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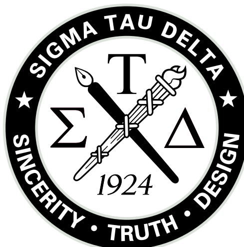

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Frederic Fadner Critical Essay Award
"A Different Kind of Magic: Derrida's *Differance* and Silver-working in R. F. Kuang's *Babel*"
by Antonina D'Eramo of Duquesne University

Contents

Audio Links vii

"Pretending to Be Two People": Dueling Identities and Resisting Readership in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Audrey Ball 1

"Dig It Up": The Complex Africanist Presence of *Holes* by Brianna Bell 10

"The Prince's Jester" and "My Uncle's Fool": Foolishness and Metamorphosis in *Much Ado about Nothing* by Kathryn "Katie" Claire Bergquist 18

A Different Kind of Magic: Derrida's *Differance* and Silver-working in R. F. Kuang's *Babel* by Antonina "Nina" D'Eramo 26

Hear the Music: Queering Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" by Owen Gornicki 35

Testing the Form-Frequency Correspondence Principle in English Adjectives: A Corpus and Dictionary-Based Analysis by Robbie Graham 41

Lilacs and Cherry Trees: An Asexual Reading of Kate Chopin's "Lilacs" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Two Friends" by Katherine Harber 47

Ireland Personified: Women Representing Ireland in Irish Drama by Kayleigh Kearsley 55

From the Monstrous to the Mundane: Queer Interpretations of *Dracula through Dracula Daily* by Sadie Olsen 60

Feminocentric Spatial Transformation, Connection, and Empowerment in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* by Julianna Reidell 67

Setting and Subjectivity in A Pale View of Hills by Isaiah Russell 75

The Protest of Artistic Expression in Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" by Emily Theroux 81

Back Matter 87
Contributors' Biographies 89
About SIGMA TAU DELTA 97

Audio Links

“Pretending to Be Two People”: Dueling Identities and Resisting Readership in Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Audrey Ball

“Dig It Up”: The Complex, Africanist Presence of *Holes* by Brianna Bell

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CONTENT WARNING

Manuscripts included in this publication may address difficult topics (such as death, assault, sexual content, and prejudice) that may cause duress for readers; to prevent unnecessary duress, we offer this warning and acknowledge the humanity of both our authors and our readers. We appreciate the writers' transparency in addressing sensitive topics.

The opinions presented in the published works of the *Sigma Tau Delta Review* do not reflect the organization or membership but rather reflect the opinions, values, and perspectives of the individual authors.

EDITOR'S NOTE

For this issue of the *Sigma Tau Delta Review*, I have asked the authors to record readings of their works so that you may enjoy a multi-modal presentation of the publications and so the authors may present how they intended their works to be read. Granted, you should enjoy the work and have some creative interpretation, but hearing the author read may give you some insight into meanings, emphases, and highlights. Readings (audio files) are linked in the Audio Links page following the Table of Contents for your enjoyment.

Thank you to all the authors, who provided their audio recordings for our readership to enjoy.

"Pretending to Be Two People": Dueling Identities and Resisting Readership in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Audrey Ball

Lewis Carroll's Alice from his Victorian children's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has long been studied regarding Alice's identity. Although feminist analysis of (e.g., Ren) the novel has been prevalent in literary scholarship since the late twentieth century, critics have merged a feminist perspective for analysis with the more recent view of postcolonial studies (e.g., Armstrong; Graner; Shi). In merging theories, Graner and Armstrong have created a dichotomy, concluding that Alice is or is not a feminist or imperialist, often citing one identity as a lack of the other. They fail to acknowledge Alice's dual nature as a young girl and also as a Victorian English subject of interpellation. Furthering Arnavas's argument that Wonderland is a representation of Alice's emotions, I contend that Carroll creates Wonderland as an internal environment for Alice's dueling personalities to persuade her as she is going through an identity crisis. Alice's duality and subsequent identity crisis are reminiscent of Judith Fetterley's concept of the "resisting reader" within her 1978 book, which calls upon its audience to engage in feminist reading to counteract the often-patriarchal ideology of media. To address this duality, I examine dialogue and consumption patterns during Alice's journey through Wonderland, persuaded by its resisting anti-English inhabitants and the hegemonic royal court. Although ultimately submitting to the dominant ideology, Alice will eventually return to her journey of breaking free of interpellation within Victorian English patriarchy and become a resisting reader.

Some theorists (e.g., Little; Ren) have read Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as proponing feminism and as a nonconformist work of Victorian children's literature because of Alice's bold and inquisitive nature; however, in recent years, scholars have moved from this exhausted reading. Literary critics, including Nancy Armstrong, Emma Graner, and Flair Shi have analyzed the novel through a postcolonial lens, each concluding that Alice is a product of her Victorian English environment and that British imperialism is upheld

within Wonderland. The critics accomplish this reading by attributing the characters in Wonderland with a native title akin to African or Asian people of the era by creating an "other" to exclude from the "us" that is Alice's English society.

Another critic, Lisa Coar, has subverted typical readings of Alice to identify her subconscious or manufactured participation in Victorian ideology, namely consumerism and consumption, which are regulated by men. Her stance contends that Alice is complacent in her role as a citizen in Victorian England and that Wonderland is an external entity being acted upon by Alice instead of as an internal force influencing her search for identity. This internal view of Wonderland creates a constructed environment that is Alice's conscience and houses her two opposing perceptions of Victorian English society, one as an anti-English resisting reader and the other as a subject of Victorian English patriarchy, both trying to persuade her.

A postcolonial view of Wonderland presents its inhabitants as an external, cohesive group: Wonderland has a separate culture that conflicts with Alice's submersion in Victorian society and results in Alice "othering Wonderland and its residents" (Shi 194). Instead of a separate, unified entity "against which Alice learns to define her British, female subjectivity" (Graner 257), Wonderland is an environment hosting Alice's internal conflict between her two opposing identities. Alice's conflict becomes apparent in Wonderland's inhabitants, which builds on critic Francesca Arnavas's discussion of Alice's emotional instability being linked to Wonderland's environment. In Arnavas's view of nonsensical emotions, Alice's emotions are manifested within Wonderland through "structural elements" (par. 29), such as when Carroll introduces the metamorphic Caterpillar after Alice expresses identity issues and introduces the irritable Queen of Hearts after Alice's angry outburst (par. 29). Using this textual evidence to view Wonderland as an internal force representative of Alice's consciousness, Alice's resisting readership manifests within Wonderland's various creature citizens through a childish connection, whereas her patriarchal Victorian English ideology is evident within Wonderland's royalty.

Reading Wonderland and its inhabitants as representative of Alice's conscience is consistent with the end of the novel, but the internal nature of Wonderland is explicit through more than Alice's remark that she has "had such a curious dream" (Carroll 189). After

Alice cries and chastises herself aloud after being unable to reach the garden door key, the narrator comments that Alice is "very fond of pretending to be two people" (13), even noting that "sometimes, she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears to her eyes" (12). Although Alice cries a few times in the novel, it is only when lamenting how lonely she is. Her tears are never caused directly by Wonderland's citizens. Considering the intensity with which she is noted to speak to herself, it is not atypical that Wonderland's fantastical inhabitants, the adult women especially, are characterized as aggressive to the point of verbal and physical violence. Only after an explanation of Alice's self-quarrelling are most of Wonderland's residents introduced. By illustrating Alice's precondition to argue both sides of a point internally, Carroll alludes to the role that Wonderland's inhabitants take. They are physical manifestations of Alice's documented habit of two-sided internal discussion, illustrated by Alice's extended conversations with the Caterpillar (59–69), the Cheshire Cat (89–93), and other instances of identity discussion with Wonderland's citizens.

Wonderland's creatures are characterized as childlike and represent part of Alice's dual identity as both a little girl and a Victorian English citizen. When put into conversation with postcolonial scholarship on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this reading treads between perpetuating harmful stereotypes of communities characterized as "other" and being convincing and respectful. However, the creatures' connection with Alice and their childlike disposition is evidenced in the novel. Following her introduction to the group of animals on the shore of her pool of tears, the narrator remarks that "after a few minutes[,] it seemed quite natural to Alice to find herself talking familiarly with them, as if she had known them all her life" (30). When asked for suggestions to help dry the group off, the Mouse recites a history lesson about William the Conqueror when Alice had recently thought about the historical figure several pages beforehand (25, 30). Similarly, the Caterpillar answers Alice's internal questions, "'One side of what? The other side of what?' . . . as if she had asked [them] aloud" (68). This rapid interconnectedness of thought illustrates a link between Alice and the animals, resulting from their childish natures. When arguing with the Lory, it eventually would only answer Alice with, "I am older than you, and must know better" (30), reminiscent of a response a child on a playground might give another. The Lory refuses to tell Alice its age when pressed, again

displaying the animal's child-like nature. Likewise, the Eaglet and other animals participate in a type of adolescent bullying of the Dodo:

> "In that case," said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, "I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies—"
>
> "Speak English!" said the Eaglet. "I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!" And the Eaglet bent down its head to hide a smile; some of the other birds tittered audibly. (Carroll 32)

The animals' childish dispositions represent Alice's anti-English side, competing against Wonderland's royal manifestations of English society to encourage Alice's resistance to the dominant culture. When arguing for Alice as a feminist icon, Aihong Ren notes her curiosity and rationality as deviating from typical Victorian standards for women. However, Shi notes that scholars citing Alice's rationality incorrectly compare Alice to the standards for adult women (182). Comparing Alice to the standards for Victorian girls, Shi concludes that Alice "actual[ly] conform[s] to the social rules of the Victorian era" (185). Based on these criteria, Wonderland's animals deviate from the standards for Victorian girls in their lack of rationality, which they employ regularly throughout the novel. For example, the Frog-Footman replies to Alice's query of how to get into the Duchess's house with, "There might be some sense in your knocking . . . if we had the door between us. For instance, if you were inside, you might knock, and I could let you out, you know" (Carroll 79), and the March Hare offers Alice wine when none is at the table (96). Using this lack of rationality, the animals influence Alice to abandon her Victorian ways, facilitating her move toward resisting readership.

Although the animals express their desire for Alice to move away from Victorian culture through example, they also hint at this desire through dialogue. Alice is asked, "Who are you?" and similar variations of the question by the Caterpillar (Carroll 60), the Pigeon (72), and the Queen of Hearts (116), although the Queen directs the question to the Knave of Hearts. Alice's responses to the two creatures are full of doubt and hesitation (60, 72), whereas the Knave of Hearts answers for Alice

with a nod (116). In asking this question, the animals sow confusion in Alice's identity journey, attempting to eliminate Victorian society's grasp on Alice. The Caterpillar furthers this goal by informing Alice that change should be welcome, as she will "get used to it in time" (68).

Additionally, to stop Alice from directly interacting with the Duchess, a representative of Victorian patriarchy, the Frog-Footman asks Alice if she is "to get in at all" (Carroll 80). Alice, due to the stagnant nature of Victorian English values, especially concerning women's status, is continually surprised by the ever-changing nature of the animal's irrational defiance of Victorian culture. Through subtle and direct dialogue, the animals attempt to strengthen Alice's resistant reading, leading her away from the pull of the dominant culture.

Toward the end of the novel, Carroll introduces Wonderland's royal court, primarily consisting of the King of Hearts, the Queen of Hearts, and the Duchess among other nameless face cards, which are representative of patriarchal Victorian values. Although some scholars (Graner 254; Ren 2062; Shi 187) attribute Wonderland as a matriarchy headed by the Queen, I contend that the Queen has power in name only and the King is Wonderland's actual ruler. Although the Queen is loud and aggressive, her demands for beheading are often ignored by her staff or stifled, as with her demand to behead the croquet players when the King quietly states that "[they] are all pardoned" (Carroll 137). Furthermore, the King acts as the judge during the Knave's trial, meaning he (not the Queen) has final judgment over the proceedings. The royal court represents patriarchal structure through the King's quiet dominance over Wonderland, acting as a stand in for Victorian society, to which the animal citizens are in opposition. This opposition is the primary reasoning for Alice's identity crisis, resulting in the creatures' endorsement of resistant readership in the face of Victorian patriarchy. Additionally, Wonderland's male domination is true of consumerism and food consumption in the Victorian era. Victorian women are the most affected by commodity culture and weight struggles, with "the inclination to consume . . . always imminent," but Victorian men are the actual consumers, as they hold power over finances and beauty standards (Coar 66).

The royal court contains two of the three women who enact the persuading for the dominant culture. Victorian patriarchy actively harms these women, but they illustrate Friedrich Engels's 1893 Marxist concept of false consciousness, or intense indoctrination into the

dominant ideology, so much so that one would act against one's own interests. This false consciousness is illustrated in the Duchess taking care of her screeching baby and enduring the Cook's onslaught of pans despite having the ability to leave whenever she likes (Carroll 83–86). Despite the Duchess's aggression, which is not characteristic of the Victorian "Angel" of the house, the Duchess's reluctant childrearing is emblematic of a Victorian woman's responsibility toward the home, children, and her "self-sacrificing" nature (Ren 2061). The women in the royal court willingly work to indoctrinate Alice into these Victorian patriarchal standards despite their distaste for such expectations, as seen by the Duchess speaking roughly to her child and violently tossing him up and down (Carroll 85).

These women in the royal court work in opposition to the animals, who try to inspire free thought within Alice. In the garden, the Duchess "tuck[s] her arm affectionately into Alice's," physically attaching herself to the little girl to prevent her from leaving. The Duchess restricts Alice from having a private thought, saying, "Thinking again?" to which Alice responds, "'I've a right to think,' . . . for she was beginning to feel a little worried" (Carroll 135). Additionally, after Alice states, "[Mustard is] a mineral, I think, [. . .] the Duchess, who seemed ready to agree to everything that Alice said" replies, "Of course it is" (134). The Duchess agrees with everything Alice says to dissuade Alice from having free thoughts so she cannot question her interpellation in Victorian culture. The Duchess wishes to stifle Alice's internal discussion. When the Queen asks, "Who is this?" about Alice (116), she directs the question to the Knave rather than Alice herself. The animals ask this question intending to disorient Alice from her Victorian identity. In contrast, the Queen avoids having Alice question her identity and thus avoids questioning her status as a subject of interpellation, guiding her away from resistant readership.

Alice is unable to resist the dominant patriarchal culture, emphasized in the way consumerism and consumption are represented in Alice's obsession with food. As she falls down the rabbit hole, her consumerist tendencies are exemplified in her fascination with the "ORANGE MARMALADE" jar. Alice takes the "jar from one of the shelves as she passed," finds it empty, and "put[s] it into one of the cupboards as she [falls] past" (Carroll 3–4), much like a consumer in a store. Alice's appetite is constant, evidenced by the narrator's mention that Alice

"always took a great interest in questions of eating or drinking" (106) and her comment at the trial about "get[ting it] done" so they would "hand round the refreshments!" (163). Alice's rampant consumption of food is punished by Carroll in the form of bodily modification (Coar 57). Each time she gluttonously consumes the "EAT ME" and "DRINK ME" refreshments, Alice's body suffers odd consequences: e.g., her neck elongates (15), she grows too large for the White Rabbit's house and becomes stuck (44), and her neck becomes serpentine (70). Only when she "set[s] to work very carefully, nibbling first at one and then at the other" of the mushroom pieces is her change in size completed smoothly (74), akin to how Victorian beauty standards restrict women's consumption. The reward of restriction is evident even in food choice, as Alice eats a mushroom, a vegetable, rather than the usual drink or cake. Alice eventually falls victim to the restraint on consumption that Victorian men have commanded.

The trial further exhibits Alice's complete surrender to her Victorian English identity. When called to be the next witness at the trial, "she jump[s] up in such a hurry that she tip[s] over the jury-box with the edge of her skirt, upsetting all the jurymen on to the heads of the crowd below" (Carroll 176). Despite her large size and physical power, she follows the King's order to place all jurors back as they were. By physically knocking over the jurors, who are representative of her resistance to the dominant culture as animals, and following the King's order, she finalizes her choice to abide by the dominant culture and submit to men. Likewise, when she starts to grow in the courtroom, Alice "decide[s] to remain where she [is] as long as there [is] room for her" (169), illustrating her apprehension to change evident in her earlier conversation with the Caterpillar (67–68). Because Alice refuses to move, the Dormouse who is sitting next to her is uncomfortable and then physically displaced (169), further illustrating her identity choice. By displacing the Dormouse, a creature that represents Alice's internal resistant reader, Alice has chosen to abandon her duality, inviting in Victorian patriarchy and its expectations. When Alice wakes from her dream, she is instructed by her sister to "run in to tea" (189), "which, as Brittany O'Sullivan notes, symbolizes the domestic sphere of the middle class in which Victorian women lived and that Alice enters without hesitation" (qtd. in Shi 185). However, Alice refers twice to Wonderland's royalty flippantly as a "pack of cards" (116, 187),

signifying her apprehension to her interpellation. Furthermore, Alice is envisioned by her sister to recount her dreams of Wonderland to other children to make "their eyes bright and eager," and her sister earnestly hopes that Alice can "keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood" (192).

Carroll's main character Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* outlines the struggle between free thought and patriarchal culture many young girls in Victorian England likely encountered. The novel provides a hopeful outlook on the topic despite Alice succumbing to the dominant ideology. Although her internal resistant reader, characterized by Wonderland's creature citizens, thoroughly attempted to persuade Alice through connection and dialogue, her adherence to Victorian systems of power and values prevails. Alice's willingness to restrict her consumption despite her voracious appetite best illustrates her interpellation into Victorian society by giving up a prominent part of herself for male benefit. It is her apprehension of change that keeps Alice a subject of interpellation. Despite Judith Fetterley's hope to foster resisting readers, the dominant culture sometimes has too firm a grasp on subjects to implement significant changes in perception, as Alice's adventures exhibit. However, resistant reading takes effort and dedication that is often overlooked. Alice's future retelling of her time in Wonderland will invite others, as well as herself, to reconnect with an internal resistant reader, illustrating that breaking free of interpellation is not a linear process.

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“Dig It Up”: The Complex Africanist Presence of *Holes*

Brianna Bell

Although progress has been made across the years in the film industry, black characters in Hollywood have historically been represented in one-dimensional ways. They were the “token black friend” used to show diversity among a film’s cast without having a personality of their own, or the “violent gangster” who was in and out of prison or running from the law. These representations of “blackness” (the social, cultural, and political experiences and connotations that come with being black) leave no room for interpreting—or reinterpreting—racial identity and the role blackness plays in everyday life. Said another way, these representations bolster the trope of American Africanism. Renowned author and scholar of African American literature Toni Morrison explains American Africanism and its history in her 1993 book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. She defines American Africanism as “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (6–7).

The 2003 Disney film *Holes* presents a multidimensional portrayal of blackness that invites discussion of this concept. When viewed alongside Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, the film *Holes* offers a complex rendering of blackness that does *not* advance the trope of American Africanism. Rather, *Holes* features a complex representation of race in the setting of a juvenile prison, one where blackness is both centralized and humanized. This complex representation depends on the film’s divergence from films’, and specifically Disney’s, typical portrayal of black characters and the characters’s relationships with each other.

Holes, based on Louis Sachar’s 1998 novel of the same name, is a 2003 film produced by Walt Disney Pictures. The film’s story follows Stanley Yelnats IV, a poor, white teenager who is wrongfully arrested for theft and sent to a juvenile detention camp in Green Lake, Texas. The boys at the camp are forced to dig holes daily despite the dangers of the desert sun, rattlesnakes, and yellow-spotted lizards. The film tackles several heavy topics for a Disney film, such as racism, oppression, and

power dynamics within the juvenile justice system. The importance of race cannot be overstated; the film's critique of these topics would feel unrealistic if the entire population of Camp Green Lake had been white boys. Assertions on the importance of race in the film may seem pedantic, but the erasure of discussions surrounding race and representation would be problematic.

Morrison writes about this assertion in *Playing in the Dark*. In her words, "The world does not become raceless or will not become unracialized by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act" (46). This statement goes beyond the literary analysis on which she spends much of her time and into real trends in US discourse, making it an invaluable tool for film analysis.

The trope of an Africanist presence permeates American literature, most frequently turning black characters into a space that white authors can use to meditate and reflect on themselves and their experiences—at the expense of the black characters' humanity. One example Morrison points to is Willa Cather's 1940 novel *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Sapphira Colbert, a disabled woman, is convinced that her husband is having or planning an affair with Nancy, the daughter of her enslaved servant Till (Cather). To curb her husband's "interest," Sapphira invites her lecherous nephew to visit, in the hopes that he will rape Nancy. The "slave girl" Nancy is functionally alone in the Colbert household: Sapphira loathes her, the darker-skinned enslaved people envy her, and her mother Till is loyal only to Sapphira (Cather). Morrison argues that such conditions can only exist "in a slave society where the mistress can count on (and an author can believe the reader does not object to) the complicity of a mother in the seduction and rape of her own daughter" (21). That is to say, such conditions are unhuman and unrealistic. Yet the reader is asked to believe this portrayal of blackness and racial representations to understand and appreciate Sapphira's reconciliation with her fa mily at the end of the novel.

The trend of asking consumers to enjoy unhuman and unrealistic portrayals extends beyond literature. Films produced by the Walt Disney Company have become well known for their participation in the trend as well as the resulting criticism. Jessica Kee and Alphonso Grant, in their chapter "Disney's (Post?)-Racial Gaze: Film, Pedagogy, and the Construction of Racial Identities," point to the 1946 film *Song of the South* as an example. Uncle Remus, a black employee of a white family,

is portrayed as a negative stereotype of black servitude through his "placid, conciliatory responses to White hegemony" (Kee and Grant 73). Although this interpretation is complicated by Remus' status as the keeper of black oral narrative, viewers are nonetheless asked to accept a sanitized—or Disneyfied (76)—version of blackness that has been removed from a social and political context. If this trend is common in Disney films, then how does *Holes* complicate such portrayals?

Although a white teenager, Stanley, is the main focus of *Holes*, black characters fill the population of Camp Green Lake. The named black campers live with Stanley in D-Tent: X-Ray is the mean-spirited, *de facto* leader of the group who orders a strict hierarchy; Armpit is a tough guy who provides comedic relief; and Zero likes to dig holes and keeps to himself. Wide-sweeping shots of the population highlight that more black and brown characters live in the camp. For instance, after Stanley accidentally falls onto a camper in the break room, the two start to fight. The camera switches to a higher angle, revealing that many of the campers are black or brown (31:40–32:28). It could be argued that their background presence both follows Disney's trend of stereotyping black characters and lands them in the Africanist role outlined by Morrison. These characters had to commit a crime to be arrested and sent to Camp Green Lake, which feeds the stereotype that black and brown[1] people are criminals. Moreover, because these characters (except Zero) do not directly further the plot, their existence could be interpreted as a playground for Stanley to contemplate his privilege as a white teenager or for Sachar (the original novel's author) to contemplate his humanity as a white man. With this line of logic, *Holes* falls into Morrison's fourth category of topics that need critical discussion: "the manipulation of the Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation . . . on one's own humanity" (53). On the other hand, these representations are made more complex across the film in ways that transcend traditional expectations of black characters.

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[1] Writers and scholars debate over whether "brown" should be capitalized to indicate race. I have chosen to use "brown" to encompass characters who have lighter skin tones and whose physical features may lead others to assume that those characters are black or Hispanic, as people of these backgrounds are imprisoned at an alarming rate. For more information on the use of "Brown," see "Capitalize the B in Brown" (Balta), w which is included in the Works Cited.

The very presence of these black characters, bound to the camp and rejected by society, complicates *Holes*' representation of race. First, the black characters are not Stanley's servants, nor do they show any sense of loyalty to him as the enslaved people do in Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. In *Holes*, the campers are expected to show loyalty only to X-Ray, a black teenager, because of his social status at the camp. Stanley learns this expectation early in his sentence; when he grabs a shovel to dig holes for the first time, X-Ray takes the shovel from him. Other campers let him know that X-Ray gets to use that shovel because "it's shorter than the rest of them" and "smaller shovel, smaller hole" (16:36–57). Second, although the characters are bound to the camp and rejected by society, they do not act out a sanitized version of their reality as Uncle Remus does in *Song of the South*. The characters in *Holes* are aware of the cruelties of their situation, and they do what is necessary to survive without sacrificing their humanity. For instance, they know that the labor they perform is akin to slavery. When Armpit catches Zero helping Stanley dig his hole for the day, he remarks, "Where's your whip, Caveman? You don't want your slave to be slacking off" (1:06:57–07:03). The social position of the black characters and their awareness of this position complicate the notion of an Africanist presence meant to build up the white characters or author. This notion is complicated further by the inner workings of the juvenile justice system, represented in the film by Camp Green Lake.

Morrison argues that, through literature, white American authors use the Africanist presence to construct a "new White man" identity that depends on being the opposite of the black population. She illustrates her point by breaking down a passage from Bernard Bailyn's 1986 book *Voyagers to the West*. William Dunbar, the subject of the passage, is a man of "fine education, London sophistication, [and] theological and scientific thought" (Bailyn qtd. in Morrison 43). And yet, he trades this life for the authority and power of Mississippi plantation life (44). Authority and power over a black population became core tenets of the white American man over time, a belief that wove its way into societal structures. The juvenile justice system, as a remnant of slavery, operates in a way that upholds these tenets.

Texas, the location of the fictional Camp Green Lake, has a controversial history with its juvenile justice system. William Bush provides an overview of this history in his chapter "Introduction: Race,

Childhood, and Juvenile Justice History." He describes a statewide scandal of the early 2000s when youth in juvenile detention facilities were revealed to have been abused, physically and sexually, for numerous years. Bush notes that "poor whites, African Americans, and Mexican Americans" are at the highest risk of enduring abuse in juvenile detention facilities because they fill "the dockets of juvenile courts, the cells of county detention centers, and the dormitories of large juvenile facilities" (3). Researchers David Barrett and Antonis Katsiyannis, in their study "Juvenile Delinquency Recidivism: Are Black and White Youth Vulnerable to the Same Risk Factors?," corroborate Bush's claim. Barrett and Katsiyannis examine the role that racial differences play in predictors of repeat criminal offenses. They report that mental-health history and characteristics of the first offense are stronger predictors of recidivism for white youth, whereas gender, poverty, and school classification of an emotional or behavioral disorder are stronger predictors for black youth (190–91). When read together, Bush's examination and Barrett and Katsiyannis's study reveal that black and white youth are sent to juvenile prisons for different reasons; however, both groups are detained in a system that wields authority and power over them.

On the surface, the campers in *Holes* are subjugated by the all-white authority figures. Mr. Sir, the head counselor at Camp Green Lake, takes pleasure in exerting control over the camp, especially over the group in D-Tent. He explains—with a smile—his philosophy to the Warden of the camp as "punishment and reward" so that "every time they see me coming, a little shiver goes up their spine" (57:45–54). Dr. Pendanski, the counselor for D-Tent, cannot intimidate the campers like Mr. Sir due to his smaller, less intimidating build. He aligns himself with the campers and takes on a nurturing and empathetic role, which leads to the campers giving him the nickname "Mom." However, to ensure that he retains authority over the group, he bullies Zero by calling him "stupid" and "worthless" throughout the film. Warden Walker, owner of the camp, proves her authority by staying informed of everything that happens at the camp. When meeting Stanley for the first time, she knows his nickname is Caveman despite its recency (42:10–14). Her constant surveillance keeps the camp running because everyone is intimidated by her presence. These three authority figures, by positioning themselves as above the campers, lean into a construction of whiteness that depends on the awareness and usage of a subjugated, disempowered Africanist presence.

The campers, however, subvert the Africanist stereotype by finding ways to exert power *despite* the prison atmosphere. One way they exert power is through the enforcing of nicknames. Nicknames play an important role as they allow the campers to create their own identities—identities that are separate from their lives before camp. When Dr. Pendanski introduces Stanley to members of D-Tent, he uses the boys' birth names: Rex for X-Ray, Alan for Squid, and Theodore for Armpit. The boys quickly correct him, but Dr. Pendanski brushes them off, saying, "They all have their little nicknames, but I prefer to use the names their parents gave them. The names society will recognize them by" (11:17–26). The boys continue to use their nicknames throughout the film and correct Dr. Pendanski each time he uses their birth names. Their assertion of power undermines Dr. Pendanski's authority, preventing them from being fully controlled.

Another way the campers exert power is through creating joy despite their circumstances. The campers make time for bonding and leisure—such as in the gaming room furnished with pool tables, foosball, and television sets—and they express their senses of humor. For example, when Mr. Sir has his back turned to fill the campers' water jugs, a camper nicknamed Magnet steals his sunflower seeds from his truck. Magnet holds up the seeds in triumph, and the rest of the campers cheer and joke about his hands acting as magnets (54:04–55:10). Creating joy through humorous moments demonstrates the power of agency as the boys maintain high spirits and remember their humanity. The juxtaposition of the campers' power and the administration's authority challenges the idea of the campers fulfilling the Africanist role.

One could argue that *Holes*, by virtue of its status as a Disney film, is not concerned with matters of blackness or racism. Sachar discusses the idea behind the story of *Holes* in his blog post "Holes Q & A" and makes no mention of the implications his plot has regarding race and racism. Digging holes in the Texas heat, according to him, is supposed to be ironic: "While [the campers] were ostensibly digging to build character, the camp warden actually had hidden and dishonorable reasons for demanding this chore." However, ignoring the subtle elements of racism is a disservice to the film. Sachar, as a well-known, white, male author, likely had a significant amount of power when negotiating to adapt his novel into the film. He was brought onto the project to write the screenplay for the film and likely helped to choose actors, design sets,

and stage scenes. Therefore, the choice to put black characters in the foreground and background and to show them undermining authority with their own sense of power was an intentional choice.

Sachar's choice reflects how blackness and the remnants of slavery puts black people into the juvenile justice system and into marginal positions in society. Kirsten Møllegaard, in her article "Haunting and History in Louis Sachar's *Holes*," writes of this phenomenon as a haunting of the nation: "At a national level, such literary instances of haunting constitute the ongoing process of dealing with a shameful and troublesome past, most poignantly with slavery" (150). This haunting, if left unaddressed, will grow and further permeate societal structures. The haunting can be quelled by the efforts of writers, such as Sachar, to encourage empathy and critical thinking among the youth population. Vandana Saxena, in her article "Magical Worlds, Real Encounters: Race and Magical Realism in Young Adult Fiction," illuminates why the narrative of *Holes* is important for young readers: "*Holes* emerges to be a narrative of the revelation of racial tensions; . . . at the same time, the magical motifs linked to the coming-of-age story assert the hope and promise of atonement possible in the present as well as the future." Perhaps Sachar did not set out to write a story embedded with racial identity, but these themes weave their way into the story. The narrative Sachar created for *Holes* weaves together fantasy with real-world trends, offering a lens through which blackness can be shown and interpreted in a new, more complex manner than what many Hollywood films offer.

Holes uses a unique portrayal of blackness and a distinct connection between characters to produce a narrative in which blackness is both centralized and humanized. This portrayal goes against the tropes of Hollywood productions and offers a perspective on juvenile delinquency that is typically ignored. Film studies would benefit from using Morrison's argument of the Africanist presence to revisit classic films and investigate the presence, absence, or complication of blackness.

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“The Prince’s Jester” and “My Uncle’s Fool”: Foolishness and Metamorphosis in *Much Ado about Nothing*

Kathryn “Katie” Claire Bergquist

Alongside comedic misunderstandings and mistaken identities, Shakespeare’s fools—hereafter stylized as “Fools”—are a classic aspect of his comedies. However, despite being a comedy, *Much Ado about Nothing* lacks a definite “Fool” character. Although the dimwitted Dogberry comes to mind, he is not the only Fool in the play; a closer analysis of metaphor, the use of humor, and the interactions between these Fools and their masters reveals two underappreciated Fools in *Much Ado about Nothing*: Beatrice and Benedick. Through witty banter, carefully placed insults, and recurring metaphor, Beatrice recognizes Benedick as a fellow Professional Fool, forcing him to undergo a moral metamorphosis and ultimately turning him into a moral, “responsible” Fool.

To classify Beatrice and Benedick as Fools, one must first distinguish what makes a Shakespearean Fool. For the sake of clarity, I’ve separated the modern word from its Shakespearean counterpart. When uncapitalized, “fool” refers to the modern definition of “fool,” defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a person lacking in intelligence or judgement, and related senses” (“Fool” N. def. 1). When capitalized, “Fool” refers to the Shakespearean Fool. One of Shakespeare’s own Fool actors, Robert Armin, sorted Fools into two categories: “natural” and “professional” (Haworth 116). Natural Fools are fools in every sense; most of their witty commentary stems from their lack of intelligence. *Much Ado’s* Dogberry, for instance, is a classic example of a Natural Fool; whether Dogberry is misquoting proverbs or calling Leonato “tedious” in an attempt to compliment his wealth, his unintentional verbal blunders anger, confound, and amuse those around him, all while he remains blissfully unaware of his own Foolishness (116–23). For Professional Fools, Foolishness is wholly artificial; they are often employed as Court Fools, but lacking formal employment doesn’t disqualify a character from serving as a Professional Fool (116–23). Touchstone in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, for instance, doesn’t limit his witticisms to the confines of court or his employers (Bell 23–24). A

Professional Fool's primary role is to chastise their "social betters" by "questioning [. . .] and revealing the flaws in the protagonists' reasoning and behaviour" through a mixture of intelligence and humor, often referred to as "wit" (Haworth 116). Of course, Professional Foolishness has varying degrees of success; those whose witticisms push the target of their wit—their "master"—to self-reflection and long-term change serve as "responsible" Professional Fools, while those who misuse that power are "irresponsible" Fools (Bidgoli 214). Also called "jesters" or "artificial fools," Professional Fools wield a unique license to critique and even insult their employers and/or "social betters," using language to "[break] down [. . .] [social] barriers" and encouraging personal growth in those for whom attempts at encouraging self-reflection are typically met with hostility (Bell 12; Bidgoli 212–13; Haworth 116–18; Sahi 18).

Although Fool-like characters intended for comic relief are present in Shakespeare's earlier works, the publication of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1595 and Will Kemp's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's Men marked a shift for Shakespeare's Fools. Around the time that the widely-acclaimed Fool actor Will Kemp was replaced by literary critic and author Robert Armin in 1599, Shakespeare began to differentiate between "clowns"—characters who wielded Kemp's slapstick-style comedy for comic relief—and Fools (Bell 12). Rather than Kemp's comic relief characters like Launce in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, later plays like *As You Like It* or *Much Ado about Nothing* are rife with Fools who wield their wit against those around them, prompting self-reflection and change (9–12). Rather than being relegated to the sidelines, Foolishness is directed "toward 'some necessary question of the play'" through Robert Armin's Professional Fools, including Touchstone in *As You Like It* and Feste in *Twelfth Night* (21).

However, alongside Armin's Dogberry, *Much Ado About Nothing* hid two other Professional Fools in plain sight: Beatrice and Benedick. In his aptly-named literary analysis of Shakespeare's "Great Stage" of fools, Fools, and Fooling, Robert H. Bell recognizes both Benedick and Beatrice as Fools. Furthermore, he argues that "fooling and feeling" are constantly at odds throughout the play; for Beatrice and Benedick, Foolishness is not an end, but a barrier to true emotional vulnerability and interpersonal connection (55). Although I agree with Bell's categorization, I argue that "fooling and feeling" are not entirely at odds; Foolishness is not a mere pretense or barrier, but a

tool wielded by Beatrice. Throughout their early interactions, Beatrice continually references fools, Fools, and Fooling. In a series of elaborate metaphors, Beatrice imagines Benedick as a Fool's opponent or even as a Fool himself. Beatrice's references to Fooling and her use of wit force Benedick to recognize and attempt to correct his own failings. Beatrice's "fooling" encourages Benedick's "feeling," ultimately turning him into a moral, "responsible," and "Professional" Fool. Any good Fool—Natural or Professional—isn't complete without a "master," and Beatrice is more than happy to allow Benedick to fill that role. Before she and Benedick even meet, Beatrice takes aim at Benedick's promiscuous nature by calling him "Signor Mountanto," a euphemistic reference to a type of directional thrust used in fencing ("montant"). When others attempt to defend him in his absence, insisting that he is a "good soldier," Beatrice notes that Benedick may be "a good soldier to a lady, but what is he to a lord?" (Shakespeare 1.1.50–52). Even when Benedick arrives, Beatrice has no qualms about criticizing him to his face, suggesting that it would be impossible for "disdain [to] die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick" and that "courtesy [. . .] must convert to disdain [in Benedick's presence]" (1.1.115–18). Whether Benedick is present or even receptive to Beatrice's critiques, Beatrice's message remains clear: Benedick's continual mistreatment of women makes him less of a man, unworthy of her respect and the title of "Lord." Throughout their interactions, Beatrice crafts elaborate, carefully-placed metaphors which result in a "social reversal," allowing her—a social inferior—to critique Benedick's behavior with impunity (Haworth 117–18; Weinhold 50). Thus, Beatrice serves as a Professional Fool with her social superior and target, Benedick, as her master.

Beatrice first mentions Fools when discussing a metaphorical duel between Benedick and Cupid, and a closer analysis of this metaphor shows that Beatrice turns the multiple definitions of "fool" against Benedick. In fact, she may even view herself as a kind of Professional Fool. Beginning the jest, Beatrice jokes that Benedick's promiscuity is paired with an inflated ego; he "set up his bills [i.e. advertisements]" around Messina, challenging Cupid to a duel in an attempt to usurp the God of Love (Shakespeare 1.1.37–40). However, Beatrice notes that her "uncle's fool" stood in for Cupid and "challenged him at the bird-bolt," a reference to a fowling game played with blunt arrows (1.1.39–40; Weinhold 49–50). It's unclear what exactly Beatrice means,

but she is likely implying that Benedick is so promiscuous that his behavior essentially constitutes a duel with Cupid. As Paul Weinhold notes, this metaphor can be interpreted in one of two ways: if "my uncle's fool" is meant to be taken literally, Benedick believes that he is a worthy adversary for Cupid, the Roman god of love and lust (50). In reality, Beatrice insists that Benedick is only a worthy adversary to a Fool; Benedick may be a "lady-killer," so to speak, but that doesn't make him worthy of dueling Cupid himself (50). According to this interpretation, Beatrice is calling Benedick a fool in the traditional sense, turning the multiple definitions of the word against Benedick to insult his intelligence. However, if "my uncle's fool" metaphorically refers to Beatrice, the metaphor's meaning changes drastically: Beatrice recognizes herself as a Professional Fool battling against Benedick. With this interpretation, "**fowl**ing with blunt-headed arrows becomes **foul**ing with the taut bowstring of wit and the sharp arrows of insult," and Beatrice is more than well-armed (50; emphasis in original).

During the masquerade ball, Beatrice once again turns the varying definitions of "fool" against Benedick, inadvertently revealing him to be a Professional Fool as well. During the ball, Beatrice takes advantage of the anonymity a masquerade provides, referring to Benedick as "the Prince's jester, a very dull fool" (Shakespeare 2.1.103). While the Prince's jester may be employed as a Professional Fool, his lack of wit and overall mental "dull[ness]" suggests that he—and, therefore, Benedick—is Beatrice's opposite, a Natural Fool masquerading as a Professional Fool. However, Benedick's behavior contradicts this. Unlike Dogberry or other Natural Fools, Benedick's Foolishness isn't derived from mistaken proverbs or malapropisms, but from the deliberate use of his wit to fuel the fire of their "merry war" (1.1.45–46). During their first encounter, Benedick calls Beatrice "Lady Disdain" and wishes that his horse "had the speed of [her] tongue" (1.1.88; 1.1.105). Like a Professional Fool, Benedick continually chastises Beatrice for her behavior using a mixture of intelligence and humor, matching her wit at every turn.

Although Beatrice doesn't directly admit that Benedick is a Professional Fool, it's no coincidence that she uses a metaphor involving a Fool to criticize Benedick. During the masquerade ball, Beatrice echoes her earlier metaphor in which her "uncle's fool" is a worthy adversary for Benedick, imagining Benedick not as a worthy opponent for a fool, but as a Professional Fool himself, albeit one who critiques

his social inferior (Beatrice) rather than a suitable "master" of a higher rank (1.1.39). If Beatrice is imagining herself as her "uncle's fool" in her earlier metaphor, as Paul Weinhold suggests, referring to Benedick as a "dull fool" allows her to take a step toward turning that metaphor into a reality, casting herself as Benedick's opponent in an enduring battle of Fools (50). "Dull" has many meanings in Shakespeare; it denotes stupidity, sluggishness, or even desensitization ("dull"). Thus, by calling Benedick a "dull" Fool, Beatrice acknowledges Benedick's status as a Professional Fool while also exposing him for being a stupid, sluggish, and generally desensitized Fool. As Robert Bell suggests, for Benedick, "fooling" has gotten in the way of "feeling" (55). Benedick's insistence that he has a "hard heart" and "love[s] none" leads him to shun marriage and to continue his battles of wit with Beatrice (Shakespeare 1.1.120–22).

Contrary to the actions of a "responsible" Professional Fool like Beatrice, Benedick's Foolish quips are primarily targeted at her, his social inferior. Furthermore, his Foolishness is ineffectual at best; Beatrice continues to berate him for his mistreatment of women until she learns of his sudden infatuation with her (3.2.107–16). Benedick may have the wit of a Professional Fool, but that wit is misdirected, making him an "irresponsible" Fool whose critiques fail to encourage self-reflection in his "master." Recognizing Benedick as a fellow Professional Fool (albeit a poor one), Beatrice turns her "skirmish of wit" with Benedick into a battle between a "responsible" Professional Fool and an "irresponsible" one.

At a glance, Beatrice's Fooling appears as futile as Benedick's; despite her quips, he shows no signs of redirecting his Foolishness toward a more suitable target, and Beatrice, likewise, refuses to halt her "merry war" against Benedick (1.1.60). Where Beatrice's long-standing verbal war against Benedick fails to force him to recognize his own failings, the brief interference of the "Men's Club of Messina"—Leonato, Claudio, and the Prince—succeeds, urging Benedick to reflect on his promiscuous nature and his mistreatment of women (Berger 305). Both Beatrice and the "Men's Club of Messina" are the catalyst for Benedick's self-reflection—after all, it is knowledge of Beatrice's affections toward him that forces Benedick to reflect on his faults in the first place—but Beatrice is the only one who actively "browbeat[s]" Benedick into moral reformation, channeling his self-reflection into action (Bell 22; Bidgoli

210). Once Benedick moves to comfort Beatrice after her young cousin Hero is falsely accused of adultery, Beatrice and Benedick admit their love for one another. In response to Benedick offering Beatrice his hand, Beatrice insists that he "use it for my love some other way than swearing by it" (Shakespeare 4.1.309). This brief meeting between the two lovers marks a major turning point for Benedick: for the first time in the entire play, he shows sincere concern for Beatrice's wellbeing. After Leonato, ashamed by his daughter's perceived slight, wishes death upon her, Benedick even admonishes him: "Sir, sir, be patient. For my part, I am so attired in wonder I / know not what to say" (4.1.137–38). Benedick does so even without certainty that Hero is truly innocent, actively rejecting the misogynistic views of his comrades (4.1.310–12). Despite risking his friendship with Claudio, Benedick ultimately chooses Beatrice, fostering genuine moral growth in the process.

One could argue that Benedick's actions are driven by love rather than a moral metamorphosis, but his indirect treatment of Hero suggests otherwise. In wishing Beatrice farewell and promising to ensure that Claudio is brought to justice, Benedick encourages Beatrice to "go comfort [her] cousin" (4.1.315–16). Having already promised to follow Beatrice's wish that he kill Claudio, Benedick has no reason to wish Hero well or to tell Beatrice to comfort her. He even follows it by noting that "I must say [Hero] is dead, and so farewell" (4.1.316). Reminding one's significant other about the impending "death" of their beloved cousin is hardly an effective way to woo a potential significant other, especially one with whom he is deeply in love. For the first time, Benedick isn't trying to woo or quarrel with Beatrice; he's trying to *empathize* with her and to share in her frustration. Beatrice's "fooling" has allowed for Benedick's "feeling" (Bell 55). By encouraging her to comfort her cousin, Benedick demonstrates genuine care for both Beatrice and Hero. Given that Benedick claims to have a "hard heart" and to "love none," caring for someone—especially a woman with whom he has no interest in forming a romantic relationship with—reveals that his moral metamorphosis is not just a short-term shift born out of his love for Beatrice, but an enduring change (Shakespeare 1.1.120–22).

Once Benedick agrees to seek justice for Hero on Beatrice's behalf, Benedick becomes a true Professional Fool by channeling his wit and his newfound moral backbone toward a suitable target: Claudio. Once Benedick enters the scene, Claudio and Leonato remain seemingly

ignorant to Benedick's purpose, joking that they had come frighteningly close to "[having their] noses snapped off with two old men" (Shakespeare 5.1.112). While Benedick may have been receptive to Claudio and Don Pedro's hyperbole prior to his change of heart, his responses to their teasing are remarkably devoid of humor. When Claudio asks if Benedick will use his infamous wit in their impromptu verbal sparring match, Benedick responds by threatening him, insisting that his wit is "in [his] scabbard" (5.1.119–21). While Benedick attempts to seem serious, this seriousness only melds with his naturally Foolish nature, and he finally agrees to match Claudio's wit "in the career" (5.1.129–30; 5.1.135). Imagining himself as a warrior in a metaphorical tourney battle against Claudio, Benedick insists that Claudio's wit "ambles well" rather than gallops (5.1.146).

There are no direct references to "dull fool[s]" or Cupid, but Benedick wields his wit against Claudio the way Beatrice did against him (2.1.103). Although Benedick tries to suppress his usual humor in keeping with the seriousness of the situation, he still constructs his own elaborate metaphor with his "master"—Claudio—at the center. Within a single scene, the student has become the master; Benedick insults Claudio's wit just as Beatrice did in comparing Benedick to the Prince's fool. While it isn't as obvious as many of Beatrice's insults, Benedick still essentially serves as a Professional Fool to Claudio, attempting to force him to recognize the seriousness of the situation and to accept Benedick's challenge.

From comedies to tragedies, Fools have delivered scathing critiques of their social superiors or provided simple comic relief from the moment that Will Kemp and Robert Armin stepped onto the Shakespearean stage. While *Much Ado about Nothing* features Will Kemp as the "Natural" Fool Dogberry, two "Professional" Fools hide in plain sight. Throughout the course of *Much Ado*, Beatrice offers personal and social critique as a "Professional" Fool, albeit without the career to back it up. While she may not have the official title of court Fool, Beatrice wields her wit as a weapon against her "master," Benedick. Through metaphor, Beatrice constructs an enduring battle of Fools, forcing Benedick to reflect on and rectify his moral failings. By the play's end, Beatrice's use of Foolishness encourages Benedick to aim his own wit at a worthy target: Claudio. Beatrice's "Fooling" encourages Benedick's "feeling,"

transforming him from a "hard[-]heart[ed]" and irresponsible Fool into a moral, responsible, and "Professional" Fool worthy of the title (1.1.120).

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A Different Kind of Magic: Derrida's *Differance* and Silver-working in R. F. Kuang's *Babel*

Antonina "Nina" D'Eramo

In R. F. Kuang's reimagined world of the eighteenth century, language not only is intimately intertwined with the politics of domination but also can alter physical reality, thanks to the work of The Royal Translation Institute at Oxford University (aptly nicknamed "Babel"). A practice called silver-working, developed at Babel, involves inscribing translated words or phrases onto silver bars, curing diseases, making industrial machinery more efficient, fortifying infrastructure, and advancing weaponry among countless other applications (Kuang). England's monopoly on silver-working and on translation scholarship have led to unparalleled economic and military achievement, placing the British Empire at the top of the global order. The novel *Babel* follows Robin Swift, a Canton-born, Chinese-English student as he learns the secrets of silver-working and reckons with his own involvement in Babel and complicity in British imperialism (Kuang). Silver-working seemingly derives its power from the act of translation, making Babel and its scholars the very lynchpin of the Empire. However, the way that silver-working is described in the novel points to an underlying source beyond translation. In this paper, I postulate that the underlying source which makes the hypothetical existence of silver-working possible is Derrida's *differance*.

Differance is a neologism created by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. The word is an encapsulation of the play of language he believed was not adequately captured by the verbs "to differ" and "to defer." We use the verb "to differ" to indicate "distinction, inequality, or discernibility," whereas we use the verb "to defer" to indicate "the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible" (Derrida, "Differance" 255). Both verbs refer to a kind of absence, and Derrida unites the two meanings through *differance*, maintaining the dissociative and the spatial/temporal connotations of both verbs. His predecessor Ferdinand de Saussure theorized that language is characterized by

absence—that is, every sign is understood by what it is not. Although Saussure writes, "in language there are only *differances* without positive terms," Derrida ascribes positive value to absence—*differance*—as that which makes signification possible (Saussure qtd. in "Differance" 263). Derrida goes on to say that *differance* is what makes presence itself possible, as presence can be understood only by its distinction from absence. Expecting resistance to such a radical assertion, Derrida writes,

> We might be tempted by an objection: to be sure, the subject . . . becomes a signifying subject (generally by speech or other signs) only by entering into the system of *differances* . . . . But can we not conceive of a presence and self-presence of the subject before speech or its signs, a subject's self-presence in a silent and intuitive consciousness? (267)

One might readily admit that signification is "entering into the system of differences" that is language but hesitate to apply the same logic to the word "presence." As Derrida implies in the framing of his question, the hesitation comes from the belief that "self-presence" has positive value, which can be understood intuitively by consciousness. However, this privileging of self-presence ignores the absence that makes it possible. According to Derrida then, presence only is because *differance* is not, and every presence bears the trace of *differance*.

Trace is the absence that marks every sign's presence, a symptom of *differance* that "makes the desire for presence possible in the first place and what makes the fulfilment of that desire impossible" (Bradley 77). Derrida describes the term "trace" in terms of signification:

> Differance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be present, appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. ("Differance" 265)

The "movement of signification" (265) extends both forward and backward in time—every element is tied to those elements that come before it and those that follow. As an element "presents" itself,

it "retains the mark of a past element." In other words, the "present" element is conceptualized and contextualized by all preceding elements. Simultaneously, the "present" element allows "itself [to] be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element" (Derrida, "Differance" 265). Or, the "present" element, even as it is being presented, effaces itself to make way for future elements. This continual process of self-effacement is what Derrida refers to as *trace*. "Present" elements are marked by absence and "already" absenting themselves, making true presence impossible since it is continuously deferred. Thus, presence is not "the absolutely matrical form of being" but a "determination" and an "effect" within a system of *differance* (Derrida, "Differance" 291). Trace itself is not a presence but rather the "simulacrum of a presence," which perpetually defers meaning (274).

Now that we have established the aspects of *differance* relevant to this paper, we can return to its implications for silver-working. Upon entering their second year as translation students, Robin and his cohort are introduced to the basic principle of silver working: "untranslatability." Professor Playfair, chair of Babel's faculty, explains that "when we say a word or phrase is untranslatable, we mean that it lacks a precise equivalent in another language" (Kuang 155). Playfair goes on to say,

> No translation can perfectly carry over the meaning of the original. But what is meaning? Does meaning refer to something that supersedes the words we use to describe our world? I think, intuitively, yes. . . . Humboldt, for instance, argues that words are connected to the concepts they describe by something invisible, intangible—a mystical realm of meaning and ideas, emanating from a pure mental energy which only takes form when we ascribe it an imperfect signifier. (156)

Here, Professor Playfair seems to discard the arbitrariness of language put forth by Saussure and accepted by Derrida. He describes the "invisible, intangible" connection between words and the concepts they describe as proposed by Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt. Such an erroneous assumption on Professor Playfair's part is Kuang's critique of how enmeshed the professors of Babel are in the ideology of colonialism, since Humboldt also argued that "a culture's language is deeply tied to the mental capacities

and characteristics of those who speak it," which was a line of reasoning that allowed the British to deem non-English speakers as mentally inferior (Kuang 156). It is the "pure mental energy" that Playfair describes (Kuang) that is of interest to this paper. Derrida describes *differance* as that which "makes the presentation of being-present possible . . . holding back and not exposing itself . . . yet is not itself concealed" ("Differance" 258). Essentially, he theorizes that, although *differance* is what makes presence possible, it never presents or "exposes" itself. It can only be uncovered by its trace, which is detected in language; the signifier exposes the trace of *differance*. This description sounds extremely similar to what Playfair calls "meaning": an "energy" that only "takes form" when ascribed "an imperfect signifier" (Kuang 156).

From Playfair's description of the "mystical realm of meaning and ideas" (Kuang 156), it may be theorized that this "energy" is metaphysical. Playfair could be referring to ontological difference, not *differance*. *Ontological difference*, as philosopher Martin Heidegger understood it, is the "difference [which] both originates and sustains that which emerges from it while holding itself back and allowing that which emerges to be on its own" (Brogan 52). Thus, ontological difference is the metaphysical genesis that distinguishes between *beings* and *Being*, *present* and *presencing*, while "holding itself back." In this way, ontological difference and *differance* seem to be closely related. Derrida even writes that "in one particular respect, *differance* is, to be sure, but the historical and epochal deployment of Being or of the ontological difference." At the same time, however, he writes, "*differance* conceived within the horizon of the question of Being" is but "an intrametaphysical effect of *differance*" (Derrida, "Differance" 272). To Derrida, *differance* lies outside of metaphysics because it lies outside of history. It is what "opens up the very space in which onto-theology . . . produces its system and history" (259). Thus, "differance is 'older' than the ontological differance or the truth of Being. . . . It is a trace that no longer belongs to the horizon of Being but one whose sense of Being is borne" (273). *Differance* is not a genesis in the Heideggerian sense but a play of traces beyond ontology that originates *differance*. If one stopped at ontological difference when trying to locate the source of silver-working's energy, then their findings would be incomplete.

After having described "untranslatability" as the "core principle" of silver-working (Kuang 155), Playfair reveals that is actually meaning

(established as *differance*) that gives silver-working its abilities (156). But how do Babel scholars draw from this source? Professor Playfair explains that the process of silver-working begins by "inscrib[ing] a word or phrase in one language on one side [of a silver bar], and a corresponding word or phrase in a different language on the other" (156). The physical act of inscribing the words or phrases, called *match-pairs*, onto the bar of silver is essential to the practice of silver-working, and it further supports the conclusion that *differance* is the source behind silver-working's abilities. According to Saussure, speech is the natural expression of language "whereas writing is the unnatural, technical or artificial inscription of the spoken word in permanent graphic form" (Bradley 65). However, this logic is flawed because, due to the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, all language is "unnatural" and thus belongs to the category Saussure calls writing (65). To redeem writing from its status as the "mere signifier of a signifier," Derrida appropriates the term and proposes arche-writing as the common framework of all "systems of signification" (68). According to Derrida's "Of Grammatology,"

> There has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added, only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement. (1692)

The match-pair on the silver bar, whatever it may be, is the supplement; it is the substitutive signification that points to the "real" (1692). However, because true presence is impossible as it is continuously deferred, what the inscription actually points to is the "simulacrum of presence" produced by trace, which becomes more important than true presence (Derrida, "Differance" 274). To invoke the trace, *Babel* scholars inscribe significations onto the silver.

The invocation of trace becomes clear from the rest of Professor Playfair's explanation of silver-working: "because translation can never be perfect, the necessary distortions—the meanings lost or warped in the journey—are caught, and then manifested by the silver. And that, dear students, is as close to magic as anything within the realm of natural science" (Kuang 156). Herein lies the crux of silver-working. Playfair

and his associates at Babel ascribe silver-working's "magic" to the meanings that lie between two translated words or phrases. For example, one commonly reproduced silver bar that is used to treat sick people has the word *triacle* inscribed on one side and *treacle* inscribed on the other. When the words are spoken out loud by the bar's user (necessary to activate the bar), the person on whom the bar is being used tastes a sweetness and is cured of illness. This bar ostensibly works because *treacle* was "first recoded in the seventeenth century in relation to the heavy use of sugar to disguise the bad taste of medicine" (Kuang 157) but can be traced back to the Old French word *triacle*, meaning "antidote" or "cure from a snakebite," which itself can be traced back to the Latin *theriaca* and the Greek *theriake*, both that mean "antidote" (157). Although the match-pair is only between the English and French, it is able to invoke "older etymologies" through a technique called "daisy-chaining" (158). The differences between the meanings of the match-pair and those "older etymologies" are what is "manifested by the silver" (158). So, although translation is a crucial component of silver-working, it is not the source of silver-working's abilities. Rather, translation is the vehicle through which Babel's scholars access *differance*.

The treacle/triacle example shows the play between the signified concepts of the match-pair. In trying to "establish the signified of [one] signifier[,] we are led to *other signifiers*" (Bradley 72)—i.e., the other signifier of the match-pair. In Derrida's words,

> . . . the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differances. Such a play then—differance—is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality. ("Differance" 263)

The concepts signified by the match-pair are literally "inscribed in a chain or a system" in which they refer to one another (263). The "systematic play of differances" (263) allows for each signified concept to be conceptualized as neither can be conceptualized by referring "only to itself" (263). Each one bears the trace of the other and effaces itself to make way for the other; each is characterized by an absence that defines

it. The magic of silver-working then lies in its ability to capture those absences. Thus, it is not the translative act but the underlying *differance* that generates the power of silver-working.

If all language is *differance* and if the "locus and operation" of *differance* is "seen wherever speech appeals to *differance*" (Derrida, "Differance" 256), then could not silver-working feasibly work using a match-pair in which both words are from the same language (256)? I would answer yes and no. The "operation" of *differance* is seen within one language just as it is seen across languages. In a letter to a Professor Izutsu concerning how best to define and translate the word "deconstruction," Derrida writes, "the word 'deconstruction' like all other words acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is to [sic] blithely called a 'context'" ("Letter" 7). Here, Derrida is obliquely describing the effects of trace within a single language, from which a word "acquires its value." He goes on to write: "I do not believe that translation is a secondary and derived event in relation to an original language or text. And as 'deconstruction' is a word, as I have just said, that is essentially replaceable in a chain of substitution, then that can also be done from one language to another" (8). In some ways, then, *differance* acts similarly both within and across languages. However, I would conjecture that it is the medium of silver that makes a match-pair from the same language unfeasible since we know that a bar's physical properties (including size and concentration of silver) affect its capabilities. Perhaps a different (or hypothetical) medium would be capable of capturing the trace between two words from the same language. Or perhaps translation is the only act capable of turning *differance* into an energy source. In the same letter to Izutsu, Derrida writes, "another word [. . .] can be found in Japanese to say the same thing [. . .] to speak of deconstruction, and to lead elsewhere to its being written and transcribed, in a word which will be also more beautiful" (8). Translation transforms language. Here, Derrida describes it as "a transcribing which makes that which it translates more beautiful" (8). In *Babel*, perhaps it is a transcribing which makes that which it translates more powerful.

There is one match-pair that Robin and his cohort are told not to attempt: translations of the word *translation* itself. The result is a paradox that violently destroys the silver bar onto which the match pair is inscribed. In the final scene of the novel, Robin and his comrades use

stacks of silver bars inscribed with match pairs of *translation* to destroy Babel and put a stop to the machinations of the British Empire:

> The bars were singing, shaking; trying, he thought, to express some unutterable truth about themselves, which was that translation was impossible, that the realm of pure meaning they captured and manifested would and could not ever be known, that the enterprise of this tower had been impossible from inception. (Kuang 535)

The match-pair approaches too close to "the realm of pure meaning." It tries to distill the differences between language into *differance* itself, which has "neither existence nor essence" (Derrida, "Differance" 259). And, as Derrida writes, "it is a relation between a *differance* that is accounted for and a *differance* that fails to be accounted for, where the establishment of a pure presence, without loss, is one with the occurrence of absolute loss, with death" (271). Derrida is speaking philosophically, but the match-pair does produce a kind of death by attempting to make evident the "inconceivable factor" that is *differance* (271).

By imagining the movement of signification as an energy source, silver-working demonstrates how absence is capable of creating presence (or at least the simulacrum of presence); it explains the trace left by the movement of signification. Although fictional, silver-working is inextricably tied to *differance*. Underlying R. F. Kuang's sharp indictment of British colonialism and the stratification of language, her ode to and a critical examination of the uses and capabilities of translation, is an exploration of philosophical linguistic theory as this paper has demonstrated. Reading *Babel* through this lens adds new perspective on the origin, production, and perpetuation of differences, both linguistically and conceptually, that have been weaponized by the Empire to preserve a standing social order.

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Hear the Music: Queering Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

Owen Gornicki

The works of James Baldwin, a black queer writer of black queer characters, have been analyzed extensively through the lenses of race and queer studies, to the point that other approaches are rare. Addressing Baldwin's work in her essay "Finding a Way to Listen: Emergence of the Hero as an Artist in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues,'" Jacqueline C. Jones laments the lack of diversity in the analytical approaches. Strangely, though, her statement does not hold for readings of "Sonny's Blues," the 1957 work of short fiction that she explores. The story addresses "a conservative algebra teacher living in Harlem, whose social assimilation has instilled in him a distrust of anything unconventional, learn[ing] . . . to accept the vocation and lifestyle of his younger sibling, an aspiring jazz musician" (Baldwin). As described by Charles Duncan in his own essay "Learning to Listen to 'Sonny's Blues,'" "it [Baldwin's work] has inspired prolific scholarship in the realms of race and cultural studies but has nevertheless been left out of the intensive queer theory scholarship that dominates discussions of the rest of Baldwin's oeuvre" (3). Jones rejects a queer reading entirely, declaring, "'Sonny's Blues' is pivotal in the Baldwin canon because its only focus is the rebirth of the hero as an artist . . . since sex and sexuality do not complicate the plot. . . . [T]he gut-wrenching rebirth that Sonny undergoes is pristine, untouched, and unclouded" (467). However, I argue against Jones' notion that sexuality is absent from "Sonny's Blues" and propose that the essay attempts to address the dearth of queer scholarship of "Sonny's Blues" by demonstrating sexuality as a major theme, despite its lack of explicitly sexual narratives. Baldwin's use of jazz as a vehicle to urge the acceptance of non-hegemonic sexual and nonsexual modalities vindicates "Sonny's Blues" as a work that explores sexuality just as much as the rest of the Baldwin canon.

Jones errs in concluding that, because "Sonny's Blues" does not feature explicit instances of sex or sexuality, the work does not engage with these matters. Her conclusion is contrary to ideas that have emerged in queer studies, which, as critic Michael Warner observes in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, has long been

aware that "the logic of the sexual order is . . . deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and . . . in the most standard accounts of the world" (8). He posits that the order of heterosexual reproduction has so pervasively invaded society that it is no longer possible to separate society, or the works it produces, dubbing this phenomenon: heteronormativity. A queer interpretation of the story, with attention paid to how gender and sexual dynamics appear and function beyond the narrow framework of heteronormativity, reveals that this exact limiting framework is a critically important theme throughout the work.

The Narrator (hereafter "Brother") is one of the two principal characters of "Sonny's Blues" and is, in many ways, the embodiment of the heteronormative ideal. He is married and a father (therefore fulfilling his ultimate responsibility as a heterosexual: reproduction), and he provides for his family with a stable income earned in his respectable job as a math teacher. His job also is representative of hegemonic desires: he furthers the mission of heteronormative reproductivity by dedicating his life to its ultimate signifier, the child, and by teaching children mathematics, a subject characterized in the popular imagination by its rigid binaries. He stands in stark contrast to Sonny, who diverges from the ideals of heteronormative societal institutions. Sonny earns a meager, unstable income from his louche occupation as a jazz musician, struggles with addiction, and apparently has no sexual partner, thereby failing as a supposed heterosexual. Although Baldwin leaves Sonny's sexuality ambiguous, Brother typifies heteronormative ideals and Sonny does not; Sonny is then distanced from heteronormativity and therefore heterosexuality.

Due to experience with this distance through the narration of Brother, the audience can identify his disapproval of Sonny's lifestyle through his heteronormative worldview. He projects his own life goals onto Sonny and is frustrated and confused when Sonny fails to live up to or share those goals. Brother's internal frustration reaches a climax after Sonny is arrested for using drugs: "I couldn't believe it. . . . I couldn't find any room for it anywhere inside me. I had kept it outside me for a long time. I hadn't wanted to know. I had had suspicions, but I didn't name them, I kept putting them away" (Baldwin 213). Brother's disapproval pressures Sonny to conform to heteronormative lifeways, manifesting what scholar Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality."

Importantly, though, this conservative position occupied by Brother is challenged and changed throughout "Sonny's Blues," providing its central narrative thrust. Despite being the titular character, Sonny undergoes relatively little change, and it is Brother who has a clear and significant arc. Brother begins the story confused by and battling against Sonny's more radical lifeways and, through a transformative process, ends the story with the possibility of accepting them, having realized that their differences are valuable and essential (in the sense of both "inherent" and "necessary") parts of Sonny. "For Brother, accepting the disorder that characterizes Sonny and his jazz is to engage with the turmoil of life rather than trying to submerge it beneath superficial convention" (Duncan 8), analyzes Duncan again tantalizingly approaching a queer reading. An intentional queer reading limns Duncan's "superficial convention" as heteronormative order and his "disorder" as a rejection of it. Under this queer lens, it is difficult to view Baldwin's story of a conservative family member struggling with and beginning to accept his brother's non-normative identity as anything other than an allegory for accepting his brother's queerness. Furthermore, by establishing Brother as the narrator, audience surrogate, and center of the story's principal emotional arc, Baldwin guides readers through a similar process of acceptance, ensuring that they will absorb this critical message whether or not aware of the allegorical overtones.

The focus on jazz and the role it plays as a fixture of Sonny's identity in "Sonny's Blues" is far from disconnected in this allegory and is indeed a significant part. Since its inception in Black New Orleans and as a marginalized space within a city already characterized by its unique cultural admixture, jazz diverged from hegemonic power structures. Even as jazz music and musicians began to circulate outside of this space with developments such as the Great Migration and the proliferation of radio broadcasts, its associations with race persisted. In examining jazz and its threat to hegemonic power structures, critic Paul McCann shares his literary analysis "Performing Primitivism: Disarming the Social Threat of Jazz in Narrative Fiction of the Early Twenties," which has risen to nationwide popularity. McCann observes that "for many critics jazz represented a threat to an existing social order maintained and legitimized by European cultural traditions," and that, in their eyes, "the increasing popularity of jazz reflected a wider decay of the natural social and moral order—an order maintained by European

aesthetic values that governed the previous century" (659). In short, because jazz is chiefly a black rather than European art form, it carried the same associations and was subject to the same discriminations as black people. Jazz is inseparably linked to blackness and is viewed by mainstream, white culture as inherently obscene, improper, and even sexual. With its once alluring and repulsive eroticism, jazz frustrated the sociosexual norms of the heteronormative cultural environment it inhabited, manifesting a kind of "aesthetic queerness."

Defining queerness as a general nonconformance with hegemonic ideals can further enrich a queer reading of "Sonny's Blues." In the extensive analyses of the story from race and cultural studies perspectives, many authors (e.g., Alberg, McParland, and Nelson) have identified its final scene, in which Brother visits the jazz club where Sonny plays and sees him perform for the first time, as the pivotal moment of connection and transformative understanding that allows Brother to begin to understand and accept Sonny and his differences. Critically, these analyses center this connection in Brother and Sonny's shared experience of race. In "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community," Emmanuel S. Nelson writes that "in their moment of reciprocal recognition . . . they recognize that they share an entire racial experience" (30).

A queer reading does not refute this widespread interpretation but adds to it by interpreting Brother's recognition of himself in Sonny as recognizing not only their shared racial experience but also this experience as a kind of "aesthetic queerness." When Brother recognizes how his own racialization by hegemonic societal powers places him outside of them, even despite his best efforts to achieve this in-group status by leading an ideal, straight-and-narrow life, he can understand how imposing his hegemonic norms onto Sonny's life harms Sonny much like how they are both harmed by racism. The final and transformative moment provides emotional power for the story's ending but is only the starting point of Baldwin's lessons when viewing "Sonny's Blues" through a queer theory lens.

If attempting to view Baldwin's exploration of the societal dynamics of sexuality as an outright queer allegory, clear parallels emerge between Sonny's experience as a jazz musician and real-world queer experiences. Brother learns to view Sonny's musicianship not only as a choice or occupation but also as an inextricable part of Sonny's identity that,

although yielding a degree of adversity, brings him a sense of joy and belonging. Brother's realization unfolds as he watches Sonny play at the jazz bar: "Here, I was in Sonny's world. Or, rather: his kingdom. Here, it was not even a question that his veins bore royal blood" (Baldwin 238). In presenting this moment of realization and acceptance as relating to queerness and to jazz, Baldwin demonstrates that, for many, queerness is not a "choice" nor is it sex acts but is instead a deeply valued, enduring identity. Baldwin also asserts that, though queer identities often beget struggle and adversity, they also bring people an important sense of joy, freedom, and belonging.

This essay's reading of "Sonny's Blues" as an allegorical narrative of queer acceptance by no means attempts to be a definitive queer reading of "Sonny's Blues." Rather, it intends to highlight the surprising lack of queer scholarship surrounding this otherwise celebrated story and to provide inspiration for future readings. It leaves many avenues of this topic unexplored—from the extensive history of queer jazz performers, the importance of Greenwich Village, the neighborhood home, and the jazz bar where Sonny performs to both queer and jazz history and the intercourse between jazz and queer art forms, such as ballroom and drag. These connections are left to future essays that identify intersections of queer, race, gender, cultural, and musicological studies to continue queering "Sonny's Blues." If anything, the abundance of queer theory analyses of the works of James Baldwin is not proof that this line of analysis has been exhausted, but of the enduring vision and brilliance of one of black, queer, and American literature's greatest minds.

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Testing the Form-Frequency Correspondence Principle in English Adjectives: A Corpus and Dictionary-Based Analysis

Robbie Graham

The form-frequency correspondence principle, articulated by Haspelmath et al., posits that linguistic forms align with their usage frequencies: less material is used to express more frequently occurring meanings. This principle stems from a usage-based approach to language, in which structure emerges from communicative need and efficiency rather than solely from formal rules. Although prior studies have primarily focused on casual-noncasual verb pairs such as "raise/rise" or "break (tr.)/break (intr.)" (Alexiadou; Haspelmath et al. 587; Heidinger), this study expands the investigation to adjectives.

Adjectives are central to descriptive language and are a domain for examining form-frequency correspondence because they often appear in synonymic pairs that vary in syllabic length and formality. My hypothesis is that, in English, speakers tend to prefer one-syllable adjectives for frequently expressed meanings due to their efficiency, whereas longer, three-syllable adjectives are reserved for stylistic variation, emphasis, or formal spaces. By testing this hypothesis with corpus frequency data, I assess whether Haspelmath et al.'s principle applies to this domain and explore how frequency of adjectives shape lexical choice. Additionally, I examine dictionary-based richness by comparing how many distinct entries each adjective has in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), hypothesizing that more frequently used adjectives may also possess broader semantic range.

Framework

In their 2014 study, Haspelmath et al. proposes a form-frequency correspondence principle that challenges traditional form-meaning. The principle suggests that more frequency expressed meaning are encoded with less grammatical material. Haspelmath et al. writes, "Languages tend to use less coding material for more frequent expressions" (592).

This principle explains cross-linguistic patterns in the morphological coding of causative and anti-causative verb pairs.

This study takes the core idea of the grammatical form-frequency correspondence principle and tests its applicability to English adjective pairs that differ in syllabic length. The selected adjectives are paired, one being monosyllabic and the other being a three-syllable synonym. If Haspelmath et al.'s principle holds, shorter adjectives will be used more frequently, reflecting their greater communicative efficiency. Furthermore, if lexical economy and communicative utility extend beyond usage to semantic coverage, these one-syllable adjectives may exhibit a wider range of definitional entries in authoritative sources like the *OED*.

Method

To evaluate the grammatical form-frequency correspondence principle in adjectives, I selected twenty adjective pairs in English, each consisting of a one-syllable adjective and a semantically similar three-syllable synonym. Frequency counts were obtained from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), one of the largest and balanced corpora of US English. COCA contains more than one billion words of texts from eight genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, TV and movie subtitles, blogs, and other web pages (Davies). The data used are the frequency of all contexts of each word analyzed found in COCA.

For each adjective, raw frequency counts were extracted, and the results were compared pairwise to determine whether the shorter form was more frequent than its longer synonym. In addition to frequency counts, I consulted the *OED* to count the number of distinct entries each word possessed, offering insight into the lexical-semantic breadth of each form.

Results

In all 20 adjective pairs, the one-syllable form was substantially more frequent than its three-syllable counterpart. Moreover, the majority of one-syllable adjectives had more dictionary entries in the *OED* than did

their three-syllabic synonyms. For example, "small" and "slow" each had 21 distinct entries, whereas their three-syllable counterparts "miniscule" and "lethargic" had only two and three, respectively. (See Table 1 for the frequencies of one- and three-syllable adjectives, per COCA and *OED*.)

Table 1. Frequencies of One- and Three-syllable Adjectives, per COCA and *OED*.

One-Syllable Adjective	COCA Frequency of One-Syllable Adjective	*OED* Entries for One-Syllable Adjective	Three-Syllable Synonym	COCA Frequency of Three-Syllable Adjective	*OED* Entries for Three Syllable Adjective
big	471,289	17	gigantic	5,254	3
small	323,408	21	miniscule	1,549	2
slow	66,673	21	lethargic	663	3
bright	50,779	20	luminous	2,796	2
loud	33,977	5	boisterous	1,160	10
hot	118,650	12	sweltering	987	3
smart	60,541	15	brilliant	26,988	2
mean	515,231	7	malicious	3,462	4
strong	152,004	26	powerful	76,806	6
weak	36,447	20	powerless	3,885	1
clean	81,755	14	orderly	4,674	5
clear	195,797	25	coherent	5,996	4
rough	27,506	21	turbulent	2,843	2
thin	41,641	4	delicate	13,248	12
Shy	15,137	8	suspicious	13,232	2
Brave	17,777	4	courageous	4,744	3
Glad	59,646	7	contented	1,167	3
Sad	51,798	11	heartbroken	1,565	2
Rich	84,507	9	prosperous	4,720	2
Poor	121,425	7	penniless	727	1

Discussion

These outcomes provide robust support for the form-frequency correspondence hypothesis in the domain of adjectives and suggest a lexical parallel: more frequently used adjectives not only appear more often in discourse but also tend to encode a broader range of meanings.

The data strongly confirm that one-syllable adjectives are favored in high-frequency usage, consistent with Haspelmath et al.'s principle. These short adjectives are generally semantically basic, highly accessible, and broadly applicable in informal and spoken registers. Their higher frequency likely reflects their communicative efficiency and functional necessity. The accompanying OED data reveals that this frequency also correlates with greater semantic richness, as seen in the wider array of definitional entries attributed to one-syllable forms.

Conversely, the three-syllable synonyms, although semantically similar, are more often associated with formal, academic, or poetic discourse. Words like "malevolent," "luminous," or "gigantic" are stylistically marked and tend to appear in contexts when elaboration or emphasis is desired. Their relative infrequency supports the idea that speakers use these forms selectively, when precision or stylistic nuance outweighs efficiency. The fact that these words also show fewer dictionary entries supports the view that they serve narrower semantic or rhetorical roles.

This pattern mirrors Haspelmath et al.'s findings in the verbal domain, where the more-frequent form in a causal-noncausal pair is less likely to be overtly marked. The pattern also aligns with broader trends in grammatical economy: speakers reserve longer or more complex forms for meanings that are rarer, less predictable, or rhetorically significant. As Haspelmath et al. state, "Short forms are used for frequent meanings because of their predictability" (594).

My findings reinforce that this principle applies not only to morphological coding but also to lexical selection, suggesting a general efficiency pressure operating across linguistic levels. The inclusion of *OED* data expands this argument by showing how usage frequency and semantic generality often go hand in hand, pointing to a deeper connection between frequency, form, and meaning.

Although the adjective pairs analyzed in Table 1 are drawn from English, the implications of this pattern may be cross-linguistic. Future studies should explore similar patterns in other languages that have rich

adjective inventories or should investigate form-frequency alignment across different word classes (e.g., adverbs, nouns). Additional work may also investigate if dictionary-defined richness consistently correlates with usage-based frequency across parts of speech.

Conclusion

This study extends the form-frequency correspondence principle to the adjectival domain in English. Using frequency data from COCA, I found consistent evidence that one-syllable adjectives are significantly more frequent than their three-syllable synonyms, supporting the hypothesis that shorter forms are used to express more frequent meanings. Complementary data from the *OED* further reveal that these shorter forms tend to have more definitional entries, suggesting they also carry broader semantic range.

These findings affirm Haspelmath et al.'s usage-based account of grammatical asymmetries and broaden its relevance beyond verb morphology. They also underscore the importance of corpus-based approaches in uncovering general principles of linguistic economy. As Haspelmath et al. emphasize, "The trend in the formal patterns is exactly as expected" when guided by usage frequency (589). Further research across languages and grammatical categories should continue to test and refine the scope of the form-frequency correspondence principle. In this light, both corpus data and dictionary data together illuminate the efficiency and semantic adaptability of short linguistic forms.

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Lilacs and Cherry Trees: An Asexual Reading of Kate Chopin's "Lilacs" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Two Friends"

Katherine Harber

Despite its significant potential as an analytical framework within queer studies, and more specifically queer literary criticism, asexuality continuously fails to attract consideration from critics and scholars as a useful addition to their queer-identity-focused scholarship. Asexuality is frequently misunderstood, and even criticized, by those within and outside of the LGBTQ+ community to the detriment not only of asexual people but also of scholars who stand to benefit from the incorporation of asexuality into their scholarly work. However, the purpose of this essay is not to ascribe modern labels or identities to fictional characters but to utilize modern frameworks of identity to provide alternatives for the interpretation and analysis of literary texts. Asexuality is a versatile identity that is compatible with other queer identities and, as such, incorporating asexuality into the broader framework of queer literary criticism provides readers with greater analytical potential to understand and interpret potentially queer relationship dynamics in literature, which brings an added level of complexity to analyses of romance, sex, and identity across literature.

This essay advocates for the incorporation of asexuality into queer literary criticism. Romantic friendships between nineteenth-century women have long been examined through a lesbian lens, but the inclusion of asexuality in criticism broadens the possible interpretations of a text to examine the profound connections between female characters in literature without the need for sexual contact as the only manner of proving a relationship's romantic legitimacy.

Asexuality is broadly defined as "a sexual identity that refers to those who experience low/no sexual attraction" (Winer 2) according to sociological researcher Canton Winer in his paper "Understanding Asexuality: A Sociological Review." In queer studies, sexual orientation and gender identity are often viewed as existing on a spectrum. Sexual attraction is no different, having a broad range of levels of attraction

between asexuality and allosexuality. In her study, "Queering Relationships: Exploring Phenomena of Asexual Identified Persons in Relationships," researcher Valerie Q. Glass defines allosexuality as "an individual who experiences sexual attraction to others," which is seen as the average experience of sexual attraction (345). People who fall between the two identities may refer to themselves as "graysexual," meaning that they only experience sexual attraction to others "at low levels and/or in context-dependent scenarios" (Winer 2). The variety of identities contained on the spectrum of asexuality indicates that, like gender identity and sexual attraction to a particular gender or genders, the experience of sexual attraction itself is more complex than traditional models and beliefs would suggest.

An important caveat within asexuality is the difference between romantic and sexual desires. The split-attraction model is a common way of differentiating the two, as it "identifie[s] that there can be both physical and romantic attraction that can occur separately or in varying degrees" (Glass 345), a concept that allows for a separation of romantic and sexual desires, those of which do not always align, especially for asexuals. In a discussion of her study's findings, Glass explains that the asexual participants reported finding that their committed relationships had "a phenomena of intimacy that often transcends traditional views of sexual and/or romantic intimacy between committed partners" (355). Not only will this expansion encourage new interpretations of literary works but also it will serve to educate readers about the often-misunderstood experience of asexuality and foster a more nuanced understanding of sexuality as a whole.

In most nineteenth-century female friendships, both real and fictional, the context does not provide definitive proof, nor any legitimate reason to assume, that these relationships were sexual in nature. However, participants in these types of relationships were effusive in their expressions of love and affection for one another and were as often committed to each other as a married couple would be. In the introduction to her book *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Lillian Faderman explains, "romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital" (16), indicating that these relationships were indeed quite significant to their participants but simply lacked a sexual component. For the modern reader, such effusions of love between women are often explained and examined through the lens

of same-sex attraction. However, as Caroll Smith-Rosenberg argues in "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," the most effective way to understand romantic friendship between women is via "a spectrum of affect gradations strongly effected by cultural norms" and which contains a "wide latitude of emotions and sexual feelings" (29). Women in the nineteenth century relied on other women for emotional fulfillment and support, which stemmed primarily from the gender roles that relegated women to domestic spaces and thus to homosocial environments for much of their lives. Thus, their formation of committed relationships with one another is best understood within their specific historical context, but literary portrayals of such relationships can be examined through a queer lens, especially one that includes asexuality, to reveal nuances in the story and the characters' relationship dynamic that draw connections between the story's historical context and our modern queer frameworks.

Faderman defines lesbian relationships as "two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other" (27), which broadens the potential use of the term to include romantic friendships that did not have a sexual component. Faderman's definition of "lesbian" certainly pertains to the relationships featured in Kate Chopin's "Lilacs" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Two Friends." In Chopin's short story, Adrienne Farival returns every spring to the convent outside Paris, where she was raised. She is particularly close to one of the nuns, Sister Agathe, until one spring, when she returns to the convent and is barred by a cryptic note from Mother Superior. The story ends with Adrienne and Sister Agathe separately mourning their mutual loss.

When examined through the lens of asexuality, "Lilacs" presents a profound emotional connection between Adrienne and Sister Agathe that is ultimately severed for reasons unclear to the characters, leaving the situation to the reader's discretion. The women's relationship has sensual elements, though Chopin presents limited indication of sexual contact between the two. The titular lilacs that remind Adrienne of her childhood and that she picks on her way to the convent play a key role in developing her and Sister Agathe's relationship. When Adrienne returns to the convent, Sister Agathe rushes to meet her, they embrace, and the lilacs are "crushed between them" in their eagerness, followed by "ardent kisses" and "pink flushes of happiness mounting the cheeks

of the two women" (Chopin 355). This eager display of affection shows Adrienne as having a deep bond with Sister Agathe.

The strength of their relationship, though confined to Adrienne's two-week visits each year, is further illustrated as Adrienne recalls her nostalgic attachment to lilacs as a symbol of her idyllic childhood at the convent. She tells Sister Agathe, "There is no holding me back" from leaving Paris for the convent once she catches the scent of lilacs in the spring, and Sister Agathe returns this sentiment by admitting that "I wait for you, and watch those lilac bushes, Adrienne!" (Chopin 358). Her next comment foreshadows the painful severance of their relationship at the end of the story: "If you should once fail to come, it would be like the spring coming without the sunshine or the song of the birds" (358). Chopin establishes the significance of Sister Agathe and Adrienne's connection through the symbolic use of nature and their tender, passionate language toward one another.

Scholar Mariko Utsu notes in her article "Lesbian and Heterosexual Duality in Kate Chopin's 'Lilacs'" that, despite these expressions of affection, scholarly debates exist over the nature of Adrienne and Agathe's relationship, especially regarding how truthful Adrienne has been about her profession as an actress or "public woman" with her sheltered friend. Utsu draws attention to the contrast between the simplicity of Adrienne's life at the convent to her normal life in Paris, which is more worldly and lavish. This contrast "directs us to read the character of Adrienne in a certain way" (304) to see her as possibly duplicitous toward Agathe, especially in regard to the nature of her profession. Adrienne's profession as an actress complicates her dynamic with the pious Sister Agathe, whether she is aware of Adrienne's profession or not, and it may be the reason the Mother Superior forbids Adrienne from returning to the convent at the end of the story. Despite the implications of sexual promiscuity that accompany the actress archetype in that time, the "absence of . . . sexual hints in this work" is deemed "almost deliberate" (306). Adrienne's potential promiscuity as an actress does not, however, negate the asexual nature of her relationship with Sister Agathe.

This absence of overt sexuality opens the door to an asexual reading of "Lilacs," wherein Sister Agathe and Adrienne share a deep emotional and physical bond but not a sexual relationship. Adrienne is assigned to sleep in Sister Agathe's room during her stay at the convent, but

Chopin includes no implication of sexual contact. Instead, the reader is reminded of Sister Agathe's commitment to chastity and purity as a nun by the description of the "immaculately white" room and her instructions toward Adrienne to "say your 'Hail, Mary'" until she falls asleep (360).

The tragic ending of "Lilacs" serves as further evidence for Sister Agathe and Adrienne's devotion to one another, even if Adrienne has not been open with the nuns about her Parisian life. When she receives the note from the Mother Superior, who banishes her from the convent and returns her previous gifts to the nuns, Adrienne weeps against the convent door "with the abandonment of a little child" (Chopin 365). Sister Agathe mirrors Adrienne's reaction to the news as she sits on the bed in which Adrienne once slept: "her face was pressed deep into the pillow in an effort to smother the sobs that convulsed her frame" (365). Sister Agathe's retreat to Adrienne's bed could be interpreted as a nod to their sexual connection as well as Sister Agathe's attempt to connect with the last physical reminder she has of Adrienne, since the. (Mother Superior has returned Adrienne's gifts to the convent.) Furthermore, because the contents of the Mother Superior's note are never revealed, "the cause of the banishment" is left "up to the reader's interpretation" (Utsu 306). Chopin's intentional use of "narrative blanks hidden at decisive points in the story" (310) leave key themes to the reader's interpretation; those themes include the nature of Adrienne and Sister Agathe's relationship and the reason the Mother Superior banished Adrienne from the convent (Utsu 310). In a final blow to Adrienne and Sister Agathe's bond, the image of the lilacs as a representation of their mutual affection returns: a lay sister sweeps the lilacs from the door of the convent where Adrienne dropped them in her anguish (Chopin 365). An asexual framework allows the reader to acknowledge that a sexual bond between Adrienne and Agathe is unnecessary for their relationship to be valid or important and that their devastation over the loss of that bond can be understood on purely emotional terms.

In contrast to "Lilacs," Mary Wilkins Freeman's short story "Two Friends" portrays two older women, Abby and Sarah, in rural New England who have been living happily together for decades. When Abby becomes gravely ill, Sarah confesses a secret she has long kept from Abby, but Abby's reaction is far from the negative one that Sarah has feared. The women's unwavering devotion to each other in the

face of long-kept secrets and debilitating illness is a clear example of a lesbian relationship, as defined by Faderman. Sarah and Abby live in comfortable companionship with a "settled and amicable division of labor" in their household (Freeman 132). Their bond is reflected in the natural world around them, as the front yard of their home, which Abby inherited from her mother, contains two matching cherry trees that "had been called Abby and Sarah ever since the two women could remember" (133). Similar to Chopin's symbolic use of Adrienne's beloved lilac flowers in "Lilacs," Freeman uses the two cherry trees to symbolize the bond between the two women and the shift in their dynamic when Abby falls ill. As Abby's health declines, the Abby-tree "display[s] only her fine green leaves in fruit time," whereas the "Sarah-tree alone [is] rosy with cherries" (134).

As Abby's health continues to worsen, she wishes to see her cherry tree in bloom one last time. The Abby-tree refuses to bloom, so Sarah, being the self-sacrificing companion, spends her day cutting branches off her own tree to tie to the Abby-tree. "That afternoon one looking at the tree from the house would have been misled. That side of the Abby-tree was brave with bloom" (Freeman 139). Sarah's devotion to Abby is reflected in this physical sacrifice of her own tree's blooms for Abby's happiness. Sarah will do anything to ensure Abby's comfort during her last days, like a devoted spouse in a traditional marriage. Abby's and Sarah's devotion is a remarkable example of a healthy, loving relationship that is outside the bounds of what was conventionally expected of women at the time.

As they look out at the trees together, Sarah finally breaks down and admits to her fears of living without Abby. She desperately confesses her long-kept secret about Abby's mother's blessing for Abby to marry her suitor, only for Abby to react quite differently than Sarah anticipated. Abby laughs and says, "I wouldn't have had John Marshall if he'd come on his knees to me all the way from Mexico!" (Freeman 140). Abby's response is a clear indication that, as she approaches her death, she has no regrets or reservations about her life with Sarah. Her own devotion to Sarah is equal to Sarah's love for her. Throughout the story, Sarah's and Abby's actions demonstrate their commitment to one another; however, the story presents no hint of a sexual relationship between them. They have a deep, emotional connection that supports their decades of blissful domesticity together.

In her article "Geographies of Intimacy in Mary Wilkins Freeman's Short Fiction," Jennifer Ansley explores the connection between place and identity in Freeman's story, calling attention to "the possibility of queer intimacies emerging among women in 'lesser' geographical spaces," such as rural New England (446).

"Two Friends" provides a clear example of a queer relationship between women in the nineteenth century. Ansley labels relationships like Abby's and Sarah's as queer in her essay, "not to speculate about the sexual preferences of her characters but to name a relational quality that exists both between the characters and in the felt relationships to the spaces in which they live and work" (452). To read "Two Friends" as a portrayal of a queer or asexual lesbian relationship is to recognize that sex is not a requirement for every romantic relationship, nor does it necessarily have any bearing on the emotional intimacy within that relationship.

Asexual interpretations of romantic friendships such as those portrayed in Chopin's "Lilacs" and Freeman's "Two Friends" expand analyses of these texts to acknowledge their romantic nature without the requirement of an accompanying sexual element. Incorporating asexual identities more frequently into queer studies across academia will serve to validate asexual individuals and educate readers about asexuality. Queer literary critics will have the opportunity to expand their analyses of identity and relationships beyond the conventional focus on sexual themes to include a more complex view of sexual and romantic desires in literature.

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Ireland Personified: Women Representing Ireland in Irish Drama

Kayleigh Kearsley

In response to the Irish stereotypes perpetuated on the English stage, Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats organized the Abbey Theatre, intending to prove through drama that "Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment" but rather "the home of an ancient idealism" (Gregory, "Our Irish Theatre" 402), which causes scholars to consider how Ireland is portrayed in Irish drama. Although some characters represent various groups of Irish individuals, other characters represent Ireland itself, and these personified versions of Ireland are often female. One of the earliest dramatic versions of this is "Cathleen ni Houlihan," written by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, in which the eponymous character is the representation of Ireland itself. The character inspires men to join the fight for freedom. In later years, Sean O'Casey's "Juno and the Paycock" was performed in the Abbey and I believe that, like "Cathleen ni Houlihan," the main female character Juno is another female allegorical representation of Ireland. However, whereas in "Cathleen ni Houlihan," Ireland is represented as a woman calling upon the men to fight for her, in "Juno and the Paycock," this personification of a female Ireland is reimagined, and the woman must forge her own destiny after being failed by the men, thus reflecting the shift in perspective toward Irish women and nationalism.

To grasp the purpose of these plays, scholars must understand Irish nationalism and the role of women in this movement, as this role was an integral part of the identity of these Irish playwrights. Themes of Irish nationalism are seen throughout both plays, and Yeats himself declared, "I am a Nationalist" (413). As both playwrights were involved in Irish nationalism and wrote stories with strong female characters, they contrast with how women were often treated in the Nationalist movement.

In reference to women volunteers, female historian Dana Hearne discovered that some men "despised feminists and would only tolerate women who obeyed instructions" (4). Many people believed that women should abandon their suffragist movements and focus solely

on nationalism; therefore, the "male state kept women in subjection and used them to suit their own purposes" (11). These attempts to subject and exploit women upheld a correlation between heroism and masculinity. Despite these attempts, people challenged "the maleness of the system," which inevitably led to women's right to vote in 1918 (11). This struggle for women's rights and their ability to vote and participate in nationalist movements is depicted in various Irish dramas.

In the context of the Irish women's fight amidst a patriarchal society, Yeats and Gregory chose to represent Ireland in the form of a woman in "Cathleen ni Houlihan." In the play, a "poor old woman" appears at the Gillane household, where residents are preparing for the following day, when their son Michael will wed. The poor old woman refers to her "four beautiful green fields," alluding to the four Irish provinces (Yeats and Gregory 7). This direct reference to Ireland relays to the audience that the character's purpose is to personify Ireland. Throughout the play, she plays the role of "the anthropomorphic incarnation of Ireland, demanding in stentorian tones for all patriotic young men to answer the call to arms" (Dean 74). This call to arms from the old woman demanded that the man "must give [her] himself, he must give [her] all," which inspired the young Michael to leave his betrothed and instead defend Ireland (Yeats and Gregory 8). Thus, the woman, representing Ireland, needed willing men to fight for and defend her future and hope.

The necessity of having the men fight for Ireland is further depicted in the old woman's transformation at the conclusion of the play, after Michael has chosen to follow her. She is described as a "young girl" who "had the walk of a queen" (Yeats and Gregory 11). This remarkable transformation of Cathleen ni Houlihan, which extends to Ireland itself, portrays her rejuvenation "by the restorative power of the dedication and bravery of revolutionary men" (Dean 75). Cathleen ni Houlihan, and in turn Ireland, is restored and strengthened because of the courage of the men who were willing to fight for her. As researcher Tanya Dean summarizes, this play was written to "inspire men to restore Ireland to her former glory in a transformation similar to that of Cathleen Ni Houlihan" (78). Throughout the play and the critical conversation surrounding it, Cathleen ni Houlihan—despite being a strong, female personification of Ireland—still required the men's valor and bravery to arrive at her hopeful, glorified ending.

Conversely, in Sean O'Casey's "Juno and the Paycock," it is through the men's failure to act that Juno, who seems to represent Ireland, can acquire her hopeful ending. O'Casey, who was intimately familiar with the violence and bloodshed prevalent in 1920s Ireland, wrote this play after an influential compliment from Lady Gregory. She once informed the playwright, "Mr. O'Casey, your gift is characterization," and this focus on characters led to "Juno and the Paycock" (Gregory, "Journal 1923–24" 501). Accordingly, his characters offer complex criticism of Irish nationalism and masculinity. In the first two acts, Juno Boyle tries to force her husband to work and take the initiative. Despite her efforts, Boyle continues to refuse, which leads to Juno's decision to leave her husband to "furrage for himself," as "he'll be hopeless till the end of his days" (O'Casey 244). Remarkably, the moment when she chooses to leave her husband rewards her with a more optimistic ending. As scholar Cathy Airth states, "Once all the men have been removed, the play seems more hopeful" (46). This hopeful ending for women, once they leave men behind, is further emphasized by the final scene with the drunken Mr. Boyle and his friend, who are left in an empty home complaining, "th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis!" (O'Casey 246). Their repeated inability to take responsibility and solve their issues renders them hopeless and empty, just like the house in which they are left behind.

As the ending scene depicts, Juno (a female representation of Ireland) finds hope and a promising future when she takes control of her destiny, rather than relying upon men. As Airth explains, it is "up to the women to secure the future" (46). She elaborates upon the significance of this by stating that this characterization "inverts binary oppositions associated with national gender stereotypes" (43), in which women are strong and authoritative and men are weak. The men's failed masculinity is seen with Juno's words that serve as "a gesture against the male-dominated politics of the day" (Murray 510). With these critiques of the men throughout the play and the failure of men to work and secure the future, this play criticizes the national gender stereotypes that depict men as the source of strength and hope for a future. Rather, the play's depiction of Juno's hopeful ending after she abandons her husband suggests that Ireland's future and hope reside, not in a continued cycle of failed masculinity but in the decisiveness and action portrayed by Juno.

Unlike in "Cathleen ni Houlihan," in which the female representation of Ireland relies on the men for a hopeful future, in "Juno and the Paycock," this female allegory instead rejects the men and fights for her own future. Whereas Cathleen's transformation is supported by the men's courage, Juno transforms after supporting herself and leaving the inadequacies of the men behind. The blind nationalism and masculine heroism depicted as the solution in "Cathleen ni Houlihan" instead becomes a source of strife in "Juno and the Paycock." Juno's character complicates the allegorical depiction of Ireland and advocates for the independence of women from men. Whereas Cathleen somberly expresses that "many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name" (Yeats and Gregory 10), Juno has a more positive outlook of the removal of the men from the lives of the rising generation. When Juno decides to leave the men behind and have her sister raise her daughter and grandchild, her daughter cries out that her poor child will be fatherless. Juno consoles her by saying, "It'll have what's far betther—it'll have two mothers" (O'Casey 244). This declaration shows that it is Juno and her daughter who are strong and find hope in the face of failed masculinity.

These two plays, with a different female allegory of Ireland, depict the shift of the perspective of Irish women over the years. "Cathleen ni Houlihan" was written before the suffragist movement that led to their right to vote, and the female representation of Ireland depends on the men for a hopeful future and victory. Conversely, "Juno and the Paycock," written after the Irish women had the right to vote, offers a different portrayal of the female Ireland. The Ireland anthropomorphic Juno forges her destiny and decides to break the cycle of female dependence on failed masculinity, which allows her to create a more hopeful future for her and her daughter.

O'Casey complicated the female representation of Ireland as depicted in "Cathleen ni Houlihan," which depended on men, in contrast with Juno, who inversely transformed after terminating her dependence on the men, which offered a critique of national gender stereotypes and advocated for a more hopeful future, when women are not required to rely on men. This contrasting portrayal of Ireland also reflects a shift in the perspective of Irish nationalism, as the blind patriotism and heroic masculinity celebrated in "Cathleen ni Houlihan" is replaced with personal responsibility and an individual's decision to

fight for country and future, instead of conforming to the previously sustained stereotypes. Through O'Casey's play, it becomes apparent that Ireland's hope no longer lies on cycles of men willing to blindly sacrifice themselves for visions of grandeur, as presented in "Cathleen ni Houlihan," but rather is found in individuals—male and female—who will take charge of their destiny and forge their futures.

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From the Monstrous to the Mundane: Queer Interpretations of *Dracula* through *Dracula Daily*

Sadie Olsen

The novel *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker and published in 1897, has spawned a wealth of adaptations. One of the most unique adaptations, created by web designer Matt Kirkland, is *Dracula Daily*, an email subscription that delivers entries of iconic epistolary novel that correspond to the day's date. The subscription began in 2021 and took off in 2022 as it became popular on social media, particularly on Tumblr and Twitter (Bonus 7: The *Dracula Daily* Instigator). The *Dracula Daily* readership has explored the book's contents, and one of the most discussed themes is the queerness present in the novel.

Dracula Daily's queer reading of the main characters in *Dracula* is a reclamation of queerness in the novel. Instead of being analyzed as monstrous, the novel's queerness is seen as something beautiful and mundane. Additionally, the *Dracula Daily* readership studies the novel's fluidity of queerness through a focus on bisexuality, polyamory, and gender nonconformity, which are not fully addressed in modern scholarship. This phenomenon is significant because it proves why scholars should pay attention to literary discussions conducted on social media, demonstrating that a change in the perception of classic literature opens new readings.

A large majority of critics focus their attention on Count Dracula as the main source of queerness in the novel, pointing out his fluid sexuality and gender expression as sources of his monstrosity, and by association place queerness in the realm of the monstrous (Craft; Halberstam; Reyes). If critics do focus on the Crew of Light (the protagonists of the novel), they apply narrow lenses of homosexuality and gender that focus on Jonathan's and Count Dracula's relationship or on Mina Harker, Jonathan's wife, and her friend Lucy Westenra's relationship, without capturing the complexities of these characters (Fox; Kountz and Norton). Some recent scholars (e.g., Hessen) have examined gender nonconformity in *Dracula*, and this essay incorporates Hessen's scholarship. In this essay, the focus on reception of *Dracula* through social

media, specifically the social media site Tumblr, questions why social media should be used as a source to discuss literary interpretations. As Bronwen Thomas argues, "Social media platforms . . . allow us to observe the multiplicity of ways in which those engaged in literary activities both express themselves and express their appreciation, admiration or criticism of the creations of others" (5). Using social media in this paper demonstrates how audiences find new interpretations of Dracula and share their perspectives.

The *Dracula Daily* readership first differs from the critics in its interpretation of the novel's bisexuality. An example of the readership's contrasting analysis comes from the end of the novel where Jonathan writes, "for Godalming and Seward are both happily married," referencing Lord Arthur Godalming and Dr. John Seward (Stoker 410). One Tumblr user after a lengthy analysis concludes, "The only possible conclusion—logically, thematically, or emotionally—is that Art [Godalming] and Jack [Seward] married each other" (danthen). This interpretation contrasts with modern scholarship (Clark, 174; Craft, 128), in which the homoerotic nature of the men within the Crew of Light is mentioned but not fully addressed, and no conclusion of possible romantic and/or sexual relations between them is reached. The reading instead focuses primarily on Count Dracula's bisexuality (Reyes 127, 131). The *Dracula Daily* community uses Jonathan's entry to further a bisexual reading. The general consensus within the community is expressed by one reader, who posted, "Adaptations: 'Dracula is about sexual repression!!!!'...Dracula fans on Tumblr: 'And bisexuality!!!!'" (everythinandanything).

This lens of bisexuality is extended to all members of the Crew of Light but for Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, due to his age. Quincey Morris, a Texan on the Crew of Light, is often paired with both Seward and Arthur (lxgentlefolkcomic), and many readers interpret Mina's and Lucy's relationship as sapphic (jellolegos). Jonathan is also included, as evidenced by the humorous take on the phrase "queer dreams" (Stoker 4) found in his first entry (aranciu). This focus on bisexuality is important because it allows various interpretations of the novel to exist simultaneously. The *Dracula Daily* community, while actively "shipping" (desiring romantic pairings) queer relationships also enthusiastically "ship" the two heteronormative couples of Mina and Jonathan (popsicle-stick) and Arthur and Lucy (paris-in-space). A bisexual interpretation

allows for the queerness of the novel to be expounded upon while still supporting the relationships found in the text. This focus on bisexuality of the Crew of Light as something worth celebrating helps reclaim bisexuality from Count Dracula's monstrosity and places it in the beauty of the mundane.

The *Dracula Daily* community's next queer interpretation is of the polyamory found in the novel. Early in the text, Lucy has been proposed to by three men on the same day, and she writes, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (Stoker 67). This line has been taken by critics to further express Lucy's "latent sensuality" that is contained by the end of the novel when she is staked through the heart and the "traditional order [is] restored" (Senf 42, 45). The *Dracula Daily* readership has taken Lucy's quotation to have the same meaning as the critics have, but the online readers approach her desire with excitement for the possibility of a polyamorous relationship between Lucy and her suitors. As one Tumblr user explains, "Dracula [is] basically a novel of kitchen-table polyamory already" (thethirdromana).

The positivity surrounding Lucy's polyamory is contrasted with views regarding Count Dracula and the three vampire women who inhabit his castle. While Stoker never specifies their relationships to Count Dracula, many scholars present them as his brides (Clark 172), which once again relegates an aspect of queerness to Count Dracula's monstrosity. The polyamory that the *Dracula Daily* community engages with is not of the monstrous but of the mundane. They have made charts detailing the intricacies of the polyamorous relationships (the-crooked-library) and have made artwork depicting these relationships in a positive light (tiffycat "Lucy's three . . . "). The theme is also present in the fan-made comic, *The Extraordinary League of Gentlefolk,* a story that follows the Crew of Light after the events of *Dracula*; in the comic, Arthur, Quincey (alive but paralyzed), and Seward are depicted in a polyamorous relationship (lxgentlefolkcomic). Focusing on polyamory allows the different parts of the text to coexist, as characters can be in multiple relationships, some fan-created and some from the novel. It also presents polyamory in a positive light, a reading that inverts the focus on the Count and the three vampire women.

The last area in which *Dracula Daily* readers find queerness is in the novel's gender nonconformity, which is not fully explored by modern critics. An example occurs when Jonathan is exploring Castle Dracula

and finds a room that used to belong to the women of the castle. He writes, "Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter, and writing in my diary" (Stoker 42). Jonathan comparing himself to the women of old is an example of how the narrative portrays him as a Gothic heroine. This has not gone unnoticed by scholars, but most focus on the threat of sexual violence and passivity that is associated with Gothic heroines, in addition to how Count Dracula breaks gender norms because he preys on both genders (Craft 109, 125–26). The *Dracula Daily* community has noticed the correlation between Jonathan and Gothic heroines, dubbing him a "damsel in distress" (the-illustrative-interloper) and their "favorite gothic heroine" (see-arcane).

Gender nonconformity can be difficult to observe in the text, especially if the audience does not have an in-depth knowledge of the time period's impact on gender identity. However, the *Dracula Daily* community has decoupled the gender nonconformity of the text from the characters' sexualities, something that is only starting to emerge in scholarship (e.g., Hessen). This decoupling is evidence of the community's modern understanding of gender and sexuality as separate identities. Additionally, the *Dracula Daily* community approaches this nonconformity with the same excitement they have for the other queer aspects of the novel. They note the art of Mina with her gun (tiffycat, "Mr & Mrs Harker") and art that depicts the "hysterics" of the men in a sympathetic light (tiffycat "The love we shared for her"). Although the *Dracula Daily* community may not know all the historical context for the novel's gender nonconformity, they have found examples within *Dracula* and have again reclaimed this "monstrous" aspect of the Count for the heroes of the novel, celebrating *all* of the characters' gendered nuance.

Diving into online analyses proves why critics should consider social media as a valuable source for literary discussion (Thomas 5). Social media allows space for people from various backgrounds to collectively analyze novels in a new light and find readings that scholars have not widely explored. These findings are communicated to a large audience, generating more discussion. This growing trend is especially evident in *Dracula Daily*, as the sporadic and often short updates encourage the readers to analyze each section of the novel closely (Young 249). The uniqueness of these readings when compared to scholarship on

the subject is evident: the readers of *Dracula Daily*, for the most part, do not have an in-depth understanding of literary theories and lenses, historical context, and critical analysis of the novel. As a result, they have read the text differently and created queer readings that celebrate a fluidity of sexuality and gender. The community has breathed new life into a novel that is more than a century old; their interpretations would have rarely occurred without social media as a conduit.

Count Dracula is portrayed by Bram Stoker as monstrous, and the queer subtext of the Count is part of that monstrosity. Stoker portrays Count Dracula as monstrous, with many scholars (Halberstam; Reyes) identifying the novel's queer subtext as part of the Count's monstrosity; however, few studies examine queerness in the novel beyond the Count himself. In contrast, *Dracula Daily* has provided an opportunity for people to reclaim the queerness within the text as something that is mundane and beautiful, found in the novel's heroes. The analyses and discussions in the *Dracula Daily* community are unlikely to be discussed by professional critics, but that does not make the observations any less valid. Literature does not always need to be rewritten to be queer; sometimes, all that is needed is a new perspective.

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Feminocentric Spatial Transformation, Connection, and Empowerment in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

Julianna Reidell

In the five years since its publication, Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* has generated considerable scholarly discourse. Critical analysis of the text often falls into one of two categories: work centered on Evaristo's innovative, purposeful style and syntax (Sánchez-Palencia 2019) or an examination of prominent themes of power, privilege and intersectionality evident throughout the narrative (Courtois 2021; Koegler 2023; Strauss 2023). The two concepts may be intertwined; however, little concentrated attention has been paid to *Girl, Woman, Other*'s treatment of space and place. Physical space is both a producer and a result of complex social relationships often linked to categories of identity and power; therefore, a geocritical analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* would align consistently with the existing scholarship on Evaristo's themes of privilege and hierarchy. The scope of the novel, however, is vast—spanning a century—and composed of vignettes, each of which delves into the life of a black British female person; each protagonist inhabits, embodies, and transforms a variety of spaces and places. Although most characters are linked in some capacity, their experiences of shared physical surroundings may differ drastically. Likewise, characters with no direct connection, inhabiting drastically different environments and even time periods, may undergo parallel spatial transformations.

This paper examines the narrative trajectories of two of Evaristo's protagonists in *Girl, Woman, Other*: Grace, a mixed-race woman born in Northern England at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Bummi, a Nigerian immigrant struggling to make a life for herself and her family in modern-day London. Although Grace and Bummi initially appear to possess notably distinct lived experiences, each woman loses her mother at a young age and is notable for her lack of traditional and spatial power. To acquire a greater degree of agency and stability, however, each turns not merely to a practice of space production but one frequently connoted as feminine: cleaning. In attempting to revitalize and purify the spaces around them, Grace and Bummi help to create the conditions through

which they accomplish a true transformation of their lives. Through these largely equivalent characters and their corresponding evolutions, the deeper geocritical themes of *Girl, Woman, Other* are best revealed.

Both Grace's and Bummi's childhoods are marked by disappointment and dispossession. Grace's loving mother succumbs to tuberculosis when Grace is eight years old; though her subsequent upbringing in a girls' orphanage is relatively bearable, she is devastated when, due to the color of her skin, she is denied the chance to work as a shop employee and instead hired as the maid of a local baron (Evaristo). She eventually marries a white farmer and landowner, which grants her, for the first time, a sense of spatial security and power over her own home at Greenfields Farm. Bummi's family struggles to survive in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has been long exploited by the oil industry. Her father is killed in a refining mishap, and Bummi's mother eventually dies in a work accident in the Lagos slums. Bummi is sent to live with a cousin, who exploits her for labor. Her future appears brighter when she graduates from the University of Ibadan and marries a fellow student; however, the couple's move to Britain in search of economic opportunity results in further hardship. Unable to acquire employment matching their qualifications, Bummi and her husband struggle to raise their daughter in an impoverished neighborhood, and Bummi is left to a cleaning job and the responsibilities of a single parent when her husband dies of undiagnosed heart disease (Evaristo).

With similar professions, Grace and Bummi possess connection to the task of cleaning. Each further encounters a change of circumstances with the potential to alter their relationships to the chore: Bummi is left adrift upon the death of her husband, whereas Grace's new status as a housewife with a maid allows her to give up cleaning (Evaristo). At this crossroads, however, each woman makes the notable decision to engage *further* with the activity. Grace, encountering racist disrespect from her maid, dismisses servants altogether and cleans the house herself. In this fashion, she is able to discover the difference between cleaning for others, which she characterized as "non-stop scrubbing, scraping, shining, ironing, folding, fetching, and carrying, because you're a nobody" (384), and cleaning for herself. Bummi also approaches cleaning with a more proactive attitude: "she was going to be someone who employed others, rather than someone who was waiting to be employed/she was going to become the proprietor of her own cleaning company" (170).

Grace's and Bummi's cleaning practices represent a transformation of their surroundings, illustrating one of the essential tenets of the field of geocriticism: the concept of all space as the active and changeable product of various forces, as opposed to an "empty canvas" across which events simply unfold. In the geocritical text *Spatiality*, author Robert T. Tally, Jr., credits French philosopher Henri LeFebvre's 1991 novel *The Production of Space* with largely originating this key concept of geocritical analysis. Other scholars have since expanded on LeFebvre's initial theories by providing additional nuance to the creation of space in relation to power and marginalization based on factors including race, gender, class, and capital. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, author and professor Katherine McKittrick has expanded and challenged traditional understandings of black women's geographies and spatial relationships: the many ways in which space serves, and has historically served, both a shaper and a product of personal and social forces. McKittrick particularly emphasizes the extent to which traditional spatial/cartographic organization relies on the creation and perpetuation of power imbalances, hierarchies, exclusion, and exploitation.

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Grace's and Bummi's life experiences reflect this principle. For example, Grace encounters the dominant power's reliance on spatial exclusion when applying for a position at the local store Gillingham and Sons. She relates that "[a]s soon as she presented herself to the manager, dressed in her smartest outfit, he said outright that she'd put his customers off" (Evaristo 383). The potential opinions of Gillingham and Sons' majority white clientele (and the business's corresponding profits) dictates that the store remains a white space—a space from which the biracial Grace must necessarily be excluded. The circumstances of Bummi's childhood evoke similar ideas surrounding exploitation: when Bummi's father is killed, she reflects that his work was not only dangerous but illegal; "the whole Delta knew, yet how else to survive in that devastated place where millions of barrels of oil are suctioned up by the gargantuan drills of oil companies [. . .] to provide precious energy for the rest of the planet/while the land that produces it is left to rot" (159). The effect of the oil industry is felt not only on the region's struggling inhabitants, but also on the land itself; as she and her mother flee the Delta, Bummi notices "the acid rain that made the water undrinkable [. . .] the oil spills poisoning the crops, the diseased fisheries

in the soupy creeks, the fishing baskets that lifted out of the water congealed with gummy black oil" (160). The industry on the Delta, in addition to devastating the ecosystem, never results in real wealth or progress for its human residents—yet their continued exploitation remains a necessity for the wealthier companies and countries that benefit from the massive supplies of cheap oil.

In space, as in most facets of their lives, Grace and Bummi possess little traditional power. Though definitions of power differ notably in feminist scholarship, Grace's and Bummi's experiences best adhere to the idea of "power as domination" or "power-over" (Allen). Scholar Amy Allen's theory of power posits that power can be equated with the ability to control or alter the lives and actions of others, often against their will, including forcing individuals into spaces where they are unable to thrive or removing them from spaces coded as socially desirable.

The systemic nature of the obstacles faced by both women further ensures that they will never reach a power equilibrium with the forces working to oppress them. The continuation of the traditional system depends almost entirely on their ongoing exploitation, exclusion, and oppression, be it at the hands of an individual white storeowner or the companies and nations benefiting from the extraction of cheap oil in the Niger Delta. Nevertheless, although Bummi and Grace are relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy in a societal structure of "power-over," each maintains a degree of "power-to," also defined by Allen as the ability to control their own bodies and their own choices within a limited set of options. They make deliberate decisions to exercise their "power-to" and further engage with an act of spatial transformation: cleaning. In doing so, each woman enhances her agency, which eventually results in altered spatial and emotional circumstances.

The extent to which Grace's and Bummi's transformative practices can be understood as feminine is emphasized by the spaces that they clean or dream of cleaning. Although Grace's restyling of her own house allows her to exercise an authority previously inaccessible, Bummi is relegated to cleaning the homes of others. Nevertheless, when Bummi establishes her own company, she also expresses agency as she envisions radical spatial revitalization. On the night she decides to launch her business, Bummi

> dreamed of employing an army of woman cleaners who would set forth across the planet on a mission to clean up all the damage done to the environment [. . .] legions of singing women sifting the rivers and creeks to remove the thick slicks of grease [. . .] and digging up the land until they'd removed the toxic sublayers of soil. (Evaristo 170–71)

Though Bummi's wistful dream (which includes the lives her family may have lived in a wealthier, healthier Nigeria) remains unattainable, her ideas and focus reveal a difference in priorities between masculine- and feminine-coded spatial transformation. Although the oil companies, governments, and armies of the world produce and alter spaces by destroying land, families, livelihoods, and lives, Bummi and her cleaners (women who are primary victims of masculine colonial notions of transformation) seek to cleanse, revive, and heal spaces typically perceived as feminine (Mona and Seager 2001). Bummi and Grace, in pledging to restore settings of both the home and the land, therefore generate a sense of feminine community: a willingness to heal and be healed by their surroundings, thus replicating a bond seemingly lost with their mothers' deaths.

The obstacles each woman faces in the process of spatial transformation are also intricately linked to the female experience: specifically, the experience of possessing a body seen as exploitable for reproduction or sexual satisfaction. Alice Laurentino has assessed the means through which the bodies of the characters of *Girl, Woman, Other* function as "both their confinement and the key to freedom, since it serves as the root of prejudice [. . .] but also the means through which they can express their individuality" (151–52). McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* further foregrounds the ways in which bodies—particularly black women's bodies—must be viewed not only as a component of geography (*in* a space) but also as geographic in themselves. In other words, bodies are spaces, and the means through which Grace and Bummi begin to perceive their bodies as spaces involve their experiences with objectification. Grace's emotional wellness and happy marriage are considerably strained by her struggles with pregnancy and childbirth; after suffering two miscarriages and the deaths of two infants, her successful birth of a surviving daughter is overshadowed by postpartum depression and thoughts of self-harm. The tension between Grace and

her husband, whose desperation for an heir overshadows his concern for his wife's mental and physical health, leads Grace to long to escape her own body, which she envisions as a broken means of production—"a body that gave birth to death" (Evaristo 397).

Bummi also finds herself depending on the will of a man: to procure enough money to launch her cleaning company, she engages in transactional sex with the bishop of her local church, whose (unwanted) attention she has noticed since the death of her husband. Although Bummi attempts to separate this decision from any emotion, privately determining that "she was now a businesswoman/this was her first transaction" (Evaristo 174), she is shaken by the experience. When she returns home, she takes an hours-long bath, which she "[tops] up at regular intervals, trying to sweat him out of her" (174). She struggles with the invasion and use of her body, her space.

Bummi and Grace thus come to view themselves as parallels to their respective settings: disordered and polluted landscapes in need of cleansing, healing, and renewal yet ever vulnerable to topographical or literal penetration by powerful men. Like land in Western conceptions of use and ownership, the bodies of each woman are perceived as exploitable and possessable. To achieve furtherance of their desires—children and a happy family life for Grace and her own company for Bummi—each woman further realizes that she is forced to submit to this exploitation and possession.

Despite the degree to which Bummi and Grace continue to be subjected to and exploited by systems of traditional power, the conclusion to each woman's narrative places them in significantly improved circumstances. Grace recovers from her postpartum depression by her daughter's third birthday, they have a close and loving relationship, and Grace and her husband regain a sense of marital connection and stability after deciding not to have more children. Bummi's cleaning business soon leads her to a romantic connection with a woman in her employ. Their relationship fragments under Bummi's internalized homophobia, but she does eventually meet and marry Kofi, a Ghanaian man who also worked for her company.

Each woman's renewed emotional and physical well-being is also reflected in their relationships with the land around them. Grace first takes pride in her ability to transform the interior of her house and then delights in the outdoor farm duties she has accomplished, including that

she has learned how "to harvest fruit from the orchard [. . .] to pick and pickle vegetables [. . .] to feed the cows, goats, pigs, horses, chickens [. . .] to do the hedging, hurdle-making, basket-making, butter and cheese-making" (Evaristo 403–04). Bummi, in a new home, is captivated by the presence of nature in her yard, where "lilac wisteria spreads across the shed" (187) and "apple trees [. . .] line the left side of their orchard" (188). With this spatial fulfillment, however, also comes reflections on their long-deceased mothers. Grace lists events in her life that she wishes her mother could see: "Everything changed, Ma, once me and my Hattie found each other [. . .] I wish you'd seen me spoil her, Ma" (402). Bummi's concluding thought is "see me now, Mama, see me now" (188). Both women have lost their mothers early in their lives, and those losses continue to affect them. Nevertheless, the textual proximity of Grace's and Bummi's thoughts of the land and of their mothers underlines the extent to which their new environments represent the success and comfort their mothers might have desired for them as well as a source of empowerment and emotional connection akin to their mothers' love.

This final linking of the land to maternal figures solidifies Evaristo's highlighting and valorizing the connections, contributions, and sacrifices of females and the struggle around the female body. Evaristo seeks to present a textual perspective that is fundamentally feminocentric. These two characters of *Girl, Woman, Other* live in a societal organization and corresponding spatial structure that disempowers and excludes them; neither Bummi nor Grace precisely achieve the lives they desired. Nevertheless, in prioritizing the transformative power of female-coded practices, spaces, and connections, Evaristo narrates a crucial set of ideas and behaviors—a guide, essentially, with which women can continue to forge a path.

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Setting and Subjectivity in *A Pale View of Hills*

Isaiah Russell

Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, is generally read as a study in obscuration. A frame story of a woman (Etsuko) living in England whose daughter has recently committed suicide, the novel operates primarily in flashbacks as she recalls her experiences in postwar Japan. The work has consequently been analyzed largely in terms of its narration, as scholars have focused extensively on the unreliability of Etsuko as the storyteller and how the prose functions in repressing her past traumas. However, a factor that remains underdiscussed in this discourse is Ishiguro's use of physical space and sensory imagery, which often reflects Etsuko's present-day psyche in more indirect ways. These frequent moments and conspicuously written moments, understood in conjunction, create a story that progressively reveals itself and the initially buried aspects of Etsuko's character to the reader. Therefore, the characterizations of the settings in the novel that are colored by her memory—the "pale view" alluded to in the title—become essential in understanding both the book's historical subtext as well as Etsuko's fractured past and troubled present. Focusing on Etsuko's physical surroundings, two specific locations (Inasa and the cottage) exhibit her unstable and restricted memory.

Although Matek mentions that the day trip to the resort in Inasa as significant—it contains the story's titular hills and is representative of Etsuko's "pale view"—she does not specify how the text signals Inasa's significance. In this sequence, differing perceptions of the scenery imply that Etsuko has been overestimating her recollections. After purchasing a pair of binoculars, which are noted to be "just a toy" (Ishiguro 104), Etsuko recalls that "they were surprisingly powerful" (104) when used to view the hills. Another character soon contradicts her, claiming they "aren't any good" and that they "can't even see [the] trees, the near ones" (108). These discrepancies in memory are exposed elsewhere by the seemingly more-objective views of characters such as Ogata-San (Molino), and the same concept can be applied to this scene, which serves as a microcosm of Etsuko's compromised point of view throughout the story.

Sachiko and Mariko's cottage is also a point of interest due to Ishiguro's repeated—almost obsessively so—motif of darkness and shadow in that location. During her first visit inside, Etsuko observes that, although the cottage has an opening for sunlight, "much of the place remained in shadow" (Ishiguro 18), and some approximation of the darkness occurs during every subsequent visit (39, 78, 158). Another scene describes Sachiko "gaz[ing] out through the open partitions, out into the darkness" (45). Although shade, shadow, and night pervade or surround the space, a lantern often "provide[s] the only source of light" (42). This throughline potentially connects to a commonly debated aspect about the novel, which is the reality of Mariko and Sachiko as characters. Scholars like Horton, Fau, and Baillie and Matthews speculate that the two characters are merely fabrications from Etsuko's psyche and ideas of herself as a mother—"a spectral double" (Baillie and Matthews 50). Others, such as Drąg and as Karni, have disputed this claim, positing that Etsuko is focusing on these individuals during this period because of the ways they parallel, or are projected to parallel, her own situation. These latter interpretations prove more textually compelling, as Ishiguro's interplay of light and darkness serves to heighten the ambiguity regarding the accuracy of Etsuko's perception of Sachiko and Mariko, rather than outright questioning their existence or Etsuko's sanity, and to visually reinforce the impression of the narration as merely a spotlight in its capacity to capture the full extent of her past experiences.

Another function of the novel's settings and their descriptions to convey Etsuko's internal perception of Japan's postwar period and societal flux, which differs from how she expresses it verbally. From Etsuko's first flashback (Ishiguro 11), imagery of reconstruction abounds. When walking into the city, she sees the "apartment blocks standing like four concrete pillars" (13). The word "pillars" is telling when juxtaposed with the waste ground around her home, which is characterized by disorder and muddy amorphousness (12,16). Other passing observations invite further scrutiny through their peculiar wording. On the excursion to Inasa, Etsuko sees "the harbour looking like a dense piece of machinery left in the water" (110), and upon her return, she takes in a street "littered with discarded newspapers" (124) and "the changing lights of the city" (125). Such brief details illustrate the cultural and infrastructural transitions in Japan. Toward the end

of her flashbacks, she remembers, "The wasteground outside must have hardened significantly since the first occasion I had watched that large American car, for now I saw it coming across the uneven surface without undue difficulty" (156–57). Ishiguro seems to be signaling a broader historical progression while also insinuating potential justifications for Etsuko's future actions. Her eventual marriage to a journalist and her immigration to England, "whose details and intervening years the reader can only imagine" (Molino 327), may be understood once considered with these segments. Though she outwardly sympathizes with nationalistic rhetoric from people like Ogata-San, her portrayal of the changing scenery, especially features tied to the growing Western influence, subtly renders her—and by extension, Japan's—desire for stability and renewal following the national traumas of the war.

Ishiguro also conveys these cultural shifts through yet another visual motif: placing characters with disagreements and generational divides on slopes, hills, or otherwise uneven footing. After a terse conversation with Sachiko while walking up a hill, Etsuko curiously remarks that "[Sachiko's] youthful figure had been deceiving, for she had the face of an older person" (Ishiguro 15). A mirrored scenario is played out moments later when Etsuko goes to the river to acquaint herself with an unresponsive Mariko, who merely stares "from the bottom of the slope" (16). The scene where Sachiko drowns the kittens in the river later calls back to this setup: "The little girl was standing at the top of the slope, watching with the same blank expression" (167). Strung together, these moments create a kind of generational chain, where Sachiko looks down on Etsuko, who looks down on Mariko, who looks down on Sachiko. Thus, the landscape's dynamism, while operating as shorthand for interpersonal discord, stands in for cultural tensions as well.

These disparities are further explored when Etsuko accompanies Ogata-San, the embodiment of Japanese traditionalism, to confront an old friend of Jiro's who has written a pro-communist article (Ishiguro 144). Etsuko notes that his house is situated in a particularly hilly neighborhood, and the men's ensuing argument occurs "halfway up a steep path" (Ishiguro 142). Following the most explicit scene of political and generational friction, Ogata-San watches "the young man disappear down the hill" (148). Considering that each of these instances is playing with differences between values and ages, Ishiguro appears to be highlighting the hostility between the emerging and residual cultures of the period, which is then manifested in the landscape, or at least the

remembered landscape in Etsuko's mind. As the novel progresses, these national conflicts gradually intertwine with the difficulties and trauma Etsuko faces with her children.

Analyses of Ishiguro's book often centralize Etsuko's grief over Keiko as the crux of her story and key to understanding its peculiar narration. Indeed, the aftereffects from Keiko's suicide infiltrate the descriptive passages in both past and present time periods, most clearly when Etsuko recalls natural elements. For example, Keiko's lingering presence is felt when Etsuko describes the scenery near Nagasaki, which adopts womblike qualities. When she and Sachiko are searching for Mariko, she details the setting sun "highlighting the muddy furrows" (Ishiguro 37) of the wasteground and later "[t]he ground [feeling] soft, almost marshy under [her] feet" (40). Fau, noticing this pattern, suggests, "In the Japanese setting of the novel, children are born as well as unborn beings. Motherhood constantly oscillates between life and death, being frequently related to various elements like earth (more exactly mud) and water" (149). Such a connection elucidates another scene where, upon finding a piece of rope along the riverbank, Etsuko comments, "When I held it up to the moonlight [the rope] felt damp and muddy between my fingers" (Ishiguro 83). Although some critics explain how this moment calls to mind the nature of her daughter's suicide, Fau also makes the leap to view the rope as evoking an umbilical cord—a simultaneous image of life and death (152). The way in which these images permeate her prenatal memories suggest that her perspective is colored by her current reflections of Keiko's death.

Natural destruction, namely from the atomic bomb and its aftermath, also stands in for Etsuko's trauma about her daughter. Following a break from the present-day segment in which Keiko and her death are first mentioned, Etsuko reminisces: "A river ran near us, and I was once told that before the war a small village had grown up on the riverbank. But then the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins" (Ishiguro 11). The conspicuous verb "had grown up" (11) proceeded by an image of evisceration evidently reflects her own headspace following her daughter's suicide. Drąg, who specifically aims to connect the historical context of the bomb to Etsuko's personal grief, asserts that Keiko's death is itself an aftereffect of the bombing, as the trauma of the event was subsequently passed on to Keiko generationally through Etsuko and her actions (96).

Etsuko's descriptions of her home in England are then striking in how they show her attempting to nurture the surrounding environment. At one point, she is seen pruning "a large number of [pot plants], cluttering the window ledge" (Ishiguro 91). Then, in an undeniably deliberate callback, Ishiguro connects the "thin young trees planted when the buildings had gone up [in Nagasaki]" (37) with "the orchard [outside Etsuko's house] and the neat rows of thin young trees" (179), showing how she hopes to foster or rebuild lost life, just as the case after the war. Altogether, these repeated images of nature, seen through the filter of present-day Etsuko, suggest a tormented mind struggling to reconcile experiences of motherhood and losing a child.

In a story that is often seen as constantly holding information back, the details that Ishiguro ultimately does decide to include then become revelatory when analyzing Etsuko's character and questionable narration. This unreliability becomes apparent in key locations where Etsuko's portrayal of the scenery is either refuted or written in a way that warrants suspicion. Further demonstrating her subjectivity, the landscape of Japanese reconstruction is interpreted and contorted to emphasize personal aspirations of rehabilitation and a tumultuous cultural restructuring. Finally, through Ishiguro's employment of nature, Etsuko's grief is explored in a narrative that seemingly tries to focus on anything but the traumatic events, leaving readers with the sense that, however circuitously, Etsuko has begun to process the reality of her enigmatic life.

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The Protest of Artistic Expression in Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills"

Emily Theroux

Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" depicts the major struggles of factory workers during the nineteenth century. Her short story critiques the unbothered white middle and upper classes that allowed mill workers to face unimaginable conditions for their benefit. The incredibly low compensation that the working class received would never make up for the permanent damage to their quality of life. These men and women faced a daily routine that was comparable to the eternal punishment of burning in the fires of hell. One character, Hugh Wolfe spends each day inside of a furnace, stuck in a job that takes more from him than it gives. To cope with his desire to break free of the chains that come with making a wage, he turns to the creative side of his mind. Wolfe crafts the Korl Woman, a statue that shocks those socially above him into acknowledging the pain that mill workers experience. Wolfe's artistic vision is the central symbol of the story, solidifying Rebecca Harding Davis's goal in creating this narrative: to force others to face the injustice the working class was experiencing during this time. Although this novella is fictional, it is set in the harsh reality of this time. The Korl Woman is an artistic protest to the ignorance about the plight of the working class before labor reform was enacted. "Harding Davis insists that the artist's task is not merely to seek aesthetic satisfaction but to solicit social change" (Molyneaux 173). The statue exemplifies Davis's mission to refuse to let the injustice experienced by the working class be forgotten.

The Korl Woman exemplifies the forgotten stories of mill workers, shown through the reactions of the white, male, middle-class onlookers. Among these men is Kirby, who owns a mill through familial ties. The statue triggers Kirby to acknowledge the hardship of the people working in his mill. However, he quickly returns to pretending that he can ignore what he sees:

> "You think you could govern the world better?" laughed the Doctor.
>
> "I do not think at all."

> "That is true philosophy. Drift with the stream, because you cannot dive deep enough to find the bottom, eh?"
>
> "Exactly," rejoined Kirby. "I do not think. I wash my hands of all social problems,—[*sic*] slavery, caste, white or black. My duty to my operatives has a narrow limit,—the pay-hour on Saturday night. Outside of that, if they cut korl, or cut each other's throats, (the more popular amusement of the two,) I am not responsible." (Davis 55)

Kirby does not allow himself to think about the men and women who work for him. He recognizes that they are oppressed and working tirelessly, but he chooses to settle into half-hearted ignorance because this unequal system benefits him. Kirby's role in society dictates his actions: "The drama generated by the korl woman exposes the vacuous platitudes and indifferent, satanic machinations of the mill's visitor. Their actions are not merely idiosyncratic but rooted in a widespread system in which an undivided—but socially divisive—allegiance to the cash nexus overrides all other consideration" (Molyneaux 169). The self-serving narrative that Kirby chooses to adopt is what prevents mill workers from receiving anything more than platitudes from those who believe change is unnecessary. Kirby may not believe that the injustice is justified, but he is willing to sit back and watch the consequences of his ignorance.

The Korl Woman is Hugh Wolfe's artistic vision that represents every forgotten member of the working class. The statue is based on the strife that Wolfe endures and observes every day—the essence of Wolfe's pain and his resilience. Acknowledging that the labor system strips workers of their worth is too expensive and Kirby does "not think at all" (Davis 55). Kirby gives no thought to fostering Wolfe's gifts; he considers Wolfe a lost cause. "Hugh [Wolfe] dies because he can-not be a genteel artist, end of story" (Watson 127). His plight is ignored by the middle class.

The Korl Woman illustrates the physical condition of the mill workers. Davis provides a harrowing description of the female figure's physique, detailing how hard labor has warped her body:

> There was not one line of beauty or grace in it: a nude woman's form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing. One idea: there it

> was in the tense, rigid muscles, the wild eager face, like that of a starving wolf's. Kirby and Doctor May walked around it, critical curious. Mitchell stood aloof, silent. The figure touched him strangely. (Davis 53)

The Korl Woman is a work of art that lacks "beauty" and "grace." Kirby, Mitchell, and Doctor May are shocked when they see the sculpture; its composition conveys the true suffering of mill workers that Davis seeks to push forward in her short story. It is questionable, however, if Davis's description of the statue is simply the perception of those who are higher in social standing than the working class. If so, the narrative asserts that the middle and higher classes cannot find any complex beauty within the working class.

The material of the statue is korl, the leftover limestone from iron production that has no value. "Hugh appropriates benign waste, from the industry that poisons him with its hazardous waste, for artistic, emotional sustenance, creating beauty and value that exceed capitalist exchange" (Gatlin 224). The use of that material for Wolfe's creative vision is fitting, considering the nonexistent worth that the mill owners ascribe to their workers. They see the Korl Woman, a representation of the mill workers, as a horrific example of what they disregard every day.

The statue's body is described as "muscular" and "coarse with labor" (Davis 53)—adjectives that bring forth the physical toll that mill labor has on the human body. Being "muscular" is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is unnatural in the generally gentile portrait of the ideal woman. The roughness of her body, the fact that it is "coarse," also presents that the physique of this woman has been put through "labor" that has caused unnatural evidence of physical survival. Her most significant attributes, however, are the sense of intense "longing" the statue possesses in its "limbs," "muscles," and "eager face" (53). The statue is not to illustrate the silence of mill workers as they complete their exhausting shifts, complacent in their fate, but instead to solidify their desire to break free of the system that abuses and ensnares them.

The Korl Woman's agony of yearning for something it cannot retrieve is the most intense part of its existence. It serves as the most intricate part of Hugh Wolfe's statue. Even Hugh cannot fully articulate that for which she hungers when he is asked by Doctor May. Wolfe tries to explain:

> "Not hungry for meat," the furnace tender said at last.
> "What then? Whiskey?" jeered Kirby with a coarse laugh.
> Wolfe was silent a moment, thinking. "I dunno," he said with a bewildered look. "It mebbe. Summat to make her live, I think,—[*sic*] like you. Whiskey ull do it, in a way." (Davis 54)

Hugh's attempt to express what the Korl Woman needs is a clear example of how the figure communicates truth about the internal struggle of the working class that cannot be understood otherwise. Something "to make her live" (54) is what Hugh concludes she wants or needs. Mill workers, though breathing, are not really living; they engage in labor so intense that they are cheated of the simple pleasures of being alive. They are not afforded time to enjoy the scenery or to find meaning in their work, so they search for something to alleviate their pain, such as the "Whiskey" Kirby jokingly assumes the Korl Woman wants. Although he is making a cruel jab, whiskey may be one of the only means these mill workers have to escape the oppression of the mill. In contrast, Hugh Wolfe, through this sculpture, finds what makes him "live." He says The Korl Woman aches for something to allow her a life, just like those who stare at her with confusion and disgust.

In the end, Wolfe experiences a tragic ending. "Davis's Hugh Wolfe is frustrated in life by the inhumane economic forces that determine his inability to fulfill his creative desire to finish his sculpture. Like his statue of the korl woman, Hugh Wolfe fails to satisfy his hunger, to use his power, to find his voice; he kills himself" (Rose 157). Wolfe's description of the statue's wish is clearly also a descriptive of his internal conflict. The Korl Woman conveys the hunger of all mill workers, including Wolfe, to find meaning outside of the labor that robs them of life.

Hugh Wolfe is trapped every day in the death shift; the mill workers search for escape from the death shift in every crack in the floorboards of the mill's furnace, but Wolfe finds his mental exit, his escape, through his artistic expression of the Korl Woman. She stands, wearing nothing but the scars from the factory that dictates her every curve.

On October 27, 2023, I toured the Carrie Blast Furnaces—a landmark in Pittsburgh, PA, to study "Life in the Iron Mills." My tour guide, Dr. Kirsten Paine, explained that korl, the material of which the statue is composed, is called "slag." The word "slag" is slang that doubled as a way to call women trash. Outside the Carrie furnaces, slag covered

the ground, ignored as commonplace. While on site, I picked up one of the rocks. It was almost soft, as if it would crumble if I closed my fist too tightly around it. By experiencing a site similar to Davis's iron mills, I could interpret the story with even more poignancy.

The working class in the iron mills suffered in silence because they were written off as inconsequential pebbles (like that rock I held) that were collateral damage under the middle class's boots. The Korl Woman is an emblem that the dehumanizing narrative is false; she acts as the "trash" woman, representing those workers whose very existence confronts her oppressors. The workers volunteered to labor by applying for employment, but did they have a choice? Did they have options? The mill workers did not have the option to say "no" to working in the iron mills. Therefore, they worked and creative works, like Davis's story and Wolfe's Korl Woman become pieces of protest. Unfortunately, the protest resulted in the erasure of mill workers' *individual* narratives. These artistic works represented the mill workers but were made without the workers' permission. The outcome was that viewers admitted that beauty could be found among what was discarded as trash and acknowledged the pain that comes with the promotion of capitalism.

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BACK MATTER

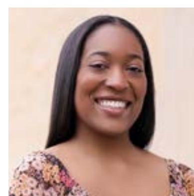
Contributors' Biographies

Authors

Audrey Ball
Fort Hays State University

Audrey is a senior, majoring in English Writing with a minor in Communication Studies and a Grant-Writing Certificate. She presented a paper at the Sigma Tau Delta 2025 Convention and is serving as the 2025–2026 Student Representative for the High Plains Region. She is a member of a local choir and, in her free time, she loves to crochet, cook, and watch horror movies with friends.

Brianna Bell
Texas Christian University

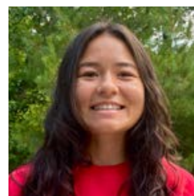


Brianna recently graduated with her BA in English from Texas Christian University. As a student, she served as President of her university's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. She received numerous recognitions for her research and writing, including the AddRan Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, the Women's Wednesday Club Undergraduate Research Essay Award, and the English Senior Scholar Award. In her free time, Brianna enjoys reading on the couch of her favorite boba shop.

Kathryn "Katie" Claire Bergquist
St. Olaf College

Katie graduated in May 2025 from St. Olaf College with a BA in English and History. She served as a Peer Writing Tutor at the St. Olaf's Writing Desk and as Student Manager for St. Olaf's Norseman Band. Between reading and writing, she enjoys fiber arts, spending time with her pets, and Oxford commas. She hopes to serve as a speaker for Dysphonia International, a nonprofit group dedicated to supporting individuals with voice disorders.

Antonina "Nina" D'Eramo
Duquesne University



Nina is graduating in May 2026 with a BA in English and a BS in Secondary English Education. She recently was selected as the recipient of the Frances J. Chivers Scholarship, which is awarded for interpretive essay writing. Nina plans to pursue an

MA in English at Duquesne, having been accepted into the Accelerated MA Program. Currently, she is the Fiction Editor of the school's literary journal.

Owen Gornicki
Alma College

Owen is a Legal Administrative Assistant and recent graduate of Alma College, where he earned BAs in English and in World Languages and Cultures while serving as a Spanish tutor, Writing Center Consultant, and Sigma Tau Delta Chapter President. His essay "Hear the Music: Queering Baldwin's 'Sonny Blues'"—Winner of the Isabel Sparks President's Award at the Sigma Tau Delta 2025 Convention—showcases his interest in critical theory and cultural studies.

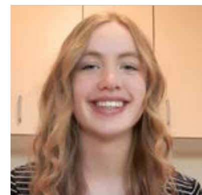
Robbie Graham
Illinois State University

Robbie is a senior English Education major with minors in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages and in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. His Honors Thesis "Inquiring into Power, Identity, and Engagement" explores how high school students respond to dystopian young-adult literature in a book club setting. His academic interests include socially just English Language Arts. Robbie plans to teach in the Chicagoland area in a student-centered, critically engaged classroom.

Katherine Harber
Berry College

Katherine graduated from Berry College in May 2025 with a BA in English and French and a minor in History. She is pursuing a Master's degree in Historic Preservation with a concentration in Public History at Georgia State University, though she remains passionate about literature as well. Katherine spent her fall 2023 semester studying French in Paris, France, and she has been published in the *Rock Creek Review*.

Kayleigh Kearsley
Utah State University, Logan



Kayleigh studies English Teaching and is an advocate for student voice and choice in the classroom. She also loves reading all forms of literature and dabbles in writing and editing. Her previous work has appeared in *Intraminutia* and

Curiosity publications. When she is not reading, writing, or editing, she is often found spinning around a dance floor or traversing through the woods—on foot, in snowshoes, or on horseback.

Sadie Olsen
Utah State University, Logan

Sadie is a senior, pursuing a BS in English Literature with minors in Linguistics and Folklore and with a Museum Studies Certificate. "From the Monstrous to the Mundane" is her first published work. Sadie is a member of the Utah State University Writing Fellows and of the Aggie Marching Band. She hopes to pursue a master's in Literature with an emphasis on Victorian literature and queer theory.

Julianna Reidell
Arcadia University

Julianna graduated *summa cume laude* in May 2025, majoring in English and French with a minor in Pan-African Studies. On campus, she served as an editor for Arcadia's academic journal *The Compass* as well as Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Arcadia undergraduate literary magazine *Quiddity*. Julianna's academic work previously has been published in the NCHC journal *UReCA*, and her creative pieces have appeared in *Roi Fainéant Press*, *Moss Puppy Magazine*, and *For Page and Screen*, among other journals.

Isaiah Russell
Fort Hays State University

Isaiah is pursuing a Master's in English. He serves as Sigma Tau Delta's Senior Student Advisor as well as President of his university's chapter. He has presented papers at the 2024 and 2025 Sigma Tau Delta Conventions in the British Critical Essays category and he won third and first prizes, respectively. On campus, he works in the university's writing center and is on the editorial board of the university's literary and arts journal *Lines from the Middle of Nowhere*.

Emily Theroux
Duquesne University

Emily is in her first year at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law through Duquesne University's 3+3 Law Program. She completed her undergraduate degree as an English major

and a Political Science minor. She was the Social Media Director of Duquesne's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, and she is employed at the university's writing center. Her short story "The Fog" was published in Duquesne's literary journal *Lexicon* and was presented at the Sigma Tau Delta 2025 Convention in Pittsburgh.

Faculty Reviewers

Lisa Bell, PhD
Fort Hays State University

Lisa Bell is the Writing Center Director and Instructor of English at Fort Hays State University, where she serves as the Co-Advisor for the Sigma Tau Delta Chapter. Her teaching and research focus on developmental writing and first-year composition programs. She believes that writing education is the foundation for solid communication skills and encourages her students to explore their worlds through words.

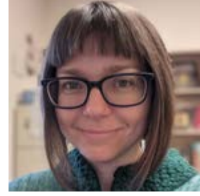
Sonia Mae Brown, PhD
Philander Smith University

Dr. Sonia Brown is an Associate Professor of Language and Letters and the Southwestern Regent of Sigma Tau Delta. She earned her PhD from Howard University and is an Erotic Scholar whose work explores Black literature, sexuality, identity, and performance. A dedicated community activist, Dr. Brown teaches students how to live sustainable lives through their connections to the soil and their communities. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, writing, cooking, and curating creative spaces that nurture joy, growth, and self-discovery.

Michael Frizell, MFA
Missouri State

Michael Frizell is Director of Student Learning Services at Missouri State University and edits *The Learning Assistance Review*. An ICLCA Certified Learning Center Professional (Level IV, Lifetime) and 2024 CLADEA Fellow, he serves as Vice Chair of the Council of Learning and Developmental Education Associations and on *RiLADE*'s editorial team. Frizell edited *Learning Centers in the 21st Century* and has written nearly 200 biographical comics for TidalWave Comics.

Madeline B. Gangnes, PhD
University of Scranton



Dr. Madeline B. Gangnes is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Scranton, where she teaches courses on nineteenth-century British literature, environmental and climate literature, utopia and dystopia, science fiction, and literary works. She specializes in Victorian studies, comics, and illustration, with a special interest in late-Victorian illustrated periodicals. Her scholarship appears in venues that include *Victorian Periodicals Review*, *Victorian Popular Fictions*, *Studies in Comics*, and *The Edinburgh History of Children's Periodicals* (2024).

Emily Ruth Isaacson, PhD
Heidelberg University

Emily Isaacson is a Professor of English and the Director of the Honors Program at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, OH. She earned her degrees at Augustana College and the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has previously taught at Florida Atlantic University and Chowan University. Having published on early modern city comedy (especially that of Ben Jonson, she pivoted her scholarship to pedagogy and now is researching how to encourage empathy through teaching early modern literature.

Kriss Larkin, PhD
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Kriss Larkin is an Instructor of English at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She holds bachelor's degrees in Sociology and English from Middle Tennessee State University, a master's degree in Literature from Belmont University, and a PhD in Literature from The University of Texas at Dallas. Exploring the interplay between sociology and English is a central passion, as she seeks to integrate the popular with the academic.

Shirley F. Manigault, PhD
Winston-Salem State University

Professor of English, Dr. Manigault holds the doctorate, master's, and bachelor's degrees in English from University of North Caroline at Chapel Hill, Wake Forest University, and Bennett College, respectively. In addition to teaching, she has served as Special Assistant to the Chancellor, as Associate Dean, and as Chair of English. A recipient of awards for teaching and service, she has interests that include development and assessment of writing programs.

Jennifer Randall, PhD
Dalton State

Dr. Randall has taught at Dalton State since Fall 2011. Before Dalton State, she taught at Hampton University, Kennesaw State University, Midlands Technical College, Coker College, and Western Carolina. She received her BA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Converse University, her MA in English with a concentration in Composition and Rhetoric from Western Carolina University, and her PhD in Rhetoric with a concentration in Medieval Literature from Georgia State University. When she is not running her four children to activities or teaching, she likes to hide and listen to music (K-Pop to country).

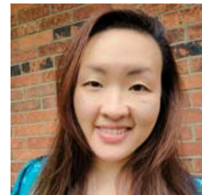
Shelly Sanders, PhD
Abilene Christian University

Shelly Sanders has enjoyed teaching creative writing workshops for the last 20 years as Professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Abilene Christian University (ACU) in Abilene, TX. She enjoys advising ACU students as they prepare and publish the university's literary journal, *The Shinnery Review*, and she also recently served as fiction editor for *Aethlon: A Journal of Sport Literature*.

Nicole Sheets, PhD
Whitworth University

Nicole Sheets is Associate Professor of English and a Sigma Tau Delta Chapter Advisor at Whitworth University in Spokane, WA. She is the Managing Editor of *Rock & Sling*, a journal of witness housed at Whitworth. Her writing has appeared in *Mid-American Review*, *Image*, *Bellingham Review*, and other journals. She's very proud of the green beans she grew for the first time in her little garden.

Yu-Li Alice Shen, PhD
University of Southern Indiana



Yu-Li Alice Shen is a playwright, English professor, and audiobook narrator. Her plays have received awards from the American Playwriting Foundation, ATHE-KCACTF, and SETC, and they have been fully produced in New York and a handful of other states. In her spare time, Alice sings and plays ukulele at local assisted living facilities; co-hosts a humor/improv podcast called "Going Terribly"; and lends her quirky, versatile voice to the audiobook narration industry.

Editorial Team

Carie S. Tucker King, PhD
The University of Texas at Dallas

Carie King is Clinical Professor in Literature and in Communication Studies and is the Sigma Tau Delta Chapter Advisor at The University of Texas at Dallas in Richardson, TX. She is the Managing Editor of Publications for Sigma Tau Delta and a proud member since 1989 (inducted at Baylor University). She has been published in *Health Communication*, *Communication Design Quarterly*, *Journal of Surgery*, and *Technical Communication*, and she has co-edited and authored five books, including her monograph *The Rhetoric of Breast Cancer*.

Adrianna Bailey
Prairie View A&M University

Adrianna, a recent graduate of Prairie View A&M University, is a writer whose work explores language, storytelling, and cultural critique. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and an emerging voice in literary analysis and creative fiction. With a passion for psychological thrillers and contemporary literature, Adrianna is committed to shaping narratives that challenge, inform, and inspire both academic and general audiences. Adrianna will continue developing her voice and expertise through her enrollment into the Fall 2026 New York University Master of Arts in Professional Writing Program.

Hana Ishige
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Hana, a recent graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, majored in English with a double minor in Creative Writing and Advocacy and Public Writing. During her time of study, she was an Editor of her university's magazine, *The Coraddi*, and she interned for the literary journal *The Greensboro Review*. She is a huge enthusiast for books and all types of stories, often spending hours of her day reading. Currently, she pursues her passion for writing through digital and social media marketing.

Starla Jade Parker (she/her)
Nicholls State University

Starla, a recent graduate of Nicholls State University, is an editor, writer, and artist out of Baton Rouge, LA. She is teaching English to students with dyslexia. She is an Alumni Editor for *The Mosaic Literary Magazine* at Nicholls State University.

She also collaborated on an open-source textbook for all entry-level English courses for the universities in Louisiana. Starla is an MFA student at Eastern Kentucky University and serves as President of the Sigma Epsilon Chapter. She has multiple publications in *American Weirdo Magazine*.

About SIGMA TAU DELTA

Since its inception in 1924, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society has modeled its mission to confer distinction for high achievement, promote interest in English language and literature, foster exemplary character and fellowship, and exhibit high standards of academic excellence.

In 1972, Sigma Tau Delta was accepted as a member of the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS). Currently the Society has grown to include nearly 800 active chapters with more than 1,000 Faculty Advisors; more than 7,500 members are inducted annually.

Sigma Tau Delta has continued to flourish and expand, branching out in 1996 to found Sigma Kappa Delta for the growing two-year college system, and in 2004, it established the National English Honor Society for secondary school students and faculty. The English Language Arts Honor Society for students in grades 6–9 was launched in 2023. Sigma Tau Delta is now the second largest honor society in the ACHS.

Through hard and dedicated work, Sigma Tau Delta has built upon the strong foundation of its founder Judson Q. Owen, whose initial foresight shaped the Society; three subsequent executive secretaries/directors—E. Nelson James, William C. Johnson, and Matt Hlinak—added their own visions to the Society, and many other individuals further shaped the vital, growing organization we are today.

Sigma Tau Delta's Journals

The Sigma Tau Delta journals publish annually the best writing and criticism of undergraduate and graduate active chapter members of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle was founded in 1931 as a quarterly publication highlighting the best creative writing of the Society's members. At the fall 1998 meeting of the Board of Directors, the Rectangle went to a once-a-year publication schedule, providing a more professional look and permitting the inclusion of more student writing in each issue.

Sigma Tau Delta Review was added as a societal journal in 2007 and publishes critical essays on literature, essays on rhetoric and composition, and essays devoted to pedagogical issues.

Annual Submissions

The best writing is chosen for publication from hundreds of submissions. Not only do these refereed journals go to chapters worldwide, but they also honor the best writing in each category, with five awards totaling $2,500.

As of 2016, the Sigma Tau Delta journals are catalogued with the Library of Congress. There is also an annual reading at the Sigma Tau Delta convention by any of the published writers in attendance.

All active undergraduate and graduate members of active Sigma Tau Delta chapters are invited to submit their work to the *Review* and *Rectangle*. Chapter Advisors, faculty members, alumni, and honorary members are not eligible to submit.

Submissions for the 2027 journals are due between March 16 and April 13, 2026.