The need for the imaginary seems to be a basic feature of human nature. A slow immersive reading of the old-fashioned sense of printed novels, poems, and plays) are now available on-line either for free or for a few dollars. These digital versions are usually searchable. This a great help in certain kinds of literary study. Multitudes of teachers in the United States and globally, moreover, both young ones and old ones, are continuing in their classrooms every day quietly teaching their students as best they can a love of literature and how best to read it. Many of these are brilliant teachers. They are my unsung heroes and heroines. Here are several answers to the question, "Why Literature?" 1) No doubt the real world is transformed by being turned into literature, but I see no reason to deny that we learn a lot about that real world now and in the past by reading literature. Such learning is a great value. 2) In addition, we can learn from literary works the way what might be called "ideological mistakes" often come to be made, by taking figurative language literally. "We all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphor, and act fatally on the strength of them," says George Eliot's narrator in Middlemarch. The novel gives a striking example of this in the way the intelligent and sensitive heroine, Dorothea Brooke, thinks the dry-as-dust scholar, Edward Casaubon, is like Augustine, Milton, Bossuet, Oberlin, or Pascal. Therefore, marrying Casaubon would be like marrying one or another of these worthies. 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Dowd uses irony to devastating effect in her unmasking, and Krugman has repeatedly pointed out that conservatives' propaganda for austerity depends on a false analogy between household finances and spending by the Federal government. Believing that is like Dorothea believing that Causabon is like Milton or like Pascal. If we learn about the real world by reading literature, the danger of taking figures of speech literally is one of the many things we can learn. 4) Even more important, as an indispensable function of reading literary works, is the sheer delight of entering an alternative imaginary world. We do this by way of the words on the page. Every work opens a different and unique world. This pleasure of entering a new world is a good in itself. It needs no further justification. The need for the imaginary seems to be a basic feature of human nature. A slow immersive reading of Middlemarch does not just teach you about the linguistics of literariness. 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Films, video games, and television sit-coms are no doubt also alternative worlds, but they cannot easily match the pleasure caused by the linguistic complexity of literary works, as the relative thinness of language in films made from classic novels attests. The narrative voice and the characters' interior thoughts and feelings vanish, to be replaced by faces on the screen and dialogue. Those faces and their talk have the same overpowering power as the words on the page. It is only partly linguistic. One often visits in an iconic way the film version some piece of prose or play that has caused jouissance in reading the print-text original. It is, as it were, a presence of mind, a gift of a piece of prose or play that I as a humanist and feel I ought to do. The contexts in which I go on performing that work have, however, changed considerably, to say the least.
“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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Contributors
Imagine our delight when Dr. J. Hillis Miller accepted our invitation to write the forum prompt for the Winter 2014 issue of *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*. Once, in admiration for Dr. Miller’s intellect, close friend Jacques Derrida publicly wondered “how one can be J. Hillis Miller.” As a member of the legendary circle of the Yale School deconstructionists, Dr. Miller has written nearly thirty books and countless articles on literary criticism throughout the course of his career. Now he would like to learn from student writers by asking a short yet deceptively problematic question to the authors, editors, and readers of *Criterion*: “Why Literature?”

Dr. Miller’s prompt—which he extracted from an essay published in *Daedalus*—is timely and necessary, addressing with his characteristic mix of depth and clarity a question with profound implications for what we do as students and scholars of English literature. Each of the essays featured in this edition of *Criterion* address the broad topic uniquely, some through a close analysis of individual texts and others through more peripheral examinations of theory and composition. The effect is a heterogenous defense of literature. One essay argues that proper investigation into Victorian poetry could offer new insight for addressing contemporary ecological issues; another claims that the creative non-fiction genre instigates a special reader-writer partnership, enabling both parties to truthfully explore the limits of memory and representation together, without concealed partiality or disparity of information; and another illustrates the global, humanistic quality of literature by tracing Wordsworth’s influence throughout a century of Chinese literary history.
Literature is evolving so quickly that we can hardly anticipate the details of its future; rather, our priority is to continually reexamine and recover its intrinsic value for the present. Criterion values the study of literature as an investigation of meaning and truth. Even the imaginary shapes our perceptions of truth. Fiction and poetry helps us to form connections with other people, both real and imaginary. Perhaps no other medium allows us to vicariously experience the thoughts, feelings, and actions of fictional characters so fully. All the books that have ever been written, or will ever be written, cannot possibly contain all that humans are able to imagine, feel, or comprehend; literature will endure as a means of communicating meaning and truth. Our hope is that the student essays published in this issue effectively communicate new insights for both the processes of meaning-making as well as the elucidation of truth.

Italo Calvino, who thought of literature as communication, begins his novel Invisible Cities like this: “Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his.” As students and scholars, perhaps our attention to literature is fueled by a similar curiosity as that ascribed to Kublai Khan, by the feeling that there is truth in fiction.

Maybe that’s why literature.

*Tyler Corbridge and Shane Peterson*
New digital devices—computers, iPhones, iPads, Facebook, Twitter, video games, and the like—are rapidly diminishing the role literature plays in many people’s lives. A lot of people these days play video games or watch films on Netflix or surf the Net instead of reading printed literature. That is a big loss, but it is not the end of civilization, any more than was the shift from manuscript culture to print culture.

The reading, study, and teaching of literature, even so, is surviving more strongly than one might expect in the midst of an exceedingly rapid and no doubt irreversible global change from one dominant medium (print) to another (digital). A lot of people are going on reading literature, but in digital form—on Kindles and the like. An amazing number of literary works (in the old-fashioned sense of printed novels, poems, and plays) are now available on-line either for free or for a few dollars. These digital versions are usually searchable. This a great help in certain kinds of literary study.

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Here are several answers to the question, “Why Literature?”

1) No doubt the real world is transformed by being turned into literature, but I see no reason to deny that we learn a lot about that real world now and in the past by reading literature. Such learning is a great value.

2) In addition, we can learn from literary works the way what might be called “ideological mistakes” often come to be made, namely by taking figurative language literally. “We all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them,” says George Eliot’s narrator in *Middlemarch*. The novel gives a striking example of this in the way the intelligent and sensitive heroine, Dorothea Brooke, thinks the dry-as-dust scholar, Edward Casaubon, is like Augustine, Milton, Bossuet, Oberlin, or Pascal. Therefore, marrying Casaubon would be like marrying one or another of these worthies. Much fiction deals thematically with imaginary characters who, like Dorothea Brooke, are wrong in their readings of others, for example Elizabeth Bennett in her misreading of Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, or Isabel Archer’s misreading of Gilbert Osmond in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, or the disastrous effect on Conrad’s *Lord Jim* of reading too many adventure stories. Flaubert’s Emma Bovary and Cervantes’s Don Quixote are Jim’s predecessors in making that mistake. All three think life is really going to be like the romances they have read.

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The pleasure caused by felicitous and surprising language is the hardest aspect of literature to carry over into the new media. Films, video games, and television sit-coms are no doubt also alternative worlds, but they cannot easily match the pleasurable linguistic complexity of literary works, as the relative thinness of language in films made from classic novels attests. The narrative voice and the characters’ interior thoughts and feelings vanish, to be replaced by faces on the screen and dialogue. Those faces and their talk have their own power, but it is a different sort of power from the words on the page. It is only partly linguistic. One often waits in vain to hear in a film version some piece of word play that has caused jouissance in reading the print-text original.

Helping students share in my joy of the text is what I do as a humanist and feel I ought to do. The contexts in which I go on performing that work have, however, changed considerably, to say the least.
While geologists continue to debate whether the Holocene epoch will be formally replaced by what has been dubbed the “Anthropocene,” scholars in the humanities have heartily embraced the term. The 2012 Annual Meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) took as its theme, “Anthropocene Humanities.” Other platforms have brought human-nature relationships to the fore, including a recent issue of SubStance entitled Globing the Earth: The New Eco-logics of Nature. The review takes its title from Ranjan Ghosh’s article of the same name, in which Ghosh explores how developing conceptions of nature will continue to shift from the anthropocentric to the biocentric. At its extreme, Ghosh’s article claims that ecological sensibilities will become so dominant that a sort of “green racism” will develop, denying “access to people who would like to migrate from green-impure territories” to “green pure” territories (9). Yet Ghosh’s article is typical of concerns that are prevalent in the humanities today, questioning how humankind defines its relationship with nature and investigating to what extent ecocentric and biocentric voices can be heard over anthropocentric voices. While scholars like Ghosh focus on the theoretical basis of such implications, others have exerted efforts to reveal how literature can provide an insight into a historical conception of nature, thus informing
contemporary ideas. Some of these ecocritics have sought to show how the literature of the nineteenth century contains the early shadows of ecological and biocentric thought.

The debate as to whether the Victorian Era can be a site for ecocritical research is over. Scores of scholars have published numerous pages exploring this question. However, the debate remains as to how the ecological understandings of that era will inform contemporary society’s relation to the natural world. Some have implied that ecocriticism’s goal has been to “re-write the canon” (Parham 156), a goal that has been unsuccessfully sought and has resulted only in the creation of a canon of its own. But I submit that the value of ecocriticism lies not in its attempts at re-writing the canon, but in its successes in reevaluating the canon, to approach the canon through an environmentally minded and scientifically informed worldview. The next stage in Victorian ecocritical research is not the search for the “green Victorian”; rather, the next stage will be finding how the era provides ample room for ecocritics to show that their unique perspective augments scholarly understanding of the texts of the age. Beyond addressing these foundational concepts, this paper explores the ways Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “Binsey Poplars” informs a theoretical and ethical paradox not often addressed within ecocritical circles: how to balance voices of nature and voices for nature.

Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “Binsey Poplars” provides a textual site at which ecocritical insights inform a deeper understanding of the poem. By calling upon the interdisciplinarity of ecocriticism (with its implementation of scientific principles), this paper demonstrates that Hopkins’s poetic innovations and religiosity are only parts of a whole, a whole that includes a distinctly biocentric awareness. The paradox at the heart of ecocriticism lies in the texts that ecocritics study and the relationship in those texts between speaker and subject matter: Can poets (who are always only human subjects) offer voices of nature (which, by conventional definitions, is not human)? Many efforts have been made to demonstrate that nature writing can properly convey voices of nature (consider the poetic projects of Robinson Jeffers, W. S. Merwin, and others), while careful examination allows only that texts demonstrate voices for nature. Various ecocritical and theoretical critics have developed ideas regarding humanity’s relation to the natural world. The framework created by these writers allows for a cohesive discussion about voices for nature, voices of nature, and the ultimate benefits of acknowledging the proxy element of nature
writing. Hopkins himself, in lamenting the loss of the titular trees, reveals that his is indisputably a voice for nature, not a voice of nature.

What I have dubbed the “ecocritical paradox” develops from recognizing that ecocritical theory differs dramatically from its counterparts. Feminist theory, postcolonial theory, Marxist theory, and queer theory all, at a certain level, share a common goal: integrating into the literary discussion texts that represent voices for the previously marginalized and texts that represent voices of those groups. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, cannot share this same goal. Never will the voice of nature be heard in our language except through the channel of human writers who are, unequivocally, only voices for nature. Calling this phenomenon a “paradox” relies on the insistence that ecocriticism has attempted to establish itself among other literary theories while lacking a crucial element common to its fellow theories. This observation is not new, but it is somewhat under-acknowledged and underdeveloped. Lawrence Buell, sometimes hailed as the father of modern ecocriticism, wrote, “But an obvious difference between ecocriticism and emergent discourses on behalf of silenced or disempowered social groups was in the kind of identitarian claims that could plausibly be made in that context. One can speak as an environmentalist, . . . but self-evidently no human can speak as the environment, as nature, as a nonhuman animal” (7). Central to the ecocritical paradox is the construct of the modern concept of nature, outlined most thoroughly by William Cronon in the nineties.

Conceiving humans as part of “nature”—and hence entitling them with the power to be voices of nature—is a questionable prospect; our very view of nature is a human-made construct, and there are times when the “interests of people are not necessarily identical to those of every other creature or of the earth itself” and vice versa (Cronon 22). Even in Ghosh’s biocentric article, he states that “[n]ature is more than what takes place without the voluntary and intentional agency of man; nature is beyond the human will; it is also functionally multivalent, historically complex, and an ideological and paradoxical concept” (3–4).

To this same end, C. S. Lewis wrote regarding the love of nature. He takes as his subject matter those people for whom “[i]t is the ‘moods’ or the ‘spirit’ [of nature] that matter” and for whom Wordsworth is considered the standard bearer (18). Lewis, however, criticizes the extremes of Wordsworth’s writings, saying that Wordsworth said some “silly things” (18). He explains that if one seeks to be taught by nature, then one might learn a lesson of which
Wordsworth would have disapproved: “It might be that of ruthless competition” (19). Lewis concludes, “If you take nature as a teacher she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already decided to learn” (19). Thus, literally speaking, nature is not a site of inherent interpretation and exegesis, but rather a site of anthropocentric reflection and eisegesis. The value of studying the ecological inklings of Romantic or Victorian writers does little to speak to the voice of nature and does much to speak to the voice for nature, the voice of humans in the act of observing nature or annexing it into their own identity.

When Cronon explored the construct of contemporary perceptions of nature, he focused mainly on the idea of “wilderness” and its juxtaposition against the city. Cronon argued that, over time, people have shifted their perception of wilderness from a site of woe to a place of illumination. In the religious focus of his essay, he says that “Satan’s home had become God’s own temple” (9). This change in perception resulted from the growth of cities and societies. Cronon argued that “[n]o matter what the angle from which we regard it, wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us” (16). Thus, the city and the natural world have been created in opposition to one another.

Such opposition is clear in countless poems throughout the Romantic era and even earlier. The Scottish poet Allan Ramsay wrote “An Epistle Written from Mavisbank, March 1748, to a Friend in Edinburgh,” in which he advises his friend “out of pity / To leave the chattering, stinking city; / Where pride, and shallowness, take place / Of plain integrity, and grace” (ll. 7–10). Ramsay imbues the countryside with “plain integrity” and “grace” while attributing negative traits to the city. Like Ramsay, Coleridge would later express similar sentiments in his poem, “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison.” The vistas that his wandering friends encounter are explored within the limits of Coleridge's own mind and so too are the conclusions he reaches about their feelings on such a scene. The poem does not reveal Charles Lamb’s reaction to nature but rather presents only Coleridge’s projection of his own sentiments onto Charles’s thought. Such a projection is at the core of nature writing. Cronon argued that the entire concept of nature is a human construct; thus, thinking of nature as those places most free from human civilization is incongruous. Nature “is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made” (7).

The problem arises that any text seeking to speak for nature becomes a reflection on the writer’s worldview. The writer, in speaking for nature, becomes
nature’s proxy, a responsibility that modern ecologists would happily defend. Because the voice of nature itself will never be heard, the voices of informed writers must speak on nature’s behalf. Proxy, in the sense I use, has less to do with one voice standing in for another and more to do with one voice standing in for the perceived rights of an otherwise voiceless group. In this way, the city (a physical human construct) can find a balance with nature (itself a construct of human perception). Again, Hopkins’s poetry can demonstrate how one writer embraces the responsibility of proxy writing, though he may not have been aware of this perspective. His presence within the poem—if only through voice rather than direct reference—is not secondary, but rather crucial.

As contemporary society’s perceptions of nature are a construct, and as the messages that writers glean from nature in fact represent reciprocal confirmations, students of the environmental writings of the nineteenth century must acknowledge that the benefit of reading such texts is less to re-write the literary canon and more to reevaluate what canonical texts have to say. In this reevaluation, ecocritics will cease the search for the most “correct” voice of nature and instead demonstrate how literary texts can inform both the construct of nature and humans’ relationship to nature. Hopkins’s poetry has been the object of much ecocritical interpretation in recent years. But before I explore how “Binsey Poplars” speaks to the act of such proxy writing, I will, following the tradition of other ecocritics writing about the nineteenth century, provide a cursory reflection on how scholars have established the “greenness” of the Victorian Age.

The critic to have established the “greenness” of the age most comprehensively and concisely was John Parham. In 2002, Parham edited and published *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, contributing his own chapter to the collection: “Was there a Victorian Ecology?” Scholars now answer that question with a resounding yes. The poetry and prose of the era has been explored through the ecological and ecocritical lens many times since Parham himself asserted that an ecological awareness was alive and well in the Victorian Era. He cites David Pepper as having argued that the Romantic writers praised and admired nature to better the “isolated individual” (qtd. in Parham 159), whereas Parham claims that the Victorians took up the standard of reform and became advocates for the world outside human creation by arming themselves with the advances of science and technology to better understand nature. By defining ecology as pursuing the preservation and conservation of natural places through legislation and action, scholars have more clearly shown
that the Victorian era stands as the true beginning of contemporary ecological thought.

The same energies that resulted in various reform bills and acts of parliament to defend workers, women, and children were used to defend nature. “Natural history societies came and went, and only in the late nineteenth century did a conservation movement emerge,” writes Christopher Rootes (34). The Selborne Society for the Protection of Birds, Plants, and Pleasant Places was established in 1885. Its aims are evident in the name of the organization, but some of its famous patrons are not: Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and John Ruskin were among some of the members of this society, revealing the link between the literary community and the nascent ecological movement (“Science”). The mere existence of such a society may surprise some, let alone the involvement of such eminent literary figures. Other groups included The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (the predecessor to the RSPCA), The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, and the Commons Preservation Society. The latter organization boasted John Stuart Mill as an early member (“History”). Clearly, Victorian society invested heavily in the welfare of the natural world.

The literature, too, was fraught with environmental understanding and ecological leanings. Scholars have taken Parham’s question to heart, dedicating many pages to revealing the ecological underpinnings of various Victorian writers. As one example, Christopher Hamlin explores the biocentricity of Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*. Although the novel conventionally presents familiar tropes regarding the Chartist movement, poverty, and class struggles, Hamlin contends that Kingsley’s own scientific understanding informs a different reading of the novel. Kingsley “imagin[es] the self as a biotic being” that is deeply linked with the surrounding natural world (Hamlin 255). Hamlin explores how the dream sequences within the novel develop an animalistic connection to nature. In “opposite trajectories,” he explains, “Darwin animalized the human, while Kingsley humanized the animal” (260). For Kingsley, the world could be seen as biocentric as opposed to anthropocentric, focused on a biotic community instead of on human beings. Other realist novelists have been brought into this environmental conversation in somewhat lateral ways. Joseph Carroll submits that Dickens’s portrayal of London presents a certain “wild” scene akin to Conrad’s Africa or Kipling’s India (305–7). Such a wilderness allows the reader to draw connections between social stratifications and theories, including Darwinian evolution or the laws of thermodynamics. These
laws have also been applied to readings of *Jane Eyre* (Gold 222). Yet all of these explorations pale when compared to the depth of scholarship that has been devoted to Hopkins’s conceptions of the natural world, his understanding of thermodynamics, and his own sense of ecology.

“Binsey Poplars” has already been explored through the lens of ecocriticism in a 2004 issue of *Victorian Poetry*. Brian Day writes with the intent to define Hopkins’s “spiritual ecology” as evidenced in the poem. He begins his article by mentioning Parham’s question as to whether there was a Victorian ecology and states that in the midst of the many discussions on Hopkins, “no significant attempt at an ecocritical reading of Hopkins has appeared since a pair of essays by Jerome Bump in the early 1970s” (181). This claim, however, overlooks some of the scientific/ecocritical investigations of Hopkins, particularly Jude Nixon’s “‘Death Blots Black Out’: Thermodynamics and the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins,” as well as Parham’s own “Green Man Hopkins: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Victorian Ecological Criticism.” Day establishes his own argument by focusing on specific lines within the poem itself. He explores Hopkins’s theological understanding of what “selving” means and how his concept of creating a self extends beyond the human to the nonhuman, which Day demonstrates through his own reading of the poem. “Hopkins’s argument,” writes Day, “undermines the traditional humanist position that emphasizes the differences between human selfhood and nature’s otherness as signified by the exclusive human possession of soul, mind, and consciousness” (183).

For Day, the impact of Hopkins’s reflection on the felling of the titular trees is Hopkins’s attempts to understand the inner essence of the trees; using Hopkins’s own terms, this means that he implements “instressing” to understand the “inscape” of the trees. Day asserts that in this poem, Hopkins has deliberately conflated the trees with Christ. As Christ exists in his corporeal form as well as in the Eucharist, the tree has its own “thingness” that is “inseparable from its inscape” (187). Day then begins to present a familiar reading when he says that “[i]nscape therefore does not move Hopkins away from the thing into the realm of transcendental signifiers, but keeps him looking at the thing itself even as he perceives Christ’s sacrifice” (188). Day thus claims that Hopkins’s focus is continuously on the trees, but this looking at the “thing itself” is accomplished only through Hopkins; never have the trees spoken nor will the trees speak on their own behalf, revealing the utter otherness of nature. Day states that “[a] nything becomes sacred when we take the trouble to instress its inscape” (189), but this is the same pitfall against which Lewis warned when he explained that
nature will teach the watcher the lessons he or she has already determined. Day has fallen victim to the same assumption under which Ricks Carson explains how this poem reveals a sympathy that

has its roots in romanticism, but here nature is an even more intimate companion than it is in poems such as Wordsworth’s “Prelude” and Keats’s “To Autumn.” . . . In those poems, nature is made to serve humans as a vehicle for or reflection of emotions. Hopkins makes himself the trees’ mirror, by becoming the vehicle of nature’s emotions. We feel the trees’ passing as if bells knelled in a church where the poet-priest knelt. (Carson 163)

Both Carson and Day fail to acknowledge that Hopkins’s is the only voice heard in the poem. Yes, Hopkins’s own ideology allowed that humans could instress the inscape of any other living entity, but such is a sympathetic understanding that operates at the site of the human. When Carson claims that Hopkins has made himself a mirror for the trees’ emotions, he assumes that the trees have emotions. Neither writer addresses the fact that, however compelling the poem is, it nevertheless represents a voice for nature, not a voice of nature.

And yet, this sense of proxy speaking and nature advocacy does not reveal any shortcoming on the part of the poet. Rather, investigating the poem through the understanding given by Cronon and Lewis, the careful reader will come to see a new perspective offered by Hopkins’s poem. For Day, the crux of “Binsey Poplars” lies in Hopkins’s use of the word “unselve” and the sentience that this lends to the trees, but acknowledging that any sentience in the poem comes directly from Hopkins through the construction of nature results in a substantially different reading. A more ecologically minded reading focuses on the relation between humans and nature, and that “even where we mean / To mend her we end her” (ll. 16–17). Hopkins begs the reader to consider whether humans can ever repair the damage they have done to the natural world. He speaks to contemporary readers by insisting they reflect on whether efforts to curb climate change and deforestation only push the earth more deeply into the Anthropocene.

Hopkins offers a solution within the poem that can be accessed by understanding the trees’ otherness and considering Hopkins’s scientific influences. Contrary to how Day and Carson have represented the poem, Hopkins speaks for the trees, and they remain distinctly other throughout the poem. To convey the sense of pain the trees feel (or that Hopkins presumes to know they feel), Hopkins compares the felling to removing a human’s eyeball
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(ll. 14–15). Hopkins has no means to convey the pain of dis-branching or dis-leafing and, therefore, must rely on images of human dismemberment. This cuts against Day’s and Carson’s readings, which so heavily rely on Hopkins conveying the feelings of the trees. Furthermore, Hopkins genders the trees by referring to nature in the feminine when he says, “her being só slender” (1. 13), maintaining an otherness between Hopkins and the trees. Again, the poem itself suggests otherness in the midst of advocacy. Even as Hopkins seeks to reveal the inscape of the trees, he reveals his own sympathies reaching out for the trees.

But these sympathies are not any less potent than the previously perceived mirroring of nature’s feelings: the otherness of nature does not undermine Hopkins’s ecological efforts. On the contrary, the otherness inherent in the poem functions in tandem with scientific concepts and allows Hopkins to become nature’s proxy. The first image that Hopkins uses in the poem refers to the photosynthesis of the felled trees. He speaks of his “aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled, / Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun” (ll. 1–2). While some may read this “quelling” as simply the shade offered by the leaves, a more informed reading will illuminate Hopkins’s scientific understanding of his beloved trees. The principle of photosynthesis was well established by Hopkins’s time, having been explored by various Swiss and Austrian scientists in the late eighteenth century. Parham agrees with this photosynthetic reading, saying that the poem’s opening “immediately highlights a tension between preservationist sentiment and ecological science,” between Hopkins’s opposition to tree-felling and his scientific knowledge (“Green” 205). In this way, “Binsey Poplars” strongly represents a Victorian text worthy of ecocritical scrutiny. Clearly, Hopkins found inspiration in science, revealing his own interdisciplinarity that ecocriticism so heartily embraces. Jude Nixon explains that “Hopkins’s conversion to Roman Catholicism (1866) and Jesuit affiliation (1868) granted him membership in a religious community open to scientific inquiry” (132), a combination of traits found throughout Hopkins’s poetry. The mere presence of a poetic reference to photosynthesis may provide a substantial argument to the ecological and scientific motivations behind Hopkins’s writing, but this is not all the poem has to offer.

Continuing with themes informed by science, Hopkins uses concepts borrowed from thermodynamics to create a sense of order amidst the chaos of human destruction. Nixon opens his article on Hopkins’s thermodynamics by explaining that Hopkins’s “discourse reveals an attraction to the emerging
science of thermodynamics, especially an anxiety with the second law” (131). The second law of thermodynamics is commonly referred to as the law of increasing entropy. The law details how in any system in which energy is expended, the amount of heat required to produce any effect—and the ensuing entropy, or disorder—will continually increase. Nineteenth-century scientists, and the environmentally minded writers of the era, began to fear the resultant “heat death” that would naturally stem from continually increasing entropy. This sense of spiraling perhaps influenced Yeats’s concept of gyres, but it certainly influenced Hopkins’s writing.

In “Binsey Poplars,” Hopkins uses repetition to convey this sense of growing disorder. The third line mourns the loss of the trees that are “All felled, felled, are all felled.” Hopkins echoes this deliberate repetition by alliterating the same sound in the line immediately following: “Of a fresh, and following folded rank” (l. 4). Hopkins has implemented this same technique in other poems. In “God’s Grandeur,” a far more widely evaluated poem, Hopkins declares that men “reck” the “rod” of God as their “[g]enerations have trod, have trod, have trod” (ll. 4–5). By increasing the use of particular words and sounds through repetition, Hopkins contributes to a sense of increasing entropy, a sense that by the end of “Binsey Poplars” takes its full and most poignant effect. The final three lines, those that describe what the “Strokes of havoc unselve” (l. 21), begin with a sense of disorder before finding a profound resolution.

The sweet especial scene,
  Rural scene, a rural scene,
  Sweet especial rural scene. (ll. 22–24)

Hopkins, in his mastery of poetic language and form, creates a sense of increasing disorder by describing the “sweet especial scene” and repeating the words “rural scene.” As in earlier moments of the poem, the repetition suggests the increasing entropy described in thermodynamics, but Hopkins does not leave the poem with that sense of imminent destruction. Instead, he organizes the disorder in the act of re-creating his feelings for the trees prior to their felling. Hopkins, as voice for nature, has conveyed his personal understanding of what he perceives their suffering to be; he has expressed the destruction that results from even the best intentions of humanity and has conveyed a sense of the effects of ever-increasing entropy. And then, Hopkins shows the power of the poet to choose to create meaning out of chaos, to find order amidst disorder, to somehow reverse the effects of entropy. Hopkins, in turn, has become the proxy
for nature, voicing “her” pains and discovering how humans can interact with nature through sympathetic projection.

The poem does include moments that provide conventional readings of nature. Hopkins mourns the loss of the trees, looking back on their “beauty” that “After-comers” cannot guess at (l. 19). He mentions the “Shadow” that these trees had offered to “meadow and river and wind-wandering weed-winding bank” (ll. 8–9). Such images reflect a common ecological lament: that deforestation or other alterations of nature remove beautiful places from the view of coming generations. Hopkins seems to lament the effect of tree-felling on not only human “After-comers” but also natural inhabitants of the forest, benefactors of the “Shadow.” These moments of Romantic elegy for destroyed nature are part of the scene that is set to stage the formal poetic experiments and scientific knowledge that becomes so apparent in the poem once ecocriticism has been allowed to cultivate. Hopkins does not rely on familiar tropes to convey his own ecological agenda. Rather, he uses such tropes, sentiments, and images to lay the foundation for his innovations. The poem thus uses the poet-ecologist’s right to become proxy for nature in order to convey perceptions of nature’s suffering (as opposed to nature’s actual suffering) and poetically to teach a poetic lesson regarding the formation of order in the face of thermodynamic terror.

Ecocritics need not rely on the Romantic ideal of finding texts that most nearly convey the voices of nature. Contemporary ecology means championing the causes of nature, actively seeking to use the means available to preserve beautiful places and conserving natural resources, standing as a proxy for nature that has no means of expressing its own distress. In light of climate change, the imminent entrance into the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene, the reef-shriveling effects of ocean acidification, and other consequences of the overuse of fossil fuels, ecocritics can show the long heritage of environmentally aware literature. They can use texts from the Victorian era to show the importance of standing as proxies for nature while acknowledging that there can never be voices of nature. Ecocriticism may not be able to share all of the foundational goals of other approaches to literary criticism, but ecocriticism does represent an important exploration into how humankind interacts with the natural world.

Whether through an eco-conscious anthropocentric focus or through the more extreme biocentricity found in certain writers, ecocritics must arm themselves with the understanding that the meaning of nature has been constructed and that the process of choosing what nature teaches is a perfectly
acceptable means of interpretation. Hopkins is just one poet who chose to understand nature through a deep sympathy that governed a sensitivity for the natural world. Many other authors found inspiration not only from the natural world, but from the power of information and scientific exploration. The future of ecocriticism, specifically in regard to the Victorian era, rests in the hands of scholars who devote time and energy to researching the scientific advances of the era and how those advances impacted the literature and legislation of the period. All of these advances are most fully grasped when the constructs of nature are confronted and when ecocritics acknowledge the power of choosing to be proxies for the natural world.
Works Cited


English poet laureate William Wordsworth has long been lauded as the first major “poet of place” in modern literary history. Few writers can rival his connection to the land on which he lived, walked, traveled, and wrote. In their narrative atlas, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*, Daiches and Flower posit, “To a greater extent than any other major British poet, Wordsworth was a poet of place; the experiences out of which he created his finest poetry involved what he called ‘spots of time,’ each identified with a particular locality, and his poems are studded with precise topographical references” (Daiches qtd. in Luckman 3). Indeed, the impact he made on the geography and culture of his home region is notable: his home in the Lake District, called “Wordsworth Country” by some, still draws tourists by the thousands; he is the subject of numerous homes-and-haunts texts from the Victorian age and on; and even Americans recognize that his advocacy of landscape preservation impacted the national parks system on their side of the world. While this “poet of place” has left an undeniable influence on the Western world, especially on the places where he lived and physically visited, are the changes he made in the Anglophone literary world transferable to a foreign place and culture? This paper seeks to explore the transferability of Wordsworth’s works, particularly to a time and culture far removed from his familiar homes and haunts. During the poet’s lifetime, the influence of his works did not reach far-removed Eastern countries such as China, and indeed his feelings toward that far-off land were
less than amicable; after all, it was England’s opium trade with China that eventually took the life of William’s beloved brother John (Kitson 4). However, beginning in the early twentieth century when Wordsworth’s poems were first introduced to Chinese society in translation, they quickly gained popularity. This introduction to his works was accompanied by a surge in Western influence on Chinese literary and cultural movements. Despite Wordsworth’s fluctuating popularity in Chinese culture throughout the twentieth century, this paper will trace his impact on the cultural reformations and developments of the times and discuss how his works and ideas can break out of his geographic “place” to be transferred to a soil and a society that exist oceans and decades apart from him. Further, if the foundational ideas found in Wordsworth’s works are indeed so effectively transferrable to a foreign place, then they may in fact be more rooted in the human experience rather than a particular geographic landscape, as is commonly believed.

A study of the cultural movements in twentieth-century China reveals a large body of research connecting nineteenth-century Western romanticism to Chinese literary reformation. The intent of this paper is not to survey the impacts of each romantic author on Chinese culture, but simply to examine the connection between Wordsworth, his ideals, and the reception and adoption of those ideals in China’s cultural revolutions. Likewise, his influence on Chinese literature has been so widespread in recent decades that a discussion of his impact on every Chinese author or poet who gleaned inspiration from him is impossible in the scope of this paper. Consequently, the essay will embark on a limited number of the most noteworthy cases of direct reference to Wordsworth in well-known Chinese publications. Furthermore, Wordsworth commented on such a broad range of ideas and opinions that an analysis of each of those ideals in twentieth-century Chinese thought and literature would also be impractical; the following work, therefore, will trace the parallels over time between Chinese writing and Wordsworth’s specific championing of the common man and his calling card as a poet of place.

**Wordsworth’s First Introduction to China**

Oceans away from Wordsworth country and a generation after the English poet’s death, his words first found an audience in China in 1914 when scholar Lu Zhiwei translated two of his poems into Chinese. At the time, China was
undergoing a major political, cultural, and social transformation. Just three years before, in 1911, the Xinhai Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty, marking the end of the imperial rule that had characterized the nation since the Xia Dynasty in 2000 BCE. Describing the state of China in the vacuum of dynastic reign, Ersu Ding writes that “there were calls from prominent intellectuals of the time to reform traditional Chinese institutions to meet the demands of modernization” (419). These demands included a literary revolution, whose characteristics were described in a 1917 article by Chen Duxiu. His counsel to Chinese writers is to “replace the ornate literature of aristocracy with a simple literature of common people” as well as move toward a “straightforward and accessible” art form (Duxiu qtd. in Ding 420). These movements are grouped with what is called the New Culture Movement, or the May Fourth Movement of 1919, named for the student demonstration at Tiananmen Square on that date that protested China’s concession to Japan and championed democracy, science, and anti-imperialism.

The broad cultural impact of the May Fourth Movement can be traced in the shifts in Chinese literature of the time. Chi Pang-Yuan, the chief editor of An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature, states that the May Fourth writers and frontrunners of the literary revolution “diligently studied, translated, and experimented with nearly all the Western literary schools from romanticism and symbolism to realism and naturalism” (iv). In an attempt to modernize their literary forms, they “either merged the meters and cadences of past ages into new patterns or adapted free verse forms from the West” (iv). Kirk A. Denton comments on the reasons that May Fourth artists looked to the West for inspiration:

Intellectual iconoclasts of the May Fourth period for the most part consciously rejected traditional literary discourse as artificial and inappropriate for the expression of sincere emotion. They turned to nineteenth-century European literature (especially the Romantics) as models for the unfettered expression of subjectivity they sought to liberate in themselves. (115)

It was during this transformational age that Wordsworth’s works were first introduced to the literary scene in China, adding fuel to the young revolutionary fire that was well positioned to soon erupt. While a complete exploration of Wordsworth’s influence on the May Fourth writers would be too broad a study to discuss in a paper of this scope, this section will trace the parallels between China’s New Culture ideals and the values espoused by Wordsworth.
This section will also highlight the significant impact that Wordsworth had on one influential Chinese author of the time, Yu Dafu.

Readers familiar with Wordsworth’s “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” will recognize many intimations that he championed in the thoughts of the May Fourth writers. While reading Duxiu’s counsel to Chinese revolutionary writers, one cannot help but be reminded of Wordsworth’s own “principal object . . . to chuse [sic] incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men” (59). Just as Chinese authors were rejecting traditional literary forms and poetry and believing that it “had exhausted its stylized forms” (Pang-Yuan iv), so did Wordsworth disdain the traditional language of poetry. While he states that the “earliest Poets” used language that was “really spoken by men,” he asserts that “succeeding Poets constructed a phraseology” that was “unusual . . . extravagant and absurd” and eventually became “more and more corrupt, thrusting out of sight the plain humanities of nature by a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas” (“Preface” 79). Wordsworth’s passionate advocacy of the common speech of the common man, a trailblazing idea for his time and place, was resurrected during the May Fourth Movement to once again set the stage for a literary revolution that championed the common man.

While it is easy to see the commonality in philosophy between Wordsworth (caught up in the fervor of the French Revolution) and the May Fourth writers, a clear link between them is found in Chinese literature of the time. One footprint Wordsworth left in the body of Chinese literary works can be found in the works of author Yu Dafu (1896-1945), particularly in his 1921 short story “Chenlun” (“Sinking”). This story, according to Kirk A. Denton, “has generally been seen as representative of the Romanticism which characterized much of the literature of the May Fourth period” (107). It is of note in this study because of its volume of references to Western writers and thinkers, including Wordsworth. In fact, in the opening scene of the story, readers meet the protagonist, who is strolling the countryside with a pocket edition of Wordsworth in hand. In the following pages, in true Wordsworthian style, the protagonist observes a nature scene in solitude, reflecting on his surroundings as he reads aloud and then

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1 The list of Western writers and thinkers read or mentioned by Dafu’s protagonist in “Sinking” includes but is not limited to Wordsworth, Emerson, Thoreau, Zarathustra, Heinrich Heine, Gogol, and George Gissing. He also references the story of Adam and Eve from the Bible. Additionally, classic Chinese writers are referenced, including Tao Qian (365-427) and Wang Bo and Rong Yu of the Tang dynasty.
translates Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper” into Chinese. Dafu explains the protagonist’s emotional reaction to this poetic exercise:

After orally translating these two stanzas in one breath, he suddenly felt that he had done something silly and started to reproach himself: “What kind of a translation is that? Isn’t it as insipid as the hymns sung in church? English poetry is English poetry and Chinese poetry is Chinese poetry; why bother to translate?” (33)

The protagonist’s soliloquized question echoes the question of this paper: What connection is there between English poetry and Chinese poetry? His unique reflections suggest that Dafu is contemplating the possibility of a direct translation, either literally or figuratively, between the literatures of two disparate continents and cultures.

As it unfolds, the story yields suggestive answers to the protagonist’s rhetorical question as well as allusive implications about the significance of Wordsworth’s placement and impact in the May Fourth Movement. The protagonist in the story is a young Chinese university student attending school in Japan. He seeks Westernization, but in doing so feels a sense of displacement and discontent as he leaves his homeland. Much of the story is characterized by his sentiments of dissatisfaction, reminiscent of the nostalgia described in Wordsworth’s poems of place, such as his lyrical ballad “The Brothers.” Dafu’s story concludes with the displaced young student looking westward toward his homeland China; he sees “a bright star trembling in the farthest reaches of the western horizon” and ponders despondently as he accepts the truth that he will not return there. He sighs, “Underneath that shaky star lies my country, my birthplace, where I have spent eighteen years of my life. But alas, my homeland, I shall see you no more” (55). Just as the forward-thinking young man feels a sense of loss as he considers his homeland, so does Leonard, the brother seeking greater gains beyond his childhood dales in Wordsworth’s “The Brothers.” Leonard’s closing thoughts as he decides to never return to live in his old village are similarly heavy:

[his] cherished hopes,
And thoughts which had been his an hour before,
All pressed on him with such a weight, that now,
This vale, where he had been so happy, seemed
A place in which he could not bear to live:
So he relinquished all his purposes. . . .
While Dafu does not necessarily write his story with “The Brothers” in mind, the connections between these characters are striking. They speak to the parallel between the feelings of nationalism and connection to place common among both worlds and times. Furthermore, the comparison explores the deracination that comes with modernity, a troubling issue that surfaces in the analogous circumstances of industrial and political revolution in nineteenth-century England and twentieth-century China.

If Dafu’s short story is characteristic of the May Fourth Movement, it is noteworthy that the protagonist, ostensibly representative of the rising generation of revolutionaries, reports feelings of nostalgia and loss. In the midst of the excitement of revolution, the connection to place that Wordsworth had established so profoundly in England years before is the perfect medium by which New Culture writers could cope with the radical shifts they were facing. In a realistic rather than a revolutionary approach, as the May Fourth writers rejected the traditions of millennia and embraced modernization, they were leaving behind their sense of place. Just as the displaced protagonist of “Sinking” turned to Wordsworth both to fill in his sense of loss of home, the revolutionary May Fourth writers needed a means by which they could replant their roots in their own native soil. Wordsworth’s hallmark poetry of place, though itself tainted with the air of foreignness (especially in wistful pieces such as “The Brothers”), was a natural source of inspiration for forward-thinking but nostalgic nationalist writers.

Dafu is not the only New Culture writer who drew influence from and directly referenced Wordsworth in his works and commentary. A complete list would be nearly impossible to compile, but authors such as Xu Zhimo, an early translator of Wordsworth who wrote a poem in which the speaker draws a parallel between himself and a cloud, as in Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” Guo Moruo; Zhu Guangqian; Zhu Weizhi; and Yuan Kejia come to the forefront as proponents of Wordsworth in China’s May Fourth Movement (Ding 422-23).
An Interlude: Shrinking Spheres of Influence in Communist China

Despite being widely read and praised by the Chinese in the early nineteen hundreds—even being “incorporated into various university textbooks as one of the greatest epoch-making poets of the West”—Wordsworth’s works saw a distinct drop in publicity with the rise of Mao Zedong and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 (Ding 423). Instead of being lauded as the champion of the people, Wordsworth was now classed with the substandard “reactionary romantics” rather than the “revolutionary romantics” such as Byron, Shelley, and Blake. Such a characterization echoes the cries of Wordsworth’s younger, reform-minded contemporaries, who viewed him as a traitor to the revolutionary cause when he instead adopted conservative ideals. In Chinese academic circles in the period between 1949 and 1976, scholars quoting and drawing influence from *The Soviet Encyclopedia* condemned the “reactionary romantics” for using literature and art as “a vehicle for personal perfection rather than a tool to change the world.” The reactionary, or “passive,” romantics were said to have “jettisoned the rationalist principles of the Enlightenment in their literary creations” and “politically speaking, instead of throwing themselves into the revolutionary storms of the time, . . . retreated into peaceful rural areas and sought refuge in the ‘backward relations of production’ of the pre-industrial society” (Ding 423). In the face of these harsh critiques, Wordsworth’s works likewise retreated into the backdrop of China’s cultural revolution until the next major societal upheaval reversed the cultural trends once more.

Poets of Place in Post-Mao China

Another dramatic shift in Chinese cultural trends is marked by the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the ensuing age of “ideological liberalization and economic integration with the rest of the world” (Ding 423). Once again, a cultural transformation was on the horizon, and complete modernization and industrialization were in order for Chinese society. Wordsworth’s works were once more cast into this swirling pot of change and urbanization. The 1980s and

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For examples of contemporary criticism against Wordsworth’s conservative ideals, see Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem “To Wordsworth” and Robert Browning’s “The Lost Leader.”
1990s saw a remarkable upsurge in the market for Wordsworth in translation, with hundreds of his newly translated poems hitting Chinese bookshelves in multiple anthologies.

This time around, Wordsworth’s works were not only spotlighted for their revolutionary undertones through championing the common man, but also for their pattern of putting down roots in a homeland. The rapid urbanization China faced in this time period echoes the atmosphere in mid-nineteenth-century England that Wordsworth encountered, and both societies were experiencing growing pains. Therefore, instead of condemning Wordsworth for being a “reactionary romantic” who sheepishly retreated into his pastoral fields to hide from the revolutionary developments, Chinese critics of the post-1976 period “do not interpret Wordsworth’s retirement into the lake area of Grasmere as a negative retreat from the real world; rather, they view it as a preparation for a different kind of commitment to the human community” (Ding 424). Just as Wordsworth’s observations of the changing world served as his catalyst to dig his heels more firmly into his beloved home soil through derailing the steam train and advocating landscape preservation, so too did the sudden expansion of modern technology and Western culture in China inspire authors to turn to “native soil” writing, a genre that became increasingly popular in China in the late twentieth century.

While this paper will not trace the references to and influences of Wordsworth on specific Chinese literary works during the time period after the death of Mao, it will highlight some of the imprints that Wordsworth made on contemporary Chinese culture and underscore the ripple effect that his works have had on China’s literary criticism scene. It will also undertake a broader comparison of the ideals that Wordsworth so powerfully pioneered and the adoption of those ideals among the writers in China’s most recent literary revolution.

In contrast to world culture half a century ago, when an individual’s fame could (at least partially) be adequately measured by writers’ commentary on them or artists’ renditions of them, in today’s society an individual’s visibility in media networks and pop culture are more suitable measurements of impact and popularity. Whereas Wordsworth’s impact on society and in his own time was visible in letters and writings of his contemporary writers as well as through his fans’ tours to visit his home in the Lake Country, his impact on the modern world would more accurately be identified by watching for his name in news articles or in pop culture trends. One such example of his current footprint
in Chinese society can be read in a 2006 news article reporting that for the first time, the Shanghai metro would feature content from a foreign culture instead of advertisements. Instead of publishing the words of Maoist slogans or traditional Chinese poets as they had previously, “in a sign of changing priorities, the Shanghai metro [would] display poems by four British poets,” including Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” and William Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” (Watts).

A second notable current event item that underscores the impact of Wordsworth in modern China took place in early 2013, when Mei Zeng, a faculty member from a Chinese university presented a decorative scroll of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” written in Chinese script to the Rydal Mount home, the site where Wordsworth originally composed the poem. A news article about the event states that the professor who presented the scroll to Rydal Mount did so “after discovering a remarkable affection for the Lakes poets among students in China” (Morley). The article also reports Mei as stating that “the love of Wordsworth’s poetry among the Chinese was ‘amazing’” and that “it is part of the core curriculum for students.” In an age of intellectualism, the teaching of an idea or a piece of literature to students suggests its significance in the university’s culture, and thus can reflect its foundational impact on the areas where graduates may scatter.

This increasing presence among students and scholars in modern China serves as an analyzable measurement of the poet’s impact and influence on the distantly removed culture of modern China. A search for “Wordsworth” on CNKI.com.cn, a Chinese online database for academic journals, results in hundreds of hits, demonstrating the plethora of Chinese scholars who are publishing on the British Lake poet’s works, many of whom are drawing comparisons between Chinese poets and Wordsworth. As early as 1981 and 1986, many Chinese translators showed a fresh zeal in translating Wordsworth’s works into Chinese. In the preface to one 1986 volume of Wordsworth’s poems in Chinese, the translator Huang Gaoxin “ranked Wordsworth together with William Shakespeare as one of the greatest poets in the history of English literature” (Ding 424). During this post-Mao time period, many cultural factors contributed to the increased popularity of Wordsworth in the Chinese literary scene. Ding asserts that “this revival of interest in Wordsworth undoubtedly has benefited from the liberal intellectual climate of the late twentieth-century China, but it would not have occurred without the concerted effort of eminent scholars . . . who all spoke and wrote positively about the English poet” (424). Chinese scholars in this era enjoyed greater freedom to explore and publish on
works from foreign countries than they did during the time Mao was in power, leading to the second major shift in Chinese literary tradition in the twentieth century.

The Chinese literary scene in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes referred to as the “New Wave” era, introduced the growing culture to a “young generation of writers associated with the ‘search for roots’ (xungen) movement,” with one writer in particular, Shen Congwen, at the origin of this development. Leo Ou-fan Lee comments that Shen “enjoys an exalted position as a writer whose visions of rural reality do not fall into the same revolutionary mode” as previous writers, who treats his “rural locality not merely as critical leverage for dramatizing a social message” (370). Shen, like Wordsworth, lived in a landscape “rich with literary allusions,” and as a result, “his native soil fiction comprises both a biographical attachment and an imaginative tie to the literary place” (Lee 370). Similarly, Shen is also known among the New Wave writers for his travel writing and his “evocations of bucolic countrysides and the lives of minority groups and country people from his travels in western China” (Ng 82). His works, like Wordsworth’s, focus on the healing relationship between man and nature and between common individuals more than on the political scene of the day.

An analysis of Shen Congwen’s personal background and literary style sheds light on the analogous themes in the “native soil” movement and in Wordsworth’s personally reflective “spots of time” poetry. Shen was born in West Hunan, a region of China known for its literary history, especially because it was the site of the “ultimate Chinese utopian text,” entitled “Peach Blossom Spring” (Wang 114). His family moved away from the region when he was fifteen years old, but seventeen years later he returned to seek the place of his homeland and the mystified “utopia.” This trip sparked the creation of Shen’s noteworthy Random Sketches on a Trip to Hunan. Readers of Wordsworth will find parallels between this work, which is composed of a realistic “accumulation of data—natural and human scenery, detailed biographical information” compiled not in a complete, chronological fashion, but rather in “fragments of what he sees and hears” (Wang 113, 115), and Wordsworth’s hallmark Prelude, composed of a series of “spots of time” anecdotes from the poet’s life. The resultant works are a collaboration of scenes meaningful to the authors that, when read together beneath the lens of the author’s personal experiences and commentary, form a more significant worldview than the simple experience alone could create.
Furthermore, Shen’s *Random Sketches on a Trip to Hunan* captures the simultaneous feelings of loss and nostalgia and of greater appreciation on revisiting a place, an idea explored in great depth in Wordsworth’s works. Janet Ng states that this work is “often read as Shen’s metaphoric [journey] in search of self through revisits to a personal past” (81), a notion that is reminiscent of the title of Wordsworth’s masterpiece: *The Prelude: Or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind*. While Shen does not explicitly mention Wordsworth in his text, themes in *Random Sketches on a Trip to Hunan* again recall the character of Leonard from “The Brothers,” who revisits his homeland after a long absence to find it full of emotional significance but impossible to reassimilate. In Shen’s work, he is unable to complete his “quest . . . to relocate the mythical utopia” of his homeland, and instead “finds it most enjoyable to portray people from the lower classes” (Wang 116). According to David Der-wei Wang, one reason Shen approaches the mythical “Peach Blossom Spring” in this way is that “it is the surviving elements of the ‘noble savages,’ residual remembrances of the golden time, or lingering impressions of the landscape that we must learn to capture and decipher so as to reconstruct things past” (116). Instead of being content to observe the landscape, Shen, like Leonard, turns to the common people and their riveting stories to provide a reconnection to the land. Wordsworth’s poems frequently capitalize on this theme, as in his many “encounter” poems, such as “The Leech Gatherer” or “Stepping Westward,” which highlight unexpected connections with a stranger as instructive and enlightening moments.

Connecting Places by their People

The commonality of connecting to a geographic place by having an encounter with the people found there is a key element that helps uncover an answer to this paper’s original query about the transferability of English poetry of place to Chinese soil. In the works discussed so far, it is the connections with realistic and common people that grant the texts validity and life. Most recently, in Shen Congwen’s New Wave writings, his emphasis on discovering and rediscovering the simple delights of the lower-class population seeks to make up for the impossibility of truly reconnecting with the land itself. His works also highlight the healing power of beautiful landscape but most forcefully nod to the instructive nature of encounters with the common man to help the author “reconstruct things past” (Wang 116). Thus, just as Wordsworth’s own poetry of
place and travel literature often rely on the human aspect of an encounter to inform and construct meaning, so does the transfer or “travel” of literary tradition rely on an application of analogous principles to the common man in order to find force.

This claim holds true during the earlier stages of China’s literary history as well. When Wordsworth’s writings were mistakenly viewed as reclusive and unconnected to the ideals of the common man of China in the phase between 1949 and 1976, his works saw a falling off the charts. Before this interlude, however, it was the personal connection in Yu Dafu’s “Sinking” between the protagonist and the Western authors that underscored the meaning (or lack thereof) of the protagonist’s existence. In the absence of human encounters in the foreign Japanese school, he turned instead to Western writers and thinkers such as Wordsworth to develop a meaningful life experience, proving the power of text’s transferability to create an original and individual worldview.

Finally, the emphasis on the human connection highlights the “rootlessness” of literature. Despite its ties to the land of Western Hunan, David Der-wei Wang argues that

native soil literature is literally and rhetorically a “rootless” literature, a kind of literature whose meaning hinges on the simultaneous (re)discovery and erasure of the treasured image of the homeland. Native soil writers come forth to write out what they fail to experience in reality. Their imagination plays just as much a role as their lived experience, and their “gesture” of remembering is no less important than the things remembered. (109)

This argument harkens back to Wordsworth’s own reasoning that in writing poetry, “the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling” (“Preface” 61). Indeed, the “spots of time” experiences to which he refers in his “Two-Part Prelude” are able to “[nourish] and invisibly [repair the mind]” especially through the “imaginative power” (ll. 288-94). With this argument in mind, it is clear why the literatures of disparate eras and cultures are able to travel so well; if the primary meaning is developed in the imagination of the event and not in the event itself, a reader’s literal connection to the geographic place is unnecessary to construct a personally meaningful experience in reading the text.

In a commentary on the literary tourism of England, Ian Ousby supports this claim as it refers to Wordsworth’s poetry of place:
Though deeply and precisely rooted in place, his poetry achieves its characteristic greatness by a process that has little, if anything, to do with topographical description. It works, as “Tintern Abbey” does, not by literal attention to the scene at hand but by the interplay between the spirit of the place, the personal experience that the poet brings to it and the larger truths this combination helps him to glimpse. (144)

Thus, the writers most rooted in place seem to also be more wrapped up in connection to the humanity of a place and the author’s own contributions to the scene than in the literal landscape. In seeking to preserve the landscape amid rapid urbanization, both Wordsworth and parallel Chinese writers seem to want to preserve their own reality of their beloved homes and haunts rather than a material reality. In fact, their approach toward writing can be said to deny the existence of one single objective reality, in favor of a myriad of constructed realities shaped by the observer’s personal experiences in a place.

On the surface, in constructing their own realities, the writers and their characters discussed rely on the topography of their surroundings. Indeed, their texts suggest that they are tied deeply to the land and place in which they lived or traveled, and without heavy referencing to those places they would not have had as rich a source from which to draw inspiration for their works. However, after exploring the transferability of such literary works of place across oceans and eras, it is clear that these works are truly constructing a reality more rooted in the topography of human interaction and imagination as a geographic land to be explored. These highly accessible works, written for and about the common man doing common things, underscore the power of literature to connect humanity across cultures and time periods and create a shared cultural foundation. Thus, the ideals and works of Wordsworth are as accessible in industrial-age England as they are in revolutionary China, and as critics map the influence of Wordsworth’s writings on the literary and imaginative constructs of twentieth-century China, both bodies of work will continue to act as guides to interpret the constructed realities of the other.


“Some things I have to say aren’t getting said,” begins Julia Alvarez’s poem “Bilingual Sestina,” a title that reflects both the subject material and the literal linguistic content of the piece (824). It is a poem whose Latin-American speaker muses over her inadequate grasp of English and the complexity and fluidity of the language barrier between her and assimilation into American culture. For her, this barrier is neither rigid nor unyielding; rather, her partial knowledge of the English language reshapes its contours and breaches it in places, allowing her to glimpse the other side, but not to fully immerse herself in it. Some things she has to say are not getting said because she lacks the ability to convey her feelings in the language of the culture around her. Even if she has the appropriate vocabulary, the foreignness of the words makes her own thoughts seem alien to her.

This tension between languages is a theme woven throughout most of Alvarez’s works—novels, essays, and poetry alike. “Bilingual Sestina” distills and encapsulates the essence of the linguistic tug-of-war, emphasizing through repetition of the word “closed” that an imperfect understanding of the language prevents a hyphenated American, like Alvarez herself, from becoming fully American. The power of language to dictate where the speaker stands within (or without) a culture endows it with a significant role in the formation of identities, both those imposed by others and those constructed by the self.
Alvarez’s writing tacitly acknowledges language’s special power over memory, history, and identity. The eponymous character Yolanda in her 1997 novel ¡Yo! personifies the way memory and history are fictionalized by their written or spoken representations. As the vehicle of thought and communication, words are inherently positioned to shape a reader’s perceptions of and emotions toward the events they attempt to portray. Furthermore, even the very material the words draw from is subjective; memory is never exact, and the mind, whether knowingly or not, fills in the gaps with fictional constructions. If memory were perfect and words could convey exactly what the objective experience was like, the interpretation of events would still be slanted by the influence of the author’s own paradigms and past experiences. Every narrative, then, whatever claims it may make to veracity and objectivity, must necessarily contain elements of fiction and myth.

As a Dominican-American author, Alvarez is preoccupied with two important facets of language: first, the influence of bilingualism on the formation of identity; second, the way that history, heritage, and memory shape the identity of hyphenated Americans like Alvarez herself. This focus is particularly evident in the recurring character Yolanda, who serves as the author’s own alter ego. Alvarez’s works flirt with the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction, as well as memory and myth. As a result, they are haunted by a sense of missing or broken identity. For Alvarez, the joint ambiguities of history and memory (further distorted by the language chosen to represent them) yield an ambiguity of identity, which manifests itself in her fragmented combination of Spanish and English. The wall between languages and the bilingualism that allows some fluidity around it provide a framework through which her characters can navigate the tension between fact and fiction in their memories and, ultimately, formulate constructions of the self.

Alvarez’s novel ¡Yo! is set against the backdrop of Raphael Trujillo’s dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, known among Dominicans as the Trujillato (Holguín 92). Upon assuming power in 1930, he made his party the only legal party, dispensed with the formalities of voting, closed down emigration from the country, and began changing names of mountains and cities to variations of Trujillo. During his thirty-one year reign, he was responsible for the deaths of over fifty thousand people, many through brutal massacres and others at the hands of his secret police, the SIM. Disappearances and murders were common. Terrified, Dominicans lived in oppressed silence, knowing that if they spoke out against the regime’s injustices, their lives would be forfeit. In
the vein of Freudian psychoanalysis, Jessica Wells Cantiello argues that this injunction for silence has caused the horrific events of the Trujillato to become a culturally repressed memory for Dominicans (92). She claims that although years of imposed oppression effectively conditioned the nation to remain silent, Yolanda (nicknamed Yo) represents a form of rebellion against the dictatorship in the story about the gun, which is repeated several times throughout Alvarez’s oeuvre. Each narrative, crucially, posits a different version of events. In ¡Yo! the tale is recounted from the perspective of Yolanda’s mother. Still living in the Dominican Republic under the thumb of the Trujillato, the mother enters a closet where her husband has hidden an illegal firearm to find that Yo, then a small child, has been rifling through the drawers. She knows that if her daughter saw the gun, she holds the family’s life in her hands—should the SIM learn of its existence, they will all be arrested and probably killed. When questioned, Yo says nothing of having found the gun, but her mother senses that she is lying, as if Yo implicitly understands that keeping it a secret gives her an unspoken power over her parents. “I hated being at the mercy of my own child,” says the mother, “but in that house we were all at the mercy of her silence from that day on” (28).

It is language that gives Yo this power to influence her future: Ironically, the safety of her entire family hinges on her silence. In one version, it is because she tells her story to a neighbor that the SIM come to arrest her father (Cantiello 93). In ¡Yo! she is characterized as a compulsive storyteller: “For Yo, talking was like an exercise in what you could make up” (24). This innate characteristic gives the impression that she possesses an inborn power and drive to fight the silence of her culture through language.

That Alvarez has written so many different versions of the story about the gun throughout her works reflects her awareness of the fictitious nature of memory. In her short essay entitled “A Note on the Loosely Autobiographical,” Alvarez relates a story about her family in which she asked them to write down what they remembered about the day they left the Dominican Republic:

The arguments began . . . My mother remembered going to a fortune-teller to find out whether or not we would make it out of the island safely. My father said that such a trip would have been impossible because we received word at the last minute, and then had to leave immediately. One sister remembered that we pushed the car down the driveway, afraid to turn it on . . . My older sister laughed when she heard that story. “That’s from The Sound of Music!” (166)
Although the tone of this passage is lighthearted, it provides a fascinating insight into how fickle memory can be. All family members had experienced the same event, but time and personal emotions distorted the recollection to such a degree that they disagreed on the basic details. This interplay between memory and fiction is one of the prominent themes in the first chapter of ¡Yo!. The parents, Mami and Papi, struggle to reconcile who they were before—affluent, intelligent, Papi a prominent doctor—with who they are now, penny-pinchers living in a tiny urban apartment. Perhaps the hardest change to swallow is that in their own country, operating under their own customs, laws, and language, they felt capable of protecting their family, while in the United States they are left powerless by their inadequate grasp of English. Haunted by the ever-present fear that their family will be deported, they are terrified that speaking only Spanish will render them defenseless against the implacable force of American bureaucracy. Thus, the language barrier becomes not only a nuisance but also a threat to their very survival. Mami, the narrator, mentions speaking with the social worker in the United States about the horrors that happened back in the Dominican Republic: “I get a little carried away and invent a few tortures of my own,” she admits, but “nothing the SIM hadn’t thought up, I’m sure” (32). Like her daughter Yo, Mami feels compelled to invent stories now that she is in the United States and free from the repressive mandate of silence that had hovered over her in the Dominican Republic. The traumatic memory of the disappearances of friends, the recollection of “nights . . . up to four sleeping pills to numb myself into a few hours of the skimpiest sleep” clearly still haunts her; yet, she does not believe that the truth is sufficient to convey the weight of what she wants to communicate to the social worker (26). The fact that she “can’t find the words in English—or Spanish” reflects her awareness that words in either language cannot do justice to the awfulness of the memory, necessitating a lie to convey its full weight (34). Furthermore, she is speaking in “broken English that usually cuts [her] ideas down to the wrong size” (32); she feels like the use of a language foreign to her hinders the efficacy of the truth and renders it inadequate. Hence, even though she would often “put Tabasco in [Yo’s] mouth to burn away the lies,” she herself is driven to the same sin because memory is insufficient for her purposes (24).

Mami also has a strong sense of the power of language in overriding and reshaping memory and history. This is most keenly felt in her transition from relating events that took place in the Dominican Republic to explaining the
more recent happenings in America. In a chilling paragraph, she reveals her awareness of the fictional nature of any retelling of an event:

Isn’t a story a charm? All you have to say is, And then we came to the United States, and with that and then, you skip over four more years of disappearing friends, sleepless nights, house arrest, narrow escape, and then, you’ve got two adults and four wired-up kids in a small, dark apartment near Columbia University. Yo must have kept her mouth shut or no charm would have worked to get us free of the torture chambers we kept telling the immigration people about so they wouldn’t send us back. (28)

The dark undertones in these words effectively convey the dread and terror of four long years skipped casually over by the transitional phrase and then. When the narrator tells her story and uses and then to gloss over the horror, her listeners do not hear the repressed memories of all the friends who have disappeared and all the times the family narrowly escaped the prying fingers of Trujillo’s secret police. When Alvarez acknowledges the insufficiency of and then in her writing, the reader suddenly understands how inadequate mere words are and how far they can strike from the real heart of the story while still purporting to be the truth. The words misrepresent the narrator as well, as and then conveys nothing of the emotional and psychological damage Mami has experienced. “How can this lady with her child’s eyes and her sweet smile understand who I am and what I have been through?” she asks of the social worker who comes to inspect their house (34). Like this naïve, blond American assigned to evaluate their situation, the reader forms an erroneous image of who Mami really is, with no notion of the scars underlying the formation of her identity. As Cantiello points out, this element of unknowability is also reflected in her choice of the words must have (Cantiello 96). The phrase indicates an oxymoronic fusion of conviction and uncertainty, maintaining that something must be true, but simultaneously acknowledging that Mami has no certain proof and therefore can only infer it from the consequences that followed. She is haunted both by what she does remember and by what she does not. As Julie Barak argues, “The stories that spin out from this center are about what they remember and what they invent to survive” (Barak 60).

From the beginning, Mami identifies language as the element of Americanness with which she struggles most. It places a barrier between herself and those with whom she tries to communicate, most specifically the social worker who arrives at the end of the story. Alvarez’s choice to compose
the narrative in English, however, heightens the sense of fracture—although the story is being told in English, it is actually happening in Spanish. There is a jolting reminder of this every few paragraphs, when Alvarez slips in an unfamiliar word: *el cuco, guayabera* (24), *Papá Dios* (26), which lead the reader to associate fractured language with fractured identity. Evidence of the brokenness of Mami’s sense of self emerges throughout the narrative. There are several instances in which she compares her current perception of past and memory to a puzzle: “All those years have mixed together like an old puzzle whose box top is lost. (I don’t even know anymore what picture all those little pieces make.)” (24). The reader is left trying to sort out the puzzle, and in doing so he or she is struck by the sense of narrative dislocation caused by the family’s transplant from its dark, culturally rich, native soil into “snowy, blonde, blue-eyed, gum-chewing” American ground (“Bilingual Sestina” 824). It is significant that Mami no longer knows what picture the pieces should make; she feels as though her life and her identity have been turned upside down and scattered, but now that she is living in the unfamiliar culture of the United States, she is no longer sure what she should be creating out of the pieces. Mami will not—and cannot—simply cease to be a Dominican, but she seems unable to effectively mix her new nationality with her old one. Thus, she becomes a Dominican American waging an internal war of self-hyphenation, a conflicted binary that she never fully resolves. Her failure to assimilate renders her incompetent in American society, which is exactly what her daughter does not want to be.

There is a sense of the dichotomy between memory and stories in *Yo* as well. Although other Alvarez novels give different accounts, in *¡Yo!* the reader never finds out whether she really did see the gun, or whether she told anybody that her father had one. Mami thinks she did, but the question is left open-ended. Yo, however, even as a small child, somehow understands the power that the ambiguity of the story gives her; since not even her mother knows the truth, Yo uses it as her bargaining chip in a deal. Yo’s actions imply that she agrees to keep her mouth shut as long as “the bear won’t be coming anymore” (28). Mami frequently dons a bear-looking mink coat that her children are convinced is the corporeal manifestation of *el cuco*, the Haitian boogeyman, and that terrifies them into immediate obedience. Yo hates it. When she finds that her mother is distressed over her rummaging in the closet, she recognizes that she can use her experience as leverage: She will tell no one about the gun if Mami will stop pretending to be a bear. As soon as Mami breaks that deal by locking her in the closet with the mink coat, Yo returns to telling stories about “[k]ids locked in
closets and their mouths burned with lye. Bears mauling little children” (33). Both of these untruths have their roots in Yo’s memory. The use of lye contains an interesting play on words: Mami burned Yo’s mouth with Tabasco sauce to rid her of the lies, but in her newly-concocted story, it is the lye that is burning her mouth. The close tie between memory and language here further highlights how different the reality is from the narrative that eventually emerges—and how telling lies creates for Yo and her mother an entirely different identity, a fictionalized version of themselves that does not reflect the complexity of who they really are. The way Alvarez portrays stories as a “complicated confluence of truth, lies, and memory” manifests itself in Yo’s storytelling (Cantiello 84). Keenly aware of the fracture in her identity and her ability to exploit it with language, Yo yearns for a sense of completeness and belonging. When she returns in other novels, she has forfeited many facets of her Dominican culture and heritage. She even feels uncomfortable speaking Spanish, a clear indication that her facility with English and her ability to communicate were key in forming her adult identity. Ultimately, the character she spins for herself with her stories supplants the character that memory and history had formed for her. For her mother, this assimilation is the ultimate betrayal, but Mami spends the rest of her life trying fruitlessly to finish a puzzle with missing pieces; for Yo, abandoning that part of her heritage is the only way she can find resolution and gain a sense of self that is not torn by language or lies.

Lucía M. Suárez casts the novel as Yo’s—and by extension, Alvarez’s—“struggle to pull the thread of her own identity from a tangle of possibilities” (118). Suárez argues that ambiguity is key: ambiguity of history yields creativity of imagination, and ambiguity of identity yields conflict of situation and heritage (118). This is why the most difficult part of Americanization for Yo is the increase in proximity to her mother. To Yo, Mami represents what she does not want to become: a hyphenated American who is struggling desperately to pick up the pieces of her identity. Suárez, citing an interview with the author herself, explains that Alvarez defines herself first as a writer, and only then as Dominican or American. As her alter ego, Yo follows in the same vein, desiring to rid her name of the hyphen and become fully American. Although this desire is not as evident in this novel, mentions of it in others of Alvarez’s works make it clear. Even the title, ¡Yo!, defies Yo’s wish to abandon her former heritage. Yo is intended as a nickname for Yolanda, but it has a double meaning. In Spanish, yo is the singular first-person pronoun, roughly translated as I. Names, of course, are key in self-perception, which means that the title of the novel is
a proclamation of Yo’s search for identity. Although unsure how to reconcile herself with her heritage, Yo undoubtedly wanders in search of self-discovery and self-determination. Even in the search for identity that is indicated by such the pronoun she shares for a name, she cannot escape the linguistic elements of her roots. On the other hand, Dominicans pronounce the semi-vowel y as Americans would the consonant j, meaning that Yo’s name is pronounced the same way as the very American “Joe” or “Jo”. This remarkable duality in the nature of her nickname also accentuates her double consciousness—her sense that she is at once both Dominican and American, even though culture dictates that the two are supposed to be somehow mutually exclusive.

Yo, as a stand-in for Alvarez, represents the autobiographical self. By definition, autobiographies are meant to be objective histories of their subjects, but in light of the argument that there is no such thing as objectivity in representations of events, it is impossible for an autobiography to not contain elements of fiction. Therefore, an autobiographical work is the same as a semi-autobiographical work, which is the same as a non-autobiographical work. Alvarez makes this point in her essay: “All novels are loosely autobiographical, but some novels are more loosely autobiographical than others” (“A Note on the Loosely Autobiographical” 165). Revealing that she accepts both the historicity of text and the textuality of history, Alvarez also highlights the power—the inevitability—of the author’s chosen words to mold objective truths (if there is such a thing) into subjective narratives. Yo’s ambition is to be a writer, but language often gets in her way. One real Hispanic writer, Esmeralda Santiago, is quoted as saying, speaking of writing Spanish scenes in English, “Nunca me imaginé que el proceso me haría confrontar no solo a mi pasado monolinguístico, sino también a mi presente bilingüe . . . I would get tongue-tied and lose the sense of what I was saying and writing, as if observing that I was translating from one language to the other had made me lose both of them” (Wall 126). This is what it becomes for Yo. She feels that by attempting to reconcile her languages, she will lose both, and it is therefore better to forget one and embrace the other.

The fluidity of language, both in its representation of events and in the bilingualism that characterizes the García family, shapes the narrative and the identities Yo and Mami attempt to construct after their relocation to the United States. As Juan Flores observes in “Broken English Memories,”

Historical memory is an active, creative force, not just a receptacle for the dead weight of times gone by. Memory has been associated, since its earliest usages, with the act of inscribing, engraving, or . . . “recording” (grabar). It
is not so much the record itself as the putting-on-record, the gathering and sorting of materials from the past in accordance with the needs and interests of the present. Remembering thus always involves selecting and shaping, constituting out of what was something that never was yet now assuredly is, in the imaginary of the present, and in the memory of the future. (381)

This concept of memory being less about the event and more about the process of remembering, with its rethinking of objectivity, memory, and text, is evident throughout ¡Yo! and its companion novels. The gaps in history shape memory; memory in turn shapes identity; language, as the means of communication, affects all of the above by the very subjectivity of its nature. Epitomizing the complicated relationship between all these varying elements of identity, Yolanda represents Alvarez herself—noble, frail, complex, and utterly human. One striking feature of Alvarez’s prose is the convincing way in which she captures the human experience; through her works, the reader catches a glimpse into the life of a hyphenated American and how bridges and barriers between languages change the nature of identity. The way the author uses a mingling of Spanish and English reflects the currents and fractures in the identities, memory, and heritage of hyphenated Americans.
Works Cited


Much of creative nonfiction is born out of the past, and most creative nonfiction writers understand the complicated nature of memory in which the histories of our individual and collective experiences exist. Theorist Paul Ricoeur discusses many of these memory complexities, delineating how elusive memory can be and showing how even in the moment we are experiencing an event, we are engaged in forgetting pieces of it (30). Likewise, as we move on from the event and try to recollect and engage in anamnesis (Aristotle’s term to denote an active search of our memories) our current understanding and experience alters the remembered event (Ricoeur 17–18). This intricate process of memory is a core issue in the debate surrounding creative nonfiction and truth, for if our memory is imperfect, and we are writing a piece representing an experience contained in the past, how can that representation be true, particularly when the idea of truth further confounds the matter through its ambiguity?

Ricoeur raises this question of truth in historical representations of memory asking: “How does history, in its literary writing, succeed in distinguishing itself from fiction? To pose this question is to ask how history remains or
rather becomes a representation of the past, something fiction is not, at least in intention” (190). Ricoeur’s idea of truth asserts that “true” and “false” can stand in for the terms “verifiable” and “refutable” (179), respectively—a helpful view in looking at what truth is in creative nonfiction. Ricoeur goes on to posit that representations of history are true if they show events and experiences “as they really happened” (279). His ideas of truth are Aristotelian in this sense, calling back to one of Aristotle’s famous phrases when defining “what truth and falsehood are: for to say that that which is is not or that which is not is, is a falsehood; and to say that that which is is and that which is not is not, is true” (23). In creative nonfiction then, truth would become a matter of writing that which is (or was) rather than that which is (or was) not.

Some creative nonfiction writers expand their narratives outside of what is true by Ricoeur’s and Aristotle’s standards, creating characters, inventing conversations, and combining events all for the sake of “moving the narrative forward” (Gornick 9). Vivian Gornick admits to altering time in her memoir Fierce Attachments, “mak[ing] a composite out of the elements of two or more incidents” and “play[ing] fast and loose with time” (9). Likewise, other authors (such as Elie Wiesel) make the same moves in their work, moving further away from a verifiable representation of history. Wiesel’s acclaimed memoir Night involves the use of a composite character, which, for some, invalidates the entire memoir. Other writers, however, believe that moves such as these create a work of fiction rather than nonfiction. In his essay “Of Liars,” Montaigne said, “In plain truth, lying is an accursed vice. We are not men, nor have other tie upon one another, but by our word. If we did but discover the horror and gravity of it, we should pursue it with fire and sword, and more justly than other crimes.” Montaigne’s point of view has many followers, who believe that truth is what makes humanity, and that forgoing truth in creative nonfiction in order to sweeten the piece is an injustice to readers and other writers of the craft. This debate regarding truth in nonfiction is an intricate conversation that has been going on for years and has been limited in only designating two arguments: first, that some fiction can exist and is inevitable in creative nonfiction, and second, that nonfiction must only testify to the past as it actually existed. This two-ended spectrum fails to recognize the intricacies of truth and how it is achieved in recapturing memories. Viewing the discussion through this dichotomy neglects a third approach where authors recognize the difficulties memory holds when trying to create a completely accurate or true testimony, yet still see merit in striving for that difficult truth and showing that war on the
page. In grappling with the difficulties in this metacognitive way—the author being self-consciously aware of his or her thought processes and memories and the inadequacies inherent in both, and sharing them with the readers—these authors can show readers and writers that “reality is sly, people are complicated, and truth is slippery” (“Reality is Sly”). Presenting metacognition of memory on the page shows readers that even through the difficulties of representation, every sentence in our piece can still “aim for a truth that is a communication between the reader and the writer” (“Reality is Sly”). Authors who engage in this form of communication demonstrate to their readers the struggle of trying to be truthful in their depiction, cueing their readers to parts of the memory that might be less than whole. Some may think this visible metacognition muddies the creative piece, but I argue that an open representation of memory will split open the conversation regarding truth, creating a piece of creative nonfiction that merits both parts of that title.

Creative nonfiction allows writers and readers to engage in a discovery of the world around them—that which they see and experience in everyday life. Readers come to the piece with an understanding that they will be reading a true account, or rather, an account that does not deviate from what was and existed in the experience being shared. Nancy Mairs defines what it means to be truthful in creative nonfiction that emphasizes this relationship between reader, writer, and the responsibility of truth even in its difficulty. She states:

When I write a piece labeled nonfiction, I make an implicit contract with the reader, who reads with a set of expectations different from the ones fiction elicits. . . . Perhaps I could have gotten away with some embellishment of the facts and my own popularity would have soared, but I’d have strayed from my aim of plumbing the significance of ordinary human experience. (Mairs 89)

Mairs points to the idea that truth is ordinary human experience. When a writer consciously combines multiple people into one character, the character no longer belongs to ordinary human experience; it becomes extraordinary. It no longer exists as it was. It doesn’t represent reality but an unreal character. Furthermore, when that author fails to alert the reader to the deviation, there is a “disconnect” between the author and reader. Some writers of the creative nonfiction genre may think that the expectation readers have is the very problem of the debate—that readers anticipate too much from creative nonfiction, not understanding that truth is difficult to grasp. If this is the case, then shouldn’t we, as creative nonfiction writers, take it upon ourselves to inform the reader
of the problematic nature of memory and truth in creative nonfiction through demonstrating the memory wrestling that takes place?

Memory theorists as well as creative nonfiction writers recognize that it isn’t possible to remember every minutia. Both groups, however, also understand that it is still necessary to tell the story, to share the witness and testify to events and experiences that exist in our past even if those events and experiences are constantly moving away from us. In her award-winning memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion demonstrates to us the importance of the act of writing to understand, and at the most basic level, writing to remember. Throughout the entire work, Didion is writing through the death of her husband, remembering what that encompassing grief felt like, what grief means, and what grief tells us about human nature and human experience. At the same time, Didion’s memoir demonstrates how memory has shaped her experience. Didion tells of an instance that demonstrates the fickle nature of memory as well as the necessity of writing as a means of remembering when she recalls her husband, who was also a writer, having a moment of creativity and finding himself unprepared: “He had thought of something he wanted to remember but when he looked in his pockets he found no cards. I need you to write something down, he said” (23). She goes on to wonder about the forgetfulness of her husband, questioning if it was an indication of his approaching death, since she knows he had an understanding of memory and writing. She asks herself, “Why had he forgotten to bring note cards to dinner that night? Had he not warned me when I forgot my own notebook that the ability to make a note when something came to mind was the difference between being able to write and not being able to write?” (23). She wrote it down for him for the same reason he asked her to: writing is to remember. Writing is a form of memory preservation and dissemination. Even with the uncertainty of memory, Didion recognizes the importance of communicating the past, sharing it, protecting it from extinction in fading memory—the fate of memories not communicated (Lowenthal 196). Didion writes, “This is my attempt to make sense of the period that followed, weeks and then months that cut loose any fixed idea I had ever had about death, about illness, . . . about life itself” (7). Didion understands the importance of trying to contain this memory as much and as completely as possible for her own understanding as well as for the understanding of others, that it may “connect [her] with a meaningful cosmos” (Lowenthal 197). Even though complete remembrance isn’t possible—for, as Lowenthal argues, “the passage of time induces qualitative memory change as well as loss” (208)—what
is possible is to be as truthful as we can about the reality of the event or experience being shared, maintaining honesty regarding what is remembered and what isn’t. It is necessary to have an open and honest conversation with oneself as a writer and with the readers as they read the piece.

To facilitate this conversation of memory in a creative nonfiction piece, Giorgio Agamben’s ideas of subjectification and desubjectification provide an apparatus with which creative nonfiction writers can understand the questioning that needs to take place when testifying to personal and collective memories. Agamben argues that testimony takes place once the “I” is spoken. As soon as we identify ourselves as the subject of discourse, we begin the process of subjectification and begin giving a testimony, even if, due to our wavering memory, it is an inaccurate testimony. Subjectification, the construction of the self and making the self a subject of exploration, is essential for desubjectification to take place, and vice versa. Desubjectification is the act of stepping outside of ourselves and the testimony we are giving, becoming an onlooker of that self, and deconstructing that self to understand more fully who we are and the experience we are unearthing. Put simply, subjectification is the recognition of the self, and desubjectification is an attempt to analyze oneself from an exterior position as an object rather than a subject. Agamben recognizes that no one can put off their subjectivity but argues that in order for discourse to take place, “the psychosomatic individual must fully abolish himself and desubjectify himself as a real individual to become the subject of enunciation” (116). In creative nonfiction, once the “I” is written the author is engaged in testifying to something; whether the work is a journalistic piece or a memoir, a testimony is being given of some person, event, or experience, and desubjectification should be the goal.

In order for an author to write a memoir or personal essay, she must engage in the text metacognitively and engage in the desubjectification of herself, stepping back and seeing herself being seen by others, and asking herself questions that will allow for fruitful analysis and further exploration of the event by the author herself, her readers, and her critics. Agamben indicates that at the moment of testimony there is a separation that occurs—the desubjectification where we divide ourselves into two parts: what he calls the human and the nonhuman. Many successful creative nonfiction writers engage in this dual conversation of the two selves. In The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion goes on an honest exploration of her memory as she retells the account of her husband passing away from cardiac arrest. She details to the reader the memories that stand clear
in her mind and the events of the experience that have escaped her. Didion questions herself throughout the piece, engaging in a mode of reflection that is necessary for truth telling in creative nonfiction. In Agamben’s terms, the human part of Didion in this process would be her detailing the experience of losing her husband. The inhuman would be the part of her that existed in the moment her husband was dying—the moment of the personal narrative that has since past, which is currently being explored through writing. Didion is no longer watching the EMTs try to resuscitate her husband, but she once was, so there are two parts of her coexisting in this narrative that she needs to be aware of: the part of her that is currently writing what she experienced, and the part of her that experienced it. Didion recognizes these two parts, desubjectifying herself when she recalls her retelling of the experience to her friends and states, “Clearly I was not the ideal teller of this story, something about my version had been at once too offhand and too elliptical” (6). This confession that Didion makes, indicating she had honestly forgotten to tell her friends about the blood her husband’s body left behind from hitting something as he fell down, is a desubjectification of the self and an admission of a conversation Didion is having with herself and her reader about the role of memory in telling her story.

Didion is stepping back, desubjectifying herself and trying to see herself as others might view her, trying to see the holes in the witness she is giving. Making this conversation of desubjectification visible to herself and her readers allows Didion to further explore the event and her recollection of it, as well as form a relationship of trust between her and her readers. The readers recognize that Didion is keeping them in the loop, indicating where there is a weakness in her memory, and showing them the wrestling she is taking part in for the sake of relaying the event as closely as possible to how it really happened. Other writers may have ignored this lapse in memory, devised a scene to fill in the gap, and moved the story forward, simplifying the piece by not dealing with the messiness of memory. However, Didion makes a conscious choice to grapple metacognitively with her memory and bring reality, free from deviation, to her creative nonfiction. It is clear that this admission of the messiness of remembering and witnessing in creative nonfiction is much more interesting than a clean, contrived retelling of an event. This metacognitive approach allows the writer, reader, and critic more time for crucial pondering that could bring to light interesting questions on the nature of memory and recollection—questions such as why Didion forgot about the blood her husband’s body left behind. This pondering could then lead to areas where further analysis could
take place: perhaps at the time Didion didn’t remember because she didn’t realize the blood signified the horridness of it all to her, or maybe it was because she knew exactly the weight of the recollection and her memory was protecting her. If we have intrinsic systems in our bodies that protect ourselves from harm, such as nerves telling us a flame is hot, then our mind or emotions must have some aspect to protect us from the memories we are not prepared for or that may hurt us. This inquiry of self-preservation is a result of the relationship between the reader and writer that is created when the writer delineates the interworking of her mind as she remembers. Moves such as these in creative nonfiction writing not only open the conversation for analysis of memory, but also produce a venue for the writer and reader to engage in further examination of the piece and the experience being rendered, objectifying the narrative by looking at it in ways that extend beyond itself. In this way, a piece of writing such as Didion’s becomes so much more than a retelling of the events of a heart attack; it becomes a search for meaning in the unexpected.

Just as Agamben’s subjectification and desubjectification theory forces the author to acknowledge a duality in the memory process through the human and inhuman aspect of the witness, Dominick LaCapra’s theory regarding working through our pasts pushes us to engage in a similar dualism. LaCapra argues that we must be both within and without to gain a greater understanding of the event and learn from it. We must be able to revert to the moment of experience and nearly relive it while also acknowledging that time has passed. Only then can we use the dual perspective that naturally exists to look at the memory in more helpful ways that will aid in understanding larger questions we may have surrounding the experience.

LaCapra points out the impossibility of testifying to an event with precision, for when expressing our testimony we are restricted to the modes of representation we hold: language, art, and other forms of depiction. The problem LaCapra sees in these representations is that they “may involve distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to processes of imagination transformation and narrative shaping, as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation, and foreclosure” (89). He goes on to argue, however, that even with these weaknesses, “testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath, including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with—or denying and repressing—the past” (87). LaCapra’s theory of being within and without when recalling our experiences can help us avoid these problems of representation. If we look at our memories as we are
testifying to them in our nonfiction pieces, if we ask ourselves questions such as, “Is that how it really happened? Why do we remember certain things and not others? Why is it important that we remember at all?” and as we grapple with the complexities of those memories on the page, we can gain insight into the event, into memory itself, and (as David Lowenthal would argue), into our own identities (197–200). Additionally, if we allow ourselves to work through these questions within the narrative itself, as Joan Didion does, we engage the reader in the search for the answers, and our piece becomes honest and layered, begging for analysis of the event, the witness, and the world that contains them.

LaCapra believes working through the trauma of past events begins when “the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective” (90). Some creative nonfiction writers write in order to process the events in their lives. These writers approach an essay with a question and work toward understanding. Many who write personal essays with this purpose understand the need for distance to avoid the “Therapist’s Couch,” where the writer is still entirely consumed with conflicting emotions, or “Revenge Prose,” where the writer’s intent seems to be pure vengeance, both of which Brenda Miller discusses in *Tell It Slant* (44). Miller speaks to the same perspective for which LaCapra argues. She indicates the necessity for a writer to gain distance and emerge from the experience through time, wisdom, literature, and other forces to gain perspective and to look at yourself and your experience from a different point of view. She states, “This peripheral vision—this ability to sidle up to the big issues by way of a side route—is the mark of an accomplished writer, one who has gained enough perspective to use personal experience in the service of a larger literary purpose” (45). Didion had to have enough distance in order to write *The Year of Magical Thinking* with as much clarity, objectivity, and truth to the human experience as she did. Didion tried writing the experience earlier, but she could only get out four lines, as she hadn’t yet been able to remove herself from the past enough to view it in the present (Didion 3). After waiting some time before beginning again, Didion was able to give the past the space it needed in order for her to understand the experience, how her memory had changed it, and the larger context in which the experience existed. This distance from the event is the “without” of LaCapra’s memory process. The “within” aspect of the process is just as important in being able to work through our memories. There must be the ability to return to the past and achieve closeness to the event, even if that means acknowledging fear, sadness, or pain that our
memories and past can sometimes contain. Didion had to be willing to go back to the moment when her husband collapsed at the kitchen table; she put herself in a position to relive a sorrowful event for the sake of working through the trauma in writing. We must be here (the present) and there (the past) to gain a greater understanding of the event (LaCapra 90), learn from it and represent it as Ricoeur would say it truly was, without fiction, just as it occurred in the past. Not only would our work be honest, but we would be working through our past at the same time and engaging in “laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in [a] more critically tested [sense]” (LaCapra 90), moving beyond a crippling past to a state of understanding of the event being shared.

Through engaging the analysis of memory with readers in our creative nonfiction pieces and inviting them into our incomplete memories through metacognitive writing, we provoke readers to extend their understanding of the world as they look at a subjective experience and as we try to make it objective. It would then be impossible for our piece to reflect anything other than the reality of ordinary human experience. Lee Gutkind writes that if creative nonfiction means anything, it means “we are attempting, as writers, to show imagination, to demonstrate artistic and intellectual inventiveness and still remain true to the factual integrity of the piece we are writing” (3). Through doing this, we are “reaching a deeper level of solidarity with those bearing a human form” (Ricoeur 259). If we write our creative nonfiction pieces as reflections of the ordinary human experience as it occurred, and if we lay bare the muddy waters of memory that make such a representation so complex, we will transform experience into understanding of that event and the greater world in which that experience existed, providing insight for the reader, the writer, and even the critic.
Works Cited


Rejecting the Mother Tongue
Family Secrets and the Self in Mary Karr’s The Liars’ Club

Kellianne Coltrin

Perhaps permanently reeling from Kathryn Harrison’s memoir, *The Kiss*—which had been reviewed by some critics as “slimy, repellent, meretricious, cynical”—readers and critics alike seem to have developed an expectation from of a sometimes sordid tell-all, prompting review titles like “No Incest, and Only a Little Drink” for O’Faolain’s *Are You Somebody?* A similar expectation of secrets revealed and taboos hung out on the laundry line colors the complaints detailed in Carolyn Heilbrun’s “Contemporary Memoirs: Or, Who Cares Who Did What to Whom?” She describes readers—particularly male readers—who are sick of “disgustingly” personal exposures saturating the memoir genre. What is the value, she hears many asking, of this kind of exposure?

With the prevalence of secret-telling in memoirs, that is a question worth asking. The purpose of the secret’s exposure must be proportionally meaningful with the pressure to remain secretive, particularly when the secret being exposed is not the author’s alone, but a town or a culture’s secret (as in *Are You Somebody?* or *Angela’s Ashes*) or a family’s secret (as in *The Liars’*
Club, Omaha Blues, and Prozac Diary). The psychology behind secret-keeping and secret-revealing is extensive, and could offer a plentitude of explanations for memoirists’ secret-revealing. I believe one explanation, however, may lie in memoir’s requirement that the author narrate the self.

The ability to narrate the self is learned, and as such, each individual’s self-narration is at least in part a product of their parent’s self-narrating style. Women—who interestingly have received the majority of criticism for baring too much in the memoir—are especially likely to inherit their mother’s self-narrating style, or what might be termed a “mother tongue.” In the case of the modern female memoirist, many of these women are inheriting mother tongues designed or evolved to conceal a cultural or family secret. Thus, as memoirists like Mary Karr seek to affirm their own identity separate from their mothers, this can manifest itself in a rejection of the mother tongue; that is, through revealing the secret. This self-affirming rejection, fraught with the anxiety of simultaneous mother love, is visible both in the narrative action and in linguistic signals within the text. Using Karr’s The Liar’s Club as a subject for this lens, Karr can be seen to reveal two great secrets—her mother’s night of terrible insanity and her mother’s two disappeared children—as a way to reject her mother tongue and affirm her own identity through an independent self-narrating style.

To understand the significance of mother tongue rejection, we must first understand the role of narrative in identity-creation. Here Paul Ricoeur’s writings on this subject are helpful, because he both provides a definition (of sorts) for the self and explains this self’s reliance on narrative if it is to be understood. Ricoeur defines the self in two ways: idem and ipse. Idem is the self as defined by its “spatio-temporal” continuity over time, i.e. my self is that which continues from moment to moment and space to space. Idem is demonstrated, for example, by the part of my third grade self that has continued to exist in my twenty-three year old self. Ipse is the self as defined by its unique will and “ability to initiate something new and imputable to a self, be it oneself or another, as agent” (Dauenhauer). Thus ipse is evident when I hold my mother’s hand and she smiles, when I decide to be in a grumpy mood, or when I knock over a bowl of pistachios. In each case, I am self because I have a will which I can exercise and thereby affect myself and others. Ricoeur argues that both ipse and idem are necessary for selfhood, and thus the necessity of narrative becomes quickly evident. To provide the temporal sameness of idem and the
action/consequence evidence of *ipse*, the answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’ can only be narrative. Dieter Teichert, writing on Ricoeur, explains it this way:

> What kind of unity constitutes the identity of the person if there is no single feature of identity neither on the level of physical properties nor on the level of psychic properties? According to Ricoeur, this unity is constituted by a narrative: “To answer the question “Who?” [...] is to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the “who”. And the identity of this “who” therefore itself must be a narrative identity.” (178)

Thus while Ricoeur denies self-narrative’s ability to perfect self-knowledge, he defends self-narrative as the only reasonable way—and in fact, the only intuitive way—to approach self-knowledge. Teichert further emphasizes the relationship between self-knowledge via narrative in that “stories about oneself” allow the individual to both recognize the self and evaluate the self. He writes, “I want to know whether I am the person I want to be. The way I as a person confront the life I am living, the attitude I take to my life and the life of others defines my personal identity” (185). Notice that narrative frees the individual to distinguish between what he has done and who he is: this gap is formed by the acts of narrative creation, identification, and evaluation, which enables the individual to reform their identity (and their perception of others’ identities) through revisiting those actions.

That said, a person does not approach narrative creation or its subsequent actions in a vacuum. Cultural and familial—particularly parental— influences shape how a person tells those “stories about oneself.” Narvaez elaborates on this idea, stating that “Caregivers co-construct an individual’s personal biosocial grammar and resulting personal narrative through the repetition of social interactions” (83). This co-construction is evidenced in a study by Sylvan Tomkins, in which a baby’s communicative action (cooing, babbling, crying, screaming and even throwing or gesturing) brings a response or nonresponse from their caregiver (Narvaez 84). This parental action helps to shape the child’s narrative and thus how the child perceives their identity which rises out of the narrative.

Beyond early parental responses to children’s communication, parents influence their children’s self-narratives through their own narrative style. For children as young as two, studies demonstrate children adopting their parents’ narrative style, including whether they were “topic extending” or “topic switching,” whether they were “highly elaborative” or “low elaborative,” and
even what, from a narrative standpoint, typically moved the plot (Wenner). If a parent frequently neglected the “where” or the “why,” for example, children followed suit. As one author states, “Two decades of research have now confirmed that there are profound and enduring individual differences in how mothers reminisce . . . and that these differences are clearly related to children’s developing autobiographical memory skills” (Fivush 566). Parental narrative style therefore not only influences how children narrate in general, but notably how they narrate “autobiographical[ly]”—that is, how they narrate themselves within their own story.

While correlation has been observed between any type of parent-child dyad, the connection is especially strong between mothers and daughters—a characteristic of special importance when examining female secret exposure, as in the case of Liar’s Club. In a study examining how different family members recalled a traumatic event, aspects of the narrative style were isolated into five categories, including length, context, coherence (causality relationships between events), elaboration, and cohesion (sentences relate to one another). The study then analyzed the relationship between family members’ narrative styles, looking particularly at parent-child dyad similarities and differences (Peterson 555). Unlike mother-son, father-son, or father-daughter dyads, mothers and daughters showed high similarities in narrative style on all five indicators (558). For girls, then, the mother tongue reigns.

The reason for mothers’ stylistic dominance in their daughters’ narratives might lie in the special psychological closeness between mothers and daughter, providing both a possible reason for daughters’ narrative similarities and why daughters ultimately feel a need to reject their mother tongue. According to social cognitive theory, children are likely to choose subjects for emulation whom they can most successfully emulate, which is typically the subject most similar to them (Peterson 551). For this reason, girls will most frequently look to their mothers for emulation, as opposed to their fathers. Delving even deeper into the mother-daughter dyad, Nancy Chodorow argues that with the mother as the primary caregiver in a child’s youngest years, daughters’ experience of identity formation differs from sons because of daughters’ shared gender status with their mothers. Daughters, unlike sons, do not have to reassert their identity outside the realm of femininity when they assert themselves separately from their mother’s identity, encouraging daughters to define themselves more closely than sons with their mothers. When mothers act as a dominant caregiver,
girls create an identity kinship with their mothers that expresses itself in the adoption of the mother tongue.

Of course, this also means that if and when daughters seek to differentiate themselves from their mothers, their task is particularly hard, having a shared gender and a shared narrative style through which they have constructed their identity. Looking specifically at deviation in narrative content, adolescent girls are more likely than boys to show stress and feel a strain in their relationship with their mothers when they choose to hide content that is typically shared (secret-keeping) or unveil content that is typically not shared (secret-sharing) (Meeus 293). This narrative divide is connected with daughters seeking autonomy from their mothers in adolescence but also as adult women, particularly adult women seeking conflict recognition and resolution. In a separate study examining adult daughters and their mothers, secret-keeping was found to be one of the central themes grouping how the dyads described their relationships (Bojczyk 464). In yet another study, daughters of recently immigrated mothers asserted themselves over their mothers in conflicts by “code-switching” from their mothers’ native tongue to English—a move identified by linguistic analysts as a differentiating and empowering speech act (Williams 320). We can conclude from these studies that for daughters, abandoning their mother tongue is most likely to be a conscious decision, made to distinguish the self as empowered beyond or at the least separate from the mother.

We have now developed a lens for examining Liar’s Club in which we can reasonably argue that narrating the self, as in a memoir, is significant as an act of identity creation; the narrative style used to form that identity is influenced by parents; for daughters, mothers’ narrative style is especially influential, giving rise to a mother tongue which is adopted by the daughter; and finally, one method for daughters to claim autonomy and individuality is to reject their mother tongue—a move which is especially important if self-narration is the means by which we come to know ourselves. I will now move my attention specifically onto Karr’s mode of mother tongue rejection, both in its central differentiating characteristic and how linguistic cues within the text can alert readers to Karr’s rejection.

Before Karr even begins her story, she introduces her memoir with quote from R.D. Laing, who writes, “We have our secrets and our need to confess. We may remember how, in childhood . . . what an accomplishment it was when we, in our fear and trembling, could tell our first lie, and make, for ourselves, the discovery that we are irredeemably alone in some aspects” (xviii). The
criterion

quote identifies two ideas: (1) secrets (in this case, a particular brand of secret designed to deceive, which we know as “lies”) isolate the secret-keeper at her most fundamental level; and (2) this isolated identity is undesirable and motivates confession. Just a few pages later, Karr extends this idea of the isolated secret-keeper to the isolation of the person excluded from the secret—in this case, herself. Secrets, she writes, are like “ghosts,” calling “undue attention” to themselves by their “very vagueness” and frightening those they haunt by their blankness (9). Indeed, referring back to Ricoeur, it is clear how the identity of the excluded person is frustrated by such ghosts. A “hole” or a “missing story” hampers narrative continuity for idem and the causality required for ipse, leaving the excluded person grasping for a cohesive narrative to find themselves within (9-10). It’s a small wonder that Karr labels herself and her world as a child as “Not Right,” and that secrets make for lonely people: aside from being isolated outside of a secret, how can one be in company if one is nothing at all, but only half composed, inchoate, or worse, because of an equally half formed self-narrative? I say half formed because Karr, with these secretive holes, cannot say with any confidence “I was this” (because she does not know what happened between her and her mother) or “I caused this” (because she does not know why whatever happened, happened).

Her discontent is manifested again in the final pages of *Liars’ Club*, when Karr describes her (understandable) response to finding a “line-up of wedding rings” in an attic and is rebuffed by her mother when she asks about them. Karr pummels her readers with a series of questions lifted from a notebook reserved for Karr and her therapist. She asks, “Whose wedding rings were those? Who were the two kids Grandma Moore showed me a picture of? After she died, why did you go nuts? What were you doing with the knife that night? Why did you tell Dr. Boudreaux that you killed us? What happened to you in the hospital?” (312). Karr begins with the immediate question of the wedding rings ownership and escalates into questions that are decades-old, linked to one another but giving an obvious air of frustration to a family narrative with some rather obvious holes. The events behind the holes are significant, but Karr emphasizes the narrative style of secrecy accepted in her family: “[My therapist] pointed out that they weren’t cruel questions. In my family lingo, though, they were. More than mean, they might prove lethal” (312). For Karr, the defining feature of her mother tongue is *what is not said*. To say what, in the mother tongue, is not said—to say what is secret—is to reject the identity that the mother tongue has defined for Karr. And this is exactly what she does.
In order to thoroughly identify and analyze this rejection, we must have a clear concept of what distinguishes Karr’s original mother tongue. While Karr quotes from her mother throughout *Liars’ Club*, these quotes come filtered through Karr and through a long passage of time. Rather than making tenuous extrapolations from these quotes, I believe analysis of mother tongue rejection will be better founded on its key characteristic of secrecy, focusing on (1) obvious decisions to expose subject matter kept secret by Karr’s mother, Charlie, and (2) occurrences of linguistic signals tied to secret-keeping and secret-telling. Because secrecy and deceit function very similarly in the linguistic sense, I will look for linguistic “cues” that signal either kind of speech act in *Liars’ Club* as evidence for Karr’s decision to apply or reject her mother tongue (Toma). These cues include: distancing of responsibility, use of present tense, negating words (such as *no*, *never*, or *not*), semantically negative words (such as *bad*, *fear* or *evil*), fewer self-references, fewer words in general, and overall vagueness. Distinct from secretive or deceitful linguistic cues, a key language marker for anxiety—which could rise with secret-telling—is emotional avoidance (Borelli 514). By examining how these kinds of linguistic cues occur within *Liars’ Club*, patterns of mother-tongue adoption and rejection can yield insight into how Karr views herself, her secrets, and ultimately, what new identity Karr forms by creating her own narrative style. In the following paragraphs, I acknowledge that my linguistic analysis is only semi-scientific, and that further analysis and literary application are in order, but I hope my own limitations are viewed as an invitation for further scholarship.

I stated earlier that the analysis for these cues would be concentrated on two major sections of *Liars’ Club*—the section recounting her mother’s night of madness, in which she burns the family possessions and hallucinates stabbing her daughters to death, and the section in which Charlie finally reveals to Karr her past marriages and the loss of her two previous children, on pages 145–157 and 312–318 respectively. I choose these moments intentionally—the latter is the only revealed secret that immediately indicates “absolution” for her and her mother. The former is the secret which, yet unrevealed, launches Karr into her memoir, “a single instant surrounded by dark” (1). It is also the only secret which Karr immediately recognizes as causing a change in her own identity during her childhood—an effect I will explore later. Finally, it is the only secret which Karr connects to her mother’s secret of losing her children. Karr makes this connection immediately after being informed of her mother’s secret past, writing, “And the night she’d stood in our bedroom door with a knife?” (318).
These two connected secrets are how the memoir begins, the literal center of the book, and how the memoir concludes, making Karr’s linguistic treatment in these passages of “secret-telling” the most significant for my analysis.

In the first section, the most obvious departure from her mother tongue is Karr’s extremely detailed narrative style, even when revealing a secret. She describes a “big rectangular mirror that had been scribbled up with lipstick of an orangey-red color,” “sit[ting] down hard on the wet St. Augustine grass” with “blades as hard as plastic,” and even playing “finger tag” with Lecia under the blanket, moving from squares of “black gabardine to charcoal flannel to gray pinstripe” (147, 150, 154). Karr holds nothing back. While she admits occasional moments from that night are beyond her recollection, what she does include is full-fledged and fleshed out.

Karr further rejects a secretive narrative style through her use of self-references. Karr repeatedly emphasizes her own self in the secret, as in the scene where her mother burns her old rocking horse. Karr describes her own self “zero[ing] in on my old red wooden rocking horse,” her instinct to “jump and catch her [mother’s] arm” from dousing it in gas and lighting the match, and, when Karr herself is held back by Lecia, she relays to the reader her own emotional interplay, ranging from embarrassment at wanting to keep the toy “for bouncing,” to a wistful goodbye: “Bye-bye, old Paint, I think to myself, I’m a-leaving Cheyenne” (150). While these self-references are rather obvious, taking form in actual pronouns, Karr also allows herself to be present in the text through permitting her imaginative self to color the narrative through simile, metaphor and even visions, so that the intense detail is simultaneously self-referential. The cracks in the punched mirror are like “a cyclone,” her mother heaves the “box spring” over her head “like Samson,” and “the glint of light” on the tip of the knife is a “star” from a nursery rhyme (147, 149, 155). More powerful than simile and metaphor is Karr’s willingness to interweave her own imagined visions with her memories of actual facts. She writes, “I can very well picture” her neighbors ignoring the scene, and even of her own father “turning the volume down” on their plight to instead enjoy a catfish dinner (153–154). Even during the occasional lull of pronoun self-references, Karr’s presence dominates the narrative style.

While the cues above are relatively consistent throughout the passage, other cues for anxiety and secrecy are not. Rather, there is a decline in emotionality, a rise in passivity, and a rise in negative grammatical and semantic words as the passage progresses. Karr describes feeling “a weird calm” and later a “pool
"of quiet" filling her head when she holds back a scream, after which there is no further acknowledgement of feeling real emotion on Karr’s part (152, 155). Interestingly, this emotional distancing—a strong cue for intense anxiety—coincides with a rise in secrecy cues via passivity, or responsibility distancing. She writes, “We are in the grip of some big machine grinding us along,” and “Daddy is gripped,” too, as if she, along with her family, have found ipse to be nonexistent after all (152–3).

Then there is Karr’s rising negative and negating language. While Karr occasionally employs two types of negative language earlier in the passage (forms of “blood” and “fear”), her mother is the major source of negative or negating language, as in her expletive-laden self-references, “NO!” and “I just killed them both . . . I’ve stabbed them to death” (emphasis added, 156–7). At the conclusion of this passage, however, Karr begins to adopt the narrative style through negating terms: “I don’t know what to wish for . . . I wish not to scream . . . a scream is definitely not what I want to happen to me right now,” or later, after mentally altering her mother into a cartoon form, “That stick woman . . . is no more my mother than some monster on the Saturday cartoons. She just isn’t” (emphasis added, 154–5). This increase of negative and negating language further demonstrate Karr’s style evolving towards a mother-tongue narrative.

Some basic conclusions about this passage may be helpful before turning to the next moment of secret-revealing. There is a strong rejection of the mother tongue at the beginning of the passage via detail and self-references, but the rise in mother-tongue usage at the passage’s conclusion suggests that perhaps this is Karr recording the birth of a secret, although the memoir itself is disclosing it. Karr, out of fear of her mother, makes her mother a secret—a secret from herself—by dehumanizing her into a “monster” with “pointy teeth” and “pin-dot eyes” (154). This move not only isolates Karr from her mother, but also from her own emotions and thereby herself, causing her to “harden into a person I hardly notice” (155). The secret splits, isolates, and confuses the young Mary Karr, which Karr, the memoirist, records with rising anxiety. With these conclusions in mind, I will turn to the next major instance of secret-revealing.

From the first paragraph, Karr’s narrative style is noticeably different from the former passage. Her mother tongue is thick on the page, dodgy of details, unusually sparse, and drifting off with vagueness reminiscent of her mother’s claimed forgetfulness. Karr writes, “[Mother] first married at fifteen. No, she hadn’t been pregnant at the time. Grandma Moore just wanted her out of the house. The first baby came a few years after that, a boy. Let’s call
him Tex for the sake of simplicity”—an astonishingly bare-boned account of a marriage that dismisses names, motivations, or emotional responses, and additionally, distances responsibility for the marriage or the child (312). Also relatively absent from this account are the self-references that dominated the prior passage. Pronoun self-references appear infrequently and only outside the events of the secret, when Karr describes herself sitting in the bar while her mother relates the story.

Finally, the passage begins with a high amount of emotional distancing, almost as if Karr is holding her breath. The two paragraphs announcing the disappearance of Charlie's husband and children are utterly devoid of emotional reactions, as are the paragraphs following. There are indications of emotion, such as Charlie admitting to getting “pie-eyed” after her family’s disappearance, or, her pulling out all the cords from the phone-operating switchboard after learning that her father had died. But Karr herself consistently avoids naming any particular feeling behind these emotion-laden actions, when the actions are present at all.

Yet, like the previous passage, the role of the mother tongue and the presence of anxiety linguistic cues are not constant. Instead, as the secret unfolds, the mother-tongue usage declines, along with Karr’s anxiety. Karr’s initial vagueness, for example, slowly gives way to increasing detail, gradually including dialogue in place of the short, summarizing sentences. As Charlie describes finding the home of her vanished, now remarried husband, the particulars of the new wife’s living room also begin to filter in; Karr describes the “black alligator purse” containing the court order, the “saddleback chair” into which Charlie collapses, the “silk curtains” behind the constable, and the little girl “idly stacking blocks on the immaculately vacuumed Oriental rug” (316–17). Compared to the secretive, sparse style used earlier, Karr’s narrative here takes on camera-like detail.

Other hallmarks of the mother tongue—distancing of responsibility and low numbers of self-references—also begin to disappear. In addition to her mother’s brutal self-reprimand (“I hadn’t thought, just hadn’t thought about any of that”), Karr also places herself in the narrative, allowing herself to take responsibility for the narrative through the questions she chooses to pose. This inclusion, along with Karr’s increasing inclusion of her own reactions to her mother’s secret, also obviously necessitates a rise in self-references.

As the mother-tongue usage declines, so does Karr’s emotional distancing. Emotion recognition seeps into the narrative gradually, beginning with
her recognition of the emotions of peripheral characters (the “relief” of the constable and the “smug[ness]” of the mother-in-law) and then building to her mother’s emotions, which form the heart of the story (317). At the very end of the secret revealing, Karr names these emotions: “despair,” which Karr offers as her own observation, and “miser[y],” which Karr places in the mouth of her mother (319). This emotional closeness is painful, but it also demonstrates a narrative that is more relaxed and less anxious.

This second passage, then, demonstrates the predicted pattern for Karr’s mother-tongue rejection. Her narrative style is initially highly secretive (according to linguistic cues) but evolves to become less secretive; additionally, the narrative is marked by cues for anxiety that would be naturally linked to secret-telling. As the secret-telling nears completion, her style relaxes and loses these linguistic markers of tension. In short, Karr take her mother’s secret, and reinterprets it as “non-secret,” both by exposing it and by relating it in a new, non-secretive style. Karr’s narrative style, as opposed to her mother tongue, is marked by detail, imagination, ownership, empathy, and frankness. Perhaps the beauty of this stylistic move could be underestimated—a mistake I hope now to prevent. For Karr to take her mother’s darkest secret and reconstruct it in this non-secretive, even intimate, style is to deny her mother a reason to hide, to feel guilt, and ultimately to fear. Karr’s refusal to continue in her mother tongue is as much a move for compassion as it is a move for her own freedom.

When the conclusions of the previous section are considered in connection with this second passage, a new narrative—the one of Karr the memoirist, who is telling us her secrets—begins to take form. Karr recognizes that, as a child, her terror drove her to hide her mother from herself, essentially making Charlie and the associated fear a secret. She demonstrates this decision by abandoning her own narrative style and adopting the mother tongue, which is well suited for hiding things like monster mothers and deep-rooted fears. As a result of this secret formation, Karr’s self becomes schismatic and isolated, a decision that arouses anxiety within Karr. The fact that Karr does tell the secret, however, is significant; it opens the door for the secret to be dissected and ultimately dissolved. In this case, it is Karr’s mother and her “monster” self that must be understood and reinterpreted, which is precisely what the second passage accomplishes. The root of Charlie’s terrifying behavior is the secret of the lost children, which, once redefined as non-secret, redefines Charlie as both human and forgiven—no longer the pointy-toothed, inscrutable non-mother Karr made in her moment of fear. She writes of this evolution, “We should have
glowed, for what Mother told absolved us both, in a way. All the black crimes we believed ourselves guilty of were myths, stories we’d cobbled together out of fear” (320). This redefinition of the original secret, and thus the redefinition of Charlie herself, allows Karr to release her own secret of the monster-mother, which, in turn, transforms Karr.

And so it is, the key words of fear within the mother tongue are ultimately lies: the blood is not blood after all, the children are not dead, and the mother is no monster worthy of her children’s rejection (318). Karr writes, “I never knew despair could lie,” but such is the case (320) Through the rejection of secret-keeping, and the mother tongue which enabled it, Karr is “filled” with the “clear light of truth”—a hallmark of her new identity associated with her now-continuous past. The enabled aspects of self—ipse and idem—mean Karr is also free to see herself as whole and is empowered to act—characteristics she had lost in her former sea of secrets. This new self is strong, honest, forgiven, and forgiving, and having healed her relationship with her mother, Karr is free to love without fear.

If this is the power of female secret-telling—of daughters casting off their secretive mother tongues—then secret exposure in memoirs needs to be reconsidered. At best, secret-telling currently is regarded with rather superficial purposes, whether it is to confess, to demonstrate frankness or honesty, or to illuminate a poorly understood social ill. At worst, secret-telling is perceived as vulgar, attention-seeking, or, to refer back to Carolyn Heilbrun’s article, just poor writing in vogue with women—a bad feminine fad. As I have demonstrated, the exploration and exposition of secrets is not only helpful for self-knowledge, but is, at times, essential. I believe further exploration can and should be done to explore mother-tongue rejection in women’s memoir, both for the sake of understanding secrets’ role in the memoir, but also for the sake of women who, like Karr and countless others, must tell their secrets to demystify them, and thereby heal themselves.
Works Cited


Historia Calamitatum Heloysae

Defensive Autobiography through Epistolography in Héloïse’s Letters to Abélard

Kaitlin Coats

Scholars have given much attention to the genesis of autobiography in Pierre Abélard’s autobiographical epistle Historia Calamitatum. This letter has often been remarked upon for the suitability of the epistolary form to both publicize and defend the emotions of the writer. Mary M. McLaughlin notes, for example, that the letter’s strength seems to lie in the externally-focused “habit of self-defense” (469). Yet Abélard’s autobiography also serves an internalized, self-consoling function, which Chris D. Ferguson identifies as “therapy” driven by the “autobiographical impulse” (205). Abélard, in sum, is much praised for his contribution both to the increased sense of self arising in the twelfth century and to the impulse to formalize the publication of such concepts of self. Yet in writing the Historia Calamitatum, Abélard is not only representing himself, but also his lover-turned-chaste-wife Héloïse, whose dramatic contribution to his calamitatum inevitably plays a large part in his autobiography. Abélard himself notes that the story of his love affair has been popularized by love songs even before the writing of the Historia Calamitatum (Radice 68). It is only natural, therefore, for Héloïse to have felt a need to correct Abélard’s public depiction of her via her own autobiographical writing in her letters. Glenda McLeod, Juanita Feros Ruys, and Sylvain Piron have encouraged a view of Héloïse’s letters as autobiography or self-writing, but no one has yet provided a systematic account of precisely how Héloïse’s letters contribute to the growing tendency of self-definition in
the twelfth century. Here, I intend to examine Héloïse’s use of epistolography to contribute to the forging of a new genre: autobiography. Specifically, Héloïse uses her letters to Abélard as a sort of defensive autobiography, alternating between public and personal modes in order to address and correct his representation of her in the Historia Calamitatum.

It will first be important to note the public situation Abélard creates for Héloïse, a clear justification of the self-defensive tone of her letters. In his autobiography, he exclaims, “What sorrow she suffered at the thought of my disgrace!” acting as if, firstly, he is privy to the interior Héloïse which only she herself can possibly access, and, secondly, her identity and emotions are first concerned with him (Radice 68-9). Abélard’s explanation of his lover revolves solely around him, and does not, even despite her incredible education, consider her as a fully-fleshed being with thoughts separate from his own. He introduces Héloïse in his biography as “a young girl” who

in looks . . . did not rank the lowest, while in the extent of her learning she stood supreme. . . . I considered all the usual attractions for a lover and decided she was the one to bring to my bed, confident that I should have an easy success; for at that time I had youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation to recommend me, and feared no rebuff from any woman I might choose to honour with my love. (Radice 66)

Abélard’s characterization of Héloïse as less than beautiful was no doubt irksome to the woman, not only for its insulting nature, but also, and more importantly, because Abélard seems to feel he has an authorial power to describe her any way he chooses, positive and negative. The most disturbing part of this passage, however, is Abélard’s insistent focus on himself, the bestower of the honor of celebrity upon anyone with whom he comes in contact, as the center of the story. Héloïse is merely incidental—“any woman”—to Abélard; she enters powerlessly, as one who is inevitably drawn to his “good looks and great reputation,” and from whom he “fear[s] no rebuff.” This characterization—partially a fiction—of Héloïse as merely orbiting her lover’s indubitable magnetism actually mirrored and perhaps brought about Héloïse’s reality: having been drawn into Abélard’s

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1 For the purposes of this paper, I will side with the majority of scholars in assuming that Héloïse, rather than Abélard or another anonymous writer, indeed wrote the letters that are now attributed to her. For an excellent bibliography citing scholarship on all angles of this debate, see note 2 in Glenda McLeod’s “Wholly Guilty, Wholly Innocent” (82-3).

2 Betty Radice’s English translation of Abélard and Héloïse’s correspondence, which seems to be the most trusted translation by the critics I have encountered, will suffice for the purposes of this paper.
immense celebrity, she was no doubt known by the public exclusively in the way that her husband chose to characterize her.

Naturally, then, Héloïse would want to gain control over her own image, and, since authorial power is what fashioned her public image in Abélard’s writing, what better way to reclaim her identity than through her own oppositional authorial power? Epistolography provides the perfect opportunity for Héloïse to defend herself, for several reasons. Firstly, what Giles Constable describes as the “epistolary situation” (13), in which two friends are forced to use writing as a means of remedying their distance from each other, is all too dismally true for her: Héloïse has reluctantly moved many miles away to take up the habit, having been spurned by her former tutor-turned-lover-turned-husband Abélard after he was castrated at the hands of her uncle upon the disclosure of their extramarital affair. Secondly, Abélard has set a precedent for letter-writing, both by carrying on correspondence with his wife prior to the *Historia Calamitatum* and by penning that widely-circulated letter to his friend, which Héloïse may now crack open by writing more elegantly and citing more classical and scriptural authorities than Abélard himself does. Thirdly, as Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus note, letters are a prime genre for women “because of the directness with which they convey ideas and emotions and because of their immediate availability of audience,” as well as because of the opportunity they afforded women to “bypass the need for formal education, literary patronage, editors, and publishers,” all of which were governed by patriarchal medieval culture (1). Importantly, women were even considered preferable letter-writers to men (1). Finally, letters offered a unique opportunity to interject a relatively public literary genre with the private thoughts and emotions of the author.

The fourth point deserves some elaboration, as it is the major point of exploration in this essay. Constable remarks on the importance of viewing medieval letters as a public matter: “Whereas intimacy, spontaneity, and privacy are now considered the essence of the epistolary genre, in the Middle Ages letters were for the most part self-conscious, quasi-public literary documents, often written with an eye to future collection and publication.” In fact, he continues, “it is doubtful whether there were any private letters in the modern sense of the term” (11). Medieval letters are difficult to separate from a variety of other genres from official public documents to love poems—except by their characteristic features of a salutation and subscription (Constable 12, 18). The one and only distinguishing feature of this public genre is of a very personal nature, reaffirmed by the facts that epistolography seems to have arisen out of an increased interest in friendship
in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Constable 16) and that, as Constable notes, letters “served no legal or administrative purpose and expressed ‘only the intention of the sender and recipient’” (21). While epistolography was therefore a decidedly public, rather than private, act, it was nevertheless personal and at least afforded letter-writers the opportunity to communicate matters of a more private interest than those usually taken up by public literature.

Héloïse repeatedly shows her awareness of this public-private binary in both the genre she is using and in her roles and responsibilities as a woman. In the opening address of letter one she conflates these roles in order to express her confusion: “To her master, or rather her father, husband, or rather brother; his handmaid, or rather his daughter, wife, or rather sister; to Abélard, Héloïse” (Radice 109). As McLeod notes, Héloïse here “moves from a public relationship where she is clearly the underling (master-handmaiden) to relationships progressively more familial and equitable (brother-sister)” (65)—relationships in which she can more easily defend herself, in which she precludes herself from being considered merely “any woman.” To McLeod, this salutation indicates that Héloïse links her relationships together in a “continuum” and that the connections between public and private are important to her (65-6). Héloïse figures herself in both types of roles, and, as I will explain, uses both modes to her advantage in addressing her grievances to Abélard.

I would add to Dr. McLeod’s thought that Héloïse views Abélard’s treatment of her as an inversion of public and private. For example, Héloïse writes, “But whatever you write about will bring us no small relief in the mere proof that you have us in mind” (110), which suggests Abélard has replaced the “reality [Héloïse has] lost” (109) with a lack of personal communication, thereby allowing his public, monastic duty to chastity (manifested here in the extreme through his reluctance even to communicate) to replace their private relationship. At the same time, Héloïse seems to realize he has publicized their private relationship as lovers through the writing of his letter and through forcing their romance into the mold of the public institution of marriage, which, Héloïse thinks, does not suit the distinctness of their love—hence her infamous statement that “The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or

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3 I will not include Historia Calamitatum in the collection of numbered letters; rather, I will count Héloïse’s first letter to Abélard as “letter one” of the exchange in order to distinguish the correspondence between the couple from the correspondence between Abélard and his unspecified friend. Additionally, I will focus only on letters one and three, both of which Radice classifies as “personal letters,” and exclude letter five, which falls under the “letters of direction” (107, 157).
whore” (113). In other words, Héloïse sees external, public categories as irrelevant to her private relationship with her lover.

Héloïse, then, is painfully aware of the distinction between public and private, and it is this distinction that she calls upon in the writing of her letters, using a public voice to convey private emotion and invoking features of letter-writing and autobiography as fits her case. Glenda McLeod marks the grammatical distinction between these roles in Héloïse’s letters: “First person singular indicates her private role as Abélard’s wife; first person plural speaks as the more public abbess” (65). In her public voice, then, Héloïse, as prioress, shows her consciousness of the public nature of epistolography and her expectation that her letter will be read by a wide audience, especially considering the fame she has no doubt acquired because of her scandalous relationship with Abélard.

This public voice provides a public locale for Héloïse’s emotion, identifying her with her fellow nuns and, implicitly, with others, thus exonerating her from the potential accusation of irrationality that was so quickly used against women in the Middle Ages. Héloïse speaks for her entire abbey upon receipt of the Historia Calamitatum, saying, “All of us here are driven to despair of your life, and every day we await in fear and trembling the final word of your death. And so . . . we beseech you to write as often as you think fit to us” (Radice 110). Later, in letter three, Héloïse characterizes her fellow nuns as increasingly despairing, having heard him speak of his imminent death, and wondering how he could “suppose that our memory of you could ever fade” (128). Héloïse could indeed be practically representing the emotions of her sisters, but her third-person plural writing also serves a metaphysical function. For Héloïse does not implicate her readers, other than Abélard, in the “you” of the letter, as might be assumed of the usual nature of public letters. Rather, she gives her audience the opportunity to identify with the “we.” Virtually every time Héloïse uses the third-person plural, her words may easily apply to a much broader readership of the Historia Calamitatum than just the nuns in her abbey; thus the above quotation from letter one bespeaks an audience captured by the cliffhanger in the events of Abélard’s misfortunes, and that from letter three appeals to the literary immortality of a written autobiography.

McLeod’s distinction between the singular/private and the plural/public first-person voices of Héloïse is certainly helpful in identifying the shifts of discourse in Héloïse’s letters, however, it is incomplete without the introduction of a third category, which is located in third-, rather than first-, person verbs. This voice is even more public than that of the prioress; it is that of the woman in general.
Héloïse becomes a voice for her gender in her letters to Abélard, identifying her cause with that of half of the human population.

In this third, most public voice, Héloïse says, “Every wife, every young girl desired you in absence and was on fire in your presence” (115), framing her love for Abélard, which he has so flippantly discarded, as common among her public audience. She thus builds solidarity with her readers, identifying herself with them so that they come to understand her not in terms of Abélard’s mediocre description of her in the Historia Calamitatum, but in terms of her definition of herself as an understandably lovelorn woman. So after she frames loving Abélard as public, she locates that problem within herself. In a sense, she is here showing the flip side of the “any woman” coin: every woman. When she asks, then, “among the women who envied me then, could there be one now who does not feel compelled by my misfortune to sympathize with my loss of such joys?”, she can be confident that the answer among her audience will be negatory and that there is power to be claimed in numbers (115). Thus, Héloïse refashions her identity with an attention to her audience, recasting her love for her husband as rational and relatable and reclaiming the general medieval readership as her own.

This attention to the public is loosely connected to the ideal love letter. Medieval epistolography closely modeled itself on its parent in the classical era, and, according to Constable, “there was a high degree of continuity in letter-writing, and it may be difficult to tell a letter, apart from its contents, written in one period from that written in another” (26). In the twelfth century there was strict attention paid to classical models of epistolography. The model for love letters by women, the sub-genre under which Héloïse’s letters fall, was Ovid’s Heroides, a series of fictional love letters from mythical women to their absent lovers (actually written, notably, by a man). Héloïse conforms closely to these letters in many respects, not the least of which is the heroine’s tendency to “[gesture] toward the whole as witness to her woes”—the aforementioned public appeal (Barbara Newman, qtd. in Brown and Peiffer 144). Yet Héloïse also diverts from the usual epistle, making her letters both more intimate and more concerned with self-definition. This personalization is in line with the general trend in the twelfth century of “both individual letters and collections of letters [taking] on a more personal and self-revelatory tone,” as well as with the re-introduction of love letters as a sub-genre in the same century (Constable 33-4). A brief comparison with the first of the Heroides, the letter from Penelope to Hector—the “any woman’s”
letter, so to speak—will illuminate the way in which Héloïse’s writing infuses self-revelation and proto-autobiographical elements into her epistolography.4

Firstly, the female author of a love letter should be in quite a specific situation of separation from her lover (Brown and Peiffer 144-5), as is quite famously the case with Penelope, because of which she feels abandoned and alone. This feeling of isolation is the newly human element that Ovid brings to Penelope’s story. Penelope longs for her husband’s return—“writing back is pointless: come yourself!” (Ovid 11)—and her letter centers around her faithful wish to see him again—“the gods grant, I pray, that our fated ends may come in due succession” (Ovid 19). Héloïse is in a different predicament altogether. She does, indeed, find herself separated from and missing her lover, but that issue is complicated by the facts that her lover cannot love her in the same way now that he is castrated, and that it seems he will not love her in any fashion now that they are parted. Most importantly, Héloïse faces a problem of self-definition and public image that Penelope does not touch, and which she cannot console by the Christianized analogue of Penelope’s faith, for Héloïse “can expect no reward […] from God, for it is certain that [she has] done nothing as yet for love of him” (117).

As Penelope’s conventional problem is to Héloïse’s unconventional problem, so are Penelope’s conventional emotions to Héloïse’s unconventional emotions. Penelope suffers much as one would expect her to: she wishes she had never been born to suffer this problem (Ovid 11), longs to have “only war to fear” (15), and “[lives] on in foolish fear of things like these, you may be captive to a stranger love” (17). These emotions are clinical compared to those of Héloïse, whose writing is rife with sexual imagery conveying the tension his castration has caused her in no longer being able to “[enjoy] the pleasures of an uneasy love and [abandon] ourselves to fornication (if I may use an ugly but expressive word)” (Radice 130). With such “ugly but expressive” words, Héloïse steps beyond the formal bounds of letter-writing to touch the personal nature of her complaint to Abélard. She is not interested in depicting herself as a confidently faithful woman, but one full of difficult questions for God and her lover: “How can it be

4 I have chosen Penelope’s letter to Ulysses because, according to Phyllis D. Brown and John C. Peiffer II, “medieval commentaries suggest that it was usual for medieval readers to read the Heroides ‘intertextually,’ with Penelope not only figuring as the first of the letter writers but also as the ideal against whom all the other women were evaluated” (146-7). I will discuss Héloïse’s letters relative to this ideal model of female love-epistolographic perfection.

5 Again, because this paper is not concerned with philological details, I will refer to an English translation: Grant Showerman’s in the Loeb edition.
called repentance for sins, however great the mortification of the flesh, if the mind still retains its old desires” (Radice 312)?

Héloïse introduces honesty and vulnerability into her letters, calling upon the distinction between public and private. In an un-Penelope-like accusation, she remarks that Abélard’s love seems disingenuous:

Why, after our entry into religion, which was your decision alone, have I been so neglected and forgotten by you . . . ? Tell me, I say, if you can, or I will tell you what I think and indeed the world suspects. It was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love. . . . This is not merely my own opinion, beloved, it is everyone’s. There is nothing personal or private about it; it is the general view which is widely held. (Radice 116)

The public serves as a scapegoat: “there is nothing personal or private” about this accusation, but Héloïse points to the public as the holders of the opinion. Yet buried in the letter is her identification of herself as one who believes it (“This is not merely my own opinion”). Here, then, Héloïse is able to express her emotions more honestly than an Ovidian heroine without coming across as overly brash or shrewish: the public is her vehicle for the expression of private thought.

At the center of Héloïse’s increased penchant for autobiography is the need to define herself defensively. Letter one constantly begs Abélard to “remember . . . what I have done, and think how much you owe me” (Radice 117). Quite often the language of debt appears, as here, next to requests that Abélard “remember,” as if Héloïse views his accurate memory of her as necessary—he is obligated, by his relationship to her, to represent her truthfully in his writing. Unusually for a love epistle like the Penelope Herois, Héloïse’s third letter takes a hortatory tone:

For a long time my pretence deceived you, as it did many, so that you mistook hypocrisy for piety; and therefore you commend yourself to my prayers and ask me for what I expect from you. I beg you, do not feel so sure of me [...] Do not suppose me healthy [...] Do not think me strong, lest I fall before you can sustain me. (Radice 134)

Héloïse takes issue with the events of Abélard’s last letter, for she knows that his confidence in her faith, enough to commend himself to her prayers, betrays his lack of understanding of her character. She calls upon her private relationship with Abélard, asking him not to behave as the rest of the world does toward
her, assuming her, as a prioress, chaste and sure in her convictions. Rather, she commands him simply to view her as she is. The public readership of this letter implicitly participates in this new definition of Héloïse, and thus in the formation of autobiography as a genre.

By infusing her personal details into the formulaic publicness of the epistolographic genre, Héloïse creates a form-breaking response to Abélard’s autobiography that in turn contributes to paving the way for future writers of the genre. Through the parallel between her desire to publicize her innermost thoughts and her self-conscious mingling of private and public voices, Héloïse initiates a shift in literature toward increased publicization of the self, an honest approach to the common problems of humanity that were subsumed under literary formulae. This approach to self allows Héloïse to paint herself as surpassing Abélard in both public and private roles—as a spouse but also a lover, as an ascetic but also a moralist, as a thinker but also a feeler.
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: Explorations 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


Internet dating websites like OKCupid, eHarmony, and Match.com, among many others, offer users relative control over the infinite (and sometimes cosmic) variables involved with initiating a significant and intimate relationship. Location and proximity are no longer issues, and often the body itself is a minor factor in determining the parameters of the romantic encounter. Indeed, internet dating (which has, ideally, a face-to-face, embodied meeting as its endpoint) exemplifies how corporeality functions differently online—and how paradigms associated with corporeality and embodiment have fundamentally changed in its wake. In “Life beyond the screen: embodiment and identity through the internet,” Michael Hardey suggests that online social interactions upset “the interaction order” which tends to dominate “face-to-face” relations of copresence (571). Hardey offers, for instance, the story of an internet dater named John, confined to a wheelchair, as an example of this phenomenon. John writes: “in my experience women find it difficult to get beyond the chair if they don’t know you and you just meet casually . . . Now I hold off a little before I explain about the accident . . . [the system] allows me to decide when to reveal this aspect of my life which I don’t want potential girlfriends to see as the thing that defines me” (577). Here, the internet dating profile has allowed John to regulate his image by “removing the immediacy of bodily disability” (577). For John, virtual interaction will eventually transition
into a physical copresence, but, leading up to this encounter, the internet dating
website has facilitated here a kind of identity curation. John has redesigned the
previously physicalized “interaction order” and exercised a degree of augmented
control over the formulation of his own identity as it manifests itself in body
and in text. Hardey concludes that “the domain of internet dating is a space in
which individuals seek to close the gap between embodied and disembodied
self, the public and the private individual, and anonymity and intimacy” (579).
In other words, in this instance, the written, textual, virtual body becomes a
lived extension of physical corporeality; it could be said to create more body or
broader bodies. The internet refreshes the individual and reconfigures how the
body represents, manifests, or signifies itself.

Clearly this bears significant ramifications for feminist and postfeminist
thinkers who seek to challenge traditional formulations of identity and
representation in terms of gender and embodiment. The posthuman statuses
made possible by digital technology and the internet/Web 2.0 (as exemplified,
in part, by the internet dating website) appear to open up new spaces for
genderless, even self-describing subjects to exist and to flourish. However,
at this crossroads of posthumanism, cyberfeminism, and digital discourse,
embodiment is often overlooked, reduced, or abstracted—a phenomenon which
ignores the new methods by which digital and virtual contexts can facilitate
fresh evaluations of the body in reality as a potentially liberated surface. Indeed,
discussions surrounding the internet and virtual lifestyles trend toward and
even celebrate erasures of corporeality, using the same kind of mind-body
caesura employed by de la Barre nearly 400 years ago. However, new thought in
the fields of posthuman studies, social media theory, and glitch theory help to
resituate and vindicate investigations of gendered identity initiated by Monique
Wittig and Judith Butler, who critique dualistic prescriptions of gendered
identities and explore what the body looks like as well as how the embodied
subject may represent itself beyond categories of gender. Likewise, rather
than disembodying, digital spaces allow cyberfeminists to access transgressive,
transformative, and augmented corporealities, which in turn allow scholars
to explore how subjectivity might transcend socially preformatted sexual and
biological identities.

In the late seventeenth century, Poulain de la Barre made the Cartesian
assertion that “the mind has no sex”—a statement that helped to disembody
the gendered subject for hundreds of years, if the subject is conceived of as
an esprit du corps, instead of an ontological yoking of mind and body. Indeed,
since writers like de la Barre and Descartes, the Western world has sought to perpetuate the caesura between mind and corporeality, occasionally in defense of feminist agendas. Take, for instance, sentiments expressed by Sadie Plant, who “envisions the internet as a feminist and impartial setting in which ‘access to resources’ that ‘were once restricted to those with the right face, accent, race, sex are now accessible to everyone’” (White 605). Indeed, in carefully self-curated online environments, user photos, avatars, edit options, and other “unbiased, empowering technological tools” (White 606) have allowed for a disembodied, posthuman identity politics to develop. However, this approach fails to entirely account for AFK (away from keyboard) / IRL (in real life) states, the body itself, or how this genderless, raceless, virtual space can be transposed meaningfully onto corporeality. Cartesian ruptures celebrated by some digital thinkers ultimately continue to entrap the subject and fail to address the productive and “fluid materialities” or forms of embodiment offered by new media.

Indeed, dualistic impulses and agendas continue to spring from Cartesian headwaters and ripple through all levels of society, conserved specifically in languages, both daily and digital. Even where computer code and computer culture are concerned, Anna Munster notes that “familiarity with the legacy of Cartesian ontology and post-Cartesian rationalism within the knowledge systems that have informed the rise of computation reveals that there is little place for the body within computational spaces” (3). Munster questions this “Cartesian schema” as a compromised paradigm which has led to the birth of a digital culture largely “shaped via binary logic” (3). Reductionism aside, this kind of binary logic or digital dualism, instead of freeing the subject, serves actually to subjugate and to contain, to reify and to perpetuate harmful offline social configurations. In “Digital Dualism and the Fallacy of Web Objectivity,” Nathan Jurgenson asserts that the digital dualist “assumption that the on and offline are separate,” that online ontology is a kind of Janus-faced state, is a fallacy that ultimately springs from “a bunch of (mostly) white males claiming to create a digital space somehow separate from their own socialization.” Indeed, for Jurgenson as well as Legacy Russell, the “mind-body” caesura (or rather, the IRL / real life divide encouraged by visions of a virtual utopia) ultimately fails to render a flat or objective subjectivity—or rather, a state in which “the internet has the power to transcend and remove social locatedness” (“Fallacy”). In other words, as long as a digital dualism reflective of de le Barre or Descartes’s model exists, there cannot be a “possible deconstruction of dominant and oppressive social categorizations such as gender, race, age, and even species (“Fallacy”).
Russell joins in the offensive by acknowledging “that the rigidity of digital dualism needs to be retired, as it plays into binaries of real/virtual that parallel the rampantly socialized figuration of male/female” (“Glitch Feminim”). Exploring the syntactical stakes even further, Jurgenson notes that “Lawrence Lessig, Saskia Sassen, and many other have demonstrated that computer code itself, that ultimate symbol of inhuman, logical neutrality, is embodied, social, historical, and reflects specific value judgments” (“Fallacy”). Reminiscent of Cixous, Irigaray, Gilbert, and Gubar, who each critiqued the phallocentricity of language, computer dialects also remain imperfect, non-neutral modes of expression, compromised by oppressive paradigms. Rather than offering a way out of the oppressed subject, when digital culture is informed by the same kind of Cartesian logic put forward by de la Barre, it may actually entrap and condemn the subject to old forms of social figurations.

Throughout her career, and especially in her essay, “One is Not Born a Woman,” Monique Wittig rejects this kind of dualism, too, and envisions new forms of embodiment, which are facilitated today by new media. Wittig, of course, seeks in her writing to “lesbianize” society, though, for her, the lesbian operates less as a sexual standard and more as a *bricoleur*. As a marginal subject, the lesbian exists outside normal and normative systems of representation and subjection. The lesbian “refuses dualism and gains an ‘axis of categorization from which to universalize’” (Farwell 115). Marilyn Farwell notes that by focusing on the displaced subject and by methodizing this displacement, Wittig “puts the subject ‘outside of the presence/absence and center/margin dichotomies’” (115), allowing, ultimately, no specific identity, nor recognizable point of view within the system of heteronormativity. In other words, the lesbian revises subjectivity. By “universalizing,” the new “imagination posited by this eroticism leads the [subject] to burst the bonds of recognizable sexual imagery and forge a textuality/sexuality of her own, with its own reality and language” (Farwell 116). Farwell goes on to state that “to be outside the dichotomies, undomesticated and uncategorized [is] to create new images, new languages, and a new axis of categorization” (116). This impulse becomes valuable in an effort to redefine what the body means outside of sexual or gendered standards. Today, Wittig’s project is carried out online and by digital technologies, which fulfill the function of the lesbian by expanding or universalizing the subject.

First, however, to emphasize: neither can the subject be liberated via so-called digital escapism or digital dualism, nor can the subject be liberated solely through disembodied online interactions or states of being. Jurgenson
suggests that digital ontology “done right” augments rather than replaces. In other words, recalling posthumanist cyborg discourse, internet spaces may function as add-ons or “plug-ins” to corporeality, offering “corporeal transgression . . . through a set of tangible, albeit fluid materialities” (White 605). Is it possible that digital and internet technology might serve to re-embody or re-flesh? How can the internet perpetuate Wittig’s project for re-acquiring the subject? How does a “universalized” subject facilitate fluid or diffuse states of embodiment? To be sure, discussing the body in terms of “fluidity” seems to preference perceived identity over embodiment, though a cyberfeminist model of bodily diffusion is not the same as disembodiment per se. Rather, posthumanist theorists argue that consciousness can be technologically moved or relocated, an arrangement where “the body is a prosthesis for consciousness, characterized as more of a tool that can be improved, reconfigured, and quite possibly shed for a better one” (Miccoli 2). While the term “prosthesis” plays into the trap of digital dualism by subordinating the body, the sentiment behind the idea that body and consciousness operate fluidly is key in order to reconceptualize embodied subjectivity in the digital age. Indeed, it is important to redefine embodiment proper as either a “process rather than a stable state” or “lived, fluid,” and contingent or situational (Miccoli 3). It is more helpful to talk about digital spaces in terms of temporality rather than spatiality—in terms of events, encounter, and interface, which is precisely the moment that objects interact with each other, causing either new sensitivities to embodiment or at least new configurations of embodiment.

When digital dualism is overcome, these kinds of technological and interfacable events and encounters actually function to minimize reductive definitions of the body, diffusing it and multiplying it in both on and offline spaces. Here, Joan Key adopts theoretical frameworks offered by Gilles Deleuze, arguing that the linked, interconnected, and networked nature of digital stasis is congenial to Deleuze’s conception of the fold or of folding. Key writes that “folding breaks down categorizations and the subject positions that rely on such oppositions as the ‘included and the excluded, the abject and the desirable, the obscene and the seen’” (White 610). If on- and offline life are not separate, if they are somehow interwoven, overlapping, or nested within each other, then the physics of the fold makes some visual sense, offering a conception of digital embodiment which is “shifting” and “fragmented” and “resists distinctions between subjects and objects and cohesive positions” (White 611). Further cementing the concept that on- and offline interplay can
best be addressed in terms of event or contingency, Bruno Latour’s model for object-oriented ontology states that “nothing is by itself ordered or disordered, unique or multiple, homogeneous or heterogeneous, fluid or inert, human or inhuman, useful or useless. Never by itself, but always by others” (Miller 56). Latour’s model (for ontology and even—for corporeality) resists reduction and instead argues that being is based on “local constructions,” where objects engage in folding or in “concatenating, relating, networking, negotiating, compromising, and composing” (Miller 20). By transposing Latour and Deleuze into digital and posthuman contexts, the embodied, corporeal subject becomes through interface—that is, by folding and networking. Moreover, through digital augmentation as outlined by Jurgenson, the body is also opened to new ontological possibilities, new subjectivities.

This phenomenon of (technological) extension is conceptualized at length by Judith Butler in an essay in direct conversation with Monique Wittig. Butler throws her shoulder behind Wittig in a discussion on “the existential doctrine of choice” (505), suggesting that Wittig’s theory of gender functions as a site where “gender becomes the corporeal locus of cultural meanings both received and innovated . . . and ‘choice’ in this context comes to signify a corporeal process of interpretation within a network of deeply entrenched culture norms” (506). Butler uses Sartre to supplement her reading of Wittig. Butler elaborates on the “cultural process of interpretation within a network,” writing that “the body is coextensive with personal identity, . . . [suggesting] that consciousness is in some sense beyond the body” (508). While this, at first glance, seems to reify mind/body dualism, Butler writes that “we need to understand this self-transcendence as itself a corporeal movement, and thus rethink both our usual ideas of ‘transcendence’ and of mind/body dualism itself” (508). Most importantly, however, Butler elaborates that “one may surpass the body, but this does not mean that one definitely gets beyond the body,” and “the body is not a static or self-identical phenomenon, but a mode of intentionality, a directional force and mode of desire . . . a mode of becoming” (509). While Butler and Wittig may not have been writing with digital or technological ends in mind, their perspectives nevertheless presage posthuman claims that technology may serve not only to extend corporeality but also to verify embodiment as a process of becoming—a concept made manifest specifically during moments of folding or interface, when the body concatenates with objects of technology.

And this moment of interface is the moment of expanded or extended corporeality. Anthony Miccoli writes that “datafying the self” does not eliminate
problems associated with embodiment nor does it eliminate the “Cartesian fear of annihilation” (6). In other words, and as expressed by Butler in terms of Wittig in 1986, extended corporeality is “not a question of leaving the body behind, but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis” (Miccoli 6). However, by understanding the embodied possibilities opened up by digital ontology, critics like N. Kathleen Hayles believes that posthumanists, digital humanists, and cyberfeminists can start addressing how incorporation, or, perhaps more precisely for the purposes of this argument, how re-incorporation takes place (Miccoli 7). Extended corporeality is less a push-button effect that the digital has on the real and instead more of a paradigm that can liberate attitudes held toward IRL subjectivity. Before discussing how this paradigm can be used or has been used to liberate the subject or to expand the potentiality of the subject, or how past feminists have operated in this way, it is important to understand how interface is conceived in a posthuman setting. Anthony Miccoli argues that “what posthumanism avoids addressing is the very need for connection, as well as the site of interface where connection takes place” (8). Of course, under consideration the moment of interface becomes the moment of embodiment, relationality, and digital diffusion.

Using arguments put forward by Elaine Scarry, Miccoli articulates how this moment of connection or interface is productive in re-embodying the subject or expanding the parameters and definitions of the embodied subject. Miccoli and Scarry argue that “technology is not a means to achieve some kind of improved embodiedness, instead, it is a means by which ‘a bodily attribute is projected into an artifact which essentially takes on the work of the body, thereby freeing the embodied person of discomfort and thus enabling him to enter a larger realm of self-extension” (10). Miccoli suggests that at the moment of interface (“a palpable surface across which ‘the interior act and exterior object becomes continuous’”) “technology allows the internal to be expressed in the outside world” (10). It is useful here to graft in claims set forward by glitch theorists like Rosa Menkman, who explore the concept of interface and moments when users become aware of interface (and thus aware of relationality and bodily diffusion) through glitch or bugginess. In The Glitch Moment(um), Menkman asserts that in digital media “innovation is . . . still assumed to lie in finding an interface that is as non-interfering as possible, enabling the audience to forget about the presence of the medium and believe in the presence and directness of immediate transmission” (14). However, when a glitch appears in a computer
or technological system it “fosters a critical potential . . . and captures the machine revealing itself” (Menkman 30). She writes that “when a supposedly transparent interface is damaged [by a glitch], the viewer is momentarily relocated to a void of meaning” (30), and the computer itself “suddenly appears unconventionally deep, in contrast to the more banal, predictable surface-level behaviors of normal machines and systems” (31). If the moment of interface is a moment of awareness, then the glitch aids in catalyzing this self-consciousness. A glitch becomes a way of embodying by rupturing an otherwise transparent, thoughtless, and disembodied connection between the individual and the technological artifact.

This idea remains relatively abstract until it is imported as a model into digital discourse and gender, interrogating how a glitch might manifest itself in social, gendered systems, or situations. In “One is Not Born a Woman,” Monique Wittig outlines a useful way of thinking about certain identities as explosive to normal perceptions of gender or the heterosexual matrix. In effect, Wittig offers the lesbian as a kind of glitch to this matrix, “a not-woman, a not-man,” who, by refusing the role of the woman, allows for a “new personal and subjective definition for all humankind . . . beyond the categories of sex (man and woman)” (362). If the lesbian interrupts woman’s “specific social relation to man” within a heterosexual matrix, living beyond the categories of sex, then the lesbian effectively meets Wittig’s call for “the advent of individual subjects which first demands destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals” (365). In other words, the lesbian, like a glitch, reveals the inner workings of the system or matrix and the moment of interface with this system. By doing so, the lesbian diffuses categories of embodiment and allows for subjective “self-extension.” In digital contexts, this can also occur when the subject logs in online and adopts “modes of virtual embodiment that fundamentally subvert [traditional] identities by more fully utilizing the potential of virtual technologies to disrupt the expressive or one-to-one-mapping of social identities and meanings onto bodies” (Vint “Funk Not Punk”). Interface with a computer, functional or malfunctioning, facilitates new ways of perceiving the body in offline states by re-envisioning how the subject represents itself.

Restated differently, augmented reality, as facilitated by URL ontology, expands and extends corporeality when it allows the subject to take on new signifiers or represent itself and the body in new ways. In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler writes at length on the nature of subjectivity and representation,
arguing that, as representation occurs within a system and secondary to that system, representation for (female) subjects is necessarily problematized if “the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation” (4). If embodiment is context based upon representation, this kind of systemic corruption reveals the problems associated with “liberating” the so-called subject, even online. Nevertheless, Butler acknowledges the diffuse nature of modern identity and modern “womanhood,” writing that, “because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities . . . it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (6). Butler goes on to problematize universal feminism and universal patriarchy, maintaining instead a principle of irreduction, showing the subject must remain a diffuse and diffused entity. In online contexts, representation is not infinitely liberated but is rather expanded or extended. Indeed, according to Jurgenson and Butler, the ways in which people express themselves online remain, in some ways, entrapped by offline, IRL social structures, or even by digital systems themselves. However, “radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity” (Butler 8) based in mobilizing identity remains the primary goal of a posthuman, cyberfeminist ontology. The mobile identity is an exercise in self-identification and self-representation—modes of self-expression that are facilitated by online posturing, profiles, accounts, platforms, and blogs.

In The Mirror and the Veil, Viviane Serfaty discusses the old digital dream of reframing (or dismantling) the body into an “immaterial signifier,” a site at which “corporeity seemingly dissolves and boils down into a set of linguistic signs” (101), into a body-as-text. However, if we recall writers like Hélène Cixous, the body-as-text (which can be edited and reframed and utterly controlled by the user or the subject) is not necessarily disembodied. For Cixous, the act of writing not only closely parallels embodiment, it also facilitates new bodies. Cixous argues that a woman must “write her self,” in order to catalyze “indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history,” articulating her own femininity, and, as a result, “return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display” (323). Cixous equates a censoring of the body with the censoring of speech. In other words, the very act of articulating is an act of setting up new, self-defined parameters of engenderment. If we consider contemporary discourse surrounding the narcissism of a plugged-in Generation X, Cixous
criterion argues, tellingly, that as men have censored women, “they have made for women an antinarcissism” (322). Likewise, the online text (in the form of a blog or microblog post) is fundamentally narcissistic in that it preens—since the online text can be edited continuously, the subject/user has, at all levels, the power to design, shape, and encode itself in text; therefore, the online text shifts in the mirror. Cixous argues that a new feminine discourse functions not only to “break up, to destroy” but also to “foresee” and “project” (319). A new feminine discourse not only embodies but also specifically embodies new, speculative bodies—or, rather, bodies that exist in process and are able to be edited, expanded, copied, and pasted. Online corporeality, facilitated by the body-as-text model, allows the user and the user’s body a speculative diffuseness, extension, and recombinatory nature.

Current trends and innovations in social media technology facilitate similar paradigms that encourage diffuse, recombinatory, and extended identity. Social media theorists like Jurgenson critique current configurations of the online identity profile, offering a “liquid” or “fluid” self in place of the rigidly defined and outlined identity made possible by self-curated photos, quotes, posts, and likes or dislikes. While Jurgenson principally believes that the internet (including a variety of social media platforms) constructs an expanded identity, he also suggests in an article entitled “The Liquid Self,” that the ideal social media profile should not “ask us to work ourselves into as many identity-containers, given the fact that humans and identity itself are fundamentally fluid and ever changing.” Indeed, Jurgenson calls to mind the critical work of Walter Pater, who described human identity as a “hard gem-like flame,” both fluctuating and indelible simultaneously. Jurgenson offers an updated vision of the social media profile, writing that “dominant social media has thus far taken a stand . . . for a version of identity that is highly categorized and omnipresent, one that forces an ideal of a singular stable identity that we will continuously have to confront” (“The Liquid Self”). He argues that a “temporary social media will provide new ways of understanding the social media profile, one that isn’t comprised of life hacked into frozen, quantifiable pieces by instead something more fluid, changing, and alive” (“The Liquid Self”). Of course, Jurgenson’s claims need not stand in conflict with those previously outlined in this essay—digital platforms and profiles still offer individuals profound control over self-expression—but they nevertheless provide progressive insight into how social media and “authentic” identity can be reconciled. Again, this evidence is meant to show that the internet can offer new ways of representing the subject, à la
Butler and Wittig, and that these new ways can be ported into offline bodies and ontologies.

Perhaps one way of conceptualizing this porting or the relationship between internet augmented reality and real issues of embodiment is to examine ways in which expanded consciousness has helped the individual to rethink or re-flesh the body—both in the past and in a non-digital context. Gloria Anzaldúa outlines a cosmopolitan paradigm for self-identification, raising questions on how intersectional identities can contribute to a “mestiza consciousness,” or, rather, a consciousness “of the Borderlands,” which reflects a “hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool” (386). For Anzaldúa, a mestiza consciousness is rooted in multiculturalism, even multiracialism, but has a direct impact on the psyche and the paradigms of the mind. In other words, mind and body interface or interfere with one another, bound up in a relationship where one informs the other. She writes that “mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity . . . and breaks down the subject-object duality that keeps [woman] a prisoner” (388). This paradigm correlates with “a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness—the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could . . . bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (389). In other words, Anzaldúa believes that by destroying dualities of being, by opening the subject to fluidity, contingency, and ambiguity, the subject and the body can be freed from real violence. A mestiza consciousness not only defies duality, but it also is an example of the ways in which paradigms and embodiment (or here, genealogy) intersect. From Anzaldúa, it is possible to extrapolate how expanded forms of identity, self-identification, reality, and corporeality can have real effects on real embodiment.

Rethinking the internet, digital technology, and digital culture in terms laid out initially by Wittig and Butler, and later expanded upon by thinkers like Miccoli and Jurgenson, shows that because online life overlaps with the IRL, new configurations of “personality” online can inform how identity can be manifested or expressed by the body. New paradigms regarding being and personality facilitated by the internet harmonize with a sentiment expressed by Jean- Paul Sartre in Being and Nothingness: that is, we “do not exist all at once” (352). Returning to the anecdote offered earlier in this essay, Sartre, in discussing his own corporeality and real disabilities, writes that “even this disability from which I suffer I have assumed by the very fact that I live; I surpass it toward my own projects, I make of it the necessary obstacle for my being, and I cannot
be crippled without choosing myself as crippled” (352). Sartre’s vision of the “body-surpassed”—using models of surpassing (augmented) embodiment—align with similar conceptions of extended corporeality offered in internet borderlands. As a result, Sartre’s vision readjusts how the body—including the crippled bodies of Sartre or the internet dating services user—can be revised or readjusted after the internet rehauls how people conceive of embodiment on a day-to-day basis. From glitch to blog writing, the internet helps to interrogate what embodiment means in a posthuman state and how individuals or users can expand on Monique Wittig’s project to offer new personal and subjective definitions of mankind—definitions that exist beyond gender but not necessarily beyond the body. The internet establishes a new *mestiza* consciousness, or the so-called Borderlands consciousness, where *border* is here synonymous with *interface*, a surface that folds and erupts, allowing the embodied individuals to transgress or transform traditional versions of corporeality.
Works Cited


Can the Queer Subaltern Speak?

Neocolonial Spectacle and Queer Commodification in *Dogeaters*

Jennifer Duque

In Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*, the only first-person narrators in its dazzling, postmodern pastiche of radio drama, newspaper clippings, nineteenth-century anthropological investigations, tsismis,\(^1\) political intrigue, and family letters are encoded as queer. The novel intermittently follows the coming-of-age story of Rio Gonzaga, the mestiza daughter of an upper-class, politically powerful family, who begins the novel with fragmented recollections of her childhood in Manila in the 1950s.\(^2\) Joey Sands, the abandoned son of a Filipina prostitute and an African-American soldier, is a sex worker and junkie who joins the guerilla resistance movement. In addition to their queerness, Rio and Joey share two other traits in common: both have inherited a parentage embroiled in the convoluted, often humiliating, history of (neo)colonialism, and both harbor strong identification with the spectacle (radio dramas, cinema, movie stars, entertainment, etc.). In this paper, I discuss the ways in which the interconnection between (neo)colonialism

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1 Tagalog word for “gossip.”
2 Rio sets her childhood memories in the 1950s but frequently alludes to the Marcos regime, which spanned 1965-1976. For a detailed discussion regarding *Dogeater*’s purposefully anachronistic elements, see Werrlein, “Legacies of the ‘Innocent’ Frontier: Failed Memory and the Infantilized Filipino Expatriate in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*."

and the spectacle\textsuperscript{3} authorizes social scripts, which oppress and silence queer subaltern subjects. Thus, the sites of struggle for queer subaltern speech that this paper seeks to represent result directly from the Philippines’ colonized history, and the assimilationist projects and martial law capitalism that ensued. In order to track this relationship, my analysis draws upon the following historical contexts: U.S. American colonization of the Philippines, particularly the paternalistic discourse that the U.S. employed in order to justify doing so, and the rhetorically analogous familial structures of power perpetuated by the Marcos regime, particularly in regards to its queer patronage.

I should briefly address why I’ve chosen to use the theoretical signifier “queer” in an article about sexual identities in a Filipino-American text. Why choose “queer” over “kabaklaan,”\textsuperscript{4} considering the concerns that non-western queerness has been problematically subsumed by westernized conceptions of gayness? Judith Butler suggests that the term “queer” should be conceptualized as purposefully indefinite:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestations, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. (228, italics added)

Similarly, John C. Hawley observes that queerness challenges the “[w]estern imposition of sexual epistemology,” and writes that, “this ‘queering’ of gay and lesbian studies is both a protest against a foreclosure of possible inclusion and a demand that the liberal (white, yuppified, Western) gay and lesbian establishment recognizes the ‘subalterns’ in its midst” (6). At the same time, it’s also relevant to note that “subaltern” terms such as bakla and kabaklaan are relevant only in particular cases of gender performativities, and aren’t

\textsuperscript{3} I use the term “spectacle” in the Debordian sense. In The Society of the Spectacle, Marxist philosopher Debord suggests that, due to our consumer culture, social interactions are mediated by commodities, and defines the spectacle as “the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience” (7). For an article focusing specifically on the spectacle and Dogeaters, see Mendible, “Desiring Images: Representation and Spectacle in Dogeaters.”

\textsuperscript{4} Kabaklaan simply means “being-bakla, bakla-ness.” Bobby Benedicto notes that bakla has become “a highly contested term that is sometimes read as a synonym for gay but is more accurately, though no less problematically, depicted as a sexual tradition that conflates homosexuality, transvestism or effeminacy, and lower-class status, and which is embodied by the caricatured figure of the parlorista, the cross-dresser working in one of Manila’s many low-end beauty salons” (318).
necessarily useful in describing Rio or Joey (in fact, as I’ll mention again in this paper, the term *bakla* has become extremely restrictive). However, designated as a free-floating signifier, “queer” can encompass the intersecting multiplicities of performance and sexuality, which circumvents the globalized totality of the terms “gay” and “lesbian,” as well as articulates beyond the localized demarcations of *bakla*.

Spanish colonization of the islands we now know as “the Philippines” began in 1565. Although Filipinos began agitating for independence from Spanish rule three centuries later in 1896, the U.S. seized control over the islands immediately after winning the Spanish-American war in 1898. Hagedorn includes in Dogeaters an excerpt from a nonfictional speech William McKinley gave regarding the newly “orphaned” islands, in which he cites paternalistic obligation and economic gain (on the part of the U.S., of course) as the primary reasons to “keep” the Philippines. Lest the burden of self-rule hurl the Filipinos into mass chaos and anarchy, he insists that “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them” (71). Regarding the familial tone of American imperialist rhetoric, Debra Werrlein notes the following:

As a paternal protector, McKinley interpolated Filipinos as children in a familial metaphor that equated maturation with assimilation to a patriarchal and white American ideal . . . Paradoxically, they expected Filipinos to accept their own inherent inferiority while eventually assuming the role of “mature” pseudo-parents fit to rule like their oppressors. To become “civilized” under such logic, Filipinos were required to participate in their own erasure [. . .]. (30)

The U.S. thus demanded that Filipinos “mimic” their colonial “father” in order to prove themselves capable of autonomy. However, by benevolently “taking in” the Philippines as a ward to tutor and support, the U.S. also impeded their Filipino subjects from progressing beyond their colonized status as “little brown brothers” (Creighton Miller 167). Unsurprisingly, McKinley’s assimilation project did not “liberate” Filipinos to be more like their benevolent American overlords; it simply produced “authorized versions of otherness” (Bhabha 129)

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5 Although William Howard Taft originated this now-infamous sobriquet, it became a commonplace term for Filipinos. Charles Ballantine, for instance, wrote, “Our ‘little brown brother,’ the Filipinos pure and simple, whom we are so anxious to uplift to his proper plane upon the earth, and relieve from the burden cast upon him by heredity and a few hundred years of Spanish dominion, is without doubt unreliable, untrustworthy, ignorant, vicious, immoral, and lazy . . . tricky, and, as a race more dishonest than any known race on the face of the earth” (Creighton Miller 210).
that, according to the current ideology, would always be subaltern in relation to the U.S. Empire.

In addition to being infantilized, it’s important to note that Filipino subjects were also feminized by America’s duplicitously familial rhetoric. Neferti Tadiar has written extensively about what she calls the Philippine-American romance, and observes that the relationship between the American “benefactor” and the Filipino “orphaned child” was also frequently configured as a courtship or marriage—or rather, an exploitative contract between a male customer and a prostituted woman. On that note, Viet Nguyen astutely observes that, “Dogeaters demonstrates not only that melodramatic spectacle is tied to the marketing of the commodity but also that heterosexual romance is a part of this spectacle” (134, italics added). Indeed, heterosexual romance pervades Dogeaters, transmitted by the films and soap operas that the characters obsessively consume—and, as I will discuss later, by Marcosian martial law rhetoric. Thus, the film industry and assorted media outlets function as kinds of Althusserian ideological state apparatuses that project restrictive narratives onto Filipino subjects, inculcating Filipino subjects within a simultaneously imperialistic and heterosexist ideology, which mandated their participation within the broader narrative of American (neo)colonialism.

In a conference, Hagedorn remarked that Filipinos are “brainwashed from infancy to look outside the indigenous culture for guidance and inspiration . . . taught that the label ‘Made in the U.S.A.’ meant automatic superiority, taught that Filipinos are inherently lazy, shiftless, and undependable. Our only talent, it seems, is for mimicry” (quoted in Mendible 291). In Dogeaters, it’s made clear that Filipino mimicry and western supremacy go hand-in-hand, evinced through the American products that the characters own and consume. Rio’s mother regularly goes to Chiquiting Moreno’s salon to tint her hair auburn like Rita Hayworth (82); Andres Alacran treasures his title as the “Fred Astaire of the Philippines” (35); Isabel Alacran models herself after Marlene Dietrich, Jacqueline de Ribes, and Grace Kelly (20); the winner of the talent show Tawag Ng Tanghalan is hailed as the “Barbra Streisand of the Philippines” (76); etc. It’s as though Filipinos can only exist as darker copies of white originals, or not exist

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6 Tadiar suggests, “the hyperfeminization of certain countries signifies their condensation of the contradictory symptoms of patriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism. Thus the hyperfeminization of the Philippines is a historically new phenomenon, which is not to say that this process of objectification did not exist earlier, for it might be argued that the production of the prostitute as a feminine ideal is a cultural corollary to commodity fetishism in the age of capitalism, and feminization is the process of management through investment (such was the new mode of control of the colonies in the age of imperialism)” (229).
at all—or, in Homi K. Bhabha’s words, “as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (126).

Similarly, Severo Alacran, capitalist businessman extraordinaire, signifies his wealth and power by monopolizing every imitation-U.S.A company he can: TruCola (which everyone drinks); Celebrity Pinoy Weekly (which everyone reads); Mabuhay Movie Studios (which is almost as good as Hollywood); SPORTEX (the supermarket the characters flock to almost every chapter); etc. Consuming the “Made in the U.S.A” label, or its simulacra, thus signifies civilization (and therefore a right to self-rule), whereas consuming anything else—be it pinakbet or dog—signifies indigenousness, and therefore, savagery.

It’s contestable as to where the queer subaltern subject fits into this spectacle of heterosexual romance and mandatory mimicry. On the one hand, the spectacle routinely idealizes heterosexual romance and conceals the existence of queer love—or even queer people. The omnipresence of the heterosexual spectacle instructs Filipino mimicry, both in terms of the products they consume and the sexualities they are authorized to embody. However, Hagedorn suggests that the film industry nevertheless provides a space in which to challenge this narrative, specifically through Rio.

The first chapter opens with Rio and Pucha, her cousin, watching All That Heaven Allows, enthralled respectively by Gloria Talbott and Rock Hudson. Throughout the novel, Rio and Pucha pay homage to the film industry: they eagerly watch A Place in the Sun, Sabrina, Imitation of Life, I Love Lucy, and West Side Story—all of which feature a central, heterosexual love story. Pucha, “hopelessly boy-crazy,” (85) idolizes Rock Hudson and Montgomery Clift, while Rio’s obsession with cinema allows her to hint at her awakening queerness. In addition to her fascination with Gloria Talbott, Rio reveals, “I am confused by the thought of Elizabeth Taylor’s one violet eye luminous in black and white” (17). When Uncle Panchito gives her a boyish haircut and Pucha demands why Rio didn’t get a perm, Rio nervously evokes Audrey Hepburn’s short hair in Sabrina: “She’s beautiful,’ I stammer, blushing” (237). As Bhabha notes, colonial mimicry—with which Rio participates, to an extent—can give way to slippages, or possible sites of resistance that both imitate and deconstruct dominant ideologies (127). For instance, as Rio and Pucha “practice tongue-kissing” (236) together while pretending to be Rock Hudson and Ava Gardner/Sandra Dee, they take part in the Philippine-American romance of western cultural imperialism and idealized heterosexuality at the same time they “queer”

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7 "Pinakbet,” is an indigenous meal; “Dog eaters” is a racial epithet, used both by U.S. Americans for Filipinos and by Filipinos for indigenous Filipinos (see Hagedorn 31, 33).
it. Contrasted with Pucha’s loud (if occasionally compromised) boy-craziness and resisting the expectations of Hollywood’s heterosexual master narrative, Rio’s quiet queerness emerges.

Significantly, Rio isn’t content to simply consume the spectacle; she wants to (re)construct it. “When I grow up, I’m moving to Hollywood,” (240) she announces, but quickly asserts that she has no interest in acting. To her male friend that both assumes she wants to be an actress and asks if she wants “a lesson in French-kissing” (241) when she’d much rather talk about film magazines and whether Lana Turner’s daughter really killed “that gangster” (i.e. Johnny Stompanato), Rio retorts, “I’m going to make movies, Tonyboy. Not act in them!” (241). She rejects straight advances in the same gesture that she rejects the idea of reciting a script she didn’t write. Her search for alternative narratives—underscored by her interest in the story about fourteen-year-old Cheryl Crane (who, incidentally, is also gay) murdering her movie star mother’s lover—insinuates her desire to “queer” the sanitized story/spectacle that she’s inherited, despite its underlying threat of familial violence.

Given Rio’s subversive potential, it’s understandable that Nguyen would argue that Hagedorn “appropriately places queer sexuality at the center of the revolution, a move that undermines the heterosexual romance that is an integral part of the cinematic spectacle to which Filipino audiences are subjugated” (134). The revolution in Dogeaters, he argues, is essentially a sexual revolution (138-139). That being said, it’s difficult to account for the fact that Rio’s ambivalent mimicry remains the exception rather than the rule. Far more regularly than they subvert the system, Hagedorn’s queer characters are intimately complicit with the melodramatic spectacle of heterosexual romance as avid consumers, as directors, and even as actors masquerading as straight characters on and off-screen. This problematizes Nguyen’s claim, and deserves to be explored further.

The tension between queer subjects and heterosexual scripts is starkly obvious in the film industry itself, which threatens Rio’s optimistically subversive ambitions. It’s ironic, for instance, that the actors Tito Alvarez and Nestor Noralez are queer: Tito stars opposite Lolita Luna in provocative bomba movies, whereas Nestor and his co-star Barbara Villanueva are billed as “everyone’s favorite sweethearts,” (76) and regularly perform together in Mabuhay Studios’ musicals and in radio dramas. The two maintain a heterosexual script off-screen as well, supposedly engaged to each other but still unmarried. The film industry is thus a site of profound ambivalence, a place that transmits narratives reiterating heterosexual romances and interpellates queer subjects
as straight, but also a place that fosters Rio’s queer awakening and functions as a sort of haven. The remainder of this paper will focus on tracing the fraught interchange between (hetero)sexual spectacles and queer subjects, and will expatiate further on relevant details that inform the relationship between the heterosexual, *parental* spectacle and the nation-state’s martial law, in part to examine why Rio’s potential subversion is not, and cannot be, representative of the queer norm.

In “Patronage and Pornography: Ideology and Spectatorship in the Early Marcos Years,” Vicente Rafael outlines and contextualizes the ideology of patronage that infused the Marcos regime and, I argue, constricts queer identity in *Dogeaters*. He traces the ideology of patronage to the “expanding capitalist market that characterized the dynamics of postwar Philippine politics,” (295) clarifying these mechanisms in detail in the following excerpt:

> Patronage implies not simply the possession of resources but, more important, the means with which to instigate the desire for and the circulation of such resources . . . While it is traditionally defined as consisting of the benign assertion that a hierarchy spanning a long period of time (usually measured along generational lines) will assure those below of benefits from above, it is conversely meant to confirm that those above are the “natural” leaders of those below. Patronage thus mystifies inequality to the point that makes it seem not only historically inevitable but also morally desirable, as it recasts power in familiar and familial terms. (296)

Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos thus fashioned themselves as the “‘Father and Mother’ of an extended Filipino family,” (282) and their glamorous, formulaic romance helped conceal the harsh realities of their oligarchic dictatorship.8 In a sense, the Marcos regime redeployed—or, mimicked—the American discourse of benevolent parentage/patronage, albeit with an insidiously nationalistic intent. Compared to the American colonizers’ patriarchal discourse of civilization and tutelage, oppression generated by the Filipino elite was more convincingly familial, and the intimacy of this power structure secured oppressed subjects to their oppressors in a claustrophobic bond of filial obligation.9

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8 “Because Ferdinand and Imelda worked so closely together in getting him elected in office, they could conceive of the public sphere of politics as coextensive with their private lives. Singing together on stage, they turned their private lives into a public spectacle, staging a stylized version of their intimacy. That intimacy was formalized to a remarkable degree and made over into a staple element of the Marcos myth . . .” (Rafael 284).

9 Karnow notes, “Despite its modern trappings, it was still a feudal society dominated by an oligarchy of rich dynasties, which had evolved from one of the world’s longest continuous spans of Western imperial rule” (9).
While Nguyen suggests that the queer characters in *Dogeaters* are at the center of the revolution, it’s equally important to grapple with the fact that, both historically and in *Dogeaters*, they helped construct and existed within the center of the Marcos spectacle. In 1986, Imelda told a reporter, “that she was confident her husband would win the country’s homosexual vote because dressmakers and hairdressers had told her they were afraid they would lose their jobs under a less flamboyant administration” (Mydans np). Similarly, Hagedorn alludes to this assumed loyalty in the headline of a fictional interview with the First Lady: “Madame reveals: Her unabashed belief in astrology, the powers of psychic healing, Darwin’s theory of evolution, and loyalty of her homosexual constituents” (217). Due to the patronage that the elite provided queer people working within their designated industries, queer people were thus interpellated into a contractual relationship that demanded their fidelity to the “flamboyant” spectacle that also limited the social spaces they were expected to inhabit.

As a result, the spaces that queer people were allowed to exist within were just as restrictive as the heterosexual scripts they were expected to follow. Nguyen notes that *bakla* generally operate within “a social category with limited options for agency, which in the popular imagination are in the realms of sex, beautification, and aesthetic creation. *Bakla* are seen as being especially prominent in careers associated with the arts or beauty: the movies, dance, fashion design, hairdressing, and so on” (131).10 The majority of queer people in *Dogeaters*, even if they don’t necessarily identify as *bakla*, fall under these social categories: Chiquiting Moreno owns the most expensive beauty parlor in Manila; Jojo runs a more affordable parlor which Rio and Pucha visit weekly; Uncle Panchito is Rio’s mother’s personal dressmaker, while Salvador is her personal manicurist. In the music, entertainment, and media industries, almost every male is eventually “outed” as queer: the actors Tito Alvarez and Nestor Noralez, as discussed previously; Max Rodriguez, a leftist filmmaker; Andres Alacran, who owns CocoRico (a gay discotheque), and used to perform for Mabuhay Studios; Joey, who DJs and picks up costumers at CocoRico; and even Rock Hudson, the nonfictional American heartthrob whom Pucha (ironically enough) adores. In the sex industry, the most blatant manifestation of queer commodification and the bleakest example of queer patronage, the orphaned boys that Uncle takes in—Joey, Boy-Boy, Chito, Carding—all present as queer. Chito, later revealed to be Uncle Panchito, manages to leave the sex

industry, but he simply alternates stereotypical occupations and became a *modista*, which further attests to his limited social script. It also emphasizes the point that within the Marcos regime, the definition of “queerness” was limited to specific performativities associated with commerce and occupation, so much so that queer identities were completely dependent on Manila's conspicuous consumption, and were only drawn into existence when in dialogue with patronage.

Despite the ambivalent benefits of queer patronage, and although the Marcos regime capitalized on the queer vote, *Dogeaters* points out that ultimately, patrons do not protect their queer subjects. Chiquiting Moreno's career operates at the pinnacle of queer patronage: he provides satisfying services to the elite, and his elite customers (particularly the First Lady) provide his salon with cultural cachet. Rio remarks, for example, “One of Pucha's goals in life is to be able to afford going to Chiquiting Moreno's whenever she wants . . . I can't tell what's more important to her: being invited to debutante parties or having Chiquiting lacquer her hair” (56). However, Chiquiting’s economic security doesn't protect him from structural homophobia. As Joey narrates, at a New Year’s Eve party “[Chiquiting’s boyfriend] and Chiquiting were both beaten up by the President’s son Bambi and his goons, at that boring disco in Makati. Right there, with hundreds of people watching! . . . Chiquiting won't discuss it to this day. The first Lady is his main client, after all” (134). The fact that the President’s son beat up Chiquiting and his boyfriend indicates that, in the unequal power structure of queer patronage, the people above have the capacity to hurt their clients just as much as they can help them—and that their clients are entirely vulnerable to their whims. Hence, queer patronage doesn’t guarantee anything other than its demand for the products of queer labor.

Consequently, and notwithstanding the fragile prestige that derives from assisting the production of the spectacle either by lacquering the First Lady’s hair, starring in heteronormative musicals, or DJing alluringly for sex tourists, queer subjects in *Dogeaters* are ultimately relegated to subaltern status. Developing the concept of subalternity as a particular category of postcolonial subjects, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” asserts the ethical necessity of challenging imperialistically informed interpretations of history, and suggests that we do so by “[considering] the margins . . . of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (283). Considering the gendered implications of her analysis, Spivak goes on to
write, “both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287). I submit that the same critique can be articulated against the ideological construction of sexual orientation, and that Dogeaters demonstrates that if the subaltern Filipino has no history and cannot speak due to centuries of oppression and exploitation, the queer subaltern is even more deeply in shadow.

The structural silence that queer subjects in Dogeaters confront occupies a sort of palimpsest on which the Philippines’ colonized history is also inscribed—homophobia, racism, and reductive attempts to universalize western constructs of “gayness,” are all products of (neo)colonization. It’s noticeable that elite mestizo Filipinos levy the same cultural supremacy—and outright prejudice—against queer subjects that the west levies against Filipinos in toto. Rio adores listening to Love Letters, a popular radio drama, with her Lola Narcisa and the servants, which the rest of her family frowns upon as too “common.” As Rio narrates, “According to my father, Love Letters appeals to the lowest common denominator. My Uncle Agustin’s version of the lowest common denominator is the ‘bakya crowd’” (11). Queerness is immediately correlated with Filipino identity, which brings to mind Sarita See’s assertion that “Filipinos are structurally queer to the United States” (quoted in Ponce 26). Rio goes on to note, “It’s the same reason the Gonzagas refuse to listen to Tagalog songs, or go to Tagalog movies. I don’t care about any of that” (12). According to Rio’s elite family, queerness and Filipino identity are demarcations of the lower class, and both are to be concealed. Both queer and mestiza, Rio’s personal and family history is shrouded in hazy oral traditions, colonial violence, and internalized inferiority.

Exemplifying this colonized mentality, Rio’s paternal family identifies primarily as Spanish, although they’ve all been born and raised in the Philippines. Replicating the Philippines’ bloody history of western supremacy and Southeast

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11 Ponce’s following observation is instructive: “Contesting the view of gay globalization as the Western imposition of sexual epistemology (the binary logic of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual), political strategy (coming out, public visibility, human rights discourse), and capitalist consumption (bar culture, clothing, style, tourism), scholars . . . have explored the (in) congruities between Western concepts of ‘gay’ (which encompasses same-sex attraction, identity, behavior, and, in some cases, subcultures) and Philippine notions of ‘bakla’ (which can connote effeminacy, cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, working-class positionality, and ‘real’ man sexual object choice). At stake is not merely cultural accuracy but political interpretation and possibility, particularly around the temporality of these concepts (modern gay traditional, vestigial remnants of kabaklaan) (182).
Asian suppression, Rio’s Uncle Augustin loudly claims that the Gonzagas are the direct descendants of Columbus (238), but then destroys evidence of a Chinese grandmother. Claiming European roots not only conceals Filipino-ness; it also aligns the Gonzagas with the colonizers, making them complicit with, or at least supportive of, the attempted annihilation of indigenous people. Amidst erased genealogical records and Gonzaga family propaganda, Rio reflects, “The only thing I know for sure is that my mother’s grandmother was the illegitimate and beautiful offspring of a village priest,” (239) a Spanish missionary whom Lola Narcisa refuses to talk about. The underpinning violence and intergenerational trauma in Rio’s family history thus deconstructs the spectacle of benevolent assimilation, and exposes the hypocrisy of the Philippine-American romance and its project to Christianize the “savages” and sacralize the nuclear family. While Rio can reject the colonial narratives that she’s been taught, and while her interest in directing films indicates her desire to retell these narratives, there isn’t a clear alternative account from which to draw—she has only documentational gaps and guesswork.

The parentage Rio has inherited is the colonizer’s account of his own conquest, and the anxiety of rejecting that account lies in the absence of another—just as the anxiety of rejecting Marcosian queer patronage lies in the absence of another form of support. The lack of perceivable pre-colonial roots, and the need for subalterns to wrest their history from the colonizers, relates also to Rio’s queerness. J. Neil C. Garcia notes that it’s impossible to conduct a historical study “that wishes to delineate the various concepts of gender and sexuality among the natives of the archipelago several centuries back—without having to rely on Spanish accounts . . . a historian who wants to do work on precolonial Philippines will inevitably run into the blank wall which is colonization” (155). In Rio’s case, however, the blank wall she comes across is gendered as well as colonized—there aren’t representations of female queerness, other than the tsismis surrounding Jojo. Rio, “anxious and restless, at home only in airports,” (247) is as homeless as she is history-less, her nomadism reflective of her shadowed lineage at the intersection of multiple silenced histories. Forced to come to terms with the epistemic violence that has rendered both her Filipino-ness and her queerness almost unutterable, she admits, “I am ashamed at having to invent my own history” (239).

Complicating the question of subaltern speech further, Spivak asks, “With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?” (285). While Rio’s queerness emerges as a conscious alternative to the heteronormative script that surrounds her, Joey Sands “faces a problematic, queer embodiment wherein his
queerness seems to emerge only through the attractive pull of global capital” (Sohn 320). In other words, his queerness is much more obviously inscribed upon by Marcosian systems of queer commodification. From the beginning of the novel, it’s clear that Joey has internalized his existence as a commodity—he even names himself after a casino in Las Vegas, or rather, one of his American customers names him after it. Understandably, given his self-identification as a mutable commodity, Joey isn’t sure with what voice-consciousness he speaks, and frankly admits to his own unreliable narration. Although his clients are always men, for example, he discloses that, “I’m open to anything . . . If I met a rich woman, for example . . . You’d better believe I’d get it up for her, too” (44-45). However, Joey immediately retracts his suggestion that his sexuality is based on available capital: “Maybe I’m lying . . . The truth is, maybe I really like men but just won’t admit it. Shit. What’s the difference? At least Uncle’s proud of me. I know it, though he’d never say so” (45). He thus prioritizes the approval of a paternal figure—Uncle, his pimp and adoptive father—over trying to establish a sense of self-understanding. In doing so, Joey posits himself as an ever-shifting commodity fetish that docilely conforms to his customers’—and employer’s—desires.

Although Joey’s hustling might not initially seem consistent with the Marcos regime’s cultural projects or its familial rhetoric, it follows the same script of “authorized versions of otherness” (Bhabha 129) as queer hairdressers, dressmakers, actors, etc. Prostitution is central to the Philippines’ tourism economy and history of American occupation; for instance, Joey’s first lover, Neil, is an American soldier stationed in Manila, as was Joey’s father. When he meets Rainer, a German filmmaker invited to the First Lady’s international film festival, Joey’s language suggests that he knows he’s part of the Marcosian spectacle: “I’m on display. The German is watching me from the bar” (131). He then frames his actions like a screenplay:

I imagine I’m in my movie. I’m the strong young animal—I’m the panther. Or else I’m the statue of a magnificent young god in a beautiful garden. The old man with elephant skin drools. Maybe he’s God the Father, lost in paradise. He can’t get over how perfect I am; he can’t get over the perfection of his own

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12 For more information about the prevalence of prostitution during the Marcos regime, see Tadiar, “Prostituted Filipinas and the Crisis of Philippines Culture.”
13 Regarding Joey’s character, Jessica Hagedorn said in an interview, “When I was old enough and going back to the Philippines more often, it was the time of martial law when it was very repressive on the surface. At the same time there was a lot of corruption, and pornography was part of life even though you had this regime that was trying to present itself as being squeaky clean . . . I wanted to get to that underbelly because I felt like those were the people who nobody cared about and nobody thought about and they were too easily dismissed” (Díaz 2).
creation. He falls in love with me. They always do . . . I need my own movies, with their flexible endings. Otherwise, it’s just shit. (131)

Everything is meticulously formulized, so much so that it’s difficult to believe that Joey has access to “flexible endings,” any more than Rio has access to alternative narratives. Like Rio, Joey is forced to operate within epistemic (and not to mention physical) violence, to the point that his selfhood and anticipated life trajectory is shackled to capitalist transactions and exploitative scripts.

While scholars such as Viet Nguyen, Stephen Hong Sohn, and Victor Mendoza have argued whether or not Joey’s involvement with the guerilla insurrectionist movement is an affirmation of the revolutionary potential of queer sexuality, I suggest that the conversation would benefit by focusing on the ideological breakthrough Joey undergoes which enables him to undertake an alternate narrative—a flexible ending—which challenges the script of filial obligation and ultimately leads him to the opposition movement. After Joey witnesses Senator Avila’s assassination by presidential employees and attempts to take shelter in Uncle’s shack, it becomes increasingly apparent that Uncle operates as yet another cog in the Marcosian machine of queer patronage: the familial intimacy between him and Joey is a contractual bond, contingent solely on Joey’s capacity to profit his slum-business as one of his many sex workers and petty thieves. Uncle’s occupation as a sex trafficker thus depends on the same commodification (and implied docility and lack of social categorical agency) of bodies that western (neo)colonialism and Marcosian martial law both rely upon and produce.¹⁴

Joey comes to terms with the extent of the exploitation he’s suffered at the hands of Uncle once he finally realizes that his only parental figure “was more than willing to sacrifice his surrogate son” (24) to government authorities. Trapped in Uncle’s room and guarded by Uncle’s vicious dog, his traumatic past is forcibly conjured up by the graphic images plastered on the room: “A collage of pornographic centerfolds covered Uncle’s walls, making the room feel even smaller and more claustrophobic. Joey shut his eyes to close out the sprawling, leering images of painted girls and blank-eye boys . . . Joey knew he was one of them—the ominous and holy children of the streets. ‘Scintillating Sabrina and Gigi.’ ‘Boys at Play.’ ‘Bangkok Bombshells.’ ‘Lovely Tanya and Her Sister’” (203). While towards the beginning of the novel he narrates in the first-person,

¹⁴ Juliana Chang makes a similar observation: “In the same way that Uncle’s profits from Joey ultimately derive from Zenaida’s (sexual) labor, death, and burial, we can understand neocolonial elites and U.S.-based transnational corporations as profiting from the exploitation and disavowal of subaltern feminine [and queer] labor” (656). Since the “feminine labor” here means prostitution, I don’t think it would be an infringement on her argument to add “queer” to her statement.
pointedly cool and self-possessed—“I take good care of myself, I’m in control . . . I can take it or leave it, break hearts wherever I go” (45)—he succumbs to the dispossessed third-person in the process of contextualizing himself within his own history of abuse and trauma. Realizing that he hasn’t been in control over his life, and that he’s been interpolated as a commodity ever since Uncle adopted him under fatherly pretenses, Joey finally perceives queer patronage without its familial niceties—a realization metonymic of colonial “benevolence” demystified of its exploitative, violent origins.

Once Joey admits that his surrogate parent has betrayed him—and that the old man never saw him as anything other than an investment—he is immediately overwhelmed with the long-suppressed memory of his mother. Redolent of pre-colonial Filipino history, Zenaida’s death is surrounded by silence and near-mythic rumors. Joey knows nothing about her—her last name, the province she was from, her family background—and by extension, his family background—are all mysteries (42). He does not, or cannot, mourn her death until he recognizes that the “home” Uncle raised him in is built on the same unjust system of commodification that profiteered off of his mother’s sexuality before it killed her. Unlike Rio, he doesn’t need to invent his own history as much as he needs to accept what he knows. Still reeling from Uncle’s betrayal, Joey abruptly invokes his mother’s memory:

He had not said his mother’s name in years, and steeled himself against the tears welling up inside him. He was disgusted by his own sentimentality; he had never considered himself capable of self-pity, terror, or yearning for his long-deceased mother. He had always felt cheapened and humiliated by her, Zenaida, and his unknown father . . . Joey’s tears were blocked by the force of his growing rage. He knew he had to escape, somehow . . . (205)

Destroying the piles of pornography and escaping the room by stabbing Uncle’s dog to death, Joey literally pisses on the spectacle of western commerce and sacrifices the symbol of his own subalternity, a gesture of revenge and rejection targeted at the patriarch/pimp that raised him.15

It’s been mentioned before that Joey’s queerness is configured throughout the novel as negotiable, and depicted as complicit with the bourgeois decadence of the Marcos regime. When Joey leaves Manila and joins the guerrilla resistance movement in the mountains, the concept of his queerness-as-commodity is worth revisiting. On the one hand, Sohn suggests that, “the wilderness does not seem able to nurture and develop new configurations of Joey’s queer sexuality.

15 See Ameena Meer’s interview with Jessica Hagedorn for similar ideas.
In this jungle, he moves from the highly eroticized urban center, with the relationships he shared with his johns and others, to a politically progressive, yet asexualized landscape” (332). Provocatively, Sohn goes on to ask, “Does Joey go into the closet when he enters the jungle?” (338). It’s significant, however, that Joey’s venture into the jungle is not instigated by his own revolutionary awakening; instead, he joins the guerrillas because his childhood friend, Boy-Boy, has connections with them, and seems to be politically savvy and involved with the revolution himself. This is an overlooked, but enlightening, detail of the novel. I suggest that Joey’s introduction to the guerilla resistance movement is an attestation of the revolutionary potential of queer solidarity rather than queerness per se, and its juxtaposition with Uncle’s betrayal is a rejection of the unsubstantiated familiality of western imperialism and Marcosian queer patronage.

As children, Joey saw Boy-Boy as competition for Uncle's approval: “I was . . . a natural talent, according to [Uncle]. More daring than Boy-Boy, who was two years older than me and cried all the time . . . I was the youngest and the smartest, Uncle’s favorite” (Hagedorn 43). Like Joey, Boy-Boy works in the sex industry, albeit as a shower-dancer at Manila’s Studio 54. It’s a job that Joey dreads even considering: “I don’t want to end up a shower dancer like Boy-Boy, working nights in some shithole rubbing soap all over my body just so a bunch of fat old men can drool, turning twenty tricks after that, giving away my hard-earned profits to the goddam cops or clubowners!” (45). However, in many ways Boy-Boy embodies the concept of ambivalent mimicry, and his dehumanized status as a commodity leaves him surprising room for subverting the very system that voyeurizes him. Onstage, Boy-Boy obediently performs silent queer subalternity, going through the same dance routines every night and following the script of sexiness for his audience of other queer performers and actors. Offstage, however, Boy-Boy has both connections with fugitive revolutionaries and the cunning to get Joey, another fugitive from the government, to them safely.

It’s noteworthy that Hagedorn draws parallels between Boy-Boy and Zenaida, Joey’s drowned mother. As Joey mentions, “They say Zenaida’s ghost still haunts that section of the river, a mournful apparition in the moonlight. Boy-Boy claims he’s seen her more than once, but I don’t believe him” (42). Unlike Joey’s actual and surrogate parental figures, Boy-Boy is someone he can both reliably locate and trust—and as his correlation with Zenaida suggests, he represents a relationship that Joey can only form once he confronts Uncle’s duplicity. Boy-Boy also occupies a similarly spectral, liminal space, as both a

16 To my knowledge, Boy-Boy’s significance as a queer revolutionary has not been discussed elsewhere.
participant in Studio 54’s decadent spectacle and a member of the opposition movement that objects to the Marcos dictatorship. His revolutionary presence thus “queers” Manila’s rigidly categorized “queer norms,” maneuvering a place of resistance at the center of the spectacle. “‘Boy has things to do in the city . . . He’s needed there,’” (227) Lydia, one of the guerrillas, assures Joey. The dichotomy that Sohn attempts to draw between the city and the jungle in terms of their intrinsic revolutionary value, then, is untenable.

Due to generations of epistemic violence, subaltern queerness is impelled to reinvent and to redeploy its own narratives—just as it’s impelled to redeploy the ideological infrastructure that impedes decolonization at the same time it yields to possible subversion. As Boy-Boy urges Joey while they watch the news together just days before Joey joins the revolutionaries, we must “read between the lines” (226) of the spectacle’s official discourse in order to hear queer subaltern speech. By reading between the lines of queer patronage, Hollywood, nationalistic rhetoric, and filial duty, Rio, Joey, and Boy-Boy “queer” the scripts they’re meant to recite, establishing solidarity with the margins and liminalities of society while maintaining an ambivalent relationship with the spectacle. Thus, Hagedorn also “queers” the concept of revolution, revealing its presence in problematic, in-between spaces and in guerrilla camps alike, inviting us to “consider the margins.” Mendoza suggests that, “Dogeatrs perhaps ventures toward something of a decolonization of the term queer itself” (837). Regarding what decolonized queerness actually looks like, however, the text provides only flexible endings.
Works Cited


For the “Peace of the Commonwealth”

Gender and Societal Stability in the Trial of Anne Hutchinson

Jacob Duerden

The trial and interrogation of Anne Hutchinson represents a number of competing cultural interests and societal concerns: politics, religion, and gender. Scholarly opinion as to the primary motivation (or whether any one issue can claim “primary” motivation) behind this trial and interrogation varies. However, Professor Lad Tobin challenges what he claims is a bias of the critical body of work surrounding Hutchinson’s trial and attempts to settle on a primary cause for the event. Responding to what he sees as a tradition of scholarship sympathetic with the “paternalism of Puritan society” (253), Tobin takes issue with what he views as a vaguely sexist tendency to frame Hutchinson “as if she were the elders’ naughty daughter” (254). Tobin argues that this scholarly bias has favored other elements in the Hutchinson trial (principally politics and religion) as the primary source of the controversy, sidelining gender as a secondary issue. He contends that the Elders’ gender-based frustration fuels the trial and that the text reveals gender “not as a secondary issue. . .but as the root cause” (254).

Having neither the expertise nor the page length necessary for an exhaustive consideration of the cultural and societal context surrounding
Hutchinson’s trial, this paper will primarily engage with the text—the transcript of Hutchinson’s initial examination and sentencing—in an effort to weigh the language of those voices present (principally Governor Winthrop’s) and get at the principal motivation behind the Elders’ concerns. Analysis of the issue will also consider the critical conversation surrounding the Antinomian Controversy and what it reveals about the potential threat Hutchinson and her followers represented in the minds of the Elders. This paper is not an attempt at reductionism or the over-simplification of a complex event, nor is it an over-ambitious attempt to disentangle religion from politics in Puritan society (as they are perhaps functionally inseparable) in order to say which is the biggest motivator in the Hutchinson trial. Instead, this paper will conduct an analysis of the Elders’ primary interests as revealed by their language and line of questioning. It will also consider the implications of the Antinomian movement in order to determine whether or not gender can be called the premiere issue of the text. A careful review of both the governor’s rhetorical approach (which also reveals the Elders’ priorities) and the historical context sheds unique light on the role of gender in Puritan politics and helps us to avoid modernist projections of feminist concerns into a different time.

While Tobin claims gender is the fundamental issue, he seems to miss the actual function gender performs in the trial transcript as means to the end of resolving a far more menacing situation: the threat of societal instability. The Elders use the issue of female misconduct as justification to dismantle a politically threatening body growing in number and influence. Hutchinson’s Antinomian views and the socio-political dissent they imply present the most tangible threat to authority figures of the commonwealth like the Elders and Governor Winthrop. The term “Antinomianism,” from the Greek anti (against) and nomos (law), is used in American history to describe the socio-political stir caused by Hutchinson in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and literally means “against or opposed to the law” (Hall 3). While the term traditionally carries particularly religious connotations, the word itself doesn’t etymologically suggest any restriction to the realm of spiritual or moral law; thus, this potentially represents a threat with both religious and political implications. It is difficult to imagine a body of community members (a regularly convening body no less) rallying around an ideology more frightening to civic leadership than Antinomianism. Indeed, to Hutchinson and her Antinomian followers, “one’s identity (and authority) as one of the Elect was conferred by individual revelation and had nothing to do with observance of external laws or submission
to civil and ecclesiastical authority” (Castillo 232). Thus, the fundamental premise of Antinomianism is one that flouts any and all terrestrial authority that seeks to control or contain it; this sort of premise poses a direct threat to the order and structure of the Puritan community. A careful textual analysis of Hutchinson’s interrogation and a consideration of the Antinomian threat prove tremendously fruitful in ascertaining the ideological head of the controversy. This paper contends with Tobin’s position for gender “as the root cause” of Hutchinson’s trial and instead argues that the transcript reveals gender as merely a means to an end—that end being maintaining the societal and political stability of the Puritan community.

Governor John Winthrop puts forward the fundamentals of the Anne Hutchinson problem in a decidedly “guilty until proven guilty” tenor that wastes no time in treating her not as a feminist revolutionary but as a socio-political threat to be eliminated. The Governor opens Hutchinson’s examination without explicitly enumerating her crimes or explaining her wrongdoing (as if such trifles were unnecessary) but, instead, vaguely identifies her as “one of those that have troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches here” (Hutchinson). A moment later, he is somewhat more clear, elaborating that Hutchinson “hath had a great share in the promoting and divulging of those opinions that are causes of this trouble.” With his use of the phrase “one of those” in the first passage and “this trouble” in the second, the governor already reveals a rhetorical strategy: to speak with absolute confidence, whether feigned or genuine, that her crimes must be equally familiar to all present—just as much to her as to them—and that they need not be named to be known. At the outset Winthrop’s language presumes guilt and seeks to convict her already of her unnamed crimes, as if her culpability was simply a matter of fact. Of course, the governor does go on to say that these “opinions” of hers have proved “very prejudicial to the honour of the churches and ministers” and that Hutchinson has held an “assembly” in her home that “hath been condemned by the general assembly.” The unhelpful vagueness of the phrase “prejudicial to the honour” aside, the general assembly’s denunciation of Hutchinson’s own “assembly” becomes significant. Winthrop’s chosen delivery of the condemnation implies a long-standing judgment with the present perfect tense of “hath been” and refrains from mentioning whether prior notice of said condemnation had been issued. Thus, the implied “long-standing” judgment of the council may never have been made known to Hutchinson herself (and at no point do the Elders reference instances of prior warning), and yet the governor speaks as
if all creation were acquainted with the terms of her misdeeds. Winthrop’s language assumes that Hutchinson “hath been” operating with an awareness of her crimes, whether or not that was the case. Winthrop’s strategy from the very beginning of the interrogation seeks to establish Hutchinson as an obvious political subversive, as if her status as dissident revolutionary were either self-evident or at least common knowledge.

Along with the governor’s rhetorical strategy, Winthrop exposes a hierarchy of concerns in his revealing opening remarks that produces our first notion of the place gender really occupies in the controversy. The Elders’ primary preoccupations with Hutchinson’s offenses, detailed by the governor in the above items, are addressed in the following order: upholding the honor of “the churches and ministers,” enforcing the opinion of the general assembly, condemning Hutchinson’s activities, and correcting behavior unbecoming of her gender. Winthrop’s decision to list his concerns in the preceding order sets up a helpful structure that hints at the Elders’ priorities. As the governor’s opening comments, they bear the hallmark of carefully scripted and organized remarks that have been deliberately ordered. The careful, calculated rhetorical organization of Winthrop’s opening statement exposes his hierarchy of concerns and reveals the maintenance of the social, religious, and political status quo as being first and foremost in his mind. Right up front, Winthrop’s language suggests (and at times declares) that Hutchinson’s guilt has already been decided. Though, to the careful reader, his early rhetorical decisions also end up revealing the nature of his and the Elders’ most pressing anxieties. Stirring up trouble in the Lord’s chosen community is a threat to stability, which the commonwealth cannot risk tolerating.

Rhetorical priorities aside, the pomp and circumstance of addressing the Antinomian threat—interrogation, public trial, and banishment—in order to penalize Hutchinson for behavior unbecoming of her sex merely acts as a cover for the true calculated disciplinary move to retain political power and ensure societal stability. The reality of the Puritan project is that “men ran the society which expressed the covenant with God” and, consequently, “all men were, by definition, closer to God than women” (Barker-Benfield 68). A woman of the commonwealth had no choice but to accept “that she could receive wealth, power, and status only through the man” (Koehler 63). This raises the question: If only men hold the power, where is the threat in some powerless woman who disagrees with the minister over some point of doctrine in the Sunday sermon? Hutchinson tested the limitations of the male dominated power structures
and was sharply reproved. Being a woman, she was punished for her audacity. However, the gravity of the punishment is telling; it involved not only the banishment and excommunication of Hutchinson herself but also the dismissal, disenfranchisement, and excommunication of her numerous followers. It wasn’t Hutchinson’s gender that brought down the oversized hammer. It was the movement she spearheaded and represented—the movement that jeopardized socio-political life as the colony knew it. When the assembly of Elders was called in September of 1637 and the religious and civic leaders gathered to deal with the Antinomian problem, Governor Winthrop recorded the proceedings and his thoughts and views regarding them in a journal: “A close reading of John Winthrop’s Journal reveals that the decisions of the Synod [the gathering of elders] functioned essentially to shore up crumbling civil and religious authority” (Castillo 232). The governor’s private journal identifies the Elders’ primary anxiety: the destabilization of the community and deterioration of their power within it. Though Winthrop returns to Hutchinson’s gender throughout the interrogation to justify their disciplinary action, the governor knows that what the Elders have been convened to quash is much bigger than one woman forgetting her place. Indeed, one woman’s suggestive challenge of religious/political authority resulted in one of the most ideologically influential movements of early American history.

The heart of the text’s case for gender as primary motivation rests on a moment that both Tobin and I would identify as the most rhetorically significant exchange of Hutchinson’s examination, though for different reasons. Hutchinson and the governor arrive at a new point in the debate; one they both seem to regard as entirely relevant, and one that Tobin views as the text’s strongest evidence for gender as the fuel behind the controversy. The governor contends, “If your meeting had answered to the former [truly not had men present] it had not been offensive, but I will say that there was no meeting of women alone, but your meeting is of another sort for there are sometimes men among you.” Taken by itself, this statement seems to decide the matter. Here Winthrop virtually admits that much of this whole problem, a good deal (if not all) of this “trouble” that Hutchinson has been stirring up to unsettle the commonwealth, could have been avoided if she had simply restrained herself from instructing men. Plainly, it is the idea that men were present at an assembly hosted and conducted by a woman that has so incensed the governor. But then he goes on: “Your course is not to be suffered for . . . we find such a course as this to be greatly prejudicial to the state.” Winthrop’s explanation of the why transforms
the nature of his motivation and concern. His concern for the state does not negate the preceding outrage; rather, it is the source of his outrage. It’s not that gender isn’t a prominent and even crucial issue throughout the examination, but that, when taken in context with the rest of the transcript, it becomes clear that gender is still an inferior concern put into service of a much more alarming problem. Gender is a less significant anxiety employed to facilitate the resolution of the primary threat—the religious and political stability of the community. A few kooky Antinomian women talking revolutionary heresy amongst themselves present no great threat to the religious hierarchy and politics of the commonwealth. Start instructing the men, though, and one starts influencing societal structure and perhaps even civic policy. This is the potential threat that could prove “greatly prejudicial to the state.” Had anyone been carrying on such meetings, propagating Antinomian ideas that undermined the order and practice of the local ministry/political authority, woman or not, it would have elicited a governmental reaction. Though undoubtedly the text demonstrates an added measure of outrage that a woman—who should be off submissively yielding to something somewhere—is the source of this Antinomian nonsense, the fact remains that her gender merely aggravates the situation and grants the paternal Elders a greater sense of duty in bringing the hammer down. Gender here is an issue that appears central but is, in fact, peripheral. Her sex simply fans the flames of the problem; it was never the cause of the fire.

Scholarly reflection on this period’s historical record supports the same conclusions drawn from the governor’s revealing language in the trial—that the Elders’ concerns are not motivated by some patriarchal need to police gender roles but by social and political interests. The legacy of the Antinomian Controversy is not so much an early blip on the timeline of the battle for gender equality as it is an ideological upset that challenged the very foundations of religious and socio-political authority. It is worth considering what historical hindsight reveals about the lasting effects of Hutchinson’s bold move in challenging the theological opinions of local leadership. Professor Michelle Burnham, investigating the historical watermarks left behind by the powerfully influential Antinomian movement, notes that it marked “the earliest large-scale social, political, and theological crisis in the Massachusetts Bay Colony” (338). Burnham identifies Hutchinson and her followers as having incited a “social, political, and theological crisis,” not an equal rights dilemma. While Hutchinson’s demonstration of courage and cleverness certainly deserves a
place in the annals of feminism, the fact remains that her bold challenge is still regarded primarily as a social or political one.

The impact that the socio-political tumult had on the commonwealth created the sort of waves that still allow scholars to sift through texts of the period and readily identify them as pre- or post-Antinomian Controversy. The social uproar “generated a significant number and variety of documents that are noteworthy for their anxious insistence on the stability of the colonial community of Massachusetts and the coherence of its religious mission” (Burnham 338). As an Early American scholar, Burnham’s review of the period’s primary sources observes significant evidence of what looks an awful lot like overcompensating. Following the Hutchinson episode, civic and religious leaders suddenly felt the urge to affirm and reaffirm the “stability of the colonial community.” One doesn’t feel the need to repeatedly convince others that all is well unless there exists a dissenting opinion on the subject. The scramble of the leadership to assuage the worries of any who might read accounts of the colony’s instability following the controversy demonstrates precisely the sort of insecurity and vulnerability they hoped to mask. Leaders of the colony were anxious to preserve the façade of “all is well” in order to avoid endangering the future of their whole enterprise. Thus thoughtful scholarship of the historical record surrounding the controversy reveals the degree to which Hutchinson’s Antinomianism socially unsettled and politically undermined the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Professor Tobin’s argument focuses rather single-mindedly on what it regards as a display of Puritan sexism, distracting from the heart and substance of Anne Hutchinson’s trial in which gender is an aggravator rather than the motivator. Gender is irrefutably part of the issue, just not the cause of it. Additionally, as a historical perspective on the Antinomian Controversy illustrates, Hutchinson’s legacy tends far more toward the socio-political than toward an arena of gender equality. The transcript reveals that the Elders and Governor Winthrop’s principal concern is not that a woman has been engaged in activities unbefitting to her sex, but that a member of the commonwealth commenced an enterprise that threatened the religious and socio-political stability of the community. A final illustration of the Elders’ commitment to subordinate all things to the will of political and societal order is evidenced in a particular appeal by Hutchinson to Winthrop and the Elders that seems difficult to contest: “Must not I then entertain the saints because I must keep my conscience.” Hutchinson merely asks why it is she cannot be permitted to follow the dictates of her own conscience and host an assembly of friends to
discuss issues of theology and spirituality. Winthrop’s response is decisive: “If you do countenance those that are transgressors of the law you are in the same fact.” True, the governor’s reaction is not without logic. A person cannot expect to harbor criminals or criminal activity without being held responsible themselves. Yet, alleged criminality of Hutchinson’s activities aside, Winthrop is also saying something else with his response: One can keep one’s conscience, so long as it promotes the interests of the commonwealth. Hutchinson’s activities became too politically inconvenient for the Elders to allow any longer not because Puritans are sexist, but because preserving the societal integrity of the city upon a hill is more important than any one of its members. Thus, the conclusion to be drawn from the Antinomian episode is not that gender was wholly irrelevant to the proceedings. On the contrary, Winthrop’s language was occasionally inflected with patriarchal frustration that a woman, not just anyone, would dare cause such a heretical tumult. However, had Hutchinson been a man—sewing Antinomian ideas throughout the commonwealth and undermining local clergy as well as civic authorities—the Elders would have responded just as decisively. It is tremendously important to honor the societal advances in civil rights and gender equality, and concern for a past in which many of the civil liberties we presently enjoy are absent is, indeed, healthy. Where we err is in projecting a modern social understanding into the past, assuming that our priorities must certainly have been theirs.
Works Cited


In recent times, much of the critical scholarly discussion surrounding Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has assumed a postcolonial perspective. At the center of such discussion, as Rowland Wymer argues, resides the distinction between Prospero and Caliban as colonizer and colonized respectively, essentially transporting the play to the context of New World colonization (3). Such a focus, while important and intellectually beneficial, looks past a number of even more basic questions and issues that the text raises. Beyond any regard of the play as a postcolonial text, it can be more fundamentally regarded as a political play, or even, as R. Grant puts it, a play “all about politics” (244). Indeed, as Wymer points out, “A reading which emphasizes questions of power, legitimacy, [and] conquest . . . need look no further than the . . . world in which the play is literally set” (1). Let us then follow this course—one that emphasizes and examines such political questions without any postcolonial recontextualization. Instead of imposing any specific political theory or philosophy on the play, let us instead attempt to impose the play on political theory and philosophy.

Due to the play’s thoroughly political nature, we might easily wonder what Shakespeare’s own opinions were regarding politics and the government. We could ask, for example, what Shakespeare’s thoughts were on the origins and the derivation of political authority. Or what, according to him, gave it
legitimacy and lent to its sustainability? How did he feel about real-life political situations that paralleled those of his plays’ characters? While it remains ultimately impossible to know Shakespeare’s mind on these matters, The Tempest readily provides insights into these questions when read as a political treatise. Such a reading becomes even more compelling when one considers that it was not written in a historical political vacuum. Almost exactly one hundred years before The Tempest was first produced, Niccolò Machiavelli, the “founder of modern political science,” produced his most famous work, the political treatise The Prince. Commonly held as a “teacher of evil” and referred to by Shakespeare himself as “murderous Machevil” in Henry VI, Machiavelli and his treatise, which advised how to “acquire power, create a state, and keep it” (Mansfield), provide a philosophical precedent to which Shakespeare’s philosophy, as we shall see, provides nearly diametric opposition. Having first explored Shakespeare’s philosophy in full, I will more fully explore the contrast between Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s nearly contemporaneous philosophies at the end of my analysis.

Considering the play’s ending and conclusions, Prospero, the rightful duke of Milan, lies at the center and as the foundation of its political commentary. While he, like any Shakespearean hero, exhibits flaws and imperfections as both a person and a leader, he ultimately proves to be just, moral, and merciful. Though the perspectives of varying theories may render him a cruel despot, a dominating colonizer, an evil magus with “near-demonic” power (Cefalu 105), or otherwise, it’s hard to deem him anything but justified—as he likely was to Shakespeare—without the invocation of anachronistic ideas and ideals. Likewise, though certain theories may raise doubts about the reliability of his narration, we will, in lieu of the confirmation of his benevolence and goodness at the play’s conclusion, lend his words our trust and confidence.

Thus presupposing Prospero as the play’s political hero and embodied representation of its political ideals, while simultaneously demonstrating his true heroic nature, I argue that The Tempest establishes the framework for a new and uniquely Shakespearean political philosophy. To get to the heart of this philosophy, I will read the play as a dramatic political treatise that poses and answers very important political questions. For this reading, I will examine the topics of the derivation, legitimacy, and sustainability of socio-political authority as shown through the political relationships between Prospero and Caliban; Ariel, Miranda, the shipwrecked Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian; and the relation between Stefano, Trinculo, and Caliban. Undertaking such
examination, I will demonstrate that *The Tempest*’s philosophy ultimately venerates and vindicates authority based on legitimate succession, familial loyalty, just retribution, moral obligation, intelligence, and justly exercised power, while simultaneously demonizing and deconstructing authority based on unjust usurpation, opportunism, immorality, vengeance, and unjustly exercised power. Echoing the sentiments of fellow critic Elliot Visconsi, I do not wish to “overturn the powerful colonial readings of the play, but instead [hope] to thicken our account of the play’s metropolitan ambitions” (3). We shall call this newly discovered theory Tempestian Political Philosophy.

In relation to postcolonial readings of *The Tempest*, many scholars focus on the influence of William Strachey’s account of the Bermuda shipwreck on the play. However, as Wymer points out, “what may have primarily interested Shakespeare in [this] account . . . was not so much the prospect of contact with the New World and its inhabitants, as the breakdown of authority which occurred in the group of colonists who were shipwrecked” (10). This perspective rings true considering that, as the play begins, all forms of traditional government and authority are broken down and left to be filled by newly derived replacements. The first scene of Act I sees the breaking storm and the breaking down of the authority preexistent on the ship. As the wind rages and the waves roar, the emergency and danger present renders all authority impotent: “What cares these roarers for the name of king?” Gonzalo’s frustration swells as the Boatswain disregards his “authority” and deliberately pays no heed to “whom [he] hast aboard” (1.1.17). Shortly after, we learn from Ariel that he has “dispersed them ’bout the isle” and cast them on foreign soil (1.2.221). Here King Alonso and Duke Antonio have no claims to power or dominion. Immediately following the turmoil aboard the ship, we also hear of Prospero’s own political downfall. He recounts to Miranda how, by trusting too much in his brother Antonio, he was betrayed, cast out, and cast ashore on the island. Act I thus presents two parallel stories of authority’s collapse and breakdown. It leaves a vacuum of political power that Shakespeare proceeds to fill.

After the collapse of all authority, we begin to learn of the emerging power structures taking its place. Thus our first critical question arises, regarding derivation of political authority. In other words, what sources and foundations of authority does the play explore? We quickly learn that Prospero reigns as the absolute ruler of the island; but how, from such lowly beginnings, did he gain that power? Caliban relates his perspective by stating:
“This Island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first, thou strok’st me and made much of me, would give me water with berries in’t, and teach me how to name the bigger light and how the less, that burn by day and night; and then I loved thee, and showed thee all the qualities o’th’ isle... For I am all the subjects that you have, which first was mine own king” (1.2.334-345).

Thus Prospero’s authority over Caliban and the island originally stems from a mutual regard, even friendship or love, that the two shared after Prospero’s arrival. Caliban, lacking any challenge to his authority, acts as the de facto leader of the island until someone comes whose intelligence naturally gives him a position of preeminence. Yet Prospero does not use this potential edge of authority to usurp him. After Caliban’s account, Prospero quickly retorts, “I have used thee, filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee in mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate the honour of my child” (1.2.348-351). Prospero had an implicitly peaceful agreement with Caliban until the latter violated said agreement when he attempted to violate Miranda. Here we learn that Prospero’s authority only becomes supreme when forced to suppress the other’s crimes. Rather than exhibiting any form of opportunism, he becomes the island’s new de facto ruler in order to enact justice. While his supernatural abilities here go unmentioned, we can infer that they were the means that Prospero used to subdue the criminal Caliban. Indeed, as Caliban later asserts, “I say by sorcery he got this isle; from me he got it” (3.2.50-51). Therefore, we can conclude that Prospero’s original authority over the island derives both from his just retribution of Caliban and the supernatural power with which he exercised said retribution.

Similarly Prospero’s authority over Ariel, though also contingent upon Prospero’s sorcerous magical abilities of control, does not appear to be wholly founded upon them. Caliban thinks that, without his books, Prospero “hath not one spirit to command” and that “they all do hate him as rootedly” (3.2.88-90) as he does, but this doesn’t appear to be the case with Ariel. Though Prospero’s power or art was used to free Ariel, as he relates, “It was mine art, when I arrived and heard thee, that made gape the pine and let thee out” (1.2.291-93), the basis of his authority over Ariel seems to derive instead from some sort of moral obligation as the “right of the liberator” and “rests, we might say, on imputed contract” (Grant 252). In the case of Ariel, Prospero’s authority initially stems from his power and abilities but on a more fundamental level from a morally incurred debt.
Apart from Caliban and Ariel, Prospero’s authority over Miranda and the shipwrecked castaways needs consideration. Unlike Caliban and Ariel, in whose cases Prospero’s authority resists reduction to a single factor, Prospero’s authority over Miranda finds basis purely on his position as her father and member of her family, while his power over Ferdinand, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, and the rest of the castaways is based solely on his ability to exert power over them. Through his power, they are brought to the island in the first place, are held on it, and are eventually able to return home. Yet, until now, we have overlooked a very important question: If Prospero derives his political authority primarily from his supernatural abilities, from whence does he receive these abilities?

Though multiple references are made to Prospero’s righteously exercised supernatural abilities, very little about them is stated explicitly. Upon his banishment from Milan, he receives from the beneficent Gonzalo many of the precious books in his possession. In Act I, Scene 2, it becomes clear that he was deeply studious and well-educated in the liberal arts even before his banishment. Caliban first draws the connection between his books and his power, declaring that “without them, he’s but a sot,” and so it would appear that his learning directly relates to his “art” (3.2.87-88). Whether his power extends directly or indirectly from his books, they act as the “symbols of [his] knowledge” and, as Zolfaghrkhan and Heshmatifar argue, its basis as well (7). Moreover, while he also employs his staff and coat in his magical practice, they seem to be mere mediums through which the power manifests itself rather than the sources of it. Indeed Prospero’s authority comes from his magic, which in turn comes from his extensive learning.

Yet Prospero is not the only one who seizes new authority. In the accounts of the past as recalled by Prospero, his brother Antonio takes and usurps the dukedom of Milan. Returning to the present, Stefano, the king’s butler, also gains authority over Caliban. Both cases, as negative foils to Prospero’s power, merit examination. We learn from Prospero that he, in complete confidence, leaves the governing of Milan to Antonio while he “neglect[ed] worldly ends” and “dedicated [himself] to the bettering of [his] mind” (1.2.89-90). He devotes himself to personal and intellectual affairs while turning all civic affairs to his brother. Believing himself to be the true duke, Antonio then conspires with Alonso, King of Naples, to overthrow and banish Prospero. He succeeds in this dark endeavor and gains his desired power. His power derives from nothing more than treachery, illegitimacy, and usurpation and is motivated by the
ambition for glory and material possession, as he has already been in charge of the governing of Milan.

Pertaining to the derivation of authority in the case of Stefano and Caliban, very little substance or depth exists in the newfound authority. Seeing Stefano as a source of new hope for vengefully tearing down Prospero's authority as well as a provider of “celestial liquor,” Caliban readily commits himself to this new slavery. In return for alcohol and freedom from Prospero, he will grant Stefano his servitude, kingship over the island, and Miranda as his bride. Punished at the hands of Prospero and made desperate by his dire circumstances, Caliban holds a strong reverence for the perceived beneficence he receives at the hands of Stefano. Thus Stefano's power over Caliban develops simply from a very weak and even immoral quid pro quo alliance. It comes from nothing more than the perceived ability of Stefano to give the liberty and liquor that Caliban desires and the ability of Caliban to facilitate Stefano's takeover and to answer to Stefano's whims.

Therefore, taking all accounts of the derivation of authority into account, what does The Tempest have to say on the matter? With Prospero as our guiding touchstone, we must conclude that authority is rightly derived when based on moral obligation of subject to benefactor; that authority is negated by crime and justified when relegated to the enactor of justice and retribution; that deference to family and father are correct; and finally that authority is properly based on knowledge, wisdom, and learning. This presents a significant departure from Machiavelli, whose Prince contains a chapter entitled “Concerning Those Who Become Princes By Evil Means.” Therein he, far from condemning such wicked derivations as Shakespeare does, actually offers advice on how to achieve them. However, in open opposition to such philosophies, Tempestian Political Philosophy clearly establishes that authority is wrongly derived when based on selfish usurpation, material ambition, or the simple ability to satisfy base wants.

We must now concern ourselves with the question of whether Prospero's power is legitimate or, in other words, if it proves to be necessary and justified, while contemplating if he truly has the right to authority. If he does, we must consider what this suggests about the legitimization of power in general. To provide an answer to this second very critical question of political legitimacy, let us begin with the very controversial authoritative relationship between Prospero and Caliban. As the veritable epicenter of most postcolonial criticism of The Tempest, hardly any scholarly consensus exists on the nature and morality of this relationship. As we have discussed, rather than a forced and
opportunistic takeover, the shift of power from Caliban to Prospero’s can be seen as one of just necessity. Given such a takeover, Prospero’s authority already proves its legitimacy to a great degree, yet more can be said in his favor. Having forfeited his authority on a moral basis, Caliban has rightfully lost his dominion of the island. Prospero’s initial takeover, as well as his continued dominance, is purely retributive and defensible. While he benefits from Caliban’s subjugation, the benefit is not, as Grant points out, “a utilitarian justification of his slavery” but rather “merely . . . a consequence of it” (252). As Caliban’s “attempt on Miranda, and his lack of remorse, puts him beyond the pale of civil association,” his treatment at the hands of Prospero is “duly justified: rationally, on . . . grounds of self-defense, and morally, from breach of trust and ingratitude” (251). While Prospero may admittedly act roughly and cruelly within the bounds of his dominant relation to Caliban, the bounds themselves are justified and legitimate.

Though similar to Caliban in terms of his slave-like usage, Prospero’s authority over Ariel rests, as we have discussed, upon an almost purely moral basis. Considering that Prospero freed Ariel from his former imprisonment and thereby did him an infinite amount of good, it makes sense that Ariel would wish to serve his benefactor. Yet, from Ariel’s pleas for freedom, his service is clearly no longer purely voluntary. Since Prospero literally freed Ariel from imprisonment, he “is thus entitled to treat the relationship from his side as at least partially one of contract” (252). If viewed contractually, Ariel’s position takes the dimensions of a servant or bondman rather than a slave. If viewed in such light, it becomes easy to fathom how a seventeenth century political philosophy would not take issue with such a relation. Beyond this, I would suggest that the relation, as seen as a manifestation of our developing theory, acts as a declaration of moral civil obligation. When the sovereign authority is truly beneficial, as Prospero indeed is to Ariel, moral obligation (rather than a legal one) arises on the part of the ruled to submit to authority.

While Prospero’s authority over Miranda requires nothing more than an understandable deference to traditional patriarchy for justification, his power over the castaways requires a bit more legitimizing. As we have discussed, the first enabling factor of his power over Ferdinand, Alonso, Antonio, and the rest comes from his supernatural abilities—but what justifies it? The answer to this question rests on a better definition of what constitutes those supernatural abilities. In contrast to Sycorax’s dark magic, Prospero’s magic is of a different sort. As Stephen Greenblatt explains in his introduction to the play, a distinct
difference exists between the high magus who “conjoin[s] contemplative wisdom with virtuous action in order to confer great benefits upon his age” and the dark magic used by Sycorax (366). Considering that Prospero uses his magic for ultimately just and moral ends, I contend that he is of the previous magical variety and is therefore justified in his exercise of authority over the others.

Beyond his legitimization through power and abilities, the facts of his study and intelligence also contribute to his authority. His position as a “scholar and a teacher” who “shapes the knowledge and develops the obedience of his subjects through a pedagogical process” also serves effectively to increase his legitimacy as acting sovereign of the island (Zolfagharkhani 9). As we see at the play’s conclusion, not only does he educate his more permanent subjects Miranda and Caliban, but his motive for the island-bound detention of the castaways is to teach them a moral lesson. This leads us to further consider the legitimacy rendered him by his position of moral justice. For Greenblatt, the “legitimacy of Prospero’s power . . . depends on his claims to moral authority” (367). Considering the aforementioned unjust derivation of Antonio’s authority, Prospero’s power over the islanders as a means through which justice was served renders that power thoroughly legitimate.

Prospero’s legitimacy thus established, let us quickly review the contrasting illegitimacy of the other power structures in the play. As we have mentioned, the reign of Sycorax was maintained by supernatural abilities, much like Prospero’s. Yet from references to her as that “damned witch,” her banishment from Algiers, her use of “sorceries terrible,” and her alleged union with the devil, her magical abilities are clearly of a different kind and from a different source. Her magic is a force that is, by its very nature, evil. While her authority could be considered morally unjust and illegitimate on that basis alone, the details of Ariel’s imprisonment incriminate her even further. Likewise Antonio’s authority, with its morally dubious origins, immediately renders itself illegitimate. Yet unlike Sycorax and Antonio, Stefano is no villain. Though he is not a “good” character, he occupies a comic place rather than a villainous one. However, what renders his authority illegitimate is being simply “charismatic’ . . . it is self-evidently not moral, and being so ludicrously inefficient, can hardly be called rational” (Grant 249). Having nothing more than liquor and charisma, he is sorely unequipped to exercise authority over anyone. Furthermore, his part of the bargain with Caliban originates from the agreement to enact bloody vengeance, stripping it even further of any possible moral legitimacy.
Having considered the legitimacy of the play’s relationships of authority, we are now in a position to cast further light upon its political philosophy. As with our examination of the play’s commentary on the derivation of authority, we conclude once again that authority is legitimate when set against criminality, when used for the purpose of self-defense, and when sustained by moral obligation. Furthermore, according to Shakespeare’s Tempestian Political Philosophy, authority is legitimized by righteous powers and abilities, through study and intelligence, and as a medium through which moral justice is exacted. Contrarily it renders all immorality—variably manifested through Sycorax’s dark abilities, Antonio’s corruption, and Stefano’s charismatic and vengeful opportunism—as an illegitimizing agent. Directly contradicting Machiavelli and *The Prince*, which considers authority as legitimate as long as it can be maintained, any power that is not purely moral is likewise illegitimate (Mansfield).

Finally, having discussed the derivation and legitimacy of political authority, I come to the third critical question of the sustainability of power. Setting aside Prospero’s authority for a moment, I will return first to all cases of spurious and unsustainable power that we have already discussed. The first of these ultimately unsustainable cases, though long maintained, is the authority of Antonio as the Duke of Milan. For twelve years, Antonio has held this office; yet at the hands of Prospero, it returns to its rightful place. Is it providence or cosmic justice that leads to the eventual downfall of Antonio’s reign, or is it simply Prospero’s power exercised justly and opportunistically? Whichever it may be, the lack of sustainability of Antonio’s unjustly usurped power plainly reveals itself through its failure. When challenged by its legitimate possessor Prospero, Antonio readily yields it rather than have it taken from him. As Alonso very willingly and Antonio very hesitantly come to acknowledge their enacted injustice, they make no qualms with Prospero’s rightful claim. Usurpation crumbles in the face of justice, and Tempestian Political Philosophy once again rejects it. Like Antonio’s dukedom, Stefano’s perceived authority quickly crumbles. As a result of its weak derivation and illegitimacy, it breaks down just as quickly as it was formed. While “Caliban gets tired of Stefano as soon as Stefano shows himself incapable of concentrating on the plot against Prospero” (Grant 250), the weak and immoral authority wanes until it completely shatters when Prospero and Caliban meet in Act V. Here Caliban realizes “what a thrice-double ass” he’s been to take the “drunkard for a god” and so foolishly submitted to his authority (5.1.299-300).
As for Prospero's authority, which shows correct and just derivation and legitimacy, we may now look at the sustainability thereof. Yet, having discussed the means by which he holds his power, we need look no further than those attributes of Prospero's that we've already examined. With his great supernatural power, intelligence, general virtue, moral uprightness, and ability to force and coerce when necessary, it makes perfect sense that his power could be sustained throughout his entire lifetime. Though he has agreed to release Ariel, and eventually pardons and presumably leaves Caliban to his own governing, his authority over them before their release is unchallenged. Since the castaways recognize his power and authority, both as the rightful duke and as ruler of the island, his reign conceivably would have continued had they stayed upon the island. Thus, having an element of moral legitimacy to his reign recognized by the castaways, it is unlikely that he would have faced opposition. If any sort of rebellion had taken place, Prospero's powers would allow him to suppress it quickly. Thus the play has shown that not only is immoral authority illegitimate but also lacks sustainability. That which establishes itself on morally problematic ground, in any of the possible ways heretofore discussed, makes itself vulnerable to quick defeat and destruction.

Beyond what we have been able to glean through these analyses of the cases of derivation, legitimacy, and sustainability in the play, Prospero's greatest political act is his abdication from absolute supremacy. Though he can use his power to maintain complete control not only over Ariel and Caliban but the castaways as well, the fact that he mercifully releases both Ariel and Caliban and only maintains what the castaways legally owe him opens perhaps the greatest window into Shakespeare's own philosophy. Ideal leadership does not overreach beyond necessity or seize power where seizure proves unnecessary. As with the Roman dictator who, before the times of Julius Caesar, held absolute power only in times of necessity, Prospero very righteously steps down from his place of dominance and avoids the fate of that other Shakespearean ruler.

Although we have examined the questions of derivation, legitimacy, and sustainability separately and in that order in this paper, we could have formulated our central question a different way. We may have asked, “How is legitimate authority derived and sustained in *The Tempest*?” instead. Or we could have asked, “How, once derived, is authority legitimized and sustained?” Yet, regardless of how we articulate the question, the central political thrust of *The Tempest* remains the same. In the end it reveals the same political perspectives and values. Following a mere century after Niccolò Machiavelli's
The Prince, a work which advocated that a leader “forgo the standard of ‘what should be done’” and that he “must learn how not to be good,” The Tempest’s strong emphasis on adherence to morality represents a strong political statement against such philosophies (Mansfield). In further contrast to Machiavelli’s philosophy, which includes the famous idea that “ends justify the means,” and reveres the leader who criminally seizes authority, The Tempest has conclusively venerated authority based on familial loyalty, criminal justice, just retribution, moral obligation, intelligence, learning, and righteously exercised powers and abilities. It has simultaneously condemned and denounced authority based on unjust usurpation, opportunism, immorality of any sort, vengeance, and evil or unjustly exercised powers and abilities. Furthermore, starkly contrasting the positive emphasis Machiavelli put on glory, absolutism, and “well used” cruelty, it emphasizes temperance of authority, limits of power, and mercy toward subjects. Set starkly against Machiavelli’s political precedent, Shakespeare’s contribution to the world of political philosophy and his participation in the conversation becomes apparent. While we may never have any certainty of Shakespeare’s political opinions, this look into his Tempestian Political Philosophy provides a significant clue to the question and reveals the basic foundation for a uniquely Shakespearean political theory.
Works Cited


The Conflict of Charity, Disability, and the Moral Exchange in *Treasure Island*

*Brittany Bruner*

Introduced by Billy Bones’s first warning “to look out for ‘the seafaring man with one leg’” (5), Long John Silver is arguably the most memorable character in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. Stevenson devised the character of Long John Silver by observing his friend William Ernest Henley, a dynamic and genial individual who lost a leg from tuberculosis. Jenni Calder writes that “Louis admired immensely Henley’s courage in the face of pain and boredom, and his determination to carve himself out a literary career under adverse circumstances” (93). Long John Silver embodies this same type of determination to succeed despite disability, but he lacks the positive qualities that made Henley such a positive and dynamic part of Stevenson’s life. Instead, Silver becomes a renowned, infamous villain devoid of morals. This conception of Silver took place through a unique experiment in which Stevenson decided “to deprive [Henley] of all his finer qualities and higher graces of temperament, to leave him with nothing but his strength, his courage, his quickness, and his magnificent geniality, and to try to express these in terms of the culture of a raw tarpaulin” (“My First Book” 190). Thus, through an amoral depiction of
Henley, the infamous Long John Silver—with his wooden leg, glib tongue, raw determination, and thirst for power—was born.

Much scholarship focuses on how Silver’s amoral nature creates his villainous side, but surprisingly little focuses on how Silver’s disability plays into his characterization as a villain. Much of Silver’s villainy takes place within the context of a moral exchange, which is the expectation that a recipient of charity offer some kind of moral return. If the recipient of charity offers no moral return, the giver often removes charity. Silver’s disability attracts charity, even though it may be unwarranted, from other characters. The textual (and to the other characters, visual) presence of Silver’s disability defines him throughout the novel because he is viewed as a spectacle worthy of either sympathy or rejection according to his compliance with the rules governing moral exchange. However, Silver turns against those who offer him charity, manipulating these acts of charity until they separate giver and receiver to reveal their shared motivation for selfish gain. Silver’s disability may thus be regarded as the center of conflict in the novel because both Silver and his benefactors expect to obtain power by controlling both the other party’s charitable acts and the moral exchange, leaving neither party with the ability to attain full power.

It is necessary to note the importance of Silver’s disability as a central theme in the novel, because his disability largely influences how the characters perceive and interact with Silver. Much of the description regarding Silver’s actions throughout the novel includes references to his disability. For example, Jim’s first description of Silver at the pub introduces him as a disabled working man. Jim says, “His left leg was cut off close by the hip, and under the left shoulder he carried a crutch, which he managed with wonderful dexterity, hopping about upon it like a bird. He was very tall and strong, with a face as big as a ham—plain and pale, but intelligent and smiling” (42). He describes Silver’s disability but also comments on his ability to overcome the disability. Jim paints a picture of a crippled, amiable character who elicits tender feelings from both Jim and those who interact with Silver, which shows he can be a positive influence because he works despite his disability. In this situation, his perseverance is lauded because he overcomes his physical struggles. However, Silver’s hard work is often overlooked because the characters focus on his impaired state, pitying him for having a disability rather than recognizing his strengths. This oversight is most apparent in others’ reactions to Silver’s physical impairment. For example, when Silver is working on the ship, Jim states that he “carrie[s] his crutch by a lanyard around his neck” (53), moving with stability and certainty.
Additionally, even in adverse weather, Silver moves across the deck with great efficiency and hands himself “from one place to another, now using the crutch, now trailing it alongside by the lanyard, as quickly as another man could walk” (54). Here Silver effectively performs his tasks, and his physical abilities seem to match those of the able-bodied men. However, Jim further asserts, “Yet some of the men who had sailed with him before expressed their pity to see him so reduced” (54). Despite Silver’s capability to competently perform his duties, the men still focus on Silver’s disability and pity him for it.

In further analyzing the effects of such pity, it is interesting to note that in *Treasure Island* pity and charity are used to separate giver and receiver, leaving the giver with the power to bestow to or withhold resources from whomever the giver feels is or is not worthy. In connection with this, Martha Stoddard Holmes suggests that, in Victorian culture, the mere visibility of disability identified those deserving charity. She observes,

> Traditionally viewed as the “unquestionably deserving” element among the financially dependent because they were assumed to be dependent in all other ways as well, they were often placed at the center of fictional and nonfictional narratives of suffering and charitable relief. As innocently afflicted objects, they inspired a flood of tender feelings and alms that redounded to the donor’s credit, yielding the double satisfaction of having followed in Christ’s footsteps and received the heartfelt gratitude of the feeble recipient. (113-14)

This view compliments the givers but overlooks the disabled people’s potential, reducing them to objects requiring aid. This alienating objectification is masked by the do-gooders’ perceived sense of importance for following Christ and receiving gratitude from the less fortunate. That objectification is seen in the novel, as Long John Silver’s actions are often belittled in connection with his disability despite his proven abilities to lead and persuade others and to navigate the sea. Thus, while charity is often perceived as a positive thing, in the case of Long John Silver, it actually downplays the receiver’s ability to progress and be equal to able-bodied men. This reality becomes problematic for Silver, who has great ambition.

In addition to the giver’s feelings of self-importance, the positive implications of charity are challenged by the idea of a moral exchange; this challenge informs Holmes’s example of benefactors performing Christlike charity in exchange for gratitude (113-14), which is their moral return. Thus charity becomes a selfish act predicated on the presence of a moral return. Audrey
Jaffe also mentions a moral exchange in her analysis of scenes of sympathy. She first analyzes sympathy and charity in Victorian literature and links them with the idea that identity is formulated through capitalist exchange. Jaffe suggests that scenes of sympathy ostensibly occur in an “attempt to ameliorate social differences with assurances of mutual feeling and universal humanity” (15). However, Jaffe suggests that this attempted amelioration of social differences has an underlying motivation separate from creating a universal humanity. She argues that people identify themselves through giving economic charity in the attempt to connect with other humans on a universal level. However, this self-identifying situation is only functional if it is balanced by some kind of return. Jaffe writes, “Sympathy and charity situate the self in a hydraulic relation with other selves, in which a flow of funds in one direction represents a drain unless balanced by some—usually moral—return” (16). Although this criticism on economic charity may effectively inform scenes of sympathy in *Treasure Island*, her suggestion that the continual occurrence of sympathy and charity requires a moral return provides interesting insight into sympathy given to the disabled in the novel. Those who give sympathy expect the receiver to adopt their moral code. In *Treasure Island*, the moral exchange acts through reciprocity: the giver provides charity with the expectation that the receiver give back some kind of moral return such as gratitude, humility, or hard work.

This moral exchange is often practiced through giving and attaining money with the expectation that the receiver offer a moral return in exchange for money. This exchange also comes with the expectation that the giver will still keep most of his or her money and that the receiver will receive only that which he or she needs. This expectation is problematic if both parties try to maintain economic advantage. In *Treasure Island* most, if not all, of the characters are greedy for treasure, and, arguably, the title of Stevenson’s novel suggests that the main conflict ensues from economic greed. Such an interpretation would be informed by Jaffe’s argument about the economic charitable exchange. However, Long John Silver does not seem to be solely motivated by economic gain. For example, Jim overhears Silver tell the other crew members that Silver saved his money rather than squandering it like other pirates, suggesting that he does not need the treasure (57-58). Linda Dryden describes the most telling sign that Silver is not creating conflict solely for the treasure; she states that when Silver escapes at the end of the novel, he “is not overly greedy and only takes a few hundred guineas from the surviving adventurers when he could easily, most likely, have taken more” (18). Dryden suggests that Silver’s motivation to
gain power is not solely driven by money. Rather, Silver’s motivations for power are suggested by his desire to be more than a common crew member, which can be seen when he voices his frustration with Captain Smollett in the following conversation with the crew member Dick: “‘Why, we’re all seamen aboard here, I should think,’ said the lad Dick. ‘We’re all foc’s’le hands, you mean,’ snapped Silver. ‘We can steer a course, but who’s to set one? . . . If I had my way, I’d have Cap’n Smollett work us back into the trades at least’” (59-60). Silver’s desire to steer a course suggests that he wishes to lead and have control, but Smollett does not allow upward mobility on the ship. Thus, rather than creating conflict to obtain treasure, Silver creates conflict to elevate himself to be above, or at least equal to, the upper crew; he accomplishes this by using his disability to manipulate the charitable exchange.

However, before Silver can manipulate the charitable exchange to gain power, he must understand the gentlemen’s moral rules in connection with charity and sympathy. The gentility in Treasure Island present themselves as superior benefactors with the responsibility of determining morality and the proper situations in which to exercise sympathy. Thus moral cues become as important as visual cues in determining whom they deem worthy of charity. Stevenson questions the benevolent, selfless façade of such charity by introducing the gentility to amoral, maimed pirates who challenge the boundaries of traditional moral exchange. This conflict is first shown in the gentility’s interaction with Pew.

Pew plays into the moral exchange by acting the part of the sympathetic blind man through his noble display of humility and gratitude when he first arrives at the Admiral Benbow. He steps near the inn and says, “Will any kind friend inform a poor blind man, who has lost the precious sight of his eyes in the gracious defence of his native country, England, and God bless King George!” (17). Pew plays by the rules of the moral exchange by humbly calling himself a “poor blind man,” by showing gratitude for and complimenting the people who can help him, and by showing his loyalty to the country and the king. Jim performs his act of sympathy when offering Pew his hand. However, Pew manipulates this act of charity by forcing Jim to acquiesce to his (Pew’s) requests. After manipulating Jim into taking him to Bones, Pew drops his act of humility and gratitude (or his moral return) once he gains power and has the chance to procure the treasure map. With this new assertiveness, Pew and the other pirates storm through the streets as gentlemen on horses charge toward them to thwart their immoral actions. Unfortunately, left to fend for himself
without sight, Pew goes down the wrong path and is trampled to death by a horse despite the rider’s attempt to save him, causing his disability to become his downfall rather than his means to manipulate for gain. After witnessing the accident, Jim states, “I leaped to my feet and hailed the riders. They were pulling up, at any rate, horrified at the accident” (27). This scene elicits the proper sympathy from the horse riders for the shocking accident. However, Jim then tells his story of Pew’s ruthlessness, prompting one of the riders to say, “I’m glad I trod on Master Pew’s corns” (27). This statement suggests that these characters view charity as a means for a moral exchange because the riders are only sympathetic to the blind man until they discover that he was a greedy, conniving pirate. Then death becomes their ultimate form of power over him, showing that they control the moral exchange. At this discovery, the men act as moral judges, deem Pew unworthy of sympathy, and count his death in their favor.

This sense of moral superiority and authority to grant sympathy is expanded upon in Stevenson’s description of the upper class characters. He describes Dr. Livesey, a representation of the upper class, as “very stately and condescending” (29), which suggests that Livesey condescends to those around him. Even though the act of condescension was originally benevolent, Daniel Siegel notes that by the Victorian period,

\[
\text{to condescend was no longer to renounce but to make a show of renunciation; it was no longer to help others but to demean them for one's own gain. . . .}
\]

From literary works to the treatises and memoirs of philanthropic innovators, the condescension scene became an emblem of the limitations of charity, a ritual in which fantasies of help degenerated into visions of social collapse. (4)

In light of their perceived moral character, Livesey and his comrades feel justified in condescending to help those they perceive as less fortunate. This kind of condescension follows the moral exchange because charity in Treasure Island is given for gain, but that act also demeans others. Such an act of condescension would put Silver in a subservient position. However, Silver understands that the only way he will gain power is by first acquiescing to the condescension act. This acquiescence will get him out to sea and onto the island where he can then, through mutiny, assert his dominance.

The condescension scene takes place when Trelawney hires Long John Silver as sea cook and describes Silver in his letter to Dr. Livesey. Trelawney tells Livesey that he met Long John Silver, a well-connected, old sailor who “wanted
a good berth as cook to get to sea again” (38). When Silver meets Trelawney on the sea coast, he tells him that “he had hobbled down there that morning . . . to get a smell of the salt” (38), emphasizing his disability through the use of the word “hobbled” to evoke sympathy from Trelawney. Commenting on this incident, Trelawney writes, “I was monstrously touched—so would you have been—and, out of pure pity, I engaged him on the spot to be ship’s cook” (38). Despite the fact that Silver has been a successful sailor and a military man, Trelawney sees his job offer of the subservient position of sea cook as no more than an act of pity. Both parties utilize the exchange for selfish gain: Silver to get back to sea and into a position of power and Livesey to feel satisfied for offering charity while filling the sea cook position and finding, through Silver’s connections, hardworking crew members with whom he will not have to share the treasure.

Silver initially complies with the gentlemen’s moral exchange by being amiable, positive, and hardworking, and he appears to follow the gentlemen’s rules. Silver first establishes this perception by convincing the gentlemen that he is both hardworking and honest. He promises the gentlemen a moral return by representing the ideal disabled body because he perseveres despite his struggles and will inspire others to do the same. Sally Hayward describes this paradigm by analyzing Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, writing, “Demonstrating a perfect balance between a Christian morality and a Utilitarian, self-reliant politics, the disabled male body that ‘will work’ is a body that can inspire the able-bodied and disabled, middle- and working-class male into their own particular brand of right, useful, and Godly action” (66-67). Silver, in his ability to work despite struggles, would be such an example for the other crew members because he would motivate them to work hard. In this situation, not only would Silver be offering a personal moral return, he would also inspire others to offer their own returns. Thus the gentlemen offer merely a moment of charity toward Silver and receive a hardworking crew that will lead them toward treasure.

Combined with this hardworking attitude and ability to motivate others, Silver often acts and speaks honestly, a trait many characters comment on when Silver is first hired. When Silver recounts the story of seeing Black Dog in his pub, Jim describes the account as one of “the most perfect truth” (45), and later the doctor states that Silver and the captain are both honest men (50). The trust that Trelawney has developed for Silver because of Silver’s hard work and perceived honesty proves useful to Silver because Trelawney allows
him to choose the crew members, whom he handpicks from Flint’s past crew. Trelawney comments, “Long John even got rid of two out of the six or seven I had already engaged. He showed me in a moment that they were just the sort of fresh-water swabs we had to fear in an adventure of importance” (39). This comment shows Trelawney’s unwavering trust in Silver because Silver has offered him a display of moral values and the promise of a successful crew.

Through this setup, Silver secures his power play by conforming perfectly to the gentlemen’s rules of moral exchange until he approaches Treasure Island, where the rules will no longer be in effect. He keeps up this façade while he is out to sea. Even after Jim warns the upper crew of Silver’s plans, Silver plays the gentlemen by continuing his act of subservience. Jim states, “If an order were given, John would be on his crutch in an instant, with the cheeriest ‘Ay, ay, sir!’ in the world; and when there was nothing else to do, he kept up one song after another, as if to conceal the discontent of the rest” (71). Although the gentlemen recognize his act, his behavior protects him until he can separate from the honest crew because the gentlemen cannot accuse him of mutiny while he is offering them a moral return, even if it is false. By following the rules of their moral exchange, Silver binds the gentlemen into following their own constructed setup for charitable giving. Because of this constriction, the conflict does not arise until Silver explicitly challenges his position in the moral exchange.

When Silver is finally able to separate himself, he performs an adversarial flip by turning against the honest crew, gathering a mutinous crew, and overtly defying the moral exchange in order to claim power. Siegel describes the adversarial flip, stating, “In the battle for authority, it is occasionally the subordinate who condescends” (26). To show this phenomenon, he uses the example of Frankenstein’s monster flipping on Frankenstein. Siegel then continues, “Condescension is here at its adversarial peak. It is the vehicle whereby the creature reveals his dominance, and the word itself fires a semantic revolution after which the father and creator is no longer to be supplicated but simply tolerated” (26). This same exchange can be seen once Silver reaches the island because he challenges the position of the captain, the other gentlemen, and the honest men by placing himself above, or at least on equal ground with, the upper crew by taking a leadership position rather than humbly taking his lower position. Siegel compares moments like this to the idea of the gift exchange where both parties seek the advantage. He writes, “Condescension is often just this sort of competitive exchange, with both the one who condescends and the
one condescended to seeking to turn the encounter to advantage” (26). The upper crew sought the advantage by obtaining Silver’s help without offering him any promise of treasure, and Silver now seeks the advantage by claiming his “right” as captain and his “right” to seize claim to part of the treasure. This rebellion complicates the moral exchange because it is now only beneficial to Silver, which drives the conflict between Silver and the gentlemen since they all expect to benefit from the moral exchange.

In securing his new position, Silver capitalizes on his perceived physical weakness to manipulate the charitable exchange by using his body and his crutch to exert power over others, instead of using these symbols of dependency to elicit sympathy. Thus the original sources of condescension—his wooden leg and crutch—become a means for power. Jim describes Silver’s dexterity throughout much of the novel, and when Silver’s villainy and rebellion is at its peak during his mutiny, Silver’s abilities become the ultimate form of rebellion against the Victorian stereotype of disability and the moral exchange. Shortly after killing the crew member Alan, Silver has an altercation with the honest crew member Tom, who tries to touch Silver and reason with him. Jim describes the scene: “‘Hands off!’ cried Silver, leaping back a yard, as it seemed to me, with the speed and security of a trained gymnast” (76). This description seemingly eliminates any impediment caused by disability. Silver then dominates Tom with the crutch by paralyzing him, and he consolidates his power by brutally murdering Tom with a knife. Thus the disability that secured Silver’s subservient position on the ship also acts as a gateway to physical domination. Because he could not show physical domination on the island without his sea cook position, Silver’s manipulation of the condescension scene allows him to take power and create conflict by eliminating anyone who turns against him.

While this physical domination seems to leave Silver with the power, Captain Smollett reduces Silver’s physical power and his attempt to manipulate the moral exchange by refusing him any aid when Silver comes to demand an equal sharing of the treasure. For example, when Silver first goes to meet Smollett, no one will help him up the hill. Jim comments, “Silver had terrible hard work getting up the knoll. What with the steepness of the incline, the thick tree stumps, and the soft sand, he and his crutch were as helpless as a ship in stays” (105). This struggle challenges Silver’s attempt to manipulate the moral exchange because he still needs charity, because of his disability, from those who only offer charity in exchange for a moral return. Yet Jim further asserts, “But he stuck to it like a man in silence, and at last arrived before the captain”
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(105). Despite his struggles, Silver overcomes his disability to eventually meet with Smollett, but his power is diminished by the juxtaposition of his crippled body with Smollett’s able body. In this scene, Smollett drives the conflict by reducing Silver’s power, exposing his weakened physical state, and punishing him for refusing to offer a moral return.

When Silver finally arrives, Smollett is condescending toward him to assert his authority, but his condescension is no longer masked with charity since Silver has denied the moral exchange. This condescension creates conflict between Silver and Smollett because they both seek an advantage by stubbornly demanding things and refusing to accede to the other party. When Silver asks to go inside, Smollett replies, “Why, Silver . . . if you had pleased to be an honest man, you might have been sitting in your galley. It’s your own doing. You’re either my ship’s cook—and then you were treated handsome—or Cap’n Silver, a common mutineer and pirate, and then you can go hang!” (105-06). Here Smollett expects what Siegel describes as a reciprocal relationship: “Philanthropists argued that any help they offered, spiritual or temporal, could have value only in the context of a personal, reciprocal relationship between themselves and those in need” (19). When Silver denies the reciprocal relationship by creating mutiny, Smollett does not provide Silver with any other options to progress. This lack of options leaves Silver in a dichotomous state: either he can work in the subservient position of sea cook or he can rebel, in which case he will be denied aid and comfort. Through this dichotomous separation, Smollett hopes to control Silver and elicit moral behavior from him or to let him die—either situation leaves Smollett with the upper hand. Yet Silver will not accept this, and the meeting creates further separation and conflict between the two parties.

After the meeting no one helps Silver out of the stockade, which further escalates the conflict among Silver and the honest crew because it angers Silver and educes his threats. Silver becomes a spectacle of disability as “he crawl[s] along the sand till he g[ets] hold of the porch and c[an] hoist himself again upon his crutch” (108). Silver then curses at the honest team and tells them to laugh while they can before he kills them. Then finally, Jim explains, with “a dreadful oath, [Silver] stumbled off, ploughed down the sand, and was helped across the stockade, after four or five failures, by the man with the flag of truce” (108). This scene is particularly poignant because Silver is at his weakest moment here and will not make it across the stockade without help, unlike his first attempt to climb the hill where he manages by himself. However, only the man of truce offers to help him. Despite Silver’s earlier attempts to master other men with
physical domination, the lack of charity for his disabled state thrusts him back into the power of those who will only help him when they receive a moral return and can exert dominion. Silver, angry at this attempt to control him, works even harder to outwit the honest crew and find the treasure first.

One of Silver’s next plans to outwit the honest crew is to secure Jim’s loyalty for his protection in case Silver’s plans fail, because he knows the gentlemen will honor Jim’s loyalty according to their moral code, which will in turn save Silver. For example, when Silver fears that his side is going to lose and that his life is in jeopardy, he tells Jim, “They’re going to throw me off. But, you mark, I stand by you through thick and thin. . . . I see you was the right sort. I says to myself: You stand by Hawkins, John, and Hawkins’ll stand by you” (154). In this critical moment, Silver uses rhetoric to instill honesty into Jim in order to ensure Silver’s safety. Silver makes Jim promise that he will not escape: “Hawkins, will you give me your word of honour as a young gentleman . . . not to slip your cable?” (163). He not only establishes a trustworthy relationship with Jim, he also calls him a gentleman, encouraging him to adopt the moral codes that the gentlemen espouse. This promise will benefit Silver later and will allow him to continually gain power over his situation. Silver also reminds Jim to tell the doctor about how Silver saved Jim’s life. His manipulation of Jim is successful, because when the doctor attempts to get Jim to run away with him, Jim refuses, stating, “Silver trusted me; I passed my word, and back I go” (165). Through Jim, Silver secures himself against the wrath of the gentlemen—at least while they are still out at sea.

This loyalty is important for Silver to use as leverage for his survival because he fails to secure the treasure. However, Jim’s loyalty will only prove useful if Silver obtains a place on the boat with the other gentlemen, where he can continue to manipulate the moral exchange, until he can escape with some treasure. To secure this position, when Silver’s plans fail, he quickly abandons the other pirates and relentlessly follows Jim and Dr. Livesey when the doctor comes to save Jim. Jim states, “The work that man went through, leaping on his crutch till the muscles of his chest were fit to burst, was work no sound man ever equaled; and so thinks the doctor” (179). Silver’s extreme perseverance allows him to get on the boat with the survivors, where he goes back to being his hard-working, genial self. Jim observes, “Silver, though he was almost killed already with fatigue, was set to an oar, like the rest of us, and we were soon skimming swiftly over a smooth sea” (181). To ensure his prolonged survival, Silver immediately goes back to work, providing the required moral return.
Silver’s tactics work for his survival, because once his amoral, mutinous nature has been revealed, the gentlemen relinquish their charitable feelings toward Silver and only keep him alive because they value Jim’s loyalty. Silver recognizes this, stating, “It were fortunate for me that I had Hawkins here. You would have let old John be cut to bits, and never given it a thought, doctor,” to which Dr. Livesey cheerily replies, “Not a thought” (181). Livesey, who once pitied Silver for his disability, no longer cares about Silver’s fate and happily imagines his death. Here the doctor uses death as a means to gain power over those who do not exert morality. While it is difficult to empathize with Silver after his rebellion, it is interesting that the doctor can so readily change his concern for the well-being of the maimed pirate. Yet Silver still manipulates the situation by acquiescing to the gentlemen’s required moral behavior through his hard work and feigned humility until he is able to escape with a bag of coins. By playing by the rules of the gentlemen’s moral exchange, he dupes the other men once again and ultimately comes out with part of the treasure and an escape from the gallows.

Since both Silver and the gentlemen use Silver’s disability to gain advantage through a charitable exchange, neither party succeeds in gaining full power over the other. The gentlemen try to secure power through the paradigm of charity for the disabled, which automatically places benefactors in a superior position. As a result, the disabled receiver becomes a spectacle expected to offer a moral return. Hayward critiques this construct, arguing that “unfortunately, the disabled male was assigned no intrinsic value in and of himself in this economy and, consequently, remained a mere object, an extreme example of a manhood available for middle-class scrutiny” (67). In Treasure Island, Silver is scrutinized according to his moral performance, but because of his disability he is not given the opportunity to advance. The mere presence of his disability makes Silver an object of charity, and the only way that he can ever come out of his pitiable state is to manipulate charity itself.

However, the existence of a moral exchange within society prevents Silver from ever attaining his desired power and status in the world in which he lives, which is why he is only able to try for power on Treasure Island. Jim himself suggests that Silver could never actually have power on the mainland. Commenting on Silver’s fate, Jim says, “I daresay he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint. It is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small” (187). Of course, Silver’s small chance of comfort in another world has much to do with
the crimes he commits at sea. However, it is also likely that Silver could not exist in Jim and the gentlemen’s world because he wants to have leadership, power, and a prominent position, which he would have been denied had he stayed in his occupation of pub master with no pension. The gentlemen’s treatment of Silver’s disability and their manipulation of Silver for hard work and no promise of advancement drive conflict with Silver, who is motivated to be more than a simple sea cook. In the context of Treasure Island—a far off, mysterious world—the gentlemen cannot control Silver through the societal expectation of moral gain. However, Silver cannot manipulate the moral exchange once he comes back to England, so neither party ever succeeds in gaining full power.

Through this careful examination of both the real world and the world of Treasure Island, the conflict in the novel breaks down the preconceived binaries of selfless charity and weak disability and scrutinizes the effects of a limiting charitable exchange. The novel suggests that charity itself is an act of selfishness, with the givers always hoping to gain something for themselves. In the Victorian England in which Silver lived, the receivers of charity were often placed in subservient positions with no means for mobility because they were defined by their disabilities. Yet Long John Silver had the potential to be as successful as the gentility. Silver’s crippling came about from other people’s charity. He was driven to villainy and dealt with his limitations by removing himself from a world with laws so he could make his own rules. While he tried to manipulate the charitable exchange, this manipulation could only be done outside of a world with social constraints against those who were different. Long John Silver compels the reader to analyze the real implications behind charity in order to assess if it aids or cripples the disabled.
Works Cited


Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Meiosis of Americanism in *The Marble Faun*

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Such genres as popular movies and video games often contain images of American superiority but this imagery, it should be noted, has not developed overnight; rather, it has its roots in the history of literary representation. To throw some light on this background, this paper emphasizes political reading of literary texts. In particular, I aim to provide a political response to a poetic dilemma that *The Marble Faun* (1860) features. In the preface to *The Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) professes his intention to set his new novel in Italy, which he views as the proper land for Romance, “as a sort of poetic or faery precinct” (viii). The American novelist downplays his native land as inappropriate for his narrative, as it possesses “no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity” (viii). The authorial tendency develops a binary at the outset in which the Roman setting is upheld as the proper venue for laying the story and American materialism is denounced. A legitimate Romantic pursuit though it may sound, the binary is reversed in the course of the novel. *The Marble Faun*, which narrates the account of the visit of a group of American artists to Italy, provides a Manichean appraisal of Italy. While they amplify ancient Roman history and promote its art, the American visitors continually degrade contemporary Italy, and particularly Rome. Stereotypes of the “beggar-haunted”
and “idle” Italy and the “nervous and unwholesome atmosphere” of Rome develop, and contemporary Italians are presented pejoratively (189, 24). The only Italian characterization in the novel is maimed, imperfect in intellects, and animalistic. Additionally, unlike the Italians included in the novel, the American artists are presented as sophisticated observers of the Italian milieu who comprehend Roman art and history.

To respond to the aesthetic dilemma (namely, the prefatory sublimation vis-à-vis the actual degradation of Italy along with maintenance of American superiority) I will examine the novel’s intertextualities with European Orientalism. While European Romantics are fascinated with the ancient past of the Orient, they do not appreciate what they perceive to be its present mundane status. Although the novel is set in Italy, which is an occidental territory, I will argue that the American novelist deploys devices, themes, and strategies in dealing with the Italian setting and people that are characteristic of Orientalist writings. I maintain that the Gothic travelogue bears similarity to typical Orientalist trips, in which the target space is exoticized and its inhabitants are stereotyped. As such, I will also investigate Italian identity as an American construct and will seek to find out the ways in which such journey rituals as sightseeing serve the purpose of Othering and Orientalizing. Ultimately, I will examine Othering in connection with American imperialism, which hinges on a sense of American “greatness,” “ascendancy,” and “specialness” (Culture and Imperialism 8–9). Excerpts from the novel will demonstrate how American superiority and progress are promoted in contrast to contemporary Italian corruption and primitiveness. As such, I will show The Marble Faun to be (along with its contemporary novels such as Moby Dick) a textual corroboration of the American imperialism that started during the nineteenth century.

Initial Remarks

The prominent postcolonial critic Edward Said chiefly focuses on Franco-British Orientalism, in contrast to which, as he indicates, “the American understanding of the Orient will seem considerably less dense” (Orientalism 2), growing in the wake of the Second World War (1939–45). Also, postcolonial theory focuses on misrepresentation of the Orient as carried out by Westerners. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in the American demonstration of Italy, as is evident in The Marble Faun, Orientalist topoi and elements are recurrently employed. The
novel consequently serves to reflect and corroborate emerging Americanism. While Said restricts himself, and does so expediently, to the “set of questions to the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam” (*Orientalism* 16), it is worth examining the ways in which transatlantic Orientalism takes place in an inter-Occidental spatiality.

Henry James wrote of *The Marble Faun* in 1879 as “the most popular of Hawthorne’s four novels,” a text that became “part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome, and is read by every English-speaking traveller who arrives there, who has been there, or who expects to go” (165). James characterized the text as a popular travel guide, and his contemporary American author and critic William Dean Howells (1837–1920) announced that despite its indefinite close, “Everybody was reading it” (56). Moreover, it is known that Hawthorne was commissioned to Europe on a political post (1853–57) and afterwards wrote down his observations during a year and a half of residence in Italy. He reworked the notes into the Gothic travelogue that he published in 1860 in Britain, under the title of *Transformation: Or the Romance of Monte Beni*, and simultaneously in the United States as *The Marble Faun*. The travelogue features valuable factual information regarding Italian tourist sites. Thomas Woodson, editor of the first edition of *The French and Italian Notebooks*, has stated that Hawthorne’s visit to Rome in 1858 produced “the most sustained and detailed journalizing of [his] life” (903). Despite its being a Gothic composition, the novel thus carries credit as an allegedly dependable account of the Italian milieu. That *The Marble Faun* is widely read and trusted as an introduction to Italian setting and life for its contemporary American readers is reminiscent of European Orientalist writings as they provide fascinating and (purportedly) accurate accounts about the Orient. For instance, William Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* has been mentioned as a popular travelogue among a constellation of later writers including Gérard de Nerval (1808–55), Gustave Flaubert (1821–80), and Richard Burton (1821–90) (*Orientalism* 23). Hawthorne’s Gothicism in *The Marble Faun* further echoes accounts of Oriental travel writings that grew popular among Europeans in the late eighteenth century. It has been stated that among other Orientalists, “Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, for example, urged upon their countrymen, and upon Europeans in general, a detailed study of India because, they said, it was Indian culture and religion that could defeat the materialism and mechanism (and republicanism) of Occidental culture” (*Orientalism* 115). The German poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) viewed “the Orient
as the being the purest form of Romanticism” (137). Lord Byron (1788–1824), François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) made successful attempts at producing exotic accounts of the Orient. In a similar way, in the novel’s introduction Hawthorne highlights Italy as the proper land for Romance and fairy tales, in contrast to his native land (America) with its modern, mundane, materialist progressivism (viii). As the preface suggests, Hawthorne expresses uneasiness with the material progress he notices in his contemporary America and prefers instead a quixotic setting in which to place his narrative. The pursuit of enchantment was common to Romantics in general, and they would often realize it in the Orient. While he does not enact his narrative in the Orient as his European counterparts do, Hawthorne manages to recreate the Orient within the Occidental territory of Italy, as I will demonstrate in later examples.

Pertinent to Orientalization is the politics of travel writing that informs Hawthorne’s account. Said (who is cautious about the textual attitude as the outlook one forms toward a space based on a text and not through close contact) mentions travel guides as one of its manifestations: “Travel books or guidebooks are about as ‘natural’ a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book, . . . precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one’s equanimity” (Orientalism 93). Hawthorne establishes a textual attitude for his American audiences through his guide that (as contemporary reviews witness) fell to their favor, exciting their imaginations.

A textual attitude is more likely to be established as the travel writer attempts to deliver a detailed picture of the milieu as a gesture of inclusivity and objectivity. By the same token, Hawthorne provides detailed accounts of the Italian space, which include descriptions of everyday Roman life. About Orientalist writings, Said suggests that often a “work on the Orient . . . tries to characterize the place, of course, but what is of greater interest is the extent to which the work’s internal structure is in some measure synonymous with a comprehensive interpretation (or an attempt at it) of the Orient” (Orientalism 158; italics in original). Likewise, there is a constant effort in The Marble Faun to cast an exotic light on the scenery and to foreground those aspects of architecture that help to serve similar ends. In this respect Orientalization also helps to achieve the intended bizarreness or “interpretation” of the place. The Roman architecture is first associated with Oriental imagery as the granite obelisk in Piazza del Popolo is described in connection with its historical
construction “on the borders of the Nile” (81). This kind of Orientalization of architecture abounds in the novel. One of the visiting American artists, Kenyon, is hosted by their Italian companion, Donatello, in the latter’s castle of Monte Beni. During the stay, the American sculptor wanders about the castle and observes the following:

It was a square and lofty entrance-room, which, by the solidity of its construction, might have been an Etruscan tomb, being paved and walled with heavy blocks of stone, and vaulted almost as massively overhead. On two sides there were doors, opening into long suites of anterooms and saloons; on the third side, a stone staircase of spacious breadth, ascending, by dignified degrees and with wide resting-places, to another floor of similar extent. Through one of the doors, which was ajar, Kenyon beheld an almost interminable vista of apartments, opening one beyond the other, and reminding him of the hundred rooms in Blue Beard’s castle, or the countless halls in some palace of the Arabian Nights. (172)

Primarily, it is noteworthy that the space is being viewed and described from Kenyon’s vantage point and not Donatello’s, which gives the American visitor’s position prominence in the novel as he attempts to produce a detailed account of the architectural scene. Also, during the sightseeing the milieu is being gothicized as it is compared to an Etruscan tomb (the macabre being a recurrent ingredient in Gothic stories). More importantly however, the setting is Orientalized under the American’s gaze through the links that are established with The Arabian Nights, the text that contains Persian, Arabic, Indian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian folktales and received extensive attention from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalists. As a consequence, Donatello’s palace is assimilated with a typical Oriental castle and as such receives associations as being both stately and outlandish.

Aside from the castle, the Italian scenery in general is recurrently observed and commented upon by the American sculptor. While passing through an Italian village with Donatello on their way from the castle back toward Rome, Kenyon observes, “In Italy there are . . . no pleasant, vine-sheltered porches; none of those grass-plots or smoothly shorn lawns, which hospitably invite the imagination into the sweet domestic interiors of English life. Everything . . . [is] disheartening in the immediate neighborhood of an Italian home” (233). While Orientalization may do it obliquely, such statements as this directly place Italy in an inferior position vis-à-vis the observer’s lifestyle. Architectural
criterion

description, sightseeing, and milieu reflection—which may constitute the rituals of any journey—serve at these points to promote Americanness over Italian identity. Hierarchization of this type challenges the initial Hawthornian rationale behind choosing a “poetic or faery precinct” for his narrative (viii). As it has been noted,

It is true, of course, as the preface declares, that Italy is exotic and America is commonplace. . . . [But] the gloomy wrongs of Italy are more oppressive than picturesque; and when Hawthorne justifies his choice of a setting with the assertion that “Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow” (p. 3), he seems to have forgotten that Italian ruins as he presents them are not the kind upon which romance and poetry depend. (Levy 139)

The environment reflections that Kenyon produces as one of the major characters in the novel deviate from the professed prefatory thesis and shift the romantic and exotic account to a tarnished view of the Italian lifestyle. In contrast to the “depraved” Italy, American scenery (and life) is upheld as pure and pleasant.

The Aesthetic Dilemma and Othering

The prefatory note appears as contradictory to the depiction of everyday Italian life and thus develops an aesthetic dilemma. There is a marked contrast between the exotic that is intended and the mundane that is presented. Nonetheless, resolution to the Hawthornian dilemma may be available in Orientalist scholarship. It has been argued that European Orientalists were fascinated less with the modern reality of the Orient than with its ancient past. As an instance, the German poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) has been said to be entirely concerned with the past of the Orient; Said argues that when Schlegel said, “It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism,’ he meant the Orient of the Sakuntala, the Zend-Avesta, and the Upanishads” (Orientalism 98). Similarly, upon his first visit to Egypt the French poet Nerval famously lamented the loss of the visionary past: “It is Egypt that I most regret having driven out of my imagination, now that I have sadly placed it in my memory” (qtd. in Orientalism 100). Similar to the Romantic Orientalists who
display compassion about the past of the Orient and do not engage with its contemporary status without uneasiness, the American viewers in The Marble Faun are infatuated with Roman art and have basically taken the trip to Italy in order to study and reproduce it in their performances. We see this when Hilda, one of the female painters of the group, contemplates the history of the city in contrast to its present condition: “I sometimes fancy,’ said Hilda, on whose susceptibility the scene always made a strong impression, ‘that Rome—mere Rome—will crowd everything else out of my heart’” (84). The positive appraisal of the Roman past contrasts to Kenyon’s negative view of contemporary Italy as “fallen.” Thus, while they are passionate about the old Roman architecture and art, the American viewers tend to denigrate its current Italian inheritors. The imagined past is pleasing and the modern “real” is detestable. Along these lines, the aesthetic dilemma betrays another chief connection to European Orientalism in The Marble Faun where the ancient past is pleasant and fosters romantic imagination and the current conditions are despicable and are therefore underrated.

Regarding the denigration of modern Italy, it is noteworthy to study how Italians are cast in stereotypes during the Americans’ adventurous trip to a Roman catacomb. Miriam, another female painter of the group, consents to the accompaniment of a specter she has met in the cave. His attendance, however, quickly becomes tenacious and menacing: “He haunted her footsteps with more than the customary persistency of Italian mendicants, when once they have recognized a benefactor” (21). Observations of this sort about the residents of a tourist destination may appear in any travel writings; however, their recurrence in Hawthorne’s novel develops a stereotypical picture of modern Italy. In fact, such descriptions of Italy as “beggar-haunted” (189) and of modern Rome as “the native soil of ruin” (54), possessing a “nervous and unwholesome atmosphere” (24), recur in The Marble Faun. The novel thus constructs a fallen and stereotypical picture of the Roman populace.

Also, as already mentioned, the bipolar view of the Italian past and present coincides with promotion of American manners as superior to Italians’. Germaine to this predisposition in The Marble Faun is Othering. Coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Othering is “a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes;” it is “the business of creating the enemy . . . in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others” (Ashcroft 173; italics in original). Although the United States did not colonize Italy physically, nineteenth-century Italy as
presented in The Marble Faun serves as an inferior Other to the artists’ homeland and contains that whose occurrence must be rejected in the progressing land of America. Modern Italy, as far as The Marble Faun is concerned, lacks American prosperity, and beyond that, bears features—particularly corruption and beggary—that America defines negatively.

Not only is contemporary Italy Othered, but “non-American” features are denounced within the American characters. The American artist Miriam receives positive ascriptions for her “natural language, her generosity, kindliness, and native truth of character” (14). She is also said to be born to a South American planter who has given her wealth and education; however, “the one burning drop of African blood in her veins so affected her with a sense of ignominy, that she relinquished all and fled her country” (14). Despite her privileged paternal background, Miriam is doomed to eternal wandering. It seems that the “ignominious” African background, coupled with the mysterious murder of the catacomb specter, haunts her life so much that she achieves no tranquility even as the novel ends.

Indifferent to its hideous aftermath, Miriam displays a degree of agency in murdering the infidel. Unlike her is the Italian companion Donatello who, out of passion for the American painter, becomes an accomplice in the murder. In fact, Donatello’s characterization is a significant component in the picture Hawthorne constructs of Italy. Initially, Donatello’s reaction against the haunting specter is characterized as “not so much a human dislike or hatred, as one of those instinctive, unreasoning antipathies which the lower animals sometimes display, and which generally prove more trustworthy than the acutest insight into character” (24). Further on, in one of their meetings in a wooded path in the Roman outskirts, Donatello is said to give Miriam “the idea of a being not precisely man, nor yet a child, but, in a high and beautiful sense, an animal, a creature in a state of development less than what mankind has attained, yet the more perfect within itself for that very deficiency” (57). Donatello is further presented as underdeveloped through the weird manner in which he expresses his love for Miriam:

Miriam could not think seriously of the avowal that had passed. He held out his love so freely, in his open palm, that she felt it could be nothing but a toy, which she might play with for an instant, and give back again. And yet Donatello’s heart was so fresh a fountain, that, had Miriam been more world-worn than she was, she might have found it exquisite to slake her thirst with the feelings that welled up and brimmed over from it. She was far, very far, from
the dusty mediaeval epoch, when some women have a taste for such refresh-
ment. Even for her, however, there was an inexpressible charm in the simplicity
that prompted Donatello’s words and deeds; though, unless she caught them
in precisely the true light, they seemed but folly, the offspring of a maimed or
imperfectly developed intellect. (59)

As the excerpts suggest, the Italian figure is represented as belonging to a race
lower than human beings, and as closer to nature than to civilization. He acts
instinctively and is unmindful, enamored, and underdeveloped in intellect.

Characterizing Donatello as impulsive and primitive bears striking
closeness to Orientalists’ view of the Oriental. In fact, his features echo
designations made by the French philologist Ernest Renan (1823–92) to the
Oriental Semite:

One sees that in all things the Semitic race appears to us to be an incomplete
race, by virtue of its simplicity. This race—if I dare use the analogy—is to the
Indo-European family what a pencil sketch is to painting; it lacks that variety,
that amplitude, that abundance of life which is the condition of perfectibil-
ity. Like those individuals who possess so little fecundity that, after a gracious
childhood, they attain only the most mediocre virility, the Semitic nations ex-
perienced their fullest flowering in their first age and have never been able to
achieve true maturity. (qtd. in Orientalism 149)

As the Orientalist piece suggests, both Donatello and Semite are spontaneous
and immature in conduct. They are imperfect in intellect and simple in nature.
Even as she shows her self-portraiture to Donatello, Miriam is doubtful if her
efforts are “perceptible to so simple and natural an observer as Donatello” (36).
While his American friends are in possession of artistic knowledge and skill, the
Italian figure displays almost no interest in or understanding of art. Though he
has Occidental breeding and upbringing, the Italian figure constantly receives
blatantly primitive and Oriental attributions that are meant to relegate him to
an inferior place compared to the human race in general and to his American
companions in particular.

Americanness and Imperialism
Not only Miriam but also all three American artists are represented as possess-
ing high aesthetic taste, skill, and comprehensive knowledge of the Roman
art—hence their mission to study and reproduce it. Hilda copies the paintings of the old Italian masters, Miriam paints portraits, and Kenyon sculpts. It is noteworthy that the American artists are committed to studying and perpetuating Roman art while no Italian figure is mentioned in *The Marble Faun* as having similar engagements. As self-professed guardians of Roman art, the American visitors then resemble Orientalists who studied classical Oriental art and history: “The modern Orientalist,” Said suggests, saw himself as “a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished,” just as Champollion “reconstructed Egyptian hieroglyphics out of the Rosetta Stone” (*Orientalism* 121). Likewise, Roman art and history grow to be a favorite topic of investigation and discussion for the American artists, and no artistic opinion from Italians is mentioned in the novel.

In addition to the study and practice of art, Kenyon also undertakes a study of Donatello’s pedigree. Yet, Kenyon is not the first visitor to Donatello’s castle. Prior to his visit, a few English visitors had frequented “the fairy place” for the purpose of investigating the Italian Count’s background, particularly an old English man (a necromancer), who “had gathered up all the traditions of the Monte Beni family” (198). The attempt of the American observer (Kenyon) to investigate the history of an Orientalized figure displays further intertextualities with the characteristic Orientalist writings in which

the Orient and Orientals [are regarded] as an “object” of study, stamped with an otherness—as all that is different, whether it be “subject” or “object”—but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character. . . . This “object” of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a “historical” subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself. (Abdel-Malek 107–08)

The American sculptor is represented as possessing a firm grasp of Roman art and history and also having qualifications to study Donatello’s parental background. The Italian companion, who is already Othered and lowered to a place inferior to human beings, grows to be the object of study during the Monte Beni trip. Interestingly enough, Donatello himself requests the investigation. Moreover, he does not violate the patterns of conduct of a typical Oriental in that he demonstrates continued dependence on Kenyon for discovering his own past and agrees with his (Kenyon’s) findings.
Looking at the Monte Beni sightseeing incident from a closer angle, Kenyon’s perseverance in producing observations on the milieu becomes striking. Upon seeing Donatello back in Monte Beni, Kenyon admits to his prejudice: “I have fancied you in a sort of Arcadian life, tasting rich figs, and squeezing the juice out of the sunniest grapes, and sleeping soundly all night, after a day of simple pleasures” (171). In fact, in the second part of the novel there is a tendency to suggest that Donatello has partly grown out of the childish and romantic phase. In his visit to Donatello’s vineyard, Kenyon perceives that he is no longer “the sylvan and untutored youth, whom Miriam, Hilda, and himself had liked, laughed at, and sported with; not the Donatello whose identity they had so playfully mixed up with that of the Faun of Praxiteles” (169–70). No matter how much Donatello’s native gaiety is lost after the felony of the murder, it still takes the American’s connoisseurship to recognize the alteration. Kenyon is presented as perspicacious enough to recognize and inform on the subtleties in Donatello’s personality; he is “naturally and professionally expert at reading the expression of the human countenance” (169). Added to this, the American sculptor is a keen observer of his surroundings, does not allow details to escape his notice, and makes use of them in reaching his conclusions.

Above all, Kenyon displays a thorough grasp of Italian history, which Donatello must—ironically so—lack, despite his being an Italian count. Reflecting on the history of the region and of Donatello’s castle in particular, Kenyon, with his somewhat colonial and appropriative gaze upon the milieu, has “found a great deal to interest [him] in the mediaeval sculpture hidden away in the churches hereabouts” (175). He also opines that the castle’s “tall front is like a page of black letter, taken from the history of the Italian republics.” Observing the castle further, Kenyon develops his account of the Italian count’s forefathers: “At some period of your family history . . . the Counts of Monte Beni must have led a patriarchal life in this vast house” (171). Unlike the American guest with his piercing gaze, Donatello is presented as a man of pleasure and not of curiosity or investigation, as he has already admitted: “I know little or nothing of its history” (170). In fact, he can only be grateful to his “forefathers for building it so high.” He states, “I like the windy summit better than the world below, and spend much of my time there, nowadays” (170). As such, the American sculptor is the observing eye and the Italian youth, very much like his castle, is being observed and commented upon.

Advancing the above binary of observing and being observed, it should be noted that observation and the production of knowledge are significant topics
in Orientalist discourse. Regarding contact between the West and the Orient, it has been indicated that “the West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior” (*Orientalism* 109). Moreover, the historian of empire David K. Fieldhouse has pointed out that “the basis of imperial authority was the mental attitude of the colonist. His acceptance of subordination—whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative—made empire durable” (103). The statement provides insights into the relationships that develop in the course of the novel, particularly between Kenyon and Donatello, and between the American artists and the Italians more generally. Kenyon assumes an observing position from the start, and Donatello cannot escape that gaze; he is perpetually reflected upon in terms of his countenance, personality traits, and familial history. Additionally, Donatello confirms his intellectual subordination to the American visitor on more than a few occasions. As an instance, the count, who is grappling with religious apprehensions, decides to ask Kenyon’s opinion on his future plans: “Should I do wisely, do you think, to exchange this old tower for a cell?” (210). The sculptor immediately rejects the idea as “horrible,” while Donatello cannot argue for it meaningfully (210). Donatello’s obedience to Miriam in the murder of the infidel and his later submission to Kenyon’s accounts of the castle reinforce his American fellows’ sense of superiority. Donatello’s character, history, and future take form in the novel according to the proclivities and reflections that the American visitors express, and which he pursues and confirms by his conduct.

Related to the American sense of superiority is the binary opposition that the American political diplomat and writer Henry Kissinger (b. 1923) once introduced. He argued for a distinction between the developed and the developing countries. “The West,” he points out, “is deeply committed to the notion that the real world is external to the observer, that knowledge consists of recording and classifying data” (528). On the other hand, “Cultures which escaped the early impact of Newtonian thinking have retained the essentially pre-Newtonian view that the real world is almost completely *internal* to the observer” (528; italics in original). Interestingly enough, the imperialist distinction is conspicuously evident in *The Marble Faun*. Primarily, the American artists leave their homeland and travel to the outer world, seeking to capture and reproduce a history and art that is different from that of their native home. More importantly, Kenyon (as a keenly observing character) reaches out for the external world of Italy and, possessing historical knowledge, studies and
reflects on Italian life and manners. Therefore, an American post-Newtonian character (Kenyon) is privileged vis-à-vis Donatello, who is primarily submissive and pensive at times when he is not impulsive or animalistic—hence a pre-Newtonian Italian type.

Kissinger’s binary is a blatantly imperialist attitude. One major way of maintaining and perpetuating the imperial attitude is to develop Kissingerian types of division in which upholding the empire comes at the expense of denouncing the Other. As the outspoken critic of American hegemony Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) has it,

It is an absolute requirement for the Western system of ideology that a vast gulf be established between the civilized West, with its traditional commitment to human dignity, liberty, and self-determination, and the barbaric brutality of those who for some reason—perhaps defective genes—fail to appreciate the depth of this historic commitment, so well revealed by America’s Asian wars, for example. (85)

Chomsky expresses concern about the imperial gulf that separates the modern-day America from the Othered, non-American world. Once the gulf is established, America is viewed as the preserver of human dignity and liberty against its opponents, which are considered to be essentially imperfect and abnormal. One of the material outcomes of the intellectual division is America’s Asian wars, and particularly its apogee, the Vietnam War (1956–75).

While modern imperialism is a legitimate concern, one should bear in mind the germination of American imperialism that took place during the nineteenth century. Said has convincingly argued that imperialism is not a mere act of materialist appropriation; rather, both colonialism and imperialism “are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (Culture and Imperialism 9; italics in original). The politicized attitude, or the imperialist American knowingness, it must be noted, has been textually endorsed as of the nineteenth century with production of the contrastive imagery of Americans versus foreigners. On the sources of the American sense of ascendency, reference has been made to nineteenth-century American literature. As an instance, Capitan Ahab in Moby-Dick has been said to be “an allegorical representation of the American world quest; he is obsessed, compelling, unstoppable, completely wrapped up in his own rhetorical justification and his
sense of cosmic symbolism” (*Culture and Imperialism* 288). Working toward the same end is *The Marble Faun*, which features the presentation of American sophistication and their racial Othering of Italians.

Regarding Hawthorne’s representational tendencies in this novel, it has been argued that Italy is painted as “a posthistorical, aesthetic, feminized space whose transcendent status helps to solidify the identity of the United States as the province of language, masculine political agency and contemporary history” (Bailey 176). As the previous excerpts have already suggested, the notion of American imperialist superiority recurs in the novel and is developed to the same degree that modern Italian identity is denounced. In this binary, Italian nationalist efforts are denied as well: while America is presented as pure and progressing, Italian nationalism is only barely mentioned, overshadowed as it is by French garrison presence (see pages 37, 64, 118, and 348). Moreover, contemporary Italy is economically dependent on revenues from Western countries. Despite the romantic valorization that the Eternal City receives, the capitalist underpinning of the text is exposed as the narrator indicates how dependent Italy is on the revenues procured through tourism: “as summer approaches, the Niobe of Nations is made to bewail anew . . . the loss of that large part of her population, which she derives from other lands, and on whom depends much of whatever remnant of prosperity she still enjoys” (167). As such, the so-called fairy land of Italy is in need of American finances to preserve its remainder of grandeur.

Added to insinuation of superiority, sightseeing also betrays the American attitude of possessiveness. In this regard, it is significant to consider the account of the visit to the Coliseum where Hilda and Kenyon maintain a conversation about the site. Kenyon seconds Hilda’s statement and adds,

> The Coliseum is far more delightful, as we enjoy it now, than when eighty thousand persons sat squeezed together, row above row, to see their fellow creatures torn by lions and tigers limb from limb. What a strange thought that the Coliseum was really built for us, and has not come to its best uses till almost two thousand years after it was finished! (120)

While made in a somewhat light-hearted mood, this statement must be considered in light of the overall attempt on the part of the American visitors in the novel to observe and produce reflections about Italy. In fact, the comment betrays the imperialist and colonialist mindset that motivates the Americans’ claim about the ultimate goals for which the site originally came about. Related
to the notion of American possessiveness in the novel is the presentation of Hilda’s artistic experiences. It is significant that the American painter, and no Italian artist, is able to copy the old masters’ creations with comparable dexterity: “the spirits of the old masters were hovering over Hilda and guiding her delicate white hand” (42). More importantly, some of Hilda’s copies tended to surpass the originals. In such instances, “she had been enabled to execute what the great master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas” (42). Political reading of the statement in the overall context of the novel suggests that the grandeur of the old Italian civilization is capable of being reproduced only by the hands of the newly arrived American artists. Subsequently, the Americans seek to attach to themselves the ancient past of Italian people, having regarded contemporary Italians as “corrupted” (39), “primitive” (217), and underqualified to guard it by themselves.

Following these lines, the corrupted and beggar-ridden modern Italy—for so it is presented in *The Marble Faun*—is unable to preserve its own artistic past (whose revitalization is contingent on American skillfulness), it is unable to guard its past architectural grandeur without reliance on English and American revenues, and most significantly, it does not exist except as presented from an American vantage point:

Rome, as it now exists, has grown up under the Popes, and seems like nothing but a heap of broken rubbish, thrown into the great chasm between our own days and the Empire, merely to fill it up; and, for the better part of two thousand years, its annals of obscure policies, and wars, and continually recurring misfortunes, seem also but broken rubbish, as compared with its classic history. (84)

Underrating modern Italy and simultaneously amplifying its ancient history can be a political strategy to undermine contemporary Italians’ efficacy in claiming their past grandeur, which then should be consigned to the American artists—such as Kenyon, who researches Donatello’s noble pedigree, and Hilda, who produces outstanding copies—for preservation. The aesthetic dilemma in *The Marble Faun* betrays much of the political unconscious of the text and exposes the imperialist agenda behind romanticizing Roman art and history. The contrastive appraisal exposes the nexus that—perhaps inadvertently, but still significantly—is established between ancient sublimity and modern-day imperialism. Roman art is contingent upon American connoisseurship, as its magnificence is (as far as the novel suggests) exhumed by fervent American
visitors. The United States never actually colonized Italy, yet the textual attitude that is developed in the travelogue of *The Marble Faun*, as in other similar nineteenth-century texts, facilitates the formation of the notion of American superiority over Italy. It is thus not difficult to read in the description of the American “commonplace prosperity” (viii) a meiosis surreptitiously indicating a positive view of Americanness in the novel.

**Conclusion**

This paper started with the argument that despite its narrative space (modern Italy), *The Marble Faun* displays intertextuality with Orientalist writings. Architecture and milieu reflections that the American visitors produce indicate that the Italian setting is Orientalized to a certain degree. Further intertextuality is evident in the aesthetic dilemma of the novel: while the preface promises a romantic exaltation of Italy and denounces American materialism and progress, *The Marble Faun* features (somewhat contrarily) a denigration of contemporary Italian life and an assertion of American superiority. Coupled with this aesthetic complexity, ancient Roman art and architecture's being upheld by the American visitors was shown to be similar to European Orientalists’ tendency to amplify the Oriental past and debase its modern status. While past Roman grandeur is promoted, contemporary Italy is stigmatized by recurring references to beggary and corruption.

This paper contended that ensuing denigration of contemporary Italy bolstered American ascendancy that materialized (among other ways) by characterizing Donatello as spontaneous, instinctive, and animalistic and by portraying Americans as having thorough familiarity with Italian art and history. The relationship between Kenyon and Donatello particularly suggests that the former is in an observing position and the latter is a passive recipient of the accounts made by his American guest. Further on, we examined the split between Americans and Italians in the context of germination of American imperialism and ascendancy during the nineteenth century. This paper endeavored to show how Hawthorne’s Gothic travelogue corroborates American superiority. Also, ancient Italian grandeur was demonstrated to be dependent on revenues from American tourists and on the American artists’ dexterity. Predicated on the American sense of superiority, this paper contended that a possessive
attitude developed in the novel, implying that ancient Italian grandeur is to be conserved by qualified American visitors, rather than by Italians.

To comprehend American imperialism in the modern digital age we must place it in the broader frame of fictional imagination of the nineteenth century, where the notion of American superiority started to germinate, as shown through Hawthorne’s simultaneous strategies of exoticizing and denigrating the Other. Though postcolonial studies (which concerns, among other things, Western textual treatments of the Orient) is by now an established avenue of scholarship, this paper is an example of extending postcolonialist readings to the inter-Occidental arena and exploring how Orientalist devices are utilized to project colonial imaginations inside the West. Future studies in this vein will expand postcolonial areas of study and help us challenge the homogeneous picture that classical postcolonial studies often assumes about the West, highlighting the significance of expanding of our horizons by engaging in political readings of the literary past.
Works Cited


Contributors

During his English studies in Iran, Rasoul Aliakbari simultaneously deepened his familiarity with Persian literature. He subsequently pursued both these areas at the University of Alberta where he is currently a graduate student in Comparative Literature. Rasoul's areas of studies sound diverse but are interconnected. Focusing on print history, he likes to examine English and Middle-Eastern Gothic literatures as they inform the construction of nation and empire. Rasoul is also interested in studying modern transmutations of nationalism and colonialism and, for instance, how trans-nationalism appears in contemporary Gothic fiction and cinema.

Debbie Adams is an English teaching major and editing minor from the San Francisco Bay Area. Her first published writing was a four-line poem she wrote at age 17, and she has also been on staff of three BYU student journals, including Stowaway magazine. One of her favorite writing projects has been to create all the content for a museum exhibit featuring the BYU Ballard Center. Her most meaningful accomplishment to date is serving a full-time mission among Spanish speakers in Minnesota. Future plans include motherhood, a masters degree in business, and a career in high school teaching. Her dream is to change the world with her husband Matt.

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