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“Passing, Performing: Constructing a Modern African American, Female Queer Identity in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*”

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Rebecca Parks

“Passing, Performing: Constructing a Modern African American, Female Queer Identity in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*”

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Passing, Performing: Constructing a Modern African American, Female Queer Identity in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

| Rebecca Parks

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In her article, “Black Female Sexuality in *Passing*,” Deborah McDowell explores Nella Larsen’s treatment of African American female [homo]sexuality in her novel *Passing* within the historical context of the emerging queer culture of 1920s Harlem. McDowell compares Larsen, in her role as Renaissance cultural luminary, to “black female blues singers . . . Bessie, Mamie, and Clara Smith . . . Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, and Victoria Spivey” who took to the stages of Harlem and “sang openly and seductively about sex and celebrated the female body and female desire,” while Larsen, she claims “lacked the daring of [her] contemporaries” and “could only hint at the idea of black women as sexual subjects behind the safe and protective covers of traditional narrative subjects and conventions” (368). Although McDowell is right to locate Larsen in a long-standing lineage of African American female writers subject to the limits of “traditional narrative” and to explore *Passing*’s undertones of queer female sexuality in light of the queer culture of the Harlem Renaissance, ultimately, her conclusion that Larsen “closes *Passing* ‘without exploring to the end [the] unfamiliar path into which she had strayed,’” reduces the novel’s nuanced exploration of how identity is constructed, and, more specifically, what it is like to be among the first to both negotiate and inhabit a new identity; in this case, a modern queer identity specific to African American women (Larsen qtd. in McDowell 378).

My argument attempts to recover the complexity of Larsen’s

treatment of African American, queer female sexuality by, first, resituating the novel within a broader historical context that traces the emergence of modern female, African American, and queer identities in the early twentieth century. Largely building off of Christopher Nealon's discussion of the transition between the inversion model of homosexuality and the contemporary or identity model of homosexuality in his *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall*, I posit that Larsen's female protagonists are "foundling" characters who inhabit this anxious transitional period wherein they struggle to break free of their historically "inverted," or subaltern gender, racial, and sexual identities in order to both construct and embrace a new, ethnic model of identity.¹ In other words, Larsen's characters illustrate the difficulty of turning shame into pride. Moreover, I consider Larsen's setting—1920s Harlem—as the site where all three of these modern identities intersect, and further investigate a queer Harlem far less radical than the oft-cited images of the performative, "bull-dagger" women, like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, alone suggest. Rather, I look to Larsen's text and her reference to popular Harlem entertainers, Josephine Baker and Ethel Waters, two queer women who were less "daring" when it came to expressing their sexualities, and, like Larsen's Irene, "passed" as heterosexual in the public eye. In light of this fuller picture of a queer Harlem that includes both passing and performative models of African American female sexuality, I explore how Larsen's text both reflects this historical reality and further illustrates how the acts of passing and performance themselves *are* the uncertain negotiation of modern identities. Ultimately, then, I read *Passing's* fatal end as representative of Irene's inability to see through to a future that presents more options than to just pass or perform one's identity; that is to say, as representative of what feels, for "foundling" characters, like the impossibility of ever fully turning shame into pride.

By writing a novel about both African American female sexual expression and non-normative sexualities, Larsen delves into two deeply troubled histories. The conflicted cultural image and history of African American female sexuality was borne out of the era of slavery when, as McDowell explains, "the white slave master constructed an image of black female sexuality which shifted

responsibility for his own sexual passions onto his female slaves” (366). This “heritage of rape and concubinage” and the consequent cultural myth of African American women’s licentiousness long outlived the era of slavery, and, by the 1920s, limited African American women’s ability to embrace the mainstream “sexual revolution” of Jazz Age America (McDowell 367). In order to restore the cultural image of black female sexuality African American women, largely “following the movement by black club women of the era,” reverted to tradition and “imitated the ‘purity,’ the sexual morality of the Victorian bourgeoisie” (McDowell 367). Thus, even a modernist writer like Larsen had little choice but to enter a “roughly 130 year” history of “black women novelists [who] . . . treated sexuality with caution and reticence” and were limited to covert expressions of sexuality hidden behind “traditional narrative subjects and conventions” so as not to further jeopardize the already tarnished cultural image of African American women (McDowell 366, 368).

Larsen contends not only with the limitations on African American female sexuality, but the changing cultural perceptions of homosexuality. With the turn of the century, the love that “dare not speak its name” was no longer left to quietly thrive behind closed doors, but was openly and increasingly condemned as a threatening perversion or disease. Yet, simultaneously, a unified, ethnic model of queer culture began to emerge in response to attacks of inversion; or, as Nealon puts it “roughly speaking, the inversion model enjoyed dominance in the first half of the century, while the ethnic model rose to prominence in the second,” although “the two have always been deeply bound up with each other” (Nealon 2).

Nealon’s “foundling” theory parallels W.E.B DuBois’s principle of African American double consciousness which illustrates a similar tension in regards to early twentieth-century race consciousness: blackness was at once a point of shame and condemnation, but the era of the New Negro emerged as a proud, unified ethnic response to a long history of marginalization. Larsen’s *Passing*, then, complicates the tensions of these emerging identities by writing black, queer female characters who thus embody an anxious intersection of modern gendered, racial, and sexual identities. Irene’s climactic identity crisis in part three of

the novel reveals this intersectional anxiety, for she realizes that “whatever steps she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed. A person or the race. Clare, herself, or the race. Or, it might be all three” (69). Herein, Irene struggles to reconcile “all three” of her conflicted identities: Clare, who embodies her queer identity; herself, whose sexual identity as an African American female is limited historically; and her race, which not only complicates her sexuality (whether normative or non-normative), but compromises her basic ability to live freely in society at large. In other words, Irene exists at the anxious crossroads of three emerging identities, and her foreboding that “something would be crushed” conveys the uncertainty and difficulty of both inhabiting and constructing modern identities.

That Larsen sets her novel in 1920s Harlem is crucial, for the burgeoning African American community in New York city’s Upper East Side embodied, like Irene, the meeting-place of these modern identities. Harlem was, of course, the heart of the New Negro Renaissance that fostered race pride through artistic expression and achievement. The music and performing culture that flourished in Harlem drew white and black patrons alike, yet many came for more than just the blues, jazz, and Lindy hop. Harlem’s musical community was also the site of an increasingly visible queer community which, despite its imperfections, was heretofore unprecedented on such a public scale. As McDowell notes, popular performers like Bessie Smith and Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, sang songs with blatantly queer lyrics and undertones, and often took the stage dressed in provocatively masculine attire. Venues as prominent as the Savoy Ballroom attracted African Americans and whites alike with its extravagant costume balls that were, effectively, legal gatherings wherein men and women dressed in drag and courted same-sex lovers. Less public, thus more radical, were the private apartment parties that often escalated into full-fledged “sex circuses” that featured exhibitionist queer sex or performances by transvestites and drag queens (Garber).

While this radical queer culture and community thrived in the jazz clubs and private apartments of Harlem each night, by day the reality of an increasingly conservative cultural perception of homosexuality as inversion ultimately reigned supreme. Lillian

Faderman describes Harlem's queer culture as merely "one more exotic drawing card" for whites looking to fleetingly indulge in "immoral" pleasures (69). These whites who went "slumming" in Harlem were under the impression that the African American community saw "homosexuality as a 'fact of life'"; but, in actuality, Harlem was not immune from the prevailing cultural ideology and "blacks were generally as ambivalent about homosexuality as whites" (Faderman 69). Larsen's *Passing* makes evident this division between everyday African American Harlemites and those who were members of the radical music and performance scene, for her cast of middle-class characters attend racial-uplift organization dances and respectable tea gatherings rather than the Savoy's drag balls and after-hour apartment parties (49).

This is not to say, however, that everyday Harlemites were entirely removed from their neighborhood's vast musical culture and, implicitly, its queer culture. In one of *Passing*'s many "party" scenes, Irene and another guest make casual reference to the jazz scene: "Josephine Baker No. I've never seen her Well, she might have been in *Shuffle Along* when I saw it, but if she was, I don't remember her Oh, but you're wrong! . . . I do think Ethel Waters is awfully good" (64). Herein, it is imperative to note which Harlem performers Larsen's characters are familiar with. While critics like McDowell are apt to focus on the "bulldagger" artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith who were open about their sexual identities, these "daring" women were exceptional (McDowell 368). Both due to the overarching, conservative cultural sentiment regarding non-normative sexualities as well as the fragile history of black women's sexuality, most queer African American female performers—among them Josephine Baker and Ethel Waters—chose to "pass" as heterosexual (Garber). Faderman notes that, "passing" often meant that women would go so far as to marry men "either because they were bisexual . . . needed to marry for economic reasons, or [because] front marriages permitted them to continue functioning with less stigma" (74). Thus, Larsen's reference to these "passing" women is twofold: not only would these less flamboyant performers appeal to the "ambivalent" middle-class community to which Irene and her acquaintances belong, but the reference simultaneously functions to explicitly tie Irene into this cultural

phenomena of heterosexual passing.

Moreover, Irene and Brian's apparently loveless marriage is easily read as a "front marriage," for Irene resolves "to hold fast to the outer shell of her marriage, to keep her life fixed, certain" out of fear that if Clare should be "freed, anything might happen" (77). That is, Irene's "outer shell" of a marriage is mere pretense and protection from the stigma that should follow a free and open relationship with Clare. Thus, while the novel appears to focus on Clare, who participates in the contemporary phenomena of racial passing sensationalized by the 1925 Rhinelander Jones case, Irene simultaneously participates in a heterosexual "passing" common among another set of famous New York women.² In light of this further historical context, to say that Larsen "lacked the daring of [her] contemporaries" is inaccurate, for her characters reflect the reality that the majority of Harlem's queer female cultural icons felt unable to declare their queer sexualities on the public stage and bear the weight of yet another stigmatized identity (McDowell 368).

While those like Ethel Waters, Josephine Baker, and Irene Redfield were "passing" or performing as heterosexual, those like Rainey and Smith who were open about their queerness were similarly performing their sexualities because their audiences received their flamboyant displays as exotic, Harlem spectacles rather than authentic identities (Faderman 68) In this way, then, the acts of passing and performing *are* the uncertain negotiation of modern identity: while passing more clearly reflects a "foundling" ambivalence about the ability to break free from a stigmatized past, on a closer look performing, too, contains its own traces of "foundling" uncertainty. Faderman brings this insecurity to the forefront in her analysis of even the most daring performers' song lyrics that: "flaunt unorthodoxy with a vengeance, but at the same time . . . exhibit . . . vestiges of discomfort toward female nonconformity and sexual autonomy . . . [which] suggests that even those who chose to reject the mainstream culture . . . could go no further . . . than to be ambivalent about sexual love between women" (79). In this light, then, even the most "radical" Harlem women appear to share in Larsen's hesitancy, and a comparison of the singers provocative yet ambivalent song lyrics and Irene's subtly suggestive descriptions of Clare further illuminates this collective

uncertainty about a modern African American, queer female identity. For instance, in her “Prove It on Me Blues,” Ma Rainey boldly alludes to her queer sexuality when she sings “went out last night with a crowd of my friends / They must’ve been women, ‘cause I don’t like no men,” yet her refrain “they say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me / Sure got to prove it on me” maintains a playful indeterminacy that neutralizes her preceding, brazen declaration. Likewise, in her “Tain’t Nobody’s Bizness If I Do,” Bessie Smith sings “there ain’t nothing I can do, or nothing I can say / That folks don’t criticize me / But I’m goin’ to, do just as I want to anyway / And don’t care if they all despise me,” and therein unforgivingly embraces not only her queer identity but her triply stigmatized and limited African American, queer female identity in her emphasis that “there ain’t *nothing* I can do . . . or say / That folks don’t criticize me.” Yet, she, too, veers into indecision with her refrain that proclaims it “ain’t nobody’s bizness if I do, do, do, do,” which similarly functions to undermine the validity of her daring lyrics that come before.

This same pattern of boldness tempered by ambivalence and hesitation is evident in Irene’s descriptions of Clare. From the very beginning Irene depicts Clare in subtly passionate detail: “her lips, painted a brilliant geranium-red, were sweet and sensitive and a little obstinate. A tempting mouth . . . the ivory skin had a peculiar soft lustre. And the eyes were magnificent! . . . Arresting eyes, slow and mesmeric” (21). Irene’s fascination with “the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry” continues throughout the course of the entire novel, yet is consistently interspersed with uncertain meditations on Clare, for instance, when Irene ponders “what was it about Clare’s voice that was so appealing, so very seductive?” (23). In its irresolution, Irene’s question counteracts her bold declarations of love and admiration for Clare’s body and thus effectively creates the same pattern of daring counteracted by apprehension evident in Rainey and Smith’s songs.

Furthermore, Irene’s narration often functions as a commentary on performance and the performative nature of identity and thus reveals Larsen’s more complex synthesis of passing and performance as the uncertain negotiation of modern identities. After reading Clare’s letter, itself an example of the

ambiguous passion that permeates the novel, Irene thinks that it “was, to her taste, a bit too lavish in its wordiness, a shade too unreserved in the manner of its expression. It roused again that old suspicion that Clare was acting, not consciously perhaps—that is, not too consciously—but, none the less, acting” (36). Clare, in loudly declaring her love and longing in her letter to Irene, takes on the persona of one of Harlem’s boldly queer women, which Irene, her audience, receives as the conscious, but not too conscious, “acting” or performance of identity. Later, Irene’s own passing is described in performative terms: “But that was as far as she got in her rehearsal”—that is, her rehearsal of her rejection of Clare—“for Clare had come softly into the room without knocking, and before Irene could greet her, had dropped a kiss on her dark curls . . . Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling . . . she grasped Clare’s two hands in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: ‘Dear God! But aren’t you lovely, Clare!’” (46). Irene’s rehearsal of her “passing” identity is interrupted, thus her performance falls through, which allows her desire for Clare to burst forth in an “onrush of affectionate feeling.” At one point Irene herself recognizes that the extent of this passing and performance of identity—that “people could sit so unruffled, so ostensibly friendly, while they were in reality seething with anger, mortification, [and] shame”—is truly “unbelievable and astonishing” (31). Irene’s incredulity speaks, more broadly, to the surreal state of 1920s Harlem itself, wherein passers and performers alike put on “unruffled” exteriors while the underneath they seethed with the anxious emotions borne of their conflicted identities.

By the end of the novel, Irene’s severely suppressed “anger, mortification, [and] shame” burst forth through her “unruffled exterior,” for she cannot see through to a future where identity can be safely lived out rather than anxiously passed or performed. Ultimately, then, Irene succumbs to her overwhelming fear that “anything might happen” if both Clare and her own complicated African American, queer female identity should be “freed” and made genuine (77). Thus, Irene feels she must rid herself of Clare who “had torn at [her] placid life,” and embodied the “radiant” temptation that threatened her “all-important” front of “safety [and] security” (80, 47). Clare’s death, then, is likewise the death of Irene’s

troubling queer desires, yet rather than signify what McDowell posits is Larsen's move "to punish the very values the novel implicitly affirms," or "to honor the very value system the text implicitly satirizes," this ending represents an hyperbolic manifestation of what felt like, for "foundlings," the absolute impossibility of making the transition from shameful stigmatized past to proud and ethnic present (McDowell 378).

Notes

1. While Nealon uses the term "homosexual" I use queer throughout the course of my essay because I believe it is a less definite term that more accurately reflects the same-sex dynamics presented in *Passing*.

2. Leonard Kip Rhinelander and his biracial wife Alice Beatrice Jones lived in Westchester County, New York, and, due to both their proximity to the city as well as the Rhinelander family's prominent social status, the major New York papers were abuzz with details of the case.

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The Walking Dead Weather: Predatory Capitalism, Big Data, and the Environmental (Zombie) Apocalypse in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*

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The apocalyptic scenario in *Zone One* (2012), Colson Whitehead's fifth novel, is a popular one, the logic (somehow) so familiar: a zombifying plague has descended upon the planet, transforming a majority of the world's population into what Whitehead calls the "stragglers" and "skels" (as in skeleton). In New York State, what is left of humanity has banded together in Buffalo and established a provisional government, the plans for reconstructing the fallen world turning anxiously in their heads. The first step: reclaiming from the hordes of the dead that treasured, sprawling island—Manhattan. If the survivors could successfully resettle the borough, they could inaugurate a return to normalcy, a bouncing-back from near apocalyptic extinction. They start with the area below Canal Street, designated "Zone One."

Enter the novel's Everyman protagonist, Mark Spitz, whom we know only by the moniker he has been assigned for his work as a "sweeper," a civilian tasked with eliminating zombies from the zone. The book spans three days of his life—Friday, Saturday, Sunday; possibly humanity's last weekend on the planet—and opens with an admission about Spitz: "He'd always wanted to live in New York" (1). The plague expedites the wish. He gets to live there, but instead

of achieving the cosmopolitan status he had hoped the city would confer on him, he's assigned to the Omega sweeper unit and begins patrolling his Lower Manhattan beat for the truant undead. As per the horror genre, the zombies are zombies, except when they're not; often they are described either as moving with weather or as weather themselves (Mark Spitz, for instance, remarks that the zombies "were really coming down out there"); elsewhere in the novel the zombies serve as a metaphor for the predatory capitalism that has rendered Manhattan a kind of gruesome, unnatural environment; still later the zombies embody one of the greatest contemporary anxieties about climate change—rising sea levels—and become an unstoppable surge of water that defies all attempts at subduing it that data collection has afforded humanity. Indeed, if we read at the level of metaphor, the apocalypse in *Zone One* is just as much about the environment as it is about zombies. For Whitehead, the logic and cultural currency of the zombie apocalypse narrative have convenient explanatory power that allows him to articulate the challenges of addressing climate change—from sustainability, data analysis, and adaptation, to rising sea levels and the slow violence of environmental disasters.

Yet despite the zombie apocalypse, strangely the people in this novel seemed to be getting consumed in Manhattan well before the plague arrived, the city having already been a hostile environment even before the zombie occupation. That's how it seems to Mark Spitz, at least, as he navigates the Manhattan wasteland and looks back on his previous jobs, one as an office mailman, the other as a social media coordinator for a coffee multinational. His contemplation of the merciless Human Resources department at his former office job and his past work as a social media coordinator points out the violent and zombie-like way in which institutions and companies covet and collect data, rendering Manhattan an unnatural, hostile environment. Spitz remembers "the ogre head of Human Resources, who'd been relentless about [his] paperwork, downright insidious about his W-this, W-that" (21); and at the coffee multinational (for which Starbucks is likely the inspiration), he recalls scouring the internet for any mention of coffee, caffeine, or the company's name, and,

upon finding one, spamming the potential customer with inviting, thinly-veiled advertisements, tailored to each particular mention. “He perched on the high-tension wires like a binary vulture,” Mark Spitz explains, “ancient pixilated eyes peeled for scraps . . . When he saw meat, he pounced” (185). Language that might be used to describe the zombie—“ogre head,” “relentless,” “insidious,” “vulture,” “pounced”—is here used to qualify institutional data collection and a kind of predatory capitalism, one that critic Sven Cvek argues is both “zombie-like, and creates zombies” (7). Whereas during the zombie apocalypse survivors are hunted for their flesh, citizens in the pre-apocalypse Manhattan are no longer consumers but rather *are consumed*, hounded for their “W-this,” their “W-that,” only to then be “paraphrased into numbers, components of bundled data to be shot out through fiber-optic cable toward meaning” (21). As if summoned by his daydreaming, a gang of zombified HR employees attacks Mark Spitz during his sweep of a powerhouse law firm—“these guys will crush you,” he thinks—shaking him out of his absentmindedness (13). Mark Spitz “trie[s] to heave Human Resources off him,” the narrator explains (21), and it is no coincidence that Whitehead sics Human Resources itself and not its zombified employees on Mark Spitz; the result is a scene in which Mark Spitz is literally attacked by Human Resources. This localized condition of aggressive data collection and predatory capitalism—under which citizens are “paraphrased into numbers,” “shot out,” “crushed”—presents the city as the bloodthirsty space it already is, and anticipates the hostile environment and ecology into which Manhattan will be transformed at the onset of the zombie-environmental apocalypse. Indeed, as critic Leif Sorenson points out about the novel, “the zombie apocalypse does not transform urban space into a death-world; it simply exposes the monstrousness that lurks beneath everyday urban existence” (586).

Both iterations of the city, moreover, seem equally unsustainable in the context of the novel’s zombie-environmental disaster. The survivors in Zone One, for instance, refer to the period of time after the plague initially hits as “the interregnum.” For them, the title represents the enterprise of reconstruction they must undertake before they can restore order. The interregnum,

however, is exactly that—an interregnum, a transitional moment, a liminal space. It ends, as all interregnums finally must. Humanity’s way of life in the pre- and post-apocalyptic Manhattan—which, as some characters in the novel note, is characterized by “poisoning the planet . . . the calculated brutalities of the global economic system, [and] driving primordial species to extinction” (153)—is thus deemed unsustainable, bound to come to a swift end by way of the encroaching environmental disaster. Whitehead confirms this in the text by having Mark Spitz prioritize binary logic, therefore excluding any kind of middle or “interregnum.” Mark Spitz sees in the distance “a building that had been swept clean or had yet to be swept, full of shapes moving or not moving in the darkness . . . That steadfast binary” (33). Elsewhere in the novel he remarks that “[t]he plague was the plague . . . You were wearing galoshes, or you weren’t” (153); that “Everything was either a weapon or a wall” (175); and lastly that his work as a highway-clearer “was straightforward . . . The keys were in the ignition or weren’t, the master keys worked or didn’t” (173). Spitz’s “either/or” logic here forecloses the possibility of any kind of middle or in-between space, highlighting the way in which humanity’s interregnum represents a kind of unsustainable way of life that is ultimately laid to waste by an increasingly unstable environment; in this sense, the unsustainable condition of pre- and post-apocalyptic Manhattan is not so much a consequence of the environmental disaster as it is its cause. Thus when Zone One is finally becoming overrun by “the dead sea,” the last of humanity presumably being washed off the face of the earth, it is perhaps perfectly fitting that Mark Spitz asks, “does this mean we stop referring to it as an interregnum, then?” (307). By situating humanity within this kind of suspended, transitory “interregnum,” Whitehead demonstrates the way in which the zombie narrative bears on broader scenarios of humanity’s grapple with prolonging an increasingly unsustainable way of life.

Yet prolonging life—particularly by way of managing and subduing disaster—is precisely what data collection and analysis seems to promise. The provisional government in Buffalo, for instance, sends out “info-gathering directives” (34) and requires the sweeper teams to “record demographic data: the ages of the targets,

the density at the specific location, structure type, number of floors” (37), only to have these attempts at subduing the crisis ultimately fail. As the narrator explains:

With the assembled data, [Buffalo’s] supply of eggheads could start projecting how many of the dead they’d find in your typical twenty-two-story corporate flagship . . . Numbers permitted Buffalo to extrapolate the whole city from Zone One, speculate about how long it will take X amount of three-man sweeper units to clear the island . . . The truths of the grid’s rectilinear logic . . . had already been applied to cities across the country through the decades, anywhere human activity and desire needed to be tamed and made compliant . . . It could be subdued and understood. (40-42)

In Buffalo’s estimation, surely the “numbers” that have “through the decades” allowed humanity to “extrapolate,” “speculate,” “apply,” and finally “tame” human activity should also enable them to “subdue and understand” the hostile “dead weather.” And yet what seems in this moment to be Buffalo’s sober and confident plan quickly turns desperate, prompting Mark Spitz to imagine the sweeper data “being off-loaded from a military helicopter upstate and rushed by a harried private into an underground chamber at Buffalo HQ . . . Like it was someone’s liver being delicately transported to the waning recipient” (42). Mark Spitz’s comparison of Buffalo’s data collection to an urgent, rushed organ transplant figures data as the precious “liver” from which humanity—“the waning recipient”—attempts to draw sustenance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, the transplant fails: the “dead weather” refuses to be “subdued and understood,” and throughout the novel the Big Data projections of Buffalo’s “eggheads” fail to manage the zombie weather threat. After Mark Spitz’s sweeper team finishes an inspection, for instance, he notes that “it was a larger and messier cleanup than usual for a single room in an office building” (59), the same kind of single room and office building into which Buffalo supposedly had insight. Later in

the novel he asks himself if “Buffalo’s estimates vis-à-vis skel density south of Canal were stupendously botched. How could they have reckoned the numbers skulking in the great buildings” (93)? Here Whitehead’s staging of humanity’s “stupendously botched” attempt to tame disaster with “assembled data” mirrors the way in which those same “info-gathering” processes might also fail to manage an environmental disaster. How could we ever reckon, Whitehead asks, the weather skulking in the future?

And if we can’t reckon the weather, aren’t we then required to adapt to it? The crisis the survivors in Zone One face—how to adapt to a zombified world—reflects and resonates with one many climate scientists consider today: how—and to what extent—can we adapt to an environmental disaster? As Whitehead himself has remarked about the novel: “This book to me is not so much about blowing up monsters’ heads but about how to survive in a changed world, negotiating the before and after . . . how do you make the change, navigate this new landscape and remain intact” (Naimon). Whitehead’s comments about what disasters require people to do—“negotiat[e] the before and after,” “make the change,” “navigate this new landscape”—all point to a kind of adaptation, one that, in the context of the novel’s environmental apocalypse, confirms what the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has noted about the way in which adaptation is crucial to coping with a changing climate. As the IPCC writes in their *Climate Change 2014* report, “[h]uman and natural systems have a capacity to cope with adverse circumstances but, with continuing climate change, adaptation will be needed to maintain this capacity . . . Adaptation is becoming increasingly important in climate negotiations and implementation” (838-39). Whitehead represents this in the text by locating survival on the level of adaptation, thus reshaping the logic of the zombie narrative into one that pertains to contemporary discourse on climate change. Mark Spitz, for instance, can’t decide if his habit of “conjuring an acquaintance or loved one onto [the zombies]”—which frees him up to kill more of them—“[i]s an advantage or not,” while his lieutenant calls it a “successful adaptation” (19). Thus when the narrator is explaining what happened during the first week of the apocalypse, adaptation becomes the organizing rubric by which the

survivors and the dead are classified: “[Mark Spitz survived] that first week, when the great hordes of unadaptables had been exterminated or infected, too ill-equipped to deal with the realignment of the universe” (30). Emphasizing adaptation in this way allows Whitehead to repurpose the zombie narrative in order to articulate contemporary notions of adapting and coping with climate change.

As part of this engagement with the discourse surrounding climate change, Whitehead uses the nickname the survivors have given the zombie apocalypse—“Last Night,” as in the “night” the plague hit as well as what might be considered humanity’s “Last Night”—to demonstrate how environmental disasters are often perceived as completed, compartmentalized events, instead of permanent transformations with ongoing, slow-moving consequences. From the outset of the novel, the survivors use “Last Night” as a kind of shorthand for “the day the plague hit,” even as their life in the interregnum gradually distances them from it; as Mark Spitz wonders about a zombie, “had he traveled miles, had he been here since Last Night?” (101). Gary, another member of Mark’s sweeper unit, uses the nickname, too, when he explains that he’s the one of his siblings that has survived; “The other two perished on Last Night,” he laments (47). The “zombie weather,” as a result, becomes an event that happened “Last Night,” in the confines of a single evening, instead of an event that is still in the process of transforming the environment.

Only Mark Spitz—though he may use the “Last Night” designation—seems to realize the true, permanent nature of the novel’s dead weather disaster. As the narrator points out, “you never heard Mark Spitz say ‘When this is all over’ or ‘Once things get back to normal’ or other sentiments of that brand, because he refused them. When it was all done, truly and finally done, you could talk about what you were going to do. See if your house still stood” (32). The narrator’s word choice here—“all done,” “truly,” “finally”—presents the disaster as a kind of slow and perhaps permanent transformation to a hostile environment, as opposed to the hemmed-in disaster that falls neatly within the margins of “Last Night.” At the same time, the act of “see[ing] if your house still stood” calls up an image of survivors emerging after an

environmental disaster, and anticipates a scene much later in the novel, in which Mark Spitz, trapped in a farmhouse surrounded by zombies, “picture[s] himself underneath the news copter as the folks in more fortunate weather watched from home . . . He was on the roof, the brown floodwaters pouring around the house” (228). Mark Spitz’s imagination here extends his localized encounter with zombies into the dimensions and imagery of a distinctly environmental crisis, one that passes far beyond the bounds of “Last Night.” The “zombie weather”—as opposed to the “more fortunate weather”—is therefore not so much an isolated incident as it is a kind of ongoing condition, even as the survivors continue to perceive it as a temporary, completed event.

In fact, rather than dissipating after the “Last Night” outbreak, the “zombie weather” seems to get worse as the novel comes to a close. In the last section of the novel, Zone One starts to encounter “serious dead weather up at the wall” that separates Lower Manhattan from the rest of the zombified island, the “flood of skels” building to a “higher-than-normal” accumulation (234, 239). By having the approaching hordes of zombies quickly take on the dimensions and physics of an invading, unstoppable surge of water, Whitehead uses the image of the zombie to embody anxieties about rising sea levels and the areas (Lower Manhattan) that are vulnerable to them. As the narrator writes:

The ocean had overtaken the streets, as if the news programs’ global warming simulations had finally come to pass and the computer-generated swells mounted to drown the great metropolis . . . The damned bubbled and frothed on the most famous street in the world . . . The barrier was a dam now, suppressing the roiling torrent of the wasteland . . . The dead sloshed through the gap . . . the black tide had rolled in everywhere . . . everyone was drowning . . . It was probably too late to use the subway as a shortcut. They are dripping down the steps to the platforms by now. (302-15)

The zombie weather dispersed throughout the novel here concretizes into “the ocean,” “the torrent,” “the tide,” while the solid zombie bodies liquefy into the advancing “swell” of water that the “news programs’ global warming simulations” had forecasted. “Bubbled,” “frothed,” “roiling,” “sloshed,” “dripping”—the zombies in this final scene become the very liquefied stuff of our anxieties about rising sea levels and climate change. It is at this point in the novel, moreover, that one of Whitehead’s motivations for using the zombie metaphor becomes clear: like the zombie apocalypse, the possibility of an environmental disaster caused by climate change is often relegated to a scenario that is frightening and exhilarating to imagine but not ultimately considered an actual outcome. *Zone One* is thus Whitehead’s project of tracing out the very *real* challenges of confronting climate change by way of a culturally popular narrative, genre, and tradition, one that enables Whitehead to communicate contemporary notions about climate change to an audience that would perhaps otherwise not be interested in hearing about them. The reader has come for the zombies, and stayed for a lesson in surviving the dead weather.

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“To Hange Upon a Tree”: A Didactic Catharsis of Crucifixion through Moral Subversion in Chaucer’s “Physician’s Tale”

| Timothy Ponce

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Unlike the other stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, comparatively little has been written about the “Physician’s Tale” and the few scholars who have written about it tend to share the same reaction: moral disgust at a tale that apparently glorifies filicide. In the words of Jerome Mandel, “Most Chaucerians find [the ‘Physician’s Tale’] dull, inferior, crude, routine work surely not originally composed for the *Canterbury Tales*, at best akin to the narratives in the *Legend of Good Women*, at worst irrelevant to the character of the Physician defined in the General Prologue” (316). Sourced from the *Histories* of Livy, the “Physician’s Tale” depicts a world of violence and injustice. In the tale, the judge Appius enlists the aid of a churl named Claudius to help him rape Virginia, the young daughter of the knight Verginius. Upon discovering their plan, Verginius kills his daughter in order to protect her honor, severing her head and bringing it to Appius’ courtroom. After they are publicly exposed, Appius and his churl are arrested. Appius manages to escape punishment by committing suicide, but Claudius is sentenced “to hange upon a tree.” However, Verginius intervenes on Claudius’s behalf and his punishment is mitigated from death to exile. In light of the murder of Virginia and the mitigated punishment of Claudius, it seems as if the moral compass for the tale has been completely demagnetized, making it easy to see why

critics find this tale morally offensive.

I contend, however, that medieval readers would not necessarily have shared this reaction. The phrasing of Claudius' punishment, to be "hung upon a tree," is one that Chaucer and his audience would have associated with the crucifixion of Christ. Although it is certainly unjust for Claudius to escape his harsh punishment, by associating the mitigation of Claudius's punishment with Christ's punishment, the tale juxtaposes the sinfulness of man with the grace of God. In this paper, I will provide a brief semantic history of the phrase "hang upon a tree" in order to show how the "Physician's Tale," when interpreted within a medieval framework, can be read as a didactic tale that paints a picture of earthly injustice in order to remind readers of heavenly mercy.

When approaching a text like the "Physician's Tale," we frequently forget that medieval readers often derived moral value from narratives by imposing moral value on texts that do not ostensibly appear to have any redeeming features. In the "Physician's Tale," Chaucer crafts a world of injustice in which the guilty either have their punishments mitigated, like Claudius, or they escape punishment completely, as Virginius does. But as we read the text, it is helpful to remember the words of St. Augustine in his *On Christian Doctrine*: "[we] should take pains to turn over and over in [our] minds what [we] read, until [our] interpretation of it is led right through to the kingdom of charity" (3.15.23). For Augustine, charity means loving God and one's neighbor, and this principle is the essence of the Christian life. As literary scholars, we are accustomed to looking for moral value *in* narratives. However, a medieval reader influenced by Augustine would have been comfortable with imposing moral lessons *on* narratives, lessons that ultimately point the reader back to charity. For Augustine, the ultimate application of this principle comes when ones seeks "to comprehend the cross of our Lord," the event by which "all Christian action is symbolized" (3.15.24). Readers practice the interpretive principle of charity by considering the moral value of the crucifixion, an event that, at face value, is a testament to humiliation and injustice, not divine glory and mercy. With this idea in mind, we are in a better position to understand how Chaucer uses the theologically-charged phrase

“hung upon a tree” in order to provide moral meaning to an ostensibly amoral tale.

Claudius was sentenced “to hange upon a tree,” a phrase that is tied to Judeo-biblical heritage, with the first occurrence found in the *Torah*. In the twenty-first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses provides guidelines for sentencing criminals who have been found guilty of capital offences: “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day for he who is hanged is accursed of God, so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance” (Deut. 21.22-23). Despite the fact that Roman crucifixion was completely unknown to the Hebrew people at the time of the *Torah*’s composition, after Rome extended its influence to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas in the first century BC, the Jewish community began to equate being “hung upon a tree” with crucifixion. One example of this can be found in the Mishna, where Rabi Meir creates a clear connection between crucifixion and the phrase “hung upon a tree” in a parable:

What means the Scripture: FOR THAT WHICH IS HANGED IS A CURSE OF GOD? It is as though there were two brothers, twins, who were like one another in appearance; one became king of the world, while the other went off and consorted with thieves. After a time the latter was captured and crucified on a cross, and all who came and went said, “It is like as though the king were crucified.” Therefore it is said: FOR THAT WHICH IS HANGED IS A CURSE OF GOD (3.6.5b)

Although being “hunge upon a tree,” or crucifixion, was originally associated with accursedness, as demonstrated through Rabi Meir’s parable, it experienced an inversion of symbolic significance, becoming the ultimate symbol of God’s blessing and the foundation of Saint Paul’s explanation of God’s grace.

Paul discusses this concept throughout his numerous

epistles, but for the sake of time, I will point to only two examples. In the first chapter of his letter to the church of Corinth, he argues that, “for the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1.18), and to the church at Galicia he argues that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Gal. 3.13). From the perspective of anyone familiar with the shameful and brutality of Roman crucifixion, it would be absolute foolishness and completely illogical to state that this form of death was a source of power or blessing. However, Paul argues that the logic of God is founded in a system that subverts the expected moral binaries of this world, taking the things that are seen as accursed and using them to bless humanity, like using crucifixion as the vehicle for salvation. The Pauline inversion of the symbolic significance of crucifixion is explicated upon by numerous church fathers, including those of the medieval period.

The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas takes up the question of crucifixion in the third part of his *Summa Theologica* in order to explain the grace of God. In article four of question forty-six, he explains the symbolic significance of Christ’s mode of death, noting that Christ’s crucifixion “was especially suitable in order to atone for the sin of our first parent, which was the plucking of the apple from the forbidden tree against God’s command. And so, to atone for that sin, it was fitting that Christ should suffer by being fastened to a tree, as if restoring what Adam had purloined” (3.46.4). In the eyes of Aquinas, the crucifixion was more than the method by which grace was brought to man. The cross was a dynamic symbol that continually reminds man of his fallen state while also symbolizing the restoration of man to God through divine grace, thus engendering an attitude of thankfulness and gratitude amongst the church body. This is also why Thomas a Kempis admonishes the Christian to “keep in mind the image of the Crucified [Christ],” so that “Even though you may have walked for many years on the pathway to God, you may well be ashamed if, with the image of Christ before you, you do not try to make yourself still more like Him” (25.49). Because of the historical

connotations of crucifixion and the symbolic significance of the cross within medieval theology, when Chaucer uses the phrase “hung upon a tree,” he offers his reader a vast reserve of symbolic capital from which they can construct—in keeping with Augustine’s exhortation—a meaning for the tale which is morally edifying rather than morally reprehensible.

When Chaucer mitigates the punishment of Claudius from crucifixion to exile, he creates a world of earthly injustice. However, by connecting this unjust situation to the symbolic significance of the cross through the use of the phrase “hung upon a tree,” he opens up the possibility of reading the mitigated punishment of Claudius as an allusion to the mitigating power of God’s grace made manifest through the crucifixion. The crucifixion of Christ is, from a Christological perspective, the ultimate example of injustice: the Son of God was executed in an exceedingly shameful manner for crimes that he did not commit. However, it is through this injustice that the grace of God is made available to man. By juxtaposing the imagery of the cross with the mitigated punishment of Claudius, the tale acts as a didactic scenario in which Chaucer invites the reader to see his own sinfulness, and to be thankful that, like Claudius, his eternal punishment has been mitigated as well.

The other great injustice in the tale—the death of Virginia—also acts as a reminder of God’s grace by creating parallels between the injustice of her situation and the injustice of Christ’s death. Although Virginia is not a pure parallel to Christ, certain moments in the text invite a consideration of Christian allusions. Like Christ, Virginia has, “never . . . deserve-est wherfor / To die with a sword or with a knife” (6.216-17). Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, Virginia asks her father to spare her: “Goode fader, shall I dye? / Is there no grace, is there no remedy” (6.235-36). And like Christ, Virginia ultimately submits to the will of her father, even to the point of death. These parallels between the death of Virginia and the death of Christ bring the symbol of the cross to the forefront of the reader’s mind, pointing them back to the grace of God. By drawing parallels between the death of Christ on the cross and the honor killing of Virginia, the tale provides an interpretive pathway in the midst of violence and injustice through which readers can

enter Augustine's "kingdom of charity."

As the Physician concludes his tale, he provides an admonition that reiterates the difficult relationship in the tale between injustice and punishment (or lack thereof). The Physician warns his listener, "Here may men see how sin hath his merit. / Beware, for no man knows whom God will smite / In no degree, nor in which manner wise" (6.277-79). In one sense, the admonition is problematic, for one would expect "sin to have its merit" or punishment, yet that is not the case in the tale. However, with the concept of crucifixion invoked only six lines earlier, the line "for no man knows whom God will smite" takes on a whole new meaning, pointing the reader back to the symbol of Christ's crucifixion. For God saw fit to sacrifice Christ, "His only begotten Son" (John 3.16). Even in these closing remarks, the symbol of the cross is once again invoked and the reader is again invited to see the grace of God through injustice.

Through a better understanding of the phrase "to hange upon a tree," the didactic nature of the "Physician's Tale" becomes evident. The repeated images of injustice in this tale, when placed into dialogue with the symbolism of the cross, remind the reader of the divine grace bestowed upon them by God. Admittedly, there is an inherent irony in this reading as this tale is told by a pilgrim whose "studie was but litel on the Bible" (1.438). However, with the medieval interpretive framework suggested by Augustine in mind, it is possible to find spiritual, life giving fruit within the barren garden of immorality that is the "Physician's Tale."

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Delicious Individuation: Surviving the Sweet and Nutritious in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

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In the novels of Toni Morrison, characters are often found striving to survive, seeking black individuation within a white ideology; survival may involve hunger, and identity-formation often requires an appetite. In particular, the quest for the self in *Song of Solomon* is hungry work, indeed. Investigating taste and hungers, appetites driven either to sustain or to satisfy, is an inquiry in new terms of the common trajectory of obtaining selfhood, one that proves foundational for understanding Milkman's arc from sweet white to wholesome black communal ideologies. Though preexisting criticism supports a general scheme of food motifs throughout Morrison's overall oeuvre, a focused reading of *Song of Solomon* distinguishes this novel from the rest of the author's works by revealing its food-coded identity-quest. While the artificiality of the sweet is commonly aligned with the dominant ideology of the white world, Milkman's relationships—from Hagar to Guitar—reveal that sugar is simply a supplement to the tasteless machinations of a dispossessed life, while the nutritious and sustaining is not necessarily satisfying. What emerges instead over the course of *Song*—through a framework of food that enables one both to survive and to thrive (like the self-conscious manhood of W. E. B. Du Bois)—is the dual acknowledgement of the delicious. Though the sweet does serve to represent the misleading satisfaction that comes with

being a consumer of white ideology, the sweet and the nutritious are conflated and complicated, revealing a richness in Milkman's actualized identity and awareness of ideology that speaks to an enduring life, a living death, and a quest for full deliciousness.

There are two key texts that explicitly discuss the symbolic resonance of food with ideology in Morrison's oeuvre. Elizabeth B. House argues in "The 'Sweet Life' in Toni Morrison's Fiction" that sweets and milk are aligned with superficial successes while real nutriment represents the altruistic values natural to black heritage. According to this binary framework, Morrison connects "simple, natural foods . . . with life-giving idyllic values" and "sweets . . . with competitive-success dreams" and "a success-oriented outside world" (182, 188). The superficiality of success within this competitive scheme, House asserts, parallels the appealing but non-nourishing capacity of sugar (182). The whiteness of milk joins the whiteness of sugar in symbolizing the white world, House adds, as Morrison consistently typifies milk as a further false reward employed by a system that endangers and harms black lives. This leaves behind "the inner loss which their outer victories have occasioned"—a cavity, so to speak, left behind by white ideology (182). Similarly, Emma Parker's article, "'Apple Pie' Ideology and the Politics of Appetite in the Novels of Toni Morrison," investigates what she calls the "politics of appetite" on gender and race throughout Morrison's works. She argues that the "apple pie" ideology of dominant white, male, bourgeois America is symbolically sweet but without nutrition in these novels, making it harmful—if appealing—to black communities and individuals.

Both articles binarize the simple, wholesome, and nutritious against milk, sweets, and commercially-prepared confections. Parker does criticize House for glossing the exceptions to her own binary, especially in the case of milk as a metaphor, "fail[ing] to perceive how Morrison obfuscates binary oppositions such as culture and nature that underpin a system of thought in which everything related to blackness and femininity is always" undermined (616). *Song* in particular bucks this binary: much as the novel is set off from Morrison's oeuvre as a male-centered *Bildungsroman*, Morrison's metaphors also adapt to the purpose of *Song* in ways that are unseen in and inappropriate to works such as *Sula*, *The*

Bluest Eye, or *Tar Baby*. The framework of the sweet and nutritious in *Song* must coexist with the work's decidedly Du Boisian quest for individuation. Within Du Bois's scheme of double consciousness, individuation, called "self-conscious manhood," is obtained by dovetailing the "double self into a better and truer self" where the individual "wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (3). This selfhood can be obtained only through honest acknowledgement and merging of the past to form a richer whole—mixing the binary rather than maintaining it. In order for Milkman's quest for identity to be rendered successful by these standards, amalgamations must be realized out of dichotomies. As food and hunger are metaphoric vehicles for Milkman's journey of growth, their significance is not exempt from this need to unite. The delineation between the sweet but harmful allure of white ideology and the wholesome, simple fruits of black community is dissolved over the course of *Song* to valorize, instead, a delicious life, both nourishing and enjoyable.

The life sustained, in many ways, indicates what nourishes it. For instance, much of Macon's distaste for Pilate, from her wine-making operation to the way she eats, stems from his internalization of the food politics of the white ideology that Pilate—as the keeper of this alternative wisdom—defies. In a bout of voyeurism, Macon claims that Pilate and her progeny "[eat] like children . . . No meal was ever planned or balanced or served" (29). The unplanned and unrestricted manner of their eating is applicable to everything from grapes and corn to bread and milk, the only rule being that "they ate what they had or came across or had a craving for" (29). In the context of an appetite where the only law is natural cravings, milk itself is not an unwholesome consumable: its unwholesomeness comes from misuse, the very same that named Milkman. Ruth's perverse breastfeeding is significantly not aligned with white ideology—as sweets or confections may be—but instead symbolizes the adulteration of a potentially natural act.

Ruth's ritualistic breastfeeding is non-reciprocal, engaged in only for her enjoyment and benefit but enjoyable and beneficial to her because it affords the illusion of nourishing another. For young Milkman, the taste of milk is "thin, faintly sweet," and "flat," simultaneously bland and sugary (13). This milk does not indicate the dominant white ideology according to the binary proposed by

Parker and House, per se, but rather unnatural acts and adulteration of black communal nurturing. As Terry Otten observes, Ruth Dead née Foster is only a foster mother for Milkman, unable to bring him into this world without the aid of the true mother figure, Pilate (48). Ruth's ritualistic breastfeeding episodes are thus opportunities to perform a role she does not suit, making it utterly "her . . . secret indulgence," a "fantasy" of her ability to produce, to nourish, to be a source of something as valuable as "gold thread stream[ing] from her very own shuttle" (13, 14). An older Milkman is horrified by his remembrance of these moments because, as he says, "'there was no reason for it': the nourishment is forced, redundant beside the benign "milk and Ovaltine" got from a glass and is, despite Ruth's fantasy, insubstantial (78). It nourishes only Ruth, which reverses and bastardizes the motherly exchange and traumatizes Milkman through infantilization, "decomposing" the natural mother-son relationship while simultaneously marking him as non-man, infant-man, milkman (79, 15).

The thin and childish nourishment of his youth informs Milkman's life without a selfhood, a life of eating but not tasting, subsisting but not appreciating. To him, the "racial problems that consumed Guitar were the most boring of all," and yet Guitar is able to find a selfhood within this work—though, tellingly, he is consumed by his work in more ways than one (107). But once Milkman embarks on his quest for identity, he is able to access for the first time "Real hunger, not the less than top-full feeling he was accustomed to, the nervous desire to taste something good. Real hunger" (253). This hunger is fulfilled, ultimately, by the object of the quest: Milkman's recognition of his ancestral source—of the identity he derives from knowledge of the past—is a discovery more satisfying than a bag of gold. Beyond bare survival, Milkman thrives through the discovery of self, and it is in the process of uncovering his heritage from the black community of the South that Milkman comes to have his first reciprocal encounter: his brief affair with Sweet.

Immediately, however, the binary conception of sweet and natural that Parker and House advocate hits a snag against Morrison's metaphoric matrix. Parker says that "sweets only exacerbate rather than satiate the hunger of the African American

community” (269), while House aligns sweets “with competitive-success dreams” and “a success-oriented outside world,” all of which seem to be the antithesis of Sweet as a woman who values reciprocity and who is interior to the black community (182, 188). Those binaries proposed by Parker and House are, in fact, collapsed by Morrison. Much as commercially manufactured confections carry the “apple pie ideology” of white America, the wholesome foods of the altruistic, survivable black community are imbued with the non-white values not because they exist in a binary logic but because they are, simply, products of the ideologies that prepare them for consumption. Pilate craves cherries “from her own cherry tree” but loathes the jam served alongside the “soft bland food white people ate” (167). Fruits considered wholesome can be adulterated and made into saccharine jams or pies, losing their nourishment; the antithesis of this loss is the reclamation of what is sweet as nourishing, reciprocal, and identity-validating within the black community. For Milkman to achieve a life beyond the arrested development of his father’s house—the house of bland meals and internalized white ideology—he must seek out and enact an identity informed by a collective past, surviving as well as thriving via this reciprocal reclamation of the delicious in the form of his relationship with Sweet. Her kindness, her body, and perhaps even her gumbo are “so delicious” that Milkman is reduced to fantasizing about his own immolation in order to compensate (285). Instead of self-harm, however, he elects to engage in mutual care, bathing her where he was bathed, tending to her body as his was tended to. In these moments of luxury rather than desperation, characters do not merely eke out a survival; they enjoy a life well-lived.

For characters such as Hagar, the attempted incorporation of white ideology yields death; for Macon Dead Sr., however, the idolization of the sweet yields a death-in-life. Guitar rightly characterizes Macon Dead as a man who “behaves like a white man, thinks like a white man,” and, worst, will “reap the benefits of what we sow” (223). The metaphor is apt: a farmer such as Macon’s father would reap what he sows, but it is the violence and dispossession of white order that enable a man to benefit from the work of black lives. Though he seeks the ownership of land and life that was violently taken from his father, Macon’s mode of “reaping”

worth from his property goes directly through his black tenants and hinders their ability to survive. There is a subtle sense of loss in this: in a rare moment of reminiscence and recollection of his natural upbringing, Macon reveals his idolization of his father through his love for his father's cooking: "You ain't tasted nothing," Macon declares, "till you taste wild turkey the way Papa cooked it" (51). But for all that he loved his father's food and the fruit of their past farm, Macon can't "cook worth poot" (40). In the quest for luxury, Macon becomes alienated from food so thoroughly that his life is not sweet but bland and unsustaining. In the absence of a father or a farm, the young Macon Dead's discovery of gold catalyzes his belief in monetary worth and ownership as providers of an existence that provides stability and more. As he gazes upon the gold he finds, "Life, safety, and luxury fanned out before him . . . as he stood trying to distinguish each delicious color" (170). Macon imagines a life that combines safety and luxury as one that is vivid and "delicious," but the life he establishes does not even possess the insubstantial sweetness that Parker and House align with the internalization of white values. Instead, his life is tasteless, populated by food that is "impossible to eat," making Macon as dead and empty as his gullet (63).

Blandness and craving converge in Macon Dead's character to motivate his complicity with white institutions that work against the survival of the black community. In an early scene, Macon casts out Guitar's family for want of payment and in return asked: "What's it gonna profit you, Mr. Dead, sir, to put me and them children out?" (22). As "Mr. Dead" implies, Macon's power derives from his ability to profit from the failed survival of others, feeding vampirically on the black community that he has sought to rise above. As Genevieve Fabre says, *Song* is a text of predators and potential prey (111); in his attempt to preempt the predation his father fell prey to, Macon makes a meal of those around him—though, of course, this sustenance is tasteless, offering only the allure of the delicious. His cannibalistic consumption produces a life that forever seeks flavor, a life both empty and harmful, the perfect target of Guitar's disdain.

Guitar appears initially as one who strives for a unified and self-conscious manhood. In his attempt to become a participant in

the world and to define his role through the Seven Days, Guitar acknowledges that he can deny neither his own name, Guitar, nor his slave name, Baines: "I'm all of that," he says (160), declaring an all-encompassing acceptance that exemplifies Du Bois's statement of the mission of a self-conscious man: one who "wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American" (Du Bois 3). However, Guitar thinks of Milkman's lush but hollow life as "sweeter than syrup" (61); the saccharine quality of white ideology is so viscerally tied to Guitar's memories of his father's gory death that it triggers vomiting, causing Guitar to void any nourishing food. Guitar's distaste for the sweet is not inappropriate, but it does poison all else in his diet; eventually, all that sustains Guitar is a destructive, all-purging disgust for sweet ideology. Guitar's memory coalesces his father's gruesome end, his mother's shameful acceptance of scant monetary compensation, and the "bone-white and blood-red" of a peppermint stick so that one stands for the others, and all earn disgust (225). However, this alignment of white ideology's mortal, monetary, and metaphorical-culinary violence fits into the binary proposed by Parker and House, preventing Guitar from accessing a more complex understanding of the sweet.

Guitar's extremism turns predator to Milkman's Du Boisian individuation. However, Milkman's individuation incorporates, rather than denies, Guitar's perspective: Milkman "understood Guitar . . . [r]eally understood him" in the forest, and his final leap is beyond the predator-prey configuration and into terms of fraternity, into "the killing arms of his brother" (278, 337). Guitar's "dehumanizing absolutism" (Otten 53) is justified by his desire to enable the survival of the community, but in Milkman's leap a further call is made, to go beyond mere survival—to soar, to commune, to thrive.

In an interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison has stated that she believes "black writers . . . [have] a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends," a quality that she accesses in her own novels to great effect (429). Her texts are not necessarily attempts to satisfy that hunger; instead, they tap into the uncurbed appetite and use the lingering note of dissatisfaction to greater effect, accessing a well of never-ending drive. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's is the stomach that is not full, his dispossession and disconnection from

self and past urging him onward to self-discovery as if obtaining an identity were a need as visceral as obtaining food. Just as food informs the body, ideology informs the self: sweetness utterly accepted, as with Macon, or utterly denied, as with Guitar, does not provide a balanced meal or a successfully merged, Du Boisian identity. Though Milkman is poised on the point of a delicious individuation, his story does not end with a full belly and feet on the ground. His final leap is a lurch into the liminal, a space both urgent and unresolved. This is the element of want, of hunger, of incompletely satisfied desire that Morrison strives to include in her books: “They will never fully satisfy,” she says, “never fully” (McKay 429). By ending on this leap toward self-actualization, the delicious is left a longing on the trajectory to being achieved, and Morrison reminds us that while satisfaction may be sweet and the nutritious may satisfy, it is hunger for the delicious that drives the self onward.

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Trouthe or Illusion: Masculine Honor vs. Feminine Honor in the “Franklin’s Tale”

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Despite a preoccupation with *trouthe*, the “Franklin’s Tale” is framed by a discussion of freedom. Unlike the “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” the Franklin declares, “Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee / And nat to been constreyned as a thral; / And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal” (768-70). At the end of the tale, the Franklin asks his audience, “Which was the mooste fre, as thynktheth yow?” (1622). By framing a tale that questions the role of one’s *trouthe* in society with mentions of freedom, Chaucer clearly links the two virtues: without freedom, one cannot faithfully pledge and act out one’s *trouthe*. By equating a woman’s desire for freedom with a man’s same desire, Chaucer similarly seems to say that *trouthe* is equal for men and women. But just as the ideal marriage described at the start of the tale is troubled and tested as the tale progresses, so is the ideal that men and women both desire and understand freedom and *trouthe* in the same way. The problem, of course, is that the fourteenth century was not one in which men and women were often afforded equality, particularly within marriage, which makes Dorigen and Arveragus’s marriage so singular. Through the *trouthes* that are pledged in the “Franklin’s Tale,” the Franklin’s final question of freedom is answered: feminine honor is proven to be subservient to masculine honor, thus granting more freedom to men than to women as Arveragus and Aurelius demand adulterous actions of Dorigen that she herself does not want to commit.

The honor motif of the “Franklin’s Tale” is presented in many different forms and circumstances. Alison Ganze says, “*trouthe* is perhaps the most multivalent word in Middle English” and contends that “Arveragus privileges one kind of *trouthe*—promises, or verbal fidelity—while Dorigen privileges another—loyalty to her spouse, or bodily fidelity” (312). For Ganze, the multiplicity of meanings for the word *trouthe* suggests that no character can hold to the same definition as another character. The events of the tale prove Ganze correct: Dorigen, Arveragus, and Aurelius do each view *trouthe* differently. These differences, however, are not found by determining which definition of *trouthe* a character privileges over another, as Ganze believes. Instead, the difference is that Dorigen views *trouthe* in light of all its definitions and Arveragus and Aurelius do not. Indeed, Arveragus and Aurelius are more concerned with the illusion of *trouthe* than with its reality.

Trouthe is first seen in light of Dorigen and Arveragus’s marriage. Dorigen gives Arveragus her *trouthe* to be a “humble trewe wyl” (758) in return for Arveragus’s pledge to love and serve her in equality:

Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
 That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
 Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
 Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
 But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
 As any love to his lady shal,
 Save that the name of soverayntee,
 That wolde he have for shame of his degree. (745-52)

Two restrictions on Arveragus’s *trouthe* are revealed through this pledge. First, his *trouthe* is dependent on his status as a knight as “he swoor hire as a knyght.” Because of the relationship between his knighthood and his word, Arveragus insists on the caveat of “the name of soverayntee” so that his rank is not shamed. He is comfortable to follow Dorigen’s will in private, but in public he insists that the illusion of her subservience is maintained. Otherwise, his masculine honor—as his social community views it—would be shamed. While this ultimately proves unfair to Dorigen,

the difference in public and private married life was not unusual and Chaucer's interpretation is faithful to how his contemporary audience would understand it. By the time Chaucer was writing, consensual marriage agreements, particularly among the aristocracy, were not so unusual as one might think. In the twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes was revolutionizing courtly literature by forcing men to reconsider their view of women and furthering discussions of marriage consent begun by ecclesiastical reformers. For Chrétien, marriage was "the necessary fulfillment of a love affair between eligible lovers" and consent and equality existed between the married couple (Taylor 70). Cathy Hume examines advice literature of the fourteenth century and reports that the division between private and public life was not unusual. Hume says that Arveragus and Dorigen appear "to reflect a medieval pattern of husbands expecting a show of obedience in public while adopting a far less domineering and more egalitarian mode of behavior to their wives in private" (294). Hume's research may show that Arveragus is not the hypocrite that twenty-first century readers may think, but it does suggest that in a world dominated by masculine interaction, masculine honor (as demonstrated by obedient wives) is the status quo. Thus, Arveragus (and medieval men in general) are more concerned with an illusion of *trouthe* (that is, their wives' apparent *trouthe* to them to be obedient) than with the *trouthe* they pledged to their wives to not claim *maistrie*. For Arveragus, this illusion keeps his *trouthe* as a knight free from shame.

Masculine honor's emphasis on illusion over reality is showcased most when Aurelius confesses his love to Dorigen. The difference between masculine and feminine honor, and Chaucer's critique of that difference, is starkly at play in this interaction. This scene makes clear that Dorigen is "placed in a context where the values of the chivalric male world are foregrounded" (Bowman 240). Chivalric values were the order of the day, but Aurelius fails to accurately honor them—perhaps belying his status only as a squire; he is not yet a knight as Arveragus is, thus he has less honor to keep from shame's eye. Aurelius fails as a courtly lover on several counts: first, he does not "attempt to gain his lady's favor through chivalric renown—a prerequisite to achieving mutuality in love" (Taylor 72).

Second, he repeatedly misunderstands Dorigen's clear meaning, perhaps intentionally. Since the "Franklin's Tale" likely is Chaucer's contribution to anti-adultery literature, Aurelius's disregard for Dorigen's intent is especially heinous since "even the adulterous Lancelot . . . never failed to follow his lady's intent. (Even when Lancelot does misunderstand her intent, his misunderstanding is in her favor)" (Taylor 72). Aurelius goes even farther than just misunderstanding Dorigen. He completely ignores what she makes clear: her devotion and *trouthe* to her husband. Dorigen also makes clear that she values more than just the illusion of *trouthe*:

By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
 Ne shal I nevere been untrewed wyf
 In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
 I wol been his to whome that I am knyht.
 Taak this for fynal asnwere of me. (983-87)

By claiming that she will never be an untrue wife "in word ne werk," Dorigen says that she will not act against her *trouthe*, nor will she even speak against it. With just these words, Aurelius should understand that no matter what else she may say, Dorigen will not and would not agree to be his love. She further emphasizes her refusal with her command to "taak this for fynal answere as of me" (987). Even if Aurelius still does not understand, the Franklin realizes that Dorigen is devout to her word by clearly stating that her next words—her conditional agreement to be Aurelius's love—is made "in pley" (988). Because feminine honor equates word to deed, and since her husband has granted her will equality with his, Dorigen expects that Aurelius will respect her freedom to honor the *trouthe*—her real *trouthe*—she owes to her husband. Dorigen forgets, however, that her equality exists only in private. In the public sphere, she is bound by masculine honor, which privileges word over deed. Aurelius only understands masculine honor, so even though Dorigen's intent is clear, the words "thanne wol I love yow best of any man" are spoken and so must be upheld (997). More than just forgetting her place in the public view, Dorigen's grave error is agreeing to be Aurelius's love with the word *trouthe*. Aurelius

clearly indicates he values words over intent or even actions when he reminds Dorigen of her pledge with “ye seyde so” (1329). Aurelius creates the illusion of a *trouthe* that must be upheld: Dorigen said it, so it must be true, regardless of her intent.

Aurelius’s adherence to masculine honor’s trait of privileging illusion over reality is evident in how he fulfills the false *trouthe*. The very act of removing the rocks from the shore is pure illusion. In the first place, Aurelius is not able to remove the rocks himself. He needs the help of both his brother and the clerk. Even with the help of these men, the rocks are never removed in truth—so once more Dorigen’s intent is misunderstood—only hidden through magic, through illusion. The Franklin describes the clerk’s knowledge of astrology and the moon’s working and how it was through this clerk’s magic that “it semed that alle the rokkes were awaye” (1926). The key word in this description is, of course, *semed*. The rocks have not actually disappeared; they only seem to be gone. Aurelius’s *trouthe*—in word and deed—is only an illusion.

Through his illusion, Aurelius denies Dorigen’s freedom by ignoring its very possibility but also by confronting her in public. He is very calculating and precise in deciding when and where to demand Dorigen to uphold her supposed *trouthe*:

And to the temple his wey forth hath he holde,
Where as he knew he sholde his lady see.
And whan he saugh his tyme, anon-right hee,
With dredful herte and with ful humble cheere,
Salewed hath his soveryn lady deere. (1306-10)

According to the condition Arveragus placed on his marriage, Dorigen is not able to act of her own freedom in public, but instead bow to her husband’s maistrie. Since this confrontation happens in public and robs Dorigen of her ability to act freely, she is unable to refute Aurelius’s claim on her *trouthe*. The text is clear that Dorigen is taken off guard by Aurelius’s demands. When Aurelius leaves, Dorigen laments the turn of events:

“Allas,” quod she, “that evere this sholde happe!

For wende I nevere by possibilitee
 That swich a monstre or merveille myghte be!
 It is agayns the proces of nature.” (1342-45)

Even if Dorigen had the public freedom to voice this complaint, Aurelius takes the opportunity from her by leaving while “she astoned stood” (1339). Aurelius removes any possibility for Dorigen to refute his demand by ending the conversation with his absence. Once more, Aurelius demonstrates his lack of respect for Dorigen or for her feminine honor by not only ignoring the *trouthe* she privileges—her *trouthe* to her husband—but also a disregard for any freedom over her own actions or words.

Unfortunately, not even Dorigen’s husband will come to her rescue. When Dorigen tells Arveragus of her predicament, he does not challenge Aurelius but instead continues to privilege the illusion of *trouthe* just as the squire does: “Were he to challenge the squire, Arveragus would be within his rights both as a husband and as a courtly lover” (Ganze 325). Arveragus’s concern is not with Dorigen’s impending infidelity at all, but with the apparent shame that she might break her *trouthe*. Just like Aurelius, Arveragus ignores how Dorigen pledged her *trouthe* to Aurelius in pley only and that she never intended to be taken seriously. Above all, Arveragus is concerned with the illusion of *trouthe* being upheld. As Dorigen’s public lord, her *trouthe* reflects on him, whether for ill or for good. A.C. Spearing says Arveragus “is concerned not with what is going to happen to his wife, but with what people will think of him” (Qtd. in Wilcockson 309). Spearing is only half right: Arveragus is concerned with what will happen to his wife if she does not uphold her *trouthe* since he believes “*trouthe* is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” (1479). Through his advice to Dorigen to honor her fake *trouthe*, Arveragus, just like Aurelius, demonstrates how he believes feminine and masculine honor to be the same and values the latter over the former. That Arveragus equates masculine and feminine honor is clear through his use of the word “man” in reference to Dorigen keeping her *trouthe*, even though she is a woman. Yes, “man” is often used in a collective sense to include women as well. But this general usage does not allow for women

to be autonomous from men. Thus, since “trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” it is also the highest thing a woman can keep. Once more, it does not matter what Dorigen’s intent was, or that she values every aspect of her *trouthe* in word and deed. Since men insist on maintaining the illusion that *trouthe* is kept, Dorigen must do so as well. To act otherwise would be to put Arveragus’s reputation at even more risk. Through Arveragus’s insistence that Dorigen keep her playful *trouthe*, he takes away her freedom to act according to her own will or *trouthe*, even in private.

When making her *trouthe* in *pley*, Dorigen is clear that she intends to honor her *trouthe* her husband above all else and remain a faithful wife. She also makes clear that her challenge to Aurelius is impossible and thus should not be attempted. For Dorigen, *trouthe* is more than just the words she says: it is also her actions and her intentions. According to feminine honor, she should be free to act in accordance with this belief. If Aurelius and Arveragus also operated under feminine honor, perhaps the unfortunate events of the tale could be avoided altogether. Instead, they each value the illusion of *trouthe* upheld over action and intention. This masculine honor dominates feminine honor and thus robs Dorigen of any freedom to act according to her own *wyl* and *trouthe*. Thus, Dorigen is clearly not the answer to the Franklin’s final question of “which was the mooste fre?”

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Sexual Politics and the Femme Fatale in Su Tong's *Raise the Red Lantern*

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The early twentieth century was a critical period of reform for China; for women, it was a period of struggle against the expectations of tradition for the sake of a modern existence. Being the keepers of tradition, women were torn between these family-oriented roles and China's goal for modernity, which called for national unity among all people—including women. Despite these objectives, women found it difficult to break away from the roles a patriarchal society had engineered them into fulfilling. In the 1990 Chinese novella, *Wives and Concubines*—later retitled *Raise the Red Lantern* due to the success of the 1991 film adaptation by Zhang Yimou—Su Tong explores the obstacles women faced during this time and how even the most resourceful of women struggled to find their new existence in society. The novella chronicles the life of the protagonist, Lotus, as a newly-wed concubine during the 1920s, when even educated women faced the dark realities of tradition. Tong reveals the extremity of a system so restrictive that women are unable to escape its influence, and those who challenge this system discover they are unable to defeat it. By using their bodies to threaten the imbalance between the sexes, Lotus and another rebellious concubine, Coral, rely on sexual politics to combat the patriarchal structure of tradition in a sexual struggle with fatal consequences.

Raise the Red Lantern tells the story of Lotus, a college student whose father's tea business goes bankrupt, resulting in his inability to pay her tuition. When her father commits suicide, Lotus's stepmother provides her with an ultimatum: go to work

or marry. Lotus chooses to marry a wealthy man, knowing her life will be easier despite a low status. She arrives at Chen Zuoqian's home as his fourth mistress and quickly experiences hostility from the household's other women. Master Chen has three other wives. The first wife, Joy, is as old as the master and seemingly emotionless in nearly all affairs. Joy's eldest child and only son, Feipu, becomes an object of forbidden desire for Lotus, contributing to her entanglement. Cloud, the aging second wife, is friendly toward Lotus initially, but, as the dual quality her name suggests, reveals her venomous nature later in the story. Finally, Coral, the master's beautiful third wife, is a former opera singer who is having an affair with the family doctor. Although Coral, at first, appears distant and rude to Lotus, the two eventually come to terms with their similarities and serve as catalysts for a sexual war against the patriarchal grip on them. During the master's absence, the compound's women compete in a different war—a war of women—stimulated by the clash of tradition and modernity.

In a war fueled by sexual imbalance, one sex naturally prevails over the other. Kate Millet's 1969 canonical work, *Sexual Politics*, reminds us that the power struggle between men and women is akin to politics—sex being a “status category with political implications” (337). She cites a “birthright priority” of males ruling females (338) that is found nearly everywhere in the world—the kernel of patriarchy; the alternative, matriarchy, ceases to exist. In using sexual politics, the older mistresses apply their experience in reinforcing the family's traditional patriarchy, while the younger mistresses—femme fatales in their own right—retaliate against this mold and attempt to overcome the barriers of their sex in order to gain independence. Millet examines how sexual relationships are, in retrospect, power relationships—a “phenomenon Max Weber defined as *herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination” (338). The result of this system is what Millet describes as “interior colonization” (338), which rebellious women naturally defy. The alternative, exterior colonization, represents the institutionalized system whereby the master sequesters his wives into separate houses, where they are to remain idle until he is ready to use them sexually. Lotus and Coral accept this exterior colonization but fight the interior colonization—the colonization of the mind. Because the

older mistresses accept both forms of this colonization, a conflict in which femme fatales face two sexual opponents—patriarchal men and traditional women—takes place.

Unlike their older counterparts, Lotus and Coral possess wit, intelligence, and beauty, leading critic Lu Tonglin to classify them as femme fatales in her book, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppositional Politics* (134). As the archetype's name suggests, Lotus and Coral draw their power from their femininity—the excessive feminine spirit that provides them with the means to compromise and negotiate on the same level as men. They are threats to men due to their bodies—the feminine source—but Tonglin suggests that, in a patriarchal society, “[t]heir fatal beauty is deadly only for themselves,” and, “[i]f they go beyond the allowance of freedom granted to an aesthetic object, they bring about their own destruction” (135). Although Lotus and Coral flourish in this sensuality, the circumstances of their existence proves too threatening a stronghold to overcome. In a system where men control women, the femme fatale's body must only be used for men—never for her own advantage. Skill and cleverness cannot negate status; therefore, Lotus and Coral's strengths become their weaknesses—fatal women only in the most ironic sense. Like the game of mahjong Lotus and Coral play to escape the boringness of their existence, Master Chen plays his own game, where the women are his pawns, and their sexuality is his to control.

In the Chen household, tradition carries an overbearing significance that, naturally, deters Lotus and inspires her to search for other forms of interest. Near the beginning of the story, Lotus makes her initial encounter with a peculiar space in the Chen compound, defined only by a lone well and the wisteria vine that hovers above it. Cloud tells Lotus how two women from past generations died in the well, leaving the well's intrigue to flourish in Lotus's mind until Coral reveals to her that women who committed adultery died in the well. Lotus is drawn to the well's mystery due to her metaphorical similarities to it: they are both lonely, isolated, and tainted by death's presence. More important, however, is the well's symbolic nature—its representation of fatal women, past and present, who exceed(ed) their traditional roles.

Although Lotus shares a sub-textual alliance with Coral,

their relationship extends beyond their evident similarities in the story; they represent the defiant women of the house's history—past concubines who suffered similar fates due to their excessive feminine spirit. When Lotus speaks of seeing ghosts in the well and asks Coral if she knows who died in it, Coral calmly replies, “Who else could it be? One of them was you, and one of them was me” (Tong 73), foreshadowing her own demise. Critic Hsiu-Chuang Deppman explores the well's mystery by delving into its past—what cursed it and why it haunts new concubines as if it were warning them of their contraventions. She explains, “The secrecy of [the well's] nether regions is threatening: what hides in the cave are dark reflections of infidelity, transgression, and murder” (49). Like the vagina, the well symbolizes the deepest and most intimate anatomy of a woman, where her secrets are kept and the sex of her being—not solely her body—comes to life. For women like Lotus and Coral, however, the well is a cylinder of death, as “the excessive symbol of femininity is also the killer of excessive women” (Tonglin 140).

During one of Lotus's desolate moments, she reflects on her college days and recalls a place where she would sit beneath a wisteria vine like the well does—a conduit that solidifies their sameness but further debilitates Lotus's hope of happiness. Ironically, a well, which typically evokes life and renewal, here represents death and emptiness—the emptiness complying with Lotus's failure to become pregnant before Master Chen loses his potency. The well represents Lotus and Coral, both of whom rebel against the phallic grip on them and use their femininity to venture beyond what the phallus allows them to experience. Tonglin explains, “Femininity is attractive as long as it is determined by male desire,” but that, “[a]s soon as it is detached from the phallus, femininity becomes a dangerous trap and a bottomless hole, like the bewitched well—sterile and deadly” (139). Barren and fatal women are the antitheses of traditional women. The well has only a single, dark purpose, and nearly every member of the household neglects it otherwise, contributing to its ominous impression. In the same sense, *femme fatales* have but one purpose—to produce children—and Master Chen ignores their talents, seemingly intimidated by their presence. In removing themselves from the traditional woman, Lotus and Coral are no longer beautiful; they are threatening and

must be eliminated.

In “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Audre Lorde speaks of the erotic as a “resource . . . in a deeply female and spiritual plane” (536). She claims that this resource, often untapped, “offers a *well* of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor *succumb* to the belief that sensation is enough” [emphasis added] (537). The femme fatale has tapped into this resource, and she makes use of it, knowing her powers of erotica derive from the well within herself. She does not succumb to the notion that she is incapable of anything but sexually serving men and bearing them children; rather, she is a succubus who seduces men and, by extension, controls their sexuality. Similar to how religious tradition designates sex with a succubus as a portal to disease and death, misogynist superstition declares the femme fatale a conduit to destruction. Hélène Cixous applies a similar analogy in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” distinguishing beauty from lethality. In the same manner as the succubus, the Medusa cannot escape the phallic theory that discards her innocence, but Cixous emphasizes that “[one] only [has] to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (335). In *Raise the Red Lantern*, Lotus and Coral are like the Medusa; however, they exist in a system so rigid that they are unable to fulfill their roles as femme fatales without suffering the consequences of the superstitious patriarchy. They laugh because their country is calling for the modern woman to step forward, yet those who control the country paradoxically stifle women’s progress with tradition.

Consequence is the means by which a patriarchy is able to subdue its women. Deterred by what consequence means for them, Master Chen’s wives are left with few options—none of which are pleasant. The traditional older wives, who have become numb to emotion, profit through their experience in the house, recognizing that independence is a hopeless thought; contentment in their metaphorical prisons proves to be more important than resisting what could readily destroy them. For Lotus and Coral, however, superseding tradition translates to darker realities. Ultimately, the work demonstrates that, regardless of whether or not these women conform to the traditional institution, the effects of a patriarchal

system render them dead emotionally, psychologically, or literally. When Cloud catches Coral with the family doctor at a local inn, Master Chen has his men throw Coral into the abandoned well, which Lotus witnesses. While the rumors in the household surrounding Coral's death indicate that, like past licentious women, Coral threw herself in the well to "drown her shame" (Tong 98), Lotus's subsequent insanity has most of the compound's members bewildered.

The household's members who are more familiar with the events, however, provide an idiomatic explanation of Lotus's deterioration: "The fox mourns the death of the hare" (Tong 98). The expression derives from Chinese culture and tells the story of a fox and a hare who form an alliance in defense of a common enemy: hunters. In the tale, the hunters kill the hare with a single arrow, while the fox narrowly manages to escape only to return to the hare later and weep. Lotus and Coral, like the fox and hare, respectively, rebel against a joint enemy and suffer similar fates. The fox later tells a passing elder that he and the hare are prey to hunters who vowed to combat their enemy together. As the idiom suggests, Lotus, like the fox, recognizes that she could share Coral's demise, and, without the strength of this alliance, Master Chen and his men—the hunters—will seek her next. The femme fatale is the most serious threat to patriarchal men because she is capable of modernizing herself and the future.

As a femme fatale, Lotus sees beyond the walls of the Chen compound and has experienced China's evolving ideologies. Despite being educated and un-colonized interiorly, she is torn between cyclical traditions and the impending progress that awaits her country. The product of Lotus's vision, however, is a realm of infinite possibilities. In her essay, Cixous mentions the Dark Continent, which, like the Medusa, is tainted in myth, but she explains that it is "neither dark nor unexplorable" (354). Rather, the Dark Continent is analogous to China's then-developing society that allowed for the modernization of women despite the cultural obstacles they faced. Patriarchy, however, disallows such progress, for progress shatters the otherwise infinite loop of tradition. The femme fatale threatens the patriarchal structure because she possesses the terrestrial sexuality she gains from her exploration of

the Dark Continent, which patriarchal men fear. She is capable of delving into the Dark Continent's chasms without fear because she recognizes there is nothing terrifying about progress; she has tested the continent's waters and has yet to find darkness. Despite these expeditions, however, patriarchal men mark such territory as the geological foundation of prohibited desire, where rebellious women take refuge in order to escape their intended roles.

Lotus's venture into the Dark Continent eventually leads her to an entangled relationship with Feipu, Master Chen's son with Joy. The relationship's complexity deters both Lotus and Feipu from pursuing anything beyond what their circumstance allows. Furthermore, the sexual politics of their relationship only contribute to its forbidden nature. The patriarchal system denies Lotus a lover, and, even if it allowed one, the lover could not be her husband's son, as this would involve other sexual taboos. During a game of mahjong with Coral, the doctor, and another member of the house, Lotus catches a glimpse of Coral fondling the doctor's legs—an image that flickers through Lotus's mind throughout the story. When Lotus has the opportunity to share the same experience with Feipu, she capitulates to her temptation only to frighten Feipu into rejecting the gesture. Feipu fears women and sexuality, confessing to Lotus in this scene that generations of the family's men have lusted after women, but he has never been able to because he fears women—particularly those in the Chen family (Tong 90). Despite these remarks, he claims not to be afraid of Lotus, although he recognizes that their relationship can never become an intimate, sexual one. Beauty and allure are natural to the *femme fatale*, but Feipu's horror at the notion of succumbing to his feelings prevents him from acting upon them, leaving Lotus more isolated in the sexual war that inhibits her.

In a sexual war in which she is the ultimate threat, Lotus longs to prove to Feipu that she is not deadly—that she is the modernity China needs. The patriarchal system, however, prevents Feipu from accompanying Lotus to the Dark Continent and witnessing this future. The *femme fatale* laughs at her paradoxical fate, and, although Feipu attempts to rescue Lotus from the situation that plagues her, he proves unsuccessful. Likewise, Lotus abandons her feelings for Feipu, as well as all other emotion, after

Coral's downfall, which forces Lotus to realize she could suffer the same fate. Lotus escapes into insanity to save herself, sacrificing her connection with reality and relinquishing the risk of dying like Coral; this sacrifice, however, also severs her connection with Feipu, who is torn between getting close to Lotus and accepting that nothing can save her. Although Feipu manages to look directly at the Medusa, he is paralyzed by the realization that Lotus is fighting a war in which patriarchal men are the predetermined victors, and the femme fatale is doomed to defeat.

In the sexual war, the primordial Dark Continent is the refuge for the femme fatale, whose sexual politics cannot overcome patriarchal men and the traditional women who support these men. In fear of the femme fatale, patriarchal men confine her kind to the traditional ideology that reinforces phallogocentrism and constrains the femme fatale's progressive nature. Tong's novella conveys a dismal yet truthful example of how confined Chinese women were to tradition during this period; Lotus and Coral retaliate against this dark reality by relying on their feminine energy and seeking refuge in their forbidden desires until the patriarchal stronghold consumes their freedom entirely. Coral's death frightens Lotus into psychological turmoil, as Lotus realizes the only place to escape the aging feudal system that imprisons her is within the confines of her psyche, where there are no limitations or consequences. The femme fatale frees herself in the only possible way, allowing her precursor of the sexual war effort to demonstrate how the Dark Continent—like the mind—is immeasurable and China's only hope for unity.

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“Your Cost of Living”: Bare Life and Exception in *Let it Be Morning*

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Sayed Kashua’s second novel, *Let it be Morning* (2006) is set just after the second *Intifada* and follows an Arab-Israeli journalist who returns from an Israeli city to his home village. Shortly after his return, the village is put under a weeklong siege; cut off from power, water, and phone service. The novel ends as the siege is lifted and the residents learn that a peace treaty has declared them Palestinian citizens in a new two-state plan—thus the novel in the words of Catherine Rottenburg, “chillingly literalizes the significance of [the word] ‘transfer’” (138). In this essay I consider questions of inclusion and exclusion by examining the village specifically as a geographic zone and using Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of the state of exception, the biopolitical body, and bare life. I argue that in order for a successful transfer to occur, the village has to become a zone of exception, whereby its physical separation allows its residents to become reduced to “bare life,” and consequently transferrable to the Palestinian state.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Giorgio Agamben uses a figure from ancient Roman law to conceptualize law and sovereignty. Under Roman law *homo sacer* is a man who has committed a crime and is consequently excluded from the law. As an outsider of the law this sacred man, “may be killed and yet not sacrificed” (8). As a result, “human life is included in the juridical order solely in its exclusion,” and one that offers, “the key by which not only the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power will unveil their mysteries” (8). The state of exception

whereby the sovereign may declare a suspension of the law is an especially significant manifestation of bare life as, “at once excluding bare life and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (9).

The state of exception is central to understanding the siege in *Let it be Morning*: the characters themselves conclude that the reason for the siege must be a threat within the village. Panicking at the news of the roadblocks, the narrator rationalizes with himself: “What am I so worried about? . . . maybe they’ve had warnings of a Palestinian terrorist cell hiding in the village? Why a cell? I bet it’s just a single person” (62). For the narrator’s father, the threat does not necessarily come from within the village, as he suggests that, “maybe the Americans have thrown Israel some important information about an operation—in Syria maybe—and Israel wants to make sure that life inside the country remains calm” (94). The perceived location of the threat is vital, especially in understanding the villagers’ initial reactions to the siege. The narrator’s first response is, “Something’s wrong” (52), and a bystander remarks that, “they must have confused us with Tul-Karm” (53). The narrator posits a similar comparison by telling his brother that the roadblock is, “worse than anything I saw in Ramallah or Nablus or Jenin. It’s more like Gaza” (57). The West Bank municipalities and the Gaza strip are related in their externality to Israel, but the narrator’s assessment warrants a closer examination. In the case of his own village, inside of Israel, he assumes there is a specific threat, perhaps even “just a single person” justifying the roadblocks. On the other hand, he alludes to entire cities that, just by virtue of existing outside of Israel, may understandably warrant such a siege. The geographical element of inside and outside is central to the understanding of the siege as exceptional, and points to a phenomenon in the novel analogous to the state of exception, but geographically determined *within* the state: thus the village is more accurately a *zone* of exception, physically separated from the surrounding state and consequently from its legal protections.

The siege as a manifestation of the Israeli state’s power aligns with Agamben’s description of the exception as a paradox of

inclusion and exclusion. The tanks surrounding the area physically exclude the village from the state's sovereignty, but by doing so are acting as the state and thus including the village in the state's sovereignty. In conversation with Walter Benjamin's dichotomy of a violence that constitutes the law and a violence that preserves it, Agamben suggests that state violence in an exceptional circumstance does neither, but rather, "conserves [the law] in suspending it and posits it in excepting itself from it" (64). Sovereign power, he writes, "opens a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law" (64). What is particularly interesting in *Let it be Morning* is the proximity of the law to that which it is excluding: because the village is surrounded by the soldiers, state power and its simultaneously included and excluded subjects are consistently facing each other.

This omnipresence of power recalls Michel Foucault's notion of panopticism, by which power is given an, "instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert" (211). But the soldiers in *Let it be Morning*—though anonymous—are not invisible, nor are their tanks, whose engines are never turned off (95). The power behind the tanks however, which is making the larger-scale decisions about the village residents' lives and citizenship, remains, for the majority of the narrative, both invisible and silent. There is even, as the narrator learns, a gag order that is not lifted until the outcome of the peace negotiations are revealed (271). Knowledge of the sovereignty at work is disallowed.

Because—as we later learn—there is something other than the siege itself at work, the village must be understood not only as a zone of exception, but also a zone of *transformation*. While the ambiguity of the exception comes from its simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Israeli law, the weeklong siege reveals itself to be an effort to eliminate that paradox completely. This is sought by literally transferring the specific zone not into the limbo or indistinct state of inclusion and exclusion, but completely out of Israeli sovereignty. Since the village itself does not geographically

move, a different change—a transformation from *within* the village—is necessary in order to carry out the transfer of sovereignty. This transformation, as the novel shows, is the process of reducing the Arab-Israeli subject from qualified life to bare life.

Bare life is present throughout the novel through the figure of the migrant Palestinian worker, in contrast to the Arab-Israeli citizens, who according to the narrator, “not only resigned themselves to being citizens of Israel, they even grew to like their citizenship and were worried that it might be taken away from them” (108). Their citizenship, which now affords them a *qualified* life within the Israeli state, is understood in contrast to that of citizens in the Arab states: “the idea of becoming part of the world even began to frighten them . . . People were afraid they wouldn’t get their National Insurance allowances anymore, or that a day would come when they’d find themselves in a country without medical insurance, [etc.]” (109). Again, this is in stark contrast to the Palestinian worker, whose first appearance in the novel is Mohamed, the hare-lipped construction worker (10).

The narrator’s first assumption is that Mohamed cannot speak at all, and even when he does speak, the narrator comments to himself, “His voice is strange and squeaky, reminding me of the deaf kids’ class at the far end of our elementary school” (10). His impression is based on difference, first in the quality of Mohamed’s voice, but also through the comparison to the deaf children, through which he establishes hierarchies of ability and disability and projects them onto this worker, whom he knows nothing about. Kamel, who is Mohamed’s employer, immediately tries to assuage the discomfort, and here the narrator’s description directly invokes the concept of bare life by comparing Mohamed to an animal: “some creature whose owner owes it to us to explain, right away, before I panic, that he’s just a harmless pet and not some wild beast, heaven forbid” (10). Mohamed is silent throughout the scene and is only described through his employer’s words, to which he does not respond no matter how demeaning. In the distinction between bare life and political life, Agamben emphasizes the centrality of language, quoting a passage from Aristotle’s *Politics* that illustrates, “the transition from voice to language” as analogous to the distinction

from bare life to political life (7).

This idea of naming comes up in the anecdote of another Palestinian worker, Thurmus, so named for his occupation of selling lupinus beans, and who interestingly appears outside the cemetery where a funeral has been just held for the two Palestinian workers who were shot (164). He exists then, in the wake of a death that could just as well have been his own—Honaida Ghonim invokes this omnipresence of death when discussing *thanatopower* in conjunction with Agamben's biopower. "Death," she writes, "is just on hold, again and again, from moment to moment. It's not because of the conscience of the sovereign or his sleepless nights that the subject's death is constantly delayed," but rather that, "Because of this threat of death, granting life becomes a tremendous 'favour'" (67). Thurmus's presence immediately after the funeral underscores his subjection to sovereign power; as Agamben writes, "the very body of *homo sacer* is, in its capacity to be killed but not sacrificed, a living pledge to his subjection to a power of death" (99).

The power of naming and the agency to name is also apparent in the narrator's descriptions of immigrants to the village from other locations in Israel. Each immigrant is named after their hometown: hence "*Fahmawi*" from Um el-Fahm; "*Lydduya*" from Lydda; and "*Ramlawi*" from Ramla (148-49). Interestingly, word-of-mouth has it that some of these people have been brought to the village by the police because of a crime, offering an interesting parallel to the figure of *homo sacer*: "The *Fahmawi*, for instance, was said to be the son of a murderer, who'd killed someone in Um el-Fahm and was serving time When it came to the girl from Lydda they said her father was a drug dealer who had squealed to the police, so that people in Lydda were out to get him" (147). While their movement is perceived to be for the sake of their protection, it is actually closer to the original logic of the *homo sacer*, where they are being banished from the state and placed into this specific village. Ironically the village will itself find itself (re)named at the end of the novel, as it becomes excluded from the state.

The distinction between bare life and qualified life in the novel is shown in a startling example during the scene of the shooting. The mayor of the village has fathomed that the siege will

be lifted if the village hands over the illegal workers. Once more we find the illegal workers linguistically silent, “yelling and crying” and even as they begin to “sob and plead for their lives.” These pleas are never written out in the form of dialogue but told only through the exposition of the narrator. This again recalls Aristotle’s *Politics* in which he writes, “among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings (since their nature has developed to the point of having the sensations of pain and pleasure and signifying the two)” (qtd. in Agamben 7-8). Language then is the prime distinction between *zōē*, bare life, and *bios*, qualified life—and while the workers are afforded visceral responses to their circumstances, they do not speak.

Not only are these workers shot with impunity, but their deaths are perceived by some of the villagers, primarily the mayor, as necessary. However, the mayor is not the only villager who finds the expulsion of the workers justifiable: one of the local men berates a sobbing worker: “It’s all because of people like you, you wanted Al-Aqsa, didn’t you?” (159). Fanon’s logic in *Black Skin, White Masks* suggests that this action of expulsion may be for one thing the Arab-Israeli’s disidentification with his Arabness, but also correspondingly his attempt to “furnish proof” of his Israeliness, just as Fanon’s “miserable Negro [must] furnish proofs of his whiteness to others and above all to himself” (215). In an attempt to restore the village’s status from its current state of exception, the mayor and other residents conclude that it is necessary to expel those who are entirely Arab.

This notion of expulsion warrants further attention in terms of its geographic implications. In terms of the novel’s outcome, the essential detail about the scene is that the workers are shot as they begin to cross *over the barbed wire*, in the same way that the first casualty of the siege is also shot as he approaches the soldiers imposing the blockade (53). The Israeli state’s goal seems to demand a complete isolation of the village—and, as we learn later, the other Arab villages within Israel—from the country at large. The mayor’s plan to have the siege lifted through the expulsion of the Palestinian workers ultimately fails: in order for the ultimate transfer

of the village, Arab-ness and Palestinian-ness in all forms must remain within the confines of the village. This is paralleled in the experience of the journalist, both physically—he is no longer allowed to wander in the Israeli city as an unfixed body—and intellectually, as the narrator hopes throughout the novel that his insights as an Arab journalist will be valuable to the Israeli newspaper. However, his Arab perspective can only be recognized *after* the village has been transferred to Palestinian sovereignty.

What is also crucial to this outcome of transfer is that the residents of the village be established as biopolitical subjects. As an exercise of sovereign power, the transfer requires the politicization of life itself. “It can even be said,” according to Agamben, “that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (6). The siege provides a clear example of how the biopolitical subject is established and subjected to sovereign power. The novel shows life itself in a variety of stages: for one thing, the present members of the narrator’s family are multigenerational, and thus the siege encompasses three generations simultaneously. For another, the narrator frequently frames the events through a description of his baby daughter being fed or shielded from loud noises, underscoring the vulnerability of life and specifically life under the siege. More interestingly, the narrator’s return to the village after ten years of absence causes him to reflect on many of his childhood memories and to experience his body in the same ways now as when he was a child; the first scene of the novel, in which he returns to his childhood room shows him sitting at his old desk, sleeping in his old bed, interacting with the same space as an older person (3-7). Once the siege begins and the narrator’s knowledge outside of the village is sealed off, his experiences are restricted to the spaces which he is living and reliving. The course of life, manifested both internal and external to the narrator, is thus central to the way in which the siege operates.

But the siege also, and more notably, exerts biopower on the village residents by modifying their bodily functions and experiences. The repercussions of the siege manifest in each of the five senses: they feel extreme heat in the absence of air-conditioning; they taste specific foods and drinks, or none at all, because no stock

is coming in; they see darkness / light in the absence of electricity; they hear loud explosions; and they smell the accumulating waste and sewage throughout the village. The blocking off of the village's food supply eventually leads to the looting of the narrator's house, sparked by the appearance of his feeding child, again emphasizing the vulnerability and dependency of life (221). In the absence of the law of the Israeli state—or rather its presence in limbo in the exceptional situation of the siege—a new order appears during the chaotic scene of the looting. A gang leader dissuades the mob from breaking into the narrator's parents' house, and the narrator immediately recognizes these, “new forces in control,” and begins to speak to the gang leader, “with the respect due to a new master” (223).

The siege thus establishes the bare life of the residents of the village and isolates them from the protection due to a state's citizens—or as the narrator admits, “almost-citizens” (261). In this context, a transfer of the subjects can happen, but it appears that even as subjects of the Palestinian Authority, the village residents remain biopolitical subjects with bare life: the news article that the narrator reads states that, “in return the Palestinian Authority has received Israeli *lands* in direct proportion to the size of the settlements” (261). Their value comes as a result of their interaction with space—the amount of land that they occupy. And while the new two-state plan is declared under the headline, “peace has arrived” (258), and the television commentators celebrate the advent of “clearly established borders at last” (262), the result of this specific transfer of the village is dissonant, inorganic, and perhaps even clumsy as the narrator informs his wife, “I think we're Palestinian now.” Whereas the narrator appears to have been satisfied with his status of almost-citizen, the unfixity of the Arab-Israeli identity is clearly incompatible with these two nations' visions for themselves.

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Questioning Patriarchal Authority in Piatt's Post-Civil War Poetry

| Molly Durrill

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Late nineteenth-century poet Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt's post-Civil War pieces evoke a variety of emotions—grief and anger, confusion and bitterness. Her publishing career spans over fifty years and encompasses the Civil War and the loss of three of her children in infancy or childhood. During this time, she published eighteen books of poetry, and her work appeared in over thirty-five different Irish, American, and British periodicals and children magazines. Upon reviewing her fifth book, *Dramatic Persons and Moods*, the American literary periodical *Scribner's Monthly* condemns Piatt for her “wayward, abrupt [and] enigmatic” poetry, where Piatt asks questions she “neglects to answer” (635). Several of these questions pertain to God and society, and while Piatt's speakers give no clear solutions, their questions reveal Piatt's discontentment with her current patriarchal order. Through her reversal of biblical concepts in her poems “In a Queen's Domain” and “The Coming of Eve” Piatt reveals the suffering created by the current patriarchal systems in order to question the religious construction of God, man, and woman's subservience.

In writing “In a Queen's Domain,” Piatt questions God—the highest form of patriarchal authority—through plant imagery associated with biblical image patterns. Piatt mentions three specific flora images in the poem: the “rose,” “lily,” and the “thorn” (1, 3, 10). These three images directly correspond with the images Solomon uses in the *Song of Songs*: “I am the rose of Sharon, and

the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (Song of Sol. 2.1-2). George Burrowes, who wrote a general commentary of *Song of Songs* about twenty years before Piatt wrote “In a Queen’s Domain,” maintains that this passage refers to the “Christian character, as possessing purity, beauty, loveliness; . . . in contrast with the general tone of character and feeling in the world” (94). Piatt upholds this idea of Christian character through her portrayal of these two flowers as pure, giving, and self-sacrificing:

Ah! My subject, the rose, I know,
 Will give me her breath and her blush;
 And my subject, the lily, spreads snow,
 If I pass, for my foot to crush. (1-4)

Nevertheless, Piatt renders these gifts essentially useless through their ephemeral nature: the rose will give its beauty and life, but in doing so, will lose these exact qualities; and the lily’s snow will become soiled once the Queen walks upon it, losing both its softness—as the Queen “crush[es]” it—and its purity. Piatt inverts the biblical image by ultimately presenting a dead rose and a soiled lily (4).

Piatt also emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the rose’s gift and the lily’s snow, as they cannot disarm the thorn in the third stanza. The *Song of Songs* selection mentions the unique nature of God’s love for his “daughters,” as the purity and beauty of the lily contrast with the harshness of the thorns; however, Piatt contradicts this statement of love through her characterization of the thorn (Song of Sol. 2.2). While Piatt depicts the lily and the rose as ineffectual, the thorn harms the Queen: “And my subject, the thorn, will tear” (10). While the thorns in the *Song of Songs* passage only exist in order to provoke a contrast between themselves and the lily, the thorn in Piatt’s poem attacks and produces an effect in opposition to the passive lily. This reversal of power, as the lily and rose fall under the thorn, points to another inversion of the biblical passage: if the thorns attack and the lily remains ineffectual, how strong can the Father’s love be for his daughters? Through this inversion of the natural imagery in the first two verses of the second chapter of the

Song of Songs, Piatt questions the virility of God's love.

Through the narrator's characterization and the nature imagery in Piatt's "In a Queen's Domain," Piatt reveals an inversion of the original Eden narrative and thus challenges the biblical Eden's patriarchal structure and the God who created it. In Genesis, God gave man dominion over all living creatures on the earth. Piatt inverts this structure by placing her female narrator, a "Queen" and not a man, over the other life forms and hints at the word "dominion" by calling this subversive Eden the Queen's "domain" (Gen. 1.26). Piatt continues this inversion through her depiction of the animals. While God placed Adam in the garden to "dress it and to keep it" (Gen 2.15), the Queen acts as a force of destruction, "crush[ing]" the snow and stealing eggs from the dove while it remains oblivious (Piatt 4, 7-8). Piatt applies further inversions by making several of the animals superior to the Queen:

But my subject, the bee, will sting;

.....

And my subject, the tiger, will spring

At me, with a cry and a glare. (9-12)

The Queen fails in her job as caretaker and also fails to establish her rule over the other animals, which instead pronounce their dominance over the queen through stinging and jumping (9, 11). The last stanza places the narrator in the final act of submission—death—to another animal that possesses biblical connotations:

And my subject, the lion, will shake

With his anger my loneliest lands;

And my subject, the snake (ah! the snake!)

Will strike me dead in the sands. (13-16)

The Bible contains many images of lions, from the Lion of Judah that represents Jesus, to 1 Peter's depiction of the Devil walking about like a "roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5.8). Whether signifying Jesus or the Devil, Piatt's characterization of the lion points to an innocuous figure: while angry, the lion

“shakes[s]” the lands least populated and therefore has little effect on the queen (13-14). If suggesting Jesus, Piatt implies that his actions (including his resurrection to ensure humanity’s salvation) have essentially no effect on the Queen. By proposing Jesus’ actions as obsolete, Piatt indicates that women exist in a world without forgiveness and reconciliation. If the lion represents the Devil, Piatt insinuates that Satan may seek to “devour,” but he will never find anything to swallow (1 Pet. 5.8). However, the next two lines reveal that Satan is not incapable of real action. While the image pattern concerned with the lion invokes confusion, Piatt’s snake clearly points to the Devil. While the serpent tempts Eve in the Garden and thus leads to Adam and Eve’s death, the Queen’s snake kills her with its physical prowess rather than mental cunning (Gen. 3; Piatt 16). The Genesis passage also presents a similar physical aspect:

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Gen. 3.14-15)

However, in Piatt’s poem, the woman dies and through death becomes dust (Piatt 16). Through this image, Piatt reverses God’s promise—the snake triumphs and the woman falls. Piatt also associates the snake with the rose through her use of the exclamation “Ah!” for each of them (1, 15). This connection between the death of the rose, symbolizing the Christian character, and the exaltation of the snake, embodying evil, inverts the triumph of Christianity. Subsequently, this inversion creates a space where women are torn by the world, symbolized by Piatt’s “thorn,” and then finally damned by it, as the Devil, represented by Piatt’s “snake,” is also called the “king of the world” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. By inverting Eden’s nature, Piatt questions the place of women in God’s plan through her categorization of them as fallen under the Devil and, therefore, excluded from salvation.

Piatt continues to question patriarchal authority by subverting the readers' expectation of Eden in "The Coming of Eve." While Piatt no longer places a woman in charge of all creation, as she did in "In a Queen's Domain," she still utilizes the Eden narrative in order to reveal the patriarchal system as harmful. In this poem, Piatt introduces a male and female voice, signifying Adam and Eve in particular but also symbolizing all men and all women through Piatt's capitalization of "Man" and "Woman" when introducing the voices (1, 14). By naming them thus, Piatt argues that all men and women follow the hierarchy and pattern she composes in "The Coming of Eve." From the very beginning of the poem, Piatt composes a clear hierarchy of God-male-female: "God gave the world to Man in the Beginning. / Alone in Eden there and lord of all" (1-2). God rules the heaven, Man rules the earth, and Woman simply lives in order to serve both (29-32, Gen. 1.26). However, Piatt's Man has a desire for destruction:

"I weary of the Garden. Here are roses
 That bloom and die not. Oh, that they would die!
 Without one thorn each bud its blush uncloses.
 (Perhaps the thorns will sharpen by and by!). (5-8)

However, Man is unable to fulfill his craving for death and negative change by himself: he cannot change or kill the roses that continually bloom in perfect stasis and do not even have thorns to temper their beauty and create pain (5-8). Also, Piatt's Man cannot harvest an "Apple" from the Tree, but he must wait for it to "fall" in a world where nothing ever dies (4). Therefore, his idea of "Some One" who could pluck a rose to wear (and thus kill it through that act) excites Man so much that he could "endure—even Paradise, and mind not" (11). With this statement, Piatt indirectly challenges both God and Man: Is God's Paradise—whether heaven or Eden—an unbearable place? Is stasis, even a perfect one, intolerable? Or, is Man so bent on death and destruction that he detests anything pure? Upon the arrival of the Woman, Man finally succeeds in his plan for destruction:

He woke, and lo! The Woman waited under

The Tree—whereon the Apple grew—for him.
 ‘What would my lord?’ the [Woman] sighed. ‘Command me.
 (Heaven for his pleasure made me—from his side—
 At least, not for my own!)’ ‘You understand me? —
 I want yon Apple, Fairest!’ he replied . . . (19-24)

In her version of Eden, Piatt implies that Woman never had a chance for her own happiness when faced with the patriarchal authorities: God gave Man dominion over everything on earth, including Woman. The fruit grew for Man and God made Woman solely “for [Man’s] pleasure” (20, 22). By muting the 22-23 lines with parentheses, Piatt ultimately reveals Woman’s true voice as subsumed under the male domination and control—just as woman’s desires are firmly below men’s on Piatt’s current social hierarchy.¹ In Genesis 3:1-6, the serpent (generally regarded as Satan) speaks to Eve and turns her and Adam towards destruction by convincing Eve that the fruit was not deadly; however, Piatt places Man as the destructive force because of his desire for death (4, 6). There is no need for a devil-like figure in “The Coming of Eve” because Piatt implies that Man is one: he alone asks Woman to give him the Apple (24). Man also continues in his desire for death after ejected from Eden: “He goeth forth to battle and is wounded. / She binds the wounds he dies from—or has made!” (41-42). Man acts as destructive force in the speaker’s world whether he is instigating the Fall, wandering, dashing over the seas, or killing (24, 34-35, 42). While Man moves toward destruction, God gave women “her Heart” as a gift: “The Woman said: ‘Hast Thou no gift for me?’/ ‘Yea, Woman! In thy breast a Heart is beating!’/ The Father spake. ‘That is my gift to thee!’ . . .” (30-32). The Woman’s Heart leads her to follow destructive Man with “grace, with love, with sweetness” and to place herself under Man as a “help[er]” (45). However, the speaker later suggests that God gave her a different gift:

She has her little wrongs. To bear or mend them
 Is what she—must! God gave the world to Man.
 To her He gave—her troubles! He will end them!
 But, meanwhile, let her help Him as she can! (53-56)

While God’s gift (Woman’s Heart) allowed her to love Man (50), Piatt equates Woman’s Heart with “troubles” that God will end (55). Therefore,

Piatt implies that loving and following Man is full of anguish, and the only escape Piatt suggests is through God's end of death (36, 51). The poem closes in parallel with the beginning—with the Woman now wondering when her Apple will fall—when God will end her troubles. While Piatt's narrator works inside the system as a domestic instrument that is subservient to Man, her suffering continues because of it. Piatt submits that God placed Woman on earth to serve Man and suffer, and under the current patriarchal and religious system, her only escape from suffering is through death.

In writing “In a Queen's Domain” and “The Coming of Eve,” Piatt reverses biblical concepts to question God's patriarchal authority and to illustrate how that patriarchal power harms women and all of society. Piatt's simple style conceals the complex nature of her questions; while her poems contain an easy rhyme and a fairly simplistic structure, Piatt's subtle and subversive inquiries remain complex and full of biblical symbolism and ambiguous references. After close examination, Piatt reveals herself as a critic of nineteenth-century religious constructs and their social emphasis on the infallible nature of God and man. While she seems to remain inside the feminine sphere by writing her poetry about subjects concerning domesticity, Piatt breaks the mold of the earlier female poets by challenging the highest member of the patriarchy, God, by questioning His statutes and His love for His daughters.

Notes

1. Piatt also first introduces the Woman inside a parenthetical aside attributed to the male voice, and thus firmly places Woman underneath Man in the hierarchy (14).

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Almost Friends: The Personal and Literary Influence of Bryant on Poe

| Laura Romaine

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The relationship between Edgar Allan Poe and William Cullen Bryant has received little scholarly attention. Despite being a contemporaneous American author who read and was read by Poe, Bryant has generally received only a fleeting mention in the formation of Poe's literary character. Part of this lack of attribution of influence may have been due to Poe himself, who has been accused of imitation and plagiarism (Myerson 148). Whatever the cause, Bryant's impact on Poe's work has been grievously downplayed. While impossible to trace the extent of any one writer's impact on the mind of another artist, Poe was one of Bryant's most fervent admirers, and held him as a paradigm. Bryant was not only personally influential during Poe's time in New York, but Poe's treatment of nature, ideas on poetic beauty, and even some of his melancholy themes reflect the precedent set by Bryant.

Born on November 3, 1794, Bryant began composing poetry at age nine. His literary endeavors were encouraged by his grandfather, who challenged him to turn the book of Job into verse. Progressing from these self-proclaimed examples of "utter nonsense," Bryant's contributions to Romanticism and the meditative character of his verse led him to become one of the foremost authors and editors of 19th-century America (Godwin 22). Walt Whitman, his contemporary, extollingly called him the "bard of the river and wood, ever conveying a taste of open air" (280). Bryant moved to New York from Massachusetts in 1825 and in that same year

assumed editorship of *The New York Review*. He became editor-in-chief of *The New York Evening Post* in 1829.

Though there is no explicit mention of Bryant's first meeting with Poe, the two authors may have met in the company of Elam Bliss, who had published Poe's *Poems* in 1831 and had been Bryant's publisher since 1827 (Quinn 174, Myerson 147). In February of 1837, Poe had moved to New York with his wife, Virginia, and her mother, and their second place of lodging was at 113 1/2 Carmine Street, the same street as Bryant (Quinn 263). Here the two definitively met. Parke Godwin, Bryant's son-in-law, published a popular first-hand account of their interactions at Caroline Kirkland's dinner party which highlight's Poe's adulation: "Poe approached [Bryant] as some Grecian youth might be imagined to approach an image of Plato—with a look and attitude full of the profoundest reverence; and during the whole time of their conversation he preserved this expression" (Godwin 22). Poe would have had a good deal of personal contact with Bryant through the American Copyright Club, of which Bryant was President (Silverman 247). Though there is no surviving correspondence between the two, there is reference to at least one letter in Poe's correspondence to Longfellow, and Bryant's correspondence is notoriously scarce.

Bryant's influence, however, predated their meeting. The poems in Poe's first small volume, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, bears numerous resemblances to Bryant's popular pieces. Poe claimed the poems were written when he was fourteen (*Tamerlane* 17), but Joel Myerson, one of the few scholars to give note to the two poets' relationship, suggests that this unlikely boast may be an attempt to discredit any accusations of derivation (148). However, even if the poems were written in 1821, as Poe claimed, "Thanatopsis" was published in the *North American Review* in 1817, and would correspond with Bryant's three poems, "Chorus of Ghosts," "Appeal to Death," and "Death's Messenger" which appeared in the *New York Review* in 1824. In his biographical sketch prefacing Bryant's *Poems*, Nathan Haskell Dole writes that this trio is the result of "a collateral or subordinate morbid strain" from a disappointed love interest—a familiar tone to Poe's readers (Dole xxii).

Bryant is rarely credited for influencing Poe's melancholy tone because he himself is not remembered for his few poems with ostensibly dark themes. Looking for sources of Poe's "Irenë," Thomas Mabbott—editor of Poe's *Collected Poems*—quotes Wilson and Rufus, but omits Bryant's work, which precedes all three in publication. The closing stanza of Bryant's "Chorus of Ghosts"—"Come, we will close thy glazing eye . . . / And gently from its house of clay / Thy struggling spirit lead" (29-32)—demonstrates the same sleeping lady, the dark chamber of death, and the "eye" found clearly in "Irenë" ("The lady sleeps . . . / Forever with as calm an eye, / That chamber chang'd for one more holy" [60-65]) and also in his prose pieces such as "Ligeia" and "Berenice."

Poe also shared Bryant's appreciation of natural beauty, as well as the language he used to describe it. In his review of Bryant in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe wrote: "as far as he [Bryant] appreciates her [Nature's] loveliness or her augustness, no appreciation can be more ardent, more full of heart, more replete with the glowing soul of adoration" ("Critical Notices"). Mabbott notes the kinship between the opening stanza of "Tamerlane," "In youth have I known one with whom the Earth / In secret communing held—as he with it" (1-2) and Bryant's opening lines in "Thanatopsis": "To him who in the love of Nature holds / Communion with her visible forms, she speaks / A various language" (1-3). While Poe had no tolerance for didactic poetry, referring to it as a "heresy" ("The Poetic Principle" 251), and sometimes mocked the romantic idealism of Nature (as in the gruesome imagery of "The Conqueror Worm"), he clearly shared the Romantic's spiritual associations with Nature. These sentiments were not limited to poetry. In Poe's prose, most notably "The Landscape Garden," a spiritual appreciation of Nature is clearly evident. Compare this section of "Elenora" to Bryant: "The loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim; but she was a maiden artless and innocent as the brief life she had led among the flowers" ("Eleonora"). Bryant's "O Fairest of the Rural Maidens" reads: "And we wept that one so lovely should have a life so brief; / . . . So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers" (29, 31).

Both poets agreed that Beauty was the highest necessity, and that poetry should appeal to taste rather than intellect (Bradley 124). Poe, in his “The Poetic Principle” writes: “The manifestation of the Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the Soul—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason” (273). Bryant, in his introduction to “A Library of Poetry and Song,” similarly writes: “To me it seems that one of the most important requirements for a great poet is a luminous style . . . The metaphysician, the subtle thinker, the dealer in abstruse speculations, whatever his skill in verification, misapplies it” (qtd. in Bradley 125). Before Poe, Bryant had also declared the impossibility of a long poem. Whether Poe came to that conclusion independently or simply reiterated this shared opinion is difficult to determine, but the mutual influence of ideas is undeniable.

To address any contestations that these similarities may be coincidence, Poe’s admiration of Bryant must be reiterated. Because of the lack of surviving correspondence, most of Poe’s admiration, then, comes through in his criticism. In his review of Bryant’s *Poems* in 1834 the notoriously harsh Poe wrote: “As the elegant china cup from which we sip the fragrant imperial, imparts to it a finer flavor, so the pure white paper and excellent typography of the volume before us, will give a richer lustre to the gems of Mr. Bryant’s genius” (250). Again in a critical notice in 1837 he writes, “Mr. Bryant’s poetical reputation, both at home and abroad, is greater, we presume, than that of any other American” (“Critical Notices” 41).

With such high expectations to live up to, it is not surprising that Bryant fell short of Poe’s ideal. His later opinions of Bryant are significantly less glowing. In a lecture in February of 1845, “Bryant was praised highly, but Poe emphasized his keeping within narrow limits” (Quinn 459). Poe’s later criticism admits that Bryant is “unsurpassed in America” in versification, but he adds the qualifier “as far as he goes” (185). Poe also notes disappointingly that “Now and then he gets out of his depth in attempting anapæstic rhythm, of which he makes sad havoc” (Review of *Complete Poetical Works* 185). After this harsh criticism, however, Poe ends his review speaking admiringly of Bryant’s character: “In character no man

stands more loftily than Bryant . . . His soul is charity itself, in all respects generous and noble” (*Review of Complete Poetical Works* 186). As Poe progressed as an author, his excessive adoration matured into a balanced admiration.

There is no existing criticism by Bryant on Poe. On a personal level, Poe was less of a figure in independent, reclusive Bryant’s life. In a letter to his assistant, Richard Henry Dana Bryant writes that “The three things most irksome to me in my transactions with the world are, to owe money, to ask a favor, and to seek an acquaintance. The few excellent friends I have I acquired I scarcely know how—certainly not by any assiduity of my own (qtd. in Godwin 38). Through both personality and the necessities of poverty, Poe reached out with warm and genuine feeling to Fredrick William Thomas, John Pendleton Kennedy, Mrs. Annie Richmond, and others. However, despite the inequality of sentiment between himself and Bryant, their friendship survived Poe’s accusations of plagiarism against Longfellow, who was a close friend of Bryant and whom Bryant fervently defended, Bryant’s regard for Poe led him to lend assistance during Poe’s “harrowing last years” in Fordham (Muller 197).

Bryant was not immune to the detrimental rumors surrounding Poe’s reputation, which may have been another cause for coolness and distance in a potential friendship. After Griswold’s calumnious publications after Poe’s death, even those who knew Poe well were confused by these “revelations” about Poe’s dark side. With his theatrical parents, Poe had never been quite within the boundaries of social norms, and Bryant’s strict New England conservatism was wary of any hint of moral deficiency. Bryant refused to write an epitaph for Poe in 1865, on account of Poe’s “personal character” (Bryant, *Letters* 219). His opinion changed by 1875, perhaps by reading the numerous defenses of Poe’s character written in response to Griswold’s attacks. He complied with the request of a Miss Sarah Rice, who led the Baltimore School Teachers Association, in composing an inscription for an obelisk over Poe’s grave (218). Though the inscription was never engraved on the monument, the composition is evidence of Bryant’s good faith. In another 1875 letter to George W. Childs, the publisher of the

Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, Bryant also agreed to let some of his verses be used in the dedication of a monument to Poe (*Letters* 217).

Bryant was a prominent personal and literary influence in Poe's life. If Poe had not been a thorough reader of Bryant's work and if his admiration had been anything less than worshipful, perhaps Bryant would deserve less attention as a source and influence, but Bryant was impactful even on both a personal and literary level. Far from being a mere source, Bryant's language about nature, his treatment of melancholy love, his philosophy of poetry, and their relationship helped shape Poe as a poet.

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From the Blog to the Bookshelf: Mommy Bloggers Reinvent the “Stay-at-Home Mom”

| Michelle Costello

Michelle Costello graduated summa cum laude from Marist College in May 2015, receiving a B.A. in English with a concentration in writing. At Marist, Michelle served as the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, The Circle, and as secretary of the Alpha Mu Kappa chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. She is currently working in New York City and plans to keep writing.

The status of women in the workplace in the 21st century is full of tensions. As Susan Douglas remarks in *Enlightened Sexism*, popular culture would like us to believe that women have permeated the public sphere in areas such as politics, entertainment, and business, yet these “fantasies of power” do not actually reflect the true status of women in society (5). Images such as the no-nonsense female detectives on TV, swimsuit models who are seemingly recapturing women’s sexual objectification, and “girl power” groups like the Spice Girls seem to argue that women have achieved control over their own identities and destiny, while women in the real-life workforce still only make 75 cents to the male dollar (Douglas 20).

The same tension between appearance and reality also exists in the private sphere and is especially prominent with the 21st-century resurgence of the “stay-at-home mom” (SAHM). A study by the *New York Times* reveals that only 69 percent of women in the United States are currently employed, while in 1999, the amount of employed women peaked at 74 percent (Miller and Alderman). 61 percent of unemployed women cited “family responsibilities” as the reason they were not currently at work (Miller and Alderman). Claire Cain Miller and Liz Alderman write that women in America are “leaving jobs behind,” but are they really doing so by choice? How does this new wave of SAHMs feel about staying home to raise children, and how does it compare to the “happy housewife” ideal of the past?

In the field of feminist rhetorics, the revival of the SAHM fits in a tradition of interest in women's rhetorics. On a representational level, the SAHMs of the 21st century are nothing like the popular representations of SAHMs of the 20th century, which they make clear through their tell-all experiences on their blogs. Through their open and honest tone and discussion, these women are completely abandoning the maternal "rhetoric of benevolence," as discussed by Susan Zaeske (235). In order to break into the public rhetorical sphere in antebellum America, women were forced to capitalize on the idea that it was woman's duty to "speak in defense of the slave and other downtrodden souls," fulfilling woman's "duty as moral beings" (Zaeske 247). It was because women were known for their morality that they were eventually allowed to address "promiscuous audiences" of women and men (Zaeske).

However, though these conversations address motherhood as a rhetorical strategy, little has been studied about motherhood as a subject of woman's rhetoric. Today, more women's writing about motherhood is available than ever with the onset of "mommy bloggers." Because of their popularity, mommy bloggers are dictating the way motherhood is being represented in the popular conduct literature of the 21st century. Two of the most popular mommy bloggers today are Heather B. Armstrong, creator and writer of the blog *Dooce*, and Jill Smokler, creator of the *Scary Mommy* blogging community. The popularity of both women's blogs has allowed both to write traditionally-published books, namely Armstrong's *It Sucked and Then I Cried: How I Had a Baby, a Breakdown, and a Much Needed Margarita* and Smokler's *Confessions of a Scary Mommy*. From their titles alone, it is clear each woman is shattering the idea of the traditional, "perfect" mother who remained neatly in her private sphere of the home. In fact, the tone and honesty of each woman suggests there is a new "ideal" SAHM. Their popularity shows how sarcastic, biting commentaries and advice on motherhood are the new cultural norm.

Based on tone, topic, and even direct statements condemning those who are easily offended, I argue that the subversive discourse of these new SAHMs have reinvented what it

means to be a SAHM. Contrasting this new self-representation with previous ideals SAHMs shows the rise of the mommy bloggers to be the beginning of a new era in feminist discourse. Blogs can be easily shared and disseminated; when paired with the accompanying books, the experiences of SAHMs are longer confined to the home. The open and honest testimonies of Armstrong and Smokler exemplify that as women have gained control over how they talk about their own experiences, they have allowed for a new image of the SAHM to emerge. I argue that the conduct literature of motherhood that each woman puts forward is the best example of the new, self-defined SAHM: one who rejects one “right” way to raise children, who seeks to connect with other SAHMs through shared experiences, and who is willing to discuss the darker sides of motherhood.

Critics Not Wanted: Mommy Blogs as Non-Judgmental Spaces for Truth

The casual honesty these mommy bloggers portray in their writing is also evident in the appearance of their blogs. Aesthetically, Heather B. Armstrong’s blog is unique from other blogs, because from its layout and title alone, a visitor cannot tell immediately that it is a “mommy blog.” Armstrong’s site is named *Dooce*, “dooce” being a word Armstrong made up over Instant Message conversation while still at work, a variation of the word “dude” (Armstrong). Armstrong started her blog before she became a mother, but she kept the name even as her content became geared more towards parenting advice. Even by examining her title’s rationale alone, it is evident that Armstrong does not take herself too seriously.

Jill Smokler’s blog, *Scary Mommy*, portrays a similar appreciation for keeping her tone light. However, whereas Armstrong remains the sole contributor to *Dooce*, *Scary Mommy* has evolved into a community blog. In an “About the Author” feature on the site, *Scary Mommy* defines its community as being “bound by humor, humility and an understanding that we can love our children to death . . . yet still need to vent about them.” Next to links to the site’s non-profit affiliations and “More Scary Mommy” links is a bolded question: “Are You On The Right Website?” Below is a disclaimer that reads, “Scary Mommy is intended for people

who have a sense of humor, an appreciation for sarcasm and who wear panties that don't easily get in a wad. You've been warned." This disclaimer would appeal to *Scary Mommy* readers who believe they have a sense of humor and appreciate sarcasm, while it would alienate those who are offended by the phrase "panties in a wad." The disclaimer serves a dual purpose of making readers "with a sense of humor" feel part of a community while alienating those who would criticize the site's content. By doing so, Smokler's redefinition of the SAHM mom is further codified. Those part of the new SAHM community embrace this sense of humor as a way to lighten the stresses SAHMs report.

Armstrong further encourages other SAHMs to remember that there is no one right way to raise children. In a post titled "Running, diet, and the joy found therein" from April 13, 2015, Armstrong's self-deprecating sense of humor and self-awareness comes through when she directly condemns judgmental commenters. After stating that a runner, Scott Jurek, credits his diet to being an essential component of his success, she directly addresses her readers: "Now stop. Your email and comment fingers are already getting itchy, I know. If I write about or consider changing the food I put into my body ever again YOU'RE DONE. That's it." She then posts a GIF of Whitney Houston looking displeased under this warning to her readers. Armstrong further sarcastically comments that if changing her diet would be crossing a line, "It'd be worse than exploiting my children for millions and millions of dollars on a mommy blog." By referencing what critics and commenters have said about her before, Armstrong retains control of her tone and her audience by making it clear she does not intend to change to fit into their expectations. She is also able to retain her credibility as a "real person" while encouraging her readers to mind their own business in terms of child-rearing advice.

Between *Dooce* and *Scary Mommy*, the preferred community of mothers on popular blogs today consists of women who are able to laugh at themselves while communicating their experiences to others in a positive way. Mothers who take themselves too seriously—one possible identity for SAHMs—are not only deterred from being part of either blog's community, but are actively shooed away from

reading the blogs at all. Interestingly, these are the kinds of mothers who would have been praised in the twentieth century, and they are now being looked down upon by their peers who are prominent in the blogging community.

Discourse as Community: Mommy Bloggers Offer Companionship

Armstrong and Smokler further challenge the idea of a silent SAHM by using their shared experiences as a call to community, hoping to link previously isolated SAHMs. Since Smokler's *Scary Mommy* is no longer exclusively her content, it is easier to see her openness to honesty in her "momoir," *Confessions of A Scary Mommy: An Honest and Irreverent Look at Motherhood—The Good, the Bad, and the Scary*. Smokler admits to her readers that "[e]ndless games of peekaboo and board books were not as fulfilling as I thought they would be; I felt like I was drowning in boredom and lame nursery rhymes. So, on a whim, I started a blog" (Smokler 1). By admitting that stay-at-home motherhood was not as fulfilling as she had hoped, Smokler is shattering the traditional image that being a mother is supposed to be, in itself, the purpose of a woman's life. The activism connected with Smokler's blog, creating a safe space for moms to share their experiences no matter how "scary," happened more accidentally than Armstrong's. Smokler writes that as mothers, "We all have stories to tell, and I loved that people were using my space to open up with their own" (Smokler 2). She hopes that readers will use her book "as a lifeline when [they] find [themselves] drowning in mommyhood" (Smokler 3). Smokler hopes readers will use her honest experiences as starting points for honest discussions amongst themselves, something she hopes will keep them afloat during the rough waters of "mommyhood."

In contrast, Armstrong's "momoir" *It Sucked and Then I Cried: How I Had a Baby, a Breakdown, and a Much Needed Margarita* offers parenting advice while simultaneously communicating her activist purpose. The title alone alerts potential readers that Armstrong's book does not idealize pregnancy or motherhood. Instead, her signature snark and frankness declare that pregnancy "sucks," and she makes a light reference to her postpartum depression by stating that she "cried." Armstrong also alludes to the

use of alcohol to deal with the pressures of motherhood when she refers to a margarita as “much needed.” Clearly, Armstrong is not representing herself as the traditional quiet, pious mother, and by doing so she is showing her audience that it is okay if they do the same.

The juxtaposition of Armstrong’s humorous outlook with her sometimes serious subject matter appears to send readers a mixed message, at first. Is motherhood a humorous experience, or will it make you depressed? For Armstrong, it can be both. In her prologue, she clarifies her reasons for chronicling her experiences with motherhood on her public blog (which existed for years before this book was published). Armstrong states that writing down her experiences on her blog helped her to survive her depression, and she realizes “how crucial it had been for [her] to share [her] journey” (Armstrong ix). Armstrong seeks to “bridge the loneliness” that moms can sometimes feel, giving her distinct voice an activist purpose. By making her experiences with pregnancy, day-to-day motherhood, and depression relatable and approachable, Armstrong hopes to speak to women who might be in the same position she was throughout her pregnancy/early days of motherhood. For Armstrong, the act of speaking out about these experiences is actually what gets you through them.

Blending the Public and Private: Discussing the Dark Sides of SAHMhood

Finally, Smokler and Armstrong shatter the image of a “perfect” mother by opening up about experiences in motherhood that have been historically taboo. Smokler directly incorporates the community “confessional” feature of her blog into her book. At the beginning of every chapter, she begins by listing anonymous confessions from her blogging community on each chapter’s topic. After these, Smokler writes on her personal experiences with each topic. In her chapter “Yes, You’ll Shit on the Delivery Table,” Smokler offers a no-holds barred account of her birth experience, thought traditionally to be a private experience that not even the husband was invited to witness. Smokler is vocal about her recommendation of using drugs during childbirth, a controversial topic in today’s society: “I’d opted for the drugs early on so I

wouldn't be in pain, and I wasn't . . . It was the best decision I could have made. Seriously, highly recommend, five stars, two thumbs up" (Smokler 24). She then recalls her disappointment in realizing her daughter looked nothing like her, but exactly like her husband, whom she humorously refers to as "her other DNA contributor, whom we shall now refer to as 'the prick who trumped my genes'" (Smokler 24). By keeping this humorous tone throughout her book—even when referring to her own daughter and husband—Smokler engages her audience while stating that it is okay for them to express opinions that conflict with the traditional "perfect mommy" image.

In Armstrong's book, humor and self-deprecation are again very prominent. Highlights of chapter names include "How to Exploit an Unborn Baby," "A Twenty-pound Basketball With Legs and Arms," "Dressing Like a Concubine in Humpty Dumpty's Harem," "Labor to the Tune of Janet Jackson's Nipple," and "You Have to Feed the Baby . . . Through Your Boobs," to name just a few. Armstrong's humor and light tone draw the reader in to see what she has to say about motherhood. However, in addition to her lighthearted commentary on motherhood, Armstrong talks of the seriousness of her postpartum depression after giving birth to her first daughter, Leta. In the chapter "Heather, Interrupted," she reveals that her anxiety was so prominent post-childbirth that she even contemplated suicide. Armstrong states that even though she was seeing a therapist, "I could barely eat anything and couldn't sleep, even though I'd tried every sleeping pill available at the pharmacy. I wanted to commit suicide if only because then I wouldn't have to feel the pain of being awake anymore" (Armstrong 190). Armstrong then chronicles the experience of checking herself into the psychiatric ward of a hospital with her husband's support.

By speaking out about these previously-taboo experiences, Armstrong and Smokler are tearing down the wall between public and private spheres, which Domosh and Seager found were historically exclusive. In contrast to the SAHMs of the past, Armstrong and Smokler show that the SAHMs of today refuse to remain silent. However, they do this not only to share their own stories and truths about motherhood, but to reach out to other mothers that may be struggling with the same issues. Like Smokler

says in the preface to her book, blogging is an opportunity to breach the “boredom” that can come with being a SAHM whose only companions are children. In addition, the fact that these women are able to earn a living through their blogs and books further blurs the line between these two spheres.

Stay-At-Home Motherhood & Self-Representation in the 21st century

Clearly, the topics that Armstrong and Smokler are willing to discuss, as well as the humorous tone they adopt, dispels the idea that SAHMs are meant to be pious, benevolent angels of the private sphere. Both their mommy blogs and the subsequent books emerging from their blogging success offer greater insight into the redefinition of stay-at-home motherhood that their self-representation has allowed. Shown through their denunciations of judgment, their calls for community, and their frank willingness to talk about the dark sides of motherhood, the writing of these women clearly shows that there is no longer an expectation that SAHMs will remain quietly in the private sphere. Armstrong and Smokler are extremely vocal about their experiences, which they tinge with humor and sarcasm, in an attempt to bridge the loneliness that SAHMs experienced in the era before the Internet. Through their blogs’ popularity, these women are able to gain a wider audience for their print books, making the relationship between blog and book mutually exclusive. The rhetorical success of Armstrong and Smokler signify a shift in women’s rhetorics in the Digital Age.

Keeping this in mind, it is also important to note that though Armstrong and Smokler have been successful in defining today’s SAHM, they are also both white, middle-to-upper middle class women who can afford to stay home with their children while their husbands go to work (or at least before their blogs began to make enough revenue to support their families). Less personal discourse from mothers of different social status is readily available online. It would benefit the field of feminist rhetorics if more of these women’s voices were uncovered and studied, both and in print.

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Speech and Social Death in *Othello*

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All Shakespearean tragedies must necessarily end in death—*Othello* is no exception. The true tragedy of *Othello*, however, is not in the physical death or suffering of its characters, but in their fall from a place of relative power and social standing to the social equivalent of death. This distinction is an important one and stems from one of the most dominant elements of the play: the link between human life and human discourse. The significance of death, especially within the context of dramatic tragedy, relies upon the significance of the life it displaces. In the world of *Othello*, human life is contingent upon participation and control in discourse: to be human, as opposed to being savage or inhuman, is to speak and be spoken of. Cassio puts it best in the moments after his demotion when he laments his loss of the ability to speak sensibly and the honor his name once carried, saying “reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have / lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of / myself, and what remains is bestial” (2.3.261-63). The characters of *Othello* are defined by their use of language and their roles in the speech-driven social landscape of the play as they rise, fall, and meet their tragic ends.

One of the key aspects of any tragedy is the metaphorical height from which the tragic hero must fall. In order for the catastrophe of the tragic form to succeed, the victim must have everything to lose. Though *Othello* aligns well with this standard, the play’s hero stands apart in that he has a natural disadvantage in the social schematic, being not born into a noble position nor even into the same culture as that in which he begins the play. Separated by race, ethnicity, and nationality from his peers, Othello is treated as the “Other” even in his position of power as a talented and respected general in the Venetian military. From Othello’s speech

defending his marriage to Desdemona, the reader might infer that he gained his position through great military experience, earning a position, rather than being given it. Having thus gained his position through merit, Othello must maintain it through speech. As a military general, Othello has the power to speak and command. As Madeleine Doran notes, Othello's speech at the beginning of the play is characterized by directness, simplicity, and authority, unhedged by concessions and doubts. Much of his dialogue is in the form of command. With only his calm and confidence in speech, Othello is able to shape the actions and attitudes of those around him, successfully avoiding violence from Brabantio's search party, commanding attention without interruption while he speaks his case, and ultimately winning the good will of the senate against Brabantio's slanderous claims. During Othello's defense, he reveals that he has also utilized speech to win the love of Desdemona, gaining a high social connection through marriage, and to shape his own social identity. As James Calderwood observes, Othello's "being and doing are embedded in speech as though the events of his life were being lived just one Shandy-like step ahead of the words that seize and digest them into story" (295). Othello thus holds power in that he is the one to frame the narrative, to build his own reputation.

Just as Othello is put at a social disadvantage as an outsider, Desdemona is so in being female in a patriarchal society. Despite this, Desdemona also initially holds some measure of power through her role in social discourse. Desdemona, who has resisted marriage to the candidates chosen for her by her father, asserts that she has intentionally married Othello, a black Moor many years her senior. This degree of independence, which she has wrought from her father, is earned through participation in discourse with Othello as a listener and as an encourager of speech, as Othello corroborates, saying "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them" (1.3.166-67). Desdemona also holds some standing as a speaker. More than once is she referred to by soldiers under Othello's command as some variation of "our great captain's captain" (2.1.74), implying that within her marriage, Desdemona holds some sway over Othello, and in fact, Desdemona seems to believe that she does. When Cassio asks her to speak on his behalf to Othello, she confidently assures him, "Do not doubt, /

Cassio, / But I will have my lord and you again / As friendly as you were” (3.3.4-7). Further, she insists that she will speak Othello into submission:

My lord shall never rest;
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I'll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio's suit. (3.3.22-26)

Even in the early stages of Othello's madness, Desdemona's confidence proves warranted, as he submits to her request, saying, “I will deny thee nothing” (3.3.76). Desdemona holds high standing early in the play, not only through listening and speaking, but also through being spoken of. As she arrives in Cyprus, Desdemona is described by Cassio among soldiers as “a maid / That paragons description and wild fame; / One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens” (2.1.61-63). Cassio's flattering portrayal is given outside of Desdemona's earshot and is reiterated later in the play, indicating that his praise is honest and indicative of her favorable reputation.

If any one character in *Othello* can be said to have a positive reputation early on, it is Iago, whom nearly every other character emphatically refers to as an “honest man.” Spoken highly of by all, Iago is also a master of speech, holding power in his ability to manipulate people through speech. In fact, as Judith Weil contends, Iago maintains his sense of self, of identity and humanity, through his ability to exert control beyond his social rank through verbal discourse, believing that “service wholly destroys identity . . . and that he can only be himself through a pretense of service” (70). Unlike that of Othello and Desdemona, Iago's power in speech is rooted in dishonesty and ambiguity. Where they are words, he is pauses. Where they are truths, he is possibilities.

This difference between methods of speech utilized by Othello and Iago, as Doran discusses, marks the turning point of the play. Othello's downfall will be, as both Doran and Calderwood note, his unwavering faith in the honesty of words. As Calderwood puts it, “he naively assumes that even the most ethereal of words are bonded to their meanings and that their meanings are bonded to the things they represent” (295). This naiveté represents a point of

vulnerability in Othello's place in social discourse. When speaking to Iago, Othello believes that Iago's words are related directly to his meanings, and therefore accepts Iago's leading insinuations without considering the possibility that Iago is unreliable. Iago's deceit and manipulation of Othello is such that Iago becomes the very concept of doubt and distrust. Edward Snow even suggests that Iago is "really only the name and local habitation of an invisible spirit within Othello and the texture of his world as well" (215). In effect, Iago's exploitation of Othello's weakness in language corrupts Othello's effectiveness in speech.

Under Iago's influence, Othello's eloquence and assured, commanding confidence falls apart. As Calderwood argues, Othello loses his ability to articulate words, communicating instead in "noises expelled by a creature in pain" (298). Having lost his ability to speak, Othello loses, too, his confidence in himself as a human being and a civilized man. His command of speech and his place in the social discourse allowed him to define himself as equally civilized and human as his Venetian counterparts. Without it, he sees in himself instead both an animal—a "circumcised dog" (5.2.351)—and "a malignant and a turbaned Turk" (5.2.349). It is this version of himself, as Derek Cohen argues, the dehumanized enemy and outsider, which Othello chooses to kill in the end. Othello's loss of place in the discourse is driven home when he tries to dictate what will be said of his suicide and the preceding events, but after his death, Lodovico proclaims "O bloody period!" (5.2.352), punctuating the end of Othello's speech, and Gratiano notes that "All that is spoke is marred" (5.2.353), emphasizing that Othello's control of his story is gone, and his words are no longer his own.

Unlike Othello, Desdemona does not lose her place in the social discourse all at once, but slowly and as a result of more than one decision or occurrence. Certainly, the beginning of the end for Desdemona is in Othello's loss of faith in her. Without his love, trust, or respect, Desdemona loses any power she had within her marriage. Further, as Ruth Vanita points out, Desdemona has no hope of intervention against Othello's violence from the other male members of the patriarchy. In Vanita's words, "the death blow is struck by one particular individual, but it is made possible by the collusion of a number of others who act on the assumption that husband-wife relations are governed by norms different from

those that govern other human relations” (342). By that reasoning, Lodovico and other males who express disgust with Othello’s treatment of Desdemona, and are aware of the danger, are also guilty of her death in that they have the ability to prevent it but abstain. The potential for such an intervention and the deliberate refusal to do so becomes clear when examining the speech between Desdemona and Lodovico. As Vanita notes, when Lodovico first arrives on the scene, Desdemona is delighted to see him and addresses him familiarly as “cousin,” drawing on a bond of kinship. Yet, even after witnessing Othello senselessly strike Desdemona, and indicating disapproval, Lodovico does not intervene further than to weakly suggest he “make her amends” (4.1.243). He refuses action even after Iago indicates a serious danger to Desdemona’s life. Instead, Lodovico bids Desdemona “good night” and formally thanks her “ladyship” (4.3.3) for her hospitality, utilizing stiff decorum which is a decided rejection of Desdemona’s attempt to speak familiarly with him. Desdemona responds in kind, calling him “Your honour” (4.3.4), far from the intimate “cousin” she used before. These exchanges between Desdemona and Lodovico mark Desdemona’s rejection from open discourse with men outside of her marriage. Lodovico demonstrates that she will not be spoken for, nor will she be heard outside of the domestic sphere.

With Lodovico’s rejection, Desdemona is left with few or no access points through which she may participate in human discourse. Rather than surrender to social death, however, Desdemona draws upon her last option: Iago. Significantly, Desdemona first rejects discourse with Emilia, her servant and her closest available female confidant, saying “Do not talk to me, Emilia. / I cannot weep, nor answers have I none / But what should go by water . . . call thy husband hither” (4.2.101-102, 104). Desdemona clearly believes that speaking to Iago will be more worthwhile than speaking with Emilia. Yet, Iago serves merely to confirm what has already been conveyed through Lodovico: that neither her statements, nor Emilia’s on her behalf will have any effect on Othello or any of the males who hold power over the prevailing discourse. Iago silences Emilia and encourages Desdemona to “go [to bed], and weep not,” and to trust that “all things shall be well” (4.2.169), though his plans involve becoming the instrument, not of her salvation as she hopes, but of her doom.

Having exhausted her last chance at regaining her place in the male-dominated social discourse, Desdemona resigns herself to following Othello's orders—to go to bed, dismiss Emilia, and to await his arrival. Yet, though Desdemona makes a show of doing so, she instead engages in one of the most important scenes in the play, in which she and Emilia have a candid and intimate discussion about love, sex, and freedom. As Eamon Grennan indicates, this scene hinges not only on content, but also on “shifting tonality” to create a “special pathos” (277). For Grennan, the “rise and fall of voices engaged in intimate *conversation*” creates a sense of “peace and freedom, within the clamorous procession of violent acts and urgent voices” (277). For Desdemona, this conversation represents a social space which she has heretofore rejected, and indeed, she continues to resist partaking in Emilia's conversation, a female-dominated sphere of discourse. This conversation differs markedly from the male-dominated discourse which pervades the rest of the play. Rather than the formal eloquence and coldness of the patriarchal speech, as Grennan argues, this social space holds a sense of “quotidian familiarity” and intimacy (277). In this space, Desdemona uses language to describe her love and loyalty to Othello even in light of his violent and, to her, inexplicable madness, turning, as Grennan puts it, “Othello's flaws to ‘grace and favor’” where Othello's jealousy, born in the corruption of the male-driven discourse, represents the opposite of this process, “translat[ing] her goodness to wickedness” (277). Though she partakes in the unique aspects of the female discourse, Desdemona maintains loyalty to Othello and suggests that she will do what it takes to please him, regardless of the cost.

During their conversation, Desdemona and Emilia make subtle connections to two other female characters, each of whom represents an exaggerated conception of expected female identity, and who together suggest the options Desdemona sees for herself in response to her predicament. The first of these is represented by her mother's maid, Barbary, whose husband “proved mad / And did forsake her” (4.3.27-28). Despite her husband's madness, Barbary stays with him and dies (presumably at the hands of her mad husband) singing a sad song which Desdemona sings to herself. Barbary clearly represents to Desdemona a sense of self-sacrificing loyalty to one's husband, a willingness to give up life

and self to maintain wholehearted marital commitment. Where Desdemona champions the story of Barbary, Emilia argues an opposing point, decrying the double standards of sexual freedom between husbands and wives and defending the second female character-type, the prostitute, by answering Desdemona's question, "Wouldst thou do such a deed [cuckold your husband] for all the world?" (4.3.65) in the positive, asserting that "The world's a huge thing; it is a great price for a small vice" (4.3.70). Yet, though Emilia would seem at this point to be a defender of woman's sexual freedom, she ultimately sides with Desdemona, fighting to defend Desdemona's place in the male-dominated discourse rather than nurture the female-dominated one they have created. Turning from her original argument, Emilia takes up the cause of defending Desdemona's innocence, her meeting of the expectations imposed by the patriarchy. As Snow points out, this defense of innocence in effect "lets the law itself off the hook" (216), implying that if she were guilty of infidelity, Othello would be justified in taking her life, that the injustice is only in that the allegations are false. Despite her convictions before, Emilia no longer supports the sexual freedom symbolized by the prostitute figure. In fact, when Emilia later meets Bianca, the actual prostitute in the play, she reflects the resounding male opinion, dehumanizing Bianca as "strumpet" and scoffing at her for defending her own humanity. In supporting Desdemona's desire to regain her place in the male discourse or die trying, like Barbary, Emilia throws in her fate with Desdemona's and, to some extent, dooms them both. Having already been rejected by Othello, Lodovico, and Iago, Desdemona has already suffered social death in the male discourse. As Othello intones in the strangling scene, "It is too late" (5.2.85). Desdemona has lost her chance at regaining her human identity in the male discourse, so when she and Emilia both reject the female discourse, they lose their voices completely.

The tragedy of *Othello* is not in death, but in silence. The play is dominated by voices—male voices, female voices, formal and vulgar voices, singing, shouting and whispering voices. The characters exist through the ability to speak and be heard. The hero, the heroine, and even the villain, despite bringing different—even disadvantaged—voices to the prevailing discourse, which is controlled by Venetian "white" males of high birth and social

standing, have each found some measure of power in joining the conversation. Tragedy strikes less in the form of hate and the desire to kill than in the form of doubt and the desire to snuff out the power of a voice. We mourn the ending of *Othello*, not because the characters are dead, but because they have been silenced, robbed of their power to affect the conversation, to speak for themselves in a conversation that would speak for them. By the end of the play, we know that when the story of what has happened is “with heavy heart relate[d]” (5.2.367), it will not be the story of *Othello* or of Desdemona, or of Emilia. Their stories have died with them, and the voice that now controls the narrative is that which silenced the voices that engendered it.

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The Culture of Anarchy: *V for Vendetta* in Response to Matthew Arnold

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Alan Moore and David Lloyd's dystopian comic *V for Vendetta* overtly employs political philosophy, as the entire work rests on the opposition between fascism/authoritarianism and anarchism, but the comic's political discussions are inextricably tied to a similar dichotomy in cultural theory. Carissa Honeywell notes that twentieth-century anarchists used established intellectual thought to "[work] out conceptions of freedom, national identity, tradition and development" (112). *V for Vendetta* operates in this very tradition and intentionally confronts the assumption, prominently articulated by the British philosopher Matthew Arnold, that anarchism inherently opposes culture. Through the form of the comic, the use of allusions, and the discourse about creation, *V for Vendetta* reacts to the traditional understanding of art and culture established in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* by presenting utopian anarchism as an effective means for preserving all forms of culture inside a work of "low culture."

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold articulates a theory that places culture solely in the realm of authority. Arnold's focus on "perfection" through "real" culture sets the groundwork for the dichotomy between "high" and "low" culture and leaves the definition of "perfection" to those who already control culture. Arnold argues that culture originates "in the love of perfection" and defines culture as "a study of perfection" that "is not satisfied till we all come to a perfect man [sic.]; it knows that the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses

of humanity are touched with sweetness and light” (47). According to Arnold, “*real* thought and *real* beauty; *real* sweetness and *real* light” cannot be found in the “ordinary popular literature” (47). While Arnold claims that he does not “condemn” popular products created for “the masses,” he separates these things from the very idea of culture as “culture works differently” and attempts “to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere” (47-48). Therefore, Arnold articulates the inscribed disparity between high- and low-culture, but he does so in a way that rhetorically dismisses low-culture as a true path to “perfection.” Even though Arnold aims for a culture in which all people become perfect through culture, he only legitimizes authoritative culture and discounts the very cultural products directed at the middle- and lower-classes. Arnold’s thesis dismisses the possibility that anything produced by or for the middle- or lower-classes may demonstrate the “perfection” of “sweetness and light” and clings to the vain hope that such people must accept the “perfect” works and ideas of authoritative culture exactly as they receive them.

The crux of Matthew Arnold’s argument uses this theory of “real” culture to make a case for cultural authority. Arnold warns against “worshipping” freedom “without enough regarding the ends for which freedom is to be desired” and then decries the end of feudalism as Britain now faces the “danger of drifting towards anarchy” (50). Arnold’s argument regarding the slippery slope into anarchy rests on an idea of culture defined by the State, or, “the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with . . . controlling individual wills” (50-51). While Arnold lauds the feudal system for its supposedly monolithic culture, the hierarchical system that defines feudalism lacks his modern definition of the State and thereby glorifies a past that never even existed. While Arnold labels the “worship” of freedom a “machine,” he also blindly advocates for a machine that engages in self-preservation by extolling culture as the highest end of humankind while limiting culture to authority acting under the guise of “reason” (55). Even more problematically, Arnold claims that dissent and protest, however “artful” those ideas and acts may be, “ought to be unflinchingly forbidden and repressed” because, in his view, challenging the foundational order

of the State's authority inherently rejects culture and therefore will not produce "anything precious and lasting" (135-6). Building on his authoritarian view of culture, Arnold rejects the possibility that resistance to authority can either produce or preserve artistic culture. Arnold constructs an essential opposition between culture and anarchy because culture can only be legitimized through a source of authority, but this circular reasoning renders a classist system of authority rather than a broad definition of culture.

The very form of *V for Vendetta*, the comic book, stands in opposition to Arnold's definition of "real" culture. In his history of British comics, James Chapman locates the original printing of *V for Vendetta* in the short-lived *Warrior* publication (224). Ironically, *Warrior's* slogan was "The Best of British," which refers to both its uniquely British content and its assertion of being the "best" of a "lowbrow" form in the vein of Arnold's criticism (Chapman 227). In his study of the historically oppositional relationship between comics and art, Bart Beaty notes how critics working under the umbrella of "cultural studies" use "the lens of popular culture" to "recuperate" the academic study of comics, but because those scholars "rebelled" against "Matthew Arnold's call to study the 'best that has been thought and said'," works in the comic medium "have rarely been considered an art form akin to painting, sculpture or photography" (18). The unconventional nature of *V for Vendetta* does not discount the centrality of the comic form to the work's meaning. To the contrary, Matthew Smith argues Alan Moore intentionally uses his "working knowledge of the relationships and intertextual references" to the comics medium "to tell stories in a way that would not function coherently in other media" (183). The comic form intentionally blends multiple mediums into a cohesive cultural product. By including works of high- and low-culture in this low-culture medium, *V for Vendetta* creates a singular, broad work to counter Arnold's classist definition of culture.

V for Vendetta's almost constant use of allusions constitutes the most obvious way in which the comic engages with artistic culture. These allusions come in four main categories: books, film, music, and visual art. *V's* home, "The Shadow Gallery," serves as a collection of all sorts of cultural artifacts from all four of these categories. On two occasions, Moore and Lloyd depict bookshelves

in the Shadow Gallery that include a variety of different written works. The first bookshelf includes More's *Utopia*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Marx's *Capital*, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (9, 3, 2).¹ All of these books somehow argue for liberation and thereby set the focus for all of V's cultural allusions. Regardless of whether V or a larger conception of anarchism would embrace these visions of liberation, V values the long tradition of cultural works opposing a dominant culture. The second, larger bookshelf includes classical poetry, classic and contemporary novels, histories, various literatures from non-British culture, Shakespeare, and other works. Clearly, V does not ascribe to Marxism or Nazism and by extension may not agree with the content in the wide variety of other works in the second bookshelf. The variety of works demonstrates V's commitment to learning and preserving all kinds of culture and philosophy—not just the works that he agrees with or identifies with. The Shadow Gallery also incorporates collections of other kinds of cultural products as three different views of The Shadow Gallery include movie posters (25, 1, 3; 223, 3, 3). Since the relatively new medium of film often carries the label of “popular” or “low-culture,” the inclusion of film posters among the other works of art in the Shadow Gallery furthers the variety of cultural items from a variety of content and mediums in order to continue to construct a complete history of artistic culture that does not distinguish between “real” culture and popular entertainment. The Shadow Gallery retools Arnold's injunction that defines culture as “the best which has been thought and said in the world” by creating a cultural library that validates the present and the past, the high and the low, the West and the East, and the venerable and abominable (5).

The comic contrasts the context of the Gallery to the contextless quotations of various works. Annalisa DiLiddo suggests that V's liberal quotation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in the opening scene of the comic asserts “the great Shakespearean tradition has been erased, and the bard's voice can be heard only through the hero, who has preserved its memory” and “the result of this removal is that the literary tradition cannot be understood” (37). V performs a similar action when he quotes The Rolling Stones' “Sympathy for the Devil” before killing the pedophilic priest and Ralph McTell's “Streets of London” as he kills Finch (54, 231). While the assumed

ignorance of the audience adds a level of irony and critique to V's quotations, V also quotes various texts to Evey in order to impart that lost culture to his successor and assigns equal value to high culture, pop culture, and folk culture. When V plays Motown, he responds to Evey's unfamiliarity with the music by explaining to her that the government "eradicated some cultures more thoroughly than they did others" (19). Motown music existed as cultural products created by a marginalized people group, and V's conscious embrace of marginalized culture not only saves those products from erasure by dominant cultures, but places all of the works rendered contextless by the Fascists as marginalized culture. Conscious of the problem of contextless culture, the Shadow Gallery recreates context in order to provide a space for the analysis of the preserved cultures.

The works of art in the Shadow Gallery also obtain a new context by forming V's identity. Markus Oppolzer claims that the artistic works serve as a means for V to "[reinvent] himself completely by breathing new life into the artifacts of a dead culture" (109). Perhaps the best example of V using art in the Shadow Gallery to (re)invent his identity comes from the presence of del Pollaiuolo's *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*. Identifying with *The Martyrdom* not only renders V a martyr, but it recontextualizes a religious image into a symbol of difference as V values and identifies with this work despite his rejection of Christianity. James Keller recognizes the identity-shaping function of the art as "the gallery itself constitutes the pieces from which V, and by extension all of his countrymen, compose and construct a national, gendered, ethnic, intellectual and economic self" (179). Faced with the absence of social culture, V must interact with culture in self-imposed isolation. The works of art and culture in the Shadow Gallery originated in various societies with their own relations to power structures and V forms his subjectivity by understanding these works in isolation from a new authority that erases cultural history. Contrary to Arnold's glorification of authority as the grand arbiter of culture, authority gone amok *opposes* culture and the anarchist alone preserves the great works that Arnold wishes to preserve.

Evey's education ensures that the works in the Shadow Gallery will no longer remain without context as she continues his legacy and also forms her identity in these works. V reads a

section from Enid Blyton's *The Magic Faraway Tree* to Evey, grounds his theory of destruction in Yeats ("things fall apart . . . the centre cannot hold") to her, and quotes Aleister Crowley in a discussion on authority and destruction (68, 196, 217). In addition to the literary and philosophical works V exposes to Evey, he introduces her to Motown, Billie Holiday, and Black Uhuru when she first arrives at The Shadow Gallery, and later plays a Cole Porter record (18-19, 215). When V imparts his cultural knowledge to Evey, *V for Vendetta* claims that anarchism not only preserves various elements of culture but utilizes culture as a means of forming identity. The problem with V imparting his knowledge to Evey lies in the implicit hierarchical structure that elevates V to a position of cultural authority that echoes the same power relations that V's anarchism adamantly rejects. However, Evey's enlightenment causes her to question the sources of V's knowledge. Before V leaves for the last time, he references The Velvet Underground song "Waiting for the Man" and Evey responds: "If that's another . . . It is, isn't it? It's another bloody *quote!* I've heard it on the *jukebox!*" (221). Through her experience in the Shadow Gallery, Evey learns to recognize the sources of ideas rather than accepting them as original thoughts. Evey inherits the variety of culture that V preserved, but also learns how to interact with culture in a way that questions the individual pieces of culture and her source of inheritance. This transition of authority simultaneously locates the source of cultural authority in the works of culture themselves and the individuals that process those works—not an outside authority that initially defined the culture.

V for Vendetta's engagement with artistic culture moves past collection and critique, as his artistic subjectivity manifests itself in the performative nature of his vendetta/revolution. V engages in private acts of performance like playing the piano and dancing with Evey, but his state TV broadcast, conducting an orchestra of destruction, and other public acts are performances (174, 179, 112-14, 181-85). V grounds all of his public actions in the idea of performance as his violence intends to send a message to his victims and the people observing his acts. As V dies, he states: "This country is not saved . . . do not think that . . . but all its old belief have come to rubble, and from rubble may we build . . . That is

their task: to ruse themselves, their lives and loves and land” (245, 1, 3). While the work of one person took down the system, it will take the entire nation to responsibly embrace their autonomy in order to create V’s anarchistic utopia. Simply destroying a system will leave a culture in chaos, but V destroys the system using art in order to force his observers to think for themselves so they can realize the potential of utopian self-rule. Therefore, V argues that his introduction of anarchy by removing the existing power structure will not suffice. While V certainly extols the principles of anarchy, anarchy itself will not preserve art or create culture—anarchists will.

Without clearly answering the ethical questions regarding violence, the comic provides an answer to the problem of destruction: creation and destruction are liminal parts of the same whole, therefore justifying destruction. Although originally published in a serial format, the complete comic comprises three books: “Europe After the Reign,” “This Vicious Cabaret,” and “The Land of Do-As-You-Please.” The work then contains a progression of titles from fascism to culture to anarchy. Each book mimics a distinct formal element of the title philosophy with the cohesive yet bleak presentation of “Europe After the Reign,” the paralleling cultural acts in “This Vicious Cabaret,” and the disorienting structure of “The Land of Do-As-You-Please.” Thus the larger structure of the comic presents a trajectory from illegitimate order to chaos and the comic argues that art destroys oppressive order and creates a new, legitimate order from that chaos. At an even deeper level, V uses multi-formed experiences of low art to begin his destruction (the vaudeville of torturing Prothero in Book One, the “cabaret” of events that lead to the downfall of the regime in Book Two) and coordinates his last bombing to a symphony—a pinnacle of high art (the 1812 Overture, 182). Both high and low culture can destroy in order to create. The comic most clearly pairs creation with destruction in the prologues to Books Two and Three as lines of music divide the panels in the Book Two prologue and the bottom panel of the Book Three prologue is V conducting the 1812 Overture. Pairing creative works with destructive acts blurs the line between creation and destruction. In doing so, *V for Vendetta* rejects Arnold’s injunction against protest and his rejection of low culture.

While Arnold characterizes protest and dissent as something that opposes culture because such acts oppose authority, *V* uses culture to remove an authority that opposes culture. Therefore opposition to authority and by extension the lack of authority fully utilizes and values culture—not the authority structure. Following an anarchist ethos, the comic does not proscribe a method for creating a new culture, but leaves that up to the new anarchists (Evey and, presumably, others).

As a whole, *V for Vendetta*'s presentation of collecting and using artistic culture serves as a statement that values all kinds of culture and claims that art can bring down oppressive governments. Jesse Cohn argues that works of anarchist cultural criticism must be “dual-use,” meaning that they are “recognizable and legitimate within an academic context, but also relevant and useful in a wider sphere” (416). Rather than More and Lloyd articulating their views on anarchy and culture in an academic treatise, they create a work of art that a popular audience can enjoy and appreciate while still articulating the same message. Ultimately, Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* reacts to the traditional understanding of art and culture established in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* by presenting utopian anarchy as an effective means for preserving all forms of culture inside a work of “low culture.” *V for Vendetta* defies Arnold's definition of culture, his characterization of anarchy, and his denouncement of protest and disruption, but it goes further by actually preserving, creating, and critiquing culture. While Arnold defines culture as a product emanating from authority that simultaneously reinforces authority, *Vendetta* locates culture in the resistance to and absence of authority.

Notes

1. This citation structure functions as follows: page, panel, box. When appropriate, this study will locate the specific box that an image is in yet some references span an entire page and thus will only include a page number.

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