antonapoulos. Wrapping his self in Antonapoulos implies that Singer imposes his ipseity on Antonapoulos without establishing his own identity. By cutting
himself off from others, Singer destroys the possibility of establishing his identity. In effect, Singer creates a sense of communing without achieving mutual understanding.

Mick and Singer impose recognition on others and communicate with them through prayer-like language, falsely creating a sense of community and wholeness. To establish identity, Mick and Singer must find commonalities with their communities and commune with others. However, Mick imposes on Singer and Singer enforces on Antonapoulos their own likenesses. Thus, neither Mick nor Singer must struggle to find and build commonalities with others. In his *Essence of Christianity*, Feurbach argues that “a God . . . who does not reflect our own emotions . . . is nothing to us, has no interest for us, does not concern us” (282). If compared to human relationships, finding a God—or “friend”—who reflects the self is selfish. Instead of looking outside the self and learning to understand others, people create the idea that another person mirrors themselves. McCullers extends this idea in an essay on *Heart*, contending that to overcome isolation, man creates a personal god, “a reflection of himself” (*Mortgaged Hearts* 141). Therefore, those who create gods do not work to find commonalities or learn to communicate ideas, but create someone just like themselves. Ultimately, by creating personal “gods,” communication becomes pure transmission with no reception. Thus, Mick and Singer do not commune with others. Instead, they create a sense that they are able to articulate their identity by engaging in almost prayer-like language with their personal gods. Through their articulation and seeming recognition from another being, Mick and Singer think that their multiplicity is being recognized and reconciled. In their study on communication through prayer, Baesler, Lindvall, and Lauricella argue that prayer “bolster[s] an individual’s sense of . . . identity,” and that people who pray regularly have a higher degree of spiritual health and feel a close relationship with God (198, 205). Read in conjunction with Hegel, higher spiritual health comes because, in communicating their self-consciousness to a god through prayer, Singer and Mick articulate their selves through language. The word “health” is rooted in the word “whole” (“health”) which implies “good condition, sound” (“whole”). Thus, prayer, by improving “spiritual health,” helps not only in establishing “identity,” but also specifically in constituting a “whole” identity, an identity of “oneness.” Prayer creates a close relationship in which Singer and Mick may feel connection and a sense of identity; however, because they establish an artificial connection, their personal gods never recognize
them. Thus, they only create a false connection in which they inform their “god” about their identity and yet never listen for reception or response.

As Mick and Singer become too dependent on their personal gods, this relationship turns negative because it destroys communion. The purpose of communicating the self through language to community is that it removes isolation through connection and requires the communicator to understand his or her multiplicity, the aspects that make up the communicator’s being, well enough to put it into language in a way that another person understands. For example, if Mick were to articulate her identity to her brother Bill by sharing her “inside” and “outside” rooms, she would have to understand each room well enough to describe it in language and would have to understand Bill well enough to know what words to use. Thus, she better grasps her and Bill’s identities and personalities. Through this struggle between the self and language, Mick would be able to grow and better understand herself. Creating personal gods who are all-knowing and understanding, however, falsely creates a connection. It destroys the dynamic between language and discovering self and also becomes a safety net for when she avoids trying to understand and communicate with others.

Without communing, Mick and Singer simplify their identities by imposing not only understanding, but a reflection of themselves on their personal gods. When Mick and Singer rely solely on personal gods and make those personal gods a reflection of themselves, they deny their multiplicity and exist as a single fragmented part of their selves. Thus, they do not experience a fullness of identity from interacting with different members of their community. Also, they are unable to recognize, and will not learn how to explain to an “other,” how diverse their character is. This simplification is evident in how they objectify their exalted friends. Mick claims that music articulates who she is; however, she cannot have a relationship with her music, neither can she interact with that music. In a similar vein, Mick’s and Singer’s gods are mirrors who reflect the self that Singer and Mick want to see; however, in so doing they do not allow themselves to engage with an “other” and develop a full and whole self. This behavior actually further fragments their identity because it allows them to push away parts of themselves they do not want to learn how to reconcile. For example, because she believes Singer comprehends her “inside” room perfectly, Mick does not have to help others understand it, and thus does not have to understand her “inside” room well enough to articulate it.

Singer’s relationship with Antonapolous exemplifies how relying on a personal god destroys the self. By communicating only with Antonapolous, Singer
speaks to a mirror of his self. Singer molds Antonapoulos to suit his needs and is thus accustomed to communicating with his own flat, static identity. By not recognizing Antonapoulos’s as a separate entity and by imposing understanding on Antonapoulos, Singer’s being is wrapped in Antonapoulos. However, while denying any multiplicity in his own character, Singer senses a need to articulate himself and let another person be aware of his being. When Antonapoulos is gone, his restless hands reflect his need to speak:

His hands [Singer’s language] were a torment to him. They would not rest . . . when he was alone and his thoughts were with his friend his hands would begin to shape the words before he knew about it. Then when he realized he was like a man caught talking aloud to himself, it was almost as though he had done some moral wrong. The shame and the sorrow mixed together and he doubled his hands and put them behind him. But they would not let him rest. (McCullers 206)

While he is filled with shame and sorrow at talking to himself, Singer has only ever spoken with a flat and simple version of himself, the mirror image he created in Antonapoulos. Tragically, though he wants to speak, he does not know how to begin to understand himself or others. This is indicated when people visit him and he is “always the same with everyone” (Heart 92). He views others to be just as uncomplicated as he has created himself to be. Singer is lost without Antonapoulos because even if it was a simple identity, Antonapoulos’s presence was Singer’s articulation of himself. Instead of reaching to others after Antonapoulos leaves, however, Singer’s hands remain in his pockets, refusing to communicate (Heart 92). When he eliminates his language, Singer removes any method to connect with others and effectively cuts himself off from others. Hegel states about those who detach themselves from community and live for themselves, “It took hold of life, but instead it thereby took hold of death” (qtd. in Forster 69). Forster clarifies Hegel’s pun, which may translate to take “its [share in] life for itself” or may translate to “commit suicide” (69). An identity is made up of multiple parts brought into a cohesive whole. But the further Singer pulls away from his community, the more he destroys his person. When the single aspect of himself—Antonapoulos—dies, Singer does not understand how to live. Thus, by wrapping his “communion” in one individual, when his only source for communion dies, Singer’s person dies before he kills himself.

Personal gods inhibit growth and destroy the self; however, in some ways Mick is able to utilize her false communion with Singer to learn the process of
true communion. Mick feels torn between the different sides of herself that she wants to express. Particularly, her “inside” room is the “real plain her” and she struggles to reconcile it with all other parts of herself (118). Singer’s presence helps Mick to feel she is reconciling these different aspects and bringing them together. Poignantly, McCullers places Singer in both Mick’s “inside” and “outside” rooms so that he is navigating her multiplicity and uniting her dual natures within himself, helping her to feel whole. For instance, after sexual intercourse with Harry, Mick becomes severely fragmented (“It was like her head was broke off from her body and thrown away”). The experience breaks Mick because she does not understand the new dimension to her multiplicity that the experience creates. She contemplates afterward, “she was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not” (276). She wants to explain to her family the deep change that has taken place in her identity so that she can reconcile it and make it part of herself. Though she cannot tell anyone about Harry, Mick addresses difficult topics when she speaks with Singer. Because Singer is a representation of her “inside” room and difficulties in her life are her “outside” room, Mick pulls her rooms together by talking with Singer. Mick’s salvation, however, is that she does not rely solely on Singer as Singer did on Antonapoulos. While she does wrap her self in Singer and views him as a reflection of herself, Mick persists in trying to connect with her community.

Because she begins communicating different sides of herself to Singer, Mick begins to reconcile her multiplicity as she lives for others instead of solely for herself. Mick does not transmit her ideas to her family but she begins to receive the ideas of those around her. McCullers portrays Mick continuing to struggle to find her place and connect, particularly as Mick moves outside of herself. At Vocational “everybody seemed to belong to some special bunch”; therefore, Mick throws a prom in order to find her “bunch” (104). Though the prom ends badly, it demonstrates that Mick attempted to connect. In another attempt, she begins a relationship with Harry that ends poorly and leaves Mick fragmented and discouraged. Significantly, Mick does not allow these experiences to discourage her but continues to try to communicate. At home, Mick attempts to connect and understand someone else as she asks her ill sister, “‘How you feel this morning, Etta?’ . . . ‘A lot you care,’ Etta said.” Mick simply replies, ‘You needn’t try to pick a fight”’ (265). Mick passively acknowledges Etta’s remarks and patiently communicates. Despite failures and being pushed away by family, Mick persists in trying to establish a relationship with her community.
Therefore, Mick learns the process of communicating all sides of her self while simultaneously living for others.

Just as bringing opposing parts of the self together into a cohesive identity can seem a paradox, establishing community is built on a paradox of partly building identity and relinquishing it. In her progression, Mick finally learns to connect and become an integral member of her family community by beginning to work and assisting in their survival. Granted, this does not allow Mick to complete the process of becoming whole because she has not yet communicated her “inside” room to them; however, she is focusing on receiving her family’s message and not on transmitting her own. As Mick decides to help the family and work, she sacrifices her desires and will to her family’s needs. Thus, Mick exemplifies better understanding of what her family wants from her. As the family discussed Mick going to work, she “felt excited. They were all talking about her—and in a kindly way . . . Of a sudden she loved all of the family and a tightness came in her throat” (316). Because of her understanding and their reciprocation, Mick feels an intricate member of her family. Though she has not yet shared her inside room, she is progressing toward the ability to share herself because she understands that she no longer lives purely for-herself of for-another, but both.

While Mick progresses towards establishing a whole identity and coming together with her community, Biff demonstrates that to establish a whole identity, he must confront and recognize himself. Biff asks himself difficult questions and acknowledges discouraging answers. By boldly facing himself, Biff learns more about his multiplicity so that he can bring his different parts together. He questions, “What did he understand? Nothing. Where was he headed? Nowhere. What did he want? To know. What? A meaning. Why? A riddle” (237). Though unsure of his knowledge, he is aware that he wishes to understand. This understanding takes place as he considers how he wants to adopt children, make their clothes, and nurture and care for them (235). With realizing he wants to be a full person, Biff allows his feminine side that he formerly stifled to have free reign. He decorates the bedroom: “Before it had been tacky and flossy and drab,” but it is “his entirely now. . . . He loved the room” (224–25). He also uses Alice’s old perfume and shampoo (226). By consciously and actively reconciling different parts of himself and allowing himself to be the person he wants to be, Biff learns not only how to recognize himself but how to share it with others and, in turn, recognize others.
Biff’s curiosity about his and others’ identities depicts how developing and sharing an identity establishes community. As Biff explores his self, he no longer needs to hide features of who he is. In being himself and openly communicating that self, others are able to recognize him. He says, “That’s a compliment” when Lucille tells him he would be a good mother (230). When he expresses gratitude, he accepts and recognizes his feminine side. Significantly, Lucille sees and acknowledges Biff’s united self because he is no longer ashamed of this essential aspect of his being. By learning others have multeity, Biff becomes comfortable with himself and more closely analyzes others. He observes, “By nature all people are of both sexes” (The Mortgaged Heart 132). Through recognizing these similarities, Biff comfortably expresses himself and, because he has brought his identity into a whole, reconciles himself with his community. Applying the questions he asks himself, Biff inquires after and considers other people, seeks to understand and communicate with them, and thereby is able to feel at whole with his community. Further, he understands that communication brings greater understanding. After watching a man named Blount, Biff “wanted to talk to somebody about [Blount], because maybe if he told all the facts out loud he could put his finger on the thing that puzzled him” (32). Biff recognizes the power of vocalizing Blount’s identity, but it is only by his inquisitive observations that Biff recognizes the need to communicate to understand Blount. Observing Biff’s interest in others elucidates why Mick struggled longer than Biff in communicating. Though she was continuously attempting to communicate herself, she does not attempt to observe and learn about others in order to connect with them.

At the close of the novel, Biff’s and Mick’s experiences demonstrate that becoming whole requires constant evaluation. At any time, either could fall back into living for the self or living for others, which would hinder him or her from being whole. They obtain wholeness by uniting with their community and uniting the different parts of themselves. Anytime they focus on only community or the self, they pull themselves apart. Sitting in his empty diner, Biff envisions himself inhabiting two spaces, a space of both/and: “Between two worlds he was suspended . . . One eye was opened wider than the other. The left eye delved narrowly into the past while the right gazed wide and affrighted into a future of blackness, error, and ruin. And he was suspended between radiance and darkness” (359). Symbolically, Biff’s precarious balance between blackness and light may represent two spheres, the divide between living for the self and living for others. Biff stands in a safe place during his vision because he can see
both the darkness and the light by balancing his self and his community. Singer, contrarily, remained in a dark sphere unable to recognize his need for others. While Singer represents extreme isolation and Biff represents balance, Mick continues to struggle for her balance. At the close of the novel, she no longer escapes to her inside room; however, she contemplates “[setting] aside a little for a secondhand piano,” indicating that she has not destroyed her inside room (353). Her last words are that life is “some good” (354). Similarly, Mick is some whole. She is not in the both/and area Biff occupies yet, but she is closer than Singer was and is closer than she was at the opening. Ultimately, Mick moved closer to the center by learning to bring out her inside room and by connecting with her family when she relinquished her wants for theirs. As she continues to grow—if Mick will examine herself and how she changes, recognize similarities with others, and learn to articulate her self—she can commune and reach a balance.
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In her recent study of the “Indian ghosts” that, she argues, haunt the American literary tradition, Renée L. Berglund proposes that “all stories are ghost stories,” if only insofar as all stories are told in words, and all words conjure something that is no longer present—and possibly never was. Perhaps because its object is so often language, much recent literary and cultural criticism invokes the notion of haunting to describe pasts that make themselves forcibly felt in the present, absences that still seem somehow present, things supposedly dead which still and endlessly insist upon mixing their business with that of the living.

In the shadow of the First World War, Sigmund Freud pioneered the underlying notion of the so-called return of the repressed. For Freud, this return initially occurred primarily within the individual mind—that of the subject, in 1917’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” who remains ambivalent toward the dead, or of the one who, in Freud’s later essay “The Uncanny” (1918), has never fully come to terms with forbidden desires. But the repressed also returns at the level of whole cultures, like the ones that Freud later depicted in Totem and Taboo (1918) which make enemies of their dead and thus doom themselves to be visited by those dead again and again in perpetuity. Freud’s distinctions between psychological and cultural models of haunting charted a theoretical divide that persists even now.
Common to both models—about which more anon—is a revenant of a stock ghost story formula, one in which the spirits of the dead return to impart the whereabouts of buried treasure, or to bring guilt to light. And yet the notion that ghosts turn up to expose what has been hidden is a distinctively modern one which goes hand in hand with the enlightened conviction that ghosts as such do not exist except figuratively. This conjunction shapes two influential efforts to account for modern conceptions of the apparition by the literary critics Stephen Greenblatt and Terry Castle to account for modern concepts of the apparition. Greenblatt’s 2002 study *Hamlet in Purgatory* examined the figure of Hamlet’s dead father that literally stalks the wings of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Greenblatt found that the kind of ghost that he embodies (or does not)—the riddling specter who arouses tormenting ambivalence, stirs a sense of personal guilt, and simply will not be gone—came along at exactly the point where a longstanding relationship between the living and the dead collapsed. In that relationship, Roman Catholic theology and an accompanying, communal set of mourning practices and death rituals allowed it to be common knowledge that the spirits of the dead work their way between worlds: it was possible in the context of Purgatory to question ghosts, to acknowledge them, and thus to assist them in their movement onward to the next world. This process was in Greenblatt’s view disrupted by a Protestant Reformation riveted on inner lives and the isolated individuals who live them; suddenly, there was nowhere for the dead to go and so they lingered indefinitely in the phantasmal space between life and death.

In *The Female Thermometer* (1995), Castle moves the marker forward another two hundred years to find that, before the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, ghosts were believed to exist objectively, outside the mind. Debunked by enlightened rationality, they were, however, less exorcised than turned into psychological entities—hallucinations, delusions of presence, inescapable thoughts that certified the isolation of the modern mind. In their classic theoretical work, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno made a similar point: for them, secular and rational modernity is characterized by a “disturbed relationship with the dead.” Because we have been spoiled by apparent advances in knowledge, claim Horkheimer and Adorno, we are no longer able to acknowledge our likeness to the dead; thus we project onto them our “our own purpose and fate.” In all of these examples, the experience of haunting—which can include that of not being visited by
culturally sanctioned spirits—marks modern subjectivity, separating it from the relatively decisive thought forms and belief structures of the past.

In none of these guises is modern haunting imagined with pleasure, although it might be said that ghost stories at least convert the fear and dread with which they are imagined into pleasure. Etymologically speaking, the word *ghost* might be the revenant of the German word for guest (*gast*), but, at least in modernity, ghosts mark the unwelcome intrusion of what should remain outside, the insistence of psychic or cultural material that we would rather forget. Haunted houses are a standard trope in gothic fiction (itself an invention of modernity, circa 1765) because they so concretely express what refuses to be shut out, what is unwillingly inherited, what is woven into everyday life without quite belonging there. (This is a view indebted to Freud’s concept of the uncanny adopted in, for example, Dale Bailey’s *American Nightmares: The Haunted House in American Fiction* [1999].) The haunted house thus flatters an interiorized, psychological concept of haunting that begins with Freud and persists in the work of the Lacanian psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. In *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994), Abraham and Torok develop the notion of “transgenerational haunting”; here, children are forced to confront gaps in their parents’ accounts of reality, thus taking on the unspoken traumas that created those gaps in the first place.

Although the return of the repressed remains a constant, it is possible to theorize haunting not as the private property of the individual psyche but rather as the burden of entire societies. At the level of nation, for example, America is supposed to be haunted by wrongs committed in the past: slavery; the Native American genocide; crimes perpetrated against POWs or carried out against innocent populations during wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. At the same time, again in America, immigrants are often understood to be haunted by the worlds of suffering and injustice whose traces they bear from one world into another. In the “new world,” these same immigrants, ghostlike, often remain invisible because of the groups to which they belong; illegal aliens are often officially referenced as “ghosts.”

In a somewhat different sense, social psychology also informs standard studies of the so-called female gothic. Classic works such as Kate Ellis’s *The Contested Castle* (1989) or Claire Kahane’s “The Gothic Mirror” (1985) trace women’s apparent affinity with (or at least their relative openness to) the supernatural to their historical oppression; Victoria Dickerson’s more recent *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* (2012) identifies women’s cultural marginality
to the ontological marginality of the undead. In turn, studies of Victorian sensationalism like Richard Noakes’s “Spiritualism, Science, and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain” (2004) consider how a culture uncertain about what can be termed natural, or even bodily, fostered widespread fascination with the kinds of disembodied sensation that ghosts exemplify. A similarly collective approach has been taken recently in studies of postmodern, postnational diaspora by Michael O’Riley, Hirshini Bhana Young, and Marelen Goldman. All find that a shared experience of haunting can bind individual displaced persons to like-minded others.

Haunting may also be imagined in broader economic and class terms. When in 1848 the first sentence of Karl Marx’s The Communist Manifesto sounded the alarm that “a specter is haunting Europe,” the reference was to the bodily relations of labor and power and the accompanying subjugation of a laboring class. Both had to be denied so that the abstract corporate entities that we call national economies could emerge in their modern form. Later, in Capital (1867), Marx would liken coins themselves to specters whose connection to materiality has been all but worn away—a connection developed in Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx (1994), where Marx himself becomes a haunting presence within critical thought which would rather forget what he had to say. In Ghostly Matters; Haunting and the Sociological Imagination (1998), Avery Gordon proposes that ghosts are “neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis” but rather “a generalizable social phenomenon of great importance”—a phenomenon in which such past crimes as slavery or state terror are experienced both by those who committed them and by those who suffered them as a “felt presence.” Likewise, Gabriele Schwab’s Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma (2010) traces the ways in which experiences of violence—rape, torture, betrayal by the state—that can be neither remembered nor forgotten compound the psychic fate of individuals to the political state of corporate bodies. While such experiences can block communication between subjects and indeed between groups, they can also have the perverse effect of producing corporate unity in the present and even of binding otherwise severed generations together. For this reason, Berglund’s study of what she calls “the national uncanny” proposes that ghosts can be desired as well as feared.

No matter their focus or conclusion, however, theories of haunting do not necessarily differ in their deep structure. The ghost stories that critics tell—sometimes about ghost stories themselves but sometimes about psychology,
culture, and their interactions between them—are always stories of dispossess-
sion, retrieval, unresolved ambiguity, guilt and desire. The recurrence of such
motifs suggests that ghosts and the haunting they do “are” not phenomena in
themselves to be accessed by criticism but are rather critical tools in and of
themselves, devices that critics of culture use to communicate their percep-
tions of human reality.

And so an invitation: take up this tool! That would mean experimenting
with any of the aforementioned perspectives on ghosts and the subjects they
haunt. One possible approach would be through literary history. A work of lit-
erature may be interpreted in light of the concept of haunting that seems to be
in play at any given historical moment—whether in Victorian confrontations
with sexuality and embodiment, in the early modern loss of Purgatory, or in
the rationalizations of the Enlightenment that attempted to turn ghosts into
the fictional property of a barbarous past or into popular entertainment (for
this last, see Simon During’s Modern Enchantments (2004), or E. J. Clery’s The
Rise of Supernatural Fiction [1995]). A second approach to this topic would be
theoretical: many of the theorists cited above develop notions of haunting that
can be applied to a literary work, or that can be critiqued by citing counter evi-
dence. In contrast to that kind of hypothesis-testing, a third essay option would
be to compare two different theories of haunting (e.g., sociological versus psy-
chological) with their respective limitations considered, and a third perspective
proposed which might transcend those limitations. A fourth possibility would
be a close reading exercise that focuses on a classic ghost story—for example,
Henry James’s The Turn of the Screw (1898) or Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987)—
and probes the social and psychological dynamics encoded in the experience
of haunting at the heart of the work under consideration. Finally, it is signifi-
cant that in modernity ghosts are understood to be primarily visual phenom-
ena; they are also often linked to visual media like writing and photography.
Alternatively, those committed to literary criticism in and of itself might look at
the way media consciousness—the device of the found manuscript or the frame
tale, the use of intertextuality—realizes the experience of haunting for readers
of literary fiction.
Putting an end to one’s own life or the life of one’s own child is probably the most horrendous and shocking thing one might ever do. Yet, life often becomes so intolerably onerous that a person can experience release and find redemption in the very act of destroying himself or herself. Perceiving all self-destructive gestures as acts of despair, however, leaves us ignorant of the potential meanings of resistance that the subject might have inscribed into the tragic act of effacing himself or herself. In certain instances, self-destructive acts are not so much gestures of despair as they are acts of resistance that plea for the other to recognize equivalence. In other words, speaking through death by erasing one’s self from life can become a product of and a threat to the oppressive dominant power.

Is power so pervasive that the individual’s acts and decisions are inevitably shaped by its structures? The question has been the site of many theoretical debates about subjectivity. With the rise of post-structuralism in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, theories about the unlimited scope of power such as Althusser’s theory about ideology, Foucault’s theory about
disciplinary power, and Lacan’s theory about language influenced the emergence of many postcolonial critics of subjectivity. The conception, therefore, of a subjectivity that is always already shaped and predetermined by the coexisting structures of power and knowledge eventually results in a considerable theoretical investment in deconstructing the processes of othering and subjectification, resulting in an epistemic distrust of the subject’s autonomy and agency. Yet, the suspicion about the subject’s free will does not completely obliterate the possibilities of resistance and agency. Although Michel Foucault, for example, stresses the pervasiveness of power structures, he acknowledges, especially in his later writings, the possibility of marginal resistance. For Foucault, power is always constitutive of resistance:

\[
\text{\textit{Power can only be exercised over another to the extent that the latter still has}}
\]
\[
\text{\textit{the possibility of committing suicide, of jumping out of the window, or of killing the other. That means that in the relations of power there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there is no possibility of resistance, of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, [or] of strategies that reverse the situation, there would be no relations of power.}} \text{ (Tran 20)}
\]

Hence, for Foucault the body is not a mere site for the play of the dominant structures of power and knowledge; it functions also as a site of resistance. This resistance can sometimes be as radical as effacing the self, a gesture which may subvert or bring about fissions in the hegemonic order.

In light of this dual conception of the subject as simultaneously shaped by power and endowed with the capacity to resist it, Toni Morrison and Jean Rhys transpose their protagonists in \textit{Beloved} and \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} respectively from victimization and dis-empowerment to the subjective space of resistance and agency. Morrison’s and Rhys’s dramatizations of the subjugation and dehumanization of their female characters are done with the purpose of giving them voice and agency, even if their empowerment is achieved through death. Hence, what unites these characters, who belong to disjunctive spaces and times, is their decisions to resist violence and pain by effacing the self and speaking through death. The self-erasing of the female body, on which cultural and gendered violence has been inscribed, becomes a subversive act of resistance against the oppressive order.

Against the grain of the interpretations that circumscribe Sethe’s and Antoinette’s self-inflicted deaths as acts of despair and passivity, I argue that their self-inflicted deaths bear signs of defiance and resistance. To read their
self-effacements as mere flights and desperate escapes to end suffering mutes them and casts them as silent and submissive subjects; but above all, it empties their gestures of their purported potential for resistance. Although it is admittedly difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain whether a self-effacing act is carried out of despair or out of resistance, one can still make conclusions drawing on signs in the narrative that gesture either towards passivity or resistance. The means through which the self-destructive act is carried out for example, as well as the record of the character’s acts of resistance or submission, however minute are they, often help the reader to infer the extent to which an act of self-destruction is defiant or submissive.

Hence, the mandatory task of tracking the traces of subjugation the act of self-effacement leaves behind should be accompanied by the corollary task of excavating the traces of agency and signs of resistance, which may be submerged by the interpretive discourse. To be sure, defiant gestures of self-destruction are often preceded by either open or covert gestures of resistance that challenge the system from within and may pass due to a careless or hasty reading for signs of consent to the dominant order. The failure to perceive these signs of resistance occurs in a couple of critical studies of *Beloved* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which will be examined in the following sections. The means through which the self is effaced constitutes yet another helpful way of interpreting the gesture as resistance or surrender. The bloody and aggressive nature of these self-erasing gestures set them in contradistinction to both the romanticized passivity that characterizes self-effacing gestures in 19th century literature and the pathological suicides that fill Modernist novels. Perhaps we need a more probing expression to appraise the self-effacing gestures in *Beloved* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* than Higonnet’s depiction of 19th century romanticized suicides as gestures of “speaking silence” (Higonnet 1986). In these postcolonial novels, the victimized subaltern makes sure that does not pass away in silence; her self-destruction is vengeful in nature and is often accompanied by a violent gesture such as murder or immolation.

One can hardly agree with Foucault’s notion that “death is power’s limit” (Simons 85); for power is hardly absent before, during, and after the self-effacing gesture. Morrison and Rhys go beyond the liberating intent of and Antoinette’s mortal gestures by questioning the debilitating effects of the interpretive discourse after the subaltern’s embrace of death. The female characters who speak through death in *Beloved* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are stigmatized and recast as outlaws. Their self-destructive acts are misread and depoliticized,
and in the case of both Sethe and Antoinette, those self-destructive acts are perceived through a reductive ethical lens, instead of a political lens. Overall, I perceive the inscription of death on the body not as power’s limit, but rather as a sign whose “supplements” are perceptible in the interpretive discourse after the self-effacing gesture, as well as in the probable “fissions and elisions” that it might generate.

To examine the dynamics of resistance which certain acts of self-destruction bear, I will turn in the following section to the exploration of both the “unnamed woman[s]” self-destruction and Sethe’s act of infanticide in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* to see the extent to which the acts are meant, in the novel, to empower or dis-empower the self-erasing characters. The next novel that I will examine is Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which concludes with the controversial scene of Antoinette’s suicide. Against the grain of the mainstream critical appraisals of Antoinette’s character I argue that her self-death is an act of defiance against the colluding patriarchal and imperial orders. My aim in analyzing these two novels is to call to attention the explicit and implicit signs of resistance that the acts of self-erasure or infanticide often bear in the post-colonial novel.

Sethe: Speaking Through Death against the Racial Order
Perhaps there is no African-American novel that so powerfully delineates the pathos of slavery as does Toni Morrison’s, *Beloved* (1987). The novel brings into sharp focus the shattering and debilitating effects of slavery on the black community even after their purported liberation, and it puts emphasis on the necessity of “rememory” as an essential step on the trajectory of healing the traumatized black psyche. My concern, however, is less with the processes of “rememory” and healing, which a great number of critics exhausted, and more with the black female subject whose body becomes a site whereupon pain and subjugation were inscribed by the supremacist white racial machinery before she spoke through death. Sethe’s horrendous act of killing her own daughter functions in the novel as the fulcrum around which the whole narrative hinges.

Sethe’s gesture can also be considered as an act of self-erasure since her children are an extension of herself; thus, ending the life of the “best part of her”
is symbolically tantamount to killing herself. For understandable purposes, the scene has received much critical attention, but it is perceived, often through the lenses of post-structuralist psychoanalytical theories, as a shattering effect of the slavery system. As a result of such readings, the discourse of victimization and historical wounds is foregrounded at the expense of that of agency and resistance which receives a fairly pale treatment. My concern, therefore, is to explore how Sethe is given agency through inscribing death on her children, and how her self-consciousness is shaped not only by the memories of enslavement but also by her ancestors’ defiant gestures of effacement as well. In the course of my analysis, I equally try to trace the fissures which Sethe’s murderous act might have created in the slavery system, and I try to see how her unspeakable act is interpreted by both the white supremacist institution and the black community.

In *Beloved*, Morrison’s choice of a narrative mode that goes back and forth between the past and the present instead of a linear narration is particularly suggestive of how the historical inexorably inhabits the present. Sethe is haunted by the brutal and dehumanizing practices to which her ancestors were exposed during the ghastly journeys of the Middle Passage. In Morrison’s novel, the Middle Passage is represented as a source of Sethe’s traumatic memories as much as it is represented as a site where her ancestors tried to regain their agency and subvert the slaveholders’ power. Self-effacing gestures to escape ill-treatments on board ships were not uncommon. However, because of the dearth of historiographical data which records the slaves’ self-destructions, these gestures received less attention and are often glossed over in critical studies of African-American literature. Although Toni Morrison’s Master’s thesis was about suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf (Gillespie 410) and her novels are teeming with instances of self-death, there is still a great gap in studies of this theme in Morrison’s works. Out of all the critical studies about Morrison’s oeuvre, to my knowledge, only one article, Katy Ryan’s “Revolutionary Suicide in Toni Morrison’s Fiction”, addresses self-destruction in Morrison’s novels. In her article, Ryan draws attention to this gap, observing how the scene in *Beloved* that depicts the slave woman who throws herself from the ship into water often escapes the attention of critics (Ryan).

Morrison’s insertion of self-effacing gestures in her novels is an attempt to counterbalance the prototypical image of submissive and silent slaves that are chained and packed in miserable conditions overboard or who are overworked, flogged and tortured in plantations with a narrative that portrays...
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the slaves’ attempts to reclaim their agency. In *Beloved*, Morrison insists in several instances, through the narrative voice of *Beloved*, that the unnamed slave woman overboard “is not pushed’ into the sea but chooses to go.” This insistence confers agency on the woman and grants her control over her body (Ryan). The self-erasing gesture of the unnamed woman in *Beloved* reverses the typical representation of self-destructions in nineteenth and Western literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Neither a jilted lovelorn nor a psychically disordered being, the self-effacing woman in the novel is a being who is driven by the desire to escape the white man’s control over her body. According to Katy Ryan, self-effacement in Morrison’s novels “functions as a political form of resistance [and as] a break in history” (Ryan), in the sense that it interrupts the linear flow of the white supremacist narrative and disrupts its self-proclaimed control over time and space. In this sense, the annihilation of the self and its ultimate disappearance through self-destruction is more than a gesture of escape and despair; it also marks the slaveholders’ failure to exert full control over the black in whom they perceive a profitable economic potential. As Diedrich, Gates, and Perderson point out, “when losses in human lives through disease, epidemics, or suicide were high and caused much alarm”, caring for slaves and keeping them “in good shape was a major concern in the general economy of the trade. Captains had to commit themselves to carry the captives safe, whole, and fit for sale” (Diedrich and Gates 35). Self-destructions in this sense form hiatuses in the temporal linearity of the slavery system.

However, displacing self-destruction from passivity to resistance does not necessarily qualify it as revolutionary. The shades of resistance, as many critics note, vary from the most overt to the most covert and from the aggressive to the subversive. Obviously, the self-effacing gesture of the woman who defies the slaveholders’ orders and threats to jump overboard is not a covert gesture of resistance, but neither is it revolutionary. I locate the resistance potential of the unnamed slave’s gesture in the latter’s capacity, together with other transmitted oral narratives of defiance, to embed Sethe’s memory with a discourse of resistance and agency. As I stated above, the Middle Passage in Morrison’s novel survives not only as fragments of traumatic and painful memories, but also as a space where the white racial narrative is interrupted and subverted through a variety of resistance strategies which the slaves resort to, one of which is self-destruction. Thanks to the shared communal memory, it is the survival of the memory of the unnamed slave’s self-death and many other similar gestures of slaves who are right “under the sea” which empowers Sethe, in one way or in
another, to aspire for autonomy and regain her agency, though she does in a brutal and indisputably unethical way.

In addition to the unnamed woman’s self-destructive act in the novel, the reader comes across scattered cases of infanticide in the narrative. For African-American women, it was not uncommon to dispose of the children that the women unwillingly bore as a result of rape by white masters. In *Beloved*, Nan, Sethe’s mother’s friend, told her that her mother threw all the children to whom she gave birth during the Middle Passage from the white crew except her because she is fathered by a black man: “she threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away” (Morrison 74). Another character in the novel, Ella, a black slave and a member of the Underground Railroad who helped Sethe to cross Ohio River, left her baby that she bore of a white man to die out of neglect. These instances of infanticide with which Sethe is familiar thanks to oral memory, must have shaped her self-conscious defiant escape from Sweet Home plantation, and ultimately her decision to inscribe death on her children. Her mother’s experience in particular, as Henderson states, “enables Sethe to reread or reemploy her own experiences in the context of sacrifice, resistance and mother-love” (Henderson 96). Sethe’s act, however, should not be conflated with her mother and Ella’s, for while her mother’s and Ella’s infanticides are driven by hate and shame of having a mulatto child that is born out of rape, Sethe’s self-destructive gesture is paradoxically instigated by extreme “thick” love for her children (Morrison 164).

Sethe’s inscription of death upon her child is an outrageous act which imposes itself on the narrative to the point of overshadowing other resistance strategies which Sethe devised to escape the time and space enclosure which the racial order imposes on her. Tracing these minimal strategies of resistance (defiance of Schoolteacher, escape, sending her two boys away to Cincinnati) divulges how Toni Morrison counterbalances victimization with agency in the novel, this tracing helps in framing Sethe’s ultimate act of slitting her child’s throat in the realm of resistance.

Consequently, Sethe’s horrific act of slitting her little girl’s throat can only be examined in light of her desire to free herself and her children from the shackles of slavery. At the moment when the four horsemen, Schoolteacher, his nephew, a slave catcher and the Sheriff loom in the horizon tracking Sethe to where she thinks she is free, Sethe decides to send her children “where they should be safe” (Morrison 163). When the horsemen approach 124 Bluestone
house, the bloody act already reached its climax: “inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other” (Morrison 149). In Western literary depictions of infanticide, the mother’s killing of her child is often driven by a sense of guilt and remorse as a result of illegitimate conception out of wedlock. Accordingly, scenes of infanticide are portrayed as inevitable punishment of the female subject’s deviation from the circumscribed sexual normativity. In a traditional Scottish ballad entitled “The Cruel Mother,” the poet depicts a mother who “sat down below a thorn / Fine flowers in the valley”, and “twinned the sweet babe o’ its life / And the green leaves they grow rarely” (Ledwon 18). The idyllic scenery in the poem serves as a backdrop against which the mother is presented as a cruel and brutal being. In contradiction to conventional literary depictions of infanticide, Morrison reverses the trope of the fallen “bad mother” which dominate western literature, and re-institutes the image of the “good” African-American mother who erases from life “the best part of her” out of “too thick” love (Morrison 202), and not out of guilt or remorse. In other words, the slave mother’s killing of her child is a response to the choice between life-in-death or death-in-life, a choice that radically differs from the context of sexual relationships which stereotypically frame mainstream Western literary infanticides. Morrison blurs the boundaries between death and good mothering in order to foreground Sethe’s “existential” choice. It is not, therefore, surprising that Morrison dramatizes the scene in such an abashedly violent and bloody way.

Notwithstanding Morrison’s empowerment of her novel’s protagonist, she does not romanticize her self-destructive act. Sethe is portrayed in the novel neither as a heroine nor as a criminal. Although the author grants agency to the novel’s protagonist, she is reluctant to confer any absolute ethical judgment on her act. Indeed, Morrison problematizes Sethe’s bloody gesture, building her narrative in a way that evades judgmental foreclosure. Despite the underlying sympathy which she displays towards Sethe, she nonetheless maintains a kind of moral ambiguity all through the narrative. In the novel, Sethe is both condemned (legally and politically through imprisonment and socially through ostracization) and forgiven (through a reconciliation and reunion with her community). She is almost compared to a beast “you got two feet, Sethe, not four” (Morrison 165), but she is at the same time described in elevating terms as an extremely affectionate loving mother. In a statement which echoes the Keatsian negative capability, Morrison asserts that what Sethe did “was the
right thing to do, but she had no right to do it” (Morrison and Taylor-Guthrie 272). Against mainstream critical discussions of this issue, I argue that Sethe does not withhold moral judgment; what she withholds is absolute and unconditional judgment. Sethe’s self-destructive gesture is framed by the double-bind of the ethical and the political; consequently, misreading it in light of only one component of this binary will certainly yield a distorted understanding. The dilemma, therefore, is that what Sethe does is ethically condemnable, but, at least for her, it is politically required. The issue of the moral appraisal of self-destructive acts is not epistemologically unrelated to that of representation.

In *Beloved*, the voice of Sethe is suppressed by the white racial discourse, but more tormenting for her, by that of the black community itself. When the four horsemen backed off upon the sight of Sethe’s murder, Schoolteacher dehumanizes her, likening her to a horse or a hound which is enraged by excessive punishment (Morrison 149). Indeed, Schoolteacher’s position is typical of the racial discourse which strips blacks’ resistance of its political significations, reducing it to an ahistorical act of barbarity which the slave brings with him from the fearsome jungles of Africa. Moreover, the slavery system’s acknowledgment of its responsibility for Sethe’s gruesome act is dislocated by the paternal discourse of the white man. While Schoolteacher attributes Sethe’s inscription of death on her child to the negative effects of the 28 days of relative freedom that she had in 124 Bluestone house, the sheriff contends that “slaves needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (Morrison 151). The white man projects his fears of cannibalism, bestiality and barbarity on Sethe’s rebellious act to overshadow its emancipatory intent. To be sure, the transparency of representing the other’s actions and desires is always at stake, but it is more so when discourse and power coalesce in a blatantly overt way. Morrison’s novel, Sethe’s act is discharged of any political meaning, and incriminated by the respective discursive and coercive powers of the media and the court. Although Sethe’s rebellious gesture is transposed from the private to the public sphere, her bloody appeal for what Spivak calls “comparativism” is hardly heard.

Morrison is, however, much more concerned in her novel with the black community’s reaction to Sethe’s self-effacing gesture. The black community’s unwillingness to understand and forgive Sethe’s murderous act marks her as an outcast and aggravates her traumatic suffering. The price was too high: ostracism, limited mobility, a broken family and psychological suffering. As Debra King points out, the liberatory intent of Sethe’s self-effacing gesture “collapses
beneath the weight of social mandates defining good mothering” (Henderson 96). All in all, the re-union of Sethe with her community at the end of the novel, the exorcism of the ghost and the disappearance of Beloved all release Sethe from the tyranny of guilt, but do not release the reader from the troubling questions which Morrison triggers in his mind.

Yes, although Morrison ends her novel with a resolution which delivers Sethe of her long-repressed and tantalizing guilt, she ingeniously dramatizes Sethe’s murderous act in a way that resists easy polarizations. Although the reader cannot fail to discern the liberating impulse of her inscription of death on her child and, metaphorically, on herself, the reader finishes reading the novel with big questions that touch upon the definition of mothering and the ethical justifiability of self-destructive gestures.

Antoinette: Speaking through Death against Imperialism and Patriarchy

In Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), Jean Rhys’s masterpiece, the journey of Antoinette to self-erasure is marked as well by dehumanization and. Though she is much less exposed to physical violence than Sethe is, Antoinette’s defiant act of self-erasure is precipitated by an ignominious solidarity of racial, colonial and patriarchal violence that inscribes her, like Sethe, as a banished Caribbean who is reduced to sheer physical existence on the margins of the metropole. In her novel, Jean Rhys rewrites the history of the creole woman to showcase that her self-erasure is not instigated by sheer insanity but by a long process of cultural othering and material dispossession by the coalescing forces of British imperialism, its legacies, and its patriarchy. In Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys does not only divulge the vestiges of Antoinette’s defacement that Charlotte Brontë conceals in Jane Eyre, but also empowers her through death. In Wide Sargasso Sea, self-inflicted death marks the fate of Antoinette as well; the latter disappears from the narrative leaving the reader with the task of piecing together the significations of her self-erasure. Antoinette’s mortal incident is only hinted at in the novel, a fact which complicates even further the task of interpretation. Antoinette’s act unfolds in her last dream with which Rhys concludes her novel; there in the dream, in the realm of the subconscious, she sets fire to Thornfield Hall,
and jumps from its battlements. Nevertheless, Antoinette’s self-effacement is only concretized by Bertha in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, to which *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a prequel.¹ Since Antoinette’s self-erasure in *Wide Sargasso Sea* occurs in the third and last chapter where Rhys moves to the narrative space of *Jane Eyre*, there is no way one can read Antoinette’s self-destructive act without juxtaposing both novels.

The moment of Antoinette’s self-effacement has stirred much critical debates with regards to the questions of agency and resistance, and it is perceived either as a logical conclusion to her passivity, or as a political gesture of resistance. To jettison the claim that Antoinette is depicted in the novel merely as a victimized and passive subject, I first trace the resistance strategies to which she resorts, before decoding the signs of resistance that wrap her self-destructive act. The questions of the representation and interpretation of Antoinette’s self-destruction, and the appraisal of Rhys’s enterprise to grant her protagonist agency through death will be addressed as well.

Obviously, Antoinette is not a classic heroine nor is she presented in the novel as a powerful resistant figure. Indeed, Rhys is much criticized for rendering her protagonist a passive and submissive character. While I do agree that Antoinette is not represented as a powerful character in the way Sethe is, I stress that these critics fail to recognize the strategies of resistance which she makes. This failure in turn throws its shades on their understanding of her self-erasure, stripping it of its resistance potential and placing it exclusively within the province of victimhood and passivity.

In Rhys’s novel, Antoinette is represented as a victim of “the axiomatics of imperialism” (Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” 247), but also as a subject who tries to subvert the gendered colonial violence which is perpetrated on her. In a short but interesting article, Joseph Walker, offers a compelling analysis of the radical possibilities which may develop on the fringes of power. Inspired by bell hooks’ seminal article “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” Walker argues against conceiving of the margin as the exclusive “space of powerlessness and restriction”, while eliding how it functions as a “space of radical openness . . . a profound edge” which “nourishes one’s capacity to resist” (35). It is from her position in the margins of imperial and patriarchal power that Antoinette sets to subvert her perpetrator’s domination. When Rochester appropriates Antoinette’s name and identity into

¹ Rhys’s novel should not be, though, taken as an explanatory prequel since it creates a counter-discourse to that in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. 
a fictional Bertha which he creates in his mind, Antoinette objects: “my name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?” (Rhys 81). Conscious of the power of renaming, she asserts that “[N]ames matter. like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette” (Rhys 180). In her attempt to save her crumbling marriage, and to reverse Rochester’s hateful sentiments towards her, Antoinette resorts to a marginal local source of power, obeah (also called voodoo, a folk Caribbean magic which is contrasted with Rochester’s Christian belief in the novel). She asks her, nurse Christophine, an Obeah black woman to prepare for her a potent which would render peace to her conjugal relationship with Rochester. In as much as black magic constitutes a source of resistance for Antoinette, it also stands as one of fear and anxiety for Rochester, mainly because it belongs to the “uncontrollable” which escapes his Eurocentric rationality.

However, since these resistance strategies are weak in nature because they are undertaken within the boundaries of the dominant system, “Antoinette is doomed; her marginal space has collapsed into Rochester’s center” (Walker 46). Once she moves to the metropole, Antoinette, now an allegedly mad person, becomes not only more self-conscious of her subjugation, but also more violent and aggressive. Her violent attack with a knife on Richard Mason her brother-in-law for example thwarts the claim of her submissiveness and passivity (Rhys 184). All in all, Rhys’s protagonist is far from being totally silent and submissive, and failing to recognize the mutation of her defiance from what Katrak calls “passive agency” in the West Indies to open and aggressive resistance in the metropole will eventually lead to misreading her self-effacement, her last gesture of resistance (Katrak 15).

My intention in the above argument, therefore, is to place Rhys’s protagonist in the inter-space between victimhood and resistance, although, I admit, Antoinette’s character suffers from several drawbacks that weaken but do not negate her resistance. Doing so, I readily dismiss readings which are unable to perceive the complicated character of Antoinette, and consequently index her self-erasing gesture merely as a tragic accident and a permanent silence. One proponent of such reading is Lucy Wilson whom Mardorossian cites in her article “In Double (De)colonization and the Feminist Criticism of Wide Sargasso Sea.” According to Mardorossian, Wilson “reads Antoinette’s suicide as the logical outcome of her passivity and defeat which, she emphasizes, it is futile to try and present as a positive and self-determining gesture” (Mardorossian). Antoinette’s double gesture of setting fire in Thornfield Hall and jumping from its battlements hardly sustains Wilson’s assertion. In the novel, fire is deployed
as a means of destruction; burning Thornfield Hall—the symbol of metropolitan and patriarchal power—before her self-destruction, is an aggressive act of resistance.

In Antoinette’s last dream, fire reminds her of a gesture of vengeance which she must carry out: “I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and reminded me of something I must do” (Rhys 110). The dream in which Antoinette immolates Thornfield manor house and jumps is very suggestive. Here is the celebrated passage which I quote at length with some omissions:

I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs. . . . I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, Qui est la? Qui est la? and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! . . . But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man’s voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought Why did I scream? I called ‘Tia!’ and jumped and woke. (Rhys 110)

Tellingly, Antoinette’s self-death is a realization of her assertion earlier in the novel of her identity in sinister overtones: “I will write my name in fire red” (Rhys 53). In contrast to Brontë’s Bertha who always shrieks and laughs, Rhys’s protagonist is a subject who does not only self-consciously pose questions about who she is and why she is brought to England (Rhys 107), but also as one who decides to take action and wrest the power of othering from her oppressor. Her last statement in the novel, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” evidences how self-effacement in the postcolonial novel is generally represented as an outcome of the subject’s self-knowledge and not as a symptom of abnormality and mental disorders as it is typical of modernist literary suicides. The creole’s body becomes a repository of both power and resistance inscriptions. Since “there are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about” (Rhys 77), as Antoinette says, she chooses life-in-death rather than a submissive death-in-life. What Antoinette’s act registers is her rebellion against the conditions of her subjugation; the extent to which the self-effacing subject succeeds in making her voice heard depends on the power of the gesture as well as on the historical moment which frames the act.

As I said above, the moment of Antoinette’s self-effacement should be cross-examined in the narrative spaces of both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso
Sea. In her novel, Jean Rhys tries to do justice to Antoinette’s rebellious mortal act to save it from the Eurocentric misrepresentation. In a letter she wrote to her editor, Rhys expresses her intention to give voice to the silenced creole woman in *Jane Eyre* because she was “vexed at her [Brontë’s] portrait of the “‘tiger paper’ lunatic” that stands for “only one side—the English side” (*Letters* 206–207). In Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the creole woman’s self-destruction, like Sethe’s murderous act in *Beloved*, is divested of its political signification, and annexed to madness and lunacy. Bertha is no better than Sethe; both are dehumanized. While Sethe is compared by Schoolteacher to an enraged hound or a horse, Antoinette’s destructive gesture in *Jane Eyre* is envisaged as one of a being who occupies the borderlines between humans and animals. In an oft-quoted passage in Brontë’s novel, Jane describes the Creole woman as a figure who “ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal” (Brontë 257–58). More significantly, Bertha appears in the novel as the sacrificial “animalistic other” whose self-death and disappearance from the narrative save Brontë’s heroine from marginality and empower her. In “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” Spivak asserts that “[Brontë’s Bertha] must play out her role, act out the transformation of her ‘self’ into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction” (251).

Rhys’s writing back to Brontë’s novel, and her characterization of Antoinette as a victimized and gendered colonial subject ensure that the death of the creole mad woman in the attic is not discursively assimilated for the sake of Jane’s happiness.

So far, I traced the signs and significations of resistance and agency that mark Antoinette’s self-destructive gesture, and I explained how Rhys tries first to justify Antoinette’s self-effacement as a response against colonial and gendered violence, and second to save it from the discursive appropriation in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. I conclude this section by an appraisal of Antoinette’s self-erasure, raising the question of how successful is Rhys’s attempt to grant her protagonist agency. Although I argued, against the grain of major readings of Rhys’s novel, that Antoinette is empowered and given agency through death, I still share some of their concerns about some of the narrative shortcomings of the novel.

To begin, Antoinette’s self-destructive act is dramatized merely as a dream in Rhys’s novel which closes with Antoinette waking up and walking through
Thornfield Hall’s corridor on her way to realize it. Consequently, Antoinette’s final gesture is enacted and concretized within the narrative space of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* by Bertha. Rhys’s inability therefore to maintain narrative control over the destiny of her protagonist weakens her enterprise of writing back to the center. Besides, Antoinette’s final gesture is ethically problematized when we examine it in light of Rhys’s stance towards the local black subjects in the novel. Disconcerting in the novel is Rhys’s registration of Antoinette’s self-effacing gesture as a political act of resistance against the imperial and misogynistic inscriptions at the expense of black subjectivity. The novel is replete with instances of Antoinette’s racist stances against black subjects, although she simultaneously expresses her wish to reconnect and identify with the local culture. She denigrates for instance her black servants, and insults both Tia and Christophine, calling the former a “cheating nigger” (Rhys 14), and the latter an “ignorant, obstinate old negro woman” (Rhys 112). Correspondingly, Antoinette’s speaking, through death, against colonial and gendered violence is ethically jeopardized since she replicates the same racial axioms of imperialism which she defies. In this respect, I join Laura Ciolkowski, who argues that the novel as a whole “discloses the complicated relationship between Antoinette’s complicity with and her resistance to the English imperial project” (Ciolkowski 353). Antoinette’s act is riddled with ambivalence, being at once an instance of native resistance and a gesture which discursively contributes to the stifling of black voices in the novel.

To conclude, the highly ambivalent narrative construction of Rhys’s novel is undoubtedly responsible for the nuanced meanings which Antoinette’s self-effacing gesture bears. This ambivalence is primarily the result of two factors: the first is its problematic discursive relation to the British canon, and the second is the dialogic nature of the novel which, recalling Bakhtin, is traversed by polyphonic voices, a discursive strategy which Rhys resorts to undermine the monologic voice of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. However, Rhys’s project to write Bertha a life succeeds in imparting meaning on Antoinette’s double gesture of immolation and self-effacement, saving her from being a mere sacrificial figure who must die so that Brontë’s British heroine would be rescued from marginality. Rhys’s empowering of her protagonist through death remains problematic however, and is certainly enervated by the fact that she writes her novel as Spivak claims “in the interest of the white creole” (253), and at the expense of the West Indian black subject.
Conclusion

To be sure, self-destruction and resistance stem from the realm of identity politics. The desire to understand how the will to die or the will to kill one's children far exceeds the instinctual calls of survival, how people dare sacrifice their lives to respond to violence, pain, and ignominy and how their emancipatory intents are often appropriated when they are filtered through the distortive lenses of the dominant power's discursive structures motivated my re-reading of the self-destructive scenes in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Yet, underlying these politically oriented motives is a concern about the primordial and indivisible value of human life itself. Indeed, the somewhat naive hope to understand and limit the roots and causes of violence is what ultimately guides this article. It is my conviction that identity politics with its legitimate and necessary concerns about equivalence and "planetarity" should be redressed, but by no means substituted, by the ethics of recognition and responsibility. If there is any one important question this essay hopes to raise, it would be this: can self-erasures of the type I discussed in this essay be eliminated if their causes, gendered violence and pain, are tracked and reduced, if not eradicated? Research about these issues, I believe, is not for mere abstract theoretical contemplation; it is, and should be, guided by a pragmatic impulse to lessen and minimize violence and pain in the world.
Works Cited


“nicht wirklich unheimlich, vielleicht gemütlich, auf eine gemeine art”¹

The Pleasure of Haunting in Judith Hermann’s Nichts als Gespenster

Brad Gerhardt

Given the title of her 2003 best-selling collection of stories, Nichts als Gespenster [Nothing but Ghosts], it is surprising that Judith Hermann included so few ghosts in the stories themselves. However, in the flurry of reviews, radio broadcasts, television interviews, and general hype which surrounded the debut, most commentators seem to have ignored the title of the collection as a point of reference for understanding the text. Hermann’s reputation as an author was mostly built on the success of her 1998 collection of stories, Sommerhaus, später, which became a critical and popular success based on its participation in a new, distinctively non-political wave of German fiction; its title, with its emphasis on später (later), was seized as indicative of the larger trend in pop fiction of infinitely deferring active participation in anything productive or positive. Because it was released less than five years

¹ “Not really spooky; more like comfortable, in a terrible way”; all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
after her first wildly successful collection, perhaps too much attention was paid to the parallels between the two collections to appreciate *Nichts als Gespenster* on its own merits. This collection of stories, although it can hardly be termed horror fiction, nevertheless lends itself to an interpretation through the lens of haunting. Its title is decidedly vague but intriguing: Is Hermann discounting the presence of ghosts in her texts, or is she claiming that all her figures are, in their melancholy searching, nothing but ghosts themselves?

Although never precisely applying the term “ghost” to the book, many of the immediate press reactions focused on the haunting tone of Hermann’s stories: Christine Cosentio of Rutgers University writes that “alle Figuren befinden sich in einer Art Schwebezustand, der zumeist fortdauert [all of her figures find themselves in a sort of ‘floating’ condition which never really ends],” while Barbara Wegmann explains that “die Orte, an die Judith Hermann den Leser entführt, sie haben etwas Magisches, Verträumtes [the places to which Judith Hermann misleads the reader all have something magical, unreal about them].” Both these reviewers touch on the ephemerality of the figures in the stories, but do not pronounce judgment as to what this haunting quality might mean. In the decade that has passed since the debut of the novel, critics have reexamined this “haunting” aspect of the novel which contemporary commentators first articulated. In her analysis on the role of domesticity in Hermann’s collection, Monika Shafi pinpoints the restlessness of the characters as an update to the Gothic tradition of the haunted house, “no longer haunted by ghosts from the past but by the horror of the ennui and the everyday” (343). Fleeing the quotidian is a theme upon which nearly all Hermann scholars agree, but there have been a number of critics who have termed this tendency as being neo-Romantic in nature, most notably Thomas Borgstedt in his essay, “Imaginary Worlds: Judith Hermann and the Neoromanticism of the Present.”

Although the term neo-Romantic may be applicable in some respects (as Borgstedt notes for Hermann’s melancholy tone, rejection of social constructions, and yearning for the indefinable), the radical individuality posited by Romanticism is completely incompatible with Hermann’s characters, whose very identity and existence as subjects capable of thought and feeling are frequently called into question. Hermann’s reformation of the subject as a delocalized individual can be read more productively as an inversion of the Romantic idea of haunting as a projection of the self, where the modern subject—always already possessed by conflicting histories and identities—is the ghost who longs for any real place to call home. The effects of this “placelessness” can be
examined through both Foucault’s model of heterotopia as well as Marc Augé’s exploration of non-places in contemporary society. While neither of these texts specifically address the idea of haunting, they do both acknowledge the ruptures of modernity as being evident in particular places, whether imaginary or literal. In two of Hermann’s stories, “Zuhälter” and “Nichts als Gespenster,” haunted spaces appear as reflections of or parallels to the placelessness of her characters. These wraith-like characters in Hermann’s texts are descriptions of the ways in which identity is constructed and deconstructed by the subject in the modern world as a function of both space and time—an acknowledgement that the pleasure in haunting in the postmodern world is a function of our disturbed relation to it. The textual sites of these hauntings are the palimpsests of identity, the contested areas between past and present.

The profound changes posited as a result of modernity, which shape the characterization in Hermann’s texts, are described by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [*Dialectic of the Enlightenment*]. They address, in particular, the idea of haunting in their section entitled “Theorie der Gespenster” [*On the Theory of Ghosts*], in which they diagnose modernity as having a “disturbed relationship [gestörte Verhältnis] to the dead,” explaining the cause as such:

"man verdrängt die Geschichte bei sich und anderen, aus Angst, daß sie einen an den Zerfall der eigenen Existenz gemahnen könne, der selber weitgehend im Verdrängen der Geschichte besteht.

[We suppress history out of the fear that it could remind us of the breakdown of our own existence; that we are forgotten, however, is in large measure a result of this suppression of history.] (“Theorie der Gespenster”)

Postmodern haunting is therefore not merely a resurgence of the past to inform the present, as was largely the case in Gothic fiction, but a reminder that the past remains inaccessible and suppressed. Adorno and Horkheimer make an important distinction when they note that the modern subject does not fear being destroyed and forgotten, but rather only fears being reminded of this inevitable fate. It is not a fear of death in particular, but a fear of the meaningless remains, the reminder that with death comes the institutionalized process of decay and oblivion: “die Individuen reduzieren sich auf die bloße Abfolge punkthafter Gegenwarten, die keine Spur hinterlassen [individuals are reduced to a simple procession of tiny presents (in the temporal sense), which leave no traces].” Because the Enlightenment’s project of rationality stripped ghosts of
their supernatural power, in relation to the dead, when we are confronted with their physical remains we are forced to consider life merely as a succession of temporal “presents” (Gegenwarten) that cease with death, and we must consider the individual as a construction of these presents, denying the idea of their continuity. And that is the horror of it: Everything we consider contemporaneous with ourselves is destroyed at death, and the past can never actually be recalled into the present because all footsteps of meaning are erased by the physical reality of death.

In a similar vein, Michel Foucault, in his famous essay, “Des espaces autres” [“On Other Spaces”], explains what he considers to be another reaction to this “disturbed” relationship to the dead that Adorno and Horkheimer describe. Foucault develops the term “hétérotopie” to explain the conflation of physical spaces in contemporary society, and one of his prime examples of this is the cemetery. He explains that while an earlier era with a belief in the utopic “heaven” of an afterlife kept cemeteries at the center of their cities, that with the advent of modernity, death was seen as a disease and cemeteries were pushed farther away, being shut off from everyday life. He claims that this is because:

À partir du moment où l’on n’est plus très sûr d’avoir une âme, que le corps ressuscitera, il faut peut-être porter beaucoup plus d’attention à cette dépouille mortelle, qui est finalement la seule trace de notre existence parmi le monde et parmi les mots.

[At precisely the moment at which people are no longer sure whether they have souls or whether their bodies will regain life, they find it necessary to begin paying more attention to the mortal body, which is after all the only trace of our existence between the world and language.] (“Des espaces autres”)

The object of fascination here is the physical body (cette dépouille mortelle); attention must be paid to the physical because we have lost faith in the idea of the soul, and all we are left with as a referent for our idea of ourselves is the body itself. But this is unsatisfying because, although it is the only element of ourselves which continues after death, the longing for a soul and a resurrection remains. Thus the body becomes a site for imaginative remapping, for aberrance, and for rewriting history. Although this can certainly be read pessimistically as a negation of individuality, the reappearance of ghosts in two of Hermann’s stories is actually associated with pleasure through accepting one’s own existence as a fractured self or a ghost. The positive inscription of this loss of individuality is part of a postmodern fascination with surfaces and collage;
the body itself becomes a heterotopia, another ahistorical surface upon which identities write and erase themselves.

The postmodern flair to Hermann’s descriptions of haunting is evident in “Zuhälter,” where she uses the interrelation between bodies and ghosts to discount the value of depth (in Foucault’s model, the utopia) in favor of surfaces (heterotopias). “Zuhälter” tells the story of a narrator’s visit to a former lover, the painter Johannes, in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. The apartment in which Johannes is living belonged to a dead Chinese woman whose daughter runs his gallery, and this is where the haunting begins. The Chinese woman appears during rather strange moments throughout the story, and although the narrator is fascinated by her appearances, she seems to have little interest in learning about the history of the woman. She does not appear during moments of turmoil or anger, but rather she is seen sitting at the table with Johannes and the narrator during a moment of sheer boredom or walking through the apartment while Johannes laughs. The narrator is also endlessly fascinated by the objects belonging to the dead woman: “ich faßte alles an, roch an allem [I touched everything, smelled everything]” (Hermann 162). Yet her interest remains in the objects themselves; she does not seem to be curious about the life of the woman behind them. This paradoxical disinterest/attraction ties together both Adorno and Horkheimer’s claim that the modern subject wants to suppress history, as well as Foucault’s claim that the interest in the body increases as the belief in the soul wanes. The narrator tries on the clothes of the dead woman, wondering what she must have looked like; she ignores the political, ethnic, and personal implications of the clothes, and they become a merely physical signifier. This is the opposite of the archive, which contains objects because of their meaning, because they “prove” the histories they are said to relate. The objects in this story do not tell a story; they attempt no grand narrative and they reference no social, political, or emotional past.

These objects, as well as the characters, remain ahistorical and (in some sense) misunderstood, but this very lack of understanding creates a new method of relation to haunting which engenders pleasure instead of terror. In her analysis of the role of houses in Hermann’s oeuvre, Monika Shafi interprets the Chinese woman as a sort of liminal space in the narrative or a convergence of the past and present: “Thus [she] seems to be both dead and alive, a ghost who simultaneously haunts the narrator’s imagination and appears to comfort her” (348). This dead woman indeed seems more alive to the narrator than Johannes does, for while lying next to him, she thinks to herself, “ich hätte
ebensogut neben einem Toten liegen können [I could have just as well been lying next to a corpse]” (169). The border between dead and living is pushed further by the overly sexualized women with whom the narrator is frequently confronted (an unsurprising reality, considering that a “Zuhälter” is a pimp). As soon as she passes the border into the Czech Republic, she is appalled by the sights that greet her:

am Straßenrand standen jetzt kleine Holzbuden, in denen man Coca-Cola und Süßigkeiten kaufen konnte und hinter deren bix zum Boden reichenden Fensterscheiben nackte Mädchen unter einer Discokugel und in rotes Licht getaucht vor sich hin tanzten. (156)

[On the side of the road there were these little wooden shacks in which you could buy Coca-Cola and candy and in whose front, behind floor-to-ceiling windows, danced naked girls under a disco ball, bathed in red light.]

The language points to the dead consumerism of the sex industry—these girls are as available as a Coca-Cola and grant them about as much life as the spinning disco ball has. The lifelessness of prostitutes is carried further when Johannes takes the narrator to the nightclub in which the prostitutes “trugen weiße Kleider, die im Schwarzlicht gespenstisch aufleuchteten [wore white dresses, which gleamed ghostly in the black light]” (187). Ghosts, in this sense, are figures for which there is a discrepancy between their apparent physical state (dead or alive) and their corresponding perceived condition. The last image of Johannes that the narrator describes as she climbs into bed with him, and he holds her hand “solange, bis ich endlich nicht mehr an ihn denken mußte [so long, that finally I didn't have to think about him at all]” (192), is a haunting one because Johannes literally disappears from her memory and from the text, even while his physical body remains beside her. For all of these seemingly real characters, their physical bodies are profoundly meaningless; they are merely sites of pleasure and dissipation—liminal zones of contact between life and death—but they neither recall nor create any sense of history or meaning.

The importance of liminal spaces in this text is clear when the narrator describes her drive home, which is engulfed in a thick fog. In the midst of her fears, she explains:

[All at once I had the feeling that I was in some sort of in-between world. I thought that when the fog lifts, there will be something different, something strange and new.]

This “Zwischenwelt” (in-between world) is a heterotopia; it is a real place which is set apart from other real places and yet is designed to create imaginary space. Foucault’s primary example of heterotopia is the mirror; in a mirror we imagine that we see ourselves, but what we actually see is merely the surface of the mirror. In this case, the heterotopia’s transparency helps us to forget the real and lose ourselves in the imaginary. For the narrator, the fog enables the car to become a heterotopia, a real object with mythical dimensions as it will transport her beyond the world. Unfortunately the fog only lasts until the German border. Although she imagines the freedom of a new world because she is an object in motion, the illusion collapses with the arrival in familiar space. This can be read as a critique of Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, because it relies on a stable subject. For Hermann’s postmodern globetrotter, the apartment in Berlin is as strange and as distant as the one in Karlovy Vary; because she has no real home, she has no stable subject position. Therefore, to her, the “real” world is just as strange, as different, and as imaginary as any heterotopia she could come up with. Real and imaginary are just different modes of self-construction depending on where the subject considers itself to be. For a subject in motion, like the narrator, the transgression of spaces is not a progressive journey, or one that implies history, but a stagnant journey through successive “presents” which remain self-enclosed and transitory.

The instability of the subject is emphasized further by the link between the physical body and the textual body. In Foucault’s analysis, he claims that the physical body is “la seule trace de notre existence parmi le monde et parmi les mots [the only trace of our existence between the world and language]” (“Des espaces autres”). Foucault consciously distinguishes between the physical world (le monde) and the linguistic world (les mots), a distinction which is reasonable in terms of haunting; people can be haunted either by ghosts (physical manifestations), or by the lingering writings, memories, or words of the deceased (linguistic manifestations). Not only is “Zuhälter” the only one of the seven stories to feature an actual ghost, but it is also the most heavily intertextual by far. The narrator describes Johannes’s reading of an Italian poet (177) and Nietzsche (183); reads the obscene letters from his girlfriend (184); and describes his habits picked up from Berthold Brecht (163). She also
notices the choir singing “Ave Maria” (166), and Johannes quoting lyrics from pop songs (169, 177). She references the French fairy tale of Bluebeard as she enters Johannes’s atelier (182), and the entire motif of the dead Chinese haunting the house comes directly from Theodor Fontane’s *Effi Briest*. With such a vast archive of cultural intertexts, the question remains: Why? The narrator quotes all of these in passing, as though she is uninterested in exploring their implications. They remain fragmentary and meaningless, closely resembling the description of memory that the narrator gives:

Es ist so, als würde ich eine Kiste schließen, eine Kiste voll von altem, sinnlosem, wundervollem Zeug, und im letzten Moment fiele mir etwas ein, ein einziger, winziger Gegestand ganz auf dem Boden der Kiste, zuunterst, und ich würde die Kiste noch einmal öffnen und alles wieder herausholen, aber das kleine Ding bleibe unauffindbar, der einzige Beweis seiner Existenz meine Ahnung. (192)

[It is as though I were closing a box, a box full of old, meaningless, wonderful stuff, and at the last moment I remembered something, some single, silly thing down at the very bottom of the box, and then I would open up the box again and take everything out, but the tiny thing would remain untraceable, the only evidence for its existence being my premonition.]

For the narrator, the only proof of existence is the premonition of existence; she feels as though there might actually be something there, but because the object cannot be grasped, all that proves its reality is her own feeling. This is the world of language: the play and interplay of meanings and premonitions, rather than the actual world of referents and objects. And so the haunting is a pleasant one because it is not burdened with meaning; the Chinese woman appears and disappears, as does the narrator. The words remain, but they themselves are a sort of heterotopia that alludes to an imaginary chain of events because of their harsh physical existence on the page. Thus the reader is also haunted by an imagined history that gives real pleasure.

Along a similar line of discourse, in the introduction to the second edition of his *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Marc Augé acknowledges that contemporary authors are increasingly driven to reject current events and seek beauty in “non-places”: “they may do this by highlighting the enigmatic character of objects, of things disconnected from any exegesis of practical use” (xxii). This describes Judith Hermann’s style quite accurately, and it also acknowledges the possibility of beauty and pleasure in “non-places.” This term
was coined by Augé to describe the anthropological division of space in post-modernity. Postmodernity, or what he calls “supermodernity,” is not plagued with the same angst toward the past as modernity was. Instead of constructing places that make reference to the fractured and multiple pasts, supermodernity creates ahistorical places or non-places. He defines them as non-places because they are consciously not anthropological—they intentionally eschew history and individuality, and they do not integrate elements from previous eras which carry meaning. Augé juxtaposes place and non-place as being “rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased and the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (64). The palimpsestic nature of identity is an important concept to understanding haunting, for a palimpsest functions only as such over time; although the layers of text occupy the same space, through the constant erasure and rewriting, they do not occur simultaneously. The same is true of haunting; it requires figures who occupy the same place but whose presence at the time is called into question or seems ahistorical. In this sense, a ghost is a being both temporally and spatially disconnected from its natural anthropological surroundings.

Augé goes on to explain that “the traveller’s space may thus be the archetype of non-place” (70), meaning that tourists may enter or even transgress some legitimately anthropological places of a culture, but since it is not their own culture, and thus they remain detached and ahistorical. Travelers must position themselves as outsiders and must “observe” the culture rather than participate in it. In doing so, they may gain a “melancholy pleasure” (70). Later in Augé’s analysis, it becomes clear that this feeling of pleasure is not related to the traveler as a unique subject but to the position of the traveler as a performance. The interplay between subject and place is always negotiated not by the traveler but by the owner of that place; therefore the traveler is both isolated and standardized, “the only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others” (83). The traveler’s identity is ephemeral and relational; it is not dependent on an individual but on a role. Augé’s analysis resembles an insight by Günter Blamberger about one of Hermann’s characters: “Seine Identität ist keine Frage der Substanz mehr, sondern der Performanz, der medialen Inszenierung [her identity is not a question of substance any longer, but rather a question of performance, of production through media]” (200).
A character without substance is, in other words, a ghost. The convergence of ghosts, travelers, and media takes place in Hermann’s title story, “Nichts als Gespenster.” While Helga Meise’s analysis of Augé’s concept of place and non-place has already linked Hermann to the category of writers and artists Augé speaks of in his introduction (128), her analysis is confined to Sommerhaus, später, warranting expansion into Nichts als Gespenster.

As the central story in her second collection, “Nichts als Gespenster” is one of the few Hermann stories that is told in third person; in this case, it is the story of Ellen and Felix, a German couple driving across America. The story is actually a frame story in which the present Ellen, living in Berlin with Felix and their child, looks back to a formative experience in Austin, Nevada. They stop in this tiny desert town for only one night, but in that time they meet two memorable individuals: a woman who they call a “ghost hunter” because she photographs ghosts, and Buddy, a local who talks to them so movingly about his son that they decide to have one of their own. The location in the middle of the desert is vital to an interpretation through Augé’s concept of non-place because Hermann describes it as both a place and a non-place, or a place “zwischen den Orten [between places]” (223). Ellen’s impression of the place is, however, also filtered through media as she sits in the desert looking at the abandoned hotel, “Amerika war ein Amerika der Kinofilme . . . Amerika existierte nicht, nicht wirklich [America was an America of the movies; America didn’t exist, not really]” (205). The question of reality is a frequent one, whether something is “wirklich [real]” or not. When asking Annie, the bartender, about the ghosts that she assumes are in the second floor of the hotel, Ellen is told: “nein, nicht wirklich, nicht wirklich unheimlich, vielleicht gemütlich, auf eine gemeine Art [no, not really, not really spooky; more like comfortable, in a terrible way]” (211). Here, although Annie takes the presence of ghosts to be a fact, she does not find it to be “really” frightening; instead, it is a rather comfortable and pleasurable haunting.

The ghosts themselves are inseparable from the hotel; they are attached to the place almost parasitically, and the description of them blurs the distinction between the hotel as a previously historical place and the current displacement of its historicity:

Annie erwiderte ebenfalls ohne jede Ironie, daß das Hotel International vor vielleicht hundert Jahren von einem Goldgräber aus Virginia nach Austin, Nevada, in die Wüste gebracht worden sei, Balken für Balken und Stück für Stück. Mit dem Hotel seien die Geister gekommen, aus ihren Zufluchten und Nischen
The hotel is a demonstration of the tension between place and non-place that Augé describes: the historical hotel is not completely erased by the anonymity of the desert (its history is still known), but similarly the present has not completely absorbed it either. The ghosts are liminal figures, appendages to the drama of identity that the hotel embodies. They are described as “homeless,” an appellation that could be applied as equally to Ellen and Felix as to the ghosts.

Indeed the link between the ghosts and the characters is quite explicit in this story. The ghost hunter returns after several hours and shows them her album of ghost documentation, which Ellen later denies as simply being photographic errors or anomalies but is quite affected by them at that moment. The ghost hunter ends by saying, “diese Geister da oben können sich nicht abfinden mit dem Leben [those ghosts up there never could figure out life at all]” (229). She then asks whether Ellen and Felix would like to be photographed as well, and they all file out into the desert, in front of the hotel to do so. In this moment, Ellen thinks that “die wußte, daß sie dieses Foto niemals zu Gesicht bekommen würde und plötzlich voller Erstaunen dachte, daß es eines von 36 Fotos auf einem Film voller Geister sein würde [she knew that she would never see the photo, and suddenly she thought, to her amazement, that it would be simply one of 36 photos of ghosts on the roll]” (230). This moment has been the subject of a number of critical discussions. J. Alexander Bareis takes it as an example of what he terms the “Ästhetik des Augenblicks [aesthetic of the moment],” a demonstration of Hermann’s desire to highlight the ephemerality of the moment and the mortality of feeling (137). Thomas Borgstedt looks to the photographer herself as a demonstration of the neo-Romantic tendencies in Hermann’s work, or an alter ego of the narrator (222). Oliver Ruf interprets the photograph as an execution, explaining that “der symbolische Tötungsakt des Photographen kulminiert in einer Objektsbildung des photographierten
Subjekts [the symbolic murder which photography commits culminates in the objectification of the photographed subject]” (197). Uta Stuhr sees this last photo of the thirty-six as being essentially the same as those of the ghosts, claiming that Hermann’s stories themselves are “eine Bestandsaufnahme nicht gelebten Lebens, die an keiner Stelle vor dem Kult der Indifferenz auch nur leise erschauert. Das ist das eigentlich Gespenstische an diesen Erzählungen [an inventory of unlived life, which in no single moment departs from the cult of indifference. That is the really haunting thing about these texts]” (51).

The pessimistic interpretation of Hermann’s work that many of these critics suggest, however, is not precisely granted by the text. The photograph is a moment of triumph for Ellen, which is exactly the opposite of what Uta Stuhr claims. Ellen chooses to live in the moment of the photograph; she chooses to grab Buddy’s hand and feels completely “zuversichtlich und voller Kraft und Stärke [confident and full of power and strength]” (230). Although this feeling may not last more than the moment of the photograph itself, this moment is intense and full of life. The characters may be hardly more substantial or real than the ghosts that may or may not exist, but their momentary happiness seems to nullify the critique inherent in “insubstantiality” and posit a very definite pleasure in identifying with the subjectless, the opaque, and the ghostly. This may not precisely be a Nietzschean affirmation, but it is certainly not a nihilistic resignation either.

The pleasure in ambiguity in both “Nichts als Gespenster” and “Zuhälter” is perfectly in keeping with Hermann’s postmodern critique of stability and identity. In both these instances of haunting, Hermann acknowledges the “disturbed” relation of the modern subject to the dead, but in deconstructing the entire concept of a stable identity, she reveals the postmodern subject’s disturbed relation to itself/elves. She does not offer a particular thesis or theory of existence, which is in keeping with her project since such a positive pronouncement would contradict her aim because, since for her, the modern subject is incapable of such pronouncements. Her travel narratives construct a world of heterotopias and non-places, but without the fear and the despair that many critics associate with these interchangeable destinations. Instead, Hermann is using travel as a metaphor for the performativity of the subject; anyone (with the means) can have these experiences, visit these places, and be comforted in that anonymity. Perhaps there are no longer such things as ghosts. Then again, by denying them, perhaps we have become the ghosts ourselves.
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A trauma narrative, Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* shows the suffering of people from Haiti who have lived under the corrupt regime of the Duvaliers. Because of the cultural trauma caused by the corruption of the government, the novel and the characters in the novel are preoccupied by the topic of suffering, death, and recovering from traumatic events. In one of the sections, called “The Funeral Singer,” Freda explains that there are three types of death: “The one when our breath leaves our bodies to rejoin the air, the one when we are put back in the earth, and the one that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all” (Danticat 177). Freda’s three stages of death signify the process that a family must enact as they mourn the loss of a loved one. They also correspond with the three stages that a person must go through to heal from trauma they have suffered, or for the trauma to symbolically die. These corresponding stages include voicing the trauma, taking action, and forgetting. By showing that the stages of death function in the process of mourning the loss of a loved one and by presenting these stages of healing as a model for the characters in the novel to heal from their own trauma,
the novel suggests that healing from life-altering trauma is possible. To show this connection, I will first demonstrate how Freda's three stages of death are necessary in the mourning of a literal death and then relate these stages to the metaphorical mourning of trauma.

*The Dew Breaker*, written in 2004, is often called a short story cycle because it is composed of nine separate stories that each has its own plot. The novel tells the stories of several characters who have suffered at the hands of the dew breaker and portrays them in the aftermath of the trauma as they go through the process of healing and remembering, trying to live a life free from the trauma of the past, and mourning the loss of a loved one. Though each section of the book follows different, seemingly unconnected, characters in various stages of life and in various places including the United States and Haiti, the characters are all connected in some way to the dew breaker who the audience first encounters as the father of Ka. I will focus in particular on the stories which deal directly with Ka and her father (the dew breaker), including “The Book of the Dead” and “The Dew Breaker” which frame the novel; and I will also address the stories of “Night Talkers,” “The Book of Miracles,” “The Funeral Singer,” and “The Bridal Seamstress.”

Each of the stories in the novel shows the trauma experienced by the characters. This trauma creates significant psychological damage beyond what may be considered normal life events and sorrow. The distress of the traumatic event leaves victims with a disturbed sense of self and sense of their lives. Kathie J. Albright, Colette H. Duggan, and Marcy J. Epstein explain, “The narrative nature of daily life is breached. Trauma produces a rupture in the life story line of its victims and, as a result, survivors find it difficult, if not impossible, to untangle the now snarled or clipped threads of stories so as to create a new overarching story that makes sense to them” (400). Trauma, then, not only makes it difficult for victims to voice their suffering, but also to create a narrative of their lives as the trauma increasingly shapes the way they understand their lives and the way in which they act on this understanding after the traumatic event.

Through Freda’s comment on the three stages of death, the novel demonstrates that mourning the loss of loved ones and finding peace in their deaths acts as a model for the process of healing from trauma. By contrasting Dany’s experiences of mourning someone’s death in “Night Talkers” with Anne’s experiences with mourning in “The Book of Miracles,” the novel expresses the great need of characters to have peaceful mourning at the death of a loved one. Dany experiences this peaceful mourning when he returns to Haiti to visit his aunt
Estina and witnesses her death during his visit. As the only formal funeral in this novel among so many deaths, the funeral offers insight into elements that contribute to the process of mourning and healing. In particular, the funeral suggests that certain elements, such as the rituals of branding the final clothes (or cutting the clothes to signify that the person has passed away), and holding a wake, are necessary to the process of mourning to both prepare the dead for afterlife and prepare the living for peace in losing their loved one. In Dany’s case, the village held a wake after preparing the body for burial during which the members of the village shared stories about Estina that could evoke laughter or tears. This type of wake allows for the complexity of feelings that accompany death, both joy at remembering the dead and sadness over losing them. In *Culture and Customs of Haiti*, J. Michael Dash explains the symbolism of these rituals: “The most important aspect of the funeral and burial is the need to disorient the dead and prevent them from returning to haunt the living. The perpetual threat of the dead person’s return preoccupies family members during the period of mourning” (70). Although the characters whom Dany interacts with at the funeral do not seem preoccupied with the dead person returning, characters in other stories within the novel (like Anne) are haunted by the figurative returning of the dead when these funeral rituals are not performed. With the close connection of mourning death and overcoming trauma, the necessity of these elements in mourning suggest that overcoming trauma also has significant elements that cannot be overlooked.

The result of missing important elements in the process of mourning can especially be seen in the story of Anne because she is haunted by the death of her younger brother. This haunting comes both from being unable to put her brother’s death to rest and from being unable to overcome the trauma of the situation that caused his death. Anne’s younger brother drowned in the ocean when she was responsible for watching him, making his death particularly traumatic for her. If we consider her trauma in terms of the three stages of death, it seems that she cannot overcome her trauma because she is unable to fully mourn her brother’s death without the symbolic and peaceful acts that are performed in the funeral rituals, as demonstrated in Dany’s mourning of his aunt Estina. We see the remnants of Anne’s trauma and the burden she carries in her haunted imagination of her younger brother’s search for his grave: “She’d convinced herself that her brother was walking the earth looking for his grave. Whenever she went by a cemetery, any cemetery, she imagined him there, his tiny wet body bent over the tombstones, his ash-colored eyes surveying the
letters, trying to find his name” (Danticat 71). This passage shows not only the trauma Anne has faced because of her sense of responsibility in her brother’s death, but also the significance of being able to literally put her brother’s body to rest in order to let go of the emotional pain of his death. The lack of closure in this situation has left Anne with “a hollow grief extended over all these years, a penance procession that has yet to end” (238). The trauma of this experience haunts Anne, leaving her unable to peacefully move forward with her life. In Writing History, Writing Trauma, Dominick LaCapra explains how a person becomes unable to move past a traumatic life experience: “One is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop” (21). Anne’s situation reflects LaCapra’s explanation as she continually relives the experience of her brother’s death and is haunted by the idea of him wandering the earth in search of his grave. Since Anne can never go back and perform these ceremonies putting him to rest, her situation brings up the important question of whether Anne will ever be able to overcome her trauma.

The literal stages of death and mourning as explained by Freda’s three stages of death seem to preclude characters from healing who, like Anne, will never have the opportunity to put the bodies of those they lost to rest. However, if these characters who cannot put their loved ones to rest can instead mourn these deaths in the sense of overcoming their trauma, they may still be able to heal from their trauma and let their loved ones go. Characters who have suffered trauma, whether or not this trauma includes death, must experience the stages of the trauma dying before they can fully heal. These stages of overcoming trauma correspond with the stages of death: the breath leaves the body as the trauma is verbally shared, the body is placed in the earth as the victims take action to leave the trauma behind, and the trauma is forgotten as the victims move forward in life without the constant influence of the trauma weighing them down.

Voicing the pain of trauma can symbolically be represented by the “breath leaving the body” stage of death. Just as the breath leaves the body in death, the breath leaves the body in the act of speaking the trauma. Although characters struggle to express traumatic events, this stage opens the door to recovery. Judith L. Herman explains the well-recognized necessity of expressing trauma when she writes, “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for healing
of individual victims. . . . When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery” (1). Before victims can begin healing, they must “tell” the trauma. Herman offers verbal narrative as a prevention to or reduction of the haunting grief and trauma that many of the characters in the novel face.

In addition to verbal narration, Herman explains that “the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. . . . Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (133). Not only must victims voice the trauma, but it also seems necessary for the victims to share their trauma with others as they put words to it. In this way, they let go of the trauma as they place trust in those they share it with. In a supportive social context, the three women in “The Funeral Singer” share with each other the narratives of their lives, including their traumatic departures from Haiti. Freda initiates this storytelling: “I thought exposing a few details of my life would inspire them to do the same and slowly we’d parcel out our sorrows, each walking out with fewer than we’d carried in” (Danticat 170). Freda not only places trust in the act of sharing to relieve individual stress at the moment, but she also describes a contradictory phenomenon in which the characters collectively have fewer sorrows as they share their problems, rather than being more weighed down as they receive each other’s stories. As their breath physically leaves their body, the trauma also begins to dissipate. The experience of sharing their stories exemplifies both the need for recovery to occur within the context of relationships and the healing that comes from sharing the truth. The practice of sharing their trauma helps the three women begin healing by giving them a support system of others who can empathize with the struggles they face, which teaches them that they are not alone.

Another example of voicing the trauma is the confession of the perpetrator, the dew breaker himself. Even the perpetrator experiences trauma, which Aitor Armendariz explains, “The perpetrators are by no means excluded from this collective trauma, since they are among the most deeply haunted by those phantoms and vacant spaces that they themselves contributed to conjuring up” (41). We see the suffering of the perpetrator in the humanizing of the dew breaker in the novel. The dew breaker, who is Ka’s father, suffers from frequent nightmares which he tells Ka consist “of what I, . . . your father, did to others” (Danticat 23). In preparation to finally tell Ka the truth of his former life, Ka’s father throws the statue she made of him into the lake. This acts as a symbol of his first step in truth telling because he will no longer live what he feels is
the lie represented by the sculpture depicting him as a victim. Danticat writes that Ka’s father “looks like a much younger man and appears calm and rested” (13) after throwing the sculpture into the lake, signifying the beginnings of the relief of sharing his trauma. As Ka’s father tells her about his former life, “each word is now hard-won as it leaves [her] father’s mouth, balanced like those hearts on the Ancient Egyptian scales” (21). This comparison to the Egyptian scales shows that not only must Ka’s father lighten his heart in the afterlife to enter into the next life, so that his heart is not weighed down by guilt, but he also must lighten his heart by finding peace from his own guilt and grief on this earth to heal from his own trauma. However, even after her father’s confession, Ka still believes that “confessions do not lighten living hearts” (33), suggesting that healing and finding peace require more than simply voicing the traumatic event.

After voicing the trauma, the second stage of death in which the body is “put back in the earth” represents taking action in overcoming the trauma. As Ka states, simply confessing or voicing the trauma is not enough to “lighten living hearts” (Danticat 33). Putting the body back in the earth represents someone taking action to put a body to rest through burial. The stories in The Dew Breaker suggest that in order for healing to continue after voicing the trauma, the characters must take action and personally shape their own lives and healing. In “The Funeral Singer,” after Freda, Mariselle, and Rezia have shared their stories with one another, we see that Freda takes action to enter into the next stage of her life by committing to return to Haiti to fight in a militia. In this decision, Freda shows that she will fight the source of her trauma and by doing so will no longer remain a victim to the forces that maimed and killed her father (Danticat 180). Her decision represents taking action to leave the trauma behind, a step that could not happen until she had initiated the healing process by voicing the trauma and sharing her experiences. Unlike the action of burying a body in the earth, taking action to overcome trauma requires just the opposite: making the choice, like Freda, to no longer hide from the trauma of the past but to take action to fight against it.

Looking forward to the future rather than living in the past signifies another way of taking action to heal from trauma. In the story of “The Bridal Seamstress,” Beatrice takes action in a way that looks like simply an escape from the haunting memory of her past, rather than a positive action toward the future. However, the decisive moment of change occurs when she retires from her job as a seamstress so that she can move away from the dew breaker’s
Beatrice’s entire life has been haunted and defined by the traumatic torture she underwent. Beatrice often moves homes because wherever she goes, she believes her torturer ends up living on her street. She explains, “I let all my girls know when I move, in case they want to bring other girls to me. That’s how he finds me. It must be. But now I’m not going to send these notes out anymore. I’m not going to make any more dresses. The next time I move, he won’t find out where I am” (Danticat 137). Beatrice’s acute memory of her torturer and her imagination that he always follows her, even in America, pervades Beatrice’s consciousness and defines her life narrative, such as her retirement and her many changes of residence. Previously she had moved several times in an effort to avoid the dew breaker, but kept sending out cards and continued her same life in a different location. In this final move, however, she changes not only her residence but also her life narrative. Perhaps Beatrice’s declaration that “the next time I move, he won’t find out where I am” (137) is not so much a hope that he will not physically end up on her street, but rather the hope that as she takes this active control of defining the terms of her own life she will be able to finally leave behind the dew breaker and the scars he left her with. By leaving him behind in her thoughts she will no longer have to face the haunting reminder of him in her life.

The third stage of death, or “the one that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all,” corresponds to the stage of no longer being influenced by the memory of the trauma. It cannot be expected that a survivor could ever forget traumatic life experiences, but that they can perhaps live a life free from the oppression of those memories. An anonymous woman in the novel who was interviewed about her experiences as a prisoner in Casernes carries a permanent memory of her torturer, and this constant memory signifies the difficulty of forgetting such horrible trauma. We read, “She couldn’t remember his name, nor could she even imagine what he might look like these days, yet she swore she could never get him out of her head” (Danticat 198). Although she has forgotten her visual memory of him, her torturer is ever present. This example implies that the dew breaker will live forever in the “nightmares” of those around him despite their desire to forget him.

Like his victims, the dew breaker also desires to be forgotten in the memories of those he tortured and to forget his own hand in those traumatic events. In the conflict with the sculpture, Ka’s father shows her his desire to be forgotten. He tells her, “I don’t deserve a statue . . . not a whole one, at least. You see, Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey” (Danticat 20). In comparing
himself to the Egyptian statues that he has come to love, Ka’s father believes that a statue that is not whole would better represent him. Ka makes a further connection to her father’s knowledge of the Egyptians when she realizes that her father threw the sculpture into the lake because of his desire to be forgotten. Ka explains, “He has never wanted the person he was, is, permanently documented in any way. He taught himself to appreciate the enormous weight of permanent markers by learning about the Ancient Egyptians. He had gotten to know them, through their crypts and monuments, in a way that he wanted no one to know him” (34). Although Ka’s father admitted that he originally wanted to be buried with the sculpture, Ka now understands that her father feels that being buried with the sculpture would permanently document him, along with all the pain he represents for others. After he dies, the sculpture would be a lasting reminder of the horrors he caused that could never be forgotten.

While the sculpture would prevent the dew breaker from being forgotten, the physical scar on his face given to him by his last prisoner was meant to prevent him from ever forgetting his own trauma. The preacher who gave the dew breaker the scar explains, “Every time [the dew breaker] looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember [the preacher]. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further remind him of the truth” (227–28). While it gives the victim a sense of vindication to make the dew breaker forever remember both his victim and his guilt, this constant memory is problematic. Not only can the dew breaker never forget the trauma he caused others, but because of his remembering, those who have died cannot die the third and final death of being forgotten and thus be released peacefully into their afterlife. From this problem arises the question of the fate of all those who have suffered and cannot be forgotten. It seems that the dead who are still remembered must wait until they are no longer remembered to enter the peace of the final death, suggesting that the lasting memory of the scar and the statue will prevent numerous people from ever truly healing from the trauma.

Despite the hope provided by the model of the three deaths, the book ends with a lingering question. Anne, who is perhaps the most devout of the characters in the novel, calls the idea of atonement “a now useless cliché” when she offers the hope that “atonement, reparation, was possible and available for everyone” (Danticat 242). Her doubt suggests that the hope offered in the atonement is no longer possible, or that the wounds are too deep for an overused solution to heal. Believing in the possibility of an atonement for all would
offer not only a forgiving view of the crimes committed, but also offer hope that in the atonement of the perpetrators (and thus the relief from guilt and memory) is the freedom of the victims from the memory of their trauma. Anne's language casts doubt on the ability of both the perpetrators and the victims to ever heal. In contrast, LaCapra writes, “Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation” (42). Those suffering trauma may never fully transcend their pain in the sense of completely forgetting the experience, but LaCapra offers hope by suggesting that the victims can counteract the negative effects of the trauma in their lives even if they can never forget the terrible event. This signifies that victims can live a full life unhindered by the memory of the trauma as they take action to counteract their painful memories.

Although none of the characters have reached the third stage of forgetting—in dying, in mourning those who have died, and in healing from trauma—by proposing this third stage of death in the story “The Funeral Singer,” Danticat’s novel suggests that this third stage of no longer remembering is possible after the characters have voiced their trauma and taken action to move forward. However, because the characters of the novel are interconnected in their memory of the trauma, none can forget while the others remember. Despite this hopelessness of ever forgetting and healing under the weight of the collective memory of society, the book ultimately offers the reassurance that “some wounds could heal, that some decisions would not haunt [them] forever” (Danticat 63). In the collective memory of the trauma, the characters have a hope of collectively healing and forgetting as they each take steps to heal from the horrors they have suffered.
Works Cited


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