double space

The Undergraduate Journal of the Department of English, UCC

2021-2022

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EDITORIAL

Double Space - the Undergraduate Journal of the Department of English, UCC - was born out of a desire to showcase the academic excellence of UCC's English students. The essays and creative work that we feature are primarily from the 2020-2021 academic year, stemming from UCC's own English Undergraduate Awards and its official Global Undergraduate counterpart. Some of the works featured have been granted the esteemed Patricia Coughlan Award and the Eoin Murray Memorial Prize.

We have chosen to group the essays according to their similar themes, and hope that this is communicated to the reader. These themes include Irish poetry, motherhood, cultural anxieties, and a general commentary on Gothic Literature. The excellent short story "Virtual Bodies" by Maeve McTaggart stands apart from the others thematically, which is symbolic of its status as the sole creative writing piece of the journal.

EDITORIAL

Overall, we hope that the journal will inspire readers and ignite a wider recognition of the Arts as a whole. Our aim is to reach a wider audience beyond UCC students and alumni, and showcase the award-winning work of our contributors. We have thoroughly enjoyed reading these works while developing the journal, and hope that readers will discover new interests, as did we. We aspire to establish *Double Space* as an integral part of the Department of English in years to come.

We would like to thank all of the contributors for their outstanding work that they have kindly allowed us to feature, and to our staff editors Dr Heather Laird and Dr Miranda Corcoran for their invaluable help and advice throughout the process.

Anna Fitzgerald, Leah Mulcahy, Robyn Power, Alexandra To, and Mia Tobin Power

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Laura Shelly, "Representing Representation: Responses to the Visual Image in the Ekphrastic Poetry of John Keats and Letitia Elizabeth Landon"

I'm Laura Shelly and I graduated with a BA in English in 2020. This essay is a section taken from my final year dissertation. During my undergraduate degree, I was also involved in student journalism and poetry of mine was included in UCC's Quarryman literary journal.

Joseph Linehan, The 'Helenic' Element: Helen of Sparta and Gendered Myth in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats

My name is Joseph Linehan and I am a student in UCC's MA Modernities programme. I wrote my essay, "The 'Helenic' Element" for my final year seminar on the writings of W. B. Yeats for Prof Alex Davis. Mythology and folklore have always been keen passions of mine (I have fond memories of Greek mythology lectures from my first year as an undergraduate) but I have since gravitated towards more modern writing in Irish literature. In Yeats' poetry, however, I found a wonderful confluence of mythology from both Celtic and classical traditions, and, as is the case with everyone who studies Yeats, his love affair with Maud Gonne became a fascinating topic to me as I read more and more about his life. Soon, I began to link these two sides to Yeats' poetry together in the image of Helen of Sparta, a figure who

always appears to be on the edge of focus and around whom I decided to frame my final essay. Apart from reading mythology and twentieth-century poetry, I still like to keep my head in the books - mainly contemporary Irish and science fiction writing - between coming up with ideas for my MA blog and thesis, which is more than enough to keep me musing for hours in front of my laptop, gazing out the Q+3 windows at the brutal face of the Kane Building (which doesn't deserve the hate it gets, in my opinion).

Sarah Byrne, "'To the Women Hovering': A Discussion of the Representation of Gender and Biological Sex in Seamus Heaney's *North*"

My name is Sarah Byrne and I am a third year English and Theatre and Performative Practices student. My essay ""To the Women Hovering": A Discussion of the Representation of Gender and Biological Sex in Séamus Heaney's North (1975)" is deeply informed by a strong interest in Irish folklore, and the treatment of gender within the Irish nationalist tradition. My time is currently divided between my pursuit of knowledge in the Rebel County and the family farm in Wexford. Both a keen reader and an aspiring writer, I may often be found sitting amongst the cattle with a pen in one hand, and scratching a bullock with the other! My worldview and writing is shaped dramatically by my rural upbringing, as I feel a deep sense of connection to the Irish landscape and the history buried within it.

Lara Ní Chuirrín, "Landscape and Space: A Study of the Personal and the Political in Irish Poetry"

My name is Lara Ní Chuirrín, and I am a recent graduate of UCC, where I studied History of Art and English Literature. I am currently undertaking an MA in Contemporary Art practices and theory in NCAD. My essay on space and place in Irish poetry was motivated in part by an abiding love for both poetry and the Irish landscape. Growing up in Connemara, Co. Galway fostered in me a deep connection with land and nature, and exploring the connection between landscape and poetry was hugely rewarding. I am currently living in Cobh, where I enjoy being close to the sea, and spend my time reading and writing.

Sonja Murphy, "A Comparison of Genettean and Post-Genettean Narratology, with Reference to *Little Constructions* by Anna Burns"

I completed my BA in English at University College Cork last year. I am currently studying for a master's in modern English Literature at UCC, while also working part-time at a bookshop. During my undergraduate degree, I was a member of UCC's English society, and part of the editing team for its literary journal, The Quarryman. In my free time, I love to write, paint, and walk my dog.

Cian Egan, "Archaic Motherhood and Primal Fear: How Ridley Scott's *Alien* Evokes the Abject"

My name is Cian Egan and I'm a student of the MA in Modernities course. This was the final essay I wrote for my undergraduate degree, and I chose this topic because of my immense interest in the realm of horror and feminist critique. I intend to use a lot of the research I conducted for this essay for my upcoming MA dissertation, which will concern the sanitisation of vampires in popular media. Outside of college work, I enjoy fiction writing and painting.

Robyn Coombes, "The Maternal Burden: An Ecofeminist Consideration of "The Last Rabbit" and "The Woman Turns Herself into a Fish""

My name is Robyn Coombes and I wrote this essay for a third year seminar during my Higher Diploma in English last year. Inspired by Dr Maureen O'Connor's brilliant reading list and our discussions about Irish women's writing, ecocriticism, and the Natural World, I chose to examine this poem and short story as ecofeminist reflections on female bodily autonomy. Intrigued by Mary Toft's story in "The Last Rabbit" and Boland's title alone, I attempted to explore how both works transform the woman-animal correlation to restore agency to each. When not reading or writing essays on topics I have no authority on, it's possible I'm pencilling portraits or procrastinating in pigeon pose. But I'm probably just listening to a podcast.

Rachael O'Connor, "The Flower of the Mountain and the Old Maid: Anxieties about Aging in James Joyce's *Ulysses*"

My name is Rachael O' Connor and I am a recent graduate of a Bachelor of Arts International (English and Spanish Joint Honours). I wrote this essay for my final year Special Studies Seminar: Reading *Ulysses* with Dr Heather Laird. I originally chose this seminar because I decided to focus primarily on modules related to Irish literature in my final year. Another motive stemmed from my Erasmus year in the University of Seville where I attended classes on Spanish Modernism. As the only Irish student in the room, I was quizzed about James Joyce and it was a bit embarrassing to admit that I knew very little about his most famous work.

Certain parts of the book stuck with me and the idea for this essay title came about when I looked at how different women are portrayed throughout different stages of their lives in *Ulysses*. When comparing all the female characters, it is impossible to ignore how women are considered more or less valuable to society depending on their ages. I was drawn to this topic because it is still incredibly relevant today. You only need to examine the latest films emerging from Hollywood and the impossible beauty standards that exist in today's world to see that the anxieties about ageing depicted by Joyce have not gone away.

When I am not trying to figure out what *Ulysses* is about, I enjoy reading, writing and running. I am originally from Kerry but Cork has partly claimed me now.

Maria Quirke, "'Spurning at Slavery': The Influence of Abolitionist Literature on Mary Wollstonecraft's Rhetoric of Motherhood in *Maria; or The Wrongs of Woman*"

My name is Maria Quirke. I have completed a BA in English and Music, and am pursuing an MA in Ethnomusicology. I now spend my time in university exploring different music traditions and cultures, and maintain my connection with literature through bookbinding and excessive amounts of reading. I am passionate about frogs, dungarees, and big pockets. I first stumbled on the idea for this essay when I kept noticing details in *The Wrongs of Woman* that reminded me of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* – a text I had studied the year previously. This prompted some detective work around British slave narratives contemporary with *The Wrongs of Woman*, which led me to discover Wollstonecraft's own connection with Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*. This has always been my favourite kind of essay to write – one that demands the following up of clues and connections, tiny breakthroughs and infuriating dead ends, one that makes you think not just about what the author is writing, but also about their motives for writing it.

Robert Lyons, "Shades of Meaning: The Didactic Role of Ghosts in English Literature" (Extract)

My name is Robbie Lyons and I'm a BA graduate of UCC's English programme, and pursuing an MA in the upcoming academic year. My dissertation was inspired by a life-long love of horror

and supernatural tales. I *love* them both for the sheer joy of chills running up and down the spine as well as their more subtle function; they are the veins of dark commentary that run through every era of human storytelling, ever just beneath the surface. It will come as little surprise then that I spend my free time both reading and writing such tales, as well watching them in the company of friends! Besides that, I am a simple fellow and the most outlandish of my hobbies is no more exciting than a love of board games. I dearly hope you enjoy what I've put forward here, and that you wish me luck on my MA. The nerves are very real!

Ava Lynch, "*The Secret Garden*, Edwardian Society and the Commentative Potential of Children's Literature"

I decided to write my essay on children's literature mainly because I took a seminar in the topic in second year and found the potential analysis of children's literature perplexing. While reading *The Secret Garden* for the seminar I found a plethora of contextual points that still apply today. I suppose this piqued my interest enough to write an essay on the topic.

I grew up in Cork city. Previous to University, I had only ever been educated in Irish (ironic I chose to study English). I play a lot of video games, perhaps too many and have harnessed a whopping 700 hours in animal crossing. This equates to 30 days. Whether that be an achievement or a defeat is subjective.

Ellen Lahiff, "How *The Black Vampyre* and *Carmilla* Incorporate and Respond to their Respective Cultural Anxieties"

My name is Ellen Lahiff, and I will be going into the final year of my undergraduate degree in English and Philosophy this September. I chose to write this essay on The Black Vampyre and Carmilla because I am fascinated by the ways in which Gothic literature reflects and (sometimes) challenges the fears and prejudices of the societies in which it is produced. These short stories are two particularly demonstrative examples. Although both texts utilise the vampire trope, each author's own background and views greatly alters their portrayals of the monster. The vampire represents a cluster of contemporary fears, and the authors' contrasting treatments of the monster indicates whether they condemn or sympathise with the vital concerns of their times. Although some Gothic literature may seem outdated or otherworldly, I find it serves as an ever-pertinent reminder to examine and critique the dominant views within our own modern society. When I'm not writing essays about the metaphorical significance of Gothic monsters, I enjoy reading, music, and going out with friends.

Ciara O'Connor, "*Bell, Book and Candle* as a Queer-Coded Text"

My name is Ciara O'Connor and I am a third year English student currently on Erasmus in Munich. I enjoyed Dr Miranda Corcoran's

seminar on witchcraft in American literature enormously, particularly the topic of queer-coding and its surprising relation to a 1950's romantic comedy, so I was delighted when I got the chance to write this essay. I spend my spare time writing and abandoning novels, learning German, and reading anything that falls into the realm of fantasy, the supernatural, or 'dark academia.'

Grace Morey, "Psychoanalysis Meets Aesthetics: An Analysis of the Uncanny in *The Monk* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*"

My name is Grace Morey and I am a final year student of English and Philosophy. I wrote my essay "Psychoanalysis Meets Aesthetics: An Analysis of the Uncanny in The Monk and We Have Always Lived in the Castle" as I wanted to delve into what it is that makes these two canonical works of gothic literature so disturbing in spite of their many differences. When I am not writing about gothic literature, I love to practise yoga and go hiking in nature. I plan to spend the next few years pursuing a masters in English and travelling to as many places as I can.

Maeve McTaggart, "Virtual Bodies"

My name is Maeve McTaggart, an Arts graduate of UCC and a current journalism student at MTU Crawford. I like to write short stories that interrogate the uncomfortable parts of growing up

online and the impact the internet has on how we construct ourselves and our experiences. ‘Virtual Bodies’ came from this place. As well as writing fiction, I like to write poetry and non-fiction - with a bad habit of starting many of these things all at once.

ARTICLES

REPRESENTING REPRESENTATION: RESPONSES TO THE VISUAL IMAGE IN THE EKPHRASTIC POETRY OF JOHN KEATS AND LETITIA ELIZABETH LANDON

Island of Ireland Regional Winner of The Global Undergraduate Awards 2021

Laura Shelly

Abstract: It was in the late twentieth century that the term 'ekphrasis' became a focus of critical debate, with James A. W. Heffernan and W. J. T. Mitchell largely centring their explorations of it on the tension between the graphic stasis of visual art and the motion of verbal narrative, a tension famously dramatised by Keats in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn". This essay moves away from that conversation to examine tensions that arise in ekphrastic poetry even when the poet's thematic aim is not to animate the visual representation they describe. Heffernan briefly writes of Keats' "The Eve of St Agnes" in terms of ekphrasis, but concludes that his evaluation is inadequate. With a re-application of his seminal definition to the poem, this essay tests how that definition can be used to describea curious chain of events whereby Keats obstructs the reader's perception of the events

that take place in the poem, a mystification that is instrumental to the effectiveness of its great romance. The essay then looks at poems that are directly about paintings and more easily fit into a popular definition of ekphrasis, the poetical sketches of Letitia Elizabeth Landon. The poems of hers covered herein are slight, commercial-seeming, and have not yet been commented upon in scholarship. I weigh the degree to which the key tenets of ekphrasis under Heffernan's definition are to be found in her work, and add nuance to his theories of "paragonal" struggles and an ekphrastic male-female power struggle. In exploring both poets' work side by side and using one definition of ekphrasis in different ways, this essay attempts to demonstrate how the term can add to our understanding of the early nineteenth century's visual culture.

"Avaunt this vile abuse of pictured page! / Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear / Nothing?" Wordsworth asks in his sonnet "Illustrated Books and Newspapers" (12-14). This repulsion and "fear of both visual images and the material world" among Romantic poets clashes with the early nineteenth century's exploding visual culture, its dioramas and panoramas, its galleries, its prints, its engravings, and its prints of engravings (Galperin 19). Poets have always responded to visual art, and the use of 'ekphrasis', roughly defined as the description of visual art in words, can be traced back to Homer describing the shield of Achilles. In the early decades of the nineteenth century,

however, descriptions of this kind were not just reserved to Trojan heroes, and artworks could be found in spaces beyond churches or the walls of wealthy patrons' homes. A democratisation of imagery occurs alongside the Romantic era's much-chronicled reaction against the mechanical products of the Enlightenment.

The term 'ekphrasis' was used in Greek *progymnasmata* school lessons on rhetoric to refer to digressive, cadenza-like sections within an epic, as Ruth Webb outlines, and its meaning has not remained intact or constant from then to now (7-18). It was not a term widely used in literary criticism until the 1990s, when James A. W. Heffernan and W. J. T. Mitchell made efforts to define it and identify qualities that were particular to it. Heffernan came to define ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (3). I will apply Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis to John Keats' "The Eve of St Agnes", looking at what is lost in translation when images are converted to words and how Keats takes advantage of this to set up a verbal hegemony that celebrates the visionary and the invisible. "In their quest for the abstract visionary," Peter Simonsen writes, "the Romantics are typically seen to eschew the concrete visible" (15). I will demonstrate also the potential over- pliability of Heffernan's definition; it can be used to describe not just visual art but seemingly concrete aspects of the world too. Or to put that differently, how the seemingly concrete can be read as visual art but seemingly concrete aspects of the world too. Or to put

that differently, how the seemingly concrete can be read as visual art. Poetical sketches by Letitia Elizabeth Landon proceed the examination of Keats' romance. As of yet, no critical commentary on the poems of hers I cover here has been published, which presents an opportunity to evaluate both their merit and her position in relation to a canonised figure like Keats. Landon was commissioned to pen poetry to advertise art exhibitions and her work was designed to be placed next to engravings in gift annuals, resulting in her poems being viewed as subservient to the images they represented. I investigate, however, the representational friction that Heffernan describes as inherent in all ekphrases, the "paragonal" competitions they set up, looking at how Landon's poems critique the paintings and artists they publicise despite their seemingly unassuming, deferent nature (1).

Mitchell describes how ekphrasis revolves around "the basic relationship of the self (as a speaking and seeing subject) and the other (a seen and silent object)" (*Picture Theory* 161). The other, the silent object of art, became more palpable and, for want of a different word, visible, in the early decades of the nineteenth century. This essay characterises the way in which Keats and Landon react to this increasing visibility; the former rejects the concrete other, while the latter's poems luxuriate in the friction between it and her work.

The ekphrastic qualities of John Keats' "The Eve of St Agnes" have been mentioned on a handful of occasions. Theresa M.

Kelley describes how the poem's Beadsman "looks like a still life", that Madeline "seems a kind of a religious statue", and that the "cold sculpture" contrasts with the "warm", "sensuously ekphrastic descriptions of the lovers and their environment" (177-178). Grant F. Scott writes that the poem shows Keats "luxuriating in the texture of the medium" of words (*Sculpted Word* 87). Heffernan recognises there is a distrust around images in the poem, and applies a Freudian "Medusa model of ekphrasis" to it, wherein the beauty of a female figure threatens to petrify or castrate the male viewer (108-109). He concludes that the model does not quite fit. I will build on what Kelley and Scott write and depart from psychoanalysis to explore an idea of Silke Horstkotte's, that "ekphrasis may enable as well as hinder readerly visualisation" (136). Horstkotte notes that "ekphrases from the Romantic period onward explore moments of ambivalence, even distrust, towards visualisation" (136). In his "role as enchanter," to use R. H. Fogle's way of putting it, Keats takes advantage of the reader's inability to see exactly what it is the characters see to bring about the "wish-fulfilment" Stuart M. Sperry talks of and to carry off his fairytale romance, its bewitchment upon the reader and its happy ending (326; 30).

We must first establish what constitutes ekphrasis in the poem. Using Heffernan's seminal definition of ekphrasis, "the verbal representation of visual representation", I interpret ekphrasis as description of objects that are in some way not what they appear to be, as opposed to description of objects that are

directly perceived by the characters and the narrator (3). Ekphrasis involves the translation of an image from the narrator and the characters on a diegetic level of perception to the reader on a separate, extradiegetic level - converting a visual representation into a verbal one. At the centre of the poem is a dream vision, a visual surface which hangs painting-like before Madeline and Porphyro, the verbal rendering of which I read as ekphrastic. The above critics agree that Madeline can be read as an art object or tableau vivant. Kelley considers the food and sweets Porphyro lays out for Madeline to be ekphrastic objects on the basis of the richness of Keats' description of them (178). The reader can 'picture' objects like the "candied apple, quince, and plum and gourd" as Porphyro can see these physical objects clearly and they are subsequently unproblematically and straightforwardly represented to us (265). Visual representation is not really in question with them, because they appear as they are. I examine what occurs when Keats translates representations and misrepresentations of objects to the written word and how those objects appear to readers at third or fourth remove. "The Eve of St Agnes" tells of deceit, love divinations and myths which mist how both its characters and readers perceive the sculptures, artworks and idealised lovers within it.

The reader relies on or expects the poet to carry out the ekphrastic process of translation that will show them the images the characters and the narrator see. The language of ekphrasis qualifies and tries to recalibrate the images it transmits by

pointing out the boundaries between appearance and reality; Madeline is "like a saint: / seem'd a splendid angel" (222-223). Heffernan writes that "by explicitly noting the difference between the medium of visual representation and what it refers to [...] [ekphrasis] implicitly draws our attention to the friction between the fixed form of visual art" and poetry (4). Keats, however, flits between explicitly betraying the falseness of visual representations and presenting them without any indication of their falseness. One such sleight of hand is Keats' inconsistent treatment of the sculptures surrounding the characters. The Beadsman thinks about how "the sculptured dead [...] seem to freeze" and "may ache" and it is clear that he is merely imagining them as living. Two stanzas later, however, the narrator omits the sort of qualification that affirms the sculptures' lifelessness and instead fully personifies them, telling us "the carvèd angels, ever eager-eyed, / Stared" (14-35), destabilising authorial agency.

In this way, Keats subtly manipulates the reader's expectation to be shown faithful representations of the images in the poem and this heightens the poem's visionary potency. He mentions that the guests in the chamber simply move "faerily" and later later tells us actual "faeries pac'd the coverlet" (39; 168). The verbal medium exposes some of the *trompe l'œil* the poem's characters are subject to, and the reader is led to believe in the narrator's ability to discern the difference between life and art, real and unreal. This produces a subliminal suspicion or double-

mindedness in the reader about the illusions Keats decides not to explicitly expose. The written word can invalidate the visual illusions that are at work in the romance while simultaneously holding those illusions in place. The effects of this are twofold. It adds to that generally mystifying atmosphere Keats seems to be trying to achieve. It will also be instrumental in delivering the central characters to their fate - I add this to Jack Stillinger's note that Porphyro's possession of both mortal and non-mortal attributes is partly what allows him "to escape his mortal condition" at the end of the poem (54).

Madeline, too, is a half-form of a human whose features are oddly fused in a way we cannot fully visualise. Heffernan cites Simone de Beauvoir to explain how the female can be interpreted as an art object by a male poet; "she puts on fancy clothes, she studies herself in a mirror, she compares herself with princesses and fairies [...] she does not present herself to observation; she is [like a] picture or statue" (qtd. in Heffernan 193). Even though full stanzas are devoted to conjuring up an image of Madeline, we are not told what she actually looks like, beyond her "azure-lidded," "blue," "clear" eyes (262-310). Instead, the poet catalogues the ornaments that adorn her, her "wreathèd pearls", "warmèd jewels", "her fragrant bodice" (227-229). The rose-coloured light falls "*on* her hands" and "*on* her hair", but we cannot see what colour her skin or hair *is* (217-222; emphasis added). She is not quite "swelling into reality", to pull a Keatsism out of context, or using William Hazlitt's term, she

"wants gusto" ("Letter from John Keats to George and Tom Keats" 1350; 757). In loose Kantian terminology, we cannot perceive Madeline as a noumenal thing in herself. Mitchell argues that the ekphrastic image "acts like a sort of unapproachable and unpresentable "black hole" in the verbal structure, entirely absent from it" (*Picture Theory* 158). Madeline is unknowable to the reader as the verbal representation of her is ruptured by her inaccurate visual representation, and we can only perceive the negative space around her.

Porphyro's idealising gaze latches on to the colours and trinkets around her even though she is undressing, and the reader's perception of her is filtered through blazonry. Acontrast is commonly drawn between the lovers who, "like phantoms", manage to escape the material world of the poem and Angela and the Beadsman who end up as "ashes cold" (361-378). In addition to this, the lovers' transcendent insubstantiality stems not only from similes comparing them to fantastical, incorporeal creatures, but also from the reader's inability to actually see them, whereas we can more easily picture the crumbling of Angela's "palsy-twitched", "meagre face," which has only been filtered through one stage of representation (verbal) before reaching the reader (376).

Madeline's reaction to Porphyro, on one level, is confusing. She is convinced that Porphyro is a "traitor", while readers have been fed a romantic mélange of pretty images and it seems he has lived up to her dream vision; "a throbbing star / Seen mid the

sapphire... Into her dream he melted, as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet - Solution sweet" (330; 318-322). The abstract imagery prevents the reader from visualising what Madeline sees in a kind of reverse dramatic irony. Her pained reaction lets us know that these nice colours and stars are illusory. While we register her disappointment, all we have been shown is the heady, saccharine rose and violet. Therefore, when Madeline tells Porphyro "I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine", we can understand the cognitive dissonance, because Keats has put us through a heuristic dream vision while still letting us know it is a dream (102). He achieves this by highlighting the gap between how characters perceive specific images and how the same images appear to us now that they have been transfigured by him, the poet.

Using the term 'ekphrasis' allows us to not only understand the two separate, contradictory viewpoints, but helps us to comprehend why exactly the dream vision is the viewpoint that reigns supreme. Murray Krieger argues that ekphrasis expresses a "lingering semiotic desire for the natural sign" of the visual image, to replace the arbitrary signs of language (22). The Platonic natural sign tradition presupposes that what is 'natural' is that which most resembles the external world, but Krieger writes that Romantic poets inverted the natural sign tradition and imagined that "the direction of all representation must be from inside the human mind outward to the world" (200). Magdalena M. Ostas writes that "feelings and emotions in the

Keatsian image [...] always appear as symptoms, things "seen"" (120). An example of this is evident in Keats' translation of the dream image of Porphyro to words. He does not attempt to faithfully depict his physical appearance because we are told he is "beyond mortal", and instead chooses to portray Porphyro's "impassioned" emotions, turning them into stars, sapphires, flowers (316-321). This is the kind of outward direction Krieger describes. Ekphrasis allows the arbitrary sign to alter representations of the natural sign, and here the image of Porphyro is recomposed. In the greatest poetry, opined Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in 1769, "words cease to be arbitrary signs, and become natural signs of arbitrary objects" (qtd. in Krieger 50). Madeline weeps because her dream is not real, but by converting Porphyro's image into words and refusing to mimic the natural sign in the process, Keats asserts that the arbitrary is natural. He shifts attention from the signified, the characters and their physical nature, to the signifier, his own words. Keats detaches them from the physical world and places them in his own meontic one.

The pictorialism of "The Eve of St Agnes" was well documented in contemporary reviews, with John Scott remarking on its "picturesque effect" and Leigh Hunt writing that it is "rather a picture than a story" (qtd. in Matthews, 224; 72). The rich colours and vivid illustrations of the revelrous party-goers "with plume, tiara, and all rich array", the casement with its "panes of quaint device, / Innumerable of stains and splendid

dyes", the "golden dishes and in baskets bright / Of wreathed silver" could validly be considered ekphrases in the sense of the classical, digressive ekphrasis I outline in the introduction (38; 211-212; 272-273). Or, indeed, in a modern sense, given the complete flexibility of the term. Heffernan's narrower definition of ekphrasis, however, is useful in examining questions of representation, misrepresentation, word and image, dream and reality. The lucid, tactile descriptions of the trappings of the poem's chambers, closets and halls underscore the amorphousness of its lovers, who exist somewhere in the recesses of these more distinct shapes. Visual misrepresentation distorts the poet's verbal representations, and "The Eve of St Agnes" and the discrepancies between the two modes is foregrounded by ekphrasis. The reader's inability to visualise much of what is taking place in the poem means their disbelief can be suspended and they be enchanted by the enchanter, and the lovers can escape unespy'd.

"It is a perfect wonder," William Makepeace Thackeray wrote in a review of poems by Letitia Elizabeth Landon that had been printed in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*, "how any lady could have penned such a number of verses upon all sorts of subjects [...] She will pardon us for asking if she does justice to her great talent by employing it in this way" (736). Her poems for the *Scrap-Book* were composed to accompany engravings of paintings and to describe the scenes they depicted, and her

Poetical Catalogue series in the *Literary Gazette* was written to advertise current art exhibitions. They were seen by critics like Thackeray as sub-literary commodities. Heffernan writes that all ekphrastic poems are inherently "intensely paragonal" and that the written word always struggles for dominance over the images they describe (1). Landon prefaced her *Poetical Catalogue* of Pictures, however, with a short poem that apostrophises the paintings and displays a reverence for them: "Beautiful art! My worship is for thee / the heart's entire devotion" (2).

The term 'paragone' is taken by Heffernan from a lively Renaissance debate held by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo among others about whether painting or sculpture was the superior art form. British writers in the Romantic period, Morris Eaves discusses, felt no sense of competition with painters, as British art was thought to be going through a sort of fallow stage (248). I herein will identify flashes of paragonal energy in Landon's ekphrases but will also look at how she employs what Elaine Showalter calls "double-voiced discourse", language "that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant" (201). Landon becomes double-voiced when she acts as a voice for paintings that project voices and ideas of their own. Her ekphrastic poetry, unlike, say, Keats and his urn, does not always make the reader aware of a spectator standing before the image. She does not refer to the scene she is describing as a painting, and

instead speaks as if she is somewhere inside the frame, gazing upon a real sight. Despite this, I wish to exhibit how Thackeray underestimated the ways in which she subtly calls into question whether the images she portrays are perfect representations of reality.

"Painting has long stood as a symbol of the transcendent object," Wendy Steiner writes, "beautiful, outside of time's depredations, complete in itself" (1). Landon damages this symbolism in her poetical sketches. Increasing popularity of galleries along with a wider circulation of illustrated books meant viewers of the early nineteenth century were exposed to more images in a single day than viewers of previous centuries might have seen in a month, with one gallery-goer describing having paying two shillings to be rushed past "ten thousand rarities in thirty minutes flat" (qtd. in Faflak and Wright 98). One issue of the *Literary Gazette* published two poems of Landon's next to each other, entitled "The Hours" and "The Female Head on the Left of "The Hours"". The idea that paintings are perfectly complete worlds in themselves is weakened when they are placed in a gallery context next to other images, bringing about a "numbness induced by the sheer multiplicity of images" (Heffernan 148). "The Hours" tells of goddesses of the seasons, who glow with "happiness in their flight" in their idyllic, autotelic world (15).

Then there is "The Female Head on the Left of "The Hours"", which displays a disembodied head. Luisa Calè describes the

effect of what she calls "after-images": when one views multiple images in a book, "each image must be retained in their brain as their eyes turn to the next, so that the two subsequent engravings morph into one another" (136). The same would be true in a gallery, as is shown by "The Female Head", onto which elements from "The Hours" are dragged. After seeing the "sunny ones" of "The Hours", "The Female Head" tells us there "had been sunshine once" (7; 6). What remains of "smiles of hope" is "one pale smile" (13-14; 1). "Rainbow gleams" and rosy health fade to a "blue-veined forehead shed, / Robbed the check of its colour" (8; 2-4). "The Female Head" reads as a weathered version of "The Hours". By referring to the former poem in terms of its position in relation to the latter, Landon demonstrates how images are always in relationships with one another and never exist in isolation, and our knowledge of sunshine and colour only comes from our knowledge of their opposites. Landon points to the ultimate fallacy of the idea that paintings can be understood and function on their own.

The end of the eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth also saw the foundation of art galleries that specifically displayed illustrations of scenes from literary texts, such as John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and Thomas Macklin's Poet's Gallery, and visitors were expected to have a knowledge of the texts they depicted (Thomas 636). Landon wrote a poem for the *Gazette* to advertise "The Fairy Queen Sleeping" by Thomas Stothard, a painting of a scene from

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* featuring Queen Titania slumbering in a forest full of flowers. Her poem, however, undeniably echoes the elegiac monologue Gertrude delivers to report Ophelia's death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It seems to graft the scene from *Hamlet* onto the scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Details including "purple vases of perfume" and violets seem to refer to Ophelia's "long purples" and violets (5; 4.7.170); the image of elves that "floated" recalls how the water "mermaid- like [...] bore [Ophelia] up" (7; 4.7.177), and both poets describe the foliage as "weeping" (16; 4.7.176). Landon's line "fantastic shapes, these were her guards" is extremely reminiscent of the "fantastic garlands" Shakespeare writes of, with the combination of the word fantastic and the echoed, alliterative sounds of "guards" and "garland" (7; 4.7.169). When Landon looks at a Shakespeare painting and is told it is a Shakespeare painting, the language she uses, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is language associated with Shakespeare. She reveals here that our understandings of artworks are never pure. We process images through language from other texts. She speaks in fragments of oft-quoted lines from *Hamlet*, and merges a tragic scene with a comic one.

Dante's *Purgatorio* features an ekphrasis of sculptures that represent figures from the Bible, and Heffernan observes that he "does not aim to rival the images he represents; he turns them back into the words from which they originated – the words of Scripture and sacred legend" (43). Perhaps Landon could be

said to be bowing to Shakespeare by using his combinations of words when discussing this painting of his work. One could suggest a deference to Shakespeare is evident here, as she cannot refrain from using Shakespeare's words and cadences, but one could also read it as a comment on the commercial nature of these supposedly great, divine artworks and plays, on how they can be so easily represented in terms of each other, on how the playwright's fairy scene can so easily be represented in the language of his greatest tragedy. In this way, she overcomes what Michael Riffaterre calls the "mimesis hurdle", the idea that paintings represent a true reality instead of other texts (6). Stothard's painting does not just represent *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but also all the texts that the play is connected to and associated with. It is as much a reproduction as Landon's poem is.

Landon's sketches of landscapes also undermine art that contrivedly strives to portray the natural. Her poem "Linmouth", composed to accompany an engraving in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*, represents a representation of the cult of the picturesque. William Gilpin's mostly vaguely-defined aesthetic category of the picturesque claimed that landscape artists should aim to paint scenes that feature a perfect balance of beauty and ruggedness, and should "always conceive the detail to be the inferior part of a picture" (172). The standards of the picturesque as to what qualified a worthy scene could turn viewers against their own inherent ideas of beauty, as shown by

Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, when Henry Tilney tells Catherine Morland of the picturesque and she then "voluntarily [rejects] the whole city of Bath", which she had previously looked on with awe (76-77). The first few stanzas of the poem seem to revel in notions of the picturesque, and could be aligned with the "kenosis" stage Harold Bloom describes in *The Anxiety of Influence*, which sees a poet humble themselves by honouring another artist's work (14-15). Then, however, she goes on to say that she prefers the "busier scene" of the city (26). Her description of Linmouth mimics the conventions of the picturesque and the eighteenth century painting technique termed "keeping", the aim of which was to paint all the details of a scene with an appropriate strength in relation to their depth in the image. Her images of Linmouth are evenly drawn:

> The wild rose like a wreath above,
> The ash-tree's fairy keys,
> The aspen trembling (9-11).

The miniature botanical details of the rose and aspen are put together in one stanza as they are found together in the foreground, whereas her description of the city, where her eye moves kinetically from "the hearse that passes with its dead / The homeless beggar's prayer", placing things of different sizes next to each other, discussing the hearse and then zooming up on a beggar's hands or the sound of their voice. Her description of the city fits Lady Clonbury's view of "bad paintings" in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee*, those with "no keeping; all objects,

great and small [...] upon the same level" (440). Here, we see Landon participating in a debate about the picturesque using language to criticise the visual art she writes of.

Heffernan notes that paintings of female figures often presuppose that their viewers are male, and his idea that ekphrasis stages a paragonal contest through "the expression of a duel between male and female gazes" is demonstrated in Landon's sketches of female portraiture (78; 1). "On The Picture of a Young Girl" displays a Bakhtinian melding of contrasting discourses, as Landon addresses the portrait both as a woman and in the traditionally masculine position of viewer. She sketches "a beautiful and laughing thing [...] Of girlish loveliness", the reductive generality "girlish" suggesting some vague notion of whatever 'girlishness' must be (1-3). There is the pleonastic description of her "blue eyes, / Such blue as in the violet dwells", and the familiar Petrarchan conceit of "rose-bud lips" (3- 5). Looking at her representations of portraits through the Bakhtinian concept of self-identity as being constructed out of the discourses of others, we can see that she recourses to discussing female beauty in terms of pure, primary colours and archetypal features of girlhood, using the language male poets would use to describe female subjects. The physiognomic reading of how her "brow is all too free from care / For Love to be a dweller there" also aligns with masculine projections of how virtuous a female must be based on her outward appearance (9-10). "Yet there is a malice in her smile," Landon

writes, "As if she felt her woman's power" (17-18). This interjection of rebellion is evidence of a friction between the masculine vocabulary and her own voice that comes to the fore when a female figure describes an image primed for male consumption. It is Landon acknowledging a glint of something a male viewer might not see, even if this acknowledgement, too, is produced in language that perhaps generalises about women.

When commissioned to write ekphrastic poetry, Landon was restricted, but she works with the prescribed paintings to comment on their nature as well as the nature of her own writing. Her poems perhaps are not "intensely" paragonal, as Heffernan thought, but they do reveal cracks in the illusions paintings present while getting the job of writing something suitable for the magazines and the scrapbooks done too (1). Lining up with Meyer Howard Abrams's idea that Romantic artists began to see art as more of a lamp than a mirror, Landon's poems both reflect what they represent and shine a light on what they do not show (31).

"Sometimes we talk as if ekphrasis were a peculiar textual feature, something that produced ripples of interference on the surface of a visual representation," writes Mitchell:

> but no special textual features can be assigned to ekphrasis, any more than we can distinguish descriptions of paintings, statues or other visual representations from descriptions of any other kind of object (*Picture Theory* 159).

If there is one thing this essay proves, it is that the flexibility of

the term 'ekphrasis' means it can be stretched to fulfil an author's purposes and used in greatly differing ways, perhaps rendering it meaningless. In my analysis of "The Eve of St Agnes", I use Heffernan's definition in its most technical sense, looking at how words translate visual representations into their own medium. When I turn to Landon, ekphrasis simply becomes a label for a specific type of conversation: one in which a piece of writing discusses an image.

If one interrogates the difference between representation and reality, questions are raised. And these questions were raised particularly by Romantic poets and philosophers of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, funnily enough. As documented by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, they reconfigured the concept of art; achieving mimetic fidelity was no longer poetry's central aim. Keats' rejection of the visual for transcendent incorporeality could be said to be a reaction against the expanding visual culture that Landon's poems comment on and assert themselves within. Heffernan's idea that ekphrasis is "powerfully gendered" is reaffirmed above also, as each poet gives examples of the iconicity of female figures and how they may be misrepresented in images (1). Ekphrasis might not have any peculiar textual ripples, but even if that is the case, it can be considered a tradition rather than a technical feature, a tradition with its own codes and conventions. Hazlitt wrote that:

> ...a fine gallery of pictures is a sort of illustration of

> Berkeley's Theory of Matter and Spirit. It is like a palace of thought - another universe, built of air, of shadows, of colours. Everything seems "palpable to feeling as to sight" (qtd. in Natarajan 223).

Berkeley theorised that we cannot know the true nature of what we see. Keats' prioritisation of a visionary, invisible world, and Landon's recognition that the paintings she saw told stories that stretched beyond their frames maybe should not be viewed as a battle between immaterial and material culture but a shared celebration of the capabilities of their own medium as poets.

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THE 'HELENIC' ELEMENT: HELEN OF SPARTA AND GENDERED MYTH IN THE POETRY OF W.B. YEATS

Highly Recommended for the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 3rd Year & Highly Commended for The Global Undergraduate Awards 2021

Joseph Linehan

Abstract: William Butler Yeats is one of the most celebrated figures in Irish and world literature. Noted for his Nobel Prize-winning poems, many of these deal in subjects that are rooted in Celtic folkloric traditions, aligning with his proposals in 'The Celtic Element in Literature', his manifesto arguing for a distinctly 'Irish' tone to the poetry produced on the island. However, as well as being the poster boy for the Irish Literary Revival, Yeats is identified with the Romantic tradition, bridging the gap between that more traditional world and his modern one as 'the last romantic'. Prevalent among his Romantic readings were references to classical literature and myth, which Yeats often appropriated in an Irish context, predominantly through linking the typical artistic rendition of Ireland as a

desirable young woman through the lens of Helen of Sparta, the great beauty on whom the Trojan War and the destruction of Heroic Greece is blamed. Add to this Yeats' complex relationship with women, particularly his lifelong muse and passion, Maud Gonne, who often appears as the embodiment of that iconic woman of Éire, and Helen becomes a figure who is intensely important to Yeats' poetry as the person in whom his interests in Irish literature, the classical world and his personal love life coalesce. This brief essay examines what I term the 'Helenic' element in Yeats' poetry as a lens through which the Irishman's attitude towards gender, women, and Gonne, in particular, can be observed in a revealing light, finding that his poetic renditions of Helen often mirror changes in his relationship with Gonne and echo his insecurities as a white, middle-class, Protestant man at the forefront of a revolutionary movement in the arts and politics. Through exploring a selection of Yeats' poems in which Helen makes a significant appearance, a window into the poet's view of his great love interest, and of the relations between men and women more generally, is uncovered.

It is conceivable that, in a list of factors contributing to W. B. Yeats' fame, his relations with women would be the second most widely mentioned detail, following only his achievements as one of the foremost writers of the modern world. While his famed unrequited passion for his lifelong muse, Maud Gonne, continues

to resonate over a century after the pair first met, with the pair's love affair recently being the subject of a TG4 documentary series (*Scéalta Gra na hÉireann* 2021), the renowned nature of their relationship can mask the more complex features of Yeats' writings on women, feminine iconography and the topic of love more generally. A recurring trope throughout Yeats' poetry is that of a gendered appropriation of classical mythology, commenting on relations between women and men and commonly featuring the figure of Helen of Sparta (later of Troy) as an embodiment of both the idyllic woman and of Yeats' personal beloved in Gonne, qualities that are often synonymous in the Irishman's poetry. This essay will examine the topic of gender as it appears in Yeats' poetry through the lens of this 'Helenic' element in order to illustrate how Yeats reworks characters and scenes from the stories of the ancient world to fit his contemporary landscape.

Yeats' earliest invocations of Helen and her story come in his 1892 collection, *The Rose*, a volume of poetry chiefly featuring Celtic imagery; indeed, the first such poem to refer to the Trojan myth, "The Rose of the World", conflates Greek and Irish mythology, equating the tragedies of Troy's sacking and the murder of Usna's children. Although the poem does not refer to Helen by name, her figure is invoked through Yeats' lamentation that "Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam" (4), that legendary city's destruction being the result of her adulterous elopement with the Trojan prince, Paris. Gonne is likewise

nominally absent from the poem, although her phantasmic presence can be detected through images of her separated body parts: her "red lips, with all their mournful pride" (2), "lonely face" (10), and "wandering feet" (15). Pethica notes that this poem was written by Yeats for Gonne after their first meeting in 1889 (*Yeats's* 14 n. 1), an event on which he was to write: "I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past" (*Memoirs* 40-41); it is as though, overwhelmed by her beauty, Yeats can only bring himself to write of Gonne in isolated sections in much the same way that one may only focus their eyes on a portion of one of those "famous pictures" to appreciate the intricacies of its construction, rather than be blown away by the magnificence of the whole. "The Rose of the World", therefore, is an important poem in the study of Yeats' approach to gender through the myth of Helen as it establishes a precedent for his proceeding artistic endeavours, namely the association of Gonne with Helen, the two beauties of Yeats' poetry being metatextually linked, here, by their nominal absence from, yet steering effect on, the poem.

While Yeats reveres the legendary beauty of Gonne as equal to that of Helen, a second poem from *The Rose*, "The Sorrow of Love", addresses the negative consequences of such beauty. The poem, significantly revised in 1925 (*Yeats's* 16 n. 1), again, connects Gonne to the Spartan queen through Yeats' substitution of the word "you" (5) in the earlier version, with "a

girl" (5) in the latter, an artistic decision which, as Arkins highlights, allows Yeats to address Helen and his beloved simultaneously (85). In both versions of the poem, the recurrent "red mournful lips" (5) of the Gonne/Helen figure are suspended as the sole image of the two women, suggesting that the body which previously had commanded the archangels to "Bow down" ("The Rose of the World" 11) is, here, a Beckettian entity which is the harbinger of a sorrowful devastation, red being the colour of passion and of the war fought for the right to those lips. This "Sorrow" which accompanies the girl's beauty is specified by Yeats in 1925 as the post-Trojan War world:

> A girl arose that had red mournful lips
> And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
> Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
> And proud as Priam murdered with his peers (5-9).

A further specification of Yeats' 1925 version is the reduction of "earth's old and weary cry" (1895 ver. 12) to "man's image and his cry" (1925 ver. 12), thereby identifying the destruction following Troy's fall as a disaster inflicted upon the male by the female. While some versions of the myth of Helen's abduction dispute her willingness to leave, proposing that she was tricked by magic or forcibly kidnapped despite her protestations and resistance (Graves II 159.*s*), what all concur on is the destruction visited upon Troy as a result of her capture by Paris, a sentiment reflected in "The Sorrow of Love". Like the collection's eponymous rose, woman's beauty is the source of man's sorrow,

a flower whose thorns cause him to bleed but whose allure compels him to admire and grasp; perhaps we see in *The Rose* the budding sentiment of "terrible beauty", a paradox prevalent in many of Yeats' most famous poems (Dransfield).

Following the publication of two collections primarily dealing in Celtic iconography (*The Wind Among the Reeds* 1899 and *In the Seven Woods* 1903), Yeats makes a return to classical mythology and the figure of Helen in *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910). Many scholars acknowledge this profusion of Yeats' 'Helenic' (and Hellenic) poetry to be a reaction to the turbulence of his relationship with Gonne in the years preceding the collection's appearance (Dransfield 412). Despite numerous proposals by Yeats, Gonne had elected to marry the famed Irish nationalist, Major John MacBride, in 1903, disregarding Yeats' protestations. Yeats' inability to commit to physical-force nationalism in the same manner as Gonne further contributed to contention between the pair. Although MacBride's abusive behaviour eventually drove Gonne away, the situation was an emotional strain for Yeats which manifested in his poetry (Khan 131-132).

"A Woman Homer Sung" captures the despondence and melancholic frustration the poet was feeling at the time. Yeats writes of the extremities of his youthful emotions, of how he believed that any man physically near his beloved "holds her dear" (3), causing him to respond, "with hate and fear" (4), but that "'twas bitter wrong / If he could pass her by / With an

indifferent eye" (5-7). This opening stanza conveys a sense of male possessiveness of a female object, a patriarchal sentiment that suggests the deeper insecurities of Yeats' psyche. Almost as if to comfort himself and validate his own art, Yeats relates himself to the Greek epic poet, Homer, widely considered one of the greatest literary artists in history (Kirk 2019). The ancient Greeks would hold that both Homer and Yeats live in the 'Iron Age', the ultimate of the five Ages of Man, of which Hesiod writes that "[b]aleful pains will be left for mortal human beings, and there will be no safeguard against evil" (*Works and Days* 201). Helen, the poem's eponymous 'woman' and cause of the Heroic Age's collapse into the Iron Age, is the Homeric Gonne, having inflicted suffering on the Greek poet by inaugurating such a violent era, much as the woman who inspired many of Yeats' poems caused him to suffer. However, Yeats' relation to Homer, and the validation of his "life and letters" as "an [sic] heroic dream" that is dependent on such a relation (20-21), is a tenuous link as it is formed through a connection to the women who brought sorrow to their lives, undermining the sense of independent masculinity which Yeats may be attempting to garner from his self-comparison to the master of epic poetry.

The turbulence of Yeats' emotions and of the Ages of Man are further addressed in "No Second Troy", one of the Irishman's most skilfully crafted poems from the 'Helenic' mould. Yeats accuses his muse of having "filled [his] days / With misery" (1-2), as the woman of Homer's songs wrought misery upon that poet's

days; however, Gonne's crimes are more serious than her mythological counterpart as she has taken an active role in bringing this misery about, having "taught to ignorant men most violent ways" (3) – Helen can, at least, claim innocence in light of the gods' divine conspiracy to end the Heroic Age (Graves II 159.*e*), but Gonne is a knowing instigator of violence and destruction in her world. Yeats, though, cannot assign blame to Gonne, and, instead, values her individuality, placing her on a pedestal and admiring her both intellectually and physically for her "mind / That nobleness made simple as a fire" (6-7) and "beauty like a tightened bow" (8). The woman of Yeats' poem is a monument around whom the people gather in a revolutionary rabble, like Delacroix's Liberté, described, here, in words as though immortalised in stone. The treatment of the Gonne/Helen figure as a statue is evocative of a much later poem of Yeats', "Beautiful Lofty Things" (*New Poems* 1938), in which Yeats writes of Gonne as "Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head" (12), while she stands "at Howth station waiting / a train" (10-11), an image which Finn suggests "may well have come straight out of the Parthenon Room of the British Museum" (49). Through lapidifying Gonne in "No Second Troy", Yeats both celebrates "the glory that was Greece" and marks a shift in his representation of Helen as an emblem of Gonne and of women more generally, her statuesque presentation in this poem conveying a hardening of the heart on Yeats' part, in the context of his relationship to Gonne, and on

the part of his female love interest (Poe, "To Helen" 9). Gonne's whole body is sculpted into a form "not natural in an age like this / Being high and solitary and most stern", like the statues of antiquity that adorn modern museums, a cool figure of marble, evoking an emotional detachment and resistance to affection (Yeats 9-10).

The refashioning of Helen's image from one who is a tangible goal into one who is standing atop a pedestal, unreachable by man below manifests in two more poems from this productive period of Yeats' career: first, in "Peace", from *The Green Helmet*; and, second, in "When Helen Lived", from the succeeding collection, *Responsibilities* (1914).[1] "Peace" is, perhaps, one of Yeats' most objectifying approaches to the Gonne/Helen figure, referring to the legendary beauty of Helen – and, by association, Gonne – as having been "[b]red to be a hero's wage" (3), quite literally the 'prize' for Yeats or Paris. Again, we see an allusion to Gonne's new statuesque form as Yeats writes of her "delicate high head, / All that sternness amid charm, / All that sweetness amid strength" (7-9). Gonne, however, who at this stage is in her mid-forties, is starting to have her youthful beauty affected by age. Helen, according to the poem, is similarly afflicted, with Yeats suggesting that her worth has now declined somewhat,

[1] These two poems, "Peace" and "When Helen Lived" are taken as they appear in The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (Wordsworth Editions, 2008). All other poems have been taken from the Norton edition.

remarking that “peace that comes at length / Came when Time had touched her form” (10-11), an arresting comment that seems to connect a woman’s beauty, whether physical or otherwise, to her value as a prize. This sense of a fading connection to Helen is furthered in “When Helen Lived”. Here, Yeats assumes the voice of the Trojan artists who, having helped to win the prize of Helen, the “[b]eauty that we have won / From bitterest hours” (5-6), do not accord her the artistry she is due, treating her “but as the rest / Of the men and women of Troy” (10-11) and offering only “[a] word and a jest” (12). Troy’s failure to appreciate Helen, whom it eventually lost and suffered for having taken, speaks to Yeats’ evolving view of Gonne, suggesting that he may have squandered his talents by not treating his heartthrob with the artistry she is due and conveying a sense of dejection now that he has ‘lost’ her to age and the impossibility of marriage.

The figure of Helen appears far less frequently in Yeats’ later poetry, due, perhaps, to his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1917 (Saddlemyer 99-100). There are, however, a number of poems in which she is addressed. In “A Prayer for my Daughter” (*Michael Robartes and the Dancer* 1921), for example, the speaker wishes that his child “be granted beauty and yet not / Beauty to make a stranger’s eye distraught” (17-18), remarking that “Helen being chosen found life flat and dull” (25). Yeats’ wishes for his daughter display a distance between his past pursuit of such unearthly beauty and his present attitude, perhaps empathising somewhat with Helen for her inability to

"find a friend" (24) who is true, so corrupted a world has her beauty made. Helen makes a final appearance in "Long-Legged Fly" (*Last Poems* 1939), where her beauty is a relic of the past as she stands atop Troy's burning towers. In quick succession, she is reduced from an infantile "part woman, three parts child" (15), through echoing a "tinker" (17), a caste which Arkins identifies as "the lowest echelon of society" (80), to being metamorphosed into a "long-legged fly upon the stream" (19), a frail and repulsive creature not worth one's time bothering about. Finally, at the end of his life, Yeats has shrugged off the figure of Helen as inconsequential; now, a woman for whom so many died and who once represented so much for Yeats, being the embodiment of the idyllic female, is nothing more than a bug to him.

When it comes to gender in the poetry of Yeats, the Irishman's presence at the forefront of a movement that was revolutionary, not merely artistically, but politically, had an undeniable impact. Despite his seemingly 'patriarchal credentials', being a white, middle-class Protestant male, Yeats was far from the stereotype, respecting his female colleagues highly and being respected by them in return (Cullingford 6-9). Yeats did, however, inherit the traditions of romanticism, and millennia of Greek myth's misogynistic and patriarchal treatment of a host of female characters undeniably affected his poetry. Viewing gender and the women personally important to the poet through the lens of the 'Helenic' element and his treatment of the classic

femme fatale as a substitution for Gonne reveals Yeats' complex view of gender and women, often bouncing between the role of an oppressive coveter and victim of Gonne/Helen's divine beauty. While Yeats' employment of Helen can, no doubt, be viewed in a multiplicity of ways, what is definite is that her "terrible beauty" contributed to many of his greatest poems (Dransfield).

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“TO THE WOMEN HOVERING”: A DISCUSSION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER AND BIOLOGICAL SEX IN SEAMUS HEANEY'S NORTH (1975)

Highly Recommended for the Patricia Coughlan Award

Sarah Byrne

Abstract: In this essay, I examine the various representations of gender and sex in Seamus Heaney's 1975 poetry anthology *North*. Particular attention has been paid to Heaney's interaction with and various adaptations of the traditional *aisling*figure of Irish literature. In poems such as “Ocean's Love to Ireland”, Heaney's conformity to the image of a passive, even somnambulant woman being pursued by an aggressive male coloniser appears deeply rooted in traditional literary depictions of gender. However, this trope is offset sharply by the appearance of modern, more robust *aislingí* such as in “Bog Queen”.

Throughout this essay, I compare and contrast Heaney's male and female figures (including Heaney himself) in order to comprehensively analyse his differing illustrations of gender and sex against a background of colonisation. Using a variety of approaches, such as close reading of his poems, in-depth background historical research, and close comparisons with both Irish and foreign mythologies, I have managed to unwind Heaney's poetic tapestry of *aislingí* (and occasional male antagonists) and trace each thread's origin back through layers of memory, myth, and violence.

Seamus Heaney's 1975 *North* offers up an archaeologically and folklorically driven commentary on colonialism, tradition, and the landscape. The theme of gender is woven throughout numerous poems in this anthology. Irish women of all kinds populate North, in capacities both mundane and mythical. Heaney's fascination with the *aisling* is undeniable; although she morphs and shapeshifts from poem to poem, she is a powerfully omnipresent force. Heaney's reimagined *aisling* flits between numerous roles, often portraying not just a free Ireland, but appearing as a personification of language and the ancient landscape, as in "Bone Dreams" and "Bog Queen". He thereby returns her to her pre-seventeenth century folkloric function as a symbol of the natural world, rather than a purely nationalistic mascot (Isaac n.p.). In several poems, his feminine entities appear neither alive nor dead; they are *hovering*: suspended in stasis in the space between worlds. Heaney's *aisling* is not a solo spectre imprinted

into the pages of *North*. A male presence appears alongside the women in many of his poems, often as the narrator or 'active' party, contrasting with the unmoving passivity of their feminine counterpart. As with the *aisling*, the significance of this male presence shifts from poem to poem. In "Bone Dreams" IV, she is accompanied by Heaney himself as a lover; a complementary force fostering a sense of balance. However, the male presence is often a sexually violent threat to the fair *aisling*, as in "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union".

North echoes with chords of Heaney's own nostalgia for what has been, but never shall be again. This underlying longing for the past is made most apparent in his opening poem, "Sunlight", in which Heaney takes us to revisit his childhood home of Mossbawn. We sit, invisible, beside the young Heaney, "non-speaking but absorbing the atmosphere" as his aunt Mary performs traditional domestic tasks (Fawbert, "Sunlight" n.p.). Although this nostalgic snapshot is a memory uniquely Heaney's, his portrayal of Mary is reminiscent of countless Irish women of a certain era. Her "floury apron", her broad lap and her "goose's wing" for dusting drew me backwards into my own grandmother's kitchen, a place similarly overflowing with the love of which Heaney speaks (Heaney). "Sunlight" offers a safe haven of memory that Heaney may observe, but never return to. The scene this poem describes is a moment enshrined in the past; accessible only by memory. Mary Heaney appears as an occupier of neither the past nor present, and yet occupies both

at the same time. Her actions in stanzas two to four are firmly fixed in the past tense. However, Heaney notably shifts into the present tense in stanza five, as Mary "sits, broad-lapped" (Heaney). She is the first of Heaney's hovering women, living encased in amber long after her natural death. "Sunlight" is one of the few poems in which the female presence is not that of the lover, but that of a maternal figure. As such, Mary's womanhood is offset not by a husband, but by the presence of a male child – Heaney himself.

We visit a later stage of Heaney's youth in "Funeral Rites", the first of the poems in North to discuss the theme of death. In part I, Heaney leads us through his family's observance of the Irish wake tradition. The opening line introduces us to the strict gender roles that surround the Irish wake, as Heaney's bearing of the coffins of "dead relations" is synonymous with a "kind of manhood" (Heaney). This is reflective of how gender specific the various roles surrounding death and funerals are in rural Ireland. This image of male physical activity contrasts sharply with the depiction of the bereaved "women hovering" around the deceased's coffin (Heaney). This scene is in keeping with the traditions of an Irish wake, as it was important that the body was not left alone at any point between death and burial; the task of keeping watch usually fell to one of the women present (Delaney). These wake women therefore become silent, omnipresent sentinels of death and loss, much like Heaney's

aislingí [1]. While in a peaceful setting, these women would be able to return to their normal lives, the violence of the Troubles surrounds them with constant death. As such, the women of "Funeral Rites" seem never to be able to abandon their state of "hovering" in the face of the unnatural deaths and losses described in part II (Heaney). These "somnambulant women" appear suspended between this world and another, unable even to return to the vaguest sense of normality (Heaney). Their "emptied kitchens" illustrate that the wake is over: the time for hovering over death has now passed (Heaney). However, the women of "Funeral Rites" never really can manage to assimilate properly into their former lives. This inability to reach the end of the grieving process illustrates just how unnatural and devastating the Troubles were to communities and families.

In part III of "Funeral Rites", Heaney introduces the Icelandic character of Gunnar. Although a character called Gunnar appears in both the *Volsungs Saga* and *Njál's Saga*, it has been determined that Heaney's Gunnar is one of the heroes of the *Njál's Saga* (Hart). Gunnar is introduced to the Saga as a kindhearted young man, who is asked by his cousin Unna to recover her stolen dowry (Anonymous). In chapters Nineteen to Twenty-Four, Gunnar recovers Unna's dowry, from whom it was unjustly taken by her former husband (Anonymous). Gunnar is a

[1] Plural of *aisling*

representation of Republican soldiers who have been killed in fighting for a united Ireland during the Troubles. His restoration of Unna's dowry is similar to the plight of Republican soldiers during the Troubles to restore the dignity of their *aisling*, Ireland. This comparison follows a common trend in eighteenth century *aisling* literature of portraying Ireland as "a poor woman begging for the protection of Irish men [...] to finally return her purity or dignity to her, of which she has been shamefully deprived" (Armengol 8).

Setting aside the *aisling* motif for a moment, it is worth noting how differently Heaney portrays the grieving process of men from that of women. His depiction of silently grief-stricken, sleepwalking women contrasts sharply with that of the men in part III as they tell stories of the dead Gunnar's "verses about honour" (Heaney). This image of passive women preoccupied by death while the men dominate memorialising the deceased does indeed mirror the mourning and memorialisation process as experienced by many communities in Northern Ireland (McDowell). Storytelling and songs about the deceased are a common feature of both the Irish wake (Delaney) and of Irish Republicanism. Furthermore, stories and songs in memory of individuals martyred for Ireland are a very common republican genre (Ó Cadhla). However, the monopolisation by Heaney's "men" of the storytelling element of grieving implies that the women are stereotypically too occupied with their "hovering" to contemplate the political meaning of the "neighbourly murders"

depicted in the poem (Heaney). Such an assumption largely erases the female participation in republican paramilitary operations, in which many women held both combatant and leadership roles (Alison). This rift between male and female mourning processes allows Heaney's women to maintain a largely passive, non-threatening presence, an image which again subscribes to the depiction of women in traditional *aisling* literature.

The quiet, contemplative men and boys pictured in "Sunlight" and "Funeral Rites" contrast sharply with the overbearing male presence in "Ocean's Love to Ireland". In this poem, our *aisling* begins as a helpless and innocent young girl who finds herself ensnared and raped by the English coloniser Walter Raleigh. This rape is a symbol not only of Raleigh asserting his physical power over the young girl, but of England asserting its power on Irish shores through cruelty and violence (Moloney). The scenario depicted therein is at least partially historically accurate, being an adaptation of an anecdote concerning Walter Raleigh that appears in John Aubrey's biographical *Brief Lives* (Fawbert, "Ocean's Love to Ireland"). Both poem and anecdote open similarly, as Raleigh "back[s] the maid to a tree" (Heaney). Heaney goes on to compare this entrapment to Ireland's geographical location in relation to that of England. This image firmly establishes the role of both Raleigh and the girl as being representatives of their two countries; Ireland's "tree" is the cold Atlantic (Heaney). As Raleigh asserts himself as a boundary

between the girl and anyone who may be willing to aid her, so too does the island of Britain provide a geographical boundary between Ireland and any potential European allies. Furthermore, Heaney's merging of Raleigh's thrusting action during the rape with his inland invasion of Ireland leaves the reader with little doubt regarding the girl's status as an *aisling* and Raleigh's representation of the more powerful English colonising forces.

Although Aubrey's anecdote suggests that the girl, despite her protestations, finds the experience to be one of "pleasure" and "ecstasy", the very cries that are interpreted to be products of this ecstasy are in fact corruptions of her protestations of "Sweet Sir Walter, what do you me ask? Will you undo me? Nay, sweet Sir Walter! Sweet Sir Walter! Sir Walter!" (Aubrey 255). The similarities between the two pieces of writing end here, as Heaney notably offers no such assumptions in part I of "Ocean's Love to Ireland". Heaney's retelling of Aubrey's anecdote differs vastly in tone from the original; he does not portray the act as a humorously recalled dalliance. Rather, he records the scene as a vile rape in which the male presence forces himself upon the female, ignoring the *aisling*'s pleading. His comparison of Raleigh and the girl to the "ocean" and a "scarf of weed" respectively reflect the enormity of the power imbalance between the two; she is completely at his mercy (Heaney). It is also representative of just how meaningless an encounter this is to Raleigh, compared to the devastation it causes the girl (Moloney). Notably, the line "Sweesir, Swatter! Sweesir,

Swatter!" are the only lines spoken by a woman in the entirety of *North*, making this girl the most 'active' and rooted in the present of all of Heaney's female characters appearing therein (Heaney).

However, the girl's return in part III of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" contrasts sharply with her appearance in part I, as she now "complains in Irish" (Heaney). It is at this point that Heaney's commentary on the erosion of the Irish language by English colonisation becomes apparent. Raleigh's "broad Devonshire" has overpowered the girl's pleading in part I (Heaney). As with "Funeral Rites", part III of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" also follows eighteenth century trends in *aisling* literature, as the now "ruined maid" (Heaney) laments her sorrows as *Gaeilge* in the hope of drawing aid from male allies (Armengol). However, this endeavour brings her no aid as Philip II, her would-be Spanish saviour "fail[s] her" (Heaney). Ireland's poets, the traditional champions of the *aisling*, subside before "Iambic drums" (Heaney), a characteristic of English poetry signalling the beginning of the replacement of the Irish language in Ireland with English (Fawbert, "Ocean's Love to Ireland"). Heaney's comparison of the native poets to Onan, who in Genesis 38:8-10 was killed by God for refusing to impregnate his widowed sister-in-law by "spil[ling] his seed on the ground" is a jibe at their metaphorical impotence in the face of the erosion of their language (The Jerusalem Bible). He implies that the Irish poets failed the *aisling* not only by hesitating to come to her aid in the

face of her rape and colonisation, but by allowing the English language to become the language of Irish literature; they wastefully "spilled" the seeds of the Irish language. This implies that the Irish poets failed the *aisling* not only by hesitating to come to her aid in the face of her rape and colonisation, but by allowing the English language to become the language of Irish literature; they wastefully 'spilled' the seeds of the Irish language. Notably, the girl does not speak again after the first line of part III, but "fades" away (Heaney). Although the final lines of the poem illustrate her sinking "[i]nto ringlet-breath and dew / The ground" as though into a grave, Heaney does not illuminate clearly whether the *aisling* has in fact *died*. She therefore joins the ranks of Heaney's hovering women, occupying the spaces associated with death, and yet belonging fully neither there nor with the living.

The sexually violent coloniser again surfaces as the male personification of England that narrates "Act of Union". "Union" alludes not only to William Pitt the Younger's 1800 parliamentary Act of Union, but also the "union" of sex between the *aisling* and the male England (Heaney). The female entity in Act of Union is again seen to be in an unreactive state of unconsciousness, as she does not react to the male's "caress[ing]" of her pregnant stomach, nor the "pain" with which he leaves her (Heaney). The unresponsiveness of the *aisling* combined with the haughty imperial tone of lines nine and ten – "I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder / that you would neither cajole nor ignore"

(Heaney) – suggests that she is a passive victim of rape by the powerful male England (Armengol). "Act of Union" therefore follows in the tradition of writers such as Aogán Ó Rathaille in portraying the English colonisation of Ireland as an act of sexual violence (Armengol). Interestingly, her unborn male child occupies a more active role in the poem than the *aisling*. He is described as an "obstinate fifth column", a tiny warrior, an "ignorant" vessel of anger who is predicted to someday violently defeat his own father (Heaney). Heaney's wealth of knowledge of Irish folklore is evidenced by how closely this storyline mirrors that of the ancient legend of Balor of the Evil Eye and his grandson Lugh, who in killing Balor fulfils a fabled prophecy and frees the Tuatha Dé Danann from the yoke of Fomorian tyranny (Carmody). Heaney therefore suggests that conquest the child of Ireland's rape will be the deliverance of her people from English tyranny.

A notable exception to Heaney's usual rules surrounding gender in the poems of *North* occurs in "Bog Queen". The undead matriarch described therein is a far cry from the usual passively melancholic *aisling* that I have described previously. She shoulders through Heaney's chorus of female hoverers positively dripping with mossy threat. This Queen is notably the only woman in North to speak in the first person, a technique which roots her firmly in the present. However, it also grants her a sense of ethereal mysticism, as she defies the norms of both life and death. If she were entirely dead, she would not be

"fermenting underground" (Heaney). Her defiance of mortality distances her from her human origin, pushing her towards the realm of the Sidhe. Although the *aisling* is known today as a patriotic genre, its pre-seventeenth century ancestor was traditionally suspected to be a member of the Sidhe, and symbolised nature (Isaac n.p.). Heaney's Bog Queen lies somewhere between these two worlds, embodying both Ireland and a grotesque sort of Earth Mother (Hoff Kraemer). The *aisling* of "Bog Queen" appears to invert the norms of traditional *aisling* literature. Although she begins her poem hovering, "waiting between the turf-face and demesne wall", following the theft of her hair by a "peer's wife" she has "[risen] from the dark" (Heaney). This pattern of rising from a deathly slumber to consciousness when wronged sharply inverts the narrative of "Ocean's Love to Ireland", in which the wronged woman "fades" from a state of activity to one of deathly passivity (Heaney). Of further interest is the lack of male presence in this poem, bar the fleeting appearance of the semi-respectful turf cutter. In a sharp contrast to the trope of England as a sexually aggressive male presence as in "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union", England is in "Bog Queen" personified as a "peer's wife" (Heaney). However, the role of this "peer's wife" is not merely symbolic, as she can be identified as the Anglo-Scottish Lady Moira, on whose estate a female bog body was discovered around 1780 (Fawbert, "Bog Queen"). Although we are not explicitly aware of her intentions, the rising of the Bog Queen in

the final stanza appears grotesquely ominous. In Celtic times, hair was considered a symbol of both status and beauty (Joyce). The stealing of the Bog Queen's hair is therefore not merely an act of theft, but may be considered an attempt to dethrone and disfigure her. When viewed in the context of the *aisling*, this grievous harm is representative of the English exploitation of Ireland (Hoff Kraemer). The Bog Queen therefore is rising not only to reclaim her hair, but also to reclaim her land.

To conclude, Heaney's treatment of gender and biological sex in his 1975 anthology North largely adheres to a strict binary of the passive "hovering" female *aisling* contrasting sharply with the more aggressive male English presence (Heaney). Somewhat ironically for an Irish poet, Heaney rarely narrates from the female perspective, instead choosing to speak from the male point of view, as in "Act of Union", or as an unseen bystander, as in "Ocean's Love to Ireland". In poems such as "Funeral Rites", he relies strongly on his own memories of events within his family and community to illustrate a wider scene of colonisation and violence, which allows him to compare the attitudes to violence of both modern and mythological men and women. Although Heaney may be critiqued for sometimes adhering too rigidly to the stereotyping of women as passive, shell-shocked creatures in the face of violence, his mastery of the *aisling* genre cannot be denied. There is little doubt that North manages to establish itself as an oasis of strange – if sometimes grotesquely so – beauty against a backdrop of senseless violence.

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LANDSCAPE AND SPACE: A STUDY OF THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL IN IRISH POETRY

Highly Commended for The Global Undergraduate Awards 2021

Lara Ní Chuirrín

Abstract: This essay explores some of the ways in which Irish poets have used space and place within their poetry to explore interiority. Core concepts from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* will be used to examine four poems – Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger", Rhoda Coghill's "The Burren", Louis MacNeice's "Snow", and Sinead Morrissey's "Through the Square Window". In discussing Kavanagh and Coghill, I will explore how the landscape becomes a vehicle through which certain anxieties, ideologies, and hopes are projected outward. In contrast to this, the space of the home in MacNeice and Morrissey's poetry is an inward facing space, one where the darker and murkier parts of the psyche can be gently explored. In each poem, landscape and space are instrumental in making sense of the individual's experience within the wider world.

"Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock." (Simon Schama 6-7)

"On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (Gaston Bachelard xxii).

The following essay will examine the various roles of landscape and space in a number of Irish poets' works, looking first at landscape, and then at space, specifically the space of the home. Section One will explore the Irish landscape as it features in Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger", and in Rhoda Coghill's "The Burren". Gaston Bachelard, in his text *The Poetics of Space* acknowledges the "the correspondence between the immensity of world space and the depth of "inner space"", and it is this capacity of landscape to articulate intense interiority which will be discussed, as well as the cultural and political contexts specific to each poet/poem (205). In Kavanagh's work, the landscape will be discussed in terms of its political and sexual connotations, and Coghill's landscape will be discussed as a means to express both anxieties, and selfhood. Section Two will examine the ways in which the space of the house features in Louis MacNeice's "Snow", and Sinead Morrisey's "Through the Square Window". Here, again, Bachelard's writing is of note, particularly the idea of the house as a symbol with "one of the

greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (6). In Bachelard's schema, the house becomes a kind of metaphor for the mind. The setting of "Snow" will be discussed in terms of the house symbol as a location of memory, as well as a tool for identity formation. The house in Morrisey's poem will be examined as space used to articulate or explore anxieties of the self.

The landscape of Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" is that of rural Monaghan. Published in 1942, the poem reflects Kavanagh's own experience of growing up in rural Ireland, as well as his personal politics at the time. "The Great Hunger" follows the life of farmer Patrick Maguire, and the landscape in which Maguire's life unfolds is a farming one, made up of potato ridges, cattle, farmhouses, chickens, and so on. It is at times beautiful, but for the most part it is harsh and unforgiving.

Kavanagh's unflinching look at the struggle of rural life rejects the romanticised view of rural Ireland which had been perpetuated by church and state since Ireland gained independence. Tricia Cusack, in her essay on Irish nationalism and landscape, notes an attempt by the early Irish State and Church to differentiate themselves as acutely as possible from Great Britain (230). This resulted in an "ideology of the rural" (Cusack 230), and a form of nationalism which "typically drew upon the vocabulary of primitivism, postulating a pre-modern culture in harmony with 'nature' and innocent of contemporary civilisation" (Cusack 224). Such a romantic image of rural

Ireland is rejected throughout "The Great Hunger".

The poem opens with Patrick Maguire working in the fields with a group of men. It is a harsh scene, where "crows gabble over worms and frogs/ And the gulls like old newspapers are blown clear of the hedges" (63). The reader is positioned alongside Kavanagh as a removed observer, and told that "we will wait and watch the tragedy to the last curtain, / Till the last soul passively like a bag of wet clay / Rolls down the side of the hill" (63). There is a clear connection in these lines between man – "soul", and earth – "clay", but it is not the harmonious relationship imagined by Irish nationalism. It is also noteworthy that by positioning himself with the reader, he distances himself from the land and the people who occupy it. The landscape in which Maguire exists is one of suspicion, a place where "from every second hill a neighbour watches / With all the sharpened interest of rivalry", and of isolation, where "dawn fell like a whirring stone / And Patrick on a headland stood alone" (68). Moments of beauty and transcendence, such as when "the sun comes through a gap" and "these men know God the Father in a tree", are immediately undercut by images of despair, such as "a dead sparrow and an old waistcoat" (68). Kavanagh goes to great lengths to create a landscape which, though deeply connected to the men who populate it, is in no way sympathetic. The poem closes with the very earth itself laughing at Patrick Maguire, and he in turn "screams the apocalypse of clay / In every corner of this land" (89).

Another notable aspect of the poem's engagement with landscape is typical throughout Irish history - the association of nature with woman. In this poem, the relationship seems corrupted, and shows us a certain anxiety around female sexuality. Conley and Grinnell note a long tradition of representing Ireland-as-woman (or woman-as-Ireland) - what they term "[t]he constant personification and imaging of Ireland as "Mother Ireland"" (6). The representations of motherhood, sex, and landscape in this poem are complex, and speak to a discomfort with female sexuality. This can be seen, for example, in section two, where we are first introduced to Maguire's mother. We are told "O he loved his mother / Above all others" (66). The lines which follow tie the mother to the rural landscape by mirroring the syntax - "O he loved his ploughs / And he loved his cows" (67). The section progresses with further nature imagery such as "perennial grass", a "summer stream", the fecund season of "July", before turning to the sexual - the "impotent worm on his thigh", "passion", "lust", "flesh" (67). There is a clear line here from mother/woman, to nature, through to sex. This sexuality is then undercut at the close of section two, where Maguire returns to the fields, "[w]here eunuchs can be men" (67). This castration imagery hints at a strong unease around the sexuality of woman, as encapsulated in the land. Throughout the poem this representation of female sexuality in tandem with male anxiety and/or a grim landscape repeats again and again. The landscape of rural Monaghan becomes a

locus of resistance against an Irish nationalist sentiment which idealised rural Ireland. Elements of this landscape also suggest a discomfort with female sexuality, and the idea of a "Mother Ireland".

Rhoda Coghill's 1948 poem "The Burren" engages with landscape in a drastically different manner from Kavanagh. Similar to Kavanagh's, Coghill's landscape is a place to explore anxieties, but it also is a place of female empowerment.

"The Burren" examines Coghill's anxieties around being forgotten, or fading into obscurity. Lucy Collins notes that "[w]omen were virtually invisible in the public structures of the Free State - the highest levels of the civil service were closed to them and jury duty was restricted to those women who chose to volunteer" (37). This exclusion from public life extended to public discourse, and "women who expressed a particular political or intellectual position could never form a 'natural' part of that discourse" (Collins 37). It is in this context of silencing that Coghill's fears of erasure found fertile ground. In this sense, the Burren's timeless process of rock formation, as well as the eternal flow of the ocean, become a metaphor for both loss and preservation. There is a sense of timelessness in the "slow-flowing ocean" which "has shaped / Age-old valley and hill", and in the "cyclic ebb and flow / Of Time's refashioning" (3). This sense of timelessness belies an anxiety around the relentless march of time and history, and the individual's powerlessness in

the face of this. There is also, however, a grain of hope in this geological landscape. Physical happenings are preserved within a landscape, and this is acknowledged in the "mortuary mounds/ Of ancient men" who are, eventually "found" (3). So we see that while the landscape is a repository of anxiety, Coghill also uses it to craft an idea of hope - perhaps her work, and her memory will be preserved, will be discovered in the future. Simon Schama notes that "one of [people's] most powerful yearnings" is "the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality', and certainly in "The Burren" we see Coghill grappling with her own legacy after death (15). Another important aspect of the landscape in this poem is the effect which the speaker exerts on it. If we take Coghill as the speaker, then she grants herself extreme agency in this poem, carving a powerful space for herself within the landscape. As discussed in the previous paragraph, woman and landscape are densely intertwined at this time in Ireland. Coghill challenges what Gerardine Meaney describes as the role of Irish women as "bearers of national honour", a role which reduces a woman to an emblem (230). Where Kavanagh accepts this stereotype, Coghill rejects it. She inserts herself into a landscape which is contemporaneous with reality – the Burren, Co. Clare. This is a space which is specifically Irish, containing uniquely Irish flora and fauna. In doing so she aligns herself with Ireland, and then she alters that landscape, she remakes it. The landscape becomes a magical place, where:

birds like fishes
Swim in the liquid air, and lichened bushes
Have turned to branching coral: sheep on the mountainside
To flecks of foam left by an ebbing tide. (3)

By remaking the landscape, Coghill asserts herself as more than mere emblem, but rather as creator of meaning. And if landscape is woman, then by creating the landscape, she is creating her own conception of self. This Burren landscape becomes for Coghill a powerful tool for the creation of hope, and the assertion of selfhood.

The space of the home in poetry can become an enclosed area of exploration - a powerful metaphor for interiority and the psyche. In Louis MacNeice's "Snow", the setting of the house becomes a space for extended contemplation, remembering, and a possibility of understanding. Although it is set in a living room, the actual location of the poem is uncertain. MacNeice himself stated that the poem takes place in his own home, though he acknowledges that there were no bay windows in that house (MacNeice, Letters 679). MacNeice's friend E.R. Dodds claims that the poem is set in *his* own home (117), and finally, it has been suggested by Dr Anna Teekell that the bay window which features so prominently in the poem is the bay window of his father's home, back in Belfast (2009). The ambiguous location of the poem is not really a problem, but rather is symptomatic of MacNeice's self-fashioning. Bachelard

notes that "[o]ur soul is an abode. And by remembering "houses" and "rooms," we learn to "abide" within ourselves" (xxxiii). By locating the poem in multiple places, MacNeice is working to understand himself. The true location of the poem is all of these places. It is his own internal house, the house of his psyche.

The central image of the poem is that of the pink roses against the snow-filled window. The way in which MacNeice frames the sudden snow in the window is reminiscent of a still life, with the scene completely contained within the frame of the window. In fact it is the window itself which produces the snow – "the great bay-window was / Spawning snow" (26). Against this white bay window is placed a bunch of pink roses, which are "[s]oundlessly collateral", suggesting that they are additional or secondary to the snowy window, and that they are "incompatible" (26). There is a tension, then, between the pink of the rose and the white of the snowy window. This intense and focused viewing of the scene, this language of observing and describing, puts us at a distance from the warm room in which the poem takes place, creating a sense of detachment, and in turn a certain trance-like atmosphere. Here, the house becomes a space for reverie, and "allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard 6). In this dream are elements of MacNeice's past, come together in a moment of profound experience of the present.

If we allow ourselves to see the bay window as the window from his father's home, we can perhaps see his father – a Protestant minister – elsewhere in the poem. Fauske points out

the duality of his father's sermons, with which MacNeice would have grown up, noting that "[h]is father's sermons were about two lives: the one lived now on earth, temporal and immediate, and the one lived eternally, timeless and intimated" (56). There is a sense of two worlds, or two lives, throughout the poem, in the distinction between the interior and exterior worlds. The interior is "rich" and tangible – it is full of roses, and fire, and the peeling of a tangerine (26). It is sensory – "[o]n the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands" (26). The exterior world is snow – a white blanket which is at once beautiful and treacherous, delightful and obscuring. At the close of the poem the speaker states that "[t]here is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses" (26), suggesting that there is a great deal which separates this internal world – the world of tangible, sensory experience, as well as the daydreaming subject – from the external world – whatever it is that is hidden in the snow outside, the unknown, the spiritual, perhaps.

In MacNeice's "Snow", the house becomes a space for extended reverie, in which multiple memories merge to create a house of the mind or soul, a place where the past can come together with the future, in consideration of ideas of self, interiority, and exteriority.

In Sinead Morrissey's "Through the Square Window", the house is the setting for an intensely personal exploration of anxiety and fear. If we think again of Bachelard's idea of the house symbol

as being “the topography of our intimate being” (xxxii), we can think of the setting of this poem as symbolic of the speaker’s mind. As discussed in the previous section, Bachelard found that the house “is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (6). He goes on to state that “[t]he binding principle in this integration is the daydream” (6). I would argue that here, the “binding principle” is the nightmare. Where in MacNeice, the house is a space for reverie and for identity formation, here the daydream is a nightmare, and the house is a space of fear.

The anxiety which pervades the poem is best seen in the doubling which takes places throughout. The opening lines place us in the speaker's dream, creating a double of herself - there is at once the speaker’s physical self who features at the close of the poem, “flat on my back with a cork / in my mouth, stopper-bottled” (935), and there is the dream self, who watches the dead “wash the windows of my house” (935). We can see, then, a split between conscious and unconscious taking place within the house, or the mind as symbolised by the house. The speaker’s son is also doubled within the poem. The young boy, with “his effortless breath, his ribbon of years”, is mirrored outside by the “one blue boy” who “holds a rag in his teeth”. This pairing of images - “my son”/ “blue boy”, “effortless breath”/ “teeth”, “ribbon of years”/ “a rag” - creates a clear doubling. DeMars, in his essay “The Manifold Operations of the Gothic Double”, states that “[t]he occurrence of doubling [...] primarily occurs when

some facet of social order is not working properly; it thus signifies a breakdown of cultural structures" (2).

This idea of "a breakdown of cultural structures" is interesting when we read the poem in the context of the post-troubles Northern Ireland in which it was written. Morrissey has acknowledged the nature of the poem as a "post-troubles poem", as well as "the question of what do you do with the history, what do you do with the legacy of the victims, what do you do with those narratives of the troubles that can't be easily accommodated?" (Morrissey, "Second Cities"). She has also stated that these questions "don't go away" (Morrissey, "Second Cities"). These questions and anxieties are present in the poem in the doubling between son and boy - inside and outside, and speaker and dreamer - conscious and unconscious. There are no clear distinctions in this poem - "[t]here are no blinds to shut them out with" (935), and as the poem progresses, the dead and the outside world seem to come closer - there is "the sluicing and battering and paring back of glass" (935). Outside is the situated reality of the world, "the Lough", "Hazelbank", "the Strangford Peninsula", and inside there is anxiety. These mirror each other, and the difference between the two is not fully legible. There is no hiding from the legacy of the Troubles, either in the home, or in the unconscious, and through this doubling, the poem attempts to understand the individual's role, as well as the future of the speaker's son, in a society whose structures have been altered by violence.

Landscape and Home become loaded symbols in the poetry discussed above - motifs through which interiority can be projected and explored. It is clear from Kavanagh and Coghill's poetry that landscape is never a passive, given reality, but rather is actively created by the subject. This is true even in the very viewing of a landscape - no two people will see the same landscape. In the choices made in describing a landscape, much can be imparted. For Kavanagh, the landscape of Monaghan is used to reject certain notions of Irish Nationalism which trivialised rural life.

Elements of this landscape also speak of an anxiety (likely unacknowledged) around womanhood, motherhood, and female sexuality. It is clear that Kavanagh knows this landscape intimately, and that it is emotionally charged for him - this is part of the impact of "The Great Hunger". In Coghill's poem, the landscape of the Burren is a powerful metaphor for erasure and preservation, as well as a place in which she can assert her selfhood as an Irish woman. For Coghill, the landscape lacks the same emotional charge, and seems to be utilised in a more utilitarian sense - it serves a purpose. This is in no way a criticism. Where the landscape serves well as an outward projection of ideas and anxieties, the space of the home focuses the attention inward. MacNeice's "Snow" takes place in a house made of memories, and in this space the speaker engages in intense contemplation, touching on aspects of his

past, and on ideas of identity. Morrissey, on the other hand, uses the house as a space to explore the darker parts of the mind – the anxiety and the fear. Through doubling, Morrissey explores the legacy of the troubles, and her own anxieties which arise from this legacy. The disjunction of interior experience – the anxieties, the fears, the desires, the memories of an individual's experience coalesce in the concrete spaces of these poems, allowing the poets, the speakers and the readers to experience a sense of harmony and order amidst the disorder of the psyche. Each of the poems discussed illustrates the very natural human tendency to project an image of ourselves onto the world around us, in an attempt to better understand ourselves.

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A COMPARISON OF GENETTEAN AND POST-GENETTEAN NARRATOLOGY, WITH REFERENCE TO *LITTLE CONSTRUCTIONS* BY ANNA BURNS

Highly Recommended for the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 3rd Year

Sonja Murphy

Abstract: The flaws in Gérard Genette's narratological model emerge when we attempt to apply it to an experimental text. This essay argues that post-Genettean narratological models often provide a more effective means of analysing experimental texts, especially in regard to time, narration, and perspective. In order to prove this, I conducted a literature review which drew on the works of Brian Richardson, Richard Walsh, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, among others. Using multiple texts as examples, and through a close reading of the 2007 novel *Little Constructions* by Anna Burns, this essay highlights the weaknesses in Genette's narratological model. Ultimately, it becomes clear that Genette's theories cannot cope with *Little Constructions*, as the novel deals with characters whose lingering trauma renders time indistinct, and as it deconstructs concepts of narration and perspective. This essay finds that

using a range of post-Genettean narratological models is a better way of analysing experimental texts as they allow for us to focus on the subjective human experience of time, and as they better equip us to discuss unconventional uses of narration and perspective.

While the theories that Gérard Genette first outlined in *Narrative Discourse* prove an adequate way of analysing most prose narratives, they ultimately fall short of being a consistently useful or convincing way of doing so. Numerous critics have pointed out the flaws with Genette's concepts, with Brian Richardson stating that Genette's "model cannot deal with or even imagine a narrative that so perfectly defies his categories of order" (*Unnatural Narrative* 30). These limitations become most obvious when we examine his categories of time. Several narratives intentionally blur the lines between different time periods. To try to segment the events of these narratives into Genette's categories of time is to work against the author's original intention, and to misrepresent how readers experience fiction. We can see similar flaws surrounding his theories of narration and perspective, with Richard Walsh arguing that the concept of "the narrator, postulated simultaneously inside and outside representation, dissociates the author from the act of representation" (511).

Further shortcomings emerge in Genette's theories when we attempt to apply his model to an experimental text, such as

Little Constructions by Anna Burns. When applied to this novel, with its complex, twisting narrative form, Genette's model signally fails. This suggests that his theories are an inadequate means of discussing many postmodernist texts "since they are predicated on distinctions that more experimental writers are determined to preclude, deny or confound" (Richardson, "Theorising" 24). Using several texts as examples, this essay discusses how the Genettean model is limited in its ability to analyse time, narration, and perspective in fiction. By paying particular attention to *Little Constructions*, this essay illustrates how many post-Genettean narratological models provide a more effective means of analysing experimental texts.

Genette's theory of order distinguishes between the chronological order that events in the story take place and the order in which they are presented in the narrative. There are a number of narratives in which "the division and thus the temporality of the text is blurred", thus rendering any attempt to categorise events by Genette's concepts of analepses or prolepses ineffective (Heinze 35). The opening of *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood, for instance, pushes against oversimplified classifications of time, such as Genette's concept of order. The protagonist tells us that "time is not a line but a dimension" (3), and that "you don't look back along time but down through it, like water" (3). While the novel can be interpreted through analepses and prolepses, to do so would be to assume that time is a straight-forward, linear concept. We can brand the events

of the protagonist's childhood as analepses, but perhaps the events of her childhood and adulthood are happening simultaneously, or perhaps, as the novel's epigraph suggests, the protagonist is remembering her future instead of her past. By invoking various scientific theories, the novel questions the linear nature of time. When viewed in this light, Genette's concept of order appears largely restrictive, which led Rudgier Heinze to argue that his "division between past, present, and future is arbitrary, the future not being any more malleable than the past" (33).

The opening scene of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* also blurs the line between past and present. As the protagonist starts her day, she remarks on "a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air" (3). Kate Haffey argues that the "temporal location of this little squeak [...] is quite ambiguous", as it can be both the sound of her opening her door now, or the opening of the windows at Bourton, "a sound heard across time" (141). Any attempt to clearly define the temporal location of this sound would be a wasted one, as "we should allow for 'fuzzy' or indeterminate temporality, for narratives to be multivalent and polychronic" (Heinze 35). It is more important to understand why a text may utilise indeterminate temporality than to focus rigidly on what is happening when.

This is also evident in texts such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. In narratives of transgenerational trauma, the past cannot be

relegated into the realm of something that is over, as it continues to affect the daily lives of the characters. In one scene, Spiegelman illustrates himself sitting on top of a pile of corpses. With the birth of Spiegelman's child, the "past casts a pall over the present" as we can see "the happiness and excitement of a new Jewish life is thus tainted and sobered by the memory of so many Jewish lives annihilated" (McGlothlin 190). In this instance, Spiegelman exists both in the past and the present, and to define this as a moment of analepsis would be to ignore the point that Spiegelman is trying to make.

We encounter a similar problem when attempting to apply Genette's theories of anachrony to *Little Constructions*. Since the novel has no clearly defined present moment, any attempt to distinguish between the past and present feels needless. While it is difficult to apply Genette's model to this narrative, its convoluted narrative structure might "adequately portray the occasionally puzzling and irrational human experience of time" (Heinze 42). The indistinct nature of time in the narrative aligns with how the minds of its traumatised characters work. *Little Constructions* can be viewed as an example of a text with a conflated temporality, which is a "distinctively contemporary construction [...] in which apparently different temporal zones fail to remain distinct and slide or spill into one another" (Richardson, "Theorising" 27). As the woman at the bus stop is being attacked, for example, she recalls her childhood rape and "she was no longer sure who she was, who he was, what year it

was, what age she was [...] and couldn't tell if what appeared to be currently happening was happening or if it was a ghostly re-enactment of one of the traumas of her past" (Burns 112). Although one could consider this a moment of analepsis, to do so would ignore the indistinct nature of time that this woman is experiencing, due to the merging of past traumatic events into the present. To interpret this scene with Genette's model would counter the author's intention to display the haunting timelessness of trauma. We see the novel's other traumatised characters have a similar experience of time, as both Jotty and Tom Spaders constantly relive their trauma. To Tom, there is no need to distinguish the past from the present, as he is always replaying his assault in his mind, to the point where it might as well be "taking place simultaneously as we speak" (40).

In addition to his idea of conflated temporality, Richardson posits other narratives that cannot be understood by Genette's concept of order, such as circular narratives, narratives with differential timelines, and narratives that move backward in time. In the case of narratives that move backwards, "one can certainly have anachronies, though it's not clear whether - and why - they should be called prolepses or analepses" (Richardson, *Narrative Poetics* 26). Although Genette was interested in works that could not be easily understood by his narratological model, the precision of his terminology often seems arbitrary, especially when applied to the subjective experience of time.

Genette's concept of ellipsis proves to be more useful than his

theories of anachrony, but employing it may inadvertently render real human experiences of time as strange and irrational. An event elided from the narrative may be absent also from the memory of the character, or the character may wish that it was. Mieke Bal describes how in *Madame Bovary*, "many events, which one could expect to have been presented as dramatic climaxes, are summarized rapidly, whereas routine events [...] are presented extensively" (73). We also see this approach used in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, wherein the daily lives of the characters are described in detail, but the pregnancy and later miscarriage of a main character is given only a brief mention. Instances of ellipsis such as this are often used because "the event about which nothing is said may have been so painful that it is precisely for that reason it is being elided" (Bal 71). This could be due to trauma suffered by one of the characters, as seen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and in *Little Constructions*. The protagonist of *Beloved* never describes the infanticide she committed in her own words, although her frequent attempts to forget the past make it clear that she does remember the act. This is also the case for Jotty in *Little Constructions*, who remembers her childhood sexual abuse, but, beyond the occasional passing mention, it is elided from the narrative. Given that these characters are modelled on the experiences of real people with trauma, it is worth noting the connections between trauma and ellipsis in narrative.

Genette defines his concept of pause as "when there is a

pause in the action and a suspension of the duration of the story" (35). Often, this takes the form of a description presented by the narrator. When viewed through Genette's concepts of duration, moments of pause might seem at odds with the reality of time, especially when compared to his definition of scenes, where story time and discourse time are equal. By suggesting that pause is a narrative device, one also suggests that in reality time flows consistently. However, most people can surely recall a moment in their life where time seemed to stand still. We see a fictionalised rendering of this in *Little Constructions*, when Julie is choked by her father. After he starts choking her, the narrative jumps back several years, only to return to the moment of her choking a chapter later, making it seem like it is lasting longer than it actually is. The concept of pause also suggests that a story consists only of moments of action, and that lengthy moments of description cannot work to further the story. For these reasons, the suggestion that the story pauses in these moments is problematic.

In cases where the story literally does pause, Genette sometimes chooses not to label these events as pause. He argues that the "historical-philosophical disquisitions of *War and Peace*" cannot be defined as a moment of pause when "the narrative slows down by bringing the time of its story to a standstill so as to cast a glance over its diegetic pace. Rather, it interrupts itself to give up its place to another type of discourse" (Genette 37). Genette's view of what exactly constitutes as story

time is not altogether convincing here. It is unclear why a moment describing the fictional world in which the story takes place can be considered a more significant moment of pause than Tolstoy's digressive essays in which the story comes to a complete halt. The lack of clarity surrounding Genette's definition of pause makes it difficult to effectively discern which events in a narrative can be considered pause, and which cannot. Genette's concept of frequency is concerned with how many times events are narrated in relation to how many times they take place. Most criticism of this concept focuses on the idea of repetition. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan discusses its inherently paradoxical nature, stating that there is "no repetition without difference and no difference without repetition and each and only be discussed in terms of the other" (153). As Bal points out, "two events are never exactly the same", and that "the first event of a series differs from the one that follows it, if only because it is the first" (77). We may question the worth of analysing the frequency of events in a narrative if, as Rimmon-Kenan tells us "we never go into the same river twice, and no pure repetition exists" (153).

Genette's concept of repetition requires the narrative to be unchanging, as his "notion of frequency, as well as his concept of story, presupposes the existence of a fixed, retrievable, non-contradictory sequence of events, a sequence many postmodern writers refuse to provide" (Richardson, "Theorising" 24). *Little Constructions* can be understood in this way, as "incompatible

and irreconcilable versions of the story are set forth" (Richardson, "Theorising" 25). We see the narrative contradict itself several times throughout the novel, most notably when we are shown Judas saving his sister, only later to be told by the narrator that he made that up, and they now have to "give a negation of Judas's version [...] in order to give the honest and authentic version" (137). The reader begins to doubt everything the narrator says, and, forced "to latch on to one set of events as the real ones and disregard the other, contradictory versions as mistakes, delusions, or imaginings", we are left with no clear timeline of events (Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 46). Without it, we have no clear means of determining how often a particular event recurred, and are left unable to interpret it through Genette's narratological model.

It is more useful to try to understand the enigmatic narrator of *Little Constructions* through post-Genettean narratology. Post-Genettean models acknowledge that since narrators are not real people, they should not be expected to act with the same consistency as them. Walsh shows us that to assume "narrating characters must have continuity of being [...] is an instance of criticism internalizing a literal model of the logic of representation, and then using it against the text itself" (507). Assuming that narrators should adhere to the logic of reality is unfair, as some of the most common kinds of narration are inherently implausible.

Although at first glance *Little Constructions*' narrator appears

to be homodiegetic, their inconsistent nature proves the flaws in trying to interpret them through Genette's model. Despite presenting as one person, the narrator claims to be aware of the thoughts of every single character. As they know far more than one person would, it is more useful to understand them as a 'fraudulent' narrator, described by Richardson as a narrator "who obviously cannot be producing the narration he or she pretends to be giving voice to" ("Theorising" 33). The first-person nature of the narration makes it appear even more fraudulent, as it features "such a quantity of details in the narrative that it would be impossible for any real person to remember" (Nielsen 135). The novel itself seems to emphasise that the narrator is not a real or consistent person, and cannot be interpreted through any model that expects them to behave as such.

Given the amount of knowledge that the narrator has, it may be useful to consider them as a covert first person plural or 'we' narrator. The narrator appears to speak for the whole town of Tiptoe Floorboard, reminiscent of Palmer's idea of the 'Middlemarch mind', used to "demonstrate how the inhabitants of that town share certain views" (Fludernik 142). Throughout the novel, there are suggestions that the narrator may be a collected consciousness. When John Doe attacks the woman at the bus stop, the narrator "temporarily and accidentally [...] fell into her head" and describes the world from her perspective (Burns 112). What we might actually be seeing is this woman

taking charge of the narration herself, as the narrator had insisted that she "wasn't important and [...] we won't be needing her again" (109). If the narrator is trying to contest with all the voices in Tiptoe Floorboard, it makes sense that they often seem to lack control of the narrative. When we leave the gun shop and return to Jotty the narrator tells us, "I didn't want to alarm you but I was becoming worried we wouldn't get back to her at all" (61). By saying this, the narrator breaks the illusion that the story is in their seemingly all-powerful hands.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator is forced to participate in the story's action for the first time. Used to their role as a bystander, the narrator cries, "you want me to do something!" when Jotty asks for a favour (272). In this scene, the narrator moves from extradiegetic to intradiegetic, and we can see how "the foundation that Genette and others would use to ground their models of narrative is far more tenuous than usually imagined, and only lasts until the whim of the author intervenes" (Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 12). Both the reader and the narrator are made uncomfortable by their sudden involvement in the action. The narrator's apparent omniscience is at odds with their existence as a single person. Seeing them interact with the same characters they had been observing from a distance feels uncanny, and it makes us question how we could ever accept first person omniscient narrators before. Through its use of an experimental narrator, *Little Constructions* forces us to realise how unstable the convention of narration actually is.

Through the use of second person perspective, *Little Constructions* involves the reader within the story. Genette believed that second person narratives could be "readily situated as heterodiegetic narration", while some later narratologists believed it was homodiegetic (Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 35). Both of these assumptions are flawed, as Monika Fludernik points out that "second person fiction destroys the easy assumption of the traditional dichotomous structures [...] especially the distinction between homo and heterodiegetic narrative" (qtd. in Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 35). When *Little Constructions* uses second person, it asks the reader, who exists outside the narrative, to step into the story, albeit to a lesser extent than earlier postmodernist works such as Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*, the opening line of which instantly makes the reader part of the narrative. In *Little Constructions*, the narrative switches to second person as we experience the world from Julie's perspective, and then switches again to her mother's. As this second switch occurs, the narrator says, "You might prefer to be Julie's mother" (Burns 69). Through this, the narrative acknowledges the distance of the reader, and the voyeuristic role that second person asks us to play. In an instance such as this, trying to determine whether the narration is homo or heterodiegetic seems irrelevant to the effect it has on the reader.

Jarmilla Mildorf notes how it can often be ambiguous as to

who the second person pronoun refers to, because it may be interpreted "as the protagonist's self-address, as the text's internal address to some narratee, or as an external address to the reader—or, in fact, as a combination of some or all of these possibilities at the same time" (78). On a number of occasions, the narrator does acknowledge the reader and our ability to witness all the events they present to us, and they say, "Thanks for being here with me, by the way, I'd hate to be bystanding all of this on my own" (Burns 193). When the narrator addresses the reader directly like this, everything they say is technically true, as we are 'bystanding' the events presented to us. The narrator is able to speak with the fictional characters and the reader, which is so far from the realm of reality that "we see the limitations of all accounts of narrative based too narrowly on the model of mimesis" (Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative* 47). It is clear that Genette's narratological model provides no clear way of interpreting how this text employs the second person to involve the reader.

When analysing an experimental text like *Little Constructions*, we can see how post-Genettean narratological models prove more useful than the Genettean model. Through analysing the novel's use of anachrony, narration, and perspective, some weaknesses in Genette's model emerge. For some of his concepts on order, duration, and frequency to appear convincing, Genette requires time to be objective, which, when filtered through the human experience, it never is. *Little*

Constructions intentionally deconstructs narrative tools such as narration and perspective, making the models that were created to analyse these tools appear ineffective.

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ARCHAIC MOTHERHOOD AND PRIMAL FEAR: HOW RIDLEY SCOTT'S *ALIEN* EVOKES THE ABJECT

Joint Winner of the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 3rd Year

Cian Egan

Abstract: First coined by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), the abject denotes that which disregards borders, both physical and psychological. It intrudes upon the boundaries drawn between the external world and the internal self, thereby invalidating the individual's conception of themselves as a 'subject' wholly detached from other 'objects.' This idea is often represented visually through the presence of bodily fluids and other such excretions, as they serve as reminders that these borders are merely arbitrary conceptions that can be easily broken. Kristeva argues that which constitutes the abject is distinctly connected to the maternal body, which, in its 'primal' or 'filthy' capacity for reproduction, has been cast off from the symbolic order: the 'civilised' realm of the Father. As such, the resurgence of abject images directly betrays the sanitised ideals of the patriarchal world, wherein women's bodies are commodified sights of pleasure, thus inciting horror and disgust.

This essay examines how Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien*, evokes the abject. It argues that by presenting a world dominated by 'archaic', 'oceanic', or 'omnipresent' mothers, the film creates a space wherein patriarchal conceptions of subjectivity and the gendered body are invalidated. The abject mother is presented as a disruptive force whose presence incites confusion, terror and death, and therefore must be purged to restore order. Through this means, the film attempts to reaffirm the necessity of acceptable borders. It largely achieves this by contrasting the horrific image of the archaic mother with the pleasurable image of the film's protagonist, Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), whose heroism becomes defined by her reconstitution of the borders the archaic mother intrudes upon.

Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) evokes the abject by engaging with various maternal archetypes that exist beyond the scope of the symbolic order. The film's subtext is largely dominated by the presence of two 'archaic' or 'omnipresent' mothers: the *Nostromo*'s AI operating system, 'Mother', and the unseen alien mother whose destructive male offspring works on her behalf. Due to the presence of these abstract maternal forces—to whom both the alien and the human characters are distinctly connected—the film breaks the comfortable boundaries drawn between 'Mother' and 'Self', and thus places its characters in a liminal space between both infancy and adulthood, and often male and female as well. This intrusion on the 'symbolic' or 'patriarchal' ideal is represented visually through the presence of

bodily fluids, bodily invasion, and subverted images of reproduction. Through these means, the film presents sexuality and birth in a way that invalidates the sexual binary. It subverts the 'primal scene' by rendering the feminine object (the egg) the 'penetrator / impregnator' and the male object the 'penetrated / impregnated'—a grotesque image of reproduction wholly detached from patriarchal conceptions of the gendered body and its sexual functions. Furthermore, the film rejects the mother's symbolic function as 'caregiver' by aligning the maternal figures with destructive masculine forces. In the case of the alien mother, her distinctly phallic offspring assumes the role of 'fetish-object' for her. In other words, it is the 'presence' that compensates for her 'lack', both in terms of her genitalia and her incorporeal state. In the case of the AI Mother, her role is revealed to be that of representative for the unseen 'Father' (i.e 'The Company'), carrying out his will to transport the alien back to Earth regardless of whether the crew survive or not (Kavanaugh 95). This essay will explore these ideas at length, and aim to illustrate in detail how the film utilises these motifs to evoke the abject; as well as how this abjection is eventually resolved.

The Archaic Maternal: The AI Mother and the Alien Mother

The 'archaic', 'omnipresent', or 'oceanic' mother is a fictional figure begotten of patriarchal fear of the female body and its

'primal' reproductive functions. In her 1993 book, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed describes this figure as the "parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and of end" (17). This figure is merely an abstract concept, less so a true representation of the mother herself and more the abject ideas she is associated with within a patriarchal context: the secretion of bodily fluids, violent birth and grotesque sexuality. In *Alien*, this archetype is embodied by two distinctly different maternal forces: the AI Mother and the alien mother.

The opening sequence of *Alien* indicates a particular fascination with the maternal body. The viewer is first presented with a wide shot of the *Nostromo* drifting alone through space, immediately emphasizing the AI Mother's status as an all-encompassing entity from which the ship's crew cannot escape. This shot then shifts to a "lingering exploration of the inner body of the spaceship", which, with its vaginal corridors and womb-like chambers, leads the viewer's eye to "six curiously unsexed bodies [that] slowly come to life" (Kavanaugh 93).

(Scott 2:58) (Scott 5:35)

As Stephen Scobie points out, "[t]he symbolism of the glass-shielded 'pods' in which the crew sleep is [...] that of the womb: an enclosed, protective, inner space within 'outer space'" (83). When considered from this perspective, Kavanaugh's description of the crew as "unsexed bodies" becomes particularly noteworthy, as they appear to take on the non-sexual characteristics of new-born infants. Scobie describes their white garbs as "almost comically like diapers", again contributing to the sense that the crew are somehow underdeveloped (83). This apparent birthing scene serves as the film's first indulgence in the abject, as the crew, in their infantile states, appear as yet unformed 'subjects', rendering them mere 'objects' in relation to the mother. This notion recalls Julia Kristeva's original theories of the abject, as outlined in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. In the section titled "The Abjection of Self", she defines the subject as he who "[turns] away from perverse dodges, [and] presents himself with his own body and ego as the most precious of non-objects", and whose primal, filthy origins "are no longer seen in their own right but forfeited, abject" (5). Most notably, she cites the separation between 'Self' and 'Mother' as the most essential form of abjection the forming subject must undergo: "The abject confronts us [...] within our own personal archeology [*sic*], with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her" (Kristeva 13). The film presents an image of abjection through the crew's neotenic link to Mother. They wholly

rely on her for survival and are still integrated within her body, upsetting the natural separation of 'Self' and 'Mother' that ought to occur so as to introduce them to the realm of the symbolic: that which is 'civilised' and represented by the Father. Thus, the film envisions a world in which the abject feminine rules and dominates, contrary to the patriarchal nature of the real world. This foreshadows the oncoming arrival of the film's most transgressive maternal force: the alien mother.

Despite their shared status as archaic mothers, the alien mother contrasts with the AI Mother, most distinctly in her embodiment of the grotesque aspects of motherhood cast off from the sentimental symbolic ideal. Where the AI Mother is inorganic, sanitised, and lacks any trace of bodily fluids, the alien mother represents the 'lower-parts' of the maternal object —all that is associated with humanity's animalistic origins: the primal, the debased, the sexual. Barbara Creed writes extensively on the significance of this figure. She notes that, despite the fact that the alien mother does not appear corporeally, "her presence forms a vast backdrop for the enactment of all events. She is there in the images of birth, the representations of the primal scene [...] the rows of hatching eggs [...] and the birth of the alien" (19). Creed, among others, refers to the Space Jockey's derelict ship as the most obvious indicator of her presence. The ship's exterior resembles a pair of spread legs, and its interior—with its slimy, membranous walls that appear to be made of both organic and inorganic material

—is immediately reminiscent of a vaginal opening (Kavanaugh 93; Creed 18), albeit in a way that is far more grotesque and anatomically correct than that of the *Nostromo*:

(Scott 26:09) (Scott 27:03)

Here, the crew travel directly into the archaic alien mother's 'womb', wherein her eggs lie dormant. While rendered infantile already in their connection to the AI Mother, this return to the site of conception and birth sees the crew investigate, on an allegorical level, the mysteries of their own creation. Tying this notion back to the abject's roots in Freudian philosophy, Creed suggests that their intrusion upon this reproductive space "recalls Freud's reference to an extreme primal scene phantasy where the subject imagines travelling back inside the womb to watch her / his parents having sexual intercourse, perhaps to watch themselves being conceived" (18). As the subject ought to have abandoned this kind of fantasy upon their separation from the mother, this notion is wholly detached from the symbolic ideal, and therefore abject. Both in the grotesque bodily

imagery it presents, as well as its recreation of the primal scene, this sequence highlights the alien mother's status as one entirely detached from patriarchal conceptions of motherhood—a notion which is only affirmed by the bizarre functions of her eggs.

Phallic Nightmares: Alien's Subversion of the Sexual Binary

The conception and birth of the alien is perhaps the most notably abject aspect of the film. Upon peering into one of the alien mother's eggs, Kane, a male crew member, is forcibly impregnated by the facehugger—a conduit for the conception of new aliens. This creature, both visually and in terms of its functions, carries significantly abject implications. With its long, winding tail, extending mouth and pulsating sacs, its form is immediately indicative of a phallus; its function, likewise, is also similar to that of a phallus. However, in its association with the mother's eggs and the distinct visual coding of its underside, the creature embodies aspects of female anatomy as well:

(Scott 36:50) (Scott 49:23)

This is noteworthy, as it exemplifies an important motif that appears throughout the film. Both in its impregnation of Kane, and in its embodiment of characteristics of both sexes, the facehugger invalidates the sexual binary and subverts the male's active role in conception. Creed suggests that "[w]hen male bodies become grotesque, they tend to take on characteristics associated with female bodies", an idea which is only affirmed by the horrific birth of the alien itself (18). The scene is framed in a manner that almost parodies childbirth: with the initial pains Kane feels, to his writhing around on the table and the crew's efforts to hold him down (Scobie 84). Thus, the bodily intrusion Kane experiences is rendered a bloody extrusion, not only blurring the lines between Kane's body and the external world, but also betraying the natural functions of his anatomy.

(Scott 55:49) (Scott 56:19)

Scobie describes this scene as "an extremely powerful, if crude, image of the disruption of the "natural" order, not only in the direct association it sets up between birth and death, but

also because it is *male* childbirth" (84). In rendering the male the receptive partner in the sexual exchange, the respective roles of man and woman are made arbitrary, upsetting the binary understandings of sex intrinsic to patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, the reframing of birth as a kind of violent 'death' exemplifies the patriarchal fear of woman's reproductive capacity—affirming that her body is considered a site of horror and disgust that ought to be cast off from the conscious mind.

The phallic appearance of the alien Kane gives birth to contributes further to this motif of subverted sexual roles due to its association with the alien mother. In his essay, *Fetishism in the Horror Film* (1989), Roger Dadoun explores the implementation of the "fetish-object" in horror fiction—that is, the fantasised phallus the male subject creates to compensate for his mother's lack (39). This idea is a product of patriarchal anxieties surrounding the female body and its sexual difference from the male form, which is then displaced onto "the images of the feminine as archaic mother and as castrated other" (Creed 22). As this quote indicates, this anxiety largely manifests in the fear of castration—of being rendered the 'same' as the mother. Quoting Freud's "Fetishism", Dadoun explains that "the need to have recourse to a fetish is closely linked to castration: 'the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute [phallus]'" (39). In the case of *Alien*, Kane's alien offspring assumes the role of avatar for the archaic alien mother, executing her murderous desires on her behalf. In

this sense, her offspring "attributes to her a shape, a clearly defined, erect form in order to combat the threat of her formlessness, her totalizing, oceanic presence" (Creed 21). The alien's role as the mother's fetishized phallus is most evident in its visual design: with its extended, arched head, imposing height, and ever-secreting mouth.

(Scott 1:33:45) (Scott 1:33:38)

Its mouth is a particularly noteworthy aspect of its design, as it is the tool with which it kills most frequently. Kavanaugh goes as far as to describe the alien as a "science fiction *phallus dentatus*" (94). However, from the perspective of Freudian fetishism, this interpretation can be reconfigured to identify the alien's gaping maw as a representation of its mother's 'horrific' genitalia. Creed writes that "the mother's phallus-fetish covers over [...] her castrating *vagina dentata*" (22). When viewed from this perspective, the alien's violent actions can be understood as a stand-in for castration: for the mother's all-consuming "lack." In short, the alien recalls that which has been rendered abject:

the memory of the mother's "missing" phallus that has been discarded from the adult mind.

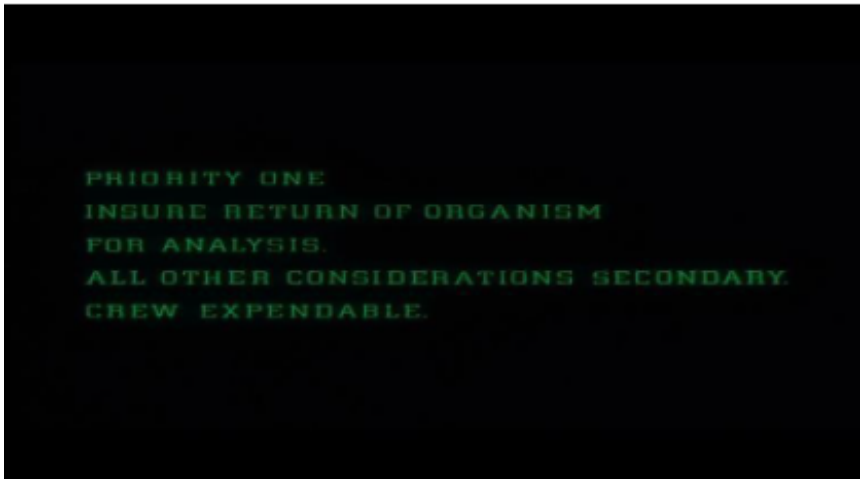
Monstrous-Feminine vs Symbolic-Feminine: Reconstituting Borders

The character of Ellen Ripley is largely defined by her contrasts to the abject femininity presented throughout *Alien*. Although this motif is made more explicit in the film's 1985 sequel, *Aliens*, it is an important piece of subtext that undercurrents much of the original film. Ripley is initially presented, as was elucidated earlier, as a sexless object in relation to the distinctly sexed AI Mother—largely evident in her formless, androgynous workwear and her embodiment of traditionally 'male' traits: such as her wielding of the phallic gun.

(Scott 59:07) (Scott 1:28:00)

Like many other aspects of the film, Ripley's ambiguous gender signifies a betrayal of the symbolic feminine ideal. She inhabits

a liminal space between the sexes: a direct consequence of the subjectivity she has not yet formed due to her dependence on Mother. However, the latter parts of the film see Ripley develop specific feminine traits as she comes closer to eliminating the alien, signifying that her role as heroine is to reconstitute the acceptable borders that have been broken throughout the film. In order to do this, however, she must first purge the source of her own abject state: the AI Mother. This purging begins with Ripley's realisation that Mother's role is not, in fact, that of caregiver: but rather that of agent for the absent Father – 'The Company.' Mother's task is to return the alien to Earth for 'his' purposes, regardless of whether it kills her 'children' in the process:



(Scott 1:20:04)

This culminates in Ripley's attempt to destroy Mother via the self-destruct sequence, but upon realising that she cannot reach the escape pod in time, she begs Mother to cease the countdown

(Scott 1:39:04). Ripley cries out to her for help (Scott 1:39:07), and when her cries go unanswered, she condemns Mother as an abject feminine force that does not belong within the realm of the symbolic: "You bitch!" (1:39:19). Having fully realised the extent of Mother's abjection, Ripley ejects herself from her body in yet another scene reminiscent of birth:

(Scott 1:42:42) (Scott 1:43:15)

As Creed writes: "the mother's body has become hostile; it contains the alien whose one purpose is to kill and devour all of Mother's children [...] the living infant is ejected from the malevolent body of the mother before the infant is destroyed; in this scenario, the 'mother's' body explodes at the moment of giving birth" (Creed 19). Thus, by destroying the mother designed to "abort" her, Ripley casts off the abjection she represents, establishing herself as an individual 'subject' separate from the maternal body.

Despite having eliminated Mother, Ripley must still purge the final remnant of abjection that exists between her and symbolic

serenity: the alien mother's phallic avatar. This final sequence of the film, as Creed argues, primarily works "to repress the nightmare image of the archaic mother, constructed as a sign of abjection, within the text's patriarchal discourses" (24). It achieves this not only through the elimination of the alien, but also through the idealistic image of Ripley it presents. Through her destruction of Mother, Ripley is relinquished of the neotenic, sexless state she began the film in, and is thus depicted in a far more objectifying, distinctly sexual manner than she is in earlier parts of the film:

(Scott 1:46:08)

Both Michael Grant and Barbara Creed suggest that this scene exists to comfort the male viewer: to contrast the grotesque femininity displayed up to this point. Grant writes that "[t]he film finally signals the accomplishment of its phallocentric project in its presentation of Ripley's [...] body as she undresses just before her final confrontation with the alien" (180). Creed directly

addresses the contrast drawn between Ripley and the abject femininity of the archaic alien mother, stating that: "Compared to the horrific sight of the alien as fetish-object of the monstrous archaic mother, Ripley's body is pleasurable and reassuring to look at. She signifies the 'acceptable' form and shape of woman" (23). Beyond just her sexuality, however, Ripley is also distinguished from the abject maternal in this scene through her relationship with the crew's cat, Jones. Earlier in the film, Ripley goes to great lengths to save Jones despite putting herself in danger, and within the comfort of the escape pod, the viewer is given the catharsis of seeing her hold him as though he were a baby (Grant 180):

(Scott 1:44:53)

Through these various symbolic representations, this sequence establishes Ripley as the antithesis of the abjection represented by the alien: where the latter is defined by destruction and monstrous femininity, the former is defined by care and 'proper'

sexuality. Having established this dichotomy, Ripley 'casts off' the final trace of the abject mother through the airlock: yet another vaginal image signifying expulsion/birth. Through this, Ripley reconstitutes the borders that have been broken throughout the film, thereby restoring symbolic order.

(Scott 1:51:44)

Conclusion

Barbara Creed describes the horror film as "a form of modern defilement rite", wherein the symbolic order is separated from "all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies." It is ultimately, as she concludes, "a representation of, and a reconciliation with, the maternal body" (14). Through the analysis presented above, it is clear that *Alien* exemplifies all of these ideas. By presenting a world in which patriarchal understandings of the body and sex are subverted, the film attempts to affirm their necessity: it presents the

archaic mother as an all-consuming, destructive force signifying death, castration and developmental stagnancy. Through her influence, the traditional roles of man and woman are confused, allowing for sights of horror such as male impregnation and violent birth to replace symbolic images of reproduction—wherein all evidence of grotesque expulsions from the body are hidden away, 'cast off', made abject. In her possession of a fetish-object/phallic avatar, the archaic mother confuses traditional understandings of the gendered body even further: a transgression which only results in violence and death. By framing these motifs in this way, the film presents the realm of the mother, the 'abject', as a scourge on symbolic ideals that must be purged, and utilises a patriarchal feminine *beau idéal* to emphasise this need. Through its heroine, Ripley, and her conflict with the titular alien, the film attempts to reconcile with these images of grotesque femininity, and ultimately does so to restore the order it delighted in rupturing—reconstituting borders, and thereby the status quo.

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THE MATERNAL BURDEN: AN ECOFEMINIST CONSIDERATION OF "THE LAST RABBIT" AND "THE WOMAN TURNS HERSELF INTO A FISH"

Winner of the Patricia Coughlan Award & Highly Commended for The Global Undergraduate Awards 2021

Robyn Coombes

Abstract: Women's bodies have traditionally been viewed as closer to nature, serving a patriarchal ideology that elevates culture and assumes human, particularly androcentric, exceptionalism. Considering Irish women's historic alignment with the natural world, both Emma Donoghue's "The Last Rabbit" and Eavan Boland's "The Woman Turns Herself into a Fish" employ the short form to challenge maternal essentialism and subvert the masculine equation and denigration of human and nonhuman mothering bodies. From an ecofeminist perspective, this essay examines the shared concern of Donoghue's short story and Boland's poem: namely, the burden of reproduction on women's bodily autonomy and the detachment provoked by the woman/animal conflation. Working to destabilise this

derogation, both writers reclaim female voices from male narratives while redressing instrumentalist appropriations of the maternal body. It will be argued that in confronting notions of identity and perception, both “Rabbit” and “Fish” traverse borders of species, time, and subjectivity to reconsider the culturally constructed female body through a biocentric frame of integration. By using and subverting the male gaze, these works harness the woman-nature alignment to undermine patriarchal exploitation from an enlightened ecocritical awareness.

Emma Donoghue’s “The Last Rabbit” and Eavan Boland’s “The Woman Turns Herself into a Fish” each convey an unsettling sense of entrapment within the patriarchal structure which conflates and derogates women and animals. Both portrayals of the female body inhabit the experience of women who internalise, yet resist, oppressive self-identities as objects of spectacle or vessels for birth. Subverting the woman-animal alignment, Donoghue and Boland challenge the borders of human-nonhuman through uncanny births and hybrid transformations to explore the peripheral position of women whose worth is tied to reproduction. While Donoghue centres on birth through the historical figure of Mary Toft, and Boland presents a mythical allegory for menopause, I will concentrate on their shared treatment of the reproductive body as a critique of male imposition on women’s autonomy. By examining their

deliberate assimilation of the male gaze and confusion of interspecific boundaries, this essay will chart how both works confront the detachment that androcentrism provokes between female body and mind.

Addressing the internalisation of women's maternal 'duty', both of these texts struggle with assigned gender roles and their effect on female bodies and identities. Most explicitly, Donoghue's protagonist is subjected to reproductive ordeals beyond the already taxing customs of the eighteenth-century. Focalised through Mary Toft (who in 1726 seemingly gave birth to seventeen stillborn rabbits), Donoghue retrieves the female voice lacking from histories penned by men. Instead of deriding Toft's deceit, she denounces the 'man-midwives' who forced or believed the fraud that hinged on the deaths of countless brutalised rabbits. In the opening paragraph we learn of Mary's maternal burden - she is "pregnant again", preparing a rabbit for dinner, and in a foreshadowing prank to amuse her husband, she pretends to deliver the animal to huffs "like a bellows" (1). These saddles of biology and domesticity, those which "no man could bear [but] women must", quickly overshadow her comic introduction (1). Not only does Mary miscarry while "shovelling dung on the common", but as a working-class woman she must carry on weeding while "still bleeding" (2).

Mary's painful reminders of a lost pregnancy are later exploited by Mr Howard who sees her lactation as an opportunity to increase the credibility of their scheme. It is clear

that her body is merely an object to be groped, usurped, and manipulated by men who claim they can teach her stomach to leap or mistake her cervix for "an enormous great tumour" (8). Their "satin breeches", elaborate wigs, and tricorn hats, are clearly juxtaposed with the frequent invasion of Mary's simple skirt and stays (8). She is a specimen for experimentation from Mr Howard's first hands "as cold as carrots" to the "flowing cuff" of Mr St Andre who "reached inside [her] dress and squeezed [her] nipple" (3; 6; 5). As a spectacle without agency, her scrutinised performance "in front of a crowd of London doctors" is fraught with coercion and sexual violation - "In the darkest corner . . . he nudged my legs apart and pushed the creature into me . . . tears were falling into my stays" (3; 6). Later she is "sore inside from strainings and pokings, and bled more than she had before" (9). Even Sir Richard, the foremost man-midwife, murmurs her "*os uteri* is so tightly shut . . . it would not admit so much as a bodkin" (9). These intrusive trials evoke Mary's intersectional dangers as a working-class woman; her body is not only gendered as feminine and therefore subordinate, but also classed as animalistic and therefore disposable. As Mr Howard plainly states, "women of Mary's station are hardy as beasts . . . [t]hey don't recall a hurt when it's over" (6-7).

This blatant conflation is especially manifest in the relation between Mary and the rabbits. Their non-hierarchical association is exemplified in the callous detachment with which each are treated by men of science. According to Karen Harvey,

historian and author of *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder: Mary Toft and Eighteenth-Century England*, rabbits were emblematic of the privileged "power of landowners as opposed to the complete lack of rights of the agricultural or rural poor" (Harvey and Cawthorne n.p.). Donoghue weaves this link to social inequality with allusions to the rabbit's other connotations, and in so doing highlights their historic mistreatment under androcentric culture. Small rabbits, or conies, have long been connected to 'rampant' sexuality and fertility but also to a wide lexicon of phallocentric terms serving patriarchal subjugation of women. As Piers Beirne explains, rabbits were consistently linked with female denigration since the twelfth-century, particularly through the term 'cony' which corrupted into an "incessant accompaniment of dysphemisms, euphemisms, and synonyms – *con(e)y*, *cunny*, *konyne*, *queynte*, and so on" that have evolved into modern slang still holding vestiges of "the forcible intersection of sexism and speciesism" (19). In vividly describing the damage caused to both the female body and the instrumentalised rabbits in the 'birthing' process, Donoghue reifies their shared oppression under patriarchal power structures into physical injustices. The "mangled rabbit" with its "skin hanging loose" (7) or its fellows in pickled jars, Mary's "magical womb" (8) or the girl "with her skirts up to her shoulders" (13), have all been trapped within a system of abuse and made powerless to an entrenched vocabulary of exploitation. Mary discovers "this so-called bathhouse" is

tantamount to a prison, disguised by language to facilitate the acts of oppression within (13). As Beirne remarks, brothels were also known as "*cunny-houses* and *cunny-warrens* [...] where workers and their customers were 'at it like rabbits'" (14).

Similarly, Boland employs this language of sexism and speciesism to confront the influence of the male gaze on the female form and autonomy. The "flanks" and "paps", "rump" and "loins" evoke connections between her objectified body and the exploitation of animals who are both viewed as consumable flesh (4; 6; 13; 21). She must relinquish these reductive nouns to be free of patriarchal subjection, and yet with them is shed her former sexual identity. This freedom is therefore ambivalent – while it is the woman who turns *herself* into a fish, her seeming agency is complex. Her body conveys her mechanically through the steps of menopause without her conscious permission, appearing less an autonomous decision than an automatic process – "It's what / I set my heart on. / *Yet*" (40-42; emphasis added). This substantial syllable halts her involuntary transformation and marks a moment of awareness. Enlightened to the influence of androcentrism, she realises that she has been conditioned to experience her own body through a male lens. She has believed the need to "[p]out / the mouth, // brow the eyes" and tame her animality (14-16). This assonance, ending in "and now / and now", conveys the cyclical pain women undergo to conform to male notions of feminine beauty and suppress their likeness to animals (17-18). Like Toft's manipulated body,

hers too has been appropriated, and similar to Donoghue, Boland stresses this historic control through images of aggression and suppression. The assimilation of violent commands like "slap", "[f]latten", and "chill", activates the speaker's punishing metamorphosis like a tale from Ovid and signifies the efficacy of internalised ideology (3; 6; 10). But the first stanza – "Unpod / the bag, / the seed" – suggests that this transformation is an act of rejection (1-3). It is an image centred around the traditional language of male fertility, and thus the dismantling of "the bag" – her baggage – not only represents the end of her reproductive viability but a deflation of the androcentric hegemony that disseminates constructions of womanhood.

According to O'Hagan, the poem "rehearses and ultimately reverses the myth that Yeats inscribes in his poem ["The Song of Wandering Aengus"]; it is the story of Yeats's "glimmering girl" attempting to turn back into the trout that Aengus caught" (54). Comparable to Donoghue's reclamation of Toft's story from male histories, Boland's female focalisation likewise critiques the imposition of male narratives on women's subjectivity. Yeats' Aengus strives to possess both the "little silver trout" and its anthropomorphic self and will not stop until the object of his desire is caught (8). He will "pluck till time and times are done, / The silver apples of the moon, / The golden apples of the sun" (23-24). As she "fade[s] through the brightening air" of Yeats' poem, she emerges into Boland's as a transfiguring fish to

escape her plucking and reclaim that which moons in her (24). Resembling the dissection of Donoghue's rabbits and the itemisation of Toft's body, the woman's transformation is a disjointed inventory of flanks and loins - the "slack / and dimple // of the rump" (11-13). But rejecting both the blazon that catalogues women's bodies and the shameful associations of the lower body, she invokes instead a celestial power to "eclipse / in these hips, / these loins // the moon, / the blood / flux" (19-24). By extinguishing power from ideologies which justify abuse and derogate women as lunar, inconstant, essentialised creatures, she also moves away from masculinist, hierarchical language to liberated inscriptions of the female body. While she is freed from the "flux" however, and its procreative pressures, her new identity still struggles against the current, as signified by the heavy consonance of her journey, "blub-lipped, / hipless" (24; 28-29). The following sibilance of stanzas eleven to thirteen hisses with the sensuality society denies her now that she is no longer fertile - "sexless, / shed / of ecstasy" (31-33). But as O'Hagan argues, the poem pivots on the above-mentioned "Yet", when she realises she cannot and should not negate her sexuality (42; 54). By re-mythologising Yeats through ecofeminism, Boland critiques cultural constructions of the female body which impose such damaging limits on agency and sexual autonomy. The transformation to a "sequin-skinned" fish emulates a rebirth outside of the patriarchal tradition, as she sheds her biddable skin to be born beyond the male gaze (36).

As the poem's most conventionally beautiful image, her sinuous unification with this element of fluidity and change is strengthened by her sequined armour which renders her impervious to masculinist authority.

Donoghue likewise reclaims figure 'F' – "The Lady in the Straw" – by giving a voice to the central woman of Hogarth's satirical *Cunicularii, or the Wise Men of Godlimon in Consultation* (1726). She foregrounds the exploitation of Mary's 'warren-like' womb – "How could there be anything hiding in me that had not been turned inside out already?" (12) – and attempts to redress the rabbits etched in Hogarth's beam of Enlightenment (see fig. 1). The physicality of their bodies is abjectly portrayed by Donoghue to confront the damage of binaries relegating animals to elevate male minds – "can't you hear its little bones crack?" (7). Just as the gendered shift in eighteenth-century obstetrics typified "men's desire to wrest from women their control over their bodies", any autonomy Mary might have had is subsumed into male-dominated science, discovery, and excavation (Cody 9). Considered an unfeeling substance "made of gold", the doctors effectively mine her – "Mr Ahlers pulled out the fifteenth rabbit like a child digging for treasure" – in exchange for a guinea or the chance of fame (8). Yet, paradoxically, it is Mary's mind, her maternal imagination, that is thought to produce these monstrous births and deform what only the male can 'form'. Though she is the *mother-mater-matter* to be shaped by men, her dreams of rabbits are enough to intrigue the man-midwives

as contemporary thinking held that "a pregnant woman's emotional responses . . . could imprint physically onto her unborn child" (Harvey).

Fig. 1. Hogarth, William. *Cuniculorii, or the Wise Men of Godlimon in Consultation*. 1726. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, www.metmuseum.org/art/collection.search/396783.

Rather than conferring any degree of agency however, this imaginative power only reveals the flawed logic that justifies women's derogation. It merely serves to oppress Mary further by blurring boundaries of real-imaginary, self-other, and stoking male anxiety. The uncanny births of dead rabbits epitomises abjection; it "disturbs identity, system, order [...] does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). Using first-person narration, Donoghue draws us inside Mary's bodily experience to increase our unease as boundaries of reader-character are

similarly crossed. When “a little bone scraped me”, there is a physical disturbance between Mary and the rabbit, and a psychological confusion between Mary and the reader (6). Our disgust as she spits out the rabbit that “might have come from between a woman’s legs” (Donoghue 9) brings us to Kristeva’s “place where meaning collapses” (2). In removing all borders between human and animal abuse, Donoghue overtly critiques the woman-nature alignment which quickly fragments Mary’s vulnerable identity from a performing “tumbler who has used up all her tricks” (6), to a “strolling player” whining “like something dying in a trap” (11).

For Mary, these transgressed borders lead to a complete detachment of body and mind. She has “lost all consciousness of who are what” (11) she is, unsure where her soul could reside and believing abstract lies had tangibly infected her (12). Treated as “nothing but a body”, she is trapped within patriarchal dualisms that consign her to the role of monstrous mother, becoming the “pubic bone [that] crushed the foetus” (12; 7). Donoghue reveals how Sir Richard deflates her purpose by pronouncing her belly flat. Unable to produce a “holy miracle”, she is instead Mary the Virgin’s ironic double whose body is defined by her unoccupied womb “big with nothing but lies” (11). This mind-body disconnection denies Mary access to the cultured world but also to an integrated self. Sharing but reconsidering this theme of detachment, Boland’s 1982 poem expresses her later reflection - “my body would lead my poetry in one direction . . . my mind could take up the subtle

permissions around me and write disembodied verse, the more apparently exciting because it denied the existence of the body and that complexity" (*Object Lessons* 26). While both writers expose the patriarchal roots of this bodied complexity, Boland considers the alternative perspectives in which binaries can coexist, boundaries bleed, and identities flow.

To confront these impeding dichotomies, her poem inhabits three bodies (woman-fish-water) traditionally associated with flow. Transvaluing women's connection to water, she undermines the logic that both links us to fluidity yet denies us the freedom to express it. Donna Potts suggests this association arose "because [female] identities have been considered fluid and malleable – awaiting definitions by men – and also because of humanity's ultimate origin in the water of amniotic fluid" (102). But the woman's metamorphosis represents active adaptability rather than passive pliability – a conscious "ruddering / and muscling" against male definition (43-44). The boundless ocean offers her infinite possibilities to define herself anew in the 'amniotic fluid' of growth and development. Similar to Donoghue, Boland explores the hybridity of identity through permeable borders of human-nonhuman. Neither humanised nor sentimentalised, fish are often supposedly brainless, indistinguishable, and fundamentally 'other' to mammals. This alienation allows the speaker to escape from the narrowness of gender constructions while also signifying her relation to her former body as a disidentification. In Boland's own words,

"[m]arginality [...] however painful, confers certain advantages [...] [and] the real potential for subversion" (*Object Lessons* 147). Taking the marginality of the fish from human experience, Boland explores the disassociation that women must grapple with in the face of gendered expectations and the misunderstandings around menopause.

When hot-blooded 'loins' become "loomy cold" and the red of monthly blood turns to "greens", the speaker still feels the "brightening" of her often overlooked sensuality - "still / she moons / in me" (53; 54; 50; 55-57). Caught in the conflict between "the sunless tons // of new freedoms" (45-46), the fish is what Vera Coleman describes as a trans-species being - "organisms that appear as hybrid or transitional conjunctions of human and non-human characteristics" (696). As border-crossers, she contends that fish inherently transgress teleology to "evoke a new concept of humanity as undergoing a constant process of reconfiguration, and prompt readers to envision the nonhuman as the past, present, and future of humanity in its becoming" (696). By turning into a fish, the woman reverses Western society's focus on end results and suggests instead the inseparable interconnection of human and 'nature'. Boland reframes our association with the natural world as an evolved existence within the whole "plurality of beings", freed from linear limits (Soper 25). As Soper reminds us, "'Nature' is [...] both that which we are not *and* that which we are within" (21).

While Boland explores the potential "new freedoms" of

escaping into 'nature' and resisting internalised roles, the conclusion of "The Last Rabbit" allows realisation rather than release (46). Both 'Woman' and Toft achieve awareness of the forces oppressing them by stepping outside of their objectified bodies and fragmented selves, but Mary knows she will "never find the way out" (13). Similar to Boland's pivotal "Yet", Mary's perspective shifts to experience the male gaze as subject rather than object. Observing the secret dealings of the bathhouse as spectator to spectacle, she accepts as unchangeable fact "that it is the way of the world for a woman's legs to be open" (13). Whether "begetting or bearing" or "pearling eggs / screamlessly", both writers condemn the inertia required of women as compliant reproductive bodies (13; 37-38). While the boundary-shifting of Donoghue's uncanny births further confines Toft, and Boland's poem suggests the alternative release of hybridity, there is a possible escape for both from androcentrism. Boland's speaker reclaims her bodily identity from male renderings but Donoghue's final line provides Mary with some hope of narratorial agency - "Sir Richard was waiting for *my* story" (13; emphasis added).

The woman-animal bond is challenged and ultimately subverted by both writers in different ways but each work conveys the expanded understanding that is achievable by empathising with other marginalised beings. As Coleman suggests, our similarities can be re-characterised as "nonhierarchical manifestations of biological exuberance" (706).

Implicit in both short story and poem is the abundant potential of biocentrism in dismantling structures of abuse. By centralising female bodies that embrace their complex connection to the natural world, they undermine the shared exploitation of women and nonhuman beings, and confront the instrumentalist attitudes that impose maternal burdens. Whether fraudulent or 'sexless', the toll of reproduction on female bodies is presented as equally damaging to the mental and spiritual self. Through permeable membranes of self and other, human and nonhuman, Boland and Donoghue collapse and coalesce the binaries of masculinist agendas to reconsider all identities as dynamic and all beings as part of the same whole.

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THE FLOWER OF THE MOUNTAIN AND THE OLD MAID: ANXIETIES ABOUT AGEING IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

Highly Recommended for the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 3rd Year

Rachael O'Connor

Abstract: *Ulysses* offers an in-depth examination of how women are perceived by society and by themselves throughout their lives. Although the novel takes place over the course of a single day, we see the main female character (Molly Bloom) age and become less desirable with the passing of time. Joyce constantly compares Molly Bloom to younger female characters, highlighting the gap between older women and their youthful pasts. In the final episode, "Penelope", Molly expresses her own anxieties about ageing and this cements the notion that women are constantly running out of time. I was drawn to this topic immediately upon reading the "Penelope" episode as it prompted me to return to earlier episodes and reread characters such as Gerty McDowell and Milly Bloom, both of whom are linked to Molly while simultaneously being sharply contrasted with her. *Ulysses* is a radical novel in more ways than one, but it is notably ahead of its time in its exploration of

gender politics. Age largely determined how a woman was seen by society in the early twentieth century. However, a close inspection of the respective treatment of older and younger women in the novel reveals that not much has changed since Joyce wrote it. Women are still disregarded by many as soon as they advance past a socially desirable age. *Ulysses* remains relevant in our changing world, perhaps now more than ever.

Ulysses explores how women view themselves and how they are viewed by society at various stages of their lives. Many of the women of the novel, most notably Molly Bloom, express fears about growing old and the resulting changes. During the "Penelope" episode we gain a deeper understanding of Molly's insecurities and anxieties surrounding her loss of youth. Molly is also linked with younger female characters such as her daughter, Milly, and Gerty MacDowell. These connections result in comparisons that remind us of what age can signify for women. Joyce also highlights how society treats these women according to their ages. The women of *Ulysses* are influenced by the male gaze and there is a focus on girlish (rather than womanly) beauty. From the first introduction of the old milkwoman to Molly's revealing monologue in the final episode, women are reduced to their age and its corresponding value in society. Joyce shows that the world has a place for beautiful young women, but their elders are often dismissed by their male counterparts and regarded with contempt by other women.

The first instance where a woman's age is highlighted in *Ulysses* is also the first introduction of a woman in the novel. In the first episode, "Telemachus", an elderly woman arrives at the Martello Tower with milk for Buck Mulligan, Stephen, and Hynes. The woman's age is repeatedly stressed as she is constantly referred to as "the old woman" (13-15). Here, Joyce is subverting the common use of a beautiful young woman as a symbol of Ireland. Stephen refers to this woman as "silk of the kine and poor old woman", two names often given to the nation (14). However, unlike nationalist texts such as *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, co-written by William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory in 1902, the old woman does not reveal herself to be a beautiful young woman by the end of the encounter. Instead, Stephen focuses on her "old shrunken paps" and "wrinkled fingers" (14). These physical signs of ageing are used to subvert the notion of Ireland as a regal young woman. He goes on to call her a "witch on her toadstool" and a "lowly form", adding further negative connotations to female ageing (14). John Bormanis writes that "Stephen's characterization of the "poor old woman" as a "witch on her toadstool" milking the kine casts her as a figure of evil" (595). Joyce is furthering the idea that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow", a phrase first said by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and repeated in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses* (552). This phrase implies that Ireland swallows and squanders her talented youth, but it also places an emphasis on age. Ireland is not a beautiful young woman; she is

an old sow. Two factors are used to deride the woman in "Telemachus": her gender and her age. Stephen muses that the milk cannot have come from her breasts as she has "old shrunken paps" (14). He also refers to woman's so-called original sin by mentioning "her woman's unclean loins" and "the serpent's prey" (14). The function of this woman is to mock certain myths and symbols of the Celtic Revival, but she also serves to ridicule the ageing process in women. Her age encompasses her, and she becomes nothing more than "the old woman" (13-15).

The episode that most clearly shows a woman's anxieties about ageing is "Penelope", which is comprised of a monologue narrated by Molly Bloom. During this monologue, Molly expresses her own fears about ageing and harshly judges women older than her. She describes one woman as "that old faggot Mrs Riordan", and derides another woman's "old maids voice" (690). She compares herself favourably to Boylan's "two old maids of sisters" (696). She also insults women who display visible signs of ageing such as Mrs. Rubio, a "disobliging old thing [...] with a switch of false hair on her [...] ugly as she was near 80 or a 100 her face a mass of wrinkles" (710). Molly is the novel's harshest critic of other women. Carrie Kancilia writes that "[a]nnoyed that she must endure sexual competition from older women whose sexual value she appraises as less than her own [...] Molly attempts to insulate herself from her own age anxieties by harshly critiquing the older women in her midst" (238) Age is often the first thing she mentions when discussing another

character. For example, when remembering Mrs Galbraith, Molly immediately adds that "shes much older than me" (702). Similarly, when thinking about a painting of a nymph, she consents that they could look alike, "only [the nymph is] younger" (704). Molly displays a need to categorise women according to their ages, herself included. She ranks herself above or below other women based on their respective ages. Molly spends much of the episode reminiscing on her youth in Gibraltar. She describes her beauty and vitality in the past tense. The phrase "I was a flower of the mountain" is written twice towards the end of the monologue and this repetition emphasises the melancholy and nostalgia represented by the words (731-732). Molly was once a flower but now she feels that her youthful vibrancy has faded. This line is repeated as she remembers her engagement to Bloom, perhaps indicating that she bloomed at that age. However, the episode also reveals Molly's insistence that she is still young. She seems to be attempting to convince herself as much as the reader when she says, "I declare to God I don't feel a day older" (731). She also remarks that it is "a wonder Im not a shrivelled hag before my time" as a result of living with Bloom (727). These desperate assertations of youth show Molly's anxiety surrounding her own ageing and her unwillingness to let go of her younger years. It is interesting to note that her declarations of youth are often linked to men and their perceptions. She states that she is "not too old for [Stephen] if hes 23 or 24", despite her being several years his senior (725).

This shows “Molly's tendency to measure her self-worth in terms of men's responsiveness to her sexuality” (Boone 210). Molly is acutely aware that femininity is a performance, and she worries that the changes she must undergo as she ages will hinder her ability to perform. “Penelope” is littered with Molly’s concerns about her appearance, particularly her weight. She already wonders if Bloom considers her to be “finished now and laid on the shelf” (717). Femininity is linked to youth and beauty and she fears that as she ages, she will lose her femininity or at least her ability to project it. There is a deep undercurrent of fear running through the “Penelope” episode. Molly is aware of her own mortality and she dreads the future and the changes it may bring. After insulting Mrs. Riordan regarding her age, she immediately adds “I hope Ill never be like her” (690). It is important to note that this is partly because “no man would look at [Mrs. Riordan] twice”, again showing Molly’s dependence on male attraction for validation (690). Molly does not only explore superficial concerns related to ageing; she also displays a genuine fear of the vulnerability of old age. She thinks about a hardened criminal that “murders an old woman for money” and “would attack a poor old woman to murder her in her bed” (716). The repetition of the word “old” is significant here as Molly seems to think that a woman is more vulnerable to crime in her old age. These lines are followed by her own worries about burglars at night, showing an awareness of her own vulnerability. Molly fears the actions of others at her present age, but she

cannot imagine the fear experienced by older women. The monologue also draws attention to her "sense of ageing and lost opportunity" in terms of her singing career (Callow 470). Callow notes that "Molly compares herself defensively with Kathleen Kearney and other younger Irish concert performers" (472). Molly feels insecure about her age and its effects on her career, so she feels the need to validate herself by comparing herself favourably to these younger women. It is interesting to note that Molly begins to menstruate during this episode. Menstruation is a symbol of fertility but despite this physical sign of youth, Molly is consumed by anxieties surrounding her future decline into old age.

Molly's unhappiness about her age is also manifested in her strained relationship with her daughter, Milly. The similarities between mother and daughter are repeatedly highlighted in the text. Even their names are almost identical. Milly functions as a mirror of her mother or, more accurately, of her mother's past. A certain bitterness is evident when Molly thinks about her daughter and her youthful beauty. She comments that "they all look at her like me when I was her age" (717). She compares their bodies, remembering how her breasts "were shaking and dancing about in my blouse like Milly's little ones now" (712). Molly longs for the body she once had, the body that her daughter now has. Molly is aware of how transient youth and beauty are, however, and she knows that her daughter will age too. She knows that Milly is "pretty with her lips so red a pity they

wont stay that way I was too" (718). This shows Molly's awareness that her daughter's looks will fade with time, just like her own. It also highlights her insecurities as she states that she "was" once pretty. These statements become more revealing when they are considered with the greater dynamics of this mother/daughter relationship. Molly is highly critical of her daughter and she has hit her in the past for bad manners. Tilly Eggers writes that in *Ulysses*, "the daughter seems to be replacing the mother" and this has resulted in a certain competition between them (391). It is clear that Bloom links the two of them as he says "Molly. Milly. Same thing watered down" in the "Hades" episode (86). Throughout the novel, Bloom focuses on Milly's emerging sexuality which "suggest[s] a certain sadness about changes in Milly/Molly" (Eggers 393). Bloom often thinks about how his daughter is "soon to be a woman" or is indeed "a woman too" already (86). This anxiety surrounding her maturity shows that age is a concern even for a woman as young as Milly. Bloom also notes that witnessing Milly entering puberty is a challenging experience for Molly, saying, "Frightened [Milly] was when her nature came on her first. Poor child! Strange for the mother too. Brings back her girlhood" (86). As Milly advances towards maturity, she serves as a reminder that Molly is advancing towards old age. As Callow writes, "clearly some kind of time line is crossed by a woman when her daughter reaches puberty" (473). Milly serves as a reminder for Molly of the youth she once possessed, while also forcing her to confront her own position as

the mother of a maturing young woman.

Another younger character that is linked to Molly is Gerty MacDowell. Gerty is introduced in "Nausicaa" when Bloom observes her on the beach and simultaneously masturbates. Gerty is a mere seventeen years old, the age Molly was when Bloom proposed to her in Howth. Molly and Gerty are linked by certain phrases, such as "leap year" and "old maid". Bloom is also reminded of Molly's perfume in "Nausicaa", linking the two women by scent. Gerty's age is significant as Bloom repeatedly stresses her "girlish" nature (334). It is Gerty's youth that attracts Bloom. She is described as appearing "as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one would wish to see" (333). It is important to note that Gerty is often read as a construction of Bloom's thoughts, so when he imagines that "the very heart of the girlwoman went out to him", it reveals much about men's perceptions of younger women (342). Double standards are evident as while Gerty wants a "real man", Bloom wants "his ownest girlie" (342). The childish terms of endearment used to describe Gerty depict men's desires to seduce younger women. Gerty is also "near her monthlies" in this episode, a symbol of youth and fertility and a further link with Molly (351). Like Molly, Gerty harshly critiques the women around her. Edy Boardman, at twenty-two years of age, is only five years older than Gerty and yet she is seen as a busybody and a jealous "old maid" (351). Peter Lee notes that this is a sign of the times and, as Gerty is "already obsessed with fantasies of marriage at seventeen, it

would only be natural for her to see twenty-two as spinster age" (821). The "old maid" rhetoric connects Gerty and Molly as both women resent the figure of the unmarried older woman, largely due to an "internalised fear about becoming one" (Kancilia 238). Part of the anxieties surrounding age in *Ulysses* stems from the notion that women are always running out of time. Gerty is desperate to find a husband; she repeatedly asserts that she has all the ideal qualities of a wife and yet she is "left on the shelf", in Bloom's words, due to her limp (351). Similarly, Molly feels that she is running out of time as she "worries that a mere few years of sexual desirability remain and assuages that anxiety by her affair with Boylan" (Kancilia 238). The women of the novel feel extra pressure exerted on them by the world due to their life cycle and time limit on fertility. This pressure is summed up by Bloom when he says, "a defect is ten times worse in a woman" (351). Age seems to be the ultimate defect as women beyond a certain number of years are considered "on the shelf" (351).

Although the entirety of *Ulysses* takes place over the course of a single day, we see Molly transform as the novel develops. Heather Cook Callow writes that "Molly's beauty is [...] asserted early in the novel [...] yet if any change at all is to be noted, it would be that our sense of her beauty dims rather than increases as the day progresses." (467) Molly is not described unfavourably at the beginning of the novel. However, it is possible that our impression of her beauty arises from the

knowledge of her extramarital affair, which implies a certain seductiveness. As the novel progresses, her weight is occasionally mentioned as a source of concern. Bloom's flashbacks create an alluring picture of his wife, but they are just that: flashbacks. Callow asserts that:

> [t]here is plenty of testimony to her fleshly charms, but closer inspection reveals that some of it is retrospective. Menton seems not to have seen Molly since she was seventeen, and the Glencree dinner where Lenehen tried to sample her "ample curves" was ten years ago (Callow 467).

Eventually, we receive a "shockingly unappetizing" description of Molly from the nameless narrator of "Cyclops" when he calls her a "flabbyarse of a wife" (Callow 467; Joyce 321). It is not until "Ithaca" that we discover the truth of the matter and learn that "Molly is not just plump, she is obese" (Callow 467). Molly's transformation is not only significant because it shows that she was considered more attractive years ago, but also because it represents the passing of time. The course of the novel represents a woman's lifetime; we see Molly's vibrant youth and her eventual decay as she ages and her beauty fades. The final episode, "Penelope", cements this idea by voicing Molly's concerns about growing old.

Ulysses highlights the anxieties that several women experience as they become aware of their own ageing processes. Joyce also depicts how society at large views women at various stages of life. Perhaps the most revealing portrayal of society's

treatment of older women is found in “Circe” when the bawd announces, “Ten shillings a maidenhead. Fresh thing was never touched. Fifteen” (420). In *Ulysses*, younger women are, quite literally, worth more. As women age, their relevance seems to decrease, and they are cast aside. A time limit is imposed on women from the moment they begin to mature, as is evident from Gerty’s need to find a husband and Molly’s urge to take advantage of the few remaining years of her sexual desirability. “Penelope” effectively captures the concerns surrounding age that have been alluded to throughout the novel. Unfortunately, many of Molly’s fears are correct because the society depicted in *Ulysses* does not value older women and the men do not look for women, but girls.

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“SPURNING AT SLAVERY”: THE INFLUENCE OF ABOLITIONIST LITERATURE ON MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S RHETORIC OF MOTHERHOOD IN *MARIA; OR THE WRONGS OF WOMAN*

Joint Winner of the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 3rd Year

Maria Quirke

Abstract: This essay investigates how Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* employs a rhetoric of motherhood to criticise mothers’ ‘enslavement’ in marriage, echoing the way in which abolitionist literature used the destruction of family as an argument against the slave trade. Portraying motherhood and breastfeeding as vital to the health and morality of mother and child, abolitionists used motherhood as a persuasive technique that appealed to their readers’ values of family. Like the abolitionists, *The Wrongs of Woman* fervently emphasises how women’s position in marriage thwarted breastfeeding and destroyed the bond between mother and child. Wollstonecraft also depicts female infant mortality as a welcome escape from the drudgery of womanhood, recalling

accounts that portrayed infanticide by slave mothers as acts of compassionate 'true motherhood'. Taking into account Wollstonecraft's established interest in the abolitionist movement and her familiarity with abolitionist texts, the specific stylistic and thematic similarities in her portrayal of motherhood with those of abolitionists could indicate a direct abolitionist influence on Wollstonecraft's writing.

In *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft uses motherhood as a rhetorical tool to dramatically criticise woman's position as the property of her husband, in a manner similar to abolitionists who used motherhood as an argument against the slave trade. Wollstonecraft, I would argue, places exaggerated emphasis on the importance of motherhood and family, in order to appeal to the values and ideals of her readership. Placing motherhood in conflict with the institution of marriage and the subjugation of women, Wollstonecraft echoes the persuasive style of abolitionist literature, which portrayed oppressive institutions as destructive of the mother-child relationship. Wollstonecraft's rhetoric of motherhood in *The Wrongs of Woman* has notable stylistic and thematic similarities to abolitionist texts such as Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative, and John Jamieson's *The Sorrows of Slavery*, in its descriptions of family separation, thwarted breastfeeding and infant mortality. These parallels could indicate that Mary Wollstonecraft's depiction of the mother-child relationship in *The Wrongs of*

Woman was inspired by the rhetoric of motherhood in slave narratives and other abolitionist literature of the period.

Wollstonecraft appeals to contemporary values of family in *The Wrongs of Woman* by stressing the importance of mother-daughter relationships. According to Susan C. Greenfield, by the end of the 18th century "motherhood was idealized with exceptional fervor" (14), and society recognised "maternal worth" by a mother's ability to care for a child's "physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual [and] vocational" needs (Francus 14). Wollstonecraft aligned herself with this contemporary idealisation of motherhood, asserting that motherhood should form "the vital center of the female cultural identity" (Ford 190). In *The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft promotes the importance of a mother's care to the development of the child – particularly the female child – when Maria identifies herself as the "only" person who will unconditionally protect her child, and "dare to break through all restraint to provide for [her child's] happiness" (94). Wollstonecraft also uses Jemima's narrative to highlight the horrific effects separation from the mother can have on a female child. Jemima attributes her downfall and "misery", to the "misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life – a mother's affection" (82), thereby associating the absence of motherhood with the disintegration of morality. The misery Jemima has experienced includes becoming a thief and a prostitute, and by attributing this to her lack of maternal bonds

Wollstonecraft appeals to societal norms which idealised motherhood as an essential pillar of morality.

Although Wollstonecraft's "commitment to the middle-class family" and idealisation of motherhood has been criticised as "feminist misogyny", in *The Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft seems to use the idea of motherhood in a calculated manner (Ford 190). Her emphasis on the importance of the mother-daughter bond is so fervent it is almost melodramatic; without a mother's love and guidance, Jemima's very humanity disintegrates, as she describes herself as a "filching cat, the ravenous dog, the dumb brute" (82). Indeed, Wollstonecraft defines Jemima's humanity as having been "benumbed" by her neglect in infancy (92). Since motherhood and the family acted as a central core of values at the time, it is significant that Wollstonecraft decides to represent motherhood in this way. There would have been nothing radical in suggesting that the relationship between a mother and child was important; therefore, I suggest that Wollstonecraft is using this portrayal of motherhood as a persuasive technique. By portraying motherhood in such a light, Wollstonecraft could appeal to conventional ideals of the time, enabling her to convince readers of her more radical ideas.

Given that Wollstonecraft establishes motherhood as a vital relationship which provides the basis for morality and civilised humanity, her placing of motherhood in conflict with marriage seems to represent marriage as a threat to her readership's

values. Natsuko Hirakura argues that in *The Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft "renounces" the system of marriage while "detaching" it from "the matter of maternity" (8); however, I would argue that Wollstonecraft places marriage and motherhood in blatant opposition. Maria's heterosexual relationships are inevitably to the detriment of the mother-daughter relationship. In Maria's husband, George Venables, Wollstonecraft creates a demonic figure who drugs his wife in order to acquire custody of their child, causing – in all but one of the possible endings – the child's death. Venables also deserts his illegitimate child, who is maintained by Maria. Greenfield asserts that Darnford, Maria's fellow inmate and eventual lover, also plays into Wollstonecraft's opposition of motherhood and heterosexual relationships, as Maria's "epistolary 'intercourse' with Darnford [...] takes precedence" over the memoir she is writing to her daughter (98). Greenfield argues that by separating the roles of wife and mother, Wollstonecraft highlights the fact that "motherhood has no legal existence" (93). Portraying marriage in conflict with motherhood, Wollstonecraft can communicate to her readers that marriage as it stands threatens their values of family and destroys the vital mother-child relationship. Here Wollstonecraft seems to use her representation of thwarted motherhood to campaign for women's release from their status as the property of their husbands, and in particular their right to custody over their children.

I would suggest that Wollstonecraft's portrayal of marriage as destructive of motherhood could have been inspired by descriptions of severed family ties in abolitionist literature of the period. Wollstonecraft was interested in the abolitionist movement, and makes repeated parallels in her writing between the institutions of slavery and marriage. Moira Ferguson describes Wollstonecraft's movement from "frontally condemn[ing] institutionalized slavery" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, to drawing a direct parallel between slavery and marriage in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (85; 87). In *The Wrongs of Woman* however, Wollstonecraft arguably goes a step further, and adopts the persuasive techniques used by abolitionists in their slave narratives, to argue against women's 'enslavement' in marriage. Notably, motherhood frequently acted as a "starting point for women's antislavery arguments" (Harris 296). Abolitionist literature in Britain was largely directed at women, and "regularly exploited the cultural currency of family and motherhood" (McDowell 17). Much of the content calculatedly "stressed the poignant suffering that slaving practices inflicted on African women" and particularly the separation of mothers from their children (Lewis 460-462). The emphasis abolitionist literature placed on slavery's destruction of family ties shows remarkable similarities to the importance Wollstonecraft places on the broken bonds between mother and daughter in order to criticize women's situation as "motherless, daughterless slaves" (Greenfield 93).

Of particular note is the similarity between Wollstonecraft's treatment of motherhood and descriptions of family in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. In April 1789, Wollstonecraft's review of Equiano's slave narrative was published in the *Analytical Review*. She commented, "Many anecdotes are simply told, relative to the treatment of male and female slaves, on the voyage, and in the West Indies, which makes the blood turn its course" (qtd. in Caretta 332). It is clear that Wollstonecraft was familiar with the text, and that it had an impact on her as a reader and reviewer; I suggest that the *Narrative* – and other abolitionist texts – may have had an influence on her as a writer as well. Like Wollstonecraft, Equiano appeals to the concept of idealised motherhood, repeatedly emphasising that "I was very fond of my mother, and almost constantly with her" (Ch 1). He speaks at length about his separation from his sister, who was also kidnapped into slavery. A particularly striking example of this is when the siblings are physically separated by their master who sleeps in between them, "while she and I held one another by the hands across his breast all night", before they are sold again and permanently parted (Ch 2). Here the slave-owner physically divides the bonds of family, playing a similar role to Venables when he forcibly separates Maria from her child. Equiano directly addresses his readers as "ye nominal Christians", and designates the cruel separation of mothers from their children as un-Christian behaviour, stating "might not an African ask you, learned you this

from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you?" (Ch 2). Here Equiano appeals to his readers' Christian values of motherhood and family, and uses these values to convince his readers of the cruelty of slavery, as Wollstonecraft does to criticise women's marital position.

There are specific stylistic similarities between Equiano's *Narrative* and *The Wrongs of Woman* in their depiction of the relationship between the lost family member and the speaker. Despite the fact that the protagonists have been physically separated from their family member, the relationship is ongoing. Like Olaudah Equiano, who at one point directly addresses his absent sister, Wollstonecraft writes most of her novel in Maria's voice, addressing her narrative to an absent daughter. Just as Equiano describes how his sister's image "has been always rivetted in my heart, from which neither *time nor fortune* have been able to remove it", Wollstonecraft creates an "infant's image" which is "continually floating on Maria's sight" (Ch 2, original emphasis; 61). Taking these similarities into account, it is arguable that Wollstonecraft was directly influenced by Equiano's narrative techniques; however, this would be difficult to prove. The similarities do suggest that Wollstonecraft's persuasive use of motherhood may have been inspired by abolitionist rhetoric, given that she drew frequent parallels between marriage and slavery, and saw them as comparable in the sense that each institution turned human beings into powerless possessions.

Like Wollstonecraft, abolitionist texts described the thwarted breastfeeding of slave women in terms of danger to mother and child, appealing to contemporary views on the importance of breastfeeding. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, the mother-child bond is effectively synonymous with maternal breastfeeding, and Wollstonecraft places particular weight on Maria's inability to nurse her baby when Venables separates them. John Jamieson's *The Sorrows of Slavery*, published in 1789 and directly addressed to "the Ladies of Britain", includes an account of a woman who is kidnapped into slavery and separated from her child. Just as Maria's baby is taken "from [her] breast", so the slave woman's baby is "wrung from [her] folding arms by ruthless hands" leaving her "doom'd never more to suckle [her] lov'd babe" (Wollstonecraft 134; Jamieson 22). While Jamieson describes the woman's kidnapper as "a tyger hideous, in man's form disguis'd", Wollstonecraft's Maria similarly characterises the maid – who acts as Venables' pawn and therefore represents Maria's oppressive marriage – as a "creature in a female form…this tiger, who tore my only comfort from me", in each case associating the separation of mother and child as animalistic in its cruelty (22; 134). Both texts emphasise thwarted breastfeeding, further appealing to social and medical ideals of motherhood (Francus 12), which regarded a mother's failure to nurse her child as producing "two great evils": a threat to both the child's health and the mother's life (William Cadogan 15). Like motherhood in general, breastfeeding is depicted as a source of physical and

spiritual wellbeing. Maria is grieved rather than comforted by the thought that her child might be nourished by a stranger (Wollstonecraft 61), and she recalls pressing the child to her bosom "as if to purify it" from the genetic influence of its father (133). Hence, by locating marriage as a destructive and immoral force which opposes motherhood and disrupts breastfeeding, Wollstonecraft emulates the techniques used in slave narratives, appealing to her readership's values and beliefs concerning the important connection between mother and child.

The Wrongs of Woman echoes abolitionist writing of the period by representing motherhood and unjust institutions as being so drastically incompatible as to cause the death of mother or child. However, in both cases, death is frequently portrayed as preferable to life within the institution of slavery or marriage, when it may lead to the separation of the mother and child. Harris notes that the institution of slavery made it impossible to meet the contemporary ideal of motherhood (303), and abolitionist literature frequently regarded infanticide by the slave mother as "the ultimate maternal sacrifice" where a mother gives up her joy to spare her child from the pain of life in slavery - particularly if the child was a girl (305). Jamieson's slave woman regards her "once long-wish'd-for babe" as her "greatest curse", envying mothers whose babies had died and been "kindly" spared a life in slavery (26). The slave mother in abolitionist literature ends her child's life in order to spare it from repeating its mother's cycle of suffering. Jemima acts

under similar motives when she decides to take an "infernal potion" to "procure abortion" after she learns that she will not be allowed to breastfeed her child (83; 84). As Jemima regards being sent out to nurse as an infant to be the beginning of her downfall, it seems likely that Jemima makes this decision with the object of saving her child from the inevitable degradation that she herself has experienced (Greenfield 95-96). After listening to Jemima's story, Maria herself "lament[s] that she had given birth to a daughter" (92). Although Maria is afraid that her child might be dead, she is now overcome by the equally distressing idea that "her own babe might even now be in the very state [Jemima] so forcibly described", neglected and alone in the world without her mother's protection (92). Equally, in the *Interesting Narrative* Equiano knows that his addressee may be dead, and commits his sister to heaven rather than wishing her alive "when I could not be with her to alleviate [her suffering]" (Ch 2). Maria comes to a similar conclusion, observing that "[t]o think that [her daughter] was blotted out of existence was agony…yet to suppose her turned adrift on an unknown sea, was scarcely less afflicting" (61). Thus, Wollstonecraft places woman's position as a mother without individual rights as similar to that of the slave mother, in which separation by death is preferable to the child's living on without this maternal connection.

In an appeal to the existing values of her readership, Wollstonecraft idealises motherhood as an essential source of welfare and morality. Illustrating that the maintenance of the

mother-child bond is incompatible with the institution of marriage, in which women have no individual rights, Wollstonecraft seems to adopt the technique of rhetorical motherhood used in abolitionist literature, arguing that marriage threatens her readers' values. *The Wrongs of Woman* has distinct similarities with abolitionist texts in its thematic and stylistic depiction of motherhood. Maria's forcible separation from her child echoes the destruction of the slave family as related in Equiano's slave narrative, in which he addresses his absent sister, emphasises the strength of his familial bonds, and directly appeals to his readers' Christian values. Furthermore, Maria's consequent inability to breastfeed her baby closely mirrors descriptions of mother-child separation in Jamieson's *The Sorrows of Slavery*. In each case, the destruction of the mother-child bond is portrayed as insupportable, a catastrophe to the welfare of the child over which death would be preferable. In this way, Wollstonecraft makes it essentially impossible for the reader to reconcile contemporary values of family with support of women's marital position, locating the radical within the conventional in a way that echoes the representation of motherhood in abolitionist literature.

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SHADES OF MEANING: THE DIDACTIC ROLE OF GHOSTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE (EXTRACT)

Winner of The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Robert Lyons

While the written romances of the High to Late Middle Ages, like *Sir Amadace*, provided the literary ghost with its first steps towards extended literary development, the era of the stage in Early Modern London is where it became truly distinct from the folklore that had formed it. It was here, in a time and place riven by the recent religious conflict of the Reformation, and just beginning to unite behind the new Anglican faith, that the spirits of the dead found a voice in fiction which could comment on both earthly and supernatural societal issues as well as reach a higher point of artistic satisfaction. Nor did these new Elizabethan and Jacobean ghosts lose their didactic role, though in the "turbulent ideology of the times", their lessons were often veiled (Owens 51).

This chapter will aim to examine the development of the ghost's literary and didactic role on the English stage of the

Early Modern era. First, we will chart how the cultural view of ghosts was altered by the "new directions of Protestant thought" brought about by the Reformation, by looking at an alleged true spiritual encounter and the societal response it received (Owens 48). Then, we will move on to examining how contemporary playwrights adapted the ghost to newfound societal pressures. Finally, we will see how the most enduring literary ghost story of the era, *Hamlet*, reacts and adapts to these societal influences and manages to fulfil its traditional didactic role in an artful and truly non-traditional fashion.

Henry VIII's desire for divorce may have been the spark that ignited the fires of Reformation in sixteenth-century England, but the blaze had long been smouldering in the grate. The Catholic Church's mercenary tendencies had been discreetly skewered as early as Chaucer's less than ideal Monk, Friar, and despicable Pardoner, and centuries later the debate on the propriety of the Church's role had become both more direct and more heated. Spurred on by the rise of Protestantism in Europe, English reformers such as Tyndale began to question "the whole elaborate system off suffrages, offerings, chantries, requiem masses and other means to assist the dead in their pain" (Greenblatt 133). In particular, reformers sought to strike at one of medieval Catholicism's most contested doctrines: Purgatory.

It is easy to see how the immense wealth of the Catholic Church may have rankled in the minds of destitute commoner and jealous nobleman alike. The great extent of the Church's

holdings was such a part of the zeitgeist that "there was a popular saying, 'If the abbot of Glastonbury could marry the abbess of Shaftesbury their heir would hold more land than the king of England'" ("House" 75). Purgatory, or more specifically the fear of its effects on the souls of loved ones, was one of the Church's greatest means of harvesting this wealth and was therefore a sore spot for early Protestant reformers, who resented "the absence of a clear scriptural basis not only for Purgatory but also for most of the practices, including indulgences, that were associated with it" (Greenblatt 49).

This troublous cultural shift necessitated a change in the role of ghosts: their traditional position of the late centuries as the messengers of Purgatory and beggars of alms for the Church could no longer be supported or allowed to thrive by the powers that be. Impossible as they were to kill, their role underwent a re-invention. Owens writes that they "were still imagined as refugees from the afterlife - but rather than being preoccupied with effecting a swift passage to heaven, their attention was now directed to more earthly affairs" (Owens 46). Ghostly visits and glimpses of Purgatory, of the kind widespread in the days of the Byland Abbey stories, were a source of controversy and very real danger in post-Reformation England.

Such danger can readily be observed in cases such as that of Elizabeth Orton, a young girl who "[i]n February 1580 [...] astonished her local parish and attracted widespread attention when she fell ill with a fever and gave voice to a pair of

prophetic testimonies" (McCarthy and Theile 39-40). The incident may have been worthy of comment already, but when Orton claimed the spirits had come to her from Purgatory, it became a matter of public and legal interest. Her tale is of a kind with Snawball the tailor's centuries before, most notably the feverish illness which attends upon the deceased's visitation (James 230). But now, no passing monk recorded her story for posterity on an idle whim. Instead, she faced the "1563 parliamentary act [which] had criminalized false prophecies," an act whose "language drew attention to the subject's volatility" (McCarthy and Theile 41). It is as well for Elizabeth that she recanted her claim before she joined the ranks of English Catholic martyrs.

Given this volatile climate, it is hardly surprising that the playwrights of the Early Modern era exercised caution when approaching spirits, ghostly visions, or anything else that may comment upon or even imply the mechanics of the afterlife. Even decades after the initial chaos of the Reformation itself, writers such as Thomas Kyd were still sufficiently circumspect to employ classical mythology in *The Spanish Tragedy*, despite its contemporary setting. Don Andrea's journey through the Greco-Roman underworld (Kyd 4-7) was too antiquated to risk offending the new state religion, and any suggestion of pagan or heretic belief was offloaded onto the Catholic Spanish rivals of England by its setting. By falling back upon classical traditions, and drawing upon the old Senecan motif of ghostly

revenge, Kyd was able to draw upon the rich imagery of the ghost for literary purposes while also conforming to the ghost's new role as a being of "more earthly affairs." The result was a rousing success, with *The Spanish Tragedy* seeing repeat performances well into the next century, and its spectre of Don Andrea proving a crucial inspiration to the most enduring literary ghost of the Early Modern stage, old King Hamlet.

Taken as a ghost story in its historical context, *Hamlet* is a tricky thing; it walks a knife's edge, presenting the form and format of the medieval ghost story while subverting its traditional messages. Shakespeare exploits the tale's distancing from the present, by both its medieval setting and situation in a foreign land, to tell a tale that employs the recently abandoned Purgatorial ghost while also demonstrating the insufficiency of its role and the injustice inherent in the old Catholic system. In a sense, it might be said that *Hamlet* assumes the shape of Purgatorial tales to damn them. But before the play can subvert any of the ghost's traditional didactic messages, it must first present its messenger.

The spirit of old King Hamlet is in form the very image of a classic ghost: that is to say, an apparition of the deceased appearing "most like" the king in life (Shakespeare 1.1.43). On its surface, old Hamlet's ghost presents none of whirling, shapeshifting behaviour of the medieval ghosts of the Byland Abbey stories and would consequently seem to lack either the folkloric ghost's power to appear as a metaphor incarnate, or

the white knight of *Sir Amadace*'s post-mortem social commentary. Yet the singular form it does adopt is one calculated both to inform young Prince Hamlet and spur him on to action. King Hamlet's spirit appears clad in full battle raiment, armed "from top to toe", showing only its pale and grizzled countenance through a conspicuously open visor that guarantees it *will* be recognised and glaring fixedly upon all who cross its path (Shakespeare 1.3.234-235). To young Hamlet, the form the ghost adopts is more provoking and weightier than any of a thousand others it might assume: here is his lost father, unmistakable, arrayed in full glory and armed for a battle he cannot fight in death. To see his grave father so returned and made helpless while his uncle leads a "heavy- headed revel" so soon after the funeral is so didactic to young Hamlet as to be imperative (Shakespeare 1.4.17). He *must* do as the ghost asks. Its form has been chosen well.

But a form apt to its teachings and purpose are not all old Hamlet has in common with the ghosts of medieval tales. In order to teach, one must possess knowledge and the spirit of King Hamlet possesses all the preternatural knowledge a medieval perspective would expect of one returned from beyond death. He is able to recount to his son, in detail, the circumstances of his own murder despite having been killed in his sleep. Even such minutiae as might escape an eyewitness, such as the very poison used, and intangible things, such as the exact motivation of the murderer, are laid before young Hamlet

as clearly as though Claudius himself had confessed them (Shakespeare 1.5.62). No explanation is offered for how the soul of a man taken by death while unconscious could know these things, because none would ever be necessary. His very nature as a restless spirit, one who has suffered one of the "worst medieval nightmares" (Greenblatt 231) and been condemned to "fast in fires" makes the scope of his knowledge a matter of course (Shakespeare 1.5.11).

These fires that the lamenting spirit obliquely references are the much-maligned Purgatory in all but name, yet a mention of how his sins in life are "burnt and purged away" within its depths is the closest anyone in the play comes to mentioning that Catholic prison house by name (Shakespeare 1.5.14). This caution on Shakespeare's part may well be attributed to a sensible fear of arousing the ire of the powers-that-be, and joining in the list of martyred names that Elizabeth Orton avoided gracing by her retraction. Royal censorship ensured that:

> Belief in Purgatory could be represented as a sly jest, a confidence trick, a mistake [...] But it could not be represented as a frightening reality. *Hamlet* comes closer to doing so that any other play of this period (Greenblatt 236).

It may have been wisest for the playwright to follow his ghostly character's example and keep even veiled references to the eternal blazon of Purgatory out of his work entirely, but to do so

would have robbed the play of its sharpest lesson; the Purgatorial ghost of King Hamlet, his needless suffering and the difficulty of seeking justice for his lost soul, all teach by example. They are taken as a matter of course by the characters of the play's medieval world, but to the audience of Early Modern and newly Protestant England, they are a powerful didactic lesson about the injustices of the past system that aligns Shakespeare with pre-Reformation polemicists and social critics like Fish, Bale, and Tyndale (Greenblatt 13) as a critic of the old system for more than merely socially fashionable reasons.

We see little of old King Hamlet's 'true' self, subsumed as he is by his role as messenger and motive, burdened by otherworldly forbiddances, but what we do see and hear of him paints him as a good king, an honourable warrior, and a loving husband and father. It may be easy to dismiss young Hamlet's likening of his father to a Greek titan as exaggerated lionisation, but this devotion must have a basis in dear affection. Concerning the dead king's actions, we hear of his campaign against Fortinbras being fought honourably and "with all bands of law", which shows him to be a man unafraid to fight alongside his subjects and who deals fairly with a defeated foe (Shakespeare 1.2.24). Even after death, his love for his wife can be seen in his injunction to young Hamlet to exclude her from any vengeance and to trust her conscience will be punishment enough. This goodly man must burn, says the old way, for the mere crime of suffering Everyman's nightmare, and going to his end

"[u]nhouseled, disappointed, unaneled [...] With all [his] imperfections on his head" (Shakespeare 1.5.77-79).

Conversely, we see much of his brother, successor, and murderer. Claudius is an overpowering figure whose jovial presence dominates the first act of the play, before the ghost appears to Hamlet. Even while off-stage, his warm presence is felt in the sounds of raucous carousal that drift up to battlements of Elsinore. Yet behind his vivacious façade lurks a man whose conscience, troubled or not, is not strong enough to stop him from stooping to attempted nepoticide. Yet once Prince Hamlet is assured of his guilt, and has the drop on a lone Claudius in prayer, he hesitates. If Hamlet were to strike him down in prayer, he would "[a'go] straight to heaven" in his state of grace. Reflecting upon his father's Purgatorial suffering, being taken "full of bread", Hamlet loses the best shot at a clean revenge he will have for the remainder of his short life (Shakespeare 3.3.74-80). The old system is easily gamed, and justice easily cheated. The more unscrupulous man may secure Heaven for himself and Hell for his enemies, not by any just assize of merits, but simply by exploiting the very systems supposedly in place to save good souls and punish poor ones. Whether or not this truly is the reason that stays Hamlet's reluctant blade, the medieval Catholic ways provide a framework to justify his excuse that would have proved infuriating to the Early Modern audience. All the tragedy to follow lies at the feet of this moment of Catholic doubt.

Of course, doubt is a natural reaction when a task as brutal as young Hamlet's is imposed upon him by his father's otherworldly imperative. This is another way in which *Hamlet* subverts the medieval narratives of Purgatorial spirits seeking redemptive aid from the living. Typically, the medieval ghost sought only to have prayers spoken in their name or old bones laid to rest in hallowed ground. These services were both broadly harmless to the living, even if some non-fatal supernatural fevers sometimes resulted from contact with the dead, and beneficial to the Church. Prayers do not speak themselves after all, nor does the gravedigger's shovel work without pay. However, there is a darker streak to *Hamlet*'s ghost, a call for vengeance, for premediated murder, that "could come only from the place in the afterlife where Seneca's ghosts reside: Hell" (Greenblatt 237). This bloody-minded spectre is far more in line with Owens' stated reinvention of ghosts in the Early Modern era as beings more concerned with "earthly affairs", and the popularity of revenge dramas in Early Modern England made the revenge-seeking ghost a figure that both aligned with popular expectation and was wholly incongruous with the old Catholic system (Owens 46). It is the obvious result of a ghostly return, an imperfect soul that places vengeance before redemption, and there is evidence that its capacity for deception and danger struck Early Modern theatregoers forcibly enough that Wye Saltonstall, nearly thirty years since its initial debut, can comfortably reference it when discussing a disingenuous

chamberlain as being "as nimble as Hamlet's ghost, heere and every where" (Sullivan 243).

Young Hamlet himself famously harbours doubts about the ghost's provenance and honesty, questioning whether or not is truly is his father when it might instead be a "dev'l" that has come to damn him, but this may be mere prevarication by the perpetually procrastinating prince (Shakespeare 3.1.522). Far earlier, immediately after his first encounter with the spirit, he asserts to Horatio that it is an "honest" ghost and goes so far as to invoke Saint Patrick to its veracity (Shakespeare 1.5.138-140). The effect of this acceptance is twofold; firstly, it again cements the importance of the unnamed Purgatory to *Hamlet*'s narrative. The invocation "of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Purgatory…a specific association with Purgatory would have probably seemed obvious to a late-sixteenth-century audience" (Greenblatt 233-234). Secondly, it begins young Hamlet's pattern of blindness to the lessons of the ghost, instead focusing myopically on his mother's incestuous relationship with Claudius. For one living in a time and place where accounts of Purgatorial spirits must be well-known, he never truly seems to grasp the incongruity of the ghost's murderous request. Nor is this the only lesson young Hamlet bluntly ignores:

> Hamlet describes his memory as a wax tablet that can be "wipe[ed] away" without leaving a trace of the prior image, characterizing memory as replaceable and fundamentally impermanent. His father's image "all alone" shall live in

Hamlet's memory (McCarthy and Theile 179).
Hamlet takes little wisdom from the ghost, instead opting to focus obsessively on singular topics. This highlights the ghost's role not as a teaching tool for the inattentive Hamlet, but for the audience.

In the end, young Hamlet's clumsy attempt at vengeance leads to the loss of everything he and his late father held dear. Their beloved Gertrude lies dead, despite the ghost's specific injunction to leave her in peace. Their advisor is slain, their court in shambles, the lineage of Denmark ended. In his last act, Hamlet lays the crown at the feet of young Fortinbras, the son of the man his father fought so hard to keep the kingdom from. All is loss and silence for the royal court of Denmark by the play's end. Although it is too late now for young Hamlet to learn, any audience must take away the lesson that this is the bitter fruit of vengeance. The contemporary Early Modern audience would also recognise the taste of Purgatory at its core. The spirit of old Hamlet teaches its lessons all too well, and its didactic role is so fulfilled.

The role of ghosts in Early Modern England was religiously and politically charged in a way that generated a unique tension and played upon fresh wounds in the national consciousness. But their didactic role endured, both in literary works and the public imagination. Patience is a quality the dead do not lack, and by the late seventeenth century the "rehabilitation of ghost stories" was well underway (Sangha 358). By that time, ghost

stories had "lost their explicitly confessional overtones and were adopted by a range of churchmen for a variety of pastoral and polemical purposes" (Sangha 358). At the dawn of the Victorian age, a few short centuries on, the literary ghost reached new heights of success, with the debut of the world's most famous ghost story and the birth of the modern horror genre.

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THE SECRET GARDEN, EDWARDIAN SOCIETY, AND THE COMMENTATIVE POTENTIAL OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Highly Commended for The Global Undergraduate Awards 2021

Ava Lynch

Abstract: Children's Literature is often overlooked as a legitimate form of prose that reflects the political and social operations of the time of publication. This essay aims to explore the representation of class, gender and imperial ideologies displayed in Frances Hodson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, while also observing the use of children's literature as a vessel for political commentary. Burnett's combination of social criticism and childhood discovery leads to an effective depiction of Edwardian society and its functions. While also creating a child appropriate narrative that encompasses the story many know today. Through analysis of the text and close inspection of the surrounding social and political events relevant to the time of publication, it is evident that the novel incorporates several political and social opinions.

Children's literature has always been looked at as separate to other forms of literature because of the demographic and the emotional grounding of the stories rather than the political narrative. Edwardian England saw several socio-political developments that differed from its Victorian predecessor, from advancements in the suffrage movements to variations in the imperial ideology. *The Secret Garden* critically comments on several of these changes and furthermore expresses an opinion on the inner workings of the society. While Burnett first published *The Secret Garden* in America, it is still considered Edwardian fiction. Burnett was born and spent several years of her life in the United Kingdom; her comments within the novel reflect this, whether it be through Mary's character or the relationships that develop throughout. The text addresses childhood in a new way, similar to other texts from around the time. Within the parameters of this essay, there will be significant analysis done on the topics of class, gender and how the imperialist ideology permeates throughout both of these social issues.

The rising Suffrage Movement was central to Edwardian society and there is no shortage of comments on gender within *The Secret Garden*. Burnett without doubt incorporates the operations of gender within the text. From the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to Mary, "the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen" (Burnett 3). The protagonist is an obviously unlikeable little girl with whom nobody can communicate. Mary does not fit the classical feminine

description and comes across as unlikeable because of it. The dependency on appearance within the text is central to the discussion on gender as it is used as a method of both incorporating and challenging the standard operations of gender throughout Edwardian society. Whether it be her appearance or the way she interacts with the other characters in the text, Mary challenges the feminine stereotype seen in Victorian children's literature.

The relationship between Colin and Mary is where the majority of the engagement with gendered ideology lies; "Colin acts as Mary's alter ego, enabling her to confront in reality those aspects of the self that she is first unwilling to acknowledge" (Foster and Simons 33). There is an obvious connection between the two characters both intertextually and narratively. The children's relationship contributes to the confrontation of gender bias, but also facilitates it. This aspect of the novel mirrors the changing society Burnett was writing in and reflects the ever-changing operations of gender in Edwardian society. Mary's reclamation of sexist terminology is one instance of Burnett's review of gender. The use of the word 'Hysterical' has always had sexist connotations. Coming from the ancient Greek word for uterus, the word was used as a medical diagnosis for what we now know to be several different serious mental illnesses. By accusing Colin of having a "hysterical lump" (Burnett 103), Mary denounces and invalidates Colin's illness, similar to what would have happened in Victorian and Edwardian civilisation. The

chapter inverts sexism and mimics the suffrage movement that was prominent at the time of publication; "[Mary] liked the words 'hysterics' and felt somehow as if it had an effect on [Colin]" (Burnett 103). She feels a sense of power from claiming that "half that ails [Colin] is hysterics and temper" (Burnett 103). The physical description of Colin carries a tone of irony; "The boy had a sharp, delicate face the colour of ivory and he seemed to have eyes too big for it" (Burnett 73). This physical description not only matches Mary's and symbolises the same connection between appearance and character, but also mirrors the description of a feminine doll. Colin's physical condition and description could suggest a comment on previous Victorian accounts of feminine frailty. This reversal of power and confrontation of traditional gender ideology is an objection to the standard operations of gender at the time of publication and is perhaps linked to the fact that "the appeal of *The Secret Garden* has always been primarily to a female readership" (Foster and Simons 326).

Unfortunately, as Foster and Simons point out, "[t]he fantasies of female power which the novel projects so powerfully remain, however tantalizingly unresolved" (Foster and Simons 325). Burnett's slight opposition to the gender ideology of Edwardian society is often overlooked due to the remainder of examples of gender bias after Colin is introduced. There is a familiarity within *The Secret Garden*. Several elements in *The Secret Garden* are reminiscent of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. The desolate location on

Yorkshire moorland, the great house from which the master is absent for long periods, the mysterious behaviour of the servants who are guarding a secret which is withheld from the heroine, the strange cry in the night, and the hysterical figure confined to a locked room (Foster and Simons 329).

As the story progresses Colin's narrative begins to overtake Mary's and by the end of the novel, similar to *Jane Eyre*, Mary and her narrative are pushed to subservience, to, in this case, submit to Colin's reunion with his father. In the final pages of the novel Mary is almost nowhere to be seen, her original domination of the story has come to an end. Mary is only mentioned once in the final pages of the novel (Burnett 172). Mary's story ends well before the novel does. Additionally, Mary's lack of parentage also echoes *Jane Eyre* and other novels of the same era; "Child orphans are key figures in the world of nineteenth century narrative" (Phillips 346). The importance of the similarities between *Jane Eyre* and *The Secret Garden* are imperative to the analysis of gender operations in the novel. *Jane Eyre* being considered one of the first feminist novels adds to the debate on gender ideology within *The Secret Garden* based on the number of parallels between the two texts and whether or not they were intentional.

One can read *The Secret Garden* without acknowledging the class system but at the same time the notion of class pervades the text. Similar to the commentary on gender, class and the systems associated with the functioning classes are woven

throughout the narrative of Burnett's *The Secret Garden*; "Analysis of gender in *The Secret Garden* cannot be isolated from analysis of social class, as the central section of the novel reaffirms the breakdown of established hierarchies" (Foster and Simons 334). The importance of class in Edwardian society is undeniable, similarly to the Victorian era. Through the analysis of Dickon as a character and his interactions with the world created in the text, the reader is presented with Burnett's representation of class in Edwardian society. Dickon both represents and challenges class throughout *The Secret Garden* by living up to and exceeding stereotypes and expectations. Dickon's physical health is one of the most obvious ways in which Burnett challenges class in the novel. Dickon is healthy, able-bodied and extremely strong. He is not only able to care for the children's Secret Garden, but also nurture his own kitchen Garden; "Our Dickon can make a flower grow out of a brick walk. Mother says he just whispers things out o' th' ground" (Burnett 49). This juxtaposition to the two other central characters within the text; Mary and Colin, who are both described as pale, weak and most importantly terribly upper class, is an example of Burnett's commentary on the operations of class in Edwardian England. Dickon's physical superiority challenges the idea of the class system by highlighting the different strengths people have regardless of their socio-economic status. Furthermore, Dickon's physicality is again, linked to classical literature. He is described to have facial

similarities to the Greek god Pan. Mary's first encounter with Dickon emphasises this further; "A boy was sitting under a tree, with his back against it, playing on rough wooden pipe" (Burnett 57). This introduction mirrors that of Pan, particularly regarding the inclusion of the wooden pipe. Burnett also includes features that echo that of classical descriptions of Pan in Dickon, "[h]is nose turned up and his cheeks were as red as poppies" (57). These links between Dickon and Pan lead the reader to associate Dickon to a god-like creature with regards to nature, further exemplifying the commentary on class within *The Secret Garden*.

Dickon's character reconfigures the power relations between the classes present in Edwardian society by connecting strength and health with nature. Dickon's ability to grow, care and nurture not only benefits the children with regards the garden and its health but also gives Dickon an advantage over Mary and Colin in a social sense. Dickon's mental well being, much like his physical well-being is depicted as 'better' or more developed than Mary and Colin. Dickon "understood what Colin felt better than Colin did himself. He understood by a sort of instinct so natural that he did not know it was understanding" (Burnett 158). Similarly, with Mary, "Dickon does not view her 'contrariness' as a serious handicap but sees her positively, as a bird he wishes to protect" (Adams 307). His emotional understanding of the suffering of others and his ability to care for those around him, again changes the normal class dynamic that was seen in

Edwardian England. Dickon's competence in relation to his surroundings again implies that Burnett is commenting on the class system by making Dickon superior to Mary and Colin in more ways than one.

Dickon is depicted as a charmer, especially with regards to animals. This again contrasts the descriptions given of Mary and Colin's amiability. Dickon is liked by all, including the several animals he charms throughout the text. Dickon is represented as an *animal charmer* in several places through the novel (Burnett 116; 157; 158), particularly in reference to Colin. This is accentuated when Dickon arrives at Colin's bedroom door for the first time. "The new-born lamb was in his arms and the little red fox trotted by his side. Nut sat on his left shoulder and Soot on his right and Shell's head and paws peeped out of his coat pocket" (Burnett 117). This further supports the above point of Dickon's connection to the classical Greek god Pan. He is again referenced to as an *animal charmer* when Colin claims, "I would have never have let him come to see me if he had not been an animal charmer - which is a boy charmer, too, because a boy is an animal" (Burnett 138) It is clear that Burnett wrote Dickon with class in mind; interwoven between notions of superiority, the reader is reminded of Dickon's class through his use of the Yorkshire vernacular. His accent can be read through his dialogue and in several places throughout the text when he responds to Mary or Colin with "eh" and does not pronounce all the letters in words. This device is used to remind the reader of

Dickon's class and social standing. Burnett uses the Yorkshire dialect to clearly state the existence of class in the novel and to differentiate between characters' social status.

Dickon is not the only character in *The Secret Garden* who represents the class system in Edwardian society. The initial interaction between Mary and Martha is a reflection in itself of the operation of class that could have been seen at the turn of the twentieth century. Mary askes whether Martha will be her servant or not and then inquires if Martha will dress her. Mary is then referred to as "Mistress Mary" (17). This clearly defines the power dynamic between Mary and the staff of the house. Furthermore, Mrs Medlock is a symbol of class; as the matriarch of the house since Mrs Craven's death, she is a symbol of authority. Yet she is also a member of staff and has a lower social status than Mary. Her expressions of power come in different shapes and forms, most notably her language. She addresses Mary in "a brisk hard voice" (Burnett 10), Mrs Medlock "did not think much of [Mary]" (Burnett 9). Mrs Medlock clearly holds all power within this relationship contrary to the standard operations of class in Edwardian society. Mrs Medlock also excerpts her power through colour, "she wore a very purple dress, a black silk mantle with jet fringe on it and a black bonnet with purple velvet flowers" (Burnett 9). In literature, purple represents power, nobility, and oftentimes royalty. Burnett consciously dressed Medlock in purple, perhaps to hint at the fact that Medlock believes she is above her class, again

highlighting the existence and challenging the operations of class.

Imperialism and colonial ideologies run through the novel and are interwoven between other socio-political commentaries throughout. Burnett's *The Secret Garden* is not a comment on the British identity and how the imperial ideology challenges what could be. The novel is instead, an observation of the results on a child whose "relationship [...] to England generally, is typical of a child whose parents serve the British Empire as colonial settlers" (Phillips 344). Mary, although having never previously visited Yorkshire or England for that matter, has grown up British and identifies with the operations of society in Britain rather than the country she was born in. This is a direct result of the imperialist ideology. As Jerry Phillips states, "The mother country defines her manners, her values, her social position and her racial identity, and yet, is only a partial truth of her day-to-day reality" (Phillips 345). This is particularly reflective of the colonial attitude seen throughout Britain in Edwardian society. The reader is also made aware of the fact that Mary's identity is never built on experience; Mary was raised by an 'Ayah' and not her parents. This implies that her knowledge, experience, and identification surrounding Britain and the Empire all come from outside sources. Mary's first experience with England and Britain itself is when she arrives at Misselthwaite Manor. Imperialist ideology is presented in several places throughout the novel through the experiences of the children. By using children as a

vessel for this commentary, Burnett is able to express more opinions on the matter. The inherent innocence of a child leaves room for more controversial discussion within a text like *The Secret Garden*. Colin is referred to as a "Rajah" and the idea of a *lingua franca* is introduced in an interaction between Mary and Colin (Burnett 129). In an attempt to "adopt the language of the servant class, the Yorkshire dialect, which is, as Mary points out, 'like a native dialect in India', a language that significantly she was never required to learn" (Foster and Simons 334). Mary and Colin intertwine the ideas of class and imperialism through this interaction by pointing out the fact that Mary never had to conform to Indian cultural norms, due to her class and colonial status. By comparing Indian dialects to "the language of the servant class", the children degrade the cultural significance of language and denote Indian languages to that of servants, further enforcing the imperialist ideology that was evidently rampant throughout Edwardian England (Foster and Simons 334). The importance of this interaction happening between two children is equally as informative as the interaction itself as it further exemplifies the reach that imperialism had throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Evidently, *The Secret Garden* not only gives a critical account of class, gender and imperialist ideologies in Edwardian England but also discusses the effects of those issues both throughout the text and in English society. The novel touches on several topical issues and addresses them through the eyes of a child,

leaving room for analysis and interpretation. *The Secret Garden* is a novel that bridges two significant eras in British history and presents the differences between them. Burnett's use of a child's point of view gives an interesting account of the operations and results of different sociological aspects of Edwardian society. Through the analysis of character and relationships between characters, one is presented with the author's commentative intentions with regards to the procedures of class dynamics, the role of women in England and the imperial ideology that inherently flows through class and gender.

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HOW *THE BLACK VAMPYRE* AND *CARMILLA* INCORPORATE AND RESPOND TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL ANXIETIES

Highly Recommended for the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 2nd Year

Ellen Lahiff

Abstract: This essay explores the symbolic significance of the Vampire and the ways in which Gothic literature relates to the cultural anxieties of the time in which it is written. In this essay, I argue that monsters in Gothic fiction are metaphorical, textual manifestations of contemporary cultural anxieties. I examine the presence of the vampire in two Gothic texts, *The Black Vampyre* and *Carmilla*, and argue that the vampire in each one embodies the societal fears of the time and place in which it was created. I first argue that *The Black Vampyre* embodies fears of miscegenation and economic collapse, and demonstrate how these fears were relevant during the period in which it was written. I then read *Carmilla* as symbolic of Anglo-Irish fears of Catholic uprising, and Victorian fears of familial and societal disintegration.

The Gothic has long been thought of as a genre in which cultural anxieties can be safely explored, whilst contained within a fictional realm. Societal fears have shifted in tandem with societal developments, and these shifts are mirrored in Gothic fiction. As Fred Botting puts it, historical "anxieties varied according to diverse changes: political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery" (3). In Gothic literature, these fears textually manifest as symbolic entities: monsters.

Monsters in Gothic fiction embody and personify fears. The Vampire is probably the most famous, pervasive, and enduring monster, and has been used to represent a multitude of fears throughout history. William Hughes argues that "much of the power of the trope is derived from the intimate relationship between vampires and blood" (*Handbook* 252). Since the earliest civilisations, blood has been brimming with significance and connotations. Hughes describes it as "culturally as well as textually, an item of multidiscursive significance, a fluid which may signify at various times notions of family, race, religion, and gender" (*Handbook* 252). Blood signifies bonds, alliances, and loyalties, for example: the blood passed from mother to infant and shared by siblings, blood oaths, the apostles drinking the 'blood' of Christ, and the blood spilled for one's country in war. The idea of preserving the 'purity', or preventing the mingling of blood, has both racist and patriarchal origins. Blood has always been highly eroticised, and is particularly symbolic of female

sexuality. Of course, there is also an intrinsic element of fear associated with blood, as it is linked to death, pain, murder, and violence. It has always been a strong feature of medical discourse, and fears of diseased or 'unclean' blood prove to be highly persistent. All these connotations lend enormous power to the concept of the vampire, a creature which feeds upon this vital substance. Nina Auerbach argues that each vampire "feeds on his age distinctively because he embodies that age" (1). Both vampires in the two Gothic texts I will analyse, *The Black Vampyre* and *Carmilla*, very much adhere to this rule. *The Black Vampyre*, a 19th-century short story by Uriah Derick D'Arcy (a pseudonym for an unknown author), is set against the backdrop of the Haitian revolution. It was first published in 1819, fifteen years after Haiti achieved independence, following the first (and most successful) slave revolt in history. *Carmilla* is another 19th century short story, by Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu. It was first published at the fin-de-siècle, in the Victorian era. In this essay, I will analyse each text in turn, and argue how each one embodies the cultural fears of its respective time. I will first discuss *The Black Vampyre* and examine how it responds to anxieties about race and the economy. Then I will turn to *Carmilla*, focusing on its treatment of cultural identity and the family.

Most explicitly, *The Black Vampyre* responds to and exploits racist fears of slave rebellion and miscegenation that were highly prevalent in the US during the early 19th century. The tale

was first published by American author Uriah Derick D'Arcy in 1819. There was much debate in America at this time between those in favour of abolishing slavery, and those opposed to it. *The Black Vampyre* is an anti-slavery text; in fact, Andrew Barger has credited the tale with being "the first black vampire story, the first comedic vampire story, the first story to include a mulatto vampire, the first vampire story by an American author, and perhaps the first anti-slavery short story" (148). On both sides of the debate was a mutual apprehension that "violent revolution might be the necessary outcome of slavery's continuation" (Faherty 3). Violent slave uprising was framed by abolitionists, as well as by D'Arcy, as an inevitable consequence of white violence and oppression.

In *The Black Vampyre*, whites are portrayed as being far more prone to resorting to violence than black people or vampires. The black prince suffers great cruelty at the hands of white people: he is captured as a young boy, forced from home, and sold into slavery. His buyer, Mr. Personne, upon realising that the boy is too weak to be of any economic value, tries to murder him to spare himself further cost. As the boy is a vampire however, the white slaver's multiple attempts to drown him are unsuccessful. Eventually, Mr. Personne attempts to burn him to death, believing that "though the water fiend was so expert in his own element, he could not stand the fiery ordeal" (18). Although the prince does later commit acts of violence in the text, immense harm and cruelty perpetrated by whites precedes

this. The prince's revenge for the horrors inflicted upon him by Mr. Personne is not overly cruel, and in fact, he mercifully proclaims, "I forgive you, my dear sir, what you performed, and intended to perform on me" (30). The prince does inadvertently cause the death of Mr. Personne (he is forced to toss him onto the fire in self-defence, and the shock of his son's supposed death causes him to expire), abducts his infant son leaving only "skin, hair, and nails" (19), and marries his widow. After sixteen years however, he leaves them reunited as vampires, to enjoy their immortal lives together. It is quite telling that "the prince said that quarrelling was all nonsense, and offered his hand; but Mr. Personne refused" (29). Likewise, when the prince gives a speech at the underground vampire ball, nothing in it suggests blood lust or desire for further violence of any kind; he merely expresses a heartfelt desire shared by all in attendance for "universal emancipation", which he refers to as that "sublime and soul-elevating theme!" (36). The prince cannot be blamed for acting violently, as otherwise he would have been brutally victimised by whites. The text reflects D'Arcy's more general belief that slaves should not be demonised for revolting violently, as it is the dominant white violence and dehumanisation first inflicted upon them that they are revolting against. D'Arcy leaves the reader with a lingering sense that, even though the rebellion is quashed, there is nothing preventing a future one. As *The Black Vampyre* was published in the aftermath of the successful Haitian revolution, its ending is imbued with a sense of

simmering inevitably.

The Black Vampyre also cuttingly responds to the common 19th century fear of miscegenation. In the tale, the wife of Mr. Personne, Euphemia, is wooed by the black prince. She (somewhat incredibly) marries and conceives a child with him on the day they meet. Although the white, nuclear family unit is restored in the end, some ambiguity surrounding Euphemia and the prince's child remains. 'Anthony Gibbons' is said to be the "lineal descendant from the last-mentioned mulatto", and "a resident in Essex county, New-Jersey" (39). The idea that a mixed race, human-vampire hybrid could be lodged in the heart of the American Midwest would have been deeply unsettling for a typical 19th century American reader. D'Arcy unflinchingly blurs the boundaries of physical, racial, and national identity, exposing how flimsy and arbitrary they really are.

The Black Vampyre's critique of slavery forms part of a broader critique of plagiarism and capitalism. All methods of profiting from another's labour are deemed by D'Arcy to be various forms of theft. In her analysis of the text, Katie Bray argues that it "explicitly critiques the capitalist and imperialist slave systems… that allowed elites to consume, profit from, and thereby sustain themselves on the labor of others" (6). D'Arcy's critique likely stems from a fear of economic collapse, in the same way that the collapse of slavery was feared to be inevitable, and to have catastrophic impact. In an essay by Duncan Faherty and Ed White, this fear is linked to the Panic of 1819, the first major

American financial crisis, sometimes referred to as the first Great Depression. They argue that in *The Black Vampyre*, "the developing forms of capitalism are emphatically linked with both the vampire's violence in sucking life from the living and the horror of dead-but-undead institutions" (6). D'Arcy's anxiety and opposition towards capitalism was probably widespread at this time of economic upheaval, and this is evident in the text. In a section titled "MORAL" directly following *The Black Vampyre*, D'Arcy defines 'real' vampires as "all whose hunger and thirst for money, unsatisfied with the tardy progression of honest industry, by creating fictitious and delusive credit, has preyed on the heart and liver of public confidence" (41). By linking this critique of corrupt profiteering and plagiarism with his tale about slavery, D'Arcy "invites the reader to contemplate how the literary market and the slave market are connected" (Bray 5).

Of course, D'Arcy's critique of plagiarism and profiting from the labour of others is also deeply ironic, as his own tale is a satire of Polidori's *The Vampyre*. He acknowledges this in the "Introduction" section of his text, claiming that if *The Black Vampyre* "be pronounced simple, stupid, and unadulterated absurdity, his own private opinion will perfectly coincide with that of the public" (14). The narrative and style of the text is intentionally outlandish, "to show how passages, which were fine in their original use, when garbelled by the ignorant and tasteless, become a melancholy rhapsody of nonsense" (14). It is possible that as well as being an obvious parody of Polidori's

tale, *The Black Vampyre* is also a satire of the hyperbolic historical and biographical accounts that Gothicized the Haitian revolution, published in its aftermath. In his article, "Race, Revolution, and the Sublime", Matt Clavin argues that "by crafting the Haitian Revolution as a Gothic tale, writers capitalised on this perception, making this real event a source of imaginative fancy and personal entertainment" (4-5). He also argues that "depictions of bloodthirsty black slaves anticipated the Gothic vampires who imbibed the blood of their helpless victims" (21). Although Clavin does not mention *The Black Vampyre* specifically, the fact that the text is set in Haiti prior to the revolution (but written in its aftermath) indicates that D'Arcy was probably aware of these culturally relevant exaggerated accounts, and is deliberately mocking them. There are elements of comedy in the text that suggest this; for example, when Euphemia's three dead husbands rise from the grave almost simultaneously, and immediately duel for the "title to the lady", as well as the idea that Euphemia was so easily seduced by the killer of her three previous husbands (28). Even the rather morbid opening of the vampire boy repeatedly refusing to die is darkly funny. Through his use of satire, D'Arcy subtly ridicules the supposedly 'accurate' accounts of the revolution, thus implicitly criticising their attempts to profit from the very real suffering and loss of life that transpired in Haiti.

Much like *The Black Vampyre*, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is preoccupied with the cultural anxieties of its time. As this text

was first published in 1872, fifty-three years after The Black Vampyre, society has subsequently evolved, and societal fears with it. Although they have changed in specificity, many of the fears embedded in *Carmilla* are still, at their core, similar in nature to the fears in *The Black Vampyre*. While D'Arcy is derisive of the baseless fears in his society (such as miscegenation), Le Fanu is far more conservative and accepting of the prejudices in his. Victorian society was patriarchal, class-based, sexually repressed, and deeply committed to the idea of the 'traditional' family. These beliefs are reflected and reinforced in *Carmilla* and go largely unchallenged by Le Fanu.

At the heart of *Carmilla* is the fear of invasion from a foreign other. This fear was rife among 19th century Anglo-Irish protestants, of which Le Fanu was one, who feared an uprising from a dissenting Catholic middle class. Robert Tracy argues that Carmilla represents "the dispossessed Catholic gentry of Ireland after the Williamite triumph" ("Unappeasable Host" 64), and despite the misleadingly foreign Styrian setting, the tale is "really about Anglo-Irish anxieties about absorption, infection, and displacement by those whose lands they have long ruled" ("Undead, unburied" 23). The protagonist, Laura, is of mixed ancestry. Her father is an Englishman, and her mother was a "Styrian lady" and a Karnstein, "an old Hungarian family" (12; 45). Laura's father is extremely anxious to keep the English language and customs alive in the house. Laura describes a particular room where "we had our tea, for with his usual patriotic leanings

he insisted that the national beverage should make its appearance regularly" (26). The schloss Laura and her father inhabit is symbolic of a sort of displaced English territory, an "England away from home" (Brock 101). It is symbolic, perhaps, of the Pale or of plantation settlements. Therefore, Carmilla's penetration into the home can be read as a sort of small-scale invasion, or "reverse-colonisation" (Brock 101). Racist undertones are used in the text to vilify Carmilla, by coding her as racially and religiously 'Other'. She arrives in a carriage with a "hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head" (27). Laura concludes, from Carmilla's sparse allusions to her home, that she comes from a place of "people of strange manners… much more remote than I had at first fancied" (37). It is also a cause of concern to Laura that "religion was a subject on which I never heard her speak a word" (53-54). When a funeral procession passes by singing hymns, Carmilla's face "darkened, and became horribly livid" (39). Despite this, Laura is peculiarly drawn to Carmilla, perhaps a suggestion from Le Fanu that "those of mixed ancestry are somehow 'weaker' and therefore more susceptible to vampiric seductions" (Haefele-Thomas 98). In any case, the foreign invasion of the English home is shown to have disastrous consequences for its 'rightful' inhabitants. William Hughes argues that "Le Fanu's structure of an invaded house in which… a stranger… brings about the eventual destruction of the house re-enacts the Irish colonial narrative" (*Open Graves* 42). Although the setting of the tale is

superficially distant, it is a thinly-veiled expression of decidedly Anglo-Irish fears.

The predominant, markedly Victorian, cultural anxiety that permeates *Carmilla* is one of social disintegration. Le Fanu's specifically Anglo-Irish fears are one manifestation of this. Another is the fear of the breakdown of the family structure. In Victorian Britain, families were conceptualised as the building blocks of empire, and it was imagined that without cohesive family units, society would weaken and crumble. Patriarchy and the subjugation of women were required to maintain the ideal Victorian family, in which women were confined to child-rearing and other domestic duties. Therefore, unrepressed female sexual appetite was perceived as destabilising and dangerous to the family, and methods of controlling it were conceived. Women were increasingly scrutinised and subjected to the medical gaze. For example, hysteria was an invented diagnosis reserved solely for women. In *Carmilla*, Carmilla's sexual appetite is depicted as a corrupting and destructive force on Laura, the embodiment of a good English wife and mother in waiting.

Carmilla's blood lust and sexual desire are conflated in the text, and both are portrayed as predatory and threatening. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault describes how in Victorian times, society shifted from "sanguinity to sexuality" (148). The historical connection between blood and sexuality would have been particularly potent in this transitional period. As mentioned earlier, blood has a long history of erotic

connotations, particularly with regards to female sexuality. Aside from the obvious reasons (such as ties to the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and childbirth, as well as being used as an indicator to determine virginal 'purity'), in the Victorian era there were various "pseudo-scientific ideas that claimed that blood depletion was caused by too much sexual activity because energy, and so blood, was exhausted in coitus" (Smith 99). Sexually aggressive women who expended too much energy on sexual activity were thought to exhibit a languorous temperament. In the text, Carmilla is emphasised to be "languid – very languid" (33). This lethargy 'infects' Laura "until it discoloured and perverted the whole state of [her] life" (60). Bram Dijkstra describes Carmilla as "Laura's erotic primal nature made flesh" (341). Not only is Carmilla sexually predatory, in successfully awakening Laura's sexuality, she corrupts and damages her ability to fulfill her 'proper' societal role. She drains her not only of blood and energy, but also of value. Carmilla pursues Laura with the "ardor of a lover", possessively claiming "you are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one forever" (36). The lesbian undertones enhance the threat, as homosexual relationships especially subvert the traditional family structure.

To emphasise the threat of lesbianism further, Le Fanu equates homosexual attraction with other, far more troubling and transgressive types. Carmilla's attraction to Laura is insinuated to be somewhat incestuous, and even paedophilic. Doubling, a feature of the uncanny, is utilised in the text to draw a

connection between Laura and Carmilla. Botting describes it as uncanny that "Carmilla is the very image of a figure who appeared, years before, in a childhood dream of the family's daughter Laura" (144). Carmilla is revealed to be "Mircalla, Countess Karnstein" (46), an ancient ancestor of Laura on her mother's side. Laura's childhood encounter with Carmilla reads almost like an experience of sexual trauma, as she describes how "she caressed me with her hands and lay down beside me on the bed… I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep" (14). Elsewhere in the text, Carmilla's treatment of Laura is strangely maternal, and Laura describes how "her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance" (35). Carmilla is portrayed as both a perverted and a perverting mother figure. Female sexuality, particularly lesbian attraction, is demonised in the text, to illustrate its supposedly detrimental impact on family. Eventually, Carmilla is slain by a "sharp stake driven through the heart" (106), symbolic of sexual penetration, and white patriarchal order is restored. Although Laura never fully recovers from her traumatising experiences, the "fiend" (110), thankfully, has been vanquished. It is clear from Le Fanu's unfavourable depiction of female sexuality, that he passively absorbed the fears of the society in which he lived, which is reflected in his work.

To conclude, in this essay, I have shown that there is an abundance of evidence in both texts that each one

encapsulates the most pressing concerns of the societies in which they were written. D'Arcy takes a satirical approach in responding to the irrational and racist fears of his society in *The Black Vampyre*, as well as subtly reprimanding those who gleefully profit from the hardships of others. Le Fanu's voice is a distinctively Anglo-Irish and Victorian one, and in *Carmilla*, he conservatively reinforces the fear-driven prejudices of his society. Although the two texts are very different, both hold an important place in the legacy of the vampire, and in Gothic literature.

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BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE AS A QUEER-CODED TEXT

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Abstract: *Bell, Book and Candle*, a 1958 film directed by Richard Quine, is, on the surface, a heterosexual romantic comedy. However, the concept of witches as an unseen 'Other' that exist alongside the ordinary humans of New York, sub-textually codes them as queer. The struggles that protagonist Gill and her fellow witches endure relate to the queer experience in 1950s America: covert existence and the threat of persecution. This experience could not be depicted on screen at the time due to social norms and the Hollywood Production Code, and so is portrayed through the queer-coding of the witch community. This essay aims to confirm that *Bell, Book and Candle* can be viewed as a queer-coded text. It will discuss and dissect the queer-coding of witches in *Bell, Book and Candle* with reference to the cultural and historical context in which the film was produced.

"Don't you ever wish we weren't...what we are?" asks witch Gillian Holroyd, at the beginning of the 1958 film *Bell, Book and Candle* (14:11- 14:15). Directed by Richard Quine and starring Kim Novak as Gillian, referred to mainly as 'Gill,' the film centres around this character as she casts a love spell on her neighbour Shep, played by James Stewart. Despite the seemingly heterosexual romantic theme of the film, there is an underlying subtext of queerness - witches are othered, hidden in plain sight, with clubs that cater to their community and anxiety surrounding being found out. Gill, although textually a witch with the desire to become human and fall in love with a man, is sub-textually struggling with her identity as an outsider, wishing to merely be ordinary. The witches in *Bell, Book and Candle* are queer-coded, i.e., they appear as a stereotypical portrayal of the LGBT+ community, and the overall story mirrors the struggles of closeted queer people in the 1950s. This essay sets out to analyse the queer-coding of the witch community in this film, with reference to the portrayal of these characters as well as the cultural and historical context during its release. The words queer and LGBT+ will be used interchangeably to describe the community.

Coding in media is "the adoption of a system of signals - words, forms, signifiers of some kind - that protect the creator from the dangerous consequences of directly stating particular messages", so to be 'queer-coded' is to be "implicated as having or displaying stereotypes and behaviors that are

associated (even if inaccurate) with homosexuality or queerness" (Radner and Lanser 414; Kim 157). Queer-coding, whether intentional or not, is a common occurrence in literature. Its presence in twentieth century film was notably used as a comedic technique. Male characters coded as gay were 'sissies', "dithering, asexual...sometimes befuddled, incompetent," or 'pansies,' "extremely effeminate boulevardier type[s] sporting lip-stick, rouge, a trim mustache and hairstyle" (Lugowski 4), while lesbian-coded characters were deep-voiced, wore masculine clothing, had short hair, and appropriated male privilege, which Lugowski suggests "the pansy seemed to give [...] up" (4).

Gillian possesses the style of such a character, with her beatnik-style clothing, short hair and deeper voice, which to the casual viewer symbolises her independent nature and otherness as a witch; however, through the lens of queer-coding, it is apparent that she displays the traits of a stereotypical lesbian in media. Her dynamic with Shep for much of the film also plays into this depiction, as she holds power - both literally and metaphorically - over him as a witch, bending his affections to her will, therefore making her the dominant figure in the relationship. Gillian and Shep regularly flip gender roles in the film, such as during their conversation about marriage. When Gillian admits she had not thought about it, Shep's response is "darling, that's the man's remark usually" (54:35-54:42), and Gillian later teases him for his insistence on marriage, with

"that's the women's remark, usually" (54:56- 55:00). Gillian's reluctance to marry itself adds to the queer-coding. It is established in *Bell, Book and Candle* that witches do not possess the ability to blush, to cry, and most importantly, to fall in love – or, if they do, they will lose their powers. This mirrors the fact that queer people in the 1950s could not love openly, and if they did enter into public relationships, it would be with someone of the opposite sex, effectively 'giving up' their identity. Gillian voices this as she says, "it would mean giving up a whole way of thinking, behaving, a whole existence," an existence that she "wishes she could" give up (56:00-56:20).

Kohnen states that "heterosexuality and whiteness formed the unspoken norms of classical Hollywood cinema," leaving "interracial and queer desire" to be marginalised (7). Following the publication of the Hollywood Production Code, which banned depictions of queer identities or communities in Hollywood cinema from 1934 to 1968, comedic stereotypes persisted in film, however, "sex perversion[s]" of any kind were expressly forbidden, meaning same-sex relationships (Lugowski 9). Much of this censorship was borne of the need to re-enforce gender roles, social standing and the traditional concept of 'family' during the Great Depression (Lugowski 8). Although same-sex relationships were not apparent on screen, LGBT+ characters appeared in new stereotypical ways, often villainised. The queer-coding of villains frequently occurs in film as a depiction of evil otherness. Many Disney villains are coded

in such a way – Jafar in *Aladdin* is "perfectly groomed," with eyeliner-ringed eyes, elegant clothing and a "melodramatic" and sarcastic persona, while Ursula of *The Little Mermaid*, based on real life drag queen Divine, is fat and loud-mouthed, with bright red lips, her eye makeup and arched brows nearing her hairline – all stereotypical traits of a drag queen (Martinez). Queer-coded characters were no longer presented to heterosexual audiences as harmless, laughable characters – they now took on a sinister edge, a warning against deviating from the norm.

However, queer-coding was not only used to vilify the community. LGBT+ creatives used this coding to discreetly portray their own experiences. *Bell, Book and Candle* is based on the play of the same name by John Van Druten, a closeted gay man, and was referred to as "one of the hidden gay plays" by William M. Hoffman (qtd. in Trask 2). Van Druten's – and subsequently, Richard Quine's – portrayal of the queer community through the metaphor of witches is not mocking, but instead creates an authentic representation of the queer experience in 1950s New York. Although it may still possess flawed depictions and contain stereotypes, coming from a queer creator the coding is far more sympathetic.

Debuting on stage in 1950, the theatre production of *Bell, Book and Candle* was being written while a culture of McCarthyism and the Red Scare surrounded Van Druten. These ideas were permeating American society with the fear of those who

conceal their true beliefs and identity and seek to destroy order. According to Heatley, it was common belief that "communists sought to destroy public order through political subversion while homosexuals sought to destroy social order through sexual subversion" (2). The cultural impact of this on the play is clear as Gillian's struggle resembles that of marginalised communities who must "pass as "normal" in a repressive society," such as communists and LGBT+ people (Campbell n.p.). The fear of communism and the fear of homosexuality became intertwined at this time, particularly during the 'Lavender Scare.' This was a purging of gay men from government positions due to the idea that they may be vulnerable to communist blackmail and therefore posed a threat to national security. Both groups "were believed to be cliquish, dishonest, and able to identify one another easily through common speech patterns and interests," as well as "actively working to indoctrinate children" (Heatley 2).

This insidious fear and the 'witch hunt' of unusual or unnatural people who walk, talk, and look the same as everyone else makes its way into the subtext of the film adaptation of *Bell, Book and Candle*. This is seen in the covert way witches express themselves, with hidden clubs, secret practises, and a constant fear of being found out, of being persecuted. Gillian in particular expresses this anxiety. Her worry when she finds that Nicky has revealed his nature to Redlitch is that he has 'outed' her as well, telling him it "doesn't pay to tell outsiders" (58:23-58:28), and Queenie corroborates this later when she

acknowledges that telling an outsider is "a very dangerous thing to do" (1:09:40-1:09:49). Gillian does not want her true nature revealed to Shep - she wants him to believe their relationship is based on mutual attraction rather than witchcraft. The farcical nature of their relationship may represent Gill's repressed sexuality and internalised homophobia - she is persecuting herself before anyone else can.

Internalised homophobia relates to the experience of queer people believing negative connotations of their identity to be true and accepting the idea of heterosexuality as the norm, an experience Gill mirrors throughout the film. Her constant wishes to be like ordinary folk, as well as her frequent rejection of and contempt for witch culture can be interpreted as the repression of her sexuality and rejection of the queer community. She wants to spend time with "everyday people," and expresses her wish to be "humdrum" with Shep (14:32-15:00). Once she has achieved this and has agreed to marry Shep, Gillian vows to renounce witchcraft, give up her lifestyle so it does not "destroy [her] as a person", signifying her internalised loathing of witchcraft, of queerness (1:05:31-1:05:35). Not only does she feel it, but she is also giving into it, conforming to society by being with a human man.

In Gillian's own words, "all the Holroyds are a little sinister" (19:56-20:03). Although she is referring to their status as witches and warlocks, their family structure poses a threat to traditional American values. There is no heterosexual family structure in

Bell, Book and Candle, as Gill spends her time with her aunt Queenie and brother Nicky, with no mention of parents throughout the film. 'Found' or 'chosen' family is a common experience among LGBT+ people, as the traditional roles of family have for so long been unavailable to them. In 1950s America, same-sex marriage was illegal and would be for years to come. The inability to marry or be legally recognised as a couple, along with potential ostracization and homophobia from biological family members, led to chosen kinships. These included not only friends, but "lovers, coparents, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and offspring conceived through alternative insemination" (Weston 3). The lack of heterosexual, nuclear family representation in *Bell, Book and Candle* suggests the trio is an example of this queer, chosen kinship.

Both Queenie and Nicky are queer-coded characters. Queenie is eccentric and frequently oversteps boundaries, going as far as to intrude in Shep's apartment and mess with his phone, depicting the stereotype of melodramatic yet threatening lesbians, while Nicky is portrayed similarly to the 'pansy' stereotype mentioned earlier: mischievous, comedic, well-dressed and with a penchant for calling people 'dear.' While both characters are unattached, Queenie's status as an unmarried older woman codes her as queer, while Nicky's close partnership with Redlitch as he "let[s] [him] in on some things" could be insinuating the existence of a romantic relationship

between the two (49:11-49:29).

The setting of the film in Greenwich Village is integral to viewing *Bell, Book and Candle* as a queer-coded text. Greenwich Village was thrumming with art, culture and free-spirited bohemians and was a hotspot for LGBT+ subculture in the 1950s. Covert clubs, bars and bathhouses lined the Village, full of queer people mingling with each other. "New York is full of 'em," states Redlitch, referring to witches, though the subtext is clear (42:26-42:47). The Village is home to the Stonewall Inn, where the Stonewall Riots took place in 1969, a pivotal event in the LGBT Rights movement in America. Although this happened post-*Bell, Book and Candle*, it is a reminder of just how significant a location Greenwich Village was for the LGBT+ community in the mid-twentieth century. The 'Zodiac' club in the film appears as a direct nod to this club culture. Located in the Village, it is "kind of a dive", difficult for outsiders to find and requires conversing with a doorman dressed as a fortune-teller to be granted entry (9:18- 9:22). Once inside, unorthodox music is performed - bongo drums are being played and French songs performed instead of Christmas carols. Certain music and dances are exclusive to queer culture and would not usually be experienced by those not in the know. Shep and Merle's reactions to the club plays with the outsider trope, as these two heterosexual, human characters now find themselves minorities for a brief moment. They listen, bewildered as Ms de Passe explains the meaning of the French song to her friend, gleefully

describing a man who was assassinated and thrown into water, kept down there for ten years with "without food, alcohol or a female friend", the punchline being that the man hates water (17:29-17:45). When their confused faces are noticed, Ms de Passe seems to recognise them as outsiders who are unfamiliar with the culture. However, they go on to mock the club and its culture, their standing in society causing no repercussions for them. As well as the more overt subtext, there are subtle nods that add to the queer-coded nature of the film, such as the Kinsey Report being mentioned briefly when Gill and Shep discuss Redlitch's book. This was a report made up of two books, one about the sexuality of men and one about the sexuality of women, both focused on categorising sexual orientations. Trask compares Redlitch's claims to have the gift of recognising witches "like a shot" to the idea of a 'gaydar,' as Redlitch ironically states this while in the presence of three witches (45:03). She notes that heterosexual people often claim to have a 'gaydar,' a radar that allows them to recognise a gay person, however this is usually due to them picking up on homophobic stereotypes (3).

Bell, Book and Candle's ending portrays the tragedy of repression and being 'closeted' in 1950s America. Gill, previously an educated, domineering, free character, sheds her identity and self-expression and conforms to society. Following her breakup with Shep, she finds she can blush, and she can cry - she is human. The concept of witches being unable to perform

these natural emotional acts unless they have found love suggests that 'real' women – women who love men – are more human, more emotionally available. As well as this, the loss of power is associated with complying with convention (Greene 113). The contrast between Gill at the beginning of Bell, Book and Candle – straight-backed, bare-foot and dressed in black – and at the end of the film is stark. Her androgyny is swapped out for hyper-femininity: soft makeup, a white, collared dress, and shoes politely covering her feet. Greene notes that this change happens subtly as the film progresses, and is also depicted in the camera work, as "there are fewer extreme close-ups, as the camera holds its distance from her body" (112-113). Gillian's dark gallery full of witchcraft wonders, symbolic of her freedom and her education, becomes a light, frilly, feminine flower-and-shell shop. Not only does Gill's clothing change, but so does her demeanour – the once dominant woman is now physically meeker in comparison to Shep, who towers over her and for the first time in the film, becomes the dominant one in the relationship. Although gender roles were played with throughout the film, heterosexual viewers receive the ideal ending – Shep is now the masculine, domineering man audiences expect to see in a romance. This final scene can be interpreted as a tragic representation of queer people shedding and repressing their identities. In order for Gillian to fit into society, she must repress everything she was and convert to femininity and heterosexuality by entering into a nuclear marriage with a man.

Bell, Book and Candle can certainly be read as a queer-coded text. Although on a surface level it is a heterosexual romance, the true story is Gillian's struggle with her identity and her assimilation into conventional society. Witches in this film are allegorical and parallel the LGBT+ community, from their thriving club scene in Greenwich Village to the desperate need for secrecy about their existence. The influence of the culture of homophobia and anti-communism in America at the time is clear in the film and lends itself to the queer-coding. Bell, Book and Candle represents the experience of queer people in 1950s America, showing identity crises, internalised loathing and the need to hide and suppress one's true nature.

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PSYCHOANALYSIS MEETS AESTHETICS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNCANNY IN *THE MONK* AND *WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE*

Highly Recommended for the Department of English Undergraduate Awards, 2nd Year

Grace Morey

Abstract: Freud's influential 1919 essay "The Uncanny" examines the most taboo psychological phenomena lurking beneath the aesthetics of literary culture. Through exploring the elements of storytelling which can transform a mundane experience into something disturbing and fantastical, Freud exposes many of humanity's deepest fears and disturbing secrets. The purpose of this essay is to analyse the uncanny in Matthew Lewis' 1796 novel *The Monk*, and Shirley Jackson's twentieth-century American Gothic novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

Despite their vastly different settings and timeframes, both novels expose the Gothic horror in our everyday lives by exploring madness and possession, repression and deprivation, and manifestations of the supernatural. Significantly, both Jackson and Lewis evoke the uncanny in the strongest possible sense when their female characters dare to challenge the patriarchal norms that uphold their societies through the power of witchcraft. Through dismantling the misogynistic societal structures that bolster the security of their respective eras, and revealing a hidden capacity for madness within us all, Lewis and Jackson force the reader to confront the most disturbing aspects of themselves and their society.

Grounded in the remarkable elements of simple everyday occurrences, Sigmund Freud's influential 1919 paper "The Uncanny" (or "*Das Unheimliche*") probes into the secret revelations behind the aesthetics of literary culture. Though this is undoubtedly an unusual phenomenon for a psychoanalyst to attempt to unpack, Freud hypothesises that humanity's morbid fascination with the uncanny exposes an obscured capacity for madness within us all. A story that contains elements of the uncanny perpetuates an ambiguous undertone of discomfort, the reasoning behind which is challenging to discern. Therefore, it is tempting to conclude that the uncanny is simply a manifestation of the unknown or unfamiliar. However, this sensation possesses many additional layers, as not everything new is inherently frightening. These unnerving qualities are

explored in both Matthew Lewis' 1796 novel *The Monk*, and many years later in Shirley Jackson's twentieth-century novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, both of which are quintessential texts of the Gothic genre. This essay argues that both novels expose humanity's deepest fears and most taboo secrets by stirring feelings of the uncanny within the reader, despite coming from divergent eras. I will analyse the uncanny within these two texts by illustrating the ways in which they explore madness and possession, repression and deprivation, the monstrous and the supernatural, unintentional repetition, and the omnipotence of thoughts. Finally, I will analyse the deeply uncanny link between the portrayal of witchcraft and the terrifying power of the patriarchy.

A defining feature of the uncanny effect within a text is the exploration of insanity or madness. Though mental illness was often considered a side effect of demonic possession in the Middle Ages (Mandeville Caciola 303), the uncanny is not generated by crude depictions of madness or bizarre stereotypes. The uncanny response results from something much more subtle, that "the ordinary person sees in them the workings of a force hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-man but which at the same time he is dimly aware of in a remote corner of his own being" (Freud 14). For example, the deceptively innocent and eerily childlike Merricat in Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* does not appear to have any concrete motive for poisoning her entire family with the exception of her beloved

sister Constance, nor does she appear to suffer from the faintest shred of remorse or guilt. She is too timid to challenge those who are cruel to her when she is taunted and harassed by the locals on her weekly trip to the village, yet the thought of "walking on their bodies" comforts her and gives her the fortitude to ignore them (Jackson 10). Initially, Merricat's desire to retaliate against the cruelty of the locals is understandable, yet the stark brutality of her thoughts is profoundly troubling. Despite her apparent meekness, even her older sister completely submits to her every desire without protest or hesitation. This disquieting command over all those close to her despite her illusory gullibility makes us wonder whether it is her sociopathy or some form of hidden supernatural ability that gives Merricat ultimate dominance over all those around her, as well as the mysterious capacity to construct precisely the life she desires.

Whereas Merricat uses murder simply as a means of removing obstacles to her happiness, in *The Monk*, Ambrosio's insanity is fuelled by frenzied lust and insatiable desire. His madness casts an impenetrable shadow over his rationality and he will sink to any means to seize the object of his desires. When he succeeds in Antonia's rape and capture, he feels that it is his obligation to murder her, insisting that it is ultimately her irresistibility which makes him "a perjured hypocrite, a ravisher, an assassin" (Lewis 296). After he has strangled her mother and committed his first callous act of murder in the pursuit of satiating his deranged appetite, he takes the drugged Antonia to an underground

cellar to “reanimate” her in order to molest her, adding incest to his mounting list of distressing crimes (Lewis 260). If a childlike teenager can poison her own family without a shred of remorse and an exemplary monk can embrace violence and necromancy to satisfy his perverse desires at the cost of his immortal soul, how can we be sure of anything at all? Both Lewis and Jackson utilise the uncanny effect created by the depiction of insanity to take the ground from out beneath the reader, shrouding the already ambiguous ethical codes of their respective eras in perplexity and doubt. It is this uncertainty that breeds the effect of the uncanny throughout both novels and forces the reader to confront an obscured capacity for madness buried deep within their own psyche.

The uncanny effect can emerge from depictions of repression and neglect in a cathartic explosion of amorality, and this is something that both Lewis and Jackson explore. Lewis had visited Paris in 1791 at a time where representations of sexual brutality and rape were frequently employed by revolutionaries in their discussions of the Catholic Church (Groom 8). Such violent inclinations were considered a fundamental trait of those in power at the time and as a result, scandalous texts such as *The Monk* were utilised as justification for revolutionary action. The pitiful weakness of Ambrosio’s resolve when he succumbs to Matilda and abandons “his vows, his sanctity, and his fame”, remembering “nothing but the pleasure and opportunity” is not only a scathing critique of the apparent ethical superiority of the

Catholic clergy, but also an exaggeration of the effect that strict repression can have on an individual's moral development (Lewis 71). As a result, Ambrosio's hellish transformation is truly a story of "Eros denied, only to reassert itself with the force of vengeance" (Brooks 257). His undoing is ultimately captured in his ironic adoration of the icon of the Madonna, which turns out to be a portrait of his lover. The cathartic realisation that his fascination with this image is not representative of his incorruptible devoutness but rather his sexual desire for Matilda intrinsically marks his descent from the divine to the demonic.

Similarly, in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, the only possible justification that Merricat alludes to for the murder of her family is the denial of her appetite. When Cousin Charles threatens to punish Merricat for destroying his room with sticks and dirt in an attempt to drive him from the Blackwood house, she is wholly consumed by the fear that she will be sent to bed without her dinner. The most basic and primal needs of a child from their parents is the fulfilment of their hunger and when these needs are not met, the seeds of abandonment and deprivation are irreversibly sown (Muñoz-González 83). Merricat regards the withholding of her meals as the ultimate penalty and associates the fulfilment of her appetite with love and belonging. When she is denied her "rightful" and "proper" place at the table, she is driven to murder the family that alienated her (Jackson 95). Additionally, women were considered the object of consumption in the 1960s and images of the compliant woman

and "genuine American housewife" were inseparably tied to the prosperity of the country (Muñoz-González 89). However, Jackson subverts this idea, transforming the Blackwood girls' inherent femininity into something deeply threatening. In murdering her family using the traditionally feminine weapon of poison, Merricat exercises her agency to consume and removes all obstacles to the fulfilment of her cravings, rooting the effect of the uncanny in the taboo of the feminine appetite and the repression of her most basic human instincts.

However, the eruption of repressed desires does not fully solve the question of the uncanny. This disquieting and indistinct feeling can also arise with the suggestion of supernatural activity. In the words of Freud, authors often utilise the uncanny to make a particular statement, and through explaining it via the supernatural, they "cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point at all" (19). Merricat's adolescence gives her a spectral facet in that she is defined by her liminality, existing uncomfortably in a period of transition (Carpenter 32). Her uncle refuses to see or acknowledge her, insisting that Merricat "did not survive the loss of her family," momentarily shrouding her very existence in doubt (Jackson 93). Constance sustains this supernatural quality of Merricat by insistently treating her like an infant, as though to freeze her in time from the moment of the familicide. As a result, we cannot help but wonder whether Merricat is truly alive or merely a spiritual representation of her murderous twelve-year-old psyche.

Jackson draws the line between the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* so finely that either interpretation could be true.

The same cannot be said of *The Monk*, where Lewis uses manifestations of the supernatural to make bold allegations regarding the perversion of the Catholic Church in eighteenth-century society. The character of the Bleeding Nun epitomises the corruption and hypocrisy of the clergy. Her habit is "in several places stained with the blood which trickled from a wound upon her bosom" where she was stabbed by a former lover after taking her vows, forcing her to eternally bear a symbol of her loss of virtue (Lewis 225). This stain links the Bleeding Nun to Ambrosio who uses Matilda's dark magic to capture and rape his sister before stabbing her, destroying his robes with her blood in the process (Blakemore 529).
After forcing Ambrosio to renounce God and pledge his allegiance to hell, Satan himself claims that Ambrosio has always been "virtuous from vanity, not principle" (Lewis 337). Within the anarchic realm of the supernatural, Lewis conceals powerful statements regarding delicate political issues, implying that the clergy are motivated by a desire for adoration and fear of damnation as opposed to faith in the divine. In this way, the supernatural produces the uncanny effect of bringing the horrors of the familiar world to light through the voice of the fantastical. In utilising the supernatural, Lewis and Jackson unveil the Gothic elements of the mundane world.

Similarly, the concept of "the double" provokes feelings of the

uncanny, and creates the unnerving effect of robbing the reader of the inherent security of the familiar (Freud 8). Freud suggests that the first double was the human soul, "originally an insurance against destruction to the ego" (9). However, Gothic literature often subverts this idea, using the double to create the very epitome of fear and terror. For example, in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Cousin Charles tries to take the place of Merricat's dead father, their likeness being so remarkable that Merricat tells her cat Jonas, "he is a ghost" (Jackson 70). Charles is a reincarnation of their father John Blackwood, sitting at his place at the table and occupying his bed, returning to reverse the power structure of the household and restore supremacy to the Blackwood men (Carpenter 34). Despite this, Constance insists that he has "a perfect right" to sit in their father's chair (Jackson 21). Merricat has gone to extraordinary lengths to create an isolated sororal utopia, and Charles's covert attempts to torment her culminate in her starting a fire that will destroy the only Blackwood asset that concerns him. She insists that "every touch he made on the house must be erased" (69), and uses the ultimate cleansing element of flames to purge all echoes of her father's memory from their home in order to preserve their feminine haven.

In contrast, in *The Monk*, the doubling effect is created within the paradoxical elements of Ambrosio's character: the duality of his public persona in stark contrast to the monster concealed within. Reminiscent of Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, Ambrosio's

desire for atonement and anxiety to preserve his highly esteemed public reputation does not stand a chance against the force of his secret lasciviousness. In comparison to Merricat's complete absence of empathy, Ambrosio has moments where the former Monk comes to the fore and appears to experience genuine remorse, feeling the full extent of "the pangs of conscious villainy, and the terrors of punishment impending over him" (Lewis 323). However, the forceful momentum of his metamorphosis ultimately cannot be impeded once he releases his amoral side and gives into the temptation. As a result, the double, originally a symbol of the pure and immortal human soul, "becomes a ghastly harbinger of death" (Freud 9). The uncanny effect created by Ambrosio's complex layers of consciousness are reflective of a society where appearances are not always as they seem, creating a world where terror and doubt reign.

Involuntary repetition has a similar effect, casting a shadow of doubt over the inner world of a novel, making the reader aware of the inescapability of fate and the reality of their own mortality. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Uncle Julian's obsession with reliving the poisoning of the Blackwood family creates this uncanny effect. Additionally, the fact that he has been left disabled by the poisoning that killed the rest of his family serves as a constant reminder to Merricat of what she has done. Despite her apparent lack of remorse, she frequently reminds herself "to be kinder to Uncle Julian" (Jackson 80). Though his rants may appear ridiculous on the surface, his

preoccupation with the tragedy "forces upon us the idea of something fateful and unescapable", and makes it appear as though the universe is determined to make Merricat pay for the lives she has taken (Freud 11). Merricat's ultimate desire is to be the uncontested author of her own destiny. She goes to great pains to eliminate the interference of her family from her life, but Julian's infatuation with their death keeps them at the forefront of her story, feeding energy into their memory and giving them a paranormal power over her fate as a result.

Similarly, in *The Monk*, the uncanny effect of involuntary repetition is manifested by the recurring motif of the Bleeding Nun. She is the ultimate embodiment of carnal sin, and her continued presence culminates in an atmosphere of pure foreboding, particularly in Don Raymond's narrative to Don Lorenzo. Freud suggests that many people feel the presence of the uncanny in the strongest possible sense "in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead", as our unconscious mind is constantly aware of our own mortality (13). The Bleeding Nun is symbolic of the consequences of humanity's inability to control an excess of erotic desire, which is at the root of all suffering within the text. Don Raymond remarks that far from growing accustomed to her incessant reappearances, "every succeeding visit inspired me with greater horror" (Lewis 126). This unwanted and involuntary repetition of events stretches the consciousness of the reader to accommodate the paranormal, eliminating the possibility of chance or coincidence so that the

effect of the uncanny can be fully realised.

In "The Uncanny," Freud puts forward that the "omnipotence of thoughts" is "one of the most widespread forms of superstition" (12). In both texts, the omnipotence of thoughts is inseparably interlinked with witchcraft and resistance against patriarchal structures. According to Carpenter in her prominent reading of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, "female self-sufficiency, Jackson suggests, specifically women's forceful establishment of power over their own lives, threatens a society in which men hold primary power and leads inevitably to conflict" (33). Merricat's life is consumed by her rituals, and her processes of nailing books to trees and burying treasure are attempts to exercise complete control in a world where women are expected to remain powerless. However, when the Blackwood girls are putting away their supplies after cleaning the house, Merricat imagines that they are "a pair of witches walking home" (Jackson 69). In this sense, Jackson infuses a special kind of power into the mundane tasks of women, and suggests that true witchcraft and successful femininity are not mutually exclusive. Their entire house has a static, untouched quality with the exception of the kitchen, which is a hub of activity, emblematic of pure indulgence. Their kitchen is fortified by decades of preserved foods (42), crafted by generations of Blackwood women, almost as though they had the foresight to know that the Blackwood sisters would one day become reliant on this uniquely feminine inheritance for sustenance. Driven by her deep

detest for Charles and the patriarchal power that he represents, Merricat burns all echoes of these oppressive structures from the house, protecting the safe, feminine space. The Blackwood sisters become mythical Greek goddesses, draped in ornate tablecloths, an outcome which appears to have been actualised by the power of Merricat's will. She can finally thrive in her castle on the hill in absolute peace, surviving on offerings from the locals and finally free from the terrifying power of the patriarchy. Though this is an outcome that Jackson must have realised was "more permissible in fiction than in reality", Merricat's desire to be worshipped, and to consume without constraint, is fulfilled in the most warped sense possible, through the strength of her will and her inherently witchy omnipotence of thoughts (Carpenter 38).

The deeply uncanny effect of witchcraft manifested in the hyper-domesticity of the Blackwood girls is in stark contrast with Matilda's aggressive, satanic power in *The Monk*. Freud suggests that the distribution of magical powers strike us as uncanny as we have undergone stages in our development similar to those of primitive humans, and the suggestion of the supernatural "fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression" (12). The suggestion of witchcraft aggravates an ancestral, inborn distrust of female power embedded deep within the human psyche. Matilda is the "archetypal *femme fatale*", and her aggressive female sexuality threatens the outdated notion that

women can have the ultimate power of giving life through childbirth, yet are robbed of power in every other facet of their life (Blakemore 523). When a deadly serpent bites Ambrosio, Matilda saves him by sucking the poisoning venom from his blood and placing her own life in jeopardy. This evokes the effect of the uncanny by subverting the creation myth from Genesis, the foundational myth of the modern patriarchy which positions women at the root of all sin and suffering in humankind. Once Ambrosio learns of this sacrifice, gratitude becomes the overwhelmingly seductive rationalisation for lust, and Matilda becomes both his saviour and the source of his demise (Grudin 138). In fulfilling Matilda's wishes, he must become a mechanism in the realisation of Satan's will and join her in "falling prey to the blackest crimes" (Lewis 70). The conceit of the satanic contract becomes an emblem of Matilda's diabolical feminine power and ruthlessness in fulfilling her heart's desires. Though Lewis and Jackson explore the power of witchcraft in contrasting ways, they share an important similarity in that the fierce independence and determination of their female characters dismantles the security of the patriarchy. The effect of the uncanny is felt in the strongest sense when powerful female characters dare to challenge the familiar structures of their society, and live on the very border between the known and the unfamiliar.

As a result, it is clear that both *The Monk* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* invoke an awareness of the uncanny by

exploring the most taboo aspects of human nature. Both Lewis and Jackson expose the Gothic horror in everyday life by delving into madness and insanity, the repression of basic human instincts, involuntary repetition and paranormal activity. Despite their different eras and landscapes, both authors conjure Freud's understanding of the uncanny in the strongest possible sense in challenging the patriarchal structures that bolster the security of their respective eras through the power of witchcraft, drawing our awareness to the Gothic elements of the real world, and forcing the reader to expand their consciousness and come face-to-face with the most uncomfortable parts of themselves and their society.

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VIRTUAL BODIES

Winner of the Eoin Clancy Memorial Scholarship in Creative Writing

Maeve McTaggart

None of it was normal, not at first. It was a game she would play, flanked by two friends and a sense of boredom that spurred no one in particular to suggest the tape over the webcam come off. She would paw at it, nails scraping until polish chipped as they reminisced over other days where boredom bred the Game. "Do you remember –" Ellie would snort, relaying a story in the same structure as always: camera on, chat entered, the genitalia of a stranger slithering as the girls winced and asked the disembodied member questions about its life. *Why are you here? Is this fun for you? Why is this even fun for you?* The answers were never anything philosophical, obviously. It's not like there are ever groundbreaking revelations on moral psychology made by a dick on the internet. Ellie would lead the "conversation," her Cork accent arching over pornographic articulations while she teased the septum ring in her nose. Shaunagh manned the keyboard, long fingers deliberate as the Stranger used his free hand to type – *how old? take your top off?* The mind of a man who gets naked online, it was a game. Harmless and boredom-induced with Saoirse sat in the middle,

the glow of the webcam pierced forward as she did as they asked.

It didn't start out that way, three twenty-one-year-old college students who would spend a Wednesday night beneath the bulb that flickered in their accommodation while one flashed Strangers—strange, naked men on the internet—and felt nothing. Originally, Saoirse had cast herself as the bystander, observing with the same knot in her stomach they had diagnosed as Catholic guilt while watching *Naked Attraction* a few months before. It had been early April when the Game started, and the girls sat on the grass outside the library while the waning sunlight lured the commuters off campus, the screeching of the gates warning that the grounds were closing in. Ellie gathered the orange rinds from around her neatly, tucking them into her palm as she stood up and exposed the blades of grass that had branded the back of her thighs. "I see your point, Shaunagh, I do," she sighed, the others following her climbed to their feet, "I just don't understand why *I* should be responsible for *his* lack of basic human decency though, y'know?" It was a conversation they had been having since that morning, when on the way to college Ellie had gotten a Snapchat message from the quiet boy in her class - the one who either had a wardrobe full of Kerry jerseys, or just a single Kerry jersey he had worn, buckled into blue jeans, every day since first year. It was a comprehensive summary of a dream this relative stranger had about her the

night before - explicit, neither safe for work nor sparing any of the graphic details which would nauseate the Catholic guilt lodged, acidic, in the walls of Saoirse's abdomen. The message bordered on gruesome. Ellie's cheeks flared as she recited it, now locked in an argument with Shaunagh about why she shouldn't be the one to exert energy educating the Kerryman on why his message was, in her words, "sexual harassment and... weird?"

Saoirse had no opinion, not at the time. The carnal confession of the Accounting undergrad inspired no profound movements in her mind, the doggedly-drawn image he constructed through direct message was unsettling, but it wasn't as if it was abnormal.

"If you want to fix people, Shaunagh, then let's try to fix people!" Ellie exclaimed, exasperated as she turned her key in the lock of the door behind her and dropped a fraying bag on the mat at her feet. 'Home' was, for them, a dilapidating three-bed closer to the city centre than it was to college, black-spots shading the ceiling and a kitchen where the chipped floor tiles exposed the grey matter the house was founded upon. Shaunagh pulled a chair from the coffee-stained table and thumbed the power button on her laptop. She agreed with Ellie - a rare occasion in a friendship where Saoirse was most often the broker between the push and pull. "Talk to them then," she smirked, rotating the

screen so that the three girls were face to parts with a stranger, the chat bubble pulsing in the bottom corner. It was how the Game began, sitting on chairs with uneven legs, psychoanalysing naked torsos through the glare of a webcam.

Saoirse always sat in the middle, not for any particular reason other than it made her feel like she was part of something - the first one these Strangers saw. There was something about that, being the central focus of this validation, that she enjoyed. An adrenalin rush that found its root in the guilt, but maybe there was never anything Catholic about it. Maybe it was just hers. After the fifth or so time they played, bemused at the entitled mind of a man who stripped down and forged notes with bad grammar, the disgust which would slink down Saoirse's spine until the tail dissolved and the whole thing felt separate to her. The next message that demanded to see her body, she showed them. Ellie shut the laptop after that, quiet as Shaunagh questioned. "What was that for?" she asked. The room seemed to change as she did, discomfort settling between the cracks in the tiles as Saoirse shook her head. It was a joke, and she coughed out a laugh before the three climbed the stairs and went to bed.

They continued to play the Game, this dance where no one knew who was winning. It wasn't as if they learned anything, gained insight into the mind of the boy who had an imagination

that swallowed Ellie whole and spat out each part of her, weighted and bound and repurposed until it was no longer her, this bundle of limbs. It was something to do, a way to make sense of the unsolicited messages and the guilt that continued to wrap itself around Saoirse and squeeze. It hurt, and when it hurt she played alone.

Loneliness would wash between her fingertips as she typed her thoughts out to strangers, the ones she would never share with Shaunagh or Ellie, sleeping on the opposite side of flaking plaster. It disturbed her how easy it all was, this dissociated self which became another of the disembodied parts on the internet. There was no pleasure involved, no satisfaction to absently drive the space bar forward, body tinged blue in the light cast by the screen, goosebumped by the wind which seeped beneath the gap of her bedroom door. She felt that guilt again, the only thing she ever felt when she started the Game alone. Guilty for her loneliness despite friends just down the hall, guilty for the meditations that came with disowning your body on the internet, letting Strangers drain pleasure off your anonymous ribcage for free.

Her motivations were cloudy, the Game had stopped being fun the day she recognised her old Geography teacher through the screen, waiting, typing, pausing. The chat bubbled as she rested her shoulders just below the camera—the frame cut just below

her voicebox, just above her waist. She watched the knuckles of his empty hand edge across the keyboard, memorialising the same movements it would make to rest on her thigh when she was in fifth year. He had always been kind, always reassuring when her grades slipped and she tripped over the sections on sub-Saharan Africa, mouth dry as he pressed his hand into where the hem of her skirt met skin. There was nothing about this she enjoyed, but there was nothing that made her want to stop it either. It was then the guilt made its way into her, a parasite that crawled from between her legs and made its home beneath the muscle. She would ask him about his wife, he would show her pictures of his dog, the type she knew whose breath smelled and white fur knotted when you rubbed it. Saoirse said the dog was cute.

He had never kissed her, his lopsided mouth where the wrinkles lingered after he smiled. He told her to call him by his first name, "because we're friends, Saoirse," he would say, going the long way to drop her home. She never did, she never called him anything at all. There was nothing in her that wanted this man in his forties to kiss her, or to touch her, really. He preferred to look at her, watch while she spoke about things that matter to a seventeen-year-old. The debs tickets had just gone on sale. She remembered because the notes crumpled in the pocket of her shirt as he moved his hand, coins heavy in the pocket as he pretended to listen to her deliberations on who she could ask -

the buffer between her and her Stranger.

The chat bubble released a noise as the message appeared, the man behind the screen moving to reveal it wasn't him after all, instead this pixelated half-person relaying a story of a fight with a girlfriend. Saoirse made him feel better, he said. Another for the list. She recited her usual script in return, empty and reviled promises of actions she would never take if it meant he could touch her. Lock the car doors and leave the lemon-scented air freshener to occupy their lungs, hook itself into the gaps in the fabric of her school jumper, the threadbare sleeves she would pull at in exam halls. The view was of roads that led to nowhere, nowhere she would ever be, fully, without the guilt that trailed behind her, shackled to the loneliness of being seventeen and silent. The loneliness of being twenty-one and unable to trade in parts already wasted.

The Game lay the ground she walked on, heavy-set down stairs and walls that felt as if they were closing in, chipped tiles consumed with festering words meant for someone else. There was no difference between her and Ellie, her and Shaunagh, her and Kerryman who sat at the back of lectures and texted girls about his teenage dreams of touching her without a reason. Without asking her first. There was no difference between her and the man who sat behind his chatroom screen exposed after his girlfriend left him. They were all the same, all just parts, all

lonely, all just playing a Game no one could win.

Saoirse would shut the laptop then, drain the light from the room and leave those bodies on the internet in suspension. She sat on the bed and laughed, hopelessly, for loneliness, for her, for her friends, for the house that creaked and groaned and bled.

MEET THE EDITORS

Anna Fitzgerald

My name is Anna Fitzgerald, and I am a second year BA English student. My interest in editorial work was piqued in the beginning of this academic year, as a result of the online journal and website related tasks I completed as part of my Special Topics module. Having surveyed and copy-edited contributor bios, It was lovely to gain an insight into the personalities of the essayists! Perhaps inevitably, my personal life is fairly literary-oriented, when not engaging with my athletic and dramatic pastimes I can usually be found curled up next to the fire in my reading chair or scribbling away on a short story.

Leah Mulcahy

Leah here, from second year BA English! I have always been passionate about reading and writing fiction - and quickly found my love for academic writing in the early days of first year. It goes without saying that I thoroughly enjoyed reading, copy-editing, and formatting all of these essays, and meeting the people behind them. The purpose of literature at its forefront is to communicate with others, and I am so grateful to have worked with so many talented and interesting people on this journal. I hope to carry this experience with me and pursue future opportunities in publishing and journalism. When I'm not double spacing essays, you can find me whizzing to and from campus on my bike, knitting (or more likely re-knitting) fuzzy jumpers, or pining for a salt and chili chicken panini at the Student Centre.

Robyn Power

My name is Robyn Power, and I'm currently a 2nd Year BA English student in UCC, along with the rest of my fellow editors. Being from Dungarvan in Co. Waterford, Cork was never too far away from me, which meant UCC was always going to be my top choice university. Passions of mine include reading, writing, (surprising for an English student, I know) walking and watching possibly every currently popular Netflix series you could think of. My main hobby, of course, is probably procrastinating on my assignments. I have a keen interest in journalism and learning more in the publishing industry, so volunteering to get involved with the journal was somewhat of a no-brainer for me. I'm so grateful that this opportunity presented itself, especially after somewhat of an isolated first year of college. It felt amazing to actually be involved in something, meeting my lovely fellow editors all whilst gaining invaluable experience.

Alexandra To

I'm Alex and I do the marketing for *Double Space*. I'm a very visual person. I love doodling, fashion and film. I think always having had an interest in these things drew me into branding.
Outside of playing around with typography and graphic design, I write haphazard poems on my notes app, consume a lot of tea and toast, and begin reading books without finishing (I am going back and forth between a Marie Antoinette biography and a book about Charles Manson and The Beach Boys).
In the future, I am unsure of what career path is calling me. Whatever it is, I hope that it speaks to my need for creativity and its role in connecting to people.

Mia Tobin Power

My name is Mia Tobin Power and I'm a second year BA English student. I worked on the copy-editing and PDF design for this issue of the journal, so I know all of these amazing articles inside out! I loved working on the journal and getting to put my obsession with grammar and formatting to good use. I've discovered a real love for copy-editing, which fits well with my interest in working in either the publishing or journalism industries in the future. When I'm not choosing fonts or adding Oxford commas, I'm probably listening to a podcast while going for a walk or watching (and subsequently writing about) films.

This inaugural issue of *Double Space* was made on behalf of the UCC Department of English.

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