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# “Aggressive Disintegration in the Individual”: A Lacanian Study of Signification and the Destruction of Self in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*

| Alex Muller

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In Lear’s division of the kingdom, the essential warning of contemporary Gestalt Theory resonates clearly: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As Lear divides his kingdom (his political body) into thirds, he divides his physical body—or more accurately, his own wit as noted by the Fool in I.iv—into a series of fragments that will never again be powerful or whole. The parallel construct of Lear’s physical body and his body politic has important implications when considered alongside the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, especially Lacan’s theory that the self is developed as a fragmentation. Lear represents what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, the Signifying<sup>1</sup> entity that establishes the identity of subjectivity through language. Yet Lear is also the signified subject in the larger entity of the body politic; the title of “King” is precisely what alienates him. Language betrays Lear in the play as he unknowingly wields it as a self-destructive tool, and the Symbolic Order loses its ability to impose Signification.

Cordelia, then, acts as a foil to Lear’s language through her decision to say “nothing” at the beginning of the play. For Lacan, Cordelia’s decision to remain silent is important because she is choosing to negate the power of the Symbolic Order. In Sigmund Freud’s 1913 essay, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” he proposed that Cordelia’s muteness established her as a Death figure. Yet Freud’s great mistake is that he often views women only as they pertain to men: He notes, “the three inevitable relations that a man

has with a woman . . . in the course of a man's life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more” (301). I would like to enter the discussion where Freud left off and where Lacan picked up by acknowledging Lear's initial de facto title of Father-King and his role in the Symbolic Order while exploring the formation of his fragmented subjectivity through his own acts of self-harm and Cordelia's ultimate Signification of him as a fragmented (and eventually dead) man. Examining the reversals of Signifier/signified binaries in the play and the destructive power of the phallus-as-language, I will argue that once the Symbolic Order loses its ability to enact Signification it can only further the fragmentation of the self; Cordelia becomes the Signifying power that ultimately determines Lear's identity and creates a new meaning for Signification, suggesting that the female does not gain her meaning from the male but rather that male's meaning is formed within the female.

The discussion of the Lacanian language in the play has yet to be fully addressed. While the linguistic irony is obviously present—much of the play's meaning derives from the statement of “nothing” in its opening pages—the amount of Lacanian criticism is disparate to the more general psychoanalysis of Lear. Most of the initial psychoanalytic scholarship identified the significance of Lear as the Father-King figure, but often only focused on Lear's relationship with Cordelia and the Oedipal/incestuous connotations it brings. Later critics became interested in Cordelia's objectification through the patriarchy of her father. In Carol Chillington Rutter's text *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*, she devotes her opening chapter to the study of Cordelia as a character as well as an actual object on stage: The body that Lear carries in by the end of the play has become a prop (2). Jeffrey Stern identifies Cordelia as a “self-object,” a maternal/mirror figure that ultimately causes Lear's fragmentation of self, offering, perhaps, the best understanding of how Cordelia is both powerful and objectified at once (307). As a

bridge into the linguistic aspect of psychoanalysis, David Willbern examines how Cordelia's nonlanguage exemplifies Shakespeare's portrayal of the gendered (and sexed) opposition of the male "thing" and the female "no-thing" (245). In a similar way, Julia Reinhard Lupton notes the Lacanian implications of signified objectification: "[the signified] in turn becomes itself a kind of thing—the material remnant of signification" (124). The psychoanalytic discussion as a whole, then, seems to be gaining interest in the nuances of gender theory and linguistics.

Lacanian theory is, perhaps, the best way to combine these theoretical approaches into one cohesive understanding of the issue of the self in *Lear*. Although Lacan is often criticized for his neo-Freudian (and patriarchal) perspective, his theories leave enough room for adaptation. While Lacan notes the male-dominated power of the Symbolic Order, he proposes that the phallus-as-language is what ultimately fragments the self; in order to be whole one must be outside of language. Because Lacan's theories are grounded in Saussurian linguistics, it is fitting to observe the Signifier and the signified as a binary opposition. As Yannis Stavrakakis explains in *Lacan & the Political*, "[the signified subject] depends on the [S] ignifier[;] it is located in a secondary position with respect to the [S] ignifier," (20). Likewise, the text of *Lear* supports binary opposition, even from its opening line when Kent asks Gloucester whether Lear favors Albany or Cornwall (I.i.1), or when Edmund notes his lower binary status with his Signification of "bastard" and seeks to "top the legitimate" position of his brother Edgar (I.ii.21). The play allows these binaries to be reversed: Lear loses his paternal power to his daughters, Edmund gains the power he seeks, and Cordelia loses her position as the favorite child. Through this reversal, the phallus of the Symbolic Order no longer contains the power of imposing meaning, it only splinters the self into a fragmented body, and it exacerbates division.

Lear displays the destructive power of the Symbolic phallus as he begins the binary reversal in the play and continues his self-

fragmentation. As Stavrakakis explains, a subject's identity is frail; "[it] is always an unstable identity, a split or even non-identity, since even identification is marked by an alienating dimension" (35). Although Lear is King, or head of the body politic, he is alienated from that body by being identified as the head. As Lacan explains in one of his seminars, "by being born with the [S]ignifier, the subject is born divided" (qtd. in Stavrakakis 28); Lear threatens his frail identity by dividing his kingdom, shattering an already fragmented structure, and accordingly, his actions toward the body and the body politic may be seen as a form of self-harm. In the opening scene, he hopes to "shake all cares and business from our age / Conferring them on younger strengths while we / Unburdened crawl toward death . . ." (I.i.39-41). As if on a whim, Lear reverses the order of things, as the Fool keenly observes later in Act I: ". . . thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches" (I.iv.170-71). Indeed, Lear wants to surrender his symbolic power, unknowingly assuring that he will never again be in control of his kingdom, nor be able to rectify the situation toward the end of the play. As Stern notes, Lear has disrupted the "oedipal law of culture" by making "his daughters his mothers" in his attempt to "retain the name but to forsake the function of king," which alienates him from that cultural construct and furthers his fragmentation (302). By being born with the phallus-as-language in the Symbolic role of king, Lear is damned with a fragmented identity. Yet Lear continues, through language, to divide himself and to ensure his total destruction.

Lear's dependency on the phallus-as-language is seen throughout the play. At first, he displays his dependency when he asks his daughters to vocalize how much they love him. Later, after Goneril refuses to house his hundred knights, he relies on language as condemnation, invoking the destruction of her body and its female functions: "Into her womb convey sterility; / Dry up her organs of increase / . . . stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth, / With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks" (I.iv.279-80, 285-86). His violent use of language continues as he relates Goneril to a disease of his

own body: “thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter— / Or rather a disease that’s in my flesh, / . . . A plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle” (II.iv.221-25). His dependency on the phallus-as-language has turned aggressive, and, as Lacan notes, “intended aggressivity gnaws away, undermines, disintegrates; it castrates; it leads to death . . .” (ch. 2). Through language, Lear has divided his kingdom, banished his only loving daughter, and ensured his own destruction.

However, Lear does not recognize the irony in his use of language. While he curses his daughter to grow old without giving birth to “a babe to honor her” (I.iv.283), he unknowingly prophesies that he will die without having an heir to continue his rule—all of his heirs are dead by the end of the play before they ever give birth to children. As he speaks of the drying up of reproductive organs and the corrosive effect of tears, he is ensuring that his kingdom will likewise fade from the earth. Likewise, his association with Goneril as a disease of his flesh parallels the actual decay of his fragmented body. Oddly enough, Lear’s speech comes true; the disease that he introduced into the body—what Lupton calls an alien, “invasive foreign body” (127)—has spread and killed off the continuation of his blood line. Thus Lear adheres to the Lacanian principal that the fragmented body may never be repaired—as Stavrakakis notes, the subject’s shattered identity can “never realize its aim . . . never achieve full identity[;] it can never bring back [its] lost fullness since it was its own institution that introduced this loss” (38). Instead, Lear’s use of language at this point in the play demonstrates how the Symbolic Order can no longer create; it can only destroy. By connecting himself to his daughter through language, Lear condemns both of them to death.

Cordelia, however, stays outside of her father’s language. Because of her refusal to speak, Freud identified her (though he did not recognize it in these terms) as the true Signifying power in the play. Indeed, Lear’s self-harming Signification of himself as a shattered body seems to lead into the idea that Cordelia is the character who imposes true meaning on the play—her famous proclamation of

“nothing” certainly seems to foreshadow the play’s grave conclusion, and it is for this reason that Freud identifies her as Death. For Freud, Cordelia’s “dumbness” (a less-than-desirable connotation, of course) equates her to a Death figure. Throughout the “Theme of the Three Caskets” Freud explores how silence is connected to the Death figure not only in Shakespeare but also throughout mythology:

Lear carries Cordelia’s dead body on to the stage. Cordelia is Death. If we reverse the situation it becomes intelligible and familiar to us. She is the Death-goddess who, like the Valkyrie in German mythology, carries away the dead hero from the battlefield. Eternal wisdom, clothed in the primaeval myth, bids the old man renounce love, choose death and make friends with the necessity of dying. (300)

Lear’s devastation at the end of the play—“She’s dead as earth” (V.iii.266)—becomes both a proclamation of grief and an announcement of his realization that Cordelia is death; in Freudian terms, she is the Death/Earth Womb (Grave) that will receive Lear at the play’s close. Wilbern makes a note of Cordelia-as-Death’s mask as well: Cordelia’s face, “That face of hers again” (I.i.262-64) “. . . remind[s] him of nothing (the ‘face between the forks’). Eventually he will meet its most traumatic mask, represented by Gloucester’s bloody eyeless face . . .”—a hopeless harbinger of Lear’s own eventual end (Wilbern 247).

Cordelia’s refusal to speak at the beginning of the play connects with Lacanian theory as well. Her refusal to speak begins to undermine language as a tool of power. As Stern acknowledges, the language in the play is an empty vessel disconnected from action: “Regan and Goneril are eager to participate in the trial because if words no longer depend on deeds, if action no longer joins [S] ignifier and signified, rhetoric alone will be power, and their claims, by definition, will be as valid as those of Cordelia” (301). Cordelia, however, gets outside of language—and thus the Signification of the Father—by refusing to use language as a communication tool with

the Father. Cordelia's function in the play is arguably outside of the actual text/language as well: As Aronson notes, "Cordelia is seen on the stage in only four scenes and speaks less than a hundred lines" (182). Again, considering Stern's point about Cordelia as a mirror, she is a silent "self-object" that only shows Lear his own fragmented reflection, but does not speak it (Stern 308). For Willbern, however, Cordelia's silence is the grounds for the formation of Lear's self: "Nothing, in other words, is the very ground of being, just as silence is the ground of speech . . . silence, too, can speak" (Wilbern 247). He, too, suggests that Cordelia defines the Signifying/signified binary by acting as the center, the determinate: "Cordelia's nothing, at beginning and end, circumscribes or pinpoints the elemental absence at the center of the target of [Lear's] sight . . ." (247). Lear sees himself in Cordelia, and she becomes the center of his perception of his selfhood, the nothingness of his broken body.

The consolidation of Cordelia's character in Freudian/Lacanian theory, then, is that Cordelia as a Death figure becomes the Signifying power, further determining the fragmented Signification of Lear as he passes from his mental instability into the mental nonexistence of death. Just as Lear (even as King) is the alienated signified in the construct of his body politic, so too does he become the signified subject in the greater structure of life. As the play's somber ending seems to suggest, death is the ultimate alienation, the inevitable Signification of all human subjects. If this inevitable death is the true theme of the play's ending, it falls in line with the rest of the play's depiction of Signifier/signified reversal. The supposed Signifying powers are ultimately outside of mankind. The "goddess" of nature invoked by both Edmund and Lear (I.ii.1, I.iv.276) is truly beyond their control; true nature Signifies only with death. Yet Cordelia-as-Death should not be seen as evil. If language is the destructive power of the Symbolic Order, then nonlanguage is reparative. The reversal of the Signifier and signified has created a new meaning of Signification. If the previous phallus-as-language was a penetrative force, then the new Signifying power

of nonlanguage-as-death is non-penetrative. Death, in this way, is the gentle silence of sleep, the return to the Earth Womb. In Lacanian terms, this is a return to the pre-Symbolic stage of the Imaginary Order, the time before subjectivity is formed—when, within the womb, the pre-self cannot differentiate itself as separate. By reading Cordelia as a benevolent, maternal Death, we may view Lear’s earlier hope to “set my rest / On her kind nursery” as less incestuous and more natural because all men must return to the womb through death (I.i.123-24). This return, then, is restorative. If the fragmented body of the subject cannot be repaired during life, then there is hope in death; the complete destruction of the self (the end) is the beginning of its re-integration in the wholeness of nonexistence.

Examining Lear through the psychoanalytic lens supports the Lacanian view that the self is truly fragmented. Michael Schoenfeldt, in *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, describes how “The self becomes for [early modern literature] a little kingdom, filled with insurrectionary forces, and in continual need of monitoring from within and without” (39). It is little wonder why Signifying/signified constructs can be so easily reversed—their subjective identities, like kingdoms, are susceptible to attacks from outside as well as from within. Because of its malleable nature, identity will continue to be an important factor in the Lear discussion, and, as I have suggested in this essay, Lacanian linguistics may be the best way to understand that identity. Certainly the idea that Cordelia’s nonlanguage is perhaps the true Signifying power at work in the play is an idea that has merited further discussion ever since Freud offered the first psychoanalytic reading of the play, painting the scene with Cordelia in light of Lear.

I hope to have begun painting the picture of Lear in light of Cordelia. Indeed, the great problem with the psychoanalytic perspective is that it views the female as the blank canvas on which the Symbolic Order of patriarchy imposes meaning. As Willbern acknowledges, the female is often Cordelia’s “nothing”—in other words, the empty space, a womb—in which the Signification is

prescribed: “These metaphors of an original lack, hole, defect, or wound signify that anatomical manifestation of presence and absence which demonstrates the fact of genital difference (la différence in the Derridean ‘différance’)” (247). The Symbolic Order (the Signifier) inserts its meaning into the signified. In the traditionally sexual language of the patriarchy, the male phallus (of power, meaning, and so forth) pierces the female space of nonmeaning, or rather, nonlanguage. Examining Cordelia as a Signifying power reveals how the female imposes her meaning onto the male, eliminating the phallus (and thus language) as the scepter of the Symbolic. I have suggested that nonlanguage is not so much an open (negative) space as it is its own sort of (positive) power, a power that is non-phallic and non-destructive. Rather, the nonmeaning, the Death, and the imminent Earth Womb are what truly shape the self—the inevitable “promised end” realized in the inarticulate unconscious: that man is born from non-meaning and to non-meaning he shall return; that the order of language is only a temporary reprieve amidst the aggressive disintegration, but the female offers a space outside of language. The womb and the grave offer forgiveness, re-integration, and wholeness—a place where we may “Say what we feel, and not what we ought to say” (V.iii.330) and in this “gored state sustain” (V.iii.326) a sense of an original unified self.

#### Notes

1. I capitalize “Signifier” throughout this essay to emphasize its higher power in this binary, as Lacan seemed to believe in his seminars on language.

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# “But Aye Be Whaur Extremes Meet”: Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetics of Rhyme in His Early Lyrics

| Nicholas Duron

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This paper examines the first two volumes of poetry written in Lallans<sup>1</sup> by Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) in order to propose a poetics of rhyme for early twentieth-century Scottish poetry. Unlike many of his English contemporaries who largely abandoned rhyme in favor of free verse, MacDiarmid consistently turns to rhyme in his lyrics from the 1920s, seeing its creative potential. I argue that in his collections *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926), MacDiarmid utilizes rhyme to create unifying paradoxes, whereby the past is synthesized with the present, thus making possible new visions for the future, and in particular Scotland’s future. Previous work has established Hugh MacDiarmid, the pen name of Christopher Murray Grieve, as one of the central figures of literary modernism in Scotland. Margery McCulloch, for example, argues that though there were many adherents to the modernist “Scottish Renaissance” of the interwar period, the movement still centered primarily on the poetry and nationalist politics of MacDiarmid (McCulloch 5). Although MacDiarmid was a Marxist throughout his career, Scott Lyall notes that MacDiarmid’s political commitments in the 1930s grew more cosmopolitan when he joined the Communist Party, marking a stylistic shift in his poetry to long, prosaic works in English (Lyall). However, MacDiarmid’s dedication in the 1920s to the local politics of Scotland is reflected in his production of short

Scots lyrics from this decade. Inspired by the 1916 Easter Rising and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, MacDiarmid hoped to reinvigorate the revolutionary spirit of Scotland to push for independence. He took on as his project the creation of a distinctly Scottish modernist poetry by drawing on the Scots language as well as the Scottish literary tradition of rhymed verse lyrics while concurrently addressing the anxieties of the modern world. This central paradox—that of looking back to the past in order to look forward to the future—not only defines his project as a whole but also characterizes his use of rhyme in his early poetry.

The Great War had a tremendous impact on MacDiarmid's consciousness as a writer and poet. Despite the war's influence in shaping the modernist project, Paul Fussell notes that none of the "masters of the modern movement" such as Yeats, Joyce, Lawrence and others were involved directly in the conflict (Fussell 314). This is not true of MacDiarmid who, as described by biographer Alan Bold, returned home from his four years of service in the Royal Army Medical Corps with "firmly held nationalistic opinions about the economic state and inferior political status of Scotland" (Bold 101). MacDiarmid saw first-hand the effects of modern war, believing that Scotland suffered disproportionately both in terms of casualties and economic hardship. Additionally, MacDiarmid believed Scotland was culturally stagnant. Reading the works of Dostoevsky, Pound, and Eliot, MacDiarmid became dissatisfied with the Kailyard School of Scottish literature being produced at the time. Dorian Grieve succinctly describes MacDiarmid's attitudes toward the Kailyard's Scots lyrics: "Doric, frozen in a rural past . . . largely sustained by a retrogressive sentimental impulse, is not fit for the purpose of dealing with the concerns of modern, urban society" (Grieve 24). Each edition of MacDiarmid's journal *The Scottish Chapbook* included a manifesto declaring as its objectives to bring "Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation" and to "elucidate, apply, and develop the distinctively Scottish range of values" (qtd. in McCulloch 16). In other words, Scottish verse must be, to borrow a phrase from

Arthur Rimbaud, “absolutely modern.” While staying true to its historical and literary traditions, Scottish verse must overcome what MacDiarmid describes elsewhere as the “mental inertia” and “over-valued pawkiness” of Kailyard lyrics (qtd. in Grieve 24) and interrogate serious psychological and philosophical questions about one’s own existence and identity. MacDiarmid began this task himself in the 1920s with *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*.

Much of the scholarship on MacDiarmid’s work from these volumes centers on the concept of the “Caledonian antisyzygy,” described as a tendency in Scottish literature more generally and as central to MacDiarmid’s poetry more specifically. The term originated in Gregory Smith’s *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, where he identifies the tendency of Scottish literature toward the “jostling of contraries” and the “combination of opposites . . . which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions” (Smith 4-5). When in his *Scottish Chapbook* MacDiarmid calls for a development of a “distinctively Scottish range of values,” it is clear from both his poetry and his prose that he means this “jostling of contraries.”<sup>2</sup> For example, in “The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea” MacDiarmid imagines Scottish poetry to be a “revolt against a dreary rut of imitative versifying and a new freedom in vocabulary, in subject-matter, in angles of expression, in technical means, in experimentation of all kinds” (“Caledonian Antisyzygy” 63). In the same essay he describes the “national genius” of Scotland as that “which is capable of countless manifestations at absolute variance with each other, yet confined within the ‘limited infinity’ of that adjective ‘Scottish’” (68). The kind of experimentation MacDiarmid wants is one that allows for, or even bases itself on, contradiction. Critics have been attentive to the tendency toward contradiction in his poetry. Ann Boutelle, for example, argues that “the guiding impetus behind all his poetry and all his prose consists of an attempt to bring together under the aegis of paradox ‘contraries’ or disparate elements” (Boutelle 11). Duncan Glen in “Hugh

MacDiarmid: Supporting Roles” and Burns Singer in “Scarlet Eminence” make similar claims, both situating their arguments in relation to the antisyzygy. However, they develop their arguments primarily in terms of either theme or through his use of Lallans. I argue that MacDiarmid also creates antisyzygy at the formal level through rhyme; that is, for MacDiarmid, rhyme is what makes the Caledonian antisyzygy possible.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, many of MacDiarmid’s contemporaries viewed poetic devices such as meter and rhyme as outworn and burdensome, preferring instead to write in free verse. In an essay from *The Egoist*, for example, Richard Aldington exclaims:

The old accented verse forced the poet to abandon some of his individuality, most of his accuracy, and all his style in order to wedge his emotions into some preconceived and childish formality; free verse permits the poet all his individuality because he creates his cadence flowing naturally he tends to write naturally and therefore with precision, all his style because style consists in concentration, and exactness which could only be obtained rarely in old verse forms. (Aldington 351)

Aldington may have particular poets in mind, but Susan Stewart notes that Aldington’s comments are largely representative of a general attitude about rhyme and poetic freedom—rhyme is a constraint from which poets have been “freed” (Stewart 31). Though this may be true of rhyme for English and American modernist poets, it was not the case for MacDiarmid, at least initially, for whom rhyme was a central feature of his early poetry.

Due to the contrary nature of rhyme, MacDiarmid is able to create the paradoxes that characterize his early poetry. Rhyme itself is a paradoxical literary device, relying on equivalence and difference for it to function *as such*. Stewart observes that rhyme is based in “aural coincidences that themselves depend upon noncoincidences in time and space” (Stewart 40). Words that rhyme

must phonologically correspond with one another but differ at least semantically, allowing ideas and concepts that are disparate or even antithetical to be held together through aural likeness. This equivalence/difference feature of rhyme carries with it a temporal element as well. As a poem unfolds, rhyme works, paradoxically, by the “sounded repetition of sameness” across time (Stewart 30), thus bridging the temporal gap between different elements through similarity in sound. Rhyme can make connections between earlier and later lines, between past and present verb tenses, between images from the past and present, and between earlier and later parts of a narrative poem. When a connection is made temporally through rhyme between a past element with a present element, the result is a unified paradox that is the poem itself. Thus the poem reenacts MacDiarmid’s project of reaching back into Scotland’s literary and historical past and bringing it into contact with the modern world, creating a paradoxical, and therefore distinctively Scottish, form of poetry.

MacDiarmid’s project of looking back to look forward is perhaps best encapsulated in his poem “The Watergaw” from *Sangschaw*. In the poem, the speaker sits in the present state in contemplation of a mysterious (“antrin”) past, thinking about the watergaw, or the indistinct rainbow, he saw a few nights before and of his father’s face as he died sometime in the more distant past:

Ae weet forenicht i’ the yow-trummle  
 I saw yon antrin thing,  
 A watergaw wi’ its chitterin’ licht  
 Ayont the on-ding;  
 An’ I thocht o’ the last wild look ye gied  
 Afore ye deed!

There was nae reek i’ the laverock’s hoose  
 That nicht—an’ nane i’ mine;  
 But I hae thocht o’ that foolish licht  
 Ever sin’ syne;

An' I think that mebbe at last I ken

What your look meant then. (*Complete Poems Vol. 1*, 1-12)

In the first stanza, the two images of the watergaw and the dead man's face are held in tension with one another, both being ambiguous images with no apparent connection. However, this tension is relieved in the poem's last lines as the images of the past and present are synthesized through rhyme. The rhyme scheme of both stanzas follows the general pattern of abcbdd, which itself provides some degree of uniformity. However, the rhymes between "mebbe," "ken," and "then" do most of the poem's work. To "ken" or to know is a present tense verb, reflecting the speaker's current, contemplative state. His present state is then synthesized with the memory of his father's look given before he died through the rhyming of "ken" with the adverb "then," signifying a moment in the past. With this synthesis of the past with the present, a new insight and sense of possibility emerges, indicated by the rhyming of the word "ken" and "then" with "mebbe." Contained within this short verse is an almost formulaic expression of MacDiarmid's program: past (then) + present (ken) = future possibility (mebbe). Ultimately, what allows the past and present to be held together, what makes the possible possible, is rhyme.

Another one of MacDiarmid's more well-known and, I would like to argue, often misunderstood poems from *Sangschaw* is "The Eemis Stane." Again we have a contemplative speaker, this time standing in the dead silence of a cold harvest night. The speaker's consciousness transcends his body as he reflects, from a cosmic vantage point, on the earth as an "eemis stane" or an unsteady stone:

I' the how-dumb-deid o' the cauld hairst nicht  
 The warl' like an eemis stane  
 Wags i' the lift;  
 An' my eerie memories fa'  
 Like a yowdendrift.

Like a yowdendrift so's I couldna read  
 The words cut oot i' the stane  
 Had the fug o' fame  
 An' history's hazelraw  
 No' yirdit thaim. (*Complete Poems Vol. 1*, 1-10)

Kenneth Buthlay and Iain Crichton Smith as well as other critics agree that the stone is a tombstone (Buthlay 27, Crichton Smith 174), but John Baglow suggests that the stone too may be a Rosetta stone or the corner stone of a ruined building. What is more important here is that the stone seems to be a remnant of an ancient and forgotten past, with the words etched into it obscured by the lichen ("hazelraw") of history and the moss ("fug") of fame.

To Philip Bozek, "The Eemis Stane" reads as a kind of lament; the ancient past is permanently lost, leaving both the speaker and the reader with a feeling of dejection and pessimism (Bozek 30-32). I think this is a misreading, however, with Bozek overlooking how rhyme functions in this piece, thus missing the feeling of hope and possibility present in the poem. Bozek detects a double negative in the poem's final stanza ("couldna read," "had . . . No' yirdit"), though he argues that "it cannot assert a positive, as a double negative normally would, without creating a damaging incongruity: I could read the words [because] moss and lichen had obscured them" (31). I suggest that the incongruity in the line is in fact purposeful and consistent with MacDiarmid's imaginary that constitutes itself in antiszygy. The rhyme scheme is highly unusual, it being abcde ebbfb, linking the end-words "stane" from lines two and seven, "fame" in line eight, the first "a" in "hazelraw" in line nine, and "thaim" in line ten. The logic behind this linkage makes little sense unless we refer to Jamieson's *Dictionary of the Scottish Language* from which MacDiarmid researched while constructing his early poems. Unlike the English word "fame" which refers to one's reputation, the word "fame" in Scots can refer to one's passion ("Fame" 187). The links among the three words and the possibility for an affirmative reading from the double negative now become apparent. Had the words on the stone not been obscured, the speaker would

only be able to read from it, thus duplicating the “mental inertia” of the imitative Kailyard poetry described earlier. Because the words (“thaim”) *have* been obscured by time (“history’s hazelraw”), the speaker can draw on the living passion (“the fug o’ fame”) he feels in the present and create his own poem from the raw materials of the past (“the eemis stane”) that can be projected into the future. What we have is not a “damaging incongruity,” but rather a unified paradox made possible through rhyme.

In the four-poem sequence “Au Clair de la Lune,” MacDiarmid returns to the image of the earth as a “bare auld stane” (*Complete Poems* 1, 2), this time making a more direct connection between the stane with a sense of the long-forgotten past:

Earth’s littered wi’ larochs o’ Empires  
 Muckle nations are dust.  
 Time’ll meissle it awa’, it seems,  
 An’ smell nae must. (1-4)

The nations having been “meissle[d] awa’” by Time leaves the speaker not only with a sense of despair at the thought of his own demise but also with a feeling of disconnection from the past from which the larochs or ruins of Empires emerged. By the second sequence, however, the speaker’s anxieties dissipate entirely. The speaker has an out-of-body experience as he likens the “warl” or the world “couped soon’ as a peerie” and the moon like an old woman “Sits on the fower cross-win’s / Peerin’ a roon” (1, 3-4). He then repeats the “ee” and “oo” sounds as he exclaims “She’s seen me—she’s seen me—an’ straucht / Loupit clean on the quick o’ my hert” (5-6). The sounds provide inspiration for the speaker:

An’ the roarin’ o’ oceans noo’  
 Is peerieweerie to me:  
 Thunner’s a tinklin’ bell: an’ Time  
 Whuds like a flee. (9-12)

The “oo” sounds of the “roarin’ o’ oceans noo” and the “ee” sounds of “peerieweerie to me” and “Time / Whuds like a flee” provide aural links to the world “couped soon’ as a peerie.” Though at first

the ceaseless spinning of the earth pushes the past further and further away in time, the rhyming sounds generate an onomatopoeic effect that brings a sense of immediacy in the poem. As noted by Susan Stewart, in a sequence of rhymes “the second term modifies and weakens the force of the first as our attention is drawn to sound alone” (43). Here, both Time and the Earth have been emptied of their connotations with distance and demise. With the rhyming “ee” and “oo” sounds, the vastness of Time and the earth as an image of ruins have instead become sites for imaginative play in the present.

In his poem “Gairmscoile” from *Penny Wheep*, MacDiarmid uses rhyme to show that the Scots language has the capacity to evoke an ancient, original energy he believes to be still present within the human subconscious. The poem opens with the image of copulating “Skrymmorie monsters” of the ancient past, “Auder than mammoth or than mastodon” though still presently lurking “Deep i’ the hearts o’ a’ men” (*Complete Poems Vol. 2*, 1-2). Catherine Kerrigan contends that these monsters represent “a primitive energy to be tapped and released in the race” (83). Though the primitive energy has hitherto been inaccessible, the speaker tells us “there’s forgotten shibboleths o’ the Scots / Ha’e keys to senses lockit . . . / –Coorse words that shamle thro’ oor minds” (*Complete Poems Vol. 2*, 59-61) and that “It’s soon’, no’ sense, that faddoms the herts o’ men” (74). That is, the mere vocalization of Scots language is sufficient to unlock the primal energy of the modern man, connecting him to the ancient past. The rhyming of the long “ee” sounds is especially important for this connection here. The aural links made with the “ee” sounds between the description of the monsters as “scaut-heid,” “Skrymmoorie,” and “beasts” with the description of their presence “Deep i’ the herts o’ a’ men” collapse the temporal gap between the primeval monster and modern man. The two are further tied together through the internal rhyme of “ee” sounds as they are said to “Mee[t] the reid een wi’ een like seevun hells. / . . . Nearer the twa beasts draw” (8-9) until finally “The bubbles o’ twa sauls” break, and they merge and mate in line ten. This mergence between

contrary elements, the ancient monster and the modern man, produce “ee”-sounding “wild cries” (the word “cries” itself having the “ee” sound) from which the speaker tell us “a’ Scotland’s destiny thrills” (20). The poem ends with the victorious declaration “For we ha’e faith in Scotland’s hidden poo’ers, / The present’s theirs, but a’ the past and future’s oors” (107-8). For MacDiarmid, the creation of the paradoxical unification between the past and present allows for the possibility of new perspectives and hopes for Scotland’s future. This unification is made possible through rhyme.

By the mid-1930s, MacDiarmid had left the National Party of Scotland, joining the Communist Party and thus changing not only his program but his poetic style. No longer looking toward the past, MacDiarmid largely abandons not only his use of Scots but also rhyme. However in his poetry from the 1920s, rhyme, as I have argued above, was central to his creative project, allowing him to meet the conceptual demands of his nationalism. To MacDiarmid, a Scottish poetic is one of paradoxes and contraries. In his volumes *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*, MacDiarmid is able to create through rhyme the central paradox that defined his early career: that of looking back in the past to look forward to the future. In “Gairmscoile,” he writes “(A foray frae the past—and future tae / Sin Time’s a blindness we’ll thraw aff some day!)” (*Complete Poems Vol. 2*, 35-36). With rhyme, MacDiarmid attempts to bridge all temporal divides, bringing new visions and perspectives for the modern human being.

#### Notes

1. Throughout MacDiarmid scholarship, the terms “Lallans,” “Doric,” and “the Scots language” are used interchangeably to refer to Lowland Scots dialects, as distinct from Scottish Gaelic. This paper continues in that tradition.

2. MacDiarmid is also likely to have been influenced by T. S. Eliot, who by 1921 had published his well-known essay “The Metaphysical Poets” which described a similar tendency in the yoking together of “heterogeneous ideas” in Donne and others.

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## “Correspondent to Command”: Linguistic Acquisition in *The Tempest*

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Postcolonial discourse surrounding *The Tempest* has often focused on the most prominent and accessible subject of Shakespeare’s fictional island, the native slave Caliban, instead of his servant counterpart, Ariel. Critics often sympathize with the plight of Caliban and oppose Prospero’s colonialist sense of entitlement and desire for cultural domination. One avenue of subjugation that critics address is the interchange of language between master and subject, alluded to in Caliban’s well-known exclamation: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (I.ii.366-68). Language is certainly a beneficial way to discuss postcolonial power relations in the play, but the body of *Tempest* criticism has left the other subjugated character, Ariel, completely out of its concern. The purpose of this essay is to wrest critical attention away from Caliban’s overly examined condemnation of language and to give power back to Ariel, the character who instead is “correspondent to command” (I.ii.299). George Lamming discusses Ariel in terms of power in *The Pleasure of Exile*, addressing Ariel’s function as a spy or intermediary and proving his importance as a function of Prospero’s dominance: “Ariel is Prospero’s source of information . . . of course, he knows what is going on from the very beginning. Ariel is on the inside” (99). Although critics such as Lamming acknowledge that Ariel does play a role in the power dynamic of *The Tempest*, they do not discuss how Ariel came to be such an integral part of Prospero’s forms of communication. By overlooking Ariel’s position in the

power hierarchy, the scholarship has left a void in postcolonial criticism of the play, presenting a mere compendium of the master/slave dynamic in *The Tempest*.

Critics have selected Caliban to represent the colonized from nearly every nonindustrialized sector of the globe, from Bermuda, to Latin America, to Haiti, and even to pre-independent Ireland<sup>1</sup>. For postcolonial critics, Caliban is the ultimate literary example of colonial ramifications, reinforcing Mary Louise Pratt's assertion that "while subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for" (36). In the case of Caliban, the absorption of the dominant culture is resisted because, as Ian Smith says, "Caliban knows that in reality . . . language training was designed to indoctrinate and inculcate as well as provide a ready medium for the issuing of orders . . . that as a slave laborer he must carry out on pain of torture" (253). Fear of physical retribution inhibits Caliban from complacent transculturation.

The same principle, however, is reversed when applied to Ariel and his relationship with the same master. While they enter the play at the same linguistic level, Ariel progresses in his communicative competence while Caliban does not. Prospero finds Ariel and Caliban on the island in similar situations: both are natives who would have been unfamiliar with Prospero's European language. While Ariel manages to adapt to his master's tongue, Caliban struggles with acceptance, cursing his oppressor for teaching him the language that would eventually undermine his authority. In adapting to their master's language, the two natives embody divergent aptitudes for assimilation: Ariel conforms easily to Prospero's tongue while Caliban resists assimilation and is kept enslaved. In direct contrast to Caliban, Ariel is able to overcome his alterity and master the hegemonic discourse of his oppressor in order to gain his freedom. As a result, Ariel becomes the ideal representative of transculturation, able to "select and invent from

materials transmitted by a dominant . . . culture” in an advantageous fashion (Pratt 36). By distancing himself from Caliban, Ariel represents the reverse side of the “other,” thereby furthering the postcolonial perspective of master/slave relationships in *The Tempest*.

Textually, there are several clues that point to the opposition of Ariel and Caliban, including the characters’ individual reactions to their new linguistic education. Prospero describes finding Ariel:

Thou best know’st  
 What torment I did find thee in. Thy groans  
 Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts  
 Of ever-angry bears. (I.ii.289-91)

Miranda describes Caliban’s state when they first arrived: “When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish” (I.ii.359-60). Both quotations describe the similar linguistic situations of Ariel and Caliban when they were found on the island, that of natives unable to communicate with their new master. As Claire Guéron points out, although it is never determined what specific language the characters in the play are speaking (2), it is certain that the two natives could not speak the exact Western language of Prospero. Instead, their language can be compared to what critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite calls “nation language”: “The submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be English: but it is often an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave” (283). While they can communicate at some level with Prospero, both the “groans” of Ariel, understood by wolves and bears, and the brutish “gabble” of Caliban relate to the primal nation language that Brathwaite discusses.

In their subaltern role, then, both characters are required to adapt to Prospero’s language in order to communicate with him. Ariel is obviously more successful at linguistic acquisition, likely because of his initial acceptance. When Prospero reminds him of their initial encounter, Ariel replies with an acquiescent, “I thank

thee master" (I.ii.295), while Caliban replies with the earlier-mentioned curse. Ariel proves his linguistic subjection when he says that he will follow Prospero's commands "To th' syllable" (I.ii.504). Caliban, however, resists his role of student/subject from the beginning to the end and, as Lamming suggests, ruins his chances of creating a beneficial relationship with Prospero: "Prospero believes . . . that Caliban can learn so much and no more" (110). It is Caliban's resistance that leads to the shift in power between him and Ariel—a shift present not only in their interactions with Prospero but also with the other European characters.

To fool the members of the lost party, Ariel begins to adapt to Prospero's language and use it in the way that his master demands. In the first act, Ariel adjusts his song to Ferdinand in order to reflect the imagined grief over the death of Ferdinand's father:

Full fathom five thy father lies.  
     Of his bones are coral made.  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes.  
     Nothing of him that doth fade  
 But doth suffer a sea change  
 Into something rich and strange.  
 Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell. . . . (I.ii.400-6)

Ariel's skillful adjustment is evident in Ferdinand's response: "The ditty does remember my drowned father" (I.ii.409). In the next act, Ariel is able to awaken Gonzalo and alert him of the coming danger:

ARIEL. While you here do snoring lie,  
     Open-eyed conspiracy  
     His time doth take.  
 If of life you keep a care,  
 Shake off slumber, and beware.  
     Awake, awake!

.....  
 GONZALO. Now, good angels preserve the King!  
 (II.i.302-09)

These two early instances illustrate how Ariel uses language to convey a persuasive meaning, even if Ferdinand and Gonzalo do not understand it word for word. However, in two later examples, he manages to communicate directly with his audience. In Act III, Ariel is able to imitate Trinculo's voice in order to trick Caliban (III.ii.43, 61) and also to make Alonso recognize Prospero's name:

Oh, it is monstrous, monstrous!

Methought the billows spoke to me and told me of it;

The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,

That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced

The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass. (III.iii.94-99)

By the end of the third act, Ariel is able to form a direct connection with the European visitors, pleasing his master in the process. His acquisition of Prospero's language is so successful that he is able to subvert the power hierarchy that should exist between him and the Westerners, placing him between Prospero and the others despite his servant status. While Ariel does remain obedient to Prospero, his newfound linguistic abilities actually raise him above the level of the other Westerners.

Caliban's interactions with the foreigners are much less productive. Instead of trying to gain autonomy, he supplants his current oppressor with a new one: "I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject, for the liquor is not earthly" (II.ii.124-25). Not only is Caliban unable to see the futility of pledging his loyalty to the duo, but he is also incapable of ascertaining the difference between the language of his master and the ramblings of two drunken clowns. Caliban's confusion is illustrated by his bewildered claim to Stephano and Trinculo that he will "bring my wood home faster" (II.ii.72-73). Later in the play, he continues to distance himself from Ariel's developed linguistic abilities when he is unable to convey caution to Stephano and Trinculo on their mission to kill Prospero, resulting in a very public scene of embarrassed pilfering. Instead of accepting the knowledge of his master and reversing the power binary of the linguistic code that subverts him, he attempts to plot

with the clowns and use Prospero's own language against him.

Power over language is equivalent to Caliban's and Ariel's respective powers over their freedom. As the control shifts for both characters, the style and format of their language change to reflect their separation. Ariel's power is so great that he is compared to a freed slave or, as Andrew Gurr states, an "apprentice" (201). In the end, Gurr's comparison becomes reality; Ariel is released both from his servitude and his linguistic instruction. Holger Henke contends that Ariel's power is the result of perseverance because the servant "only exists for the single-minded pursuit of his ultimate day of freedom" (47). Ariel's dedication occasions not just acquisition but also the mastering of Prospero's language in a way that makes him indispensable to Prospero and dangerous to Prospero's enemies. It also allows Ariel to show off his heightened linguistic skills in poetic form, as in his elegy to Ferdinand's father. Ariel's often-quoted poetry transcends a basic understanding of the language that he speaks; his elaborate use of conceit in comparing death to the natural elements of the ocean floor becomes a form of art, proving his facility in language and, therefore, his power over the language of the hegemonic culture.

Caliban's linguistic ability, on the other hand, devolves in the course of the play. Unlike Ariel, who cleanly wipes away his dreary past in order to improve his future, Caliban refuses to be what Jonathon Baldo refers to as a "forgetful native" (111) and give in to Prospero's pressure to forget his past and learn a new language. Caliban is less prone to assimilate and, therefore, resists the knowledge that Prospero offers him, causing his linguistic degradation. On his journey with Stephano and Trinculo, Caliban is not even able to recognize the song of Ariel, his slave counterpart, and believes that the music he is hearing lacks malicious intent, instead of the voice that is actually trying to trick him (III.ii.135-44). Caliban is unable to make fruitful linguistic connections with any other character, while Ariel thrives in his interactions. By comparing two of their respective passages directly, we can more accurately see

the difference in their skill:

ARIEL. Before you can say "Come" and "Go,"  
 And breathe twice, and cry "So, so,"  
 Each one, tripping on his toe,  
 Will be here with mop and mow.  
 Do you love me, master? No? (IV.i.44-48)

CALIBAN. No more dams I'll make for fish,  
 Nor fetch in firing  
 At requiring,  
 Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish.  
 'Ban, 'Ban Ca-Caliban  
 Has a new master. Get a new man.  
 Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom!  
 Freedom, High-day, freedom! (II.ii.178-85).

Both poems have a consistent rhyme scheme: Ariel uses AAAAA and Caliban ABBA CC. Ariel's statement, however, is much more consistent with traditional forms of poetry; Caliban's devolves into two lines of free verse, symbolizing the freedom that he speaks of but cannot attain. Caliban's poem is also stilted and more vernacular in diction, betraying a lower linguistic skill than Prospero's European language requires for artistic form. Caliban will never escape the stigma of his subaltern voice or the oppression of Prospero's rule because he refuses to acknowledge the power implicit in Prospero's language.

The differences between these poems exemplify the true dichotomy between Ariel and Prospero. Ariel realizes that his chances for freedom improve through effective communication with his master, and his poem exemplifies his acquiescent manner toward Prospero. Caliban is unable to ascertain the finer nuances of linguistic acquisition, and his poem illustrates that his relationship with his new masters will result in the same subordinate position he has with Prospero. As Roberto Fernández Retamar states, "both are slaves in the hands of Prospero, the foreign magician. But Caliban is

the rude and unconquerable master of the island, while Ariel . . . is the intellectual” (98). In *The Tempest*, the intellectual wins out, and it is Ariel’s compliant acceptance and mastery of Prospero’s dominant language that guarantees his freedom. Magic does play a role, but it is primarily through understanding and manipulating the European language that Ariel can convince Prospero to release him from servitude. For Caliban, the end is not as promising and, according to Deborah Willis, is left unknown because “indeterminacy is an essential feature of his character” (284). Indeterminacy causes his lack of resolution with Prospero; Caliban will not gain his freedom until he accepts the language of his European master because he lacks the power that attends it.

Thematically, Ariel and Caliban characterize *The Tempest*’s internal conflict with language and power. Postcolonial studies have shown that the power of language was often the crux that a colonized society depended upon. Resolution is possible but only when “othered” characters assent to the knowledge that language must be understood before the power that accompanies it can be accepted. Once reality is acknowledged and subjects like Ariel become masters of their own transcultured language, the balance of power becomes more level. In the end, Ariel becomes “correspondent to command” in more ways than one—not only does he communicate with others for Prospero, but he also communicates with Prospero in a reciprocal manner, advancing his master’s position and his own. Unlike Caliban, Ariel is not the naïve, exploited, and eventually broken servant of recent postcolonial reputation. Instead, Ariel denotes a new and relatively unexplored aspect of Shakespeare’s most colonial play: the successful native, a true correspondent to European hegemony.

#### Notes

1. Shakespeare’s connection to the Bermuda pamphlets has been discussed in many works, including Stephen Greenblatt’s “Learning to Curse: Aspects of Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century,” *First*

*Images of the New World: The Impact of the New World on the Old.* Ed. Fredi Chiapelli. Berkely: U of California P, 1972. 561-80; and Frank Kermode's "Introduction to *The Tempest*." *The Tempest*. New York: Routledge, 1954, xxv-xxxiv. For Latin America, see Roberto Fernández Retamar's "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America," *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, Eds. Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo. Durham: Duke UP, 2004, 83-99. For Haiti, see Jana Evans Braziel's "Diasporic Disciplining of Caliban? Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Intra-Caribbean Politics," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (2008): 149-59. For Ireland, see David J. Baker's chapter, "Where is Ireland in *The Tempest*?" *Shakespeare and Ireland: History Politics, Culture*, Eds. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray. New York: Macmillan, 1997, 68-88.

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## Best Kings: Brutus as a Literary Hybrid

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Every reader has a cultural lens through which he unconsciously views literature, and as a twenty-first century American, that lens might need adjusting when examining William Shakespeare's Roman tragedy, *Julius Caesar*. Our democratic cultural norm may erroneously focus our attention on the conflict surrounding Caesar's title of "dictator for life" (Arnold xlvi); however, as Charles and Michelle Martindale state, "in an Elizabethan context they would encourage any tendency to see Caesar as a divinely appointed monarch" (152). In other words, Shakespeare's audience would not have been disturbed by Caesar's absolute power, which shifts the themes of the play. Although the surface appears to be a political debate over different forms of government, it is not a question of monarchy versus republic. Shakespeare instead explores the complexities in political morality. Brutus serves as the vehicle for this debate, for as he struggles with the discrepancy between his motivations and his actions, Shakespeare juxtaposes him with Caesar, Cassius, and Antony to illuminate the degree to which he succeeds and fails at adhering to his moral and political agenda; furthermore, Brutus's hybrid literary role invites readers to examine the complex historical debate over the nature of a "just" leader.

The schism between Plutarch's and Shakespeare's Brutus opens up a new lens with which to examine *Julius Caesar*. Plutarch states, "*Marcus Brutus* . . . framed his manners of life by the rules of virtue and study of Philosophy . . . and was gentle and constant" (Arnold 113); however, Shakespeare's Brutus is flawed. For example, as Oliver Arnold observes in his introduction to the tragedy, "Brutus .

. . . begins to elaborate a populist justification for the assassination of Caesar (1.2.85) at the same instant he fears the people have willingly acclaimed Caesar their king (1.2.79-80)” (xxiii). Moments like these seem to clash with Brutus’s declaration that he has only the “general good” of Rome in mind (1.2.85). So why are Brutus’s portraits so different? According to Martindale, “Shakespeare’s concern is rather with the tortuous and self-deceiving ways in which men reach decisions, and, following Plutarch, he shows Brutus as a decent man who, by his actions, harms his political cause” (153). Brutus deceives himself. Whether he actually believes he is acting justly or not, his theories conflict with reality. He projects his own fears onto the people of Rome—hence why Cassius is able to manipulate him with an anonymous note that is supposedly from these people (2.1.55-58). Moreover, Brutus actually admits that his fear of what the crowned Caesar would become eclipses who he knows the current Caesar to be (5.1.10-13). By heeding these fears and using conjecture instead of logic, Shakespeare’s Brutus fails to adhere to the Stoicism Plutarch describes as “the study of Philosophy” (Arnold 113). This intrinsic flaw devalues the reading of Brutus as the protagonist of the play, yet because his antagonistic actions are steeped in good intentions, readers may find it difficult to definitively label him as an antagonist as well. Shakespeare ultimately dilutes Brutus’s constancy in order to portray him as a moral and flawed character, eliminating the possibility of clear-cut literary roles so as to grapple with political morality.

The complexity in Brutus’s character produces conflicting passages, such as the following speech to the conspirators:

We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,  
 And in the spirit of men there is no blood.  
 Oh, that we then could come by Caesar’s spirit  
 And not dismember Caesar! But alas,  
 Caesar must bleed for it. And gentle friends,  
 Let’s kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;  
 Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,

Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. (2.1.168-75)

Brutus unknowingly contradicts himself because the motivations of the foil characters surrounding him do not coincide with his own. He includes himself in the pronoun “we all” and labels the conspirators as “gentle friends,” which could incriminate him if readers are not aware of his tendency to misguide himself. He ironically asks them to kill Caesar “boldly” instead of “wrathfully” before invoking images of a “dish fit for the gods” compared to “hew[ing] him as a carcass fit for hounds.” However, Cassius and Antony do just that—they act out of vengeance and self-interest while squabbling for political favor. Brutus’s statement that “in the spirit of men there is no blood” is also flawed. Because Shakespeare’s audience knew the course of history, they would have been aware that by standing “against the spirit of Caesar,” Brutus incites a civil war far bloodier than the “dismembering” of one man. Knowing the historical bloodshed instantly condemns the ideological clash with which Brutus is concerned, especially given the political default of Elizabethan England. However, these underlying contradictions function as clues to Brutus’s complex character. The tone reflects his conception of Roman honor—the driving force in his political agenda—and the schism between belief and reality separates Brutus from the conspirators. As a result, the audience is asked to read Brutus as a literary hybrid, existing in the gray area between protagonist and antagonist.

However, before we can continue studying his character, we must first question why Shakespeare would *want* to write Brutus into this gray area. The key lies in Elizabethan England’s sociopolitical norm. Robin Headlam Wells says,

With almost universal agreement on the desirability of monarchical rule, whether absolute or constitutional, much of the political writing of the period concerned itself, not with alternative forms of government, but with the problem of defining the nature of the ideal prince. (90)

If we shift “monarchy vs. republic” to instead focus on “ideal prince

vs. tyrant”—and whether the conspirators acted accordingly—a duality emerges, wherein Brutus lingers in a political gray area as well as a literary one. French thinker Jean Bodin (1530-96) describes the “best king” as “such an one as is always ready to bestow his goods, his blood, and life, for the good of his people” (qtd. in Wells 104). Caesar—Brutus’s only role model for a political leader—does exactly that by leaving his gardens to the public (3.2.245) and offering his throat to them in an act of humility (1.2.262). Likewise, Brutus is perpetually concerned with the “general good,” which always shapes his relationship with profit-motivated characters such as Cassius:

What is that you would impart to me?  
 If it aught toward the general good,  
 Set honor in one eye and death i'th'other  
 And I will look on both indifferently . . . as I love honor  
 more than I fear death. (1.2.84-89).

Similar to a noble monarch, Brutus sees his life as inconsequential in comparison to the common good and his own Roman honor. Caesar has comparable moments, which suggests that Brutus uses Caesar as a political model, regardless of whether it concerns what constitutes morality and tyranny. Conversely, the foil characters, Cassius and Antony, share qualities that Bodin sees as tyrannical, which he states as respecting “nothing more than [their] own particular profit, revenge, or pleasure” (qtd. in Wells 104). Shakespeare thus offers Brutus up as a possible leader as he strives to embody Caesar’s good qualities, but as we will see, both Brutus and his model are far more flawed than the “ideal prince.” However, because Cassius’s and Antony’s selfishness strictly defines antagonism within *Julius Caesar*, Brutus remains most compatible with the “best king” paradigm.

Understanding how his self-deception lessens the moral severity of his actions allows readers to see the facets of Brutus that qualify him as virtuous:

When Shakespeare dramatizes stability or instability in his

characters, they are qualities seen not so much in the actions in which they participate as in the roots of their longings and fears, and in the extent of their ability to be profitably single-minded. (Martindale 172-73)

Even after an assassination and a war that lasted from 44 to 42 BCE, Cassius sees Brutus's steadfast loyalty and exclaims, "Strike, as thou didst at Caesar; for I know, / When thou didst hate him worst, thou loved'st him better / Than thou loved'st Cassius" (4.3.105-7). By applying Martindale's argument, we can see how Brutus's love trumps his murderous actions since the former is constant. He is not motivated by selfishness—unlike Cassius. Brutus even asks, "Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius, / That you would have me seek into myself / For that which is not in me?" (1.2.63-65). Elizabethan England commonly viewed monarchs as ordained by God, which creates the "danger" of which Brutus speaks. He is not Caesar; that is not "in" him. If he had knowingly and maliciously betrayed Caesar—especially if motivated by profit or revenge like Cassius—Brutus would have been seen as an antagonist similar to the many conspirators that plotted against Queen Elizabeth during her reign, such as the Earl of Essex and Mary, Queen of Scots (Arnold xlix-li); however, because he is openly misguided and motivated by good intentions, Brutus does not have to be bound by that literary role.

Nevertheless, Brutus is significantly flawed, which suggests the "ideal prince" or protagonist roles are hard—if not impossible—to attain. After the assassination, he says, "People and senators, be not affrighted . . . Ambition's debt is paid" (3.1.83-84). Ironically, Brutus becomes swept up in Cassius's ambition, and in turn, that debt is paid by their deaths (5.3.90, 5.5.50). Just as Cassius taints Brutus with the same quality that killed Caesar, he also undoes Brutus's virtuous constancy. Brutus breaks from Stoicism and succumbs to Cassius's infamous hot temper: "By the gods, / You shall digest the venom of your spleen / Though it do split for you; for, from this day forth / I'll use you for my mirth, yea, for my laughter, / When you

are waspish” (4.3.47-51). Plutarch’s Brutus epitomizes constancy and virtue, yet Shakespeare’s Brutus does not. Because of the multitude of flawed leaders—Caesar, and even the most viable option, Brutus—and the antagonistic conspirators—Antony and Cassius—Shakespeare questions whether it is possible to attain the “ideal prince” rather than creating heroes or protagonists. These main characters were purposefully flawed, just as all of humanity is—regardless of ordainment or conspiracy.

David Bevington states that in *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare “genuinely tries to represent contending issues fairly and with extraordinary insight” (43). However, these “issues” are not contending political structures, as modern readers may believe. Wells adds that for Shakespeare’s audience, “[Monarchy] was indeed the only logical form of government” (90). The focus instead shifts to questioning the complexities in human morality and weakness from a political context. Brutus, juxtaposed with Caesar, Antony, and Cassius, struggles to embody nobility in the absence of stable, virtuous models. Instead, he becomes swayed by self-deception and unconsciously succumbs to the same qualities he detests in those around him. Shakespeare thus examines the complexities in human motivation, rejecting literary molds to offer up more questions than answers.

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## Freudian Dream Theory's Influence on the Typography of E. E. Cummings

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According to critic Milton A. Cohen, Freudian theory was “the concomitant ‘modernism’ of psychology” and had great appeal to Modernist poets like E. E. Cummings because both poetry and Freudian psychoanalysis are “road[s] to the unconscious” (591, 598). From Cummings’s letters, essays, and heavily-annotated books, we know that he studied Freud’s work extensively. In one letter to his sister he urges her to read and “be conversant with two books: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and *WIT and the Unconscious*. Both are by FREUD. GET WISE TO YOURSELF!!” (qtd. in Cohen 591). Cummings’s fascination with the unconscious mind left its fingerprints on his poetry in a variety of ways, one being through his typography. His unconventionally-formatted poems like “[i(m) c-a-t(mo)],” “[n(o)w],” “[l(a),” and “[r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r]” seem to reflect the workings of dreams and Freudian theories of psychoanalytic dream interpretation through their fragmentation, visuality, and the decoding process, reminiscent of psychoanalysis, required to decipher the poetry’s words and meanings.

Doubtless, Cummings had many reasons for employing untraditional typography; critic Salvatore Marano suggests several in his article “Still Life with a Machine: E. E. Cummings’s Typewriter Poems,” including Cummings’s growing interest in the interrelations of the arts (as in the interplay between visual art and the written word) as well as pure experimentation with the new tool of a typewriter (122-23). When other biographical information is

additionally considered, it seems plausible that Cummings's poetic process, including his typographic decisions, was also influenced by Freudian thought. Based on the aforementioned primary sources that mention or discuss them, we know he was probably studying some of Freud's theories by his final years of college, which "is important," writes Cohen, "for since Cummings formulated both his aesthetics and his innovative poetic techniques in these years (ca. 1916-20), his early awareness of Freudian theory establishes the possibility of its influence on his art" (592-93). Cummings himself acknowledged Freud's influence on not just his private life but on his role as a poet as well. Not only did he allude to Freud in one of his "nonlectures" on writing, but in one note from 1940 he comments on his cognitive development in the same breath in which he mentions a particular poetic phase: "I wonder if, from my Keats period, I wasn't opened into reality via Freud" (598, qtd. in Cohen 593). Because Cummings's penchant for playing with language arrangement on a page was a notable feature of his poetic process, it is worth considering how Freud's influence may be evinced through Cummings's typography in particular.

One connection between Cummings's poetry and Freudian dream theory to acknowledge is the notion of fragmentation. In *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, a book which, as previously mentioned, Cummings studied and recommended, Freud comments, "We know dreams by the recollection which usually seems fragmentary and which occurs upon awakening" through a mental collage of "visual or other sensory impressions," "mental processes," and "emotional manifestations" (250). Freud's psychoanalytic interpreting of dreams hinged on the exploration of these fragments. As critic Kenneth Burke explains, "His procedure involved the breaking-down of the dream into a set of fragments, with the analyst then inducing the patient to improvise associations on each of these fragments in turn" (397). Modern poets may have experienced resonance with the idea of fragmentation and unconscious associations as, during this era, their "[i]magery came

to be increasingly obscure and disconnected, syntax willfully broken, words disjointed, metaphors unintegrated, and poems made up of free associations not fixed in any logical frame" (Block 176-77). Making the interdisciplinary connection clearer to explain just why Freud's "readers literarily inclined could [not] fail to be attracted [to his theories], even while repelled," Burke describes Freud's ideas as being "full of paradoxes, of leaps across gaps, of vistas—much more so than the work of many a modern poet who sought for nothing else but those and had no search for accuracy to motivate his work" (392). It's possible Freud's "leap[ing] across gaps" of dream fragments was one thing attracting Cummings to psychoanalytic theory.

A sense of visual fragmentation is obvious in much of Cummings's more experimental poetry. His heavy use of superfluous punctuation fractures words into disparate letters and chunks, as in, for example, the lines "(im)c-a-t(mo) / b,i;l:e . . ." Here, Cummings splits up the word "immobile" first by inserting a different word ("c-a-t," also fragmented in its own right) in the middle of the first four letters and then inserting a line break before even further fragmenting the word by placing punctuation between the last four letters (1-2). The poem "[r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r]" is perhaps one of the most famous examples of Cummings's topographical and syntactic experiments, and it, too, is full of fragmentation. The letters and words leap around the page almost haphazardly, with large gaps between some words. For example, there is a line that begins with the "s" of "leaps" by the left margin followed by a long space and then the lone letter "a" of "arriving" aligned at the right hand margin of the poem (10). The word "gathering," the first half of which is in line 4 and the second half of which is in line 6, is interrupted by line 5's "PPEGORHRASS," and the words "become" and "rearrangingly" in the penultimate line are broken up and collaged together: "rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly" (4-6, 14).

Fostering a feeling of fragmentation through unconventional typography is not the only way in which Cummings's work relates

to Freud's study of dreams. Burke asserts that "both the neurotic act and the poetic act" are "symbolic acts" (393). Symbolism frequently involves a visual component, and this aligns with what Freud writes concerning a dream's images—that "psychic complications" result in a "dream picture," having changed into "sensory representation" and "mental images" (Freud, "Theories" 256). Even words themselves, believed Freud, "are treated in dreams as though they were concrete things and for that reason they are apt to be combined in just the same way as presentations of concrete objects" (qtd. in Cohen 600). To a poet such as Cummings, this could have been an impetus to take words, the naturally intangible and symbolic currency of poetry, and treat them as concrete, visual objects, just as Freud asserts the unconscious mind does in dreaming. And this is, in fact, what Cohen sees Cummings doing. He writes, "One aesthetic goal that Cummings pondered in his notes and that was especially receptive to Freudian theory was to convey a sense of three-dimensional form in . . . poetry by non-traditional methods. Cummings termed this three-dimensional aesthetic 'seeing around'" (596). While Cohen focuses on Cummings's oxymoronic juxtaposition of "contrasting words, themes, and verbal structures in his poems" to create this effect of "seeing around," Cummings also incorporates a striving for visual images through his typographic decisions (596).

The poem "[*(im)c-a-t(mo)*]" is a prime example of Cummings using typography to invoke the visual. It has been frequently noted that rotating the poem 90 degrees to the right reveals an image of a cat, with the "D" as its head. Marano also notes that the ampersands used in line 9 (which simply reads "&&&") are an "iconic double of the animal" (133). The "poempicture" "[*n(o)w*]" also evokes visuality, using an apparently random mix of uppercase and lowercase letters and erratically interspersed punctuation to suggest the energetic turbulence of a thunderstorm ("Slapped:with;liGhtninG / !"), while even, at times, evoking the comparatively calm moments between jolts by allowing spans of lowercase letters with few interruptions

of punctuation (“theraIncoming // o all the roofs roar / drownInsound”) (Cummings 5-6, 17-19). Furthermore, Marano senses movement and “a transparent simultaneity of imagery” in the lines, “THuNdeRB / loSSo!M” (130). One may even interpret the occasional interruption of words and phrases with an exclamation mark as visually representative of a sudden bolt of lightning.

Another very visual poem is “[l(a),” which, when rid of line breaks, reads “l(a leaf falls)oneliness.” To visually portray the vertical path of a lone leaf falling, Cummings keeps each line very short, most being only two or three characters long. This also, as critic Robert Root-Bernstein points out, happens to make the poem resemble the Arabic numeral 1. He also sees the falling fragments tangibly “forcing the reader’s eyes back and forth across the page as if one were following the pendular fall of the leaf itself” (and points out that Cummings uses the same type of technique in his grasshopper poem, “in which the reader’s eyes must jump back and forth across the page”) (74). Such active participation in the visual reading of the poems creates palpable experiences of the imagined images, similar to the transient symbols of a dream being able to summon convincing sensations of reality. As critic Richard Shusterman puts it, “The effects of the poem’s visuality are numerous and rich. The falling of a leaf to which loneliness is compared is not only visually represented by the sharp vertical fall of the poem, but we are brought to feel it empathetically in our reading of the poem” (95). This empathic response is likely engendered by the delicate downward path our eyes must take to decode the words; this deliberately slow experience of the poem brought on by its typographical arrangement not only conjures the visual image but instills in the reader a sense of thematic poignancy, much in the same way a visual symbol in a dream is connected at a preverbal level with some unconscious psychological preoccupation.

Freud, in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, writes that the “visual or other sensory impressions” of a dream “[represent] to us a *deceptive* picture of an experience” (emphasis added, 250). His

psychoanalytic process treats dreams as a mask made of symbols and sensations borne from latent psychological content, and it is the underlying, concealed urges and wishes (revealed through a patient's free-associations) that are the keys to understanding one's psyche. In his *Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*, Freud explains that it is less about the "manifest dream-content" and more about the "latent dream-thoughts" that are hidden by the dream contents we remember in the morning. He writes that the significances of dreams are often dismissed due to "their evident absurdity and senselessness," but that "these dreams have undergone a process of disguise" and need only to be interpreted through free-association to prove their psychoanalytic worth (201).

To some students of literature, poetry can seem to carry just as much obscure "senselessness" as dream content, with the poet's true meaning hidden beneath symbols and esoterica. In the case of Cummings's typographic poetry, however, it is less the semantic meaning and more the mere syntactic decoding that creates a puzzle of disguise. Having been familiar with Freud's writings, Cummings was acquainted with the paradigm of manifest dream-content versus latent dream-thoughts, and it is feasible that he, in keeping with his fascination with the unconscious, was inspired to use his typographic choices to mimic the relationship between the two. Freud, in *Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*, says that "the dreams of adults generally have an incomprehensible content" (201). Anyone glancing at "[r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r]" would agree that Cummings probably intended to give at least an initial impression of incomprehensibility through his arrangement of words. Freud writes, "You must differentiate between the manifest dream-content, which we remember in the morning only confusedly, and with difficulty clothe in words which seem arbitrary, and the latent dream-thoughts, whose presence in the unconscious we must assume" (201). There is much in Freud's explanation that finds kinship with elements of experimental poetry. Again, the unintelligible visual impression Cummings's typography gives is

reminiscent of “confusedly”-remembered dream-content, and there is much about Cummings’s wild punctuation and syntactic rebellion that critics have found to be as “arbitrary” as the words for which we grope when trying to describe a dream.

Furthermore, in much the same way Freud insisted we must believe in the existence of latent dream-thoughts in the unconscious, Cummings essentially asks his readers to trust that there is cogent meaning behind his word jumbles—that there is a hidden solution to the puzzle. When Freud also writes that “the psychic content which underlies [dream-content] was originally meant for *quite different verbal expression*,” one can draw a connection to Cummings’s primarily visual texts that, when verbalized, both trip up the otherwise fluent reader and provide a vastly different experience of the poem, forcing the reader to make ambiguous decisions about its verbalization that are less necessary when experiencing the poem visually and more holistically (emphasis added, 201). For instance, if one were to read “[r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r]” aloud, one would have to decide how (or whether) to read the variations of “grasshopper”—PPEGORHRASS and “.gRrEaPsPhOs”—that are interjected disruptively amidst otherwise (roughly) cohesive phrases (5, 12). Would these rearrangements be read as single, fluidly-pronounced nonsense words or have their letters named individually? Or would they just be simplified to “grasshopper”? This doesn’t seem to be a poem intended for vocalization, and in creating a clash between the basic meaning of the poem (that of a grasshopper leaping) and the surface layer of fragmented, imperfect text, Cummings has recreated the disconnect between underlying “psychic content” and the scattered attempts patients make to verbalize the manifest dream-content.

Once a patient did verbalize, to the best of his ability, components of a dream, Freud would have him “improvise associations on each of these fragments in turn,” with the assumption that the uninhibited connections drawn would provide insight into the latent workings of the patient’s psyche (Burke 397).

A comparable decoding of disguised meanings seems to be the process Cummings requires of his readers, further suggesting the influence Freud may have had on his poetic process. Freud goes into detail:

One gains an understanding of [latent dream-thoughts] by resolving the manifest dream-content into its component parts without regard for its apparent meaning, and then by following up the threads of associations which emanate from each one of the now isolated elements. These become interwoven and in the end lead to a structure of thoughts, which is not only entirely accurate, but also fits easily into the familiar associations of our psychic processes. (“Theories” 251)

Consider how laborious it is to decode some of Cummings’s lines of poetry for the first time, taking these from “[*(im)c-a-t(mo)*]” as an example:

FalleA  
ps!fl  
Oattumbli

sh?dr

IftwhirlF  
(U!)(Y)  
&&& [ . . . ] (3-9)

Many first-time readers of this poem will have to parse through the disorienting typography of a passage like this and separate it into “its component parts,” most likely with more initial concern for rudimentary decoding than semantic appreciation. But upon understanding each component’s meaning in isolation, threading the connections back together can then lead to a reading of a cohesive, comprehensible idea.

It seems as though Cummings’s early appreciation of the psychoanalytic process inspired him to create poetry that alludes

to the theories and practices of Freud. His poems reveal an element of fragmentation common to both modern poetry and a Freudian description of dream recollection while striving to create nearly concrete symbols through heavily visual typography. His unconventional typography also poses a challenge comparable to dream interpretation—the need to separate and sort through often-misleading surface images/words and decode their significance in an attempt to uncover disguised meaning, similar to Freud’s idea of sorting through patients’ disparate dream elements and encouraging unconscious free-association to connect deeper layers of thought and discover latent psychological truths. Knowing the extent to which Cummings filled his personal life with Freudian thought, and having records of him discussing Freud’s influence even in relation to the poetic process, there is little reason to doubt that Cummings could have allowed his typographic experimentation to mirror unconscious processes of sleep and allude to Freudian dream interpretation.

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## The Dover Cliffs Scene (Act 4.6) in Shakespeare's *King Lear*: The Poet as Guide

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The primary issue with imagination in Elizabethan psychological theory is the possibility of that faculty delivering false images of reality to an individual's psyche. According to William Rossky, "the concern of the Elizabethan is that the imagination deliver accurate images [of reality]" (51-52). But, without the ability to control the imagination—for "the images of the imagination are idly capricious, fleeting and inconstant" (60)—there is no way to ensure that the imagination is providing accurate images. The transient quality of the imagination's inventions, in the Elizabethan configuration, is a result of the methodology of its functioning. As Rossky states, "Elizabethan doctrine pictured imagination as almost literally cutting up its images into parts and then rejoining them into forms that never exist in the external world of nature" (58). Destruction is viewed here as a necessary precursor to creation, the process of which is capable of ensnaring an individual in a realm that stands in stark contrast to reality. As Lear's madness exhibits, malfunctions do occur, and they result in mutations that lead to disfigurement, illness, and corruption.

Imagination, in the Elizabethan era, was criticized for its ability to distort and destroy. Immorality emanated from a distortion of reality, a destruction of truth. Shakespeare examines the Elizabethan criticism of the imagination in *King Lear* and ultimately challenges it by presenting a series of individual sufferings that lead into Edgar's actions in act 4, scene 6. Edgar's guiding Gloucester to the supposed White Cliffs of Dover highlights the positive, curative powers of the

imagination that directly contrast the negative views common to the Elizabethan era. By way of rhetoric, Edgar leads Gloucester through the process of coping with and overcoming his suffering, and, in this act, Shakespeare's praise of the poet's ability to harness the creative/ destructive faculties of the imagination, in order to reach a positive end, is revealed.

There is a Renaissance psychiatric practice that shares this same function—that is, the function of manipulating an individual's imagination so as to induce a curative psychic rejuvenation. Winfried Schleiner compares Edgar's actions in the Dover Cliffs scene to the Renaissance psychiatric practice of curing melancholic patients by subjecting their imagination to their reason (340) by forcing them to realize the inaccuracies of their beliefs. Although this practice was popular before Shakespeare's time, it is likely that the poet was aware of it. Schleiner states that skill in this practice "consisted of influencing the patient's surroundings so as to have an impact on his behavior" (338). That Edgar's deception of Gloucester emulates this practice is evident in his linguistic manipulation of his father's environment and in his end goal: "Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it" (4.6.34-35). But Schleiner's argument—the main point of which is that the Dover Cliff scene simply reflects these practices—is inaccurate and incomplete. Edgar performs the opposite action of subjecting Gloucester's imagination to his reason: he works to infiltrate Gloucester's imagination by way of rhetoric, temporarily stalling Gloucester's faculty of reason so that he takes Edgar's input as reality. And, as opposed to "influencing [Gloucester's] surroundings," Edgar actually creates (linguistically) an environment that is not perceivable in objective reality. Finally, Shakespeare does not use this scene merely as a display of his skill in utilizing current practices in his work; rather, he is challenging the negative connotations popular in Elizabethan belief regarding the imagination by defining the positive social role of the poet as a guide figure within a world of suffering.

The sufferings of Lear, Gloucester, and Edgar are caused by

distortions of reality—in Lear’s case, vanity, in Gloucester’s and Edgar’s, deceit—that have been rationalized into acceptance; but these distortions do not affect the characters’ faculties of reason, because it is reason that verifies these distortions as reality. As a result of such acceptance, conflict—between the conscious acceptance and the unconscious questioning of reality—grows within the psyche of each. This conflict may be read as Theseus’s “airy nothing,” as the “unknown,” that, unchecked, incubates in the unconscious mind until a triggering event breaks the barrier between actuality and perceived reality such that each man is made to recognize and confront his own mistakes. The three men have different methods of coping with their sufferings, and Shakespeare uses each method as a means of reinforcing his primary point with the play: the poet’s positive social role.

Edgar’s initial suffering differs from Lear’s and Gloucester’s in that he is not able to see the cause of it; because of Edmund’s deceit, there is no way for Edgar to determine the truth of the events that have led to his father’s rage. Edgar, though confused, recognizes the flight that Edmund recommends as a necessity. He disguises himself and leaves. But the deception that his disguise implies is not morally equivalent to Edmund’s deceit; as Stephen Greenblatt points out, “Edgar adopts the role of Poor Tom not out of a corrupt will to deceive, but out of a commendable desire to survive” (178). Edgar’s time spent in the persona of Poor Tom, rather than destroying his sanity—he acknowledges his “counterfeiting” (3.6.60), and a madman would not recognize it as such—serves as an outlet of escape from his suffering. Because he must maintain the persona of the madman in front of Lear, Kent, and Gloucester, Edgar does not have the time to dwell on his suffering; rather, he is able to channel it into the tormented persona that he chooses to adopt, via rhetorical invention. Ironically, as a result of Edmund’s deceit, Edgar is given the opportunity to hone his rhetorical skills in order to pursue a positive ambition—the preservation of his life.

His experiences as Poor Tom also afford Edgar the opportunity

to observe the sufferings of others from a more objective perspective. Edgar witnesses how suffering affects the other characters, and his observations lead him to a greater understanding of suffering in general. Lear's suffering humbles Edgar—"How light and portable my pain seems now, / When that which makes me bend makes the King bow" (3.6.108-9)—and he comes to the realization that "Who alone suffers suffers most i'th' mind . . . But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip / When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship" (3.6.104-7). Lear's suffering foils Edgar's own suffering and enlightens him. Shakespeare directs Edgar toward a total understanding and acceptance of suffering—as Matthew A. Fike notes, Edgar "sums up the tragedy in only five words: 'He childed as I fathered' (3.6.110)"—and this enlightenment, coupled with an exceptional rhetorical skill, marks the beginning of Edgar's activation as the poet/guide archetype. Edgar's response to Gloucester's questioning of his identity—" [I am] A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows, / Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows, / Am pregnant to good pity" (4.6.224-26)—presents Shakespeare's understanding of the poet's activation: the poet, intensely aware of the sufferings of others, is inspired to direct them toward an understanding that mirrors his own heightened spiritual awareness. Thus, Edgar's actions in the Dover Cliff scene highlight the positive, curative powers of the imagination.

Lear's presence in the scene, however, serves as a counterargument to Shakespeare's praise of the poet. The King's proclamation that "Nature's above art" (4.6.86), in terms of its ability to produce "side-piercing sight[s]" (4.6.85), discredits the talent of the poet and reinforces the Elizabethan condemnation of the imagination, for seeking an escape from reality, as Gloucester has done by attempting suicide, would have been considered immoral. In his madness, Lear belittles Gloucester's suffering—"Gloucester's bastard son / Was kinder to his father than my daughters" (4.6.114-15)—and he chastises the way that Gloucester has coped with it: after listing absurdly grotesque images of his older

daughters, Lear states, “Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, / Sweeten my imagination” (4.6.130-31). The King laughs at the thought that the mind may be cleansed by way of the imagination, because suffering is at the core of his universe, and the outputs of that universe fuel the imagination (for, as Rossky notes, “although imagination feigns the unreal, for the Elizabethan[s] . . . its unreal images are in a very tangible way still derived ultimately from impressions of real objects” (58)). But Lear’s madness is the result of his inability to fully manage his suffering, and so, Shakespeare presents his method of coping as lacking and flawed. Because Gloucester attempts to flee from his suffering rather than to deal with it properly, Edgar’s actions—specifically those in act 4, scene 6—display the only method of coping with suffering that Shakespeare seems to promote in the play.

Edgar’s ability to use words to superimpose an imagined reality over Gloucester’s objective reality reflects the power or ability of the poet, playwright, or artist in general, to harness the creative/ destructive powers of the imagination. The vicarious experience that the poet’s actions induce in his audience affords him the potential to transfer his enlightenment to his audience. But, in order to harness the full power of words, the poet must first shred the ligatures of learned reason, which keep his/her audience bound to objective reality: as Samuel Taylor Coleridge states, the poet must induce a “willing suspension of disbelief” (97). For instance, Gloucester, upon arriving at the “cliffs” with Edgar, is at first doubtful of Edgar’s suggested reality—“methinks the ground is even” (4.6.3), as opposed to the inclined slope that is to be expected near the cliffs—and Gloucester is doubtful of the architect of that reality as well, of Edgar—“methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak’st / In better phrase and matter than thou didst” (4.6.10-11). Gloucester’s skepticism indicates a lingering capacity to be conscious of the truths of objective reality as well as a desire to remain in that reality (ironic due to his suicidal intentions). Edgar begins to induce a “willing suspension of disbelief” by offering a simple,

initial sensation to Gloucester—"do you hear the sea?" (4.6.5)—and, in response to his audience's continued skepticism, he implants the notion that Gloucester's faculties for interpreting reality are less than capable: "your other senses grow imperfect / By your eyes' anguish" (4.6.7-8); thus, Edgar convinces Gloucester that he is in need of a guide, of an interpreter of reality.

Gloucester's eventual acceptance of Edgar's presented material implies a submission to Edgar's influence; and, as he has accepted Edgar as guide, Edgar is free to build on the initial image. Edgar offers an elaborate vision of the cliffs, and he charges that scene with emotion to strengthen its impact: "How fearful / And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low! . . . I'll look no more, / Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight / Topple down headlong" (4.6.11-24). The potency of the sensations (the sounds of Edgar's words and the images that they imply) together with the conceptualizations (the emotional and intellectual connections to these images) that Edgar generates lull Gloucester—his audience—into complete transcendence. The poet's (Edgar's) construction of an alternate reality lures the audience (Gloucester) further from objective reality and deeper into the realm of the imagination where non-experience may be perceived as an experienced reality.

Although Edgar is the primary conductor of Gloucester's transcendence, Gloucester's own consciousness is the ultimate source, for his mind processes Edgar's words based upon the knowledge that he has gained from prior experience. This reiterates Rossky's explanation of the Elizabethan conceptualization of imagination. It is necessary that an audience have prior experience with objective reality for the imagined experiences that art creates to be effective. The poet must be aware of his/her audience's prior experiences. For, if Edgar's words were to fall short of Gloucester's previous knowledge, then Gloucester would not be able to generate the images necessary for the imaginary experience that coincides with Edgar's intentions; and, as a result, the purpose of Edgar's work would be lost. Edgar's purpose would also be lost if he were to let

on to Gloucester that his experiences at the “cliffs” are a production of the imagination rather than an incident of objective reality—for this realization could cause Gloucester’s reason to be called into question, leading perhaps to insanity. Edgar realizes this, and so, he does not state his purpose to Gloucester directly; rather, he reveals it through an aside. Later, however, he does state his purpose to Gloucester: “Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors / Of men’s impossibilities, have preserved thee” (4.6.73-74); but this purpose is stated in such a manner that the context of Gloucester’s imagined experience is essential to the total understanding of that purpose. And, while the effectiveness of Edgar’s work can be seen in Gloucester’s statement, “Henceforth I’ll bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself / ‘Enough, enough,’ and die” (4.6.75-77), his understanding comes through more as a sentimental reverence for life than as an explicit linguistic statement, for he speaks in reaction to the emotions that his imagined experience produces; it is not the other way around.

In Edgar’s question, “Had [Gloucester] been where he thought, / By this had thought been past. Alive or dead?” (4.6.44-45), Shakespeare’s voice may be heard: He is pleading with his audience to consider his influence over them, to consider the poet’s influence and its significance. Edgar (the poet) leads Gloucester (the audience) toward an understanding of his suffering by leading him through an experience in the realm of the imagination. Under Edgar’s guidance, Gloucester is provided the means of facing his suffering, of realizing, of experiencing the greatest blow it could deal him—death—and from that experience, Gloucester is afforded the ability to accept suffering as a natural part of life. From “airy nothing,” Gloucester gains a great something. This stands in direct contrast to the Elizabethan condemnation of the imagination, which is summed up in Lear’s statement “Nothing will come of nothing” (1.1.90). For, through his acceptance of suffering—earned by way of an imagined experience—Gloucester achieves a determination to live a good life.

But Gloucester does die, when he is again confronted with

objective reality; and the unresolved tensions between his positive and negative responses to Edgar's intervention praise and condemn the poet's influence. Despite the fact that Edgar is capable of summing up the tragedy in five words, the force of evil in the play, as Greenblatt states, "is larger than any local habitation or name" (183). Even though Edgar is able to lead his father out of one instance of suffering, Shakespeare does not grant Edgar an epistemological understanding as to why the tragic events that have led to that suffering have occurred in the first place; and furthermore, Shakespeare destroys any semblance of hope that Edgar's actions create by killing off a large portion of the play's characters. This expresses, perhaps, a recognition of Shakespeare's own inability as a poet to offer his audience total release from their sufferings; but it may also express his/the poet's intrinsic need to continue to produce poetic works—to continue to try. In the Dover Cliffs scene, Shakespeare lauds the poet for his/her curative talent, but he does not do this in order to evade the questioning of his own skill as a poet; rather, Shakespeare praises the poet so that the play expresses a greater pity for the kind of world that is in need of such a skill.

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# Pope's *Wasteland*: *The Dunciad* Read as an Expression of the Mourning Modern Mind

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Simply because Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* participates in what it ostensibly argues against (i.e. mass print culture) and utilizes new forms of "collective memory" in its structure, which it simultaneously expresses anxiety over, does not allow us to read Pope's text as self-defeating and hypocritical. Rather, the apparatus Pope constructs in his text, throughout its publication history, only strengthens his critique of mass print culture. Pope's text is a patchwork of various voices and styles, lacking a clear central authorial figure through which we could distill clear meaning. With this lack of a central voice, Pope allows us to experience the disordered cacophony of the Grub Street press while simultaneously (and paradoxically) organizing his text in the form of tightly constructed heroic couplets. These paradoxical elements of the text, woven together mainly through the central image of "the mind," puts the reader into a state of perpetual frenzy, moving from footnote to poetic feet, desperately trying to make meaning out of Pope's constantly shifting identity. Pope fully embraces the new print media and employs the new apparatuses of collective memory in his text to disorient the reader and effectively prove the distorting and, in Pope's view, disconcerting effects mass print culture has on eighteenth century England.

To better understand the role of the author in *The Dunciad*, it is important for a modern audience to be aware of the different conceptualization eighteenth century readers and writers would

have had of anonymity in texts. Pat Rogers notes, in his analysis of Alexander Pope's authorship, that modern audiences tend to link "authorship" with a text's "authority" (Rogers 233). In other words, if a text does not have an easily distinguishable author, we tend to look upon that text with more suspicion. However, the role the author plays in shaping the expectations of a text was not as strong in the eighteenth century psyche due to many factors modern readers take for granted. The main forces that affect our reading today (dealing with our conceptualization of author) would include the aesthetics of the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century (which strengthened the idea of the individual) and the rise of the bourgeoisie which, consequently, led to the importance of ownership and patenting (Foucault 908). While modern audiences might assume that any text must have a clearly identified author to operate effectively, we cannot assume this when attempting to read any text of the eighteenth century, especially Alexander Pope.

This is not to say that anonymity in writing had a "literary" motive, meaning that the choice to publish a text anonymously was intended to change how people would have read a text; rather "[a] nonymity [was] just a practical convenience, to avoid detection" (Rogers 235). As we know from Pope's famous anonymous publication of *An Essay on Man* (1734), purely with the intent of fooling the reading public who criticized his prior work, Alexander Pope was unafraid of using anonymity to advance personal and/or professional causes (Williams xviii). In fact, Pope himself introduced his 1723 three-book version of *The Dunciad* anonymously and, as Rogers points out, while many of the reading public had suspicions as to who authored this text, they could not say with absolute certainty that it was the work of Alexander Pope (Rogers 237).

While we should not assume in our analysis of *The Dunciad* that Pope intended his role as the text's author to have any bearing on how we are to decipher meaning from the text itself, we still have to wonder why Pope would initially present his text in such a way. Pope probably thought most people would know who the author

of *The Dunciad* was once he published it, but that does not bring us closer to a deeper understanding of this text (Rogers 237). It is difficult to see a clear reason as to why Pope decided to release his text anonymously at first, and while he might not have seen this initial decision to publish his *Dunciad* anonymously as an expression of the argument within the text itself, this fact of producing a text anonymously has great significance in our understanding of how the role of the author operates within the poem.

Once we delve into the poetic text proper, the very opening lines of the First Book ostensibly declare a central voice, and modern readers will readily assume that the voice guiding this poem is Pope himself when he states: “The Mighty Mother, and her Son who brings / The Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings, / I sing” (Pope 1.1-3). We are led to believe, by this point in the poem (especially with the addition of the prefatory material in 1729), that Pope is the “I” of the first line (297). But this reading cannot continue once we read in Book III: “And Pope’s, ten years to comment and translate” (3.332). Within the reality of this poem we cannot say that Alexander Pope is guiding the text’s argument because this line, interestingly, locates Pope outside of the construction of this poem and inside the world of London writers. Of course, we as readers know that Pope literally constructed the work, but within the work itself it is significant that Pope does not allow us to ascribe authorship to him (just as he denied his first readers the actual knowledge of his authorship).

We can see that Alexander Pope obviously wants the narrative voice of this poem to be in some sense anonymous. Now we have to ask, what are we to make of this decision to eliminate a central authorial voice? In a sense we could see that this absence allows Pope to rise above the Grub Street hacks he so mercilessly attacks; the voice within his own poetic invention allows us no way to see his work as a diatribe, instead it allows him to stand above the fray he personally detests. This anonymous central voice also allows Pope to have the reader fully experience the chaotic over-proliferation

of print culture. This over-proliferation of meanings, texts, and significations in the poem all spring from the empty source of an anonymous author. Pope makes it easy for the reader to deconstruct his text and see how the over-proliferation of meaning paradoxically reveals the extreme lack of meaning.

We might better understand how Pope is operating in this text by contrasting him with how Yahweh operates in the Hebrew Bible. Yahweh, through his personal intervention and action, brought light into darkness and brought formless chaos into order (*The Holy Bible*, Gen. 1:1-31). Where there was no meaning or purpose, we could say, Yahweh invented it through his creation. Pope, on the other hand, orders the world around him as he sees it (mainly through his own subjective distortion) only to bring it back, as Pope notes through Martinus Scriblerus' prefatory note, into the "restoration of the reign of Chaos and Night" (Pope 304-5). In many ways Pope's authorship can be understood as the exact opposite of Yahweh; whereas Yahweh was personal, apparent, and creative, the author of *The Dunciad* is suspect, distorting, and impersonal. Indeed the "author" of *The Dunciad* is ever elusive and absent from his poetic text, and with this lack of a central author, through whom we might better sort out meaning, we must ask: who or what are we to turn to for meaning in this seemingly random patchwork of distorted dunces?

It could seem with all the different voices competing for attention in this mock-epic that there is no central governing principle to this poem at all. But what holds these books together is not a central authorial figure or even a coherent plot structure; what holds these books together is the image of "the mind." In fact, we could read this entire poem as a physical representation of the eighteenth century mind, using the arguments of Harold Weber and Jennifer Snead to strengthen this interpretation. Indeed, Snead points out that *The Dunciad* is the "first epic for . . . the first information age" (Snead 198). What her analysis suggests is that *The Dunciad* is distinctly of its time, and that it is impossible for us to see

this poem produced any time prior to the eighteenth century, with its over-proliferation of writing, information, and an ever-increasing readership.

The concept of memory was rapidly changing within English society, as Weber points out in his analysis of collective memory. The new institutions of preserving memory, such as “the academy, museum and library” are things which Pope thought would lead to the “inability of genuine culture to sustain itself in the face of modern methods of reproduction and preservation” (Weber 5). These facts may help us better understand Pope’s intense concern with making clear to the reader right from the start the Epic ambitions of *The Dunciad*. This identification with the Western Epic tradition is most clearly stated by Pope through Marinus Scriblerus’ “Of the Poem” in the introductory material. Scriblerus describes the author Pope as feeling some sense of “duty to imitate” the lost satire of Homer entitled *Margites* in Pope’s own *Dunciad* (Pope 303). Scriblerus then goes on to point to all the ways Pope attempts to situate his poem in the classical Epic tradition, such as the “[framing of] the title after the ancient Greek manner” (303). While Pope desperately tries in his introductory materials and his extensive footnotes to guide his readers by pointing out the Epic qualities to his poem, the poem can never be an Epic in the truest sense of the word, and Pope would have known this.

Indeed, the importance of this insistence on being an “Epic” is crucial to understanding this poem. Jennifer Snead points out that the qualities of “timelessness and universality,” which all classical epics share, are simply not present in *The Dunciad* (Snead 198). *The Dunciad* itself is not a stable work; anyone who studies this text by Pope has to learn of its extensive publication history within the specific context of eighteenth century England to begin to understand the literal meaning of the text. When we study *The Dunciad*, or rather the *Dunciads*, we see not a clear universal/timeless classical value which we expect in Epic works, rather we see the codified evolution of a poem through transient points in history;

it is a poem that is constantly shifting due to social, political, and personal changes. As Snead puts it, this evolution of *The Dunciad* expresses “Pope’s constantly evolving attempt . . . to demonstrate, simultaneously, the desirability of maintaining . . . [classical] ideals and the . . . impossibility of attaining them . . . within the culture of print” (Snead 198). As we can see, Pope deeply desires the central authority and timeless quality that Epic texts offer, but simultaneously expresses the impracticability of maintaining these ideals in a world awash with dull writing.

Indeed, in the footnote to the scatological games of Book II, Pope seems at great lengths to make his reader see his games as an imitation of the Epic games in Homer and Virgil. But the argument of the footnote breaks down even within itself, demonstrating the impossibility of writing Epics in the modern era. While this footnote states that the scatological games “may seem base for the dignity of an Epic poem,” Pope goes on to defend his choice of images via examples from Dryden, Virgil, and Homer (Pope 324). But, in this same footnote, Pope also expresses that “this part of [the] Poem was . . . what cost [Pope] most trouble and pleased him least” (Pope 324). Why would these games, often a heroic occasion of strength and revelry, seem sad to Pope? It is quite clear that the sadness Pope feels springs from his realization that it is impossible to see these classical images as signifying beauty or joy in the modern era when the Grub Street hacks are the ones that are writing them.

We can see the lament of the Epic tradition as also constituting a lament of old ways of knowing the world, or the death of an older form of collective memory. For example, the first great appearance of the mind image in Pope’s text is in the First Book where he declares the goddess of Dulness “rul’d in native Anarchy, the mind” (Pope 1.16). The anarchy within the mind, of course, foreshadows the eventual anarchy within society, or, as we have been exploring thus far, the lack of a centralized way of knowing anything in a world awash with texts that are constantly suspect.

We can understand this process of Dulness infecting English

society better in Book III which, in fact, takes place inside the sleeping mind of Cibber in the 1743 edition of this poem. What we have in this episode structurally is a great inversion of the amazing scene between Adam and St. Michael in Books XI and XII of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Adam's mind is filled (going from ignorance to enlightenment) with the whole of Christian history. Instead of being shown the glory of God's plan, as Milton described it, Cibber is shown triumphant scenes of the destruction of learning and triumph of Dulness. In Pope's episode, the King of Dulness is also shown the waters of "Lethe," a mythical river in ancient Greek mythology in which the souls of the dead forget their previous lives (Pope 340). Pope also inverts this classical image of Greek mythology by making "Bavius . . . dip poetic souls, / And blunt the sense, and fit it for a skull / Of solid proof, impenetrably dull" before they are even born (340). The way Dulness achieves her power is through the reversal of ends and beginnings; by this we mean effectively killing man before he enters the world by erasing both memory and inspiration from the mind. This is exactly what Pope has done to the minds of his readers: he has distorted classical memory (via his reverse image of Lethe).

Thus, we can see *The Dunciad* as a physical representation of the mind in the age of massive print culture and growing institutions of collective memory. Indeed, Harold Weber points out that "[t]he work's intrusive textual apparatus, which physically dominates the poem . . . exists as an immense and unwieldy hodgepodge of miscellaneous information" (Weber 15). This hodgepodge of information comes most clearly in Pope's footnotes, without which the reader cannot even attempt to read this poem, but which are also sometimes deliberately misleading. The ostensible liberation provided by a multiplicity of texts (or in this text's case, a multiplicity of footnotes) actually confines the modern reader who has no way of accurately telling the difference between the "truths" of Homer and the "truths" of Scriblerus. As Weber correctly notes: "[t]he infinite accumulation . . . of memories does not provide . . .

the realization of . . . total knowledge but the experience of . . . an uncontrollable and cancerous growth” (Weber 16). Pope exposes this complex cancerous growth by utilizing the new tools of bibliography and biography simultaneously on the page with his poem. The result is an ever increasing feeling of “not knowing” the whole picture while reading Pope’s text. We are taken out of the aesthetic of the heroic couplet, which seems to be a dream of ordered simplicity and meaning that always eludes us. Instead of experiencing the aesthetic bliss of rhyming couplets, we are constantly pushed from poem proper to footnotes, both of which are always suspect. One would be hard-pressed to find a line in the poem which expressed a universal truth, as one expects in a true Epic, without being tied down into deeper specific signification within the context of eighteenth century English literary history, which only strengthens Pope’s argument against the ever increasing English print culture.

What this all leads to is the presentation of a poem with Epic yearnings that is entirely bogged down in the specifics of the eighteenth century London press. Pope presents the modern mind on the page, in the sense that a great amount of knowledge is readily available to the reader via footnotes, but this knowledge is always suspect and the constantly shifting identities actually impedes the reader’s ability to construct a clear “meaning” from this text. The only way of accessing the mind and memory for the modern reader, as Pope suggests through his footnote apparatus, is through the rising institutions of collective memory; at the same time, he bemoans and critiques these new inventions, through his own perversions of them, as restricting us from understanding anything of real classical value. With no central author, meaning seems to be up for grabs by any dunce who has the willingness to write. The world is, as Pope sees it, hopelessly buried in a tangled mess of senselessly streaming texts that distort true meaning, which is exactly what he is able to express through his deployment of modern print culture and collective memory in the apparatus of his own poem.

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## Poetry, Imagination, and Revolution in Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*

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The nature of resistance called for in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy* (1832) has long been a source of controversy among critics. Michael Henry Scrivener argues that Shelley attempts to rally the reform movement into a "massive nonviolent resistance" (208). Paul Foot states that "at the end of the poem, [Shelley] seems to be openly advocating revolution" as opposed to lawful disobedience (qtd. in Wolfson 731). G.M. Matthews believes that "Shelley's bloodless revolutionism existed more in his hopes than in his expectations, which were less optimistic," appealing for evidence to Shelley's statement in *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1819) that "so dear is power . . . that the tyrants themselves neither then, nor now, nor ever, left or leave a path to freedom but through their own blood" (qtd. in Matthews 561). Considering the formulation of the poet's purpose and means of accomplishing it in Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840), however, I suggest that *The Mask of Anarchy* extolls revolutionary violence.

Many critics, such as Scrivener and Susan J. Wolfson, read *The Mask of Anarchy* as a call to nonviolent resistance. Wolfson, for example, believes that the manner of Anarchy's death "prefigur[es] the later call for vast passive resistance" (730). Like the manic maid who lies down before charging Anarchy, Shelley believes that "what looks like surrender is a potentially revolutionary performance, a political art" (730). In other words, Shelley believes that passivity in the face of reactionary violence can achieve a revolution. Wolfson agrees with Leigh Hunt, Shelley's publisher, who in 1832 wrote that

“the Poet recommends that there should be no active resistance” (qtd. in Wolfson 732). There are other passages which may more strongly support this conventional reading of *The Mask of Anarchy*. For example, the orator speaking in the poem instructs the men of England, “And if then the tyrants dare / Let them ride among you there, / Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,— / What they like, that let them do. / With folded arms and steady eyes, / And little fear, and less surprise / Look upon them as they slay / Till their rage has died away” (340-47). This passage, taken at face value, is an apparent call to nonviolent resistance and martyrdom.

However, *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley’s treatise on poetry’s social function, provides integral context to his political poetry. There, Shelley asserts that the poet not only invents but also maintains the means by which civilization is thereafter created and sustained. One of these sustaining functions of civilization with which poetry is associated is morality. Shelley does not consider poetry the cause of morals, echoing David Hume by stating that “we know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events” (518). Nevertheless, “the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct and habit” through such constant conjunction (519). Shelley theorizes that “the great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own” (517). In other words, “a man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own” (517). He must adopt others’ self-interests as his own and then pursue them as such. Poetry contributes to this imaginative sympathy because, as “the expression of the Imagination,” poetry strengthens the imagination “in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb” (511, 517). In addition, “poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that

it represents" (517). Therefore, one cannot adequately understand or appreciate an event until a poet "lifts the veil" obscuring it (517).

Read in the context of this ethical framework, *The Mask of Anarchy* endorses violent rather than nonviolent resistance. Because of the importance Shelley attributes to imaginative identification in the development of public morality, some pronouncements in the poem are not to be taken at face value. Instead, the orator's speech and the images of slaughtered nonviolent protestors contained therein comprise a poetic representation of the Peterloo Massacre itself with which the reader might imaginatively identify, rather than a call to nonviolent action in its aftermath.

Structurally and thematically, *The Mask of Anarchy* consists of two parts. The first is a description of the contemporary body politic and the ailments troubling it. Included in this section is the masque of Anarchy, the procession of vices disguised as government figures, or the veiled attribution of those vices to those public figures. The speaker meets Murder and observes that "he had a mask like Castlereagh," the contemporary foreign secretary (6). "Seven bloodhounds followed him / All were fat . . . [And] one by one, and two by two, / He tossed them human hearts to chew / Which from his wide cloak he drew," making Castlereagh gluttonous and murderous (8-9, 11-13). According to Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, this is an allusion to how "Britain joined seven other nations . . . in agreeing to postpone the final abolition of the slave trade" (316 fn 2). The speaker observes that "next came Fraud, and he had on, / Like Eldon, an ermined gown," thus accusing Baron Eldon, Lord Chancellor, of fraud (14-15). Finally, Anarchy concludes the masque, "and he wore a kingly crown, / And in his grasp a sceptre shone; / On his brow this mark I saw— / 'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!'" implicating the Church, the monarchy, and law generally (34-37). Furthermore, Anarchy "bowed and grinned to every one, / As well as if his education / Had cost ten millions to the nation" (75-77). Given "the millions of pounds voted for the Prince Regent's debts run up during his youthful dissipations," this

passage is a personal indictment of him (Reiman 318 fn 1). The whole group is depicted as destroying England and enjoying the process, as “with a pace stately and fast, / Over English land [they] past, / . . . / Waving each a bloody sword / . . . / Drunk as with intoxication / Of the wine of desolation” (38-39,44, 48-49). The speaker also criticizes particular social institutions, calling soldiers “hired Murderers” and asserting that “laws are [sold] in England” (60, 232). These passages and others like them are a list of grievances against the current state of things in England, not a call to particular action to ameliorate them.

The conventional approach to the second section of the poem, the orator’s speech (147-372), is to read it as a straightforward call to nonviolent action. However, the majority of the orator’s speech may compellingly be read as a continuation of the list of grievances rather than a call to action. In her speech, the orator describes a political gathering, saying, “Let a great Assembly be / Of the fearless and the free / On some spot of English ground / Where the plains stretch wide around” (262-65). The orator instructs the Assembly, “Let the Laws of your own land, / Good or ill, between ye stand / Hand to hand, and foot to foot, / Arbiters of the dispute, / The old laws of England,” rather than telling them to rebel and defy the law to produce reform (327-31). As stated above, Wolfson considers this a call to nonviolent resistance; however, it also re-enacts the Peterloo Massacre to which *The Mask of Anarchy* is a response. The demonstration at which the Peterloo Massacre occurred was “an orderly, non-violent demonstration of 80,000-100,000 men, women, and children in St. Peter’s Fields . . . gathered to hear Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt urge parliamentary reform” and not violent revolution (Wolfson 723 fn 2). Such an assembly closely resembles that which the orator describes in setting and in attitude towards the laws of England. Therefore, this part of the orator’s speech may be read not as a call to nonviolent resistance, but instead as an account of that nonviolent resistance which has already occurred, and the violent response it received. In other words, the orator’s supposed

call to nonviolence is yet another piece of evidence condemning the presiding government and justifying a call to violent revolution.

Furthermore, the orator provides a second call to action in the final three stanzas of the poem. In the third-to-last stanza, the orator says, “And that slaughter to the Nation / Shall steam up like inspiration, / Eloquent, oracular; / A volcano heard afar” (360-63). A slaughter like that described in lines 340-47 has already occurred at Peterloo, and it does not make much sense to call for a second inspirational slaughter if one is not enough. Therefore, this stanza brings the poem’s narrative from the recent past—the list of wrongs committed by the government—and transitions through the present to the future—namely, how people should respond to the government’s wrongs. *The Mask of Anarchy* itself—“these words”—is the “inspiration, / Eloquent, oracular; / A volcano heard afar” mentioned by the orator (364, 361-63). After all, it has come all the way to England from volcanic Shelley “in Italy” (1).

The content of *The Mask of Anarchy*’s revolutionary reveille is therefore in its final two stanzas:

And these words shall then become  
Like oppression’s thundered doom  
Ringing through each heart and brain,  
Heard again—again—again—

Rise like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number—  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
Ye are many—they are few. (364-72)

The stanzas are vague and metaphorical, but the diction belies the violence they encourage. As Scrivener insightfully states, “The stanza that concludes the poem . . . is a curious one to signify nonviolence” (209). The orator promises “oppression’s thundered doom”—a loud and violent end (365). The people of England are represented as “lions,” or vicious predators, rather than a more

peaceful metaphorical vehicle, such as lambs (368). They are to “shake [their] chains to earth,” an active, violent process, rather than wait for the law or those representing it to relent and free them (370). And the orator’s final words, reminding the people that “ye are many—they are few,” are the least nonviolent of all (372). Numbers count for nothing in a dispute in which a disenfranchised class calls for “greater representation,” because the very issue in question is that their voices are not recognized (Wolfson 723 fn 2). The only situation in which the greater number of a disenfranchised demographic can be of any advantage is violent revolution. This meaning is further implied by the orator’s referring to the people as an “unvanquishable number” (269). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to “vanquish” is “to overcome or defeat (an opponent or enemy) in conflict or battle; to reduce to subjection or submission by superior force”; therefore, the orator imagines the men of England as unbeatable in battle, a consideration that seems relevant only to violent resistance. In the final stanza of *The Mask of Anarchy*, “what is foremost . . . is struggle, unity, and revolutionary consciousness; this is not moral argument, but political exhortation, an appeal to *physical* superiority” as would be helpful in battle (Scrivener 209). Therefore, *The Mask of Anarchy* exhorts a violent revolution.

Additionally, this reading of the text ameliorates some of what would otherwise be the poem’s inconsistencies or shortcomings. For example, if the orator’s account of nonviolent martyrdom is not read as a re-enactment of the Peterloo Massacre, then the poem omits perhaps the most potent rallying point for reform and resistance from its list of grievances. The preclusion of such a scene is, in F.R. Leavis’ words, “a sign of hesitation coinciding with a ‘pathetic weakness’ of both form and statement” and defies belief (qtd. in Wolfson 734). Therefore, a charitable reading of the poem would interpret what resembles Peterloo as an allusion to it. Likewise, it makes no sense for the orator to say of Justice, “ne’er for gold / May thy righteous laws be sold / As laws are in England—thou

/ Shield'st alike the high and low," accusing English lawmakers of accepting bribes and passing laws which serve the rich more than the poor, and then to encourage a future resistance movement to "let the Laws of your own land, / . . . between ye stand / . . . / Arbiters of the dispute" (230-33, 327-28, 330). These lines instead criticize the foolishness of the reform movement for trusting the unjust system the movement hopes to reform. Furthermore, if the poem is believed to be a call to nonviolence, the violent conclusion of the poem is inexplicably antithetical and jarring.

There are a number of possible objections to this reading of *The Mask of Anarchy*. The strongest is that the orator speaks hypothetically and in the future tense when describing the slaughter of the nonviolent resisters: "And *if then* the tyrants dare / Let them ride among you there" (340-41, emphasis added). Therefore, one may argue that the orator is likely conjecturing about a future course of action rather than describing the past.

However, there are reasons to believe that the poem merely frames an account of the past as if it were an anticipation of the future. First, Peterloo is nowhere else mentioned except for the subtitle, and it seems that any English political poem written in September 1819, particularly one subtitled, "*Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester*" must, of necessity, provide some account of the Peterloo incident of August 16, 1819. Second, Shelley's contemporaries interpreted the poem in this way. For example, the *Athenaeum*, which first published *The Mask of Anarchy*, identified it as "Shelley's 'account of the Peterloo affair'" (qtd. in Wolfson 731). Third, since a terrible slaughter such as the one the orator describes had already occurred, and *The Mask of Anarchy* itself fulfills the prophecy of "a volcano heard afar," it is redundant for the orator to call for yet more nonviolent resistance, slaughter, and inspiration (363). Furthermore, by seemingly endorsing nonviolence—which has already failed—and then, at the end of the poem, endorsing violent revolution instead, the poem rhetorically manipulates the reader into agreement with its concluding violence.

Finding the orator endorsing nonviolence, a disillusioned post-Peterloo reformist would likely object that something new is needed and then be glad to find it in the poem's violent conclusion. In this way, *The Mask of Anarchy* may convince people to support a radical position without having to argue for it, merely by illustrating the failure of less radical methods. Similarly, there are two aesthetic reasons why Shelley could have preferred to frame a past event through the second-person future tense. First, describing the event in the second-person as something that may happen to a directly addressed "you"—both the men of England in the poem and the reader—fosters greater imaginative engagement and sympathy with the victims at Peterloo. Rather than providing a third-person account which leaves the reader an outsider and thus equally capable of sympathizing with either party, the poem interpellates the reader as a victim of Peterloo and a member of the reform movement through the use of direct address, making sympathy with Shelley's cause more likely. Second, by describing a now past event in the future tense and prophesying future inspiration in the very poem that is the product of that inspiration, Shelley is able to occupy the dual role of poet and prophet.

Shelley undoubtedly was a supporter of reform, but the nature of his resistance has been a source of critical controversy. However, *The Mask of Anarchy* supports violent revolution as a means of securing reform. Given Shelley's idealism and ethics, both of which served to ground morality in sympathetic feeling produced through poetic representation of reality, the poem's seeming call to nonviolence may compellingly be read instead as a sympathetic rendering of the Peterloo Massacre, leaving the call to future action in the poem's violent final stanzas. This reading not only conforms with Shelley's aesthetic and ethical framework as formulated in *A Defence of Poetry*, but also leaves fewer inconsistencies in *The Mask of Anarchy* than readings of it as a call to nonviolence.

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# The Blindness of an Invisible Man: An Exploration of Ellison's Female Characters

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The magnificent blonde of the battle royal dances naked in a room full of men, their eyes following each lazy swing of her hips. And yet she is nearly invisible; she is an object to be owned, coveted, destroyed, something much less than a human being. The young narrator, entranced, describes her:

The hair was yellow like that of a circus kewpie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue . . . I felt a desire to spit upon her as my eyes brushed slowly over her body . . . I wanted . . . to caress her and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her. (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 19)

Rather than describing “her hair” and “her eyes,” showing possession, the narrator refers to “the hair,” “the face,” “the eyes,” as if they are separated from the woman’s being—she is not allowed to possess even her own body. The battle royal woman is invisible to the men she dances for, masked and hollow, her sexuality engendering feelings of desire and murder alike.

Questions have long been raised about the female characters in *Invisible Man* who, as evinced in the excerpt above, frequently appear as objectified or stereotyped. The protagonist’s tendency to objectify women is called forth as evidence of a misogynistic text. His reaction to the battle royal woman is indeed intensely hostile: he desires to “spit upon her,” “destroy” and “murder her” (Ellison,

*Invisible Man* 19). His disdain for women is clear: the narrator views his reassignment to “the woman question” as a clear demotion, an “outrageous joke” (406). Especially in light of Ellison’s professed opinions against the dangers of stereotyping as a form of minority oppression, the depiction of his female characters may seem to be fundamentally hypocritical. It is, in fact, the dominant critical opinion among feminist scholars that Ellison’s treatment of female characters is hopelessly misogynistic, undermining the telos of the novel and enervating its social claims. While it is a valid exercise to analyze Ellison’s female characters with an eye towards their roles as members of an oppressed minority, this opinion fails in critical ways to assess the novel on its own terms. As shown in the example of Mary Rambo, the narrator’s misogynistic attitude is not a male-centric novel’s myopic flaw, but ultimately a *device*—a mechanism employed by Ellison to develop the narrator and to further the theme of invisibility.

The dominant critical opinion regarding *Invisible Man*’s female cast can be outlined in the terms of two prominent voices on the subject: Carolyn Sylvander and Ann Stanford. Sylvander postulates that Ellison denies his female characters full humanity, that “the narrator of *Invisible Man* in fact loses what slight recognition he has of woman-as-human at the beginning of the novel as he becomes more closely allied with manhood, Brotherhood, and his own personhood” (Sylvander 77). Stanford, in her article “He Speaks for Whom?: Inscription and Reinscription of Women in *Invisible Man* and *The Salt Eaters*,” posits the question: “What happens to ‘the second sex’ in a novel as powerful as Ellison’s *Invisible Man* where the trope of invisibility functions as a critique of racist American society?” (Stanford 17). Critics like Stanford and Sylvander press the issue of the novel’s hypocrisy, asking how one can reconcile the perpetuation of the invisibility the novel seeks to undo. In other words, the narrator extends the same discrimination that he encounters to the female sex. Sylvander’s article focuses even more specifically on the hypocrisy of Ellison, stating explicitly that

Ellison perpetuates female stereotypes and thereby perpetuates the oppression of a minority.

If his goal or purpose is indeed to uproot the invisibility of the black man, Sylvander argues that the narrator's blindness to women undermines the sanctity and the effectiveness of Ellison's purpose. Ostensibly, Sylvander may have a point. If we consider Ellison's own words in his analysis of stereotyping, it may appear that "his woman characters," at least as they are cast in the eyes of the protagonist, "are not fully human" (Sylvander 77). In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison refers to Richard Wright's critics, recognizing the dehumanization process which stereotyping can represent: "They forget that human life possesses an innate dignity and the [human being] an innate sense of nobility, that all men possess the tendency to dream and the compulsion to make their dreams reality" (81). If we apply these sensibilities to each of the female characters of *Invisible Man*—Mary, Sybil, the battle royal woman, and the slave women in his dream—none of these women seem to be afforded the depth and complexity of this definition of human life. While Ellison does depict, explore, and evaluate the humanity of black men through his protagonist, Sylvander claims that he remains blind to the humanity of his women characters. Ellison himself acknowledged, "The most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word . . . For if the word has the potency to revive and make us free, it has also the power to blind, imprison, and destroy" (79). If Ellison is opposed to this stereotypical practice, and claims it possesses a more potent danger in the written form, it may seem that the treatment of the female characters of *Invisible Man* cannot be accounted for. Sylvander and Stanford would conclude that unlike the male characters of the novel, Ellison's female minorities do not actualize their humanity, but are pawns, symbols, or flimsy, sexualized paper dolls. Given the profiles and actions of the female characters in *Invisible Man*, Ellison may ostensibly seem guilty of the same stereotyping and effacement that his works, both *Invisible Man* and *Shadow and Act*, denounce; but this is hasty, reactionary

criticism. Sylvander, Stanford, and critics like them fail to assess the novel on its own terms.

It must first be acknowledged that the “narrator” is not synonymous with the “author” these critics accuse. It is commonly understood that the two can, and often do, enact different streams of purpose. As Gérard Genette posits in his article “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative,” “rigorous identification” of author to narrator ( $A = N$ ), “defines factual narrative, in which . . . the author assumes full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative . . . Conversely, their *disassociation* ( $A \neq N$ ) defines fiction” (764, emphasis added). *Invisible Man*, defined as a work of fiction, must thus be understood in Genette’s terms: the author and narrator are disassociated and are *not* to be identified as synonymous concepts. Genette further specifies the nature of a fiction as “a type of narrative for the veracity of which the author does not seriously vouch” (764). Ellison is not necessarily supportive of the Invisible Man’s behavior simply because he writes of it, just as Nabokov is not, *ipso facto*, approving of poetic pedophilia. While Ellison’s female characters may indeed appear as typified symbols or inhuman characters, they are cast through the eyes of the narrator, the Invisible Man; the author, however, should not be equated to him, indeed *cannot* be equated to him if we are to understand *Invisible Man* as a fictional work.

Another flaw in this collection of criticism is the assumption that disorder, namely hypocrisy, is by definition a negative trait. Aesthetically, the narrator’s treatment of women does not detract from the brilliance of his character; on the contrary, it renders him more complex and realistic. More importantly, the narrator’s contradictions are a valuable literary device that functions in the narrative as a whole. The fact that the narrator turns a blind eye to women unifies Ellison’s larger purpose: to show the pervasive quality of a cultural tendency to objectify minority groups. He is invisible even to himself at first—and this blindness extends also to those “below” him in the social hierarchy instilled by a patriarchal

system of white supremacy. This flaw in the protagonist extends the novel beyond a criticism of the social discrimination the narrator alone encounters, extends it from an individual problem to a pandemic one. It shows instead that this blindness is a societal epidemic, internalized even by its victims and extended to *every* minority group, not just African Americans. Just as the narrator is “the other” to society, women represent the ignored and invisible “other” to men. This misogynistic lens is an effective device, without which the novel would lose its applicability to the greater societal condition of invisibility, stereotypification, and resultant oppression.

While it is a valid endeavor to consider Ellison’s moral investment in his work not only as an author but also as an advocate for social equality, it is a futile exercise when one becomes engrossed in disentangling Ellison from the narrator. It is a far more productive critical analysis when one regards the Invisible Man’s misogynistic outlook as a narrative device, a mechanism Ellison employs to demonstrate the narrator’s internalization of the same prejudiced blindness society turns toward him. It is in this possibility that the importance of the distinction between author and narrator is most obvious. Sylvander attempts to criticize the effectiveness of Ellison’s purpose as an attempt to represent the underrepresented; perhaps Ellison’s purpose is rather to comment on the greater system of discriminative thought. In this analysis, the Invisible Man’s attitude towards women is not a fracture in the veneer of Ellison’s philosophy, but rather one element of his literary endeavor to illustrate it. While a narrator can, of course, echo the author’s sensibilities, he can just as easily act as a literary device rather than mouthpiece.

Ellison’s own witty admonition that the rind is not the heart can guide us in our examination of the stereotyped exteriors of his female characters. Because of their deep impact on the protagonist and their deeper impact on the narrative, Ellison’s female characters reach beyond their own seemingly superficial mold. Mary Rambo, a mother figure in the novel, serves as an example of a character who,

at first a stereotyped version of a woman, challenges and contours the narrator's path. The narrator's misogynistic opinion of her, on the other hand, illustrates that social oppression of the white patriarchy works not only in terms of black and white but also as a construction of power that exploits minorities—of gender as well as of color—as a means to an end.

Mary is commonly thought of as a stereotyped caricature, either idealized or simplified. But Ellison had definitive plans for Mary: closer examination of her character will show that even in her pared-down portrayal, she is nonetheless a meaningful force in the novel. Far from being a saint-like Aunt Jemima, Mary represents an autonomous woman who not only thinks for herself, but who is also a catalyst for the narrator's action, influencing the narrator in his journey in a significant way. Despite the narrator's own stereotypification of Mary, she is not represented in the text itself as a dehumanized, pasteboard mixture of feminine conventions but as a woman whose ideas and aspirations directly challenge and influence the narrator. In the example of Mary, we can see that the protagonist's misogynistic attitude extends even to the most actualized female character of the novel; in his opinions of Mary, the idea that the narrator has internalized the blindness that renders him invisible is fully developed.

Mary Rambo is described in her first encounter with our protagonist as a comfortably sexless "large dark woman" with a husky voice and motherly disposition. She is often described by discerning critics as a rather featureless maternal prototype who is but a symptom of a larger problem: Ellison's inability, or unwillingness, to recognize human worth in a female character. As Sylvander puts it, she is "not a real person in the book," but rather "a super-human force of good, of salvation, of virtue and hope, the means by which the narrator is born anew into his Brotherhood identity, but of no interest in and of herself" as a character or human (78). Other critics, such as Stanford, view Mary as a "shapeless" character, arguing that Ellison not only denies Mary

depth and complexity, but treats her as an angelic, non-human force who, especially in light of the narrator's later derogatory comments on "the woman question," represents yet another facet of the protagonist's misogyny. These critics would argue that Ellison is falling prey to the very system he criticized—that of treating women with the same shallow stereotypification that African American males have been unjustly faced with.

Despite the narrator's view of her, Mary Rambo is not depicted in the text as a flimsy, stereotyped woman; rather, she plays an integral part in the narrator's development, even if the narrator fails to acknowledge it. Stanford, who holds the opinion that Mary is only a stereotyped version of a woman, admits that "Ellison's text has a momentary rupture in which Mary emerges demonstrating considerable sagacity and wit," (22) as shown in Mary's advice to the narrator: "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes . . . And I tell you something else, it's the ones from the South that's got to do it, them what knows the fire and ain't forgot how it burns. Up here too many forgits. They finds a place for theyselves and forgits the ones on bottom" (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 255). Mary's opinions here illustrate the pressure she places on the narrator to stimulate change in the world, to work for "the race" and "the ones on bottom." As the narrator's heroine and progenitor of his race consciousness, Mary possesses considerable power in the narrative. At the literal heart of the novel, she motivates the narrator to engage in his first act of resistance, his rally at the street eviction, and to join with the Brotherhood.

The protagonist's attitude towards Mary is always misogynistic—he refuses to view her as an autonomous force, and stereotypes her as a female version of Sambo, an "old Mary." It is for this reason, perhaps, that Mary seems to be "Mary, mother of God, sanctified as receiver of Male-God conception; Mary, mother without sexuality, sanctified because it is impossible that sinless Son be born of woman with sin; Mary Rambo, with echoes of Sambo, less advanced in race consciousness than our narrator" (Sylvander

79). The reader (or critic) is easily lulled into the language of the narrator, lulled into the impression that Mary's role in the narrative, the *novel*, is synonymous with the narrator's opinion of her. The narrator consistently fails to recognize his female counterparts as fully human, just as the Brotherhood and Dr. Bledsoe fail to see the narrator. His internalization of the white-centric patriarchy is evinced in his blindness of himself as well as his fellow female characters, and his treatment of Mary is no exception. Rather, his blindness to her complexity serves to strengthen the effect. Even when faced with such a heroine as Mary—undeniably autonomous, opinionated, and shrewd—the protagonist is nevertheless blinded by the values and prejudices imparted by the social order around him.

Blindness constitutes a major motif in *Invisible Man*, both as a literal handicap and a figurative inability to see others. The battle royal is fought in blindness, as the boys wear blindfolds while white spectators look on. Reverend Homer A. Barbee, who romanticizes and admires the legendary college founder, is revealed to be physically blind. Brother Jack is found to have a glass eye which, in a nightmarish moment, “erupts out of his face” in the very instant his antagonism is made clear (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 474). The protagonist is infected with the same blindness that renders him invisible, and it is this greater flaw that brings the book beyond a criticism of the treatment of one man as a character, but shows that this treatment is a societal epidemic, internalized even by its victims.

Ellison succeeds in showing the pervasiveness of invisibility, as well as its potency as a poison. Were the narrator incapable of such a misogynistic opinion as he extends to Mary, he would be merely a victim—if, perhaps, a more pleasant one. In creating a character who is guilty of the same crime from which he himself suffers, Ellison has concocted a marvelously conflicted man of contradiction and complexity. Caught in the miasma of a Caucasian patriarchy, the Invisible Man is not only ill-equipped to resist it, but he contributes to its perpetuation. The social oppression of the white patriarchy, Ellison cautions, functions not only on the level of black and white

but more generally as a construction of power built to exploit minorities, whether of gender or color. *Invisible Man* therefore details, in part, the struggles of a victim; but it attains its highest value in the perfect manifestation of the blindness of an invisible man.

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# “Artes That Been Curious”: Questions of Magic and Morality in Chaucer’s “The Franklin’s Tale”

| Kaitlin Coats

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Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Franklin’s Tale” treats its magical events at one moment with unquestioning faith in their reality and at the next with insistent doubt, at one moment as “artes that been curious” and at the next as “nat worth a flye” (V.1120, 1132). The tale’s events repeatedly cause us to question magic’s validity: after her husband, Arveragus, leaves to pursue honor abroad, Dorigen snubs her would-be suitor Aurelius by invoking the absolute nonexistence of magic. She’ll love him, she tells Aurelius facetiously, if he can make the black rocks off the Breton coast disappear and thus ensure the safe return of Arveragus’s ship. Aurelius takes this promise seriously, and the rocks indeed disappear from view, but the means by which they do so is unclear: Aurelius calls upon pagan gods and their astrological powers, while his brother asks a scholar of dubious credibility for help. Neither the Franklin nor Chaucer himself ever indicates whether either of these magical methods proves effective. Although magic drives the plot, Chaucer never lets us know the nature of the magic in the tale. In the case of the disappearing rocks, is what we see what we get?

Many have attempted to explain the rocks’ disappearance, but the question has not yet been put to rest by any semblance of critical consensus. In fact, scholars in Chaucer’s day could not easily solve magical problems either. Historian Richard Kieckhefer holds that the nuances in the various classifications of magic were complex enough to produce a general hesitation among the lettered class

either to support or to condemn magic completely (16-17). The range of answers in both medieval and modern scholarship ought to cause us to reconsider the nature of Chaucer's magical question. It seems to me that Chaucer's magic is self-consciously confusing. An examination of the turbulent collection of medieval attitudes toward magic, and the various types of magic that elicited those attitudes, illuminates Chaucer's magical confusion as a purposefully organic rendering of his world. I begin, therefore, with a brief historical analysis of medieval magic before moving to its fictional analogue in "The Franklin's Tale." After establishing Chaucer's ambiguous treatment of magic, I examine how this attitude toward magic generates a mistrust of supposed natural reality, which lends itself to the questioning of another assumed reality, namely, the tale's ethical scheme. Thus, I argue, Chaucer transplants magical dichotomies from his social milieu into the setting, characters, and plot of "The Franklin's Tale," deliberately vacillating between belief and skepticism, truth and illusion, nature and sorcery. With this vacillation, Chaucer creates a divide between perception and reality, which in turn undermines the tale's purported moral system.

Magic, unstable and difficult to define, was integral to Chaucer's world, no doubt precisely because of its position both as a host of so many crucial dichotomies and as a source of questioning. Perhaps the most central dichotomy in fourteenth-century magic was that of good and evil—two poles that could coexist even within one magical book. *Liber Juratus Honorii*, or the *Sworn Book of Honorius*, of which two surviving fourteenth-century manuscripts exist (Klaassen 19), is Kieckhefer's "crossroads" embodied. It contains chants in both English and Latin, clearly founded on the Judeo-Christian tradition, as in this prayer:

by thyes thy most Holy names. on. Alpha et omega.  
 principium. el. ely. eloe. eloy. elyon. Sother. emanuel.  
 Sabaoth. Adonay. egge. ya. ya. ye. ye. this creature of bludd  
 may be blessyd prepanyd and made apte ffor þe ynke of thy  
 Holy seale and of thy most Holy name. SememphoraS.

which Is blessyd worlde with owt ende. Amen. (27r)

Here, the bridge between liturgy and “abracadabra” is evident: the name of God comes to have such magical power that it can be used as a spell. In countless such incantation-prayer hybrids the *Sworn Book of Honorius* earns its status as “very religious albeit unorthodox” (Klaassen 19)—unorthodox, in fact, to the point that it is suspect. Its prayers are certainly not the stuff of routine fourteenth-century English prayer, and it contains practices almost universally considered to fall under the umbrella of evil magic (Flint 214-16, 225). Consider, for example, this procedure:

Take the naturall seed of the fyshe called a whalle, lingham aloes, costus, muske saffronne, armoniacum, w<sup>t</sup> the blude of the foule called a lapwinge, and make a conffeccion therof, w<sup>t</sup> this sayde conffeccion make a fumigaccion in a conuenient place, and you shall see visyons in the ayer, take of the sayd conffeccion and make a fumygacion aboute the sepulkers and visions of the dedd shall and wyll appeare. (20r-20v)

This is quite clearly a necromantic experiment, and such magic involving the raising of the dead was “explicitly demonic” (Kieckhefer 18). The inclusion of this and similar rituals in the *Sworn Book of Honorius* shows just how deeply the dichotomy of good and evil was diffused in the medieval magical tradition. This one book contains everything from a ritual for attaining the beatific vision—which is, in fact, the purpose of the entire collection of spells (Mathiesen 143)—to “magic of a nasty variety (to cause death, destruction, etc.)” (Klaassen 20), invoking the name of God quite possibly alongside demons. While magical procedures like those in the *Sworn Book of Honorius* often made their involvement with God or demons explicit, others did not identify with either; more often than not, people simply had to guess whether a supernatural event was good or evil. The ambiguity of some magical practices left many people unsure how to tap into the opportunities that divine, natural magic afforded without risking demonic magic along the way.

Unsurprisingly, then, Chaucer never reveals his own opinion about magic clearly. We do not know whether magic even exists in “The Franklin’s Tale,” let alone whether that magic is good or evil. Upon hearing Dorigen’s promise, Aurelius prays to the gods but then resigns himself to over two years of lovesickness (V.1080-81). Meanwhile, his brother resolves to find a clerk versed in magical illusion and astrology (V.1138-164). When Aurelius pleads to the gods, the issue of magic versus miracle arises; when his brother hires a clerk to make the rocks disappear, that of actual vanishing versus illusion; when the gods and the clerk, taken together, collide as potential sources for the magic, that of divine versus demonic. Every piece of evidence that the rocks disappear through natural, divine magic is tainted by a hint of illegitimacy. Language, character, setting, astrology, and theology all present the disappearance of the rocks as valid. Chaucer pairs each piece of evidence, though, with equally strong suggestions that the magic is spurious or sinister, leaving us to wonder what to make of the magic of the tale.

Chaucer’s language manifests the magical question within the magician’s identity. Consider, for example, his epithets: some are decidedly negative, particularly Aurelius’s brother’s reference to magicians as “tregetoures” (V.1141), jugglers or sleight-of-hand artists (“Tregetour,” def. 1a), which reduces the clerk’s magic to mere courtly entertainment: “For ofte at feestes have I wel herd seye / That tregetours withinne an halle large / Have maad come in a water and a barge” (V.1142-144). If the magic is just an amusing trick, the magician is just a jester. Yet, repeatedly calling him a “philosophre” and a “clerk” (V.1561, 1119), the Franklin subtly associates the magician with learning and theological knowledge. When caused by such a trustworthy character, how could the magical disappearance of the rocks be perceived as counterfeit or demonic? Critic Anthony Luengo finds a way. He claims that the terms “philosophre” and “clerk,” when placed alongside the term “magicien” (V.1184, 1241), “reflect the Franklin’s inability to distinguish between scientific and supernatural skills” (4).

However, considering the sheer number of times they are used, these titles seem to be Chaucer's means of drawing attention to the academic tone of the magic. Yet Luengo's analysis indicates the range of interpretive possibility implicit in the tale. Here, then, is an example of the confusion that the dichotomies in interpretations of medieval magic caused and, evidently, still cause. We cannot be sure whether the Franklin believes the magician to be a knowledgeable practitioner of his supernatural art, a misguided student dabbling in science, or a mere entertainer.

Chaucer further aggravates the question of the magician's character through his position at the university at Orléans, a major fourteenth-century center for the study of astronomy (V.1118, n.). The university provides the perfect setting for the hiring of the clerk: it links to the controlled, sanctioned astrological study of natural magic, but not to its demonic underbelly. Furthermore, the magician is not alone in his endeavors, nor are those endeavors embarked upon with less than noble intent: "yonge clerkes that been lykerous / To reden artes that been curious / Seken in every halke and every herne / Particuler sciences for to lerne" (V.1119-122). Whether magic is among the "sciences" that the university has officially sanctioned, however, is not so clear after all, for Aurelius's brother recalls that "At Orliens in studie a book he say / Of magik naturel, which his felawe, [ . . . ] Al he was there to lerne another craft, / Hadde prively upon his desk ylaft" (V.1124-128). Whether or not the clerk who secretly studies the magical arts in his room is the same one who executes the disappearance of the rocks, the image of a young man secretly hunched over a volume like the Munich handbook by night does not reassure us. Even the university's location incriminates it. According to Kathryn L. Lynch, "The Franklin's Tale" has something of the exotic unknown in its far-away setting: "[I]n this tale Orleans to the south comes to represent a world not that far from the Muslim world of the more distant Middle East, a source of relativism and illusion—of 'monstre' or 'merveille' (line 1344) that can temporarily obscure even the most

solid rocks of home" (547). Through both the secret study of magic and the unnatural and menacing picture of the non-Christian East that was so common to the medieval English mind, the university at Orléans devolves from a solid institution of learning to a source of the darkly mysterious.

Remarkably, every assuring magical detail has its carefully matched correlative doubt. At this point, we see that "The Franklin's Tale" presents the magical problem without a solution. Perhaps with these unanswered magical questions Chaucer intends to provide us with a lens through which to view the moral choices of his characters. Chaucer's brand of magic is volatile; it teaches us never to trust what we see in the world. Just as in the case of magic, morality in "The Franklin's Tale" is designed to provoke an endless strain of questions that destabilize the world of reality that is physical and reality that is contingent on promises. Through the language of magic, illusion, and perception, Chaucer draws our attention to the ethical implications of a landscape in which rocks can disappear by uncertain means. For the sake of space I will focus on the ethics of Dorigen, for her moral reality crumbles most significantly under the magical question.

In her over-fastidious promise-keeping, Dorigen shows a tendency to relate only to what is immediate. Through this literal reading of the world, she allows her marriage to suffer for a joke and her happiness to dwindle at the sight of rocks—in short, she reacts to what is nearest to her and thus relies on her perception of the external world for her contentment. The rocks lie at the center of both her despair, as physical manifestations of the danger that might threaten Arveragus, and her trust, as the objects on which her flippant promise relies. Lamenting the creation of the rocks, Dorigen accuses God, "Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?" (V.876), expecting divine purpose to be manifest in her physical surroundings and "attempting," as Critic Carolyn Collette notes, "to project her world view, literally her sublunar perception of the nature of things, into the realm of eternal stability" (398).

Later, when the disappearance of the rocks proves the natural world illusory, Dorigen's reality unravels. Her reliance on her perception makes her as unstable as the disappearing rocks on which she fixates.

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

Another tyme ther wolde she sitte and thynke,  
 And *caste hir eye* downward fro the brynke.  
 But whan she *saugh* the grisly rokkes blake,  
 For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake  
 That on hire feet she myghte hire noght sustene.  
 Thanne wolde she sitte adoun upon the grene,  
 And pitously into the see *biholde*. (V.857-63, emphasis added)

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

W. Bryant Bachman, Jr. attributes Dorigen's sight-based cares to her connection to Boethian philosophy, a fitting analysis, since her speech in lines 865 to 892 harkens directly to Book 4 of the *Consolation of Philosophy* (V.865-93, n.). Boethius, a sixth-century philosopher dear enough to Chaucer that Chaucer translated the *Consolation of Philosophy* into English a few years before he started *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, *Riverside* xxix), believes that we must find happiness internally—that "is thilke the verray parfit blisfulnesse that parfitly maketh the man suffisaunt" (*Riverside* 430)—since the external world is governed by shifting Fortune. Thus, he provides an alternative to Dorigen's sorrow that she simply cannot grasp. Bachman interprets Boethian philosophy as seeing the external world as an illusion: one may never trust that what appears to be

reality is, in fact, reality, for Fortune may redirect her course at any time. To Bachman, the ethical tension in “The Franklin’s Tale” is created by “the narrative’s action, the emotional force of Dorigen’s fear for her husband’s safety, and its philosophical Boethian demand to transcend the very limitations that define man as man, to disbelieve, if necessary, the evidence of one’s own senses” (60). Because her grief is contingent upon the rocks’ physical appearance, the eventual possibility of their vanishing undermines Dorigen’s quickness to trust in whatever happens to be before her eyes.

Significantly, the central image of magical dichotomy is also the center of Dorigen’s dilemma: Chaucer uses the rocks as the passage between the worlds of magical and moral instability. In light of Bachman’s argument, the transformation occurs when Dorigen discovers that the rocks have, contrary to her reliance on the illusion of the physical world, disappeared. Chaucer conveys the irony of the episode through the magical language:

He taketh his leve, and she astoned stood;  
 In al hir face nas the drope of blood.  
 She wende nevere han come in swich the trappe.  
 “Allas,” quod she, “that evere this sholde happe!”  
 For wende I nevere by possibilitee  
 That swich monstre or merveille myghte be!  
 The is agayns the process of nature.” (V.1339-345)

Dorigen is “astoned,” or turned to stone; she has become aware that she is her own hindrance, as she thought the black rocks were before. This magical transfer of stone from the rocks to Dorigen herself mirrors Dorigen’s shifting recognition of moral responsibility from the rocks to her own character. When Aurelius brings news of the rocks’ disappearance and Dorigen’s belief in physical stability is thereby shattered, she is forced to accept the Boethian philosophy that only one’s own attitude, not the external world, can generate—or limit—happiness. Fittingly, Dorigen at this moment does not actually see the clear coast. She recognizes that she is the philosophical “monstre” and “mervaylle;” she is the one “agayns the

process of nature,” precisely because she has trusted so bluntly in the natural process.

In “The Franklin’s Tale,” Chaucer brings us to the morality whose definition is as elusive as that of magic. His borrowing from the magical confusion of his surroundings for the ambiguous magic of his tale seems to suggest that the tale’s questionable morality, too, is lifted from fourteenth-century English life. Through the questions of magic and morality embedded in “The Franklin’s Tale,” Chaucer points to the abundance of questions in his cultural context, revealing the world where reality is not always what it seems or what is prescribed. We may also come to this realization through the very act of reading the tale. The Franklin’s narration and hurried ending present the cheery veneer that suggests that all is well. But, as the disappearing rocks have taught us, the tale is not as simple as it proclaims itself to be. Rather, it presents the complex chain of contradictions, designed specifically to lurk threateningly underneath the surface. If we are not looking closely, we might miss the uncomfortable details, such as Arveragus’s and Aurelius’s death threats to Dorigen. By the end, in which every character experiences an unnatural and hastily-constructed happy ending, we have learned, like Dorigen, to trust ourselves, rather than the artificial resolution of the tale, for moral reality.

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# Religion as the Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor and Dorothy Allison

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As a literary form, the Southern grotesque or gothic features human violence and suffering in the face of trauma, often leaving identities fractured or irretrievable (Bailey 271). This notion functions prominently within Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*. Through their deeply flawed and over-exaggerated characters' various misuses of religious zeal, these authors depict a rural or "country" poor imbued with aspects of the grotesque. While O'Connor's characters embody this notion through their manipulation of religion for personal benefit or for smug superiority, Allison's characters use religion superficially to seek redemption from (or assertion of) delimiting social labels and class stereotypes. Faux religious zeal is therefore shown as a means to rise above the collective unpleasantness of life among the working poor. In short, examining both works as expressions of "southern grotesque/gothic literature" exposes in each an underlying interaction between false models of salvific religiosity and these modes' ultimate source in southern economic repression.

Historical definitions of the grotesque have varied considerably over the centuries. Its roots lie in the gothic literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe who adopt a "prevailing mood [of] terror or suspense" in their macabre fiction ("The Southern Gothic" 17). In the twentieth century, the definition of "grotesque" moves away from supernatural horrors and demons, instead becoming embedded in the "framework of social realism" (17). This evolution

has fueled contention among theorists and critics alike. Whereas Philip Thomson attests that the effect of the grotesque “can best be summed up by alienation” (Thomson), Alan Spiegel views the grotesque as a “type of character . . . either a physically or mentally deformed character” (Spiegel 2). In regards to Southern authors, however, the realm of the grotesque encompasses a broader locale. For Southerners, the grotesque is not only a genre comprised of the alienated and deformed but is also (and more importantly) a genre characterized “by obsessive preoccupations—with blood, family, and inheritance; racial, gender, and/or class identities; the Christian religion (typically, in its most ‘fundamentalist’ forms); and home” (Bailey 271). Therefore, it is not surprising to find these aspects in O’Connor’s and Allison’s works, as the authors themselves trace the sources and manners of the grotesque in their own literature. In “The Fiction Writer and His Country,” O’Connor declares that authors of the grotesque must “find in modern life distortions which are repugnant [and make them] appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural” (qtd. in Boyd 323). Here, O’Connor recognizes the grotesque as a societal force whose source Allison revealingly describes as residing within “a lyrical tradition . . . [i]conoclastic, outrageous as hell, leveled with humor” (Allison 81). These authors’ modern interpretations of the grotesque ultimately find body and voice in their texts’ working poor, characters whose fractured identity is sustained equally by traumatic violence and by distortions of religious fervor.

Flannery O’Connor’s “Good Country People” is laden with elements of the grotesque incurred through the manipulation of religion. Mrs. Hopewell, a nosy woman with “no bad qualities of her own . . . who was able to use other people’s in such a constructive way that she never felt a lack” is “plagued” by her daughter Joy (O’Connor 2530). Joy, victim of a hunting accident who adopts the name Hulga and “stumps” around in her artificial leg to spite her mother, proves to be a catalyst for much of the text’s ambient religious grotesqueness. Hulga’s grotesque identity lies physically in her artificial leg and “spiritually” in her philosophical sense of

nihilism. Mrs. Hopewell uncovers one of Hulga's books containing the passage, "Science, on the other hand, is concerned solely with what-is . . . if science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing," fiercely underlined (2533). Hulga's beliefs arguably reflect O'Connor's own assertion that the South is "hardly Christ-minded . . . most certainly Christ-haunted" (qtd. in Presley 39).

The grotesque, "Christ-haunted" nature of Hulga's religiosity is exemplified by way of her self-assumed intellectual superiority and its roots in her ignorance of human nature. Upon meeting the "crooked" Bible salesman Manly Pointer, Hulga initially sees herself as "true genius . . . get[ting] an idea across to even [Pointer's] inferior mind" (O'Connor 2538) while helping him reach a "deeper understanding of life" (2538) through the genius of her nihilistic lectures. Although Hulga is an "intellectual," (she holds the Ph.D.), it is clear that she discounts Pointer's "religiosity" as jejune, believing instead that he has been deprived of the knowledge that salvation lies only in the removal of one's spiritual blindfold and the subsequent understanding that there is "nothing to see" (2540).

Hulga's nihilism and ignorance contribute largely to the religiously grotesque nature of the text, as does the amorality of Bible salesman Manly Pointer. Pointer manipulates Hulga and her blind assumptions through his religious façade. He appears "so sincere, so genuine and earnest" (O'Connor 2535) and in need of their charity—a true "good country person"—that his sardonic misuse of religion goes unnoticed by Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga who see him as an uneducated "poor baby" (2540). Pointer's portrayal of innocence even as they become sexually intimate, allows him to convince Hulga to remove her artificial leg making her "entirely dependent on him" (2542). After rendering Hulga powerless, Pointer removes his Bible and takes out of its hollow interior "a pocket of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it" (2542). Hulga is stunned by the falsity of his faith and his lewd advances, declaring "You're a fine Christian! You're

just like them all—say one thing and do another. You’re a perfect Christian” (2542), to which Pointer replies, “You ain’t so smart. I been believing in nothing since I was born!” (2543). Pointer’s distortion of religion and Hulga’s blind ignorance both contribute to the nature of the grotesque in the text. Because of Pointer’s amorality and Hulga’s disregard of religion, Hulga is left without an identity—her artificial leg never having been replaced—and most certainly a victim of trauma. Pointer encapsulates the grotesque notion of a flawed, over-exaggerated and “Christ-haunted” character, as his only belief in religion is ultimately fabricated and misused solely for his own selfish pleasures. In O’Connor’s story, religion—or rather, Manley’s poor man’s perverted version of it—offers a fresh definition of the Southern grotesque.

Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard out of Carolina* can be defined as grotesque in the similar depiction of the Southern working poor and their selfish abuse of religion. This mode underscores Allison’s ability to “incorporate these factors into its dramatic treatment of poverty and injustice” (MacKethan). Her main character Bone, a member of the infamous Boatwright family known more for their run-ins with the law and drunken debauchery than their fidelity, is subject to ridicule because of her socioeconomic status and her birth certificate’s classification of her as a “bastard” born out of wedlock and unclaimed by her birth father. Both of these labels condemn Bone and her family to be known only as “trash,” a stereotype that Randall Kenan defines as befitting “liquored-up, malevolent, unemployed, undereducated, country-music-listening, oversexed, foul-tempered men; and long-suffering, quickly aging, overly fertile, too-young-marrying, hard-headed women” (qtd. in Bailey 276). This designation leaves Bone with a hunger that only love and legitimacy can offer her—a craving denied time and again by those who hold higher social and economic status. Bone recognizes that this “hunger” is dangerous, as she wants to “burn everything up, everything that they had that we couldn’t have, everything that made them think they were better than us” (Allison 103). Bone’s mother

Anney, a single mother caring for two children, searches for the same legitimacy and love that Bone craves. She seems to find this in Daddy Glen, who, impelled by past traumatic abuse, immediately asserts his power over Anney and her family through his sexual and physical victimization of Bone.

Thus, Bone's quest for vivification is induced by the pressure to escape her abusive home, eventually finding solace in the music wafting from a revival tent near her Aunt Ruth's house. She describes her first encounter with gospel music as one that "poured through [her] in a piercing young boy's voice, and made all [her] nastiness, all [her] jealousy and hatred, swell in [her] heart" (Allison 135). After this encounter, Bone declares that gospel music "was meant to . . . make you hate and love yourself at the same time, make you ashamed and glorified. It worked on me" (136). This music not only reminds Bone of her wrongdoings but the promise of an assured salvation; thus, Bone begins to believe that "gospel music and religion are keys to the miracle she so longs for in her life" (Friedel 40). In effect, Bone equates gospel music with religious faith, making it her "secret ambition" (Allison 137) to become a gospel singer—someone who would be "in demand all the time" (143) and constantly in the "role of spectacle" (Friedel 41). In this way, Bone feels she will achieve the love and salvation missing from her broken family.

This idea of achieving a sense of legitimacy through religion is exemplified through Bone's baptism. Bone initially states, "it was not actually baptism I wanted . . . it was that moment of sitting on the line between salvation and damnation with the preacher and the old women pulling bodily at my poor darkened soul. I wanted that moment to go on forever . . . I wanted the way I felt to mean something and for everything in my life to change because of it" (Allison 151-52). It is clear that Bone's intentions are not purely religious in the sense of spiritual fulfillment—hers are more concerned with the "value placed on the sinner's soul" (Friedel 40). In fact, when Bone is finally baptized, she states, "Whatever magic Jesus' grace promised, I didn't feel it" (Allison 152). This statement

indicates that Bone's religious pursuits were ultimately superficial and self-serving—now that Bone has been baptized, she is no longer the object of spectacle and the “magic” of religion is gone.

Like Bone, most of her family members do not find any value in religion that truly benefits them. Her beloved Uncle Earle declares, “They want you, oh yes, they want you. Till they got you . . . Religion gets you and milks you dry. Won't let you drink a little whiskey. Won't let you make no fat-assed girls grin and giggle. Won't let you do a damn thing except work for what you'll get in the hereafter” (Allison 148). Similar to Bone, Uncle Earle entertains the idea of being wanted by the church, but ultimately feels religion only prevents him from living how he wants to. Even Granny warns her not to take “that gospel stuff seriously . . . it's like bad whiskey. Run through you fast and leave you with pain” (144). In this sense, both Earle and Granny describe to Bone a notion of religion that ultimately *takes* instead of delivers salvation, a feeling Bone is acquainted with after her disenchanting baptism.

Following her baptism, Bone turns to the Book of Revelation, finding comfort in the “promised vindication” (Allison 152) as a “source of power” (Friedel 45) to fill the void rendered by the labels “trash” and “bastard.” She returns fervently to the gospel music scene with her new friend Shannon Pearl. Bone is attracted to Shannon because of her family's connection with the gospel circuit as well as Shannon's likeness to herself as figures of the grotesque. Both girls yearn for vindication, as Shannon's albinism subjects her to endless torment and subordination by her peers. Although outwardly religious, Shannon's family hypocritically subjects Bone to the same “smug, superior faces” (Allison 162) that haunt Bone due to her low social status. The Pearls use religion superficially not only to justify Shannon's albinism—“Why, she was so frail at birth we never thought the Lord would let her stay with us” (155)—but also to cement their status as one distinct from the “drunk[en] and thiev[ing] and bastard” (170) class characterized by the Boatwrights. Religion becomes a “performance for the Pearls,” a performance that Mrs. Pearl upholds even when a gospel singer cruelly calls her

child ugly (George 110). Clearly, the Pearls distort religion to assert their status, leaving Bone—who is trying to escape the effects of their hypocrisy—to stand up for Shannon. Still seeking a sense of vindication, she declares, “If there was a God, then there would be justice. If there was justice, then Shannon and I would make them all burn” (Allison 166).

Bone also attempts to find retribution in Daddy Glen’s abuse. Earlier in the novel when Bone is at the hospital and the doctor implies that she has been beaten, Bone leaves the hospital without admitting to anyone the truths of her victimization. In the car ride home, she imagines the doctor getting into his car and stopping “inches from Daddy Glen’s terrified face” (Allison 116). She then imagines Daddy Glen admitting that he has sinned—leaving her to be the only one to say, “Yes. I forgive you” (116). Yet, toward the end of the novel, Bone’s attitude transforms as she adopts religion as a form of vindication. When Daddy Glen is horrifically raping her, Bone screams, “Damn you! Damn you! *God will damn you!*” (284), and “God will give you to me. Your bones will melt and your blood will catch fire. I’ll rip you open and feed you to the dogs. Like in the Bible, like the way it ought to be, God will give you to me” (285), clearly praying for some form of religious retribution to even the score in ways that elude her mother and family. Throughout the text, Allison depicts religion as a tool Bone shoulders to eradicate the labels and class stereotypes that have been circumstantially foisted upon her. Bone manipulates religion in order to find her “irretrievable identity” (Bailey 271) and escape the blighted one she has been forced to inhabit by those of wealth and propriety.

The Pearl family’s willful exploitation of religion to cement their social status illustrates another grotesque reality present in Allison’s fiction. Simply put, the hypocritical Pearls climb gospel music’s faux-spiritual ladder to rise above the poor and sinful masses. The Pearls simper over their “angel” Shannon and “enforce the class hierarchy of the South, subtly berating Bone as ‘white trash’ while simultaneously accepting the immoral behavior of the gospel singers” who, behind the stage curtain, obscenely pinch bottoms

and empty hipflasks of hard liquor (George 110). Therefore, a sense of the grotesque lies within the Pearls as within Bone (though the Pearls are less forgivable). The Pearls embody a shocking “disconnect between religious rhetoric and [their] actual lives” (Vickroy 58) and this disparity infuses the text with the distinct mark of the grotesque, particularly as the Pearls perpetuate the trauma and violence that has thus far defined Bone’s identity.

In both O’Connor’s “Good Country People” and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard out of Carolina*, the grotesque is represented through the working poor’s misuse of religion. In these works, both the Pearl family and Manley Pointer reveal themselves as embodiments of the grotesque—flawed characters who cynically manipulate religion and in turn are manipulated by it. Their attempts to control others expose their religiosity to be just as hollow as Pointer’s Bible. Both utilize feigned religiosity to their selfish benefit, leaving their fragile “victims” ultimately more fractured than before.

Though the victimized Hulga and Bone are manipulated by religion, in truly grotesque form, they too exploit religion for their own purposes. Ultimately, religion is not salvific for either character—Hulga is denied superiority and redemption even in her nihilistic assertions and likewise, Bone’s hunger for escape to love is unfulfilled. Both nihilistic Hulga and poverty-ridden Bone are forced to seek identities outside of the ones imposed upon them by society, and in doing so, they embody fractured, religiously grotesque figures.

Though notions of the grotesque have changed over time, O’Connor’s and Allison’s works bespeak their grotesque natures through warped and unfulfilling religiosity situated in the working poor. O’Connor’s characters display either ignorance or manipulation of religion, and Allison’s seek to escape or affirm their social status via the practice of faith. When compared, both authors’ works convey the view that even religion—abused or not—cannot redeem the South’s economically downtrodden and socially fractured grotesques.

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## Paradox in *The Golden Bowl*: Indirectness Directing an Understanding of Marriage

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In *The Golden Bowl*, Henry James's characters employ metaphors to explore how an act of adultery impacts marriage. Prince Amerigo is an Italian nobleman who is engaged to Maggie Verver, daughter of an American industrial magnate, Adam Verver, who has been arranged by Maggie to marry Charlotte Stant, a former sweetheart to Amerigo. An affair then ensues between Amerigo and Charlotte. Throughout the novel, these four characters receive sustained psychological focus, magnified by commentary from Fanny and Colonel Assingham. This focus creates a feeling of claustrophobia in the text but also enables detailed inquiries into the meaning of marriage as constructed by the characters. James presents matrimony as a journey through which characters acquire metaphors that provide them with oblique means to understand and communicate their experiences. True to this theme of metaphor, Henry James remarked in the author's preface that "what perhaps stands out for me [in the *Golden Bowl*] is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action" (xviii)<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, one of the novel's central paradoxes emerges through this indirectness, directing the novel toward a reality of cosmic loafing as characters develop metaphors and symbols to creatively present their experiences in marriage. In this manner, the intense reflections on marriage and adultery suggest that emotional drama, despite being mentally draining on the characters, can generate aesthetic value through the evocation of complex and elegant

symbols that guide characters in their understanding of marriage and adultery.

Symbolism is immediately evident in the title, which refers to a recurring image in the novel that evolves to symbolize the imperfect marriage of Amerigo and Maggie. In the context of marriage, a historical source exists for the golden bowl. While visiting the Lamb House in Sussex, James recognized an antique golden bowl that King George I delivered to the Lamb family as a baptism gift for their newborn child, leading the bowl to become a “symbol for the theme of the novel” (Edel 209). Like the novel’s bowl, the Georgian bowl serves as a gift to celebrate domestic harmony, including marriage and motherhood. However, the complications that arise during Maggie’s marriage begin to undermine such harmony, and this is symbolized by the disfiguring crack in the bowl noticed by Amerigo while in the Bloomsbury shop. Charlotte overlooks the crack, perhaps intentionally.

[Amerigo:] “Why, it [the golden bowl] has a crack.” [...]

[Charlotte:] “But it’s exquisite,” [...]

“Of course it’s exquisite. That’s the danger.”

Then a light visibly came to her—a light in which her friend suddenly and intensely showed. The reflection of it, as she smiled at him, was in her own face. “The danger—I see—is because you’re superstitious.”

“Per Dio, I’m superstitious! A crack is a crack—and an omen’s an omen.”

“You’d be afraid—?” [...]

“For your marriage?”

“For my marriage. For everything.” (VI.71)

Here, the bowl informs how Charlotte and Amerigo view reality, and specifically, marriage—it emerges as a symbol of harmony in Charlotte’s mind and of impending instability in Amerigo’s mind. The exquisite golden bowl, which “seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer,” immediately caught Charlotte’s attention, while Amerigo merely “regarded it from a distance” (VI.67). Consistent

with Charlotte's superficial admiration of the golden bowl is her inability to discern the defect in the bowl that Amerigo notices in quick passing.

The disparate views held by Charlotte and Amerigo on his marriage emerges through disparate interpretations on the condition of the bowl. Charlotte asks: "if it's something you can't find out, isn't it as good as if it were nothing?" (VI.68). Her question has semiological significance—signs and symbols create an understanding of reality, and symbolic vehicles integrate with the tenors of reality. Importantly, this style of metaphor in which "vehicles encroach and become one with their tenors" (Watts 170) suggests Charlotte understands reality through a series of lenses, which enable images to become progressively congruent with reality. For Charlotte, ontological features of the golden bowl reflect her individual perspective and interpretation. The question of whether a flaw exists in the bowl lacks a fixed answer; instead, it serves as a medium for characters to explore meanings of the bowl's crack. For Charlotte, an immaculate golden bowl, understood as a wedding gift, symbolizes her idealized vision of Amerigo's marriage to Maggie. Amerigo discerns a crack and holds a more pessimistic view of his marriage, a view that becomes a reality when his feelings for Charlotte revive during their escapade at the Bloomsbury shop and begin to put stress on his marriage.

The symbolic bowl also enables Charlotte to analyze Amerigo's personality, recalling what James describes as the "oblique" means through which characters in *The Golden Bowl* understand each other. In response to Amerigo's remark, Charlotte imagines that the golden bowl is dangerous because it may harbor defects that can undermine preconceptions of its flawless aesthetics. As interpreted by Charlotte, Amerigo's fear of unfulfilled expectations (associated with the crack in the golden bowl) fuels a generalized paranoia and superstition in which the bowl's imperfect aesthetics portend uncertainty about "happiness," then "safety," and finally "marriage" (VI.70). Amerigo never hints at a belief in superstition (in fact, he

sarcastically assumes a belief in superstition) while Charlotte uses her imagination to bring an ontological link between the crack and superstitious omens. Amerigo maintains that a “crack is a crack—and an omen’s an omen,” but Charlotte projects an image onto Amerigo in which the crack becomes an omen, defining her opinion of Amerigo as superstitious (VI.70).

Analysis of the golden bowl has elucidated how Amerigo and Charlotte understand each other through metaphors. From a formal standpoint, metaphorical links in the novel complicate the unidirectional model of metaphor in which “A” maps directly onto “B.” Watts describes a bidirectional model of metaphor in which tenor and vehicle are in dynamic equilibrium and superimposed on each other (Watts 170). A notable example of the bidirectional model can be seen in Amerigo’s meditation on Charlotte’s question: “Do you think you’ve ‘known’ me?” (XII.128).

. . . the fine pink glow, projected forward, of his ships, behind him, definitely blazing and crackling—this quantity was to push him harder than any word of her own could warn him. All that she was herself, moreover, was so lighted, to its advantage, by the pink glow. (XII.129)

Amerigo not only enables his “vehicle to encroach his tenor,” but he also constructs a series of metaphors to “know” Charlotte in which he projects one metaphor onto the next until the final tenor, Charlotte, is reached. The imagining of a “pink glow” initiates Amerigo’s layering of metaphors as the “pink glow” projects forward onto “ships” before finally mapping onto Charlotte. Charlotte herself, then, is “lighted . . . by the pink glow.” In this manner, the “pink glow” bookends the sequence of metaphors, setting them in equilibrium with each other and with the tenor: Charlotte. Thus, Amerigo develops an oblique understanding of Charlotte through a sequence of images synthesized in his mind.

Metaphors in *The Golden Bowl* appear to play a functional role—they are seemingly endowed with an “ontological power” (Steele). Metaphor, and the language used to construct it,

confers reality, particularly for the characters that are engaged in synthesizing the metaphors. Amerigo, for example, uses an indirect approach to construct an image of his father-in-law, Adam Verver.

I'm like a chicken, at best, chopped up and smothered in sauce; cooked down as a *creme de volaille*, with half the parts left out. Your father's the natural fowl running about the *bassecour*. His feathers, movements, his sounds—those are the parts that, with me, are left out.

[ . . . ]

What I mean is that he's a kind of result of his inevitable tone. My liking is accordingly *for* the tone—which has made him possible. (I.6)

Rather than considering Adam's literal features, Amerigo builds his understanding of Adam through oblique methods, first comparing Adam to himself, and then defining himself and Adam metaphorically through food and fowl. Through these idiosyncratic images, Amerigo contrasts Adam's cosmic lifestyle with his own. But instead of being explicit, Amerigo buries his thoughts in metaphor. Rather than directly stating his desire to learn about Adam, he presents "eating your father alive . . . the only way to taste him" as the means of knowing him (I.6). Part of that knowing derives from "his inevitable [American] tone," because "it's when he talks American that he is most alive," and this suggests Amerigo believes an individual's identity is defined by speech and language, pointing again to a genesis of reality through signs and symbols.

In *Book First*, the golden bowl is introduced as a cardinal symbol in the novel, and it evolves as a symbol of Amerigo's marriage to Maggie. In *Book Second*, the focus is on Maggie and the symbolic representation of marriage in her mind. She complicates the prevailing golden bowl symbol by introducing two novel images—a garden and a pagoda: "This situation had been occupying, for months and months, the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda

. . . ” (XXV.233). The “situation” refers to Amerigo’s affair with Charlotte. In this pivotal moment, Maggie’s realization of their affair is highlighted with extensive symbolism and metaphor. Importantly, Maggie’s ruminations on adultery generate meanings for the pagoda that guide the explication of adultery in her mind, and this is consistent with the role of the golden bowl in representing marriage for Amerigo and Charlotte in *Book First*.

The images generated in Maggie’s mind follow a pattern that resembles the coalescing metaphors and tenors in *Book First*, but they also pose interesting paradoxes. To describe the inconsistency between the Oriental pagoda and Edenic garden’s location, Pearce uses the phrase “pastoral fallacy” (Pearce 843). Watts clarifies this apparent inconsistency, which she views as reminiscent of the Petrarchan paradox in that the “adulterous situation participates in the garden of Maggie’s life not as the Edenic tree, but as a spontaneously generated ivory tower, or pagoda (Watts 174). Paradoxically, the “garden” is a central metaphor of Maggie’s revelation, but it lacks a stable set of entities that would ordinarily define a garden. Pearce’s pastoral fallacy and Watt’s paradox underscore the artificiality of the pagoda in comparison with the garden, much like the golden bowl in relation to its organic tenor: human marriage. As consciously manufactured entities, the golden bowl and pagoda also reside in processed worlds—an urbanized Bloomsbury shop and the Orient, respectively. In Maggie’s use of metaphor, there is a progression toward the generation of paradoxes between tenors and vehicles, and this invites an interpretation of the pagoda itself.

From an epistemological standpoint, the pagoda, with its “great decorated surface [that] had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable,” hints at the difficulty of using metaphor to penetrate and define a complex human situation such as adultery (XXV.234). In her analysis of late Jamesian language and symbolism, Yeazell references the “outlandish” pagoda image and describes it as a “mystery of the inscrutable Orient,” (Yeazell 48) and thus as

foreign and exotic in Maggie's mind. Hence, the mystery of adultery for Maggie becomes ontologically consistent with the mystery of the Oriental pagoda. Interestingly, it is through the frustrating experience of meditating on adultery that Maggie is able to both generate exquisite symbols such as the pagoda and creatively endow these symbols with meaning. One particular meaning ascribed to the pagoda derives from the literal pagoda as a haven for precious relics. Maggie's "impenetrable and inscrutable" pagoda, then, acts as a metaphorical shield that encloses the covert affair between Amerigo and Charlotte, shutting Maggie herself out from openly understanding this act of adultery. Entering the pagoda and openly uncovering the adulterous affair would disrupt marital harmony. To highlight Maggie's self-proclaimed stricture, the Oriental pagoda image is supplemented with a "Mahometan mosque, with which no base heretic could take a liberty," thus upgrading the consequences associated with open knowledge of Amerigo's adultery to a heretical level (XXV.234).

Returning to what James described as his "oblique" approach in *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie becomes aware of Amerigo's affair by focusing on circuitous psychological and philosophical cues while seemingly ignoring more direct clues, such as Amerigo's notable absences and apparent fondness toward Charlotte. Maggie's suspicion of adultery is not aroused by Amerigo's or Charlotte's actions but by the perception of a "kinship of expression in the two faces," a kinship she figures as a "medallion containing on either side a cherished little portrait": "The miniatures were back to back, but she saw them forever face to face, and when she looked from one to the other she found in Charlotte's eyes the gleam of the momentary 'What does she really want?' that had come and gone for her in the Prince's" (XXVI.252-53). Thus, Maggie's use of the dual miniatures informs how she constructs the reality of Amerigo's affair with Charlotte—through signs and symbols.

When Maggie coincidentally visits the same Bloomsbury shop that Amerigo and Charlotte had visited in *Book First*, she impulsively

purchases the alluring golden bowl. In doing so, Maggie also acquires its concealed flaws, which are associated with Amerigo's reading of the golden bowl in *Book First*. Maggie's subsequent conversation with the shopkeeper and with Fanny Assingham, almost too conveniently, confirms notions of adultery—the flaws in her marriage. This rapid sequence of cause-and-effect, in which the acquisition of the golden bowl's flaws symbolically translates into acquisition of knowledge on adultery, emotionally overloads Maggie, and she immediately develops for Fanny an exhaustive series of images to represent infidelity for Fanny, who impulsively shatters the bowl and everything the bowl has come to symbolize: "She had flushed with the force of her effort as Maggie had flushed with wonder at the sight, and this high reflexion in their faces was all that passed between them for a minute more. 'Whatever you meant by it—and I don't want to know *now*—has ceased to exist,' Mrs. Assingham said" (XXXIII.336). In this instance of destruction, Fanny has undermined the symbolic equations between the golden bowl and its acquired meanings, first of marital harmony for Charlotte in *Book First* and then of adultery for Maggie in *Book Second*. Metaphorically, this disintegration causes previous readings of the golden bowl to diffuse into oblivion. The shattered golden bowl, devoid of its acquired meanings and rendered ambiguous, anticipates the moral ambiguity that concludes the novel: was Amerigo worth the emotional and psychological effort Maggie put in to preserve their marriage? The "moral" act of remaining faithful and rescuing her marriage appears as perplexing as the "amoral" act of adultery. Indeed, the lack of a moral resolution for Maggie at the conclusion of the novel echoes the moral confusions of Amerigo at the outset of the novel.

As a prototypic late Jamesian novel, *The Golden Bowl* eschews narrative action to create room for character meditation. The plot merely consists of two marriages, one affair, and one dramatized act of violence: Fanny's smashing of the golden bowl. The nuances of marriage and adultery emerge from meditation on exquisite

symbols, such as the golden bowl and pagoda. In Maggie's mind, the final verdict on acquisition of knowledge through metaphor is one of uncertainty, as the symbols that evolve in her mind to aid in understanding marriage and adultery ultimately destabilize and result in rejection of her insights. So while the analysis of symbols and metaphors indeed direct characters' understandings of reality, the final understanding seems to be a reminder of the difficulty of faithfully representing reality through metaphor and symbolism.

#### Notes

1. Textual references are from James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl*. Ed. Nicola Bradbury. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1975. xvii, 3-443. Print.

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## Jurors

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