

Double Space



The Undergraduate Journal of the Department
of English, UCC



DOUBLE SPACE

JOURNAL

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Editorial

Double Space launches its third issue this summer 2024, showcasing the academic excellence of University College Cork's English students. The essays and creative work included in this issue have been granted recognitions such as UCC's own English Undergraduate Awards, the Patricia Coughlan Award and the Louise Clancy Memorial Prize. The theme for the 2024 issue is "Time". We have grouped the essays in order of the most modern, dating back to the essay with the oldest context. We received essays from all sorts of times periods, including the future. Time is the one thing we always crave more of and is a fitting theme as we, the team of this year's issue, cannot get enough of these amazing essays!

Our aim with this journal is to create a space to share and celebrate the award-winning work of our contributors with current and past students, as well as a wider audience. Moreover, we follow last year's issue to enhance a wider recognition of the Arts with the publication of this journal, which we hope will become an integral part of the UCC Department of English.

We would like to thank all the people who have helped us in the publication of this issue. To start, the contributors for their work that they have kindly allowed us to include in the journal. We would like to thank the English Department lecturers and professors for their tips and tricks for essay writing, and Maria Butler for mentoring the *Double Space* team in creating this journal. Finally, we would like to thank Dr Heather Laird and Dr Miranda Corcoran for their invaluable support and advice throughout the process.

We hope you will enjoy reading *Double Space* as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

– The *Double Space* Team

Articles



“Remedia Amoris”

Freyja Hellebust

Eoin Murray Prize Winner

Eight in the morning, packed into the bus, the whole lot of them, sweating in the changing spring weather. He’s dressed for the biting air of early morning, too many layers for the hot space, condensation clouding up the windows. One airpod in, playing nothing. He’d had a crime podcast going, but that had made him feel worse, the sense of closeness and noise, the voice in his ear tightening his jaw. Sweat on his back, soaking his shirt. He won’t be able to take his jumper off at work.

Sweat under the hairline, too. He knows he’ll smell – worries about it every day. All women on his team, reminds him of being sixteen and clammy. He brings mints and cologne to work in his bag.

Dublin in March – the sun’s coming back. Golden light on the top of buildings, mellower than the frozen pink of January. The evenings in the house are easier now, the rickety heating less of a problem.

Work will be awful. The day after it happened he got away with it, worked from home.

Wrapped in blankets, his takeaway-stained hoodie, deep into a job, he could forget about it for stretches of time. But he’d be reminded, then. Jack fucking the girlfriend through the wall, like neither of them have jobs.

It is Thursday now. It happened on the Tuesday.

Free bar at the work drinks. He knows he should behave himself, never quite does.

Something in him can’t resist, goes for it. In the blood, maybe, or just learned in college. Not yet unlearned.

The hangover hadn’t been as bad as he’d expected.

But –

Clara –

He’d sank into Clara, rested his hands on her warm waist, breathed the perfume off the top of

her head. Her lips, glossy. Her glazed eyes, rimmed with eye shadow, goopy mascara. Laughing in all the right places at his Davy Fitzgerald story, revealing glowing, brace-straightened rows of teeth. He'd fooled himself they were only talking for a long while, she was just one of the group in front of him. Fooled himself all the way up until he brought her to a crisp white Clayton bed and opened up the young softness of her after too many espresso martinis. One in each hand, Sally told him yesterday, laughing at him on WhatsApp. Whiskey as well, she didn't know about. A can in his room before he got the suit on. He needs to loosen himself before these things, hates talking to all these brain dead boring fuckers.

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Clara is a nineteen year old college intern. He's been aware of her, something blinking out of the corner of his eye, from day one, since the first day she walked into the office, but he's kept his gaze ahead. This is a disaster. She's a problem now.

And he doesn't even like her, not really. She's gorgeous, but a total moron. Can't manage the spreadsheets, says stupid things about reality shows. All the girls coo over her. She's a partner's niece, and that explains how they let her in the door, let alone near any numbers. She's not fit to do coffee orders. Can't respect someone like that.

He feels sick – hasn't eaten, woke up too late. That and the heat, the lack of a coffee, children shrieking up the stairs. A Ukrainian woman – the bus was full but her children had burst on. That's it, the driver had announced at the stop, once a couple navy-coated commuters had got on after them, but she'd spread her arms wide against the automatically closing doors, a huge entreating gesture and said, my children.

Down George Street, past the Spar. Finally in the middle of town, almost time to get out of the dripping heat of the bus.

Sun in his eyes when he finally does. The white light over the Liffey, its grey banks, the Immigration Museum where he eats his lunch sometimes.

He's spent so many hours here. Has so many more to go. And what after that? He sometimes entertains thoughts of moving to New Zealand, but knows he won't. Knows he would've by now, would've followed friends to England or America, Australia or Dubai. Instead it's the red-brick sameness of Rathmines, the four-bedroom terraced house between himself and Jack

and Jack's silent cousins, his off-yellow room. He knows the walls of it so well. Goes between the moulding bedroom and work, mostly. Spends the odd night with school friends, up from Waterford. Spends the odd night with them down in Waterford, visiting the mother. Lads that have broadened, fattened out, done nothing with themselves but drink. He loves them still, though he thinks some of them are thick, wasted.

Work melts by, weak spring sun passing through the office windows and making him sweat more. He thinks of ants under a microscope. The armpits of his shirt have gone stiff and waxy. Can't take the jumper off in case they've stained.

Clara smiles over at him whenever she can. He mostly pretends not to see, gets invested in the computer screen like he should be anyway. The hair is obviously done, blow dried or something. More makeup than usual. Nicer shirt. Oh God.

The real worry is what she could do to him.

The problem is he's seeing someone.

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Janey is not sparkingly pretty the way Clara is, doe-eyed and tiny, but she has a job and an apartment and can hold a halfway decent conversation. Dinner is easy and the sex isn't bad. They have the distinction of not having met online or at work. He wants to keep her. Pushing thirty and all the lads are coupled up, have been for years.

She's on holidays, a girls trip in Valencia, some D4 one's thirtieth. Won't get back until Sunday and he won't see her until some evening the next week. She's been texting him though, little updates about nothing.

Jesus Christ Jessica's driving me round the bend, she tells him around eleven, she's hungover and it's making her truly awful.

He normally likes it, seeing the name come up on his lockscreen, the reminder that he's got himself a woman for the first time in years, something more than failed Tinder dates and winding them up in bars. Today it makes his throat close up.

haha so annoying, he sends back, just ignore her.

Lunch – Sally had invited Clara along to their spot, when she first showed up. Fancies herself some sort of team mother, taking the young ones under her wing. He wonders if she'd be so

caring were Clara not related to corporate royalty. It's become routine now, whatever Sally's motivation. Clara obviously views her as the kind-hearted Angel of Accounting. She now falls into step alongside him as they leave the building, cross the square, head to Best Beans to meet Sally there.

"Hey, Joe!"

If he just pretends it didn't happen? Nineteen year olds are like that, can move on from these things.

"Hi, Clara, how's it going?"

"Yeah, grand. Um, how about you?"

"Ah, you know. Busy."

"Aha, yeah."

He lets the silence settle between them. Normally he can't stand it, lets his mouth run almost without listening to himself just to avoid any awkwardness, but now it's surely safer just to let things lie.

"So, um -"

His phone rings.

Oh Jesus.

"Hey, Janey, how's it going?"

"Hey baby, I'm good, how are you?"

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She sounds giggly, lighter than usual. Fondness in her tone that isn't always there.

"Ah, grand. What's up?"

He hears the sounds of the holiday behind her, Irish women and Spanish cars. They must be out somewhere. He imagines them, a gaggle in their sunglasses and Zara sundresses. Freckled shoulders pinkening in the Mediterranean sun.

"Well, I was wondering if you would be able to pop over to mine this Saturday around noon? My landlords after telling me that a maintenance guy will be coming that time but he needs someone to be there and let him in. And I'd rather you were there anyway, I don't trust him at

all so I hate to think what kind of character he has doing his maintenance.”

“Oh yeah that’s grand. Not a bother.”

He’s starting to feel like he needs to shit, the shock of the call rolling around in his guts.

“Thank you so much, you’re a lifesaver. Sorry, there’s no one else I can ask as easy.”

“It’s no bother, sure I’m not up to anything.”

She laughs. Through the phone he hears the almost musical siren of an ambulance going past.

“Stop it. How are things this week, I haven’t heard anything.”

“They’re fine. Boring as ever.”

Again he retreats into silence. Did he sound weird there?

“Alright, I won’t ask,” and he can hear the grin in her voice. She’s always laughing at him, thinks he’s hilarious. It’s what makes things with her so easy.

He can see, though he keeps his eyes on the grey expanse of the square, Clara’s eyes on the side of his face, watching him with big dark eyes. His forehead is damp again under his hair.

He takes too long to answer, trying to gather himself.

“Hello?”

“Sorry, I’m just walking. I’ll talk to you later, I’m just on my to lunch.”

“Ok. Thanks again!”

“No worries, enjoy the day!”

“Miss you!” she throws in, something she hasn’t said yet.

He swallows and hangs up.

Clara’s eyes are roving his face for an answer to the question she won’t ask. His stomach doesn’t settle. He’s made such a mess for himself here.

“So are you enjoying the internship?”

“Oh, yeah it’s been great. Really good experience. Good for the CV, you know.”

The river is still gleaming as they walk past other couples, single men, all on lunch break, lanyards and business casual. He remembers his lunches just out of college, the start of his

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career, with his first girlfriend, forking out far too much for paninis, lattes, cookies on those lunchbreak dates. She’d complain each time about Dublin prices, though she was never

paying herself. He liked that then, felt like a big man. They'd walk over the bridge every day on his way back, always past the same homeless guy. She'd cringe every time, like there was anything to be done for him, like it was her job.

They'd thought he'd leave when his contract was up, then. Their favourite coffee spot at the time has since closed.

"And do you want to go into finance, Clara?"

"Um," she grimaces, "no."

"Ah, you're probably right."

Again the eyes looking up at him, the eyeliner that no one but a partner's teenage niece could wear.

The canary yellow of Best Beans up ahead like a lifesaving buoy, Sally on her phone in the window.

"The coffee's good here, you'll like it," he tells Clara, holds the door open for her and she scurries in with a breathy giggle.

Too hot inside, in his coat after the walk. The sandwich-scented air hits him, makes his face feel red. The hiss of the shining red barista machine, the immediate attention of the girls working.

He orders a flat white in a takeaway cup. A chicken and cheese roll for takeaway. Checks Twitter waiting for it. Sets a reminder on his phone to buy detergent on the way home tonight, sets another reminder about Janey's apartment. A twinge, doing that. Thinks of himself in the clean space of it. The aloe vera, orchids, other ones he doesn't recognise, all fat and glistening. The flat white countertops. She keeps framed photos of her parents, her childhood dog. He thinks of her, giving him the key, beaming up at him. He'd nuzzled her hair, squeezing her round the ribs. She'd fit so well in his arms then.

Sally's finishing her food when they get to her, plate piled with rocket leaves and crisps.

"Heya Clara, how are you? Joe, how was the head yesterday?"

He winces.

"Ah, not too bad. Should've been a lot worse in fairness now."

"Lucky bastard. If I drank like you I'd be dead."

Clara laughs, looking between them, clutching her latte, sparkly pink nails wrapped around

the white cardboard cup. Her perfume hangs around the three of them, the floral vanilla tightening his stomach. He'd breathed it in deep, open-mouthed against her hair. She's sort of

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straining towards him now, like her side's been magnetised to his, subtle but the lean is there. She's flushed, blotchy red high on the cheekbones. He sees the minute Sally clocks it, the twist of her face.

"And how's your girlfriend? Janey, was it?"

The mother thing again. She'd never leave anything alone. He feels the rush of it in his chest, his throat, even his arms. Doesn't say anything back, just looks her in the eye. Thinks, come on. Feels sure she's understood.

Clara's head turns, blow-dried waves bouncing with the movement. He's expecting the big eyes to crumple, betrayal on her powdered face, but there's something else forming there. He has no idea what his own face is doing, just feels his insides bubble.

"Girlfriend?" she asks. Big cross grin on her.

Fuck.

**An Exploration of the Effect of Class on Queer Identity in *Detransition,*
*Baby, and Stone Butch Blues***

Emily McCullagh

The Patricia Coughlan Award - Highly Recommended

Class affects queer identity, as class can dictate the extent of discrimination an individual will face after coming out. It can also affect how an individual interacts with queer spaces, due to class playing a significant role in where an individual can afford to live. For example, if a queer bar is located in an affluent area this poses as a potential barrier for a working-class individual, as not only could they potentially face class-based discrimination while trying to enter the venue, but also in terms of having to face the other potential barriers such as the cost of travel and an entry fee. Under capitalism the queer identity becomes exploited, fetishised, and unequal (Valocchi 316). This exploitation manifests itself through the pink economy which “flatters the gay community with a “positive” notion of its “difference” (Morton 473), while perpetuating a society founded on inequality. The pink economy puts forward the notion that the queer community is united through “a common sexual orientation which unites across differences of class” (Morton 473). However sexual orientation cannot transcend the class divide in order to unite the masses. The Queer community is not immune to the class divide and class can play an exclusionary role. Capitalism generates an unequal society which leads to inequality within the classes (Valocchi 316). Without class solidarity there is no queer solidarity. This essay will focus on how class is depicted in relation to queer identity within *Detransition, Baby* and *Stone Butch Blues*, and how it affects the characters within these novels. Within *Stone Butch Blues* and *Detransition, Baby* there are subtle class hierarchies within the queer community. *Detransition, Baby* depicts class in a far more satirical way than *Stone Butch Blues*, while still providing a genuine social commentary. The main protagonist of

Detransition, Baby, Reese, has a theory of what is the universal problem for women in their thirties. She refers to it as, “the *Sex and the City* problem” (Peters 9), this manifests itself as when a woman becomes aware of her ageing process and “the prospect of making some meaning out of her life grows more and more urgent” (9). According to Reese this problem was purely an aspirational one for the previous generations of trans women, as they were excluded from the four options of employment, motherhood, finding a lover and a creative outlet which can be monetized (9). Employment, motherhood, and to a certain extent a creative outlet which can be monetized are class based exclusions for most trans women. In terms of employment Reese has a similar anecdote, she suggests there are “three transsexual jobs: [...] Computer programmer, aesthetician or prostitute” (54). This comment, while somewhat satirical, Reese describes this anecdote as “a funny-’cause-it’s-true joke that she liked to ask whenever she met a new trans girl” (54), highlights a certain class inequality which trans women face in society. Research has found that “trans individuals are less likely to be employed, have lower household earnings and higher poverty rates than cisgender individuals” (Suárez et al. 717). It has also been found that post transition trans women are at a distinct disadvantage in the workplace compared to trans men, as they are more likely to face discrimination (Suárez et al. 718). This places most trans women in a position of inherent disadvantage.

Within *Detransition, Baby*, Reese, Amy, and Laura Jane Grace represent the differing sides of the class hierarchy. Reese represents the working class; she has not received higher education and works as a waitress. Due to her unstable financial position, derived from her low socioeconomic status, she enters a toxic relationship founded on financial subjugation, in part because it turns her “stomach liquid with desire” (Peters 53), but also due to her only “having four hundred dollars in her bank account” (Peters 53). Despite Reese’s protests that while “Subjugation is fun in bed” (Peters 54) “Women don’t want those anywhere else, especially

not poor trans girls” (Peters 54), ultimately, she becomes reliant on Stanley. Firstly, this manifests itself as Stanley sending expensive gifts, followed by Stanley paying her rent “since their third week together” (Peters 56), leading to Reese moving “into his apartment with him” (Peters 56). Once Reese has moved into Stanley’s apartment, she realises that “she had lost not just the upper hand in this battle of a relationship, but all her other limbs as well” (Peters 57). This pattern seems to reoccur for Reese, as not long after meeting Amy, who becomes Reese’s girlfriend, Reese agrees to move into Amy’s apartment. While this relationship is not a toxic one, like Reese’s relationship with Stanley, an inequality still exists between Amy and Reese, as they belong to different parts of the class hierarchy. Amy, also known as Ames post detransition, represents the emerging trans middle class, “Reese didn’t bother to ask what Amy did. She already knew the equation: white young trans woman plus apartment right beside the park equaled job in tech” (74). In contrast to the previous two characters, Laura Jane Grace is not a protagonist, nor even a side character, she is merely mentioned in passing. She stands for the upper classes who are out of touch with their community. Laura Jane Grace is “the transgender lead singer of the punk band Against Me!” (Peters 220), Laura Jane Grace is not a fictional character created to illustrate a point within *Detransition, Baby*, but rather an actual person who did indeed release a memoir in 2016 entitled *Tranny* (Farber). Laura Jane Grace asserts that the name of the novel was inspired by her own feelings of “internalised transphobia” (Farber), yet Peters seems to view this more cynically suggesting that the motivation may in fact lie in the hope that one day “they can write *tranny* on the street themselves and, congratulate themselves on being so punk” (220). Laura Jane Grace experience's queer identity in a more detached fashion compared to the likes of Reese and Amy, this can be seen in how she names her memoir after a slur, despite her having “hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars” to protect her “from hearing someone say “tranny” to them on the street” (220).

Stone Butch Blues highlights the schism which occurred within the queer community between “an older generation of Stonewall-era activists/scholars working without much material or institutional support and the more privileged generation of [post Stonewall] lesbian and gay academics” (Morton 472). In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess – the protagonist – and her butch and femme contemporaries represent the pre-Stonewall cohort, with the post Stonewall generation represented by usually nameless characters such as the woman who Jess goes for coffee with (Feinberg 1). Morton has argued that this divide is merely derived from a “generational difference” (472). Within *Stone Butch Blues* it can be found that this is a factor: “Grant sighed bitterly ‘But some of these young kids you can’t even tell what they are— goddamn green hair and safety pins in their faces.’” (Feinberg 308). This complaint seems somewhat ironic, as it almost echoes the way in which butches like Grant were subjected to discrimination. Grant serves as an example of the imperfection of the earlier bar culture, through her racism and transphobia (Brown-Saracino 1019). Grant’s racism manifests itself through her actions which include “some terrible things about King being killed, about the riots” (Feinberg 134) and also getting into physical fights with characters of colour, such as Ed. However, it is important to note that a generational difference is not the root of the problem, Morton asserts that the problem is in fact a result of an economy in turmoil which has disrupted queer “solidarity along class lines” (472). In terms of queer identity class hierarchies can disrupt a sense of kinship and belonging. Much of the plot of *Stone Butch Blues* revolves around this, the older working class queer generation becoming excluded by the newer “university” (Feinberg 232) generation. Edna, an older femme woman, describes feeling othered from “the bar scene” (Feinberg 232), a previous safe space, if one ignores the regular police raids, as it had “changed” (232). This led her to attend “a dance on campus” (232), where “One of the women at the dance made fun of the butch” (232) she was with. This is a class issue, as it is widely known that people from a lower socio-economic background “gain access to higher

education at far lower rates” (Stephens et al. 67). It has been suggested that the class divide within the queer community stemmed from “the imperatives of reform capitalism combined with gender anxieties in middle communities to privilege middle class gay people and middle-class understandings of same-sex desire” (Valocchi 207). Due to their working-class status and their gender identity which does not conform to the approved middle-class norm “the old butches and femmes” (Feinberg 308) have been pushed “underground” (308) as they await “a time when it’s safer to come out” (308). This aligns with the view that the queer community does not experience oppression in an equal way (Morton 473). While middle class and upper-class members of the queer community still face discrimination, they experience it in a separate way to the working-class members. It has been documented that those who are both working class and queer are faced with a more difficult path to expressing their queer identity, as they are “less likely to be out, less able to find safety off the streets and more likely to be criminalised or sacked” (Morton 473) due to their queer identity.

It could be argued that the exclusion of the older queer generation in *Stone Butch Blues* from their previous safe spaces – the queer bars – is a form of gentrification. Gentrification can be defined as the procedure through which areas that previously had a low socioeconomic status are transformed into upmarket areas, thus displacing its previous working-class residents in the process (Burchiellaro 26). The older generation becomes excluded as there is no longer a place for them within society, as most of the butches worked in blue collar jobs, when the “plants” (274) closed they were pushed even further into poverty, as most were already living paycheck to paycheck. This along with the gentrification of their “blue-collar town” (274) by the “people from the suburbs” (274) buying their houses “dirt-cheap” (274) leaves the previous queer generation in a state of disrepair. As a result, the older generation are faced with the negative effects of gentrification “displacement, community conflict, loss of affordable housing, increased homelessness, industrial and commercial

displacement, loss of social diversity, and cultural displacement” (Finio 253). Queer identity becomes an issue of class when queer spaces cease to be accessible to all members of the community. As illustrated in *Stone Butch Blues* when the older generation of butches become excluded from the queer bars, they in turn become more withdrawn from the queer community. This in turn leads to increased feelings of depression and agoraphobia: “It’s getting too scary out there, Theresa. It feels like it’s getting worse. I hate to even go outside anymore” (Feinberg 151). This is a result of exclusion from Queer society and also society at large. The older generation have always been subject to discrimination due to their sexual orientation, but as the economic situation worsens, they face an increase in hate crimes. This can be seen in an interaction between the protagonist Jess and a man outside an employment office, “the dark-haired man hurled an empty pint bottle of rum at my feet. I fell backward, against the brick wall, startled. ‘You fucking he-shes. You stole our jobs,’ he shouted as I hurried away. I wondered who I could blame” (152). It has been found that during times of recession and economic uncertainty discrimination towards the queer community can increase (Mattei et al. 400). Queer spaces are vital to queer identity, it has been suggested that in the 20th century lesbian bars functioned as a space for “otherwise scattered, invisible” (Brown-Saracino 1025) individuals to gather and socialise. As seen in the previous example, without this vital space to congregate and feel accepted, individuals can become withdrawn. The idea has been put forward that the more integrated an individual is within a dense social collective “the more meaning and purpose” (Mueller et al. 2) the individual will feel towards their life. Without the protective factor of integration, the individual is at risk of suicide “resulting from isolation and a lack of collective belonging” (Mueller et al. 2), which is shown in *Stone Butch Blues* through the character of Ed who “shot herself—weeks ago” (Feinberg 191).

In *Stone Butch Blues* the class-based exclusion can at times appear rather ironic, this is exemplified in the interaction between Jess and the woman in the coffee shop. Taking this

particular character as an example we see the class-based exclusion at play within the queer community, despite talking about “Democratic politics” (Feinberg 1) and “problems with her co-op” (1), she is “opposed to rent control” (1) – “Small wonder—Daddy is a real estate developer” (1). *Detransition, Baby* also explores gentrification, but through a different lens, the lens of the gentrification of the queer identity. This is also at times depicted in a rather ironic manner – the first meeting of Katrina and Reese at the GLAAD awards. It could be argued that the decision to have these two characters first meeting “in the back of a Midtown hotel surrounded by bland carpeting and various attempts at gay branding” (Peters 164) is foreshadowing for the accusations of gentrifying the queer identity which Reese will direct at Katrina later in the novel. The GLAAD awards are depicted as a soulless façade, despite much of the speeches revolving around “how much everyone wants to see trans women allowed into public bathrooms” (168), “the money was not *for* trans people, it was to facilitate proper discussion *about* such topics as trans people” (168). The topic of the gentrification of the queer identity is also explored through the character of Katrina and her journey through a potential queer reimaging of the nuclear family. Reese questions Katrina’s intentions throughout and questions if Katrina is genuine in her newfound interest in the queer community, or if it is a post-divorce crisis. When Katrina comes out at the “doTERRA party” (Peters 291), Reese reads this interaction as Katrina thinking her newfound “queerness makes her *interesting*” (293). It could be argued that Reese’s opinion on Katrina’s queerness is somewhat cynical, but it also could be argued that Katrina is fetishizing queer identity. Her excitement “to not do the heteronormative thing” (293), and her “affinity for queerness, although because it wasn’t cut-and-dry gayness, she had never known what to call it” (294) can at times border on fixation. Reese’s intuition perhaps comes true when Katrina has “the most basic freak-out” (304) over the possibility that Reese might expose her and the baby to HIV. It could be suggested that Katrina has been influenced by “the gay lifestyle” (Morton 473) which is in fact not

representative of the queer community as a whole, but rather exclusively the middle class (473). Thus, when she is faced with that which has “been gentrified” (Peters 307), it breaks her fantasy of queerness.

In conclusion class is a necessary lens with which to examine the intricacies of the queer identity. Without examining class, one cannot truly understand the differences between the experiences of queer individuals in the differing classes. Queer identity is expressed and explored differently within the class hierarchy, this is particularly explored in *Detransition, Baby* as the reader is exposed to various examples of characters within differing class structures, whereas *Stone Butch Blues* mainly focuses on the working-class queer experience. In terms of the differing societal contexts in which both texts were written, it can be seen that while there have been significant improvements in the quality of life of queer individuals, class-based exclusion is still a pervasive issue. While the characters of *Detransition, Baby* live significantly safer and more secure lives than the characters of *Stone Butch Blues*, danger still remains. Ames is subject to a hate crime, despite his protective factor of his middle-class status. Reese ricochets from one unequal relationship to the next due to her low socio-economic status which places her in an unstable financial position. Ames faces exclusion from the queer community due to his decision to detransition, this exclusion echoes the exclusion of Jess in *Stone Butch Blues* for her decision to begin taking testosterone. Exclusion within the queer community is rooted in classism and gentrification, this in turn creates division which disrupts queer solidarity. Both *Stone Butch Blues* and *Detransition, Baby* put forward social critiques of the queer community, with *Stone Butch Blues* representing the Stonewall era and beyond, while *Detransition Baby* gives us a contemporary view. Both highlight the necessity for intersection in order to achieve solidarity, as both point out the discriminatory nature of gender based, class based and race-based exclusion.

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“All Her Attackers”: Spectating, Skating, and Subjective Media in *I, Tonya*

Leah Mulcahy

Louise Clancy Memorial Prize - Highly Recommended

Breaking the fourth wall is a theatrical technique in which a fictional work acknowledges its spectating audience and therefore its own fictionality. Schlütz et al. define the fourth wall and the breaking of it as follows:

the fictional scene is separated from reality by an imaginary wall demarcating two distinct worlds [...] When the viewer's presence (and thereby the character's own fictionality) is acknowledged, however, the wall is torn down and attention is drawn to the film as an artistic artefact (1-2).

The film *I, Tonya* breaks the fourth wall in a variety of different ways in order to evoke emotional responses from an audience of individual spectators. Schlütz et al.'s “fictional space” is referred to as the diegesis, including “settings, characters, sounds, and events” that exist “within the implied world of the story” (Pramaggiore and Wallis 67). Extradiegetic elements such as the spectating audience and real world are usually not acknowledged within diegetic narratives as this compromises the spectator's suspension of disbelief: the impression that what we are seeing is real or at least an accurate representation of reality (Balme 35).

Film that does not break the fourth wall privileges “narrative enjoyment over awareness of the artefact” (the film itself) because narrative enjoyment typically “derives from the fact that the spectator is too immersed in watching the film to acknowledge it as artefact” (Schlütz et al. 4). Film can break the fourth wall using methods such as direct address and intertextuality. Use of a frame narrative, or a story within a story, may also facilitate metafictional narratives. This may include a narrator who exists solely for the benefit of the extradiegetic audience. This

chapter, taken from a larger work, explores whether drawing attention to a text's metafictional status can contribute to narrative enjoyment and emotional persuasion in *I, Tonya*.

Craig Hight writes that the television mockumentary will:

rely on an audience's familiarity with the array of factual-based television forms, develop a commentary on these forms and the factual discourse they rely on, make intertextual reference to wider popular culture, and encourage identification with characters in the manner of more conventional fictional programming (105-106).

Craig Gillespie's *I, Tonya* profiles the turbulent personal life of figure skater Tonya Harding, leading up to and surpassing the 1994 Olympic scandal for which she is infamously known. Although a film, the work establishes itself as a mockumentary biopic, citing "irony free, wildly contradictory, totally true interviews with Tonya Harding and Jeff Gillooly" as its source of inspiration via intertitle (*I, Tonya* 0:40-0:46). The fictional narrative correlates with Hight's claim, oscillating between present-day testimonies via a supposed factual documentary mode and a cinematic mode that re-enacts key events from Harding's past. Together these modes criticise both the documentary and biopic form. The film urges the spectator to question the persuasive power of the film medium, "satirise a pressing social issue" and "poke fun at documentary filmmaking itself" (Pramaggiore and Wallis 288). *I, Tonya* utilises direct address and references to reality, while voiceover accompanies and contradicts onscreen scenes. Direct address involves character(s) looking and speaking directly to the camera and may cause the character(s) to exhibit an awareness of their own fictionality if the audience they address exists outside of the diegesis. *I, Tonya* addresses real world issues such as domestic violence and abuse, although sensationalism of graphic footage and dark comedy undermines this representation. Identification with Harding's character is reliant on both the documentary and cinematic film mode, surpassing fictional conventions. *I, Tonya* juxtaposes documentary

scenes with cinematic ones. The screen changes to a 1:1 aspect ratio when in documentary mode. The camera records interviewees statically in medium wide. Their names and relevance to Tonya are displayed in lower third text, mimicking television broadcasting and talking heads documentaries that “rely exclusively on interviews” (Pramaggiore and Wallis 283). Accompanying footage in this mode is faithful to documentary expectations: for example there is footage from Tonya’s childhood that is in poor quality as if recovered from a much older camera (1:09-1:12). Authentic presentation of the documentary mode shows how easily fiction can imitate reality—or in this case how a fictitious narrative can present itself as “totally true” through visual presentation alone. Tonya telling the camera that she’s “a real person” reinforces the ease in which the spectator can be deceived as only this line draws attention to the fact that she and the cast are not real, but actors impersonating the real interviewees (2:45-2:53). The spectator’s impression of Tonya is influenced by other characters’ opinions of her. This mirrors how perceptions of the real Harding are often predetermined by the extradiegetic media’s defamatory portrayal of her. Gillespie’s Tonya smokes, swears, and expresses pride in “growing up poor [and] being a redneck. Which is what I am” (2:57-3:04). Paulina Korzeniewska-Nowakowska remarks that the spectator’s ability to “sympathise with Tonya’s struggle” may conflict with a desire to “distance themselves from her crudeness”, yet depicting a crude Tonya conforms with the public’s expectations (69). Gillespie draws in those expecting a caricature of the real Harding to subvert said expectations and, ironically, question the media’s portrayal of real people.

I, Tonya urges sympathy through cinematic scenes that heavily contrast the documentary/ interview mode. The aspect ratio returns to that of the film screen, while the camera regains unlimited mobility. *I, Tonya* immerses the spectator in cinematic scenes before drawing attention to the film’s metafictional status. Metafictional post-production and special effects can “call attention to themselves as intermedial intrusions” and cause them to become

“object[s] of fascination by [themselves] rather than merely a means of communicating narrative content” (Jeffries 66). Tonya’s first day on the ice is interrupted by the disembodied voiceover of adult Tonya at the scene’s end: “six months later I win my first competition. I was four, okay? I mean, those bitches didn’t know what hit ‘em” (5:44-5:52). The adult Tonya interjects in order to emphasise the innocence of her younger self, urging the spectator to reconcile their opinion of the two.

Interactions between the two narrative modes undermines the documentary mode as it reveals its fictionality and role in serving cinematic stylisation. The documentary mode does not exist solely to provide biological context and frame the narrative. It tonally contrasts the cinematic mode and therefore aids in influencing the spectator’s emotional response. The modes appear to compete with one another, but this competition allows them to work in tandem. Visually graphic severity in the cinematic mode contradicts audible testimony from interview in order to provoke a charged response from the spectator:

Interview LaVona: To hear her tell it, I would operate on her daily without anaesthesia. Please. One fuckin’ time. I hit her one time with a hairbrush.

In-scene LaVona: [beating Tonya repeatedly with a hairbrush] You’re a terrible scum-suckin’ loser! (7:15-7:26).

The emotive response stems from present day LaVona’s supposed lack of accountability, a lack only alluded to from her silence as the cinematic scene takes place. *I, Tonya* draws attention to how framing an event can manipulate the spectator’s response to it.

As in the above examples, the film utilises visual violence and dark comedy. Wesley Lim notes the film’s “perpetual tension between building empathy and then abruptly disavowing the connection” (77). Empathy is built through visually graphic scenes, and then destabilised through dark humour. Tonya discloses her victimhood to withhold the spectator’s attention. She and the film itself utilise the public’s fascination with violence in order to force

a connection to Tonya's character. Tonya and Jeff argue in the car, the view too close to be mistaken for a diegetic perspective. He hits her. Voiceover becomes a startling direct address as Tonya affirms: "he started hitting me a few months in" (17:26-17:38). In the next scene a tracking shot moves slowly down the hallway, Tonya and Jeff only partially obscured by the open door. The camera enters the room and pans towards the couple. Tonya speaks candidly, disengaged from the diegesis, while Jeff remains unaware of her detachment and the camera's presence. She states: "My mom hits me. She loves me" (17:39-17:45). Her "upside-down position" paired with this wildly inaccurate assumption is both "comical and childlike" and comically tragic (Lim 83). The connection between spectator and diegesis is not disavowed here but pressed "eerily close" as Tonya holds the spectator accountable for their intrusion into her private life, making them "active, culpable figures" (Lim 85).

In other instances where Tonya imposes intimacy on the spectator the camera itself is resistant, mirroring the spectator's desire for distance. The camera must diligently follow the cinematic narrative but is not loyal to Tonya's particular testimony. When she recalls molestation by her stepbrother the camera corroborates, but when she follows up with having "Creepy Chris arrested earlier that day" she notably does not comment on the retaliatory beating she gives him onscreen (12:18-12:28). When Jeff says in-interview: "I never hit her [...] I'm actually a pretty meek guy. She hit me [...] fired a gun at me too" his narrative unfolds on-screen. The in-scene Tonya stops, turns directly to the camera, and says: "This is bullshit. I never did this," then reloads the gun (18:45-18:50). These instances question Tonya and Jeff's truthfulness but also the truthfulness of the camera. The spectator must question whether the narrative taking place is singular and objective or a plurality of perspectives.

Gillespie portrays Tonya "in a twofold role as victim and abuser", with the word 'fault' echoing eight times throughout the script (Korzeniewska-Nowakowska 71). She self-advocates

to the spectator but again the camera keeps the narrative in-check. After failing to complete the triple axel in the '92 Olympics Tonya cites her skate blade replacement as reason for her failure rather than her copious drinking two months earlier that is shown on screen (43:36-44:00). *I, Tonya* wants its subjects to be shown as unreliable, but not necessarily untruthful. The combination of the two narrative modes supports the possibility that each character believes their own description of events. It also emphasises each character's desire to be believed. Their means of persuasion draws attention to the film's fictionality, making it both more and less effective as the spectator engages their emotive and cognitive brain.

The film acknowledges its own utilisation of narrative and cinematic techniques. The immediate aftermath of Tonya and Jeff's divorce plays out in the cinematic mode with little interruption from the documentary mode or breaking the fourth wall. It uses choice cinematography, editing, and soundtrack. The film then undermines the dramatic effect this creates through a transition to LaVona in-interview, stating: "Well, my storyline is disappearing right now. What. The. Fuck" (50:00-50:05). The interruption highlights the fictionality of both scenes—divorce and interview—and the way in which the film utilises multiple narrative storylines to prompt particular emotional responses (dramatic, comedic, etc). The film also employs choice intertextuality to achieve this. Intertextuality is where the diegesis makes explicit or implicit reference to other fictional works. This can emphasise the fictionality of the diegesis but can also call attention to stereotypes or tropes employed by other fictional works and how the text chooses to interact with them. When training for the 1994 Olympics, Tonya's character enters a montage in which she references the film *Rocky* through direct address, arguably best known for its own training montage (52:47-52:53). Diane also breaks the fourth wall for the first and only time, informing the spectator that: "She actually did this... And this" (52:55-53:10). Reality is acknowledged as a brief aside, highlighting how

the film privileges creating an artistic artefact that utilises cinematic techniques over creating an accurate biopic of Harding's life.

The scene in which Jeff and Shawn plan to send death threats to Nancy Kerrigan is followed by a cinematic introduction to Stant and Smith (1:00:52-1:01:32). The intertitle "Shawn's Guys" that introduces them is redundant in comparison to the previous intertitles that have conveyed factual, biographical information to the audience, such as dates and locations. The film continues to appropriate the once-serious documentary mode to facilitate the cinematic narrative. The visual scene in which "Some people, honest to God, remember Tonya whacking Nancy herself" is purely speculative, as it is proven in reality that Harding did not carry out the physical attack (58:28-58:33). The cinematic Tonya turns to face the spectator with a bloody grin, violence and sensationalism taking precedence over fact. Jeff breaks the fourth wall mid-interrogation: "Tonya didn't know about the assault because there was never supposed to be an assault. Just letters" (1:03:24-1:03:33). The camera swivels around him as he maintains eye contact. While a faithful biopic should pay attention to fact and objectivity, above scenes show that in *I, Tonya*, the cinematic mockumentary employs as much metafictional referencing as it can the closer the film comes to portraying the actual real-life case. In this way the film conveys the impossibility of showing an actual true-to-life biopic.

Tonya herself completely dissolves the boundary between the diegesis and extradiegetic world through acknowledging her audience as extradiegetic, not one within the diegesis that the spectator happens to access:

I thought being famous was gonna be fun. I was loved. For a minute. Then I was hated. Then I was just a punchline, it was like I was being abused all over again. Except this time, it was by you. All of you. You're all my attackers, too. (1:32:04-1:32:46).

Acknowledgement of the spectator and the abuse they have allegedly committed solidifies the film's existence as an artistic artefact that dramatizes the Harding case rather than objectively reenacting it. Her address allows the spectator to "question and satirise the public version of her story shaped by the media [...] the many myths that have arisen over the years"(Korzeniewska-Nowakowska 70). Only through presenting itself as a documentary can *I, Tonya* deconstruct this public version and deconstruct the biopic form, revealing the ways in which said forms will never be objective but polluted by their own subjectivity. Ironically, in this way the film creates a more truthful portrayal of Harding than "objective" media ever has, as it is transparent with its inability to portray truth and transparent with its own manipulation of facts to prioritise entertainment:

There's no such thing as truth. I mean, it's bullshit. Everyone has their own truth. And life just does whatever the fuck it wants. That's the story of my life. And that's the fucking truth. (1:50:49-1:51:42).

The real Harding's skating routine and the real interviews that inspired the film play alongside the end credits, juxtaposing creator with subject and fiction with reality (1:52:32-1:55:01). Although subjects are dramatically and therefore subjectively portrayed, the film respects and acknowledges the real subjects that lie behind the artistic artefact, demonstrating, even at the end of the film's runtime, that reality can never be recreated, only imitated. In drawing awareness to a film's existence as an artistic artefact, the spectator's enjoyment of the text and engagement with it derives from an emotional and critical response simultaneously.

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“A Female-Centric Counternarrative”: Analysing Kelly Reichardt’s

***Certain Women* as a Post-Western**

Mia Power

The Patricia Coughlan Award - Joint Winner

In Western Studies, scholars often debate the meaning of the word “post-western”. To start, Jesús Ángel González questions the meaning of the prefix “post” in “post-western”, which I interpret as referring to “post-frontier” – the period from the closing of the frontier in the late nineteenth-century up to present day (52). If the post-western genre concerns itself with the post-frontier period, then it must ask the question, “What is the West now?” What is the West in the twenty-first century, long after the closing of the frontier? What defines the West now that the frontier myth and the ideal of Manifest Destiny no longer define it? These questions drive my definition of the post-western. To ask and answer these questions, a post-western can take the form of a counternarrative to the traditional western genre, thereby demonstrating what the West is now by focusing on the people who were historically marginalised by the genre, including women and Native Americans. Kelly Reichardt’s 2016 film *Certain Women* can be read as a post-western because it does exactly this: it provides a counternarrative to the western genre through its representation of women in the twenty-first century West. This essay will analyse how Reichardt rewrites the story of the West from one of hypermasculinity to one of sapphic desire. It will then examine how Reichardt creates a counternarrative to the western genre’s yearning for the frontier days through her representation of female yearning for connection and recognition, which she explores through the characters of Jamie and Gina.

Certain Women can be considered a post-western because of how it provides a counternarrative to the western genre through its central focus on female characters. This is in

contrast to the classical western, the tropes of which include “an individualistic male hero” and “domesticating the feminine” (González 55, Campbell 11). We find no male heroes in this film; we find no clear-cut heroes or villains at all, but simply women living their daily lives. The film gives back the voice of the narrative to women. The protagonists of the three stories are all women, whom the western genre generally sidelines. Neil Campbell remarks that the post-western’s status as “period and approach “in motion,” pushing against boundaries...make it a platform from which to examine changes in forms of representation” (6-7). The post- western is “in motion” because it constantly looks back at and reimagines the West and the western. Reichardt looks at and looks back at the West and reimagines and rewrites it from a female perspective. By centring women’s voices and stories, she writes back to the “individualistic male hero[es]” and female characters without agency who populated the western genre (González 55). Jamie’s story – that of a queer woman in the twenty-first century West – showcases Reichardt’s interest in creating a counternarrative through new forms of representation.

When adapting Maile Meloy’s short story “Travis, B.” as Jamie’s story in *Certain Women*, Reichardt decides to change the gender of the protagonist from male to female (“Spotlight”). This change is pivotal to the counternarrative Reichardt constructs through this story. It ensures that the focus of the film remains on women, but also facilitates an exploration of sapphic desire in this new West, a subject overlooked by traditional westerns. Due to the film’s minimal dialogue and exposition, as well as Jamie’s isolation – there are no conversations about her feelings nor grand declarations of love – the audience needs to pay close attention to understand that her queer desire drives this narrative. Reichardt subtly establishes Jamie’s attraction to and interest in Beth. She stays behind to speak to her after the first school law class, and offers to show her where the local diner is (*Certain Women* 1:01:46-1:01:53). In the first diner scene, Jamie does not eat, although the waitress and Beth both offer

her food. This establishes that she is there solely to spend time with Beth. The following scene reinforces this, wherein she leaves the diner, buys food in a nearby shop, and eats it in the car on the way home. These two scenes together suggest Jamie's burgeoning romantic interest in Beth, and thus, viewers begin to understand that Reichardt's female counternarrative centres a queer woman in the twenty-first century West. Jamie does not have much dialogue, especially relative to Beth, so what she does say carries importance. In this first diner scene, she tells Beth, "I'd show you if you could stay longer. [...] The ranch. The horses", even though Beth seems disinterested; she is looking at her phone, and then merely replies that she needs to get back home because she has work in the morning, barely registering Jamie's offer (1:04:35-1:04:50). Since Reichardt has spent time so far on showing Jamie caring for the horses, the audience understands that they are important to her, and therefore she must feel strongly for Beth if she offers to bring her into this meaningful, private world. Reichardt uses this audience understanding again later to further reinforce Jamie's romantic interest in Beth. By the time Jamie offers to give Beth a ride to the diner on her horse, Reichardt has shown us more scenes of Jamie caring for her horses day after day, highlighting how much effort she puts into looking after them. Therefore, this is a deliberate act of intimacy on Jamie's part. It can also be read as such because of how close Beth has to sit next to her on the horse so as not to fall off, which Reichardt conveys through her lingering shot on Jamie's smile as they travel (1:16:18-1:16:31). The week after this event, however, Beth quits her teaching job, framing her resignation as a rejection of Jamie, and leading to Jamie's final gesture of her interest in Beth, which adds to Reichardt's exploration of sapphic desire in the West.

In her final scene with Beth, Jamie's desires are thwarted. She drives four hours to Livingston to see Beth one final time, and, unable to find her when she arrives, sleeps in her car overnight in the hopes of finding her in the morning. Again, the time Reichardt has given to showing Jamie's daily routine pays off; Jamie puts her responsibilities on the ranch on hold

in order to convey her feelings to Beth. When the two women meet again, Jamie tries to verbally confess her affection for Beth in case her act of driving the long distance to see her is not clear enough. She tells her “I was sorry you stopped teaching the class. I looked forward to it. [...] I just knew that if I didn’t start driving, I wasn’t going to see you again. I didn’t want that” (1:30:00-1:30:40). By saying that she “looked forward to [the class]”, Jamie means that she looked forward to seeing and talking to Beth, since both we and Beth already know that Jamie has no knowledge of or interest in law. The closest Jamie comes to explicitly stating her romantic attraction to Beth is that she “didn’t want” to never see Beth again. The words left unsaid are the most important part of this speech. Viewers must ask themselves, if Jamie enjoys learning about law or Beth’s friendship, would she not have said as much? The fact that so much of what she means is subtextual implies that she intends to inform Beth of her attraction to her, but that she wants to be careful about it. Reichardt carefully constructs this scene to engage with an important aspect of queer desire, which I will now examine.

Jamie struggles to say exactly what she means and to ask for what she wants, partly because she is unsure of how it will be received. Thus, she says as much as she can about how she feels without making it explicit. If Beth reacts badly or is homophobic, Jamie can deny that it was intended as a confession of queer desire, thus protecting herself in an uncertain situation. This is Reichardt’s final reinforcement of the fact of Jamie’s queerness. Ironically, her omissions actually confirm her queer identity and desire. Ultimately, Beth does not respond at all; Jamie waits for her to speak, but leaves after a while when it becomes clear that Beth does not reciprocate her desires. It is left ambiguous as to whether or not Beth is queer, and Reichardt’s lack of engagement with this question suggests that it is irrelevant. Reichardt is interested in Jamie and her thwarted queer desire. Thus, through the character of Jamie, she creates a counternarrative to the western genre and its representations of an aggressive masculinity, with little space for women or queer men, and certainly not for queer women.

Reichardt's dedication to developing Jamie's story and investigating her queer desire displays her interest in constructing a post-western through representations of marginalised people.

This exploration of Jamie's thwarted queer desire also invites an understanding of the loneliness of queer desire, and of being a young queer woman in Montana. She has no one she can talk to about her feelings for Beth, no one to give her advice on how to proceed. She briefly mentions her family, but Reichardt decides not to show them, in order to reinforce Jamie's isolation and loneliness. The shot of her watching the cars drive in for the law class also serves to inform us of this (58:10-58:45). She watches them from a distance, on the outside looking in, alone while they are all near one another. Thus, the film places her in an outsider status, which it highlights in the subsequent scene. Jamie sits at the back of the class, separated from the other students. Her isolation is implied again when one of the other students explains, "We all know each other", while they are in focus in the foreground of the shot, and Jamie is out of focus in the background (59:36-59:38). Since she is out of focus, the film implies that Jamie is not important in this shot; she is not important because the other students are at the centre of this moment of the scene and they do not know or care about her. Reichardt underlines this point later, when Jamie admits, "I don't know anyone at all" (1:11:00-1:11:02). She does not know anyone, except for Beth, and that relationship is severed by the end of the film, leaving her isolated once again, as we watch her performing her tasks with only her dog and the radio for company (1:41:50-1:43:23). Jamie's loneliness and desire for connection factors into another aspect of Reichardt's counternarrative – these female characters' yearning for something more.

Campbell writes that a "curious mix of hope, yearning, and loss is intimately bound to the West and the Western as a type of haunting presence" (13). This "haunting presence" is what lives on in the West now, through *Certain Women's* characters. William R. Handley identifies "the yearning implicit in the myth of the frontier for a lost and ever-receding Eden",

thus associating a type of yearning with the frontier period, a time which the western genre often engages with (54). However, these women are not yearning for “Eden”, or for the lost ideals of Manifest Destiny. In its counternarrative to the western genre, *Certain Women* depicts the yearning of these female characters for something much less grand – for love, or respect, or connection to something greater than oneself. The film engages with this idea through its portrayal of Jamie’s loneliness, as analysed above. It suggests that the people of the West now are searching for something smaller than they were in the days of the frontier, but it is still beyond their grasp. The film explicitly engages with this idea through Ryan’s reference to “pioneer days” (38:32). This line suggests that the “pioneer days” are long gone, even though it is intended to draw parallels between those times and Gina’s own situation. Gina strikes out on her own, trying to get what she wants through her own hard work. The film also engages more ironically with the past trappings of the West. Jamie watches a TV programme that describes space as “[a] new frontier, just waiting to be explored”, implying that there is nothing left to be explored in the West anymore (56:58-57:02). What is left except this ghost of a yearning for something more, which lives on in these women?

The film’s counternarrative of female yearning in contrast to traditional male yearning in the western genre is most explicit in Gina’s story. Firstly, she yearns for a connection with the past; specifically, the West’s past, which Reichardt explores through her association with the Western landscape. The first time we see Gina, she walks through the woods by herself in the early morning, immediately connecting her to the landscape and her surroundings. We quickly learn that she is camping with her husband and daughter, in another visual connection to the landscape. Living outside, almost directly on the ground, is as close as Gina can get to the Montanan landscape. However, in the first few seconds of her story, we see her stamp out her cigarette and bury it in the ground (32:20-32:30). This suggests adding something new to

the land, bringing part of herself to it, but destructively, which calls into question her housebuilding mission later in the film.

Gina's desire to build a house using native Montanan sandstone drives her story forward. Guy Lodge proposes that this goal satirises "the opportunistic exploitation of tradition in the American heartland" (125). In one way, this is accurate. Gina tenuously convinces an elderly man, Albert, to give her his sandstone, and ultimately for free. Reichardt leaves this interaction open for interpretation. Did Gina take advantage of Albert and his fragile mental state and essentially steal his possession? Or did she negotiate with him fairly and happen to get what she wanted out of it – after all, she does offer to pay him for the materials, and he refuses (47:26-47:36; 48:54-48:58). I interpret Gina's longing for the native sandstone with which to build her house as a longing for a connection to the past, a way of bringing the West's past into its present. By building onto the land, she adds part of herself to it, and by using native sandstone, she connects herself to the landscape both past and present. Kate Stables describes "Gina's townie hunger for the original sandstone blocks that were once the frontier schoolhouse" as one of "the film's discreet echoes of north-western history", hinting at the way in which *Certain Women* engages with the past and present of the West through Gina's yearning to be connected to the past (74). In Gina's story, Reichardt constructs a counternarrative to the Western genre, one which centres female yearning. It tells the story of what the West is now through a female character's relationship to what it once was.

Gina's yearning also manifests itself as a yearning for respect and recognition. Reichardt uses dramatic irony to emphasise this yearning: the audience knows from the first section of the film that Gina's husband Ryan is having an affair with Laura, but Reichardt leaves it ambiguous as to whether or not Gina has any knowledge of this or even suspects it. Therefore, we have a greater understanding from the start of her story of how her search for respect is being frustrated, even by her husband. On their way to meet with Albert, Gina asks

Ryan to speak to him because he “trusts” Ryan, implying that Albert will listen to a man more readily than a woman (40:18-40:30). This later comes true. Ryan lacks the courage to ask Albert for what they want, forcing Gina to explicitly offer to buy the sandstone. Albert does not reply, but instead asks Ryan questions directly, looking only at him and not Gina. This establishes that Albert is not interested in responding to Gina, a woman, but will speak to her husband instead, who has been reading magazines rather than participating in the conversation. Albert disrespects Gina, and merely a few minutes later, so does Ryan. When he finally steps in to speak to Albert about the sandstone, he tells him, “You don’t have to sell it if you don’t want to. It’s just that Gina wants this new house to be *authentic*”, undermining her and her authority (49:00-49:07; original emphasis). By specifically stating that *Gina* wants the house to be “authentic”, Ryan implies that he does not share her feelings about it, and his emphasis on the word “authentic” suggests a belief that she is going too far in her quest for “authenticity”. Gina later directly questions Ryan about this betrayal, asserting that “you really weren’t helping me at all”, thus standing up for herself and implying that he is not giving her the respect she deserves (51:50-51:53). By the end of the section, Gina has made strides in her search for connection to the past and the landscape, but her search and yearning for respect and recognition within and without her family have been left unfulfilled, much like Jamie’s yearning. The fact that both women’s desires are left unfulfilled suggests a greater point that Reichardt is making – in this film and in the new West, the yearning of the western genre carries on, but in women rather than men.

In his book *Post-Westerns*, Campbell asks “How does cinema evoke the modern West once it has dispensed...with the mythic trappings and the historical locations that we associate with its most conventional representations?” (10). Reichardt engages with this question in her post-western film *Certain Women*. She “evoke[s] the modern West” by providing a counternarrative to the traditional western narrative. The film is set in the “modern

West”, twenty-first century Montana, long after the closing of the frontier. It engages with this idea of the “modern West” – which is crucial to the post-western – by centring a rancher, an archetype familiar to the western genre, but using this character to craft a female counternarrative. Reichardt’s rancher character is a queer woman, and she is the vessel for her exploration of queer (and specifically sapphic) desire in the contemporary West, writing back to the typical hypermasculine tales of the region. This counternarrative, through which Reichardt examines and evokes the “modern West”, also takes the form of an exploration of female yearning in the West. Typically, this idea of yearning in the West was associated with a longing for the lost frontier and ideal of Manifest Destiny; *Certain Women* instead associates it with the female longing for love and recognition. Ultimately, through the film’s engagement with the post-western genre, it concludes that one way of evoking the “modern West” is through a reclamation of it by women and queer women. The “modern West” belongs to them as much as the traditional West belonged to men.

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“The Evil That Men Do”: Patriarchal Violence and Incest in *Twin Peaks*

Mia Power

Louise Clancy Memorial Prize – Winner

One question defines David Lynch and Mark Frost’s TV series *Twin Peaks*: who killed Laura Palmer? In the Season Two episode “Lonely Souls”, Lynch and Frost reveal that Laura was killed by her father, Leland. This twist recontextualises the series of *Twin Peaks* so far and sets the tone for the remainder of the season, the prequel film, and the 2017 series. By reframing the mystery of Laura’s death and therefore the entire series around incest and patriarchal violence, Lynch and Frost highlight the importance of the concept of patriarchy to the story they want to tell. They represent patriarchy as a violent system by centring the story on the abuse and suffering Laura experiences at the hands of her father. This essay will explore how Lynch and Frost represent patriarchal violence in the series, focusing on their use of the double. I will analyse how the concept of the double informs the characters of Leland and Carrie Page, and how these characters embody the theme of patriarchal violence and its impact on its victim.

A useful framework for analysing *Twin Peaks* and its representation of patriarchal violence is Lenora Ledwon’s theory of the Television Gothic, defined as “utiliz[ing] familiar Gothic themes and devices such as incest, the grotesque, repetition, interpolated narration, haunted settings, mirrors, doubles, and supernatural occurrences” (260). Almost all of these tropes are present in Laura’s storyline alone, but this essay will focus on the series’ use of the theme of incest and the device of doubles. Ledwon later states that “[t]he domestic gone horribly wrong is the essence of the Television Gothic” (264). The tragedy at the heart of *Twin Peaks* centres around a domestic life that has been corrupted and perverted by the patriarch through his sexual abuse and eventual murder of his daughter. However, Lynch and Frost further complicate this tragedy using the character of BOB. BOB is a supernatural force and

manifestation of evil who comes from the Black Lodge, the otherworldly site of all evil in the world. He possesses Leland, and at first seems to be the one responsible for Laura's abuse and murder, rather than Leland himself.

Lynch and Frost frequently use doubles throughout *Twin Peaks*, which is one of the characteristics of the Television Gothic as defined by Ledwon (264). I will be using Lubomír Doležel's theory of the double in order to analyse Lynch and Frost's use thereof. Doležel defines three types, or themes, of double. The theme of the double features two versions of the same individual coexisting in the same world, which can manifest itself as "the same self...in two different bodies or two selves...in the same body" (Amer 141). This theme applies to Leland and BOB, who are represented throughout the series as two identities within the one body. Doležel's Orlando theme applies to texts that have "one and the same individual marked by the feature of personal identity, exist[ing] in two or more fictional worlds" (qtd. Amer 140). This is a useful theory for interpreting the character of Carrie Page, an identical version of Laura from another universe who may or may not actually be Laura. Both of these manifestations of the double in *Twin Peaks* are associated with Leland's patriarchal violence. Lynch and Frost use BOB, as Leland's double, to depict the conflict between Leland as Laura's father and as her abuser, while they use Carrie, as Laura's double, to illustrate the traumatising effect of this form of violence on its victim.

Lynch and Frost's use of Doležel's theme of the double to connect Leland and BOB complicates the revelation that Leland is Laura's abuser and murderer. From the moment they reveal that BOB is Leland, Lynch and Frost imply that Leland is conscious of his actions. For example, before he kills Laura's cousin Maddy, Leland looks in the mirror and first sees himself, then looks back and sees BOB ("Lonely Souls" 39:10-39:13; 39:19-39:24). Similarly, throughout the scene that follows, Maddy intermittently sees him as Leland and as BOB. Lynch and Frost's deliberate decision not to have this character present entirely as BOB when he kills

Maddy implies that Leland is in part aware of and responsible for his actions. Later, when Leland is caught by the police and BOB leaves his body, BOB forces him to “remember” what he has done (“Arbitrary Law” 34:58-35:00). The use of the word “remember” once again suggests that Leland was conscious and in control of his actions. As he dies, Leland calls out, “Oh God. Laura. I killed her” (39:31-39:35). This realisation and acknowledgment of his guilt demonstrates that Leland and BOB are one; their actions cannot be differentiated from one another. Randi Davenport et al. describe this scene as “closely resembl[ing] the incest survivor’s Utopian fantasy of the father’s confession of guilt” (257). Leland acknowledges responsibility for his violence against Laura, and also acknowledges its severity. Thus, Laura and her suffering are seen in their totality, including the painful truth of her father’s responsibility. Davenport et. al’s use of the word “Utopian” suggests that this scenario is unrealistic and perhaps impossible. Therefore, Lynch and Frost’s depiction of Leland’s acceptance of his guilt is intended to provide victims of gender-based violence with catharsis. While in reality, abusers will likely never acknowledge the harm they have caused, *Twin Peaks* creates a world wherein the abuse victim’s suffering is validated. This scene thus implies that Lynch and Frost’s intention in their portrayal of incest and patriarchal violence is to present and acknowledge the victim’s perspective. Moreover, in *Twin Peaks*’ representation of patriarchy, the text punishes the abusive father, in that he dies and in that he is forced to reckon with his crimes before he does. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me (FWWM)* features a similar confession of guilt from Leland to that in “Arbitrary Law”. As he kills Laura, he says, “I always thought you knew it was me”, taking responsibility for abusing her for four years rather than blaming it on BOB (2:03:05-2:03:07). Both of these admissions of guilt provide Laura, the victim, with some form of catharsis, if in “Arbitrary Law” she is indeed listening as Leland believes she is. Although *Twin Peaks* focuses on the search for Laura’s killer, it eventually returns to the core of this murder mystery: seeing and believing the pain of a victim of this

form of patriarchal violence. Throughout the series, Lynch and Frost attempt to balance a representation of domestic abuse that acknowledges its severity, with a representation of the victim's point of view. They portray Maddy's violent death on-screen, and reference horrific acts of sexual abuse through Laura's lines of dialogue, for example, "He's been having me since I was twelve" (*FWM* 44:22- 44:25). Meanwhile, they attempt a nuanced depiction of an incest victim's point of view, but such a depiction has its complexities and controversies. As a result of the traumatising abuse she suffers, Laura becomes addicted to cocaine and has sexual relationships with many men, including men much older than her. Laura Plummer cites this behaviour in her argument that "Laura Palmer is merely reactive; she has no agency. She is only punished" (309). Herein lies the difficulty in Lynch and Frost's representation of patriarchal violence: in attempting to demonstrate the effect of abuse on Laura through her behaviour, they open the series up to claims such as Plummer's, that Laura "is never removed from her representation as object of desire and violence" (310). However, even if Laura's behaviour and decisions are deemed socially unacceptable, they are her own; she has agency. Furthermore, *FWM* centres on Laura's perspective and gives her the subjectivity the original TV show denies her. It suggests that the audience's experience of BOB may be influenced by Laura's perception of him. Davenport et al. read the series's distinction between Leland and BOB as one made by Laura because of the trauma she suffers; they describe it as "the need to see a devil in the place of her father" (257). This reading is supported by a scene from the middle of *FWM*, wherein Laura discovers BOB's identity. She comes home to an empty house, then runs out once she finds BOB lurking there. She hides in the bushes nearby, and soon sees her father come out of the house. The link between the two is now undeniable to Laura, and she cries as the narrative she has created to protect herself from the truth is shattered.

Thus, *FWM* highlights what the original TV run sought to establish: Lynch and Frost double Leland and BOB in this way to explore the horrific nature of incest and domestic

violence. BOB is used to represent the horror of a father's sexual abuse and murder of his daughter. Since he is constructed throughout the show to be a manifestation of evil in the world, his part in these acts implies that they are among the most evil a person can commit. Laura's experience of BOB and Leland as two separate people for most of the duration of her father's abuse serves to represent the deeply traumatising and destructive nature of this form of violence. Robert Gordon Joseph writes that:

If the great reveal of *Twin Peaks* is that BOB is Leland, the great reveal of *FWWM* is that Leland is BOB, recontextualizing the demonic entity from an invading spirit to an embodiment of an evil already lurking within the patriarchy (9).

The abuse Laura suffers comes not from the outside world but from within the safety of her own home, from the patriarchal structure of family and from a father's abuse of his patriarchal power. At the end of this storyline, after Leland's death, Albert Rosenfield breaks BOB down to what he truly is, what he represents: "[t]he evil that men do" ("Arbitrary Law" 45:05-45:07). BOB represents the evil of sexual abuse and murder, and the power and capacity for evil granted to men by the system of patriarchy.

While Doležel's theme of the double can be applied to the connection Lynch and Frost draw between Leland and BOB, his Orlando theme may be useful in analysing the character of Carrie Page, her relationship to Laura, and her thematic purpose in the text. In "Part 18" of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, in an attempt to find Laura and save her from her death, Dale Cooper crosses over into an alternate universe and finds the house of a woman named Carrie Page. Carrie is identical to Laura, but she claims not to be her. However, there are hints throughout their conversation that she is connected to Laura. For example, to tell Dale that she is not Laura, Carrie says that he has "the wrong house", thus associating Laura's identity with a house (34:27-34:29). This recalls the Palmer house, the site of Laura's suffering and the destruction of her identity. However, when Dale mentions that Laura's father was Leland, Carrie shows no

signs of recognition, which is evidence of the fact that she is not actually Laura, but rather a separate individual who is merely physically identical to Laura. Her Southern accent also distinguishes her from Laura, who was from Washington. When Carrie invites Dale inside her house whilst she prepares to leave with him, he sees a dead man sitting in a chair with a bullet hole in his head. Carrie's dialogue earlier in the scene implies that she has killed him, which in turn suggests that male violence haunts Carrie's life as it does Laura's, although Carrie does not have to die to be free of it, as Laura does.

When Carrie and Dale travel to Twin Peaks and reach the Palmer house, an unfamiliar woman answers the door, who claims not to know of Laura's mother, Sarah Palmer. The idea that anyone could live in Twin Peaks and not know of the tragedy of the Palmer family, especially someone who lives in their house, is inconceivable, and therefore unsettling. When Carrie and Dale leave, Dale asks himself, "What year is this?", accepting that his attempt to find and save an alternate version of Laura has failed (54:00-54:02). His attempt to save Laura in "Part 17" also fails, after he travels back to 1989 to try to rewrite the story of her final night. In "Part 18", immediately after Dale wonders what year it is, he hears Sarah calling Laura from inside the house, as she did the morning after Laura's death, before she knew what had happened to her. Upon hearing this, Carrie begins to scream, and the lights burst inside the Palmer house, as her scream echoes and the screen fades to black. Hearing her mother's call for her, which signifies her death, causes Carrie to remember that she is Laura, or to become aware of Laura's suffering. In trying to save Laura, Dale in fact re-traumatizes her.

The implication that this is a different year, neither 1989 nor 2016, suggests that Laura's story is a cycle that she is forever trapped in because of the atrocity of Leland's violence. Even though the end of *FWWM* sees Laura finally free from her father in the Black Lodge, this ending to *Twin Peaks: The Return* asserts that she can never truly be safe. Thus, Lynch and Frost represent this form of patriarchal violence as so severe that it has scarred this character

and this universe. Dale's multiple failed attempts to help Laura suggest that it is futile to try to save her because her fate is inevitable; the damage from Leland's patriarchal violence has been done. The question of whether Carrie and Laura are an example of Doležel's Orlando theme of the double depends on one's interpretation of the character of Carrie, and whether one believes she is a version of Laura from another world who is missing her memories. Regardless, she serves to underline Lynch and Frost's exploration of the destructive nature of patriarchal abuse and violence. Leland's violence against Laura is so horrific and breaks so many boundaries that this woman, who is either an alternate version of Laura or a separate individual who is connected to Laura in several ways, can be deeply traumatised by a single signifier of her abuse and murder.

These two examples of Lynch and Frost's use of the double in the *Twin Peaks* series serve to illuminate their representation of patriarchy, specifically their representation of patriarchal abuse and violence. The doubling of Leland and BOB, as two identities in the one body, is used to represent the extreme horror of a father's acts of incest and violence. Since this doubling can be read as an attempt on Laura's part to protect herself from the devastating truth about her father, it can be seen to "giv[e] a face to the change that comes over someone engaged in this act [of domestic violence], the 'dual personality' so many accounts [of incest victims] refer to" (Bainbridge and Delaney 644). The doubling of Laura and Carrie illustrates the scarring effect of incest and abuse, in that these two characters are connected across time and space by the trauma of Leland's violence. Lynch and Frost attempt, through a medium of popular entertainment, to bring a hidden truth of everyday life into the spotlight. By engaging with what Ledwon calls the Television Gothic, by bringing a supernatural element to the deaths of Laura and Maddy, Lynch and Frost elevate their deaths and make them of cosmic importance. By insisting upon the importance of these young women's deaths, they challenge the normalisation of femicide in society. They represent the violence of patriarchy to

demonstrate that the lives of these young women, and their victimisation by the patriarchal system, matter.

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The Collective, Subjective Perspectives of Paula Meehan's Poetry

Luke Condon

Department of English Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year) - Highly

Recommended

Be it in her poetry or her public life, Paula Meehan has never shied away from her working-class roots. After spending much of her early life living in North Dublin, Meehan was inspired by a “working-class culture steeped in a rich oral tradition of storytelling and song” that fostered her creativity and was therefore an important factor in her later success as a poet (Randolph, “Text and Context” 7). With this in mind, it is no surprise that working-class themes pervade Paula Meehan’s work; her poetry is rife with the concepts of collectivity, equality and solidarity, ideas that are commonly associated with working-class literature. Although she was separated from members of her own community at a young age, Meehan continues to represent them through her writings, paving the way for other working-class poets to do the same.

However, Meehan’s approach to the depiction of working-class communities is unique in its focus on the subjective experiences of members of the working-class, including her own. By crafting representations of these individuals, both fictionalised and based in reality, and combining them with her own experiences, Meehan provides a platform for voices that are rarely afforded the opportunity to be heard and paints a picture of working-class communities from an intimate and personal perspective. This methodology can be seen clearly in Meehan’s 1984 poetry collection *Return and No Blame*, and is especially evident in the three poems “Voices That Persist”, “Intruders”, and “Chameleon”. Examining these works in this order, which is also the order in which they appear in *Return and No Blame*, reveals how Meehan unites her perspective with those of other individuals in order to represent working-class communities as a whole. “Voices That Persist” is one of the opening poems of *Return and No*

Blame. Its early placement in the collection is deliberate; the poem marks the beginning of a larger narrative within *Return and No Blame* that reflects an evolving view of working-class collectivity. The chronological setting of “Voices That Persist” can be traced to a similarly early part of Paula Meehan’s life, before “she witnessed the break-up of her community as inner-city tenements were cleared for development”; in other words, a period in which her original community still existed (Randolph, “Text and Context” 6). Accordingly, the poem is made up of four lively, distinct voices, known as “Barney the Butcher”, “Mick the Mouth”, “Joan the Moan”, and “Fat Aggie” (Meehan 9). The poem is presented in a dialogic form, which is typical of many working-class texts; Zandy believes that “what is crucial to retrieving and producing working-class culture is the [...] dialogic dimension of the process” (5). Phrases deriving from Irish working-class dialects are used: Joan the Moan’s claim that “the noise has craters / Dug in me poor old brain” is an example of this (Meehan 9). By creating a poem that is composed of working-class speech patterns, specifically those of the North Dublin area she grew up in, Meehan quickly establishes a sense of place for her poetry without explicitly locating it in a given area, allowing for the representation of her own working-class community as well as others. In addition, Meehan focuses on portraying the spoken words of her community in order to pay tribute to the “vital oral culture of [her] childhood”, replicating the anecdotal stories that bolstered her creativity as a youth (Randolph, “Body Politic” 240). Despite Meehan’s specialty in written poetry, she refuses to ignore the fact that “working-class literature has often taken oral forms”, incorporating aspects of her community’s traditional storytelling form into her work (Lauter 17). In the absence of any in-text response to the stories told in “Voices That Persist”, the reader of the poem is offered the opportunity to actively participate in this working-class storytelling culture, taking on the role of listener. Although the characters of “Voices That Persist” are notably characterised in negative ways – their nicknames, such as “Mouth” and “Moan”, are justified by the fact that each character

complains in some way – this does not indicate ill will towards the working-class (Meehan 9). Meehan has expressed that she does not want to “romanticise” her working-class past, which she considers “desperately hard times”, and this may have influenced the decision to construct the negative portrayals of “Voices that Persist” rather than positive ones (qtd. in Randolph, “Body Politic” 240). Furthermore, Boland writes that Meehan’s poems highlight “community, even while they [recognise] its flawed nature”, and this is exemplified by the characters of “Voices That Persist”; despite their grievances, they are still grouped together in the poem’s structure, inseparable as a community (Boland 18). The negative sentiments expressed by these characters also illustrate how working-class individuals are often reduced to stereotypes in order to delegitimise their causes for complaint. Despite the fact that the individuals in this poem are undoubtedly complex themselves, as all humans are, the only “voices that persist” are their complaints about their working-class lives (Meehan 9). For example, Mick the Mouth is unhappy with his labour, stating “It’s killing me to haul / The padlocks up and down, / Up and down the stairs”, and rightfully so; it is monotonous work, which is emphasised by the repetition of the phrase “up and down” (Meehan 9). This is an effort by Meehan to “reproduce the boredom of sameness, of mindless repetition, of humans acting as machinery” faced by many working-class individuals in their work (Christopher & Whitson 74). Barney the Butcher alludes to mismanagement by someone in a position of authority when he expresses his desire to “batter / The head of the bollix / That drew up the plan”; it has been written that “the working class aesthetic usually [...] involves a distrust of authority” (Meehan 9; Christopher & Whitson 75). Their grievances are legitimate, but it is unlikely that these characters will be taken seriously by either their own community or the rest of society; they are “confined to the margins, kept in their place, stuck in the dialogue”, like many other portrayals of working-class individuals in literature, defined only by their simple nicknames (qtd. in McGlynn 59). Joan the Moan and Fat Aggie suffer a similar fate; despite being justifiably unhappy about the issues

of noise pollution and local crime, the former is dismissed as a “Moan”, implying her problems are not worth discussion, and the latter is known only for her weight, a dehumanising and unfavourable moniker. This is reflective of a prevailing “toxic social stasis [...] where women were concerned”, exacerbated by their marginalised status as working-class women (Boland 20).

The usage of first-person pronouns in “Voices That Persist” is especially noteworthy in its implications. As working-class literature frequently “involves the interplay of three narrative voices: the personal ‘I’, the referential ‘They’, and the collective ‘We’”, this poem can be seen as a manifestation of the former; the poem’s speakers are concerned with their own problems, referring to themselves in the first-person (Zandy 4-5). However, this is not to say that they are selfish, or unconcerned with matters of their community, as these voices merely serve as an indicator that “rarely is the notion of human plurality immediately and unambiguously perceived as affirmative” (Poloczek 76). For Meehan to ignore this aspect of collectivity would be a disservice to the working-class community she grew up with; instead, these individuals are portrayed just as they were, rather than through a rose-tinted lens. This is backed up by the fact that “Voices That Persist” falls under under the larger heading of “Echoes” in *Return and No Blame*; such a title would imply that these voices are the reverberations of speech from the past, rather than the words of someone situated in the present day. Meehan understands that communities cannot always be depicted as a singular, cohesive unit, so she instead focuses on recreating the voices of a select few to represent the greater whole. The characters of “Voices That Persist”, despite their apparent individualism, confide in other members of their community in order to lessen the burden of their problems, and the usage of the words “I” and “me” serves to “remind the reader at every turn of that interdependence” (Meehan 9; Bolland 20). As the complaints of these individuals go unanswered by society at large, Meehan emphasises that they must draw comfort from the

knowledge that they are not alone in their struggle, demonstrating that “human plurality may be [...] the background upon which individuals can support themselves” (Poloczek 87).

The placement of “Intruders” in the larger collection of *Return and No Blame* once again takes on thematic significance; located roughly halfway through the text, it is far removed from the dynamic voices encountered in the previously analysed poem. As such, there is great distance, both physically and mentally, between the speaker in “Intruders” and their original working-class community. The poem’s setting is given in a direct fashion this time, as the speaker describes living on a “tiny island halfway to Iceland” (Meehan 36). Even here, hundreds of kilometres away from North Dublin, the focus remains on the speaker’s working-class origins, who spends time reminiscing on their past as “a young self / Sowing dreams on Gardiner Street / And not the holder on this small plot” (Meehan 36). This statement clearly shows the divide between the speaker’s current state, now a self-sufficient landowner on a remote island, and their past as a member of a vibrant working-class community. However, the poem soon takes on a wistful and even guilty tone, as the “difficult negotiations between individual and community” take hold in the speaker’s mind (Collins 83). The speaker’s thoughts go primarily to memories of other working-class individuals struggling, such as “an old man / On an older pavement cradling his bottle” and a woman who “pushes up Summerhill her battered pram / Heavy with her many years” (Meehan 36). Meehan’s manner of calling the suffering of these individuals to attention illustrates how “writing of working-class life [...] does tend to draw attention to social conditions”, which in Meehan’s case allows her “to be a voice for the voiceless” (Pierse 51). The speaker’s comparatively privileged current position leads to a sense of culpability; they feel judged by “the laughing eyes / The treacherous eyes, in Dublin’s blind windows”, and hear the “city’s million voices chiding” them (Meehan 38). This is a “representation of the price of upward mobility”, one of many crafted by working-

class writers who achieve success but feel as though they are abandoning their community (Christopher & Whitson 78).

Despite this degree of separation, Meehan remains careful to represent her past community accurately while also noting its flaws and triumphs, resulting in “specular commentary on Irish working-class life [that] is everywhere apparent in the poetry” (Pierse 52). The collective nature of working-class communities is emphasised, as the individuals in the speaker’s memory often come in groups; the “three old women beckon” together, the “boys appear by the dyke” as a group, and the “young ones / All abrash, bright eyed” are bound to each other with “arms linked” (Meehan 37). The latter description is especially crucial, as it highlights the importance of the physical, tangible connection with one’s community that the speaker lacks, as well as highlighting the positive camaraderie present amongst working-class youths. In addition to recalling the people of working-class communities, the speaker notes the similarly important locations of their youth, naming distinct areas such as “Finglas, Cabra, and Ballymun” (Meehan 37). As a writer commonly associated with the “poem of place”, Meehan often refers to the working-class areas in which she spent her childhood, explicitly naming them to make it clear she is not ashamed of their roots; if anything, she is ashamed of the perceived abandonment of these roots (Randolph “Text and Context” 11). The speaker continues in this fashion with a quip about the “shady stretches of a once Grand Canal”, employing the “ironic humour” that “is in fact a distinctive tone of proletarian class” to highlight the dereliction of this area (Meehan 37; qtd. in Dentith 69). Quick to clarify that the decline of this inner-city area is not the fault of its inhabitants, the speaker explains that the previously mentioned group of boys are only “lobbing stones” due to the “country merchants / That hold their ma’s to ransom”, invoking “the spectres of social discontent, of class war” (Meehan 37; Pierse 51). By correctly identifying the petty-bourgeoisie as the guilty party, the speaker shows that their loyalties still lie with the working-class, even if the speaker has now

“learn[ed] to pass as middle class” (qtd. in Randolph “Body Politic” 258). The speaker understands that they are still, at least in spirit, a member of the working-class, although this is not enough to quell the survivor’s guilt of escaping impoverished conditions.

If “Voices That Persist” is most closely associated with the narrative voice of the “personal ‘I’”, “Intruders” can be seen as representative of the “referential ‘they’” (Zandy 5). As this poem also makes use of first-person pronouns this may initially seem contradictory; however, it is important to note that Meehan has remarked that she does not “use a trustworthy *I* in the poetry”, and went on to say, “I’m playing all the time with *I* because I don’t have an identity” (qtd. in Collins 81). The speaker provides us with their first-person narrative voice here, but they are merely acting as a conduit for the memories of their working-class fellows – the “Intruders” in the speaker’s mind, and the true subject matter of the poem. In their inner landscape the speaker only observes as the young members of this working-class community “chatter / Through the tumbled stones” and “slip giggling into / The warm clasp of vodka and sweet Whispered promises” (Meehan 37). The speaker cannot participate in these important communal rituals, even in a daydream, due to the extent of the alienation that is now felt; their original community has become “other”, or “they”. By shifting the attention away from the speaker, who shares much in common with her, Meehan avoids the “isolated or romanticised individualism” that is common to middle-class autobiographical writing and instead “recall[s] the fragile filaments and necessary bonds of human relation”, perhaps unconsciously proving that she is not so far removed from her original community as she believes (Zandy 5). Of course, the “referential ‘they’” can also be associated with the middle to upper classes, who are often invoked in working-class poetry to illustrate the unfair gap between the working-class and wealthier groups of society (Zandy 5). This technique is also used in “Intruders”; the speaker refers to the “corporation’s pittance” of peat that working-class people use to keep their home warm, implying that their employers – most likely members of

the middle class – are not providing them with enough payment to survive (Meehan 37). Additionally, “juvenile delinquents’ crimes are [...] equated with those of merchants”, highlighting the hypocrisy of the middle and upper classes who point the finger at the working-class for crime (Pierse 51).

In “Chameleon”, the final poem of *Return and No Blame*, this divide between classes only becomes more pronounced. “Chameleon” features a speaker who seems to have reconciled with their working-class identity, and is capable of identifying the ways in which they relate to other working-class individuals, and how they differ from members of the middle-class. The poem’s placement as the concluding words of the collection indicates that these findings are also final, as the speaker prepares to fully shed the middle-class “camouflage” they have adopted, just as a “Chameleon” sheds its skin (Meehan 62). It can be assumed that the speaker is, once again, not physically present in Dublin; they make reference to named locations in Greece, such as “the Plaka” and “Acropolis”, as well as areas closer to home such as “Claddaghduff”, still in Ireland but far from Dublin, and finally the “Project”, a term that is often used to describe low-income, inner-city areas (Meehan 62). This variance of widely spread working-class locales is important, as it demonstrates “the possibility of continuity within humanity based on common experiences and the relationship of human beings to one another across time and space” (Villar-Argáiz 181). The speaker has come to understand that class solidarity extends further than the working-class community that they grew up in; it is a universal concept that reaches beyond any city or country. In this way, Meehan reiterates that her poems represent all members of the working-class, not just those from North Dublin.

Once again, working-class experiences are brought to the forefront in this poem, as the speaker retells a number of incidents that they associate with being working-class. In Greece, the speaker talks about “Answering the nice Englishman’s / Query about the Acropolis / With a shrug”, not cooperating with this undoubtedly middle-class tourist that condescends to them

(Meehan 62). In New York, the speaker states “Not one mugger got me”, understanding the importance of looking out for oneself as a member of the working-class, due to the unfortunate reality that “the law, court systems, and bureaucracies don’t do as much for working-class people as they do for middle-class people” (Meehan 62; Christopher & Whitson 75). Meehan also provides accounts of working-class individuals engaging in academic activities, such as “Going on about Grotowski”, a theatre director, and “striding / Towards Patterson Hall, to catch / A class in contemporary literature” (Meehan 62- 63). This implies that the speaker has acquired a newfound hope for the future of working-class academics, who may overcome disadvantages stemming from a history in which “many women, and especially those of working-class origins, were cut off from academic traditions and academic forms” (Lauter 20). After going through these experiences, the speaker expresses their complete lack of connection to the middle-class “woman / With the camera and the large map”; unlike this person, the speaker has first-hand experience with the mentioned areas and can serve independently as their own guide (Meehan 62). Compared to the notably uncertain speaker of “Intruders”, this voice is markedly more assertive, possibly due to the confidence gained from seeing other working-class individuals thriving.

In “Chameleon”, Meehan employs the usage of first-person pronouns once more, but she again uses the subjective experiences of others as a means of expressing her working-class identity while also representing others. Villar-Argáiz argues that the poem is Meehan’s way of addressing “through a series of parallelisms, the many multiple identities she acquires in her life”, but it must also be noted that these “parallelisms” are thoughtful representations of working-class individuals in their own right, and not just vehicles for metaphor (191). The individuals described in the poem, who each prompt the speaker into thinking “that was me”, do not merely represent the speaker’s past selves; they are a new generation of working-class youth that the speaker identifies with (Meehan 62). Seeing them allows the speaker to recognise

that, despite being separated from their own working-class community, they are still surrounded by working-class people everywhere they go. As a result, the speaker realises it is futile to continue pretending to be disconnected from their working-class origins, admitting that “This veteran could teach you all / You need to know about camouflage” but acknowledging that embracing the alternative by accepting their working-class identity will allow them to “turn golden” and “shine” (Meehan 62). In this way, “Chameleon” concludes *Return and No Blame*’s commentary on working-class collectivity by making it clear that, as Poloczec writes, “the role of [...] community is to prevent the individual from alienation from the world and herself” (83). Therefore, the pronoun best suited to describe “Chameleon” is the “collective ‘we’”, despite the usage of a first-person narrative voice, as the poem marks the occasion of reconciliation and identification with one’s working-class fellows, accepting that collective identity over any individualistic one (Zandy 5).

Together, these three poems encapsulate the value of using subjective perspectives in order to represent working-class communities. “Voices That Persist” makes use of a cast of independent characters to bring working-class struggles to light; “Intruders” describes working-class life from the troubled perspective of an individual who no longer considers themselves to be a part of it, highlighting the need for working-class collectivity in order to cope with and overcome unfair societal conditions; “Chameleon” displays how the bonds formed in working-class communities can endure even after said communities have been split up by highlighting the similarities between different working-class perspectives. All three poems feature a first-person narrative voice, but none of the perspectives offered are self-centred, with the focus always remaining on the struggles of the collective rather than any singular individual.

Meehan’s work demonstrates that the feeling of working-class collectivity is not necessarily limited to those who currently reside in working-class areas, or those who enjoy

active relationships with other members of the working-class, but can extend to any individual who regards the cause of the working-class as their own. In *Return and No Blame*, there is no greater pain than that which arises due to isolation from one's working-class roots, but the overarching themes of the collection – and especially the three poems examined – point towards the idea that working-class experience transcends the present moment.

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“A Brand Stamped in Blood”: Dostoevskian Guilt and Christ-like

Redemption in Bernard MacLaverty’s *Cal*

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Recommended

When Cal McCluskey learns that he has aided in widowing his new librarian, Marcella, he decides that “in some way, he didn’t know how, he would have to make it up to her” (MacLaverty 16). What follows is an agonising struggle in which Cal is weighed down by his guilt, irate with self-loathing, searching for a path to redemption. Surrounded by images of sacrifice and religion, Cal becomes a Christ-like figure, bearing his cross as he approaches an inevitable crucifixion. Cal’s sense of redemption is warped, for he is certain that he deserves to suffer, leading to a mortification motif that is prevalent in the novel. Cal wonders if he could restart as a good man to Marcella, leaving the past behind them. This is one of numerous plot parallels between *Cal* and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, which also happens to be the book Cal picks to borrow from the library, hoping to impress Marcella with a “highly intellectual” choice (81, 119). In comparing Cal to Raskolnikov, two characters overcome with guilt, the concept of a split personality emerges. Cal’s conscience, in a constant state of war, tears itself apart, and I argue that he is unable to redeem himself while in this divided state.

Catholicism heavily inspires the theme of guilt in *Cal*. Despite his lack of devotion to his religion, Cal “seeks... forgiveness by imitating the Catholic models and rituals he learned as a boy, fixating particularly on images and practices of redemption and atonement” (Davis 83). Such images include the crucifixion, which appears several times throughout

MacLaverty's novel. When Cal is finally apprehended "as if he expected it", he is arrested while wearing "a dead man's Y-fronts" (*Cal* 170). The Y shape is reminiscent of the cross, and as well as this, Cal is captured in his underwear, much like Christ's near-naked state upon his own death. In his suffering, Cal begins to resemble Christ. When blackberry-picking, he pushes through a bush of brambles as if to put on Christ's crown of thorns (114). In his essay on the character names in *Cal*, David Piwinski notes the significance of Cal's surname (42). In the original publication, Cal's name was McCrystal, not McCluskey. Piwinski recognises the 'Christ' in his name and argues that there was no coincidence in MacLaverty's naming of his protagonist. From his Catholic upbringing, Cal is certain that he must suffer in order to atone for his sins and that he can "stop this barrage of bloodshed by imitating Christ and offering his own body in self-sacrificial suffering" (Davis 88).

As well as the Catholic images that inspire Cal's Christ-like state, the artworks and religious anecdotes presented to Cal deepen his guilt. *The Crucifixion* by Matthias Grünewald evokes terror in Cal. The painting was included as a panel of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* at the Monastery of St. Anthony. At the time of the painting's completion, the Monastery hospitalised patients with ergotism, an agonising skin disease. Evidently, Grünewald's depiction of Jesus is inspired by said disease. In the novel, Marcella is deeply moved by the painting, and shows it to Cal. He is struck by the details of the painting: "the hands... like nailed starfish; the body... pulled to the shape of an egg-timer... the mouth open and gasping for breath" (169). The abstract similes in Cal's reception of the painting exemplify the overwhelming effect the image has on his conscience. Cal recognises himself on the cross and "greatly anticipates having his own body become something like Grünewald's Christ and suffering for what he has done" (Russell 120). To him, the painting is a mirror image. With this in mind, Christ's hands are highly significant. In the position that Marcella holds up the painting, sitting naked on the floor

with the painting below her breasts, it appears that Christ's (or Cal's) hands reach for them, his fingers stretched and agonised. Now Cal's crucifixion is no longer a punishment for his role in the murder of Robert Morton but a damnation for his sexual pursuit of Marcella, Morton's wife. The pain Cal suffers from his lust for Marcella is self-inflicted, and he cannot separate sex from self-mutilation (Davis 92). Cal feels the nails in his palms as he reaches for Marcella, his guilt dragging him further and further down in self-loathing. Considering that the painting, initially mentioned by Marcella, is finally revealed on the novel's penultimate page, I conclude that the image is the final straw for Cal: his guilt catches up with him, and he doubtfully asks, "Could he *ever* tell her the truth?" (170).

Cal attempts to combat his guilt with mortification, which he believes will lead him towards redemption. When he attends mass at Magherafelt, he listens to Fr. Brolley's story of Matt Talbot, who wore chains around his waist, so tight and worn so long that they couldn't be removed from "the mortified flesh of his body" (39). Although Cal does not come to inflict self-harm, he puts himself through other means of mortification. While unemployed, Cal subjects himself to solitary confinement. J. Cameron Moore writes that "Cal's existence is characterised by inactivity and sleeplessness" (32). Cal spends only one week working at the abattoir before applying for social welfare. Though it is understandable that he cannot stomach the slaughter, Cal makes little to no effort to acquire a new job and wanders aimlessly through unemployment. Moore continues to note that during what Cal considers "'the longest week of his life', [he] sits at home listening to records, stealing glances at Marcella in the library, and dreading a call from Crilly" (32). Plagued by insomnia, Cal subjects himself to torturous idleness. The mortification only worsens as the plot continues. When Cal is left homeless after his house is burned down, he seeks refuge in a cottage on Morton's farm. There, he recalls Matt Talbot, and compares himself to a monk in a cell, "not only deprived of light and comfort but...

deprived of God” (MacLaverty 92). Cal is without faith, and so he does not suffer for the love of God. However, he asks of Talbot, “What if he had suffered for another person?” Obviously, Cal thinks of Marcella. Being so near her causes his suffering, but also feeds his sexual desire. This is made clear on the night when he watches Marcella undress. Cal suffers in the cottage, hungry and filthy, as a method of mortification. But his perversion undermines this mortification, as he guiltily observes Marcella, no longer someone he ‘suffers for’, but more a subject of his sexual gratification. Cal’s shameful masturbation ruins any sort of redeeming mortification he was hoping to achieve by isolating himself in the cottage.

Cal is tortured by his own guilt, but although he badly desires forgiveness and atonement, he struggles to redeem himself. Focusing his path to redemption on his tragic, deceitful relationship with Marcella, his only other close relationship is neglected: that between him and his father, Shamie. Shamie becomes increasingly anxious as the plot unfolds, and Cal tells him almost nothing of his moral torment. Cal believes that he cannot speak to his father about his guilt, for he retains unbreakable values of ‘good and evil’, which one critic has related to Shamie’s interest in movies, stating that “Westerns [reinforce] a comforting naiveté in Shamie.” (Makowsky 39). Cal knows that Shamie feels safe with this naiveté, and he doesn’t want to “disillusion him” with the truth of his crime (MacLaverty 32). Shamie asks Cal, “You would tell me if you were in any trouble, wouldn’t you?” (88). But Cal never attempts to confess to his father, leaving him with the empty promise that he will tell him “someday”. By withholding information from his father, he only allows him to grow into a shaking, nervous wreck, worrying about the extent of the “trouble” his son is in. As well as this, Shamie’s character arc is left unresolved. He adopts Cal’s habit of idleness, partnered with incessant smoking (135). Had Cal confessed to his father, he may have lifted a weight off of both their shoulders, and Cal may have been able to repent of his crimes with his father’s support. Cal is

left to solve his problems in his own head.

As I have mentioned, Cal suffers from insomnia for most of the novel. Once he begins work on the farm, however, he is no longer restless. When he and Shamie use a chainsaw to cut wood, Cal takes “comfort in the noise” of the machine, despite its raucous and violent nature (46). Once Cal can sleep, he begins to dream, and dreaming becomes an important aspect of his mentality. In one dream, a train hits a man, and jets of blood fly onto a toga-clad crowd. Marcella stands in the crowd and watches. This dream symbolises Cal’s feeling of powerlessness against the violence of ‘the Troubles’, and yet he feels responsible for Marcella’s exposure to bloodshed. The dream terrifies Cal and urges him to seek redemption. When he sees Marcella the next night, he wants “to put his arms round her, to apologise to her” (119). The dream scene is followed by the second of the novel’s two mentions of *Crime and Punishment*. Dreams also play a significant role in Dostoevsky’s novel. One dream in particular bears quite a few similarities to Cal’s dream. While Raskolnikov contemplates committing murder, he dreams of a childhood memory in which an old horse is flogged to death on the street by her drunken owner, Mikolka, and his friends. Both dreams include the colour red, a sign of danger and violence. In Cal’s dream, red is in the bloodstained togas, and for Raskolnikov, it is found in the dress and complexion of the “red-cheeked peasant woman... cracking nuts and just smiling to herself” (Dostoevsky 75). In both dreams, Cal and the young Raskolnikov are witnesses to extreme violence, which they cannot stop. Dreams in *Crime and Punishment* are “the fullest expressions of potentiality”, and this is also true for *Cal* when discussing guilt (Uwasomba 293). While Cal is guilty of lying to Marcella, Raskolnikov is ashamed to learn that his adult self is not so separated from Mikolka’s behaviour.

MacLaverty’s influence from Dostoevsky’s novel is distinct in the comparison between Cal and Raskolnikov’s characters. They are both tormented by feelings of guilt, and

they both try to redeem themselves while avoiding true justice by turning themselves in. However, it is evident that Cal does not reach a level of redemption close to Raskolnikov. The elementary moral of *Crime and Punishment* is that true redemption can only be achieved through full confession and repentance. Raskolnikov's guilt, he realises, isolates him from the rest of society, as he senses when summoned to the police station: "If this room had been filled not with policemen but with his best friends, he would not have found one human word for them, so empty had his heart suddenly become" (Dostoevsky 121-122). Cal is similar in this regard, as he feels apart from those he would otherwise be close with, such as Shamie. Cal and Raskolnikov fall in love with women directly connected to their victims, and become involved in these women's families. In Cal's case, however, there is a much darker detail: he endeavours to replace the man he partook in murdering, becoming a sexual partner for Marcella. Sonya was a friend of Lisaveta, one of Raskolnikov's victims, but their relationship was not nearly as significant as that between Marcella and Robert. Although Cal's blossoming relationship isn't necessarily a bad thing, it "is based on deception and at least partially motivated by his desire to suffer in penance for his crime" (Moore 34). This is not the same for Raskolnikov. He becomes involved with the Marmeladov family after their father is knocked down by a carriage. His motive is not to seduce his victim's friend. In the epilogue, Raskolnikov is imprisoned. But, throwing himself at her feet, he mends his relationship with Sonya (Dostoevsky 557). While Cal squats in the Morton cottage, he remembers Fr. Brolley's lesson that to sin was to betray God: "You realised your sinfulness and remained outside" (MacLavery 101). But Cal never confesses his sin, and like a barrier, it keeps him "outside" (Davis 90). Cal's story ends quite abruptly, but considering his plethora of lies to Marcella, it is highly unlikely that she will visit him in prison as Sonya does for Raskolnikov, leaving him unredeemed to her.

Cal's heavy guilt and underwhelming attempts to redeem himself create a dispute

between his inner monologue and his social behaviour. He considers himself morally worthless, and yet he tries to keep his integrity in appearance. This, with his parallel with Raskolnikov in mind, creates a split personality in Cal while he deals with his guilt and redemption. As in Dostoevsky's novel, the psychological drama of *Cal* is "expressed in terms of a conflict between opposite poles of... spirit and mind, passiveness and aggressiveness, self-sacrifice and self-assertion" (Beebe 151). Cal is a contradictory character. He desires "the one woman in the world who [is] forbidden him" (102). Cal attempts to establish a relationship under the guise of redemption, with his guilt throbbing in his head as he becomes romantically inclined towards Marcella. There are numerous images and techniques in *Cal* to suggest the protagonist's duality. There is, of course, the use of interior monologue, no doubt borrowed from Dostoevsky, which "reveals the soul that is divided and a split personality... a questioning device that amounts to an easy way of bringing to the fore, the psychological state of a character" (Uwasomba 294). For Cal, much of this interior monologue is in pidgin French. Cal constantly curses himself for his actions. Splatters of '*merde*' and '*crotte de chien*' accompany many of Cal's embarrassing or shameful moments. The use of French implies that a different voice scolds Cal, not his own. Another image that suggests a split personality is found on Cal's hands. On his right hand, Cal keeps his fingernails long for picking guitar strings, while his left has short nails and callous fingertips to keep the strings pressed on the fretboard. The right hand symbolises Cal's idleness and, therefore, his guilt. The left hand, better suited for work, symbolises Cal's urge to act and redeem himself. When he begins work at Morton's farm, he cuts his nails, a sign to the reader that Cal may use this opportunity to confess to Marcella and redeem himself. And yet, this is not the case. Cal continues to berate himself in French and never truly unifies his personality to accept his guilt and restore integrity.

Although Cal has the intention of redeeming himself for Marcella, his actions are all

too little, too late. Though he calls the library when a bomb is planted inside it, “turning informer”, he does so anonymously, knowing it is not enough to redeem himself. It is certain that he saves the library for Marcella, but she will never know this, she will only know that Cal lied to her, and took advantage of her emotional vulnerability. Cal’s comparison to Christ is often supported by Cal himself, fuelled by self-pity about his guilt, and the difficult challenge of redemption. His likeness to Raskolnikov could also be self-imposed, as he claims to have seen two episodes of a *Crime and Punishment* TV adaptation. Cal allows his guilt to consume him, resulting in idle dread and insomnia. When the opportunities to act arise, Cal fails every time, for he cannot face what he has done, nor can he accept the consequences of his crimes. When arrested, he is glad that he can accept a beating, rather than give Marcella a direct and honest confession.

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Medbh McGuckian and the Curious Case of Arranging Words

Fionn O'Mahony

The Patricia Coughlan Award - Highly Recommended

Medbh McGuckian carefully selects segments of existing literature and rearranges the sentences to convey her own meanings and evoke emotions. Or perhaps she chooses these works at random to create her own poetic anagram for the sake of it? It is possible that McGuckian's alignment of words, or her "plastic use of English", as she calls it in an interview with John Hobbs, is her unique way of displaying personal themes (113). Regardless of purpose and meaning, the poet boasts an extremely innovative and idiosyncratic style. It is quite fitting that Nessa O'Mahony makes a comparison between the poet's works and the paintings of Russian abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky, stating that, after seeing his work in the Tate Modern, "the response [...] was visceral rather than intellectual", and that "The experience of reading Medbh McGuckian's poetry can be somewhat like that" (12). As Kandinsky distances his art from simply recapturing images of people and instead deals in a form of abstraction, McGuckian distances hers by refusing to abide by traditional poetic structures and absorbing her poems of any definite meaning. Instead of mining McGuckian's work for answers that may not necessarily be embedded in them, it is perhaps more worthwhile to focus on the mood that her poems cultivate.

This vagueness is not strictly limited to artworks, as it is also something that exists in philosophy. Susan Porter applies the writings of contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida to the poet's work, particularly his idea of dissemination in relation to meaning. Porter writes that, "Derrida's disseminated meaning and refusal to come 'to the point' arise from his desire to escape two kinds of authoritative determination of meaning", one of which is

“conclusions of binary [or] either / or logic” (96). Similarly, McGuckian also refuses to conform to definite meanings that could be applied to her work. Consider her poem “The Soil-Map”, which opens with the line, “I am not a woman’s man” (1), yet the “I” mentioned is not the poet herself. The binary between I and oneself is shattered. The word no longer conforms to its original definition. McGuckian toys with the binary of masculine and feminine throughout the poem, stating that, “because the mind / of a woman between two men is lighter / than a spark” (4-6). The dichotomy of male and female is mentioned here, as it is also mentioned in the opening line, showing tension between the two and alluding to this gendered binary. Yet, as there is essentially no point to arrive to, it escapes definite meaning. Woven throughout the poem are domestic terms, such as “two-leaf door”, “steps to your porch”, “fenestration”, and “slender purlins” (1-10). Returning to Porter’s writing on McGuckian and Derrida, this loose connection of terms correlates with the philosopher’s theory on dissemination, as “The unit of coherence here is not necessarily the sentence, the word, the paragraph, or even the essay”, but instead the threads that “are woven through the bindings of grammar” (Johnson quoted by Porter 95). A fecundity of household imagery is present throughout “The Soil-Map”, yet it is only loosely connected through sporadic terms and phrases, which aids the poet as she “refuses in one sense to ‘come to a point’” (Porter 96). A homely mood is crafted and presented to readers, *sans* definite meaning. Of course, this does not prevent readers from applying their own interpretations to the poem. It simply makes any certainty redundant and creates a space for speculation.

In keeping with the theme of the household, “Partly Dedicated to a House” presents us with more disseminated meaning through domestic imagery. Melancholy runs through the poem, particularly when McGuckian describes the features of the house and the accompanying farmyard. As Adam Hanna writes,

The houses McGuckian writes about are often far from settled or stable: rather, they are living, breathing and vibrant. They are capable of feeling contentment, of suffering from sleeplessness and of taking offence; in her poems they swell, dance, threaten to collapse, sicken and heal (115).

The “farmyard” that she mentions is “Swept clean and hungrier” (12-13), the “window” has a “glance all blue / And despairing” (1-2). Buildings are not just lifeless structures in the poem, but emotive objects that McGuckian breathes life into with her arrangement of words. In this case, the “farmyard” and “window” are riddled with hunger and full of despair. Instead of simply lying dormant, she animates them with emotion. It may also be worth mentioning that these personified objects are mentioned in two separate stanzas, with their feelings being the only loose connection, once again relating to Derrida’s disseminated meaning. The “window” and “farmyard” create a melancholic mood, as their feelings are projected. It is possible to impose an additional personal meaning on the poem, yet that is strictly for the reader to decide.

There may be certain personal relations to some of the households that McGuckian writes about. “Marconi’s Cottage”, which is also the name of the collection that contains it, may not be a random title as the cottage does in fact exist, and is “Situated on Ballycastle Beach (Antrim coast), [and] it is the place where Marconi first and in all probability successfully experimented with the transmission of wireless messages over water”, along with Ballycastle being the birthplace of her father (Schrage-Früh 45). McGuckian’s poems often consist of the rearranging of words from other texts that already exist, from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Woman in the Attic* – in “Journal Intime”, as Michaela Schrage-Früh highlights (43) – to the first volume of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* series, *Swann’s Way* in “Lines for Thanksgiving”, which Adam Hanna mentions (130). In an article from Michaela Schrage-Früh, she focuses in particular on the part of the poem where McGuckian writes, “you are all

that I have gathered / to me of otherness” (18-19), and claims that “This ‘otherness’ embraced by the speaker suggests the poet’s interrelations with and intertextual borrowings from artists that are Russian, German, English, French and American”, along with the implication of the title relating to Guglielmo Marconi’s transmission (46). It may act as a self-reflective nod to one of the poet’s more peculiar processes of writing, as she scrambles the terms and phrases of others to concoct her own poem. This is also one of her more controversial methods of her craft, and one that has garnered varying, but often frustrated, responses from critics. Yet, reimagining, or borrowing from existing artworks is something that has existed across a multitude of different art forms for years. Of course, this is a considerable divergence from the methods of more renowned poets such as William Wordsworth or Emily Brontë, as they did not pick apart paragraphs of pre-existing literature and have them “pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle” (Ibid 44). It is simply a different technique utilised to create poetry. Perhaps there is an element of homage in this method, an appreciation for the writings that McGuckian is reshaping. It is a possibility, however, so are a vast array of other reasons when considering the poet’s *oeuvre*.

Medbh McGuckian’s methodology may be alienating to some, but it is not unusual to reimagine the works of another and place them in your own art. Filmmakers often take inspiration from other films, and pay homage to them by recreating a certain scene in their own way, as Stanley Kubrick does in *The Shining* (1980), as the scene where Jack breaks down a door with an axe is recaptured in a similar manner that an instance that occurs in Viktor Sjöström’s *The Phantom Carriage* (1921). Artists often draw on other artist’s works for inspiration, why should the medium of poetry be any different? McGuckian’s work certainly opens an interesting conversation regarding contemporary poetry, and it displays how the medium is everchanging in today’s world. As Nessa O’Mahony states, “[like] the abstractions

of Kandinsky, we must trust the mood evoked by the arrangement of words on the page rather than strain after their meaning” (12). Her poetry is evocative, from the personification of inanimate objects by giving them emotions, and can be read in a multitude of ways (as Susan Porter does by applying Jacques Derrida’s disseminated meaning theory to it). Certainly, one may attempt to apply their own interpretations to her work, but if one is searching for definite meaning in McGuckian’s poems then their search is essentially futile. Her poetry is much more speculative, asking the reader to arrive at their own conclusions rather than having the poet explain it to them. In the case of Medbh McGuckian, the meaning of her poetry really is placed in the eye of the beholder.

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Evoking and Ejecting the Abject in *Alien* and *Aliens*

Ciara O' Connor

Undergraduate Awards (3rd Arts) - Highly Recommended

Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986) evoke the abject, that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4), through the transgression of the boundaries of structure, physicality, gender, and humanity. Both films incorporate tropes of science fiction and horror, as their focus on the transgression of borders makes these genres "illustration(s) of the work of abjection" (Creed 216). The structural designs of the spaceships, where much of the plot takes place, imitate the female reproductive organs, while the inclusion of cyborg characters evokes the abject as they threaten the borders between humanity and technology. The titular creatures, grotesque beings which disrupt structural and bodily borders and violate and consume other organisms, allow for themes of reproduction, the maternal, and the monstrous feminine to be explored. The Alien Queen in particular represents the phallic mother and unrestrained reproduction. While the abject provides the viewer with the "perverse pleasure" of "confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror" (Creed 216), it must be ejected in order to restore symbolic order. By the end of both films, *Alien* and *Aliens* reinscribe the borders that have been transgressed throughout, by contrasting protagonist Ripley with the abject figures of the 'Mother'-ship and the Alien Queen. This essay aims to examine the abject as it is represented in *Alien* and *Aliens* and how transgressed borders are reinscribed through the character of Ellen Ripley.

The abject, that which "disturbs identity, system, order, the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4), allows for boundaries to be crossed in order to "separate out the

symbolic order from all that threatens its stability” (Creed 221). The genres of science fiction and horror, both of which are employed in *Alien* and *Aliens*, possess the tropes required to best explore the abject. As science fiction is a “*literature of cognitive estrangement*” (Suvin 372, emphasis original) and horror “abounds in images of abjection” (Creed 216), these genres evoke the abject in order to transgress cultural and physical boundaries, using images of gore and representations of Otherness. Horror film imagery of bodily fluids such as “blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears, and putrifying [*sic*] flesh” (Creed 216) conjures the abject and confronts the viewer with that which they separate themselves from. In both horror and science fiction, the Other is represented through monstrous creatures, as “harbinger(s) of category crisis (...) whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” (Cohen 6) such as the Xenomorphs. Their phallic heads, their acidic blood, and their double-mouthed maw which resembles both the vagina dentata and a “science fiction phallus dentatus” (Kavanagh 76), physically marks them as monstrous. Monstrosity can be considered abject as it allows for that which is Other to undermine “the metaphysics underlying symbolic boundaries (...) that determine all those categories and classifications that separate kinds of being off from one another” (Gibson 237). When this separation is threatened, monstrosity interacts with humanity, or such as in the figure of the cyborg, takes on elements of humanity and reflects it back to society.

“Creatures simultaneously animal and machine” (Haraway 149) such as the cyborg can evoke horror in a way that positions them as monstrous and abject, by evading categorisation and confronting the boundaries between the Self and the Other. Kristeva posits that the abject produces “a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome” (2), a reaction which is best induced by the image of the corpse, a physically evident border “that has

become an object” (4). The figure of the cyborg, which disrupts and threatens the dualism of organism and machine, can evoke a similar reaction (Haraway 151). In *Alien*, the character of Ash disrupts the boundaries between humanity and technology and represents cultural anxieties about what may come from this disruption. The crew of the *Nostromo* believe he is the same as them, a human with the singular goal of returning home. The revelation that Ash is not, in fact, human, is established using bodily fluids, which, as Kristeva notes, show us what we “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (11). His milk-like perspiration and ‘blood’ which “has the appearance of semen” (Kaveney 143), evokes the abject, reminding the viewer of the fallibility of the human body and of bodily fluids which should not exist in a technological creation. Ash’s attack reveals his inhumanity and conjures images of oral rape as he chokes a near-unconscious Ripley with a rolled-up magazine, “a surrogate for the penis he presumably does not have” (Kaveney 144). The imagery and content of the magazine, which features nude women in sexually suggestive poses, furthers this phallic and sexual connotation. Due to Ash’s secretion of semen-like fluid, his substituted violent phallus, and his external appearance as a male, he is positioned as opposite to Ripley, in both perceived gender and in “species”. This attack also exposes Ash’s unnatural strength as he rips Ripley’s hair and succeeds in flinging her across a room, and this is further emphasised by the fact that it requires both Parker and Lambert to wrench him off of Ripley. Haraway notes that “the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism” (151), a description that Ash encapsulates. Not only is he separate from the crew of the *Nostromo* due to his lack of biological humanity, his creation by and loyalty to Weyland-Yutani and ‘Mother’ positions him as a threatening Other to the working-class crew. It is this capitalist, technological Otherness that allows for the Xenomorph to board the *Nostromo*, to breed with, kill and eat the crew. Just as he praises the Xenomorph’s “hostility,” Ash, too, is “unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality” (Scott 1:26:02–1:26:36) because

of his abject identity as a cyborg.

Benson-Allott argues that pieces of media that evoke horror “often start disturbing their audiences with spaces, not monsters” (268). The interiors of the *Nostromo*, the *Sulaco*, the colony, and the derelict alien ship disturb the viewer by engaging with the abject. The opening scene of *Alien* follows the camera through darkened, industrial hallways “that seem to go on forever” and “suggest that ‘things’ are not as they ought to be” (Benson-Allott 270), inspiring horror in the audience long before the Xenomorph is revealed. These shots “threaten their spectators’ agency by luring them visually into spaces they cannot master, spaces that elude their powers of perception” (Benson-Allott 272), making the *Nostromo* a space that disrupts the expected norm and threatens viewers’ understanding of the Self. While Benson-Allott distinguishes the hallways of the *Nostromo* from the derelict spaceship by suggesting the abject is only conjured in the latter, Creed suggests that the opening scene is a representation of a “primal fantasy” in which “birth is a well-controlled, clean, painless affair” (223) and compares the imagery of the opening scene to that of the female body. The crew awaken in a “womblike chamber” (Creed 223), with a door that conjures imagery of the *vagina dentata*. Kane exits in “what looks comically like a diaper” (Scobie 83), foreshadowing his transition from an inhabitant of the mothership to the carrier and birther of the fetal alien, the chest-burster. Kavanagh’s note that the crew members are “curiously unsexed” (93), in the opening scene furthers ideas of this as a representation of the primal scene, positioning them as the undeveloped children of the archaic, phallic ‘Mother’ who controls the ship. The computer room – the room in which ‘Mother’ can be accessed, suggests Scobie, resembles the womb, in both its shape and the “warm flickering lights” (83) which provide the only visual warmth on the *Nostromo*. Access to this room, at the beginning of *Alien*, is confined to Dallas, “the figure of patriarchal authority,” who “enters the computer room by inserting a phallic key in a lock”

(Scobie 83) which solidifies ‘Mother’ as an abject feminine, maternal presence.

In *Aliens*, the Sulaco looks like “a great shark, or like a Swiss Army Knife – it is an image of brutal strength and ingenious efficiency” (Kaveney 159). The tracking shots of the interior, which mirror those in *Alien*, introduce a militaristic and efficient ship, this stark technological cleanliness soon to be contrasted with the abject imagery of organic matter through the dwelling of the Xenomorphs. “The hypersleep caskets (...) are more mechanical, less organic looking” (Kaveney 160), no longer resembling a womb, no longer positioning the crew’s spaceship as an abject figure. The derelict alien ship, however, evokes the abject throughout *Alien* and *Aliens*, representing “the interior of the human body—the windings and curvings of organs and glands” (Cobbs 199). The ship, with its “vaginal doorways, cervical mazes on the walls, phallic sculptures (...) and bulbous mammary projections” (Cobbs 199) emphasises the themes of reproduction and sexuality. Creed suggests that in *Alien*, the lowering of the crew into the ship evokes the presence of the child invading the womb to experience a primal fantasy of watching their own conception (223). The eggs that they find inside the womb of the ship continue to conjure images of the female reproductive system, mirroring flesh as they drip fluid. In *Aliens*, this is furthered by the presence of the Alien Queen.

Creed posits that “all human societies have a conception (...) of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (211), drawing on Kristeva’s work which focuses on “different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies” (212). Historically and culturally, the feminine body has acted as a central source of abjection, specifically, its menstrual and maternal aspects. This is portrayed in *Alien* and *Aliens*, as gestation functions as a major theme and a central source of the abject in both films. The gestation period of the Xenomorph is outlined in *Alien* and made more monstrous by happening on a larger and accelerated scale in *Aliens*. When the face-hugger, described by Bihlmeyer as

“vulva-like” (47), again conjuring the image of the vagina dentata, attaches to its host, it penetrates the host’s mouth and extends down their throat an organ which can be viewed as both “umbilical-like” (Bihlmeyer 48) and phallic. This organ, be it a representative of the feminine or masculine organs, disturbs the border between the inside and outside of the body. The birth of the alien, as it tears through the host’s chest, killing them in the process, does the opposite and brings the inside outside, presenting an image of a birth that is bloody and horrific, and therefore abject.

Not only is pregnancy abject, but so is motherhood, according to the psychoanalytic theories of the archaic and phallic maternal figures. Creed argues that “one of the key figures of abjection is the mother who becomes an abject at that moment when the child rejects her for the father who represents the symbolic order” (212). The phallic mother represents the castrating, all-encompassing figure of motherhood who will not relinquish her control over her child. The Alien Queen in *Aliens* is positioned as such; a symbol of uncontrolled female sexuality which is abject due to “primal anxieties about woman’s sexual organs” (Bundtzen 14). The uncontrolled reproduction of these monstrous creatures which violate the human form, highlighted in the sight of the Queen’s giant ovipositor – fleshy, dripping and pulsing as it produces innumerable eggs, each one possessing an aggressive Xenomorph – evokes these anxieties. The Alien Queen’s positioning as a monstrous, abject representation of motherhood is contrasted with the portrayal of Ripley as a maternal figure in both films. Thomas argues that in *Alien*, Ripley’s “heroism is defined by her maternal leadership of the group” (77) aboard the Nostromo. Her competence and intelligence allow her to lead and protect the group and to “act as the surrogate mother of the crew” (Waldrop 34), defeating the Xenomorph and prioritising “her own species’ survival” (Thomas 79). However, Ripley’s relationship with Jones, the cat, suggests she “feels more motherly towards (him) than her fellow humans”

(Thomas 80). Ripley's return to the *Nostromo* in order to rescue Jones, risking her own life in the process, marks her as distinctly maternal and "traditionally feminine" (Newton 86). By referring to the cat with language such as "nice kitty" and "sweetheart" (Scott 1:29:14-1:29:30) as she searches for him, as well as cuddling him and tucking him into the hyper-sleep chamber, Ripley is positioned as a mother figure to Jones.

The idea of Ripley as a maternal figure is furthered in Cameron's *Aliens*, wherein she becomes a "mommy" (Cameron 2:29:55), not only to Newt, but is revealed to have been a biological mother throughout the first film as well. Ripley's position as a mother is established as she discovers that, because she has been gone for fifty-seven years, her daughter, who was a child when Ripley left, has died. This moment not only highlights Ripley's position as a mother, but also prefigures her relationship with Newt. Throughout *Aliens*, Ripley displays a softer personality than seen in the first film and adopts a motherly attitude toward Newt. In order to comfort her, she sheds her logical, commanding demeanour and becomes more playful – joking with Newt, relating to her by asking about her doll, and suggesting that because the doll does not have bad dreams, Newt shouldn't either. Ripley's maternal instincts are most evident in moments of danger, as her first thought in each situation is to protect Newt, to shield her from damage or troubling images, telling her, "Cover your eyes, Newt, don't look at the light" (1:54:39) and "Close your eyes, baby" (2:20:55). While Ripley is established as a maternal figure in *Alien* by risking her own safety and returning to the ship to save Jones, her motherly attention transfers from an animal to a child in *Aliens*, solidifying her position as a maternal figure. She no longer prefers another species to her own and embraces normative motherhood.

Ripley's final battle with the Alien Queen emphasises the Alien Queen's position as an abject figure. While Ripley is positioned as a "good" mother, a figure who prioritises "self

sacrifice, selflessness and nurturance” (Arnold 37), the Alien Queen is her opposite, a “bad” mother, a “phallic mother of nightmare” (Bundtzen 104). The Alien Queen’s position as an abject figure is linked to her feminine, reproductive qualities, emphasised by Ripley’s cry of “Get away from her, you bitch!” (Cameron 2:25:55). While the Alien Queen retains her abject, grotesque body throughout the confrontation, her phallic head and dripping mouth attacking Ripley, Ripley dons an exosuit to fight her. Charles Hicks suggests that this suit acts as “a phallic extension that compensates for her lack” and allows her to “embody the phallic mother” (32) simultaneously contrasting Ripley with the Queen while also highlighting their specular identities. Ripley’s defeat and ejection of the Alien Queen eradicates the abject, destructive “bad” mother and champions Ripley as the good mother as “it is only after Ripley defeats the Alien Queen by expelling her through an airlock that Newt refers to her for the first time as “mother”” (Hicks 32).

The transcending of gender norms in both *Alien* and *Aliens* can also be read as abject. In *Alien*, Kane gives birth to the Xenomorph, subverting the normal human reproductive process, which is already abject, and now becomes even more so, because it transcends sex and gender. Ripley is largely gender-neutral throughout the film, however, once she believes she is safe from the alien in the escape pod, she strips down, revealing her feminine figure to the audience. This reminds the audience of her gender and redraws gender norms and boundaries, allowing for a release from the abject. In *Aliens*, the female characters are largely military soldiers and are masculinised because of this. Vasquez, with her short hair and muscular appearance, is asked by Hudson, “have you ever been mistaken for a man?” to which she replies “No, have you?” (29:48-29:57), disrupting the gender norms of their society and of the film. However, just as in *Alien*, these norms are reinscribed through Ripley and her portrayal as the “good mother” in comparison to the Alien Queen. Charles Hicks suggests that a nuclear family

structure is portrayed at the end of the film through Ripley's relationships with Newt and Hicks, which continues the re-establishing of gender and social norms (32).

Creed defines the final representations of the primal scene in *Alien* in relation to the image of ejection, "a convention of the science fiction film" (224). The ejection of Kane's body from the Nostromo following the birth of the alien signifies how "the 'mother's' body has become hostile; it contains the alien whose one purpose is to kill and devour all of Mother's children" (Creed 224). Kane's corpse serves as a reminder of the death that the 'Mother' has allowed to happen in her body. Creed describes Ripley's escape from the Nostromo as a representation of "the living infant (...) ejected from the malevolent body of the 'mother' to avoid destruction" (224). However, she does not refer to the final image of ejection in the film, that of the alien itself. As Ripley opens the doors to the escape pod and watches as the Xenomorph falls to its death, she is reinscribing borders of normality, reflecting the viewer's desire to "eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human" (Creed 221). The alien clings to the doors, one final groan and opening of its vaginal/phallic mouth, but then is cast aside, allowing for normality to reign again. This scene is re-enacted in Ripley's ejection of the Alien Queen in *Aliens*, once again through doors to the outside, allowing for 'good' motherhood and normative gender and family structures to be reinscribed. The abject in *Alien* and *Aliens* allows for the consumption of that which we reject and detest, with the reassurance that the abject will always be relegated to a position outside of the borders of normality, to "the place where I am not" (Kristeva 3).

Alien and *Aliens* both portray the abject in a myriad of ways – through bodily fluids, through spaces, through technology, and through gender. Physical spaces such as the spaceships reflect images of the body and of reproductive systems, while the cyborg acts as a technological representation of the abject. Although the Xenomorphs inspire abject horror, the

most significant abject motif is that of gestation and motherhood. The Alien Queen represents unrestrained reproduction and is portrayed as a “bad” mother in contrast to Ripley’s position as a “good” mother, and their final battle highlights both their differences and their similarities as maternal figures. However, despite the frequent representations of the abject in these films, both *Alien* and *Aliens* “eject” the abject and reinscribe the transgressed borders, returning to social norms through the character of Ripley.

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“Clearing Waters”: *North to Seeing Things*

Janne Borgaes

Louise Clancy Memorial Prize – Highly Recommended

“it was marvellous / and actual, I said out loud, ‘a haven’” (“Glanmore Sonnets: VII”, *OG* 169). Heaney’s relationship with landscapes has been much discussed, though somewhat less so his imagery of and literary interaction with the sea. His work is generally and accurately characterised as having an earthy quality, rooting itself in his “rural, agrarian home ground” (Hart 3). It searches for villatic and underground histories and meanings, often exploring ambiguous issues of territory and identity beneath the topsoil. To a poet as concerned with specific, identified, geographic space as Heaney, the sea presents a challenge. Lacking distinct landmarks or geographic features visible to those situated within that landscape, it seems primed to evade Heaney’s usual mode of giving a landscape names and centres, and thereby meanings. In the imagined seascape, there is no water pump to elevate to an omphalos or farmhouses that contain a family history. However, Heaney’s depictions of seascapes are no less vivid than his inland terrains. Like the land, they are saturated with historicity, mythical *genii loci*, journeys always looping to some point of departure, and onomatopoeic renderings of nature into assonant, consonant, and vowel sounds. From his first published collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) to *Seeing Things* (1991), Heaney’s poetry undergoes changes in focus, diction, soundscape, and composition, as is to be expected. The sea’s changeable surging physicality is at first predominantly represented by the hissing staccato consonants that dominate much of his earlier work. Later, contemplating a more halcyon sea, spacious vowels take their place, opening up the seascape towards *Seeing Things*.

After his move to the Republic of Ireland in 1972 (O'Driscoll 150), Heaney's poetry undergoes a journey to reach a "clarity of expression" (210). This clarity slowly moves away from the "earthiness" of his earlier work, still very much present in *North* (1975), towards the openness and "airiness" (Vendler 136) of *Seeing Things* (1991). His representation of the sea develops in a similar direction. Instead of a mysterious place marked by "darker fathoms" ("Shore Woman", *OG* 74) or questions of an unresolvable "full identity" (*Naturalist* 47), Heaney now locates there a "clarity of [the] poetic voice" (Howley 113). Heaney slowly distances his poetry from too-overt mythologies, and indeed from the bucolic focus ascribed to his earlier poetry. As his poetry develops from the 1970s to the 1990s, the sea becomes less fearsome and terrible. Instead of assuming the emotional and mythological resonance of particularly *Wintering Out*, it becomes a medium for poetic freedom.

Gradually, the poetry located on the shore, at first so occupied with the nature of the border itself, becomes concerned with the metaphysical issues of where it is and what lies beyond it. Additionally, it migrates away from the eroticised *genius loci* of his earlier work. Instead, he moves towards a more clearly defined and independent geography, such as *Field Work*'s (1979) "Glanmore Sonnet VII" with its sea distantly "toil[ing] like mortar" (*OG* 169), and the "perfected vision" (373) of the bay's equanimous balanced waters in "Squarings" (*ST*). With this, Heaney finally fulfils his vision of founding the landscape "clean on [its] own shape" ("The Peninsula", *OG* 21). What remains is a "delighted, sensuous merging of facts of nature and facts of culture" (Corcoran 102), a sensual intimacy with the natural world that affords both sides a calm neutrality.

The only sea poems of *North* that directly associate the sea with a human figure are "Oceans' Love to Ireland" and, to a lesser degree, "Act of Union". Both depict rapes or dubious sexual relations. "Ocean's Love" recounts an Irish maid being raped by Walter Raleigh whose

relentlessness is compared to the surrounding waters: “He is water, he is ocean” (*North* 46), as unstoppable and inescapable as the sea crashing onto shore. Notably, Raleigh remains the only depiction of an “explicitly male sea” (Howley 173) in Heaney’s work, echoing the sea’s invasive potential previously explored in “Shoreline”. David Farrier observes that “the dreams (or nightmares) of empire are never far away in *North*” (41f). The sea is trapped amid this colonial violence, occupying an uneasy position between border and conduit to it.

However, the sea becomes a transitive and freeing element when separated from these *genii loci*. Then, it can be an evocative presence that embodies potential for alternative mythologies to those that govern and catalyse the Northern Ireland conflict. In “Funeral Rites”, the speaker is looking for this possibility in a drive to the shore: “we will drive north again / past Strang and Carling fjords” (*OG* 98). The Northern Irish coast is here rendered Norse by changing the “ford” in Strangford and Carlingford “fjords”. This linguistic and literary reach across the water to the Norse sagas, specifically *Njál’s Saga*, continues as the poem goes on to reference Gunnar Hámundarson:

imagining those under the hill

disposed like Gunnar

who lay beautiful

inside his burial mound,

though dead by violence (98f.)

Gunnar, described as an honourable man, is killed as result of a blood feud between Icelandic families. In the saga itself, this “neighbourly murder” (97) is condemned as the product of a spiral into ritualistic killings stemming from a false sense of honour that superseded the legal word of the Althing. Their dynamics parallel the infighting and extrajudicial violence of the

Troubles. As in the preceding collections, the “synaptic sea” (Howley 173) affords a freedom to explore the conflict in a safe and oblique manner, while also offering respite from it.

“North” then initiates a maritime movement away from Ireland and its politics. The speaker arrives at the shore, looking outwards to sea:

I returned to a long strand,

the hammered curve of a bay,

and found only the secular

powers of the Atlantic thundering (*OG* 100)

The secular Atlantic invites Heaney and the reader to leave Ireland for the Norse settlements of Iceland and Greenland. This connective power also facilitates a one-sided communication across time as the Viking “longship’s swimming tongue / [...] buoyant with hindsight” takes over the rest of the poem. Caleb Caldwell notes the prevalence of dead voices in “North”, remarking that “the poet is silent and the voices of the dead and the instruments of death speak to him” (112). Granting the dead their buoyant tongue, the speaker thereby gains permission to his own. The Vikings in their hindsight are experienced in the “hatred and behind-backs / of the althing” (*OG* 101) and “memory incubating the spilled blood” of blood feuds like Gunnar’s, dynamics similar to the Troubles. Their experience thus holds weight and is relevant to Heaney’s own. They then go on to give poetic instruction to the speaker, advising him to:

Compose in darkness.

Expect Aurora Borealis

in the long foray

but no cascade of light.

Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle,
trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known. (OG 101)

This Arctic landscape in which Heaney can “compose in darkness”, away from the scrutinising gazes of sectarian dynamics, permits him to detach himself from political scrutiny while trusting his own experience and retaining his traditions. To “compose in darkness” possibly refers to writing practice of the *filidh*, Irish poets, who would lay in a dark room with a stone on their stomach to “keep away distracting thoughts, and [help] concentrate on the subject they had chosen” (Bergin 9). The sea-space gives passage to a parallel yet separate society, one that is both reminiscent of the violence that surrounds Heaney and poetically freeing, even if he cannot fully actualise this yet. But it marks the moment in which one of the central themes his seascapes explore in the coming years first emerges: A quest for the aquatic clarity of the icicle and the sea that widens the poetic gaze and grants it independence from political expectations and confines of the borderscape.

Heaney also seeks this marine opening in *Field Work* (1979). “Oysters” begins with a sensually intense moment as “shells clacked on the plates” and the speaker’s tongue becomes “a filling estuary” (145). Christopher Ricks notes that “open at once are the oyster, the mouth, the meal and the book” (95). This openness leaves a vulnerable, but also hopeful image that is nonetheless dismantled by the inability to ignore the violence hovering in the background and fully engage with the sea and what it represents. Howley finds in “Oysters” a “shift to finding a clarity of poetic voice in the sea, not ‘bogged’ down by the expectations and complexities of his home” (113). This is only partially true; there is no direct reference to either the Northern Ireland conflict or the usually so omnipresent Mossbawn. However, the peaceful and starlit

opening is soon interrupted by exactly that violence, here evoked by the violated oysters that had to be killed to create this moment:

[...] My palate hung with starlight:

As I tasted the salty Pleiades,

Orion dipped his foot into the water.

Alive and violated

They lay on their beds of ice:

Bivalves: the split bulb

And philandering sigh of ocean.

Millions of them ripped and shucked and scattered. (*OG* 145)

What carries over from the man-nature unions of *North* is the speaker's attempts to physically engage and merge with nature: "[his] tongue was a filling estuary" (*OG* 145), attempting to eat "the day / Deliberately, that its tang / Might quicken me into verb, pure verb" (146). The tongue-heavy "L" sounds in "Bivalves: the split bulb" (145) mirror the oysters' consumption, but the expected excitement into action does not occur. In fact, the speaker's "anger that [his] trust could not repose / in the clear light" (146) shows that the clarity he searches for remains distant in his frustration. Instead, "poetry or freedom / lean[s] in from the sea", just not quite into the reach of the poet, located somewhere in the ocean with the oysters. The same issue as in *North* arises; the integration of the sea into the human body is inherently problematic. The sea, represented by the oysters, can in some way be captured but will not give meaning as the land does, making the consumption an uneasy and dissatisfying one. The reason for this seems to be the desperate strain towards that clarity and the attempt to possess or force it.

In comparison, the interaction with the sea in “Glanmore Sonnets: VII” is more receptive and less insistent on direct contact.

L'Etoile, Le Guillemot, La Belle Hélène

Nursed their bright names this morning in the bay

That toiled like mortar. It was marvellous

And actual, I said out loud, ‘A haven,’

The word deepening, clearing, like the sky

Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes. (*OG*, 169)

From this simple, undemanding relationship emerges a “buoyant optimism” (McLoughlin 204) and an ease of movement. However, McLoughlin also claims that the storm, evocative of the now distant conflict in the North, engenders in the sonnet “a sense of guilt” (211) owing to Heaney’s apparent desertion. And indeed, the mention of Rockall, an islet in the Atlantic claimed by several nations, invokes dynamics of territorial conflict. To date, Rockall, or rather the rich fishing grounds and fossil resources surrounding it, is contested territory between the UK and Ireland. Nonetheless, the transit and distance granted by the sea in multiple ways alleviates the effect of the guilt and distress caused by the violence.

The sonnet begins with an out-of-order enumeration of meteorological sectors named in the *Shipping Forecast*, a British radio programme forecasting the weather on the waters around the British Isles:

Dogger, Rockall, Malin, Irish Sea:

Green, swift upsurges, North Atlantic flux

Conjured by that strong gale-warning voice,

Collapse into sibilant penumbra (*OG* 169)

The “collapse into sibilant penumbra” of the sea’s forces refers to the programme’s speaker, but also applies to Heaney’s own play with sounds that evoke a movement in nature. *The Shipping Forecast*’s almost poetic format reflects on Heaney’s childhood preoccupation with the radio as a “journey into the wideness of the world” (“Crediting Poetry”, *OG* 449). In fact, the eponymous cottage where he composed the “Glanmore Sonnets” was reminiscent of Heaney’s childhood home, a physical “connect[ion] back to the Mossbawn house” (O’Driscoll, 198). This childhood moment is also where Heaney’s propensity for etymologies and “guttural sibilants of European speech” (“Crediting Poetry”, *OG* 449) emerges. They navigate the sea in this poem in the form of the French ships like “*L’Etoile*”, while “keen” is Irish. The words are also taken from different eras, which adds diachronicity similar to the layers of historic invasions in “Shoreline”. However, here they are part of the movement away from the speaker’s position. The kennings “eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road”, are indicative of an Anglo-Saxon identity and timescape associated with England, especially “whale-road”, referencing the Old English poem *Beowulf*. They notably refer to the sea by its transitory properties, reciting “road” four times, while also engendering a growth of the road’s travellers, from eel to seal to boat to the largest, the whale. Alternatively, they trace the passage of water from Lough and river (eel) to shore (seal) to open sea (keel/boat) to ocean (whale).

Finally, the poem returns to the *Shipping Forecast* areas, once again arranged out of their intended order. Instead of ending in the Irish Sea, now the speaker (and with him the reader) travels on these locators north-westwards. The journey traces from the Scottish Minches out to the Faroes, drifting off to a wild poetic seascape invoked by the language, into the “liberation of feeling after stress” (Deane 74). Nicholas Allen characterises Heaney offshore as “a figure of the shallows and the morning mists, [...] of riverbanks and the

foreshore, two locations that persist throughout the body of his work” (131). And it is true that many of his sea poems are set in tidal zones and coastal areas, but “Glanmore Sonnets” finally leads that poetic voice out to the wider expanse of the ocean.

Station Island (1984) is dominated by its eponymous long poem which takes place at the island of the same name in Lough Derg, County Donegal. Station Island itself is host to St Patrick’s Purgatory, a popular site of pilgrimage. *Field Work*’s evocative aquatic vocabulary that eventually facilitates an outward movement also emerges in “Station Island”, though as less of a geographical journey. Barney Murphy’s drunkenly “rowing” (OG 251) hands and the speaker’s “blurred swimmings” (249) accompany a spiritual and psychological passage, even when not set on or by the water. The island, marked by a deep Catholicism and surrounded by “black water, white waves” (258), reflects Ireland itself. Lough Derg is thus both inland lake and, by association and metaphor, an ocean in miniature. According to Allen, the “liquidity of Heaney’s language suggests the alterity of the pilgrimage as a journey to unknown territory, both human and poetic” (133). This voyage is accompanied by ghostly visions of people from Irish history and Heaney’s own life. They, for instance James Joyce, are “made of water” (Allen 134) and the insight they give exemplifies the clarifying properties water takes on in the poem.

Ryan Womack asserts a similar idea of a clarifying, but also redemptive journey in “Station Island’s” pilgrimage to the island at the centre of Lough Derg in County Donegal (220). Indeed, the self-depreciating entrance into the water has something of a sinner looking for absolution.

I dreamed and drifted. All seemed to run to waste

As down a swirl of mucky, glittering flood

Strange polypi floated like huge corrupt

Magnolia bloom, surreal as a shed breast,

My softly awash and blanching self-disgust. (262)

This passage evokes both an underwater dream-journey and the washing of sins performed through a baptism. In general, the water is repository for these personal ghosts of memory and the public ones of history, all present through apparition or intertextuality. As has been observed by numerous scholars, among them Corcoran, the speaker's journey is analogous to Dante's in *La Divina Commedia*. In the *Commedia*, the mountain of purgatory lies surrounded by water, in the poem mirrored by St Patrick's Purgatory on the island. The combination of a pre-Christian *immram* with the "tradition of the dream-vision" (Corcoran 117) and Catholic redemptive pilgrimage is part of the same movement in Heaney's poetry that had already started by *Field Work*. In *Station Island*, contact with water is Christianised. In general, the rather pagan folk elements of bog bodies and the Maighdeen Mara wane and give way to a play with ecclesiastical conceptions of holy nature, though not necessarily an embrace of them. The Catholic "vision" (*OG* 324) character of "The Disappearing Island" and the evocation of "John the Baptist / [...] on the façade of a cathedral" (340) in "Seeing Things" both recall the redemptive pilgrimage to "Station Island". The water assumes baptismal qualities that grant new insights and enables a new way forward. However, to Corcoran this amounts to "something very like a renunciation" (118). The rituals are also connected with fear and doubt, and the relationship between poet and religion remains unstable.

While not the actual sea, the waters of Lough Derg occupy a similar position in Heaney's poetry. As Howley points out, "The island-within-an-island is a part of the island of Ireland but also separate from it" (62). The island in its centre is thus connected to the islands off the shore of Ireland that shape the coastal imagination, while the Lough becomes the sea that divides the island from the Irish mainland. The Lough's "sea-ness" provides the basis for

these visions by giving it a space that can be accessed and voyaged in the context of a ritual. As Corcoran observes:

These encounters find their structural shape in the nature of the pilgrimage itself, as the pilgrims leave the ordinary social world, cross the waters of Lough Derg, perform their penitential exercises, and return. (118)

The water at the same time separates the island, thus giving it its status as a ritual space, distinct from the land surrounding the Lough, and provides the passage that forms a vital part of the ritual. Paradoxically, this ritual voyage also results in a purification from the expectations and violence of organised religion.

Finally, *Seeing Things* (1991) continues the trend towards “unhampered freedom” (O’Driscoll 322), influenced by the death of Heaney’s father and a reacquaintance with Glanmore Cottage, clearing the sea’s waters to balanced tranquillity. “Squarings” takes its own approach to the sea’s poetic clarity that here is emulated by the water itself. “Deserted harbour stillness” (*OG* 373) and the “empt[y]” (391) offering “at a distance from the shore” again present the sea as a cleansing and open element that renders “Every stone clarified and dormant under water” (373). There is a sense that the space is being opened up, as the empty head of the bay “compelled / the eye that scanned it” (391), drawing the gaze further out to sea.

Air and ocean known as antecedents

Of each other. In apposition with

Omnipresence, equilibrium, brim. (373)

The dividing line here is not the shore, but rather the horizon between sea and sky. Its “equilibrium” is phonologically associative with “brim” and implies a fullness, a stability in the water that is reflected by the “elements of language [...] in balance” (Vendler 148).

Additionally, the prevalence of deep o-sounds slows the poem's movement, a phonetic anchor from which the higher pitches of equilibrium and brim can sound to their sonar-like exploration of the water's edge. On this balanced sea the speaker can coalesce the marvellous/fantastical and the actual, already tentatively established in "Glanmore Sonnets". This is a much more concrete and profound epiphany compared to the uncertain meanings that are being searched for in "North" or even earlier poems. But despite this linguistic equilibrium, there is a decline in the intense haptic sensual assonances and staccato consonants when compared to *Death of a Naturalist* or the oysters of *Field Work*. In some parts it is still present, for instance in the "s" and "t" sounds of the "deserted harbour stillness. Every stone", but the wide-vowelled gap left by the "harbour" between "deserted" and "stillness" mitigates the intensity of it. Vendler calls this a "contemplate[ion of] an aesthetic in which the medium would be far from the thing represented" (141). Instead of an audio-haptic approach to elements and surfaces, the focus is the visual experience, as indicated by the title *Seeing Things*. The "Squarings" poems form squares on the paper, it is "the eye" (391) that is vital to experiencing the scenery. This coastal landscape, normally one of shifting waters and boundaries, possesses a solidity in the "material nouns" (Vendler 148) that amounts to a material paralysis. Similarly, there is little movement in "xlvii", rather an anticipatory quiet in the scenery's emptiness that evokes a military conflict, the "lambent troop [retreating] on the borders of your vision" (*OG* 391). These borders are not terrestrial or littoral anymore, but hinge on the sensual perception of the scene.

The continuous outward movement initiated in "North" and "Glanmore Sonnet VII" has come to a stop at the edge of the paralysed shore of "Squarings". Nonetheless, an orientation towards the open space beyond the confines of the coast remains, and this paralysis is a self-imposed one as opposed to the trappings of the selkie and Shore Woman. Depictions of the sea move away from the earthiness often ascribed to Heaney's early poetry. Its murky

“sud” (“Shore Woman”, *OG* 73) gives way to “seeable-down-into water” (“Seeing Things”, *OG* 339). Accordingly, across Heaney’s middle work, these maritime scenes are slowly but surely framed in a linguistic and poetic clarity that solves some of the poetic issues inflicted by the Troubles. They engender an absolution from sectarian impositions and fruitful personal reflections on memory and perception. The sea now becomes a medium to negotiate the imaginary, marvellous world and the world of clearly defined boundaries. Where in *North* there is a hopeful uncertainty towards the sea, the relationship eventually strives towards the respectful appreciation of “Glanmore: Sonnets VII” and perfect balances of “Squarings”. It remains an etymological poetry that reaches through history and explores the sounds that give words linguistic shape. While onomatopoeia and etymology have been firmly established in Heaney’s work at the latest since “Belderg”, he no longer searches an etiological significance in them. Instead, he presents the sea as both mutable and transforming alike, at once “deepening and clearing” (“Glanmore Sonnet VII”) his own poetic gaze.

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“Ventriloquising Venus”: Representing the Feminine in Seamus Heaney’s

North

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Published during the most intense phase of the Troubles, Seamus Heaney’s collection *North* (1975) emerges from the poet’s sense of artistic responsibility to “search for images and symbols adequate for our predicament” (Heaney, 1989, 279). Figuring the contemporary violence of Northern Ireland through the refraction of mythological and historical motifs, such as Scandinavian invasions and the bog bodies of Northern Europe, Heaney sifts through the imaginative space of the bog, probing the past for historical analogues to the present-day violence experienced. Seeking to represent a collective identity for the Catholic minority, “to forge the uncreated conscience of the race” (Heaney, 1989, 282), the poet constructs a romantic, archetypal narrative of political violence through recourse to the traditionally conservative credo of Irish pro-patria political ideology. In this replication of the ‘grand narratives’ of classical myth and Nationalist discourses, Heaney regurgitates the reductive sexual politics on which they are formed, constructing the subjectivity of a racialised (Catholic) minority by replicating his dehumanisation on a gendered other, i.e., woman. The consolidation of the Catholic racial identity in *North* is then founded upon the silenced spectre of the female body which lies passively at its heart. Imagined through Heaney’s patriarchal lens, she is stripped of selfhood and figured only in such diminutive, male-centring roles as in the neo-Oedipal binary of mother/spouse, as well as lying corporeally present in illustrations of colonial rape analogies and traditionalist associations of woman and landscape. The non-agent feminine in this collection thus serves a ‘heroic’ male fantasy of Nationalist liberation, whose actor’s voice is

ventriloquised through her mute and puppeted corpse. Consequently, concerned questions arise around the representative scope of Heaney's 'our' in "our predicament" (Heaney, 1989, 279); if this collection is to speak for a Catholic minority, it is only through the objectivised figure of its further marginalised female populace. Through a detailed, revisionist reading of a number of poems in the collection, I will seek to elucidate this complex of gender politics and reveal the 'suppressed voices' present within Heaney's limited postcolonial response. Against the "facile celebration of an insulated voice's recovery" at the expense of the female subject, (Mardorossian, 88), I will thus endeavour to fill what Alan Sinfield refers to as the "gaps and silences of narrative", demystifying Heaney's mystification of the feminine (Sinfield, 299).

Western colonial discourse involves, according to Edward Said, "a practice of the same sort albeit in different territories, as male gendered dominance or patriarchy, in modern society" (23). Just so, the feminine finds herself oppressed by both sides at the intersection of the colonial struggle in Ireland. Historically, British colonialism was posited as an imperially male conquest of virgin territory, demonising the indigenous Irish male as an illegitimate sexual power (Sharkey, 7). The struggle for territorial entitlement emerged as a masculine competition of gendered domination over the feminine, where the legitimisation of one entailed the emasculated ostracisation of the other. The reality of women's agency threatened a disruption to this male competition, which historically has been answered by an imaging of woman as "licentious[...] held in common to all men" (Sharkey, 8). Heaney, in his recourse to the icons of Ireland's patriarchal Nationalist tradition, reinforces this possession narrative throughout *North*, which, through personalised fantasies of marriage with Ireland-as-territory, male subjectification through imagery of female corpses and the imagined illustration of Ireland as the raped damsel in distress (at the hands of the imperial 'illegitimate sexual power', in a reversal of the colonial narrative), infers a call to arms for the liberating Nationalist hero-

soldiers to defend her. Ironically, this liberation is exacted only so the male Irish figure may repossess the female landscape themselves, sublimating their own freedom, not hers, despite her propagandist invocation. As Frantz Fanon delineates, “[t]he native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become a persecutor” (Fanon, 41).

North has been received as a representative text of the Troubles and Irish historical struggles for independence (Starr, 635), that which begs scrutiny of its figuration of the Nationalist experience as a singular struggle of a hero against foreign, masculine forces, which positions an essential, male narrative at the heart of the ‘Catholic condition’. The poetry of the collection is “reliant upon old, familiar and familiarly oppressive allocations of gender positions” (Coughlan, 41), the most consistent of these being the association of woman with the land. The male poet, stuck in the self / not-self dualism of the Lacanian ‘mirror phase’, defines his identity as both intrinsic to and formed against the objectivised, othered feminine (Coughlan, 59); he is “cradled in the dark that wombed [him]” (“Antaeus”), and Nationalist political analogies abound within the invoked symbol of Cathleen Ní Houlihan in the lines “[o]ur mother ground / is sour with the blood / of her faithful” (“Kinship”). Furthermore, in the male fantasy narrative of “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces”, where he imagines himself as Hamlet, accompanied by the spirits of “[o]ld fathers”, the Viking-boat which enables the poet’s quest is “mother-wet”. The feminine is thus relegated to the ‘natural sphere’ at the most foundational level, and through constructed metaphors of her passive body, a singularly male-driven narrative emerges through which the operative male speaker actualises his poetic intent. Invoked as a nature Goddess figure, the mystified ‘she’ of the narrative represents a dominant and stereotyped female ideal, obscuring the individual personhood of actual women through an overarching, dehumanising objectification. The specificity of this mystification of the female as the maternal, (“mother-wet”, “mother ground”, “wombed”), emerges as one half of

the neo-Oedipal binary within which all figurations of the female fall in Heaney's collection, defining woman only through her relation to man. Relegated to the natural, domestic sphere, women are not only erased then from the history of the Troubles but robbed of selfhood. As in "Funeral Rites", the male speaker expresses the experience of grief and loss as purely male, 'shouldering' "a kind of manhood", "the women hovering / behind me". Ostracised in "emptied kitchens", the women are conceived as outside of history, unrepresented in the "we" who "pine for each ceremony" nor even in the casualties of political violence. The grave is "his" and it is "[m]en" who speak of the loss, while women, "left behind", only think of their husbands ("imagining our slow triumph") around which their identity revolves in Heaney's poetry. Appealing to a ruralist ideology, the poet naturalises a conservative nostalgia which threatens women's subjective identity.

Though woman as symbol and image is omnipresent throughout the mythic narratives of the collection, the female subject is completely absent. The almost complete void of feminine presence in Part II of the collection (excepting few peripheral images) underscores this; woman is absent from any realistic portrayal of Northern Ireland, invoked only as a symbolic muse in the first, mythopoeic section. As Edna Longley argues, the feminine mystique of Irish nationalism, evoked by Heaney, has long "masked [its] aggressive patriarchal intent" (Longley, 187), conflating woman with the land while simultaneously excluding her and denying her rights (Starr, 630). Just as he mines her body to inscribe his poetry with metaphor through her dismembered form, the male poet constructs woman's sexualised form through a "scopic gaze, her imputed mental inaction and blankness being required to foreground the speaker" (Coughlan, 43). The neo-Oedipal binary is specified as dual-passive; the mourning Mother Ireland whose slaughtered sons must be avenged, as in "Kinship", and the desirable lover-figure who herself is a twin personification of the chaste Aisling and the

“symbolic, licentious slut” figures (Sharkey 11), which necessitate Nationalist male interference through their need for protection or (re-)possession. Heaney, as dominant actor over these passive figures, actualises this possession narrative violently throughout *North*. The earth, figured both as the feminine, and the site of male/female unification (which is intrinsic to the function of the feminine in his narrative), is repeatedly referred to as the “love nest” (“Bone Dreams”) and here the poet himself repossesses the land, after the symbolic ‘pitching’ “of chalk [...] at England”. Ownership over the female is made explicit with the possessive pronoun in “my lady’s head” in the same poem, which foregrounds the sexual possession to come, when the speaker ‘ossifies himself’ before demarcating his territory through an illustrated handling of his lover/landscape, from “the sunken fosse of her spine [...] towards [...] the lips [...] the knuckles [...] the elbows [...] her brow [...] the [...] collarbone, [...] her shoulder”. This sensual unification occurs again in the succeeding poem, “Come to the Bower”, where female agency is again nullified and feminine submission naturalised when “the dark-bowered queen” is imagined through Heaney’s fantasy lens as in need of him as her saviour. In his narration, the queen “[w]hom I unpin / Is waiting” and in his subsequent undressing of her, the poet focuses only on her physical beauty, “each curl / Reddish as a fox’s brush”. The poem ends with a sexualisation of the body, bringing our focus to the “flesh / Of her throat” as, erotically, “spring water / Starts to rise around her”, before introducing the final romantic image, where the speaker reaches out yearningly to “her Venus bone”, relegating woman once again to the dehumanised mystic ideal and allegorising Nationalist repossession of Ireland through a male conquest narrative. The ventriloquism of masculine imperatives through the female body is most overt however in the third poem of the sequence, “Bog Queen”. Here, Heaney imagines himself as the female corpse, projecting a distorting male voice from the necessarily silenced feminine body. Heaney’s fetishising male gaze takes on a particularly uneasy role as his sexualising imperative now is voiced through the body of a woman,

potentially obscuring the subjectivity of the male perspective and legitimising its regressive misogynistic politics as objective, further even than the usual supposed ‘universalism’ of the male poetic voice. Though embodying the female, Heaney maintains a perspective wrought with fetishism, imagining ‘herself’ through the male gaze. The elements possess her sexually, “dawn suns groped over my head”, “I knew [...] the nuzzle of fjords / at my thighs”. She draws particular attention to her reproductive organs, “the vital hoard reducing / in the crock of the pelvis”, “stitchwork / retted on my breasts”, and the disrobement narrative of “Come to the Bower” continues, “I was [...] stripped”. Through a repossession of the symbolic female then, “the feminine body is exalted and becomes a vehicle for resistance, while at the same time it is never [beyond] the control of men”, with the poet capitalising on feminine abjection while maintaining control over the female body (Alexander, 226), (Walsh, 319).

The collection’s imperative of forging a ‘racial consciousness’ through the construction of the Nationalist male ego against the abject feminine Other, vehicled by the explanatory context of interpretive myths is most evident in the poem “Punishment”. Here, centring the silent spectre of the ‘frail’, brutalised body of a female victim of retributive Iron Age violence, Heaney foregrounds his voice. Continuing in the same vein, drawing a historic determinism in working from past to present, the poet compares the gender-based violence meted out by a pre-historic people to contemporary ‘tribal’ punishments exacted in response to the perceived sexual transgressions committed by Catholic women with ‘enemy’ British soldiers (Ostalska, 88). As in other poems, the historicisation and mythification Heaney enacts here represents violent local acts as predetermined and atemporal, belonging to an archetypal cycle of human social behaviour, thus naturalising not only violence, but specifically gendered violence against the brutalised women present throughout the collection. As in the case of the other female bog poems, the narrative’s figure is sexualised under Heaney’s gaze; her nipples stand erect “on

her naked front”, and in the typical neo-Oedipal binary to which he relegates all women of the text, she finds herself simply as the “adulteress”. Even in death he imagines her as a one-dimensional muse whose identity must be male-centring, “her noose a ring / to store / the memories of love”, declaring that once “[her] face was beautiful” and, with ironic graciousness, “I almost love [her]”. As in the other bog poems, in “Punishment”, femicide is thus presented as pornographic. The title itself suggests the regressive ideological vein in which the poem situates itself, that spanning from postlapsarian ideas of feminine evil to the modern-day culture of patriarchy which breeds such effects as ‘revenge pornography’; that of female sexual guilt and consequential, justified male retribution in the form of women’s humiliation. The male brutaliser is absent and abstracted, with the focus concentrated on the beautiful, helpless and violated female body, consistently sexualised and imagined as a potential or actual lover. The poem’s references to contemporary violence are overt, describing in passive terms the “shaved head”, “cauled in tar” of the “[l]ittle adulteress”. Found guilty of transgressing what Heaney depicts as an age-old sexual code, “[h]er harlotry is the cause of political disaster, and the ignominy of political impotence is sublimated into a fantasy of redemptive order and restitution - the lady [is] chastened and control of the territory [is] regained with that of the female body” (Sharkey, 11). Such is posited as community property, that which Heaney’s poetry reinforces through its objectification, in the nullification of feminine subjectivity. In the foregrounding of his voice through the spectre of the woman, the poet invokes her brutalised corpse to pose ethical self-queries on the divergent loyalties he is pulled between; a “tribal, intimate revenge” and a humanistic “civilised outrage”. As the “voyeur” to the punishment in question however, Heaney legitimises both stances, confessing that he “would have cast [...] / the stones of silence” and describes the “tribal, intimate revenge” as ‘understandable’. Despite the violent image of “her drowned / body [...] her blindfold a soiled bandage”, the poet thus purveys the

right to an exaction of clannish justice and an abstinence from intervention in this naturalised, 'age-old' practice.

In considering the contemporary nature of the events evoked in *North*, the revisionism of Heaney's collection which simultaneously rewrites the reality of war as a male preoccupation and historicises violence against women as mythic inevitability takes on particularly uneasy ramifications in "Punishment", legitimising the actual culture of silence and non-interference in the gendered 'punishments' carried out against women during the Troubles. Just as the poem's speaker "stood dumb", such an approach was in line with the IRA official policy expressed in the doctrine "whatever you say, say nothing" (Ostalska, 92). Through the violent naming of the victim as "betraying" "adulteress" as well as the justifying euphemism, "they punished you", the imperative of male sexual ownership over the female is reinforced, along with a disturbing naturalisation of associated right to retributive violence. A gendered origin of violence against women is then portrayed as a community binding force, constructing racial unity through physically and discursively violated female corpses (Ostalska, 88), flattening internal inequities in the presentation of a homogenous, homosocial national culture through her spectre (Starr, 630). Just as in the colonial rape narratives of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union", where the violent domination of the female Ireland by the "imperial / Male" Britain is expressed in disturbing detail, Heaney's enthusiasm to represent female pain through loaded metaphors of gendered violence is suspect in a collection which purposefully avoids a capitalisation on the dominant (i.e., predominantly male) experiences of violence during the conflict. Figuring violence against women as different, licensable and necessary, Heaney further relegates woman to the Other in a dehumanising act which naturalises female pain.

In conclusion, the representation of women in *North* symbolises a regressive male sexual politics which hinges on the nullification of female subjectivity to foreground a male speaker in the creation of a singularly masculine war narrative. Just as the inversion or reversal of colonial gender politics represents the failed counter-hegemony of the Irish Nationalist tradition through its ultimate reliance on the same colonial rhetoric it seeks to resist, Heaney's postcolonial narrative, in recourse to this tradition, is undermined by the same. As Gyatri Spivak elucidates, "[n]o perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (Spivak, 252). Thus, not only does Heaney's reductive representation of women in this collection assure the continual atavistic inscription of female marginalisation in the contemporary Irish canon, but it also ultimately unsteadies his own overarching critique of colonialism.

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“What’s the Going Price for a Stay-in-the-Kitchen Wife with Big Boobs and No Demands?”: Dehumanisation, Performance, and Second-Wave Feminism in *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”.

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Global Undergraduate Awards – Highly Commended

Ira Levin’s *The Stepford Wives* and James Tiptree Jr.’s “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” (“The Girl”) are texts that emerged in time of great social and political change. It is clear in both texts that the real political world of the time had a definitive impact on how both stories portray the woman-as-machine through the robot wives and the cyborg figure. In this essay, I will compare these figures and argue that these characters simultaneously subvert and satirise the contemporary societal fears of second-wave feminism. Firstly, I will position the texts in their historical context and briefly explore how they emerged from contemporary societal anxieties about the Women’s Liberation movement. I will then explore the portrayal of sex and gender as performative in the texts and how this is conveyed through the figures of the “hausfrau” and the “young gods”. A comparison of the relationship between Joanna and the robot wives and that of P. Burke and her cyborg counterpart, Delphi, will be performed in relation to the creation of and dehumanisation of the feminine ‘other’. Thirdly, the physical and sexual exploitation of the women in both texts will be investigated with particular focus on the connection between the dehumanisation of the characters through their role as servant and their relegation to machine. Finally, I will discuss the concept of live products and advertising in both texts and

how the robot wives and the cyborg celebrities are expected to perform the roles expected of them by the individual societies of *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl”.

In order to accurately explore the presentation of the robot and cyborg women in *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” we must first understand the contemporary societal anxieties which created the space for the existence of such characters. *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl” were both published in the early 1970s, a time rife with political and social change. From the post-war generation of nuclear families, stay-at-home mothers, and baby boomers emerged a generation of women who yearned for sexual liberation and gender equality. Feminist theorists such as Gloria Steinem, Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir (some of whom are mentioned by name in the aforementioned texts) championed this period of second wave feminism. This new wave of feminism rejected typical gender roles and rebelled against the idea of the woman’s place being in the home which invoked the wrath of conservatives who sought to relegate these “radical feminists” back to their “rightful” place as subservient wife and mother. Thus, it is no surprise that texts such as *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl” emerged during this period of great turmoil. Both texts explore second-wave feminism as well as its criticism through the presentation of the normal and robot wives in *The Stepford Wives* and the cyborg figure of Delphi/ P. Burke in “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”.

The societies depicted in *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” exist in dystopian worlds wherein technologies have developed which allow for the creation of the ‘perfect woman’ through varying forms of artificial life. These texts demonstrate that even in dystopian/ alternate worlds women cannot escape the oppressive male tendency to project their patriarchal views and expectations of female bodies and behaviors on the women around them (Uvanovic

123). The society in *The Stepford Wives* is inherently oppressive to the liberation of female bodies. The women in Stepford are reduced entirely to their function as both sexual and physical servant to the men in their lives. Palahniuk cites the robot wives of Stepford as a direct warning of “some pent-up male reaction to the Women’s Liberation movement” (v). This world wherein the woman is entirely replaceable and killed off without much thought to her personal autonomy is Levin’s personal satire of the male anxieties about second wave feminism. A replacement robot wife who embodies traditional 1950s values of docile, subservient women is, for the men of Stepford like those of the anti-Women’s Liberation movement, preferable to a modern wife – a woman with her own thoughts and opinions, a woman interested in her social and personal autonomy.

In “The Girl”, there is a similar idea of replaceability. Delphi is Tiptree’s version of the Stepford robot wives in that she embodies her society’s beauty standards, which makes her more valuable than the physically deformed P. Burke. The most prominent divergence between the two texts is in relation to the voluntary versus involuntary methods of replaceability. The wives of Stepford are entirely dehumanised by the refusal of their bodily autonomy. They are involuntarily replaced by more worthy and desirable robot wives. However, P. Burke’s disembodiment is not only voluntary, she “welcomes the chance to shed the ignominious flesh and bone that have caused her so much suffering” (Hicks 71). While *The Stepford Wives* presents the women’s attitudes as the primary factor in the men’s decision to replace them and their bodily improvements as robots as only supplementary in the transformation, in “The Girl” P. Burke’s “pumped-out hulk” (Tiptree Jr. 3) body is the aspect of her being that needs to be replaced. Where P. Burke “loves what comes next” (Tiptree Jr. 5), Joanna argues against the inhumanity of the procedure asking, “What’s the going price for a stay-in-the-kitchen wife with big boobs and no demands?” (Levin 120). These variations in the societal satires in both texts

allow the authors to construct a basis for examining the wider societal and literary dehumanisation of the woman as replaceable.

The exploration of sex and gender as performative is most explicit in the internal dichotomies between the texts' main characters and the "hausfrau" (Levin 10) in *The Stepford Wives* and the "young gods" (Tiptree Jr. 4) in "The Girl Who Was Plugged In". The "godlings" in "The Girl" are artificially engineered beings whose beauty has gained them celebrity status among the normal people. Breath, a trio of these cyborg celebrities, are P. Burke's personal gods and she, in turn, is part of the "loser's cult" that worships them (Tiptree Jr. 4). These beings are designed with the sole purpose of being sexually appealing and we see that just the sight of their "inhumanly tender lips" is enough to make their crowds moan with adoration (1). These cyborg figure, as well as the figure of the "fifteen and flawless" Delphi (7), are literal embodiments of Judith Butler's theory of sex and gender performativity. Butler's theory states that what we believe to be an "internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body" (xv). Thus, the highly sexualised, performatively gendered bodies of the "gods" are elevated in contrast with the grotesque body of P. Burke. The narrator devalues and, therefore, de-genders P. Burke's body through the repetitive, horrifying descriptions of her as a "girl-brute" (Tiptree Jr. 3), a "monster" (20), a "big rancid girl-body" (4), and "guttermeat" (23). She cannot convincingly perform her gender in such a grotesque body which dehumanises her in relation to her cyborg counterpart. In satirising the societal need for a beautiful body in order to perform one's gender in "The Girl", Tiptree Jr. highlights the societal scripts that view a woman's value and her gender identity as reliant on her body through the contrast between P. Burke and the "godlings" of her world. The connection between performing gender and the dehumanisation of those who do not or, in P. Burke's case, cannot conform is haunting. Not only is P. Burke relegated from

her own gender identity through her inability to embody the societal beauty standards, but she is also relegated to a form of sub-human and is ‘othered’ by society as a result.

The contrast between the “hausfrau” domestic goddesses of *The Stepford Wives* and the pre-transition Joanna similarly explores the idea of performative gender. As previously mentioned, where P. Burke’s physical body is the most prominent problem, it is the attitudes and opinions of Joanna and her fellow wives which the men of Stepford find abhorrent. According to the “scripts she is expected by society to play” (Donawerth 60), Joanna is not correctly performing her gender. She is not “pleased with detergents and floor wax” nor is she “big in the bosom but small in the talent” like the robot wives (Levin 49). Joanna, like P. Burke, is not truly woman she does not condescend to her society’s ideas of femininity. The robot wives enact the ideal, stereotypical female values and perform what their creators (the Men’s Association) view as their gender. They too are embodiments of Butler’s theory taken to the literal extreme. They have no “internal essence of gender” and are entirely defined by the “gendered stylisation” of their bodies (Butler xv). However, in the eyes of the Stepford husbands this makes them womanlier than their original counterparts who subverted traditional gender performance. In doing so, the robot wives also engender their own objectification and dehumanisation. Their innate need to perform the traditional duties of the 1950’s housewife relegates them to the role of servant. Joanna and the other pre-robot wives are also dehumanised by this societal focus on their being subservient to their husbands. For example, when members of the Men’s Association visit the Eberhart’s house Cobra degrades her by saying “I like to watch women doing little domestic chores” (35), while Ike Mazzard draws her in a sexually suggestive manner, scrutinising her body and making her feel “as if she were naked, as if Mazzard were drawing her in obscene poses” (33). Even before they are transformed, the women are inferior, sexualised and treated as servants by the men of Stepford, just as P. Burke is seen as sub-human in her own body and as no more than a sexual tool in Delphi’s body.

The function of both the robot wives and the cyborg P. Burke/ Delphi as servant is another point which finds its roots in the second-wave feminism debates of the time. The wives of Stepford are reminiscent of the dissatisfied housewives described by Friedan as “the problem that has no name”. The “problem” of the 1950’s and 60’s housewife, says Friedan, was nothing to do with her husband, children, home, or sex: it was a feeling of guilt and shame for not fulfilling the perfect role that had been so engrained in their minds and their cultures. The pre-robot Stepford women embody many of these dissatisfied characteristics. For example, Joanna questions whether some of the robot wives such as Kit Sundersen are happy in Stepford, asking Kit “do you feel like you’re living a full life?” (Levin 49). The robot women represent the idealised 1950’s and 60’s vision of a real housewife, believing that by performing the role of subservient house servant they are “living a full life”, working as a ‘unit’ with their omnipotent husband. However, housework in the novel is also symbolic. Friedan suggests that “the more a woman is deprived of function in society at the level of her own ability, the more her housework, mother-work, wife-work, will expand – and the more she will resist finishing her housework or mother-work, and being without any function at all” (226). This theory is conveyed through the robot wives who always have “so much to do around the house” (Levin 25). The men have designed their robot women to be more than content to serve as the equivalent of a washing machine in their own house. These robot women are not given the opportunity to fall into the trap of the “problem that has no name” that affected so many women during the 1950’s and 60’s and are, thus, able to exist as perfect, idealised versions of real women and wives. Pat Mainardi theorised that even something as “trivial” as housework is “intensely political, because it [...] both enables men to do other, more “important” things, and at the same time prevents women, who are busy scrubbing toilets, from doing those same things” (Krugovoy Silver 114). This is, then, why the robots of Stepford when asked if they go out much respond with variations of “No, not much [...] I don’t feel much need for relaxation”

(Levin 25). The robot wives are designed with the private sphere as their domain and, as such, leave the public sphere to the men which demotes them to the position of unintelligent, uninteresting “hausfrau” (Levin 64).

In “The Girl”, Tiptree Jr. presents a different kind of servantry to the subservient housewives of Stepford. Donawerth provides an interesting argument that suggests that there is even a dichotomy within the sub-genre of texts offering portrayals of the woman as machine. She argues that “the mechanical woman created by women writers will not stay in the servant mold men have designed for them” as they do in texts written by men (Donawerth 60). This can be observed in the two texts being examined in this essay: *The Stepford Wives* written by a man, Ira Levin, concludes with all of the female characters being confined to their woman as machine role in the form of the robot wife, while “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”, written by a woman under a male pseudonym, has a more complex ending for the half-mechanical P. Burke. P. Burke is, in essence, a different approach to Mainardi’s woman who is relegated and confined to the private sphere. Where the robot wives of Stepford are the realisation of this theory, P. Burke is the antithesis of it and is, then, a demonstration of what could come of intellectual women in control of their own autonomy. Hicks states that P. Burke as the “real living woman” (Tiptree Jr. 29) behind the robotic Delphi, is the woman that Paul, “archetypal male idealist and intellectual, recoils from and murders” (74). P. Burke’s function is to play the role of servant - to her company, to Paul, to Delphi’s body – and when she fails to do so she is revealed as inhuman: “the thought of that monster fastened into little Delphi’s brain nauseates [Paul]” (29).

Interestingly, where *The Stepford Wives* concludes with a new prospective robot wife, Miss Austrian, encountering the now robotic Joanna who has succumbed (involuntarily) to her position as housewife, “The Girl” does not afford P. Burke the same fate. As suggested

previously, P. Burke is killed because of her inability to perform her expected role in society when she is literally exposed as the “gaunt she-golem flab-naked and spouting wires and blood” that lies behind the societally perfect Delphi. However, P. Burke’s death could also be seen as a mercy killing by the author who, in doing so, gives her the luxury of escaping her mechanical prison, the “fantastic cybersystem” which she is trapped in by a permanent contract, through death. In fact, in both stories the primary character is killed by the man she loves which could symbolise the inescapability of the clutches of the patriarchy by any means other than death. Even when these characters rebel they are overpowered and outnumbered by the men in their lives, indicative perhaps of the societal fear of the “radical feminist” of second-wave feminism who mainstream society tried to eradicate to ensure the upkeep of the status quo.

Donawerth’s “woman as machine” trope is exemplified further in both texts through the authors’ examination and use of advertising as symbolic. In both *The Stepford Wives* and “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” the women are reduced to the role of servant by their mechanical state which becomes their only function in society. However, the robot wives and the cyborg Delphi are further dehumanised by the simultaneous role of product and advertiser which they are expected to conform to. Delphi, like the other “godlings” (Tiptree Jr. 2), is an “investment” (11). Her role as a celebrity is to endorse and sell products for her company to bypass the future world’s strict “NO ADS” (2) policy. However, it could be argued that the entire story is an advertisement (Hicks 75). Where P. Burke is selling products through the body of Delphi, so too is the author selling her technologically advanced future through the story of the cyborg girls. In the narrator’s advertisement of this new technological world, the story of P. Burke/ Delphi is a portrayal of selling a flawed product in the same way Delphi sells products that “gave her a rash and [...] made her dizzy” (17). It is no surprise, then, that when P. Burke is killed, Delphi’s body is repurposed and refitted with another “Remote” who will

continue to sell the company's products. P. Burke is entirely dehumanised and replaceable like the Stepford women, as Donawerth's "woman as machine" (60) suggests. Once she can no longer perform her function as product and advertiser, she can be replaced by another brain that will.

The robot wives of Stepford are subject to playing the role of advertiser and product in a similar fashion. The Stepford wives are "actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax" (49). They continuously perform to an invisible audience for their husbands who derive pleasure from watching women "doing little domestic chores" (35). Their entire being, then, is an advertisement for new prospective 'clients' such as the aforementioned Austrians. The construction of the wives as products of the Men's Association, however, is an uncomfortable and complex relationship in a different fashion to that of Delphi and her company. The Stepford men, in effect, become "fathers" to their own wives through the process of the creation of their robot body (Krugovoy Silver 120). However, Freudian allegories aside, the robot wives are manufactured and produced by their creators in a way that renders them inhuman. Unlike Delphi who has a human brain, they entirely embody the woman-as-machine, losing all human functions, including reproduction. This is exemplified in the novel when Joanna is manipulated into attending her own murder scene by her belief that seeing Bobbie bleed would prove that she is still "real" (Levin 129). This concept is expressed far more overtly in the 1975 *The Stepford Wives* film when Joanna stabs the robot Bobbie in the stomach, and she does not bleed. Not only does this show that her transformation has dehumanised her by rendering her entirely mechanical, but it is also symbolic of her inability to menstruate and, thus, to reproduce (Krugovoy Silver 119). The Stepford wives are, then, sexually impotent but still programmed to cater to their husbands every sexual desire without any of their own. Not only are the robot wives dehumanised literally through the removal of their human bodily functions, but they are also rendered even more mechanical by the societally desired role of the

sexually available, yet innocent woman that they are now forced to play. Levin addresses some of the fears about the women's sexual liberation movement of the time in the portrayal of the men as creating sexually desirable and entirely acquiescent robot wives, who have no wish for bodily autonomy of their own. They are relegated to the position of object and are punished by being forced to serve their role as a product of the men.

The roles of the female characters in both *The Stepford Wives* and "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" are entirely dependent on and constructed around the stereotypical, largely misogynistic views of the patriarchal societies in which they live. The robot wives of Stepford and the cyborg body of P. Burke/ Delphi are very similar figures that suffer because of the societal scripts that define their roles as women and as human beings. Through the examination of their gender as performative, their function as servants to their husbands and company, respectively, and the creation of these figures as products and live advertisements, this essay has explored the connections between Joanna and the Stepford wives and the figures of P. Burke and Delphi. I have also argued for the relationship between second-wave feminism, anxieties around women's liberation, and the creation of these two texts which subversively and satirically portray the woman-as-machine. The dehumanisation of the female characters in these texts is irrevocably linked with the societal ideologies that saw them as subservient to their male counterparts and believed that their primary function in society was as servant. This essay has dissected the intersectionality of the above topics and themes with the aim of proving that these texts subversively convey Palahniuk's statement that "a woman's place was on the picket line, and it's no wonder men were scared" (vi).

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The Mythical Method in T.S Eliot's *The Wasteland*

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Recommended

Myth and mythological motives and narratives hold a prominent presence in T.S. Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land*. In his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot outlines his theory of the "mythical method" that he observes in the novel and then further develops. "In using the myth, [the writer is] manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (5). To Eliot, myth is thus capable of "controlling, ordering, giving a shape" (5) to chaos and confusion, which he now seeks to apply to a post-World War society. Denis Donoghue sums this mythical method up as "the juxtaposition of two levels of awareness, two planes of reality, at once similar and different" (211). This way of linking past and present serves to give structure to one or both, in this case primarily post-World War One Europe. The devastation across much of Europe that also tore into a whole generation of young Englishmen and a crisis in the theory of knowledge (Brooker & Bentley 13) created a social, but also artistic atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation. Historically, myth has been the source of explanation of natural phenomena and societal structures, of etiological and eschatological orders, connecting their writers and audiences to the world around them and their history, and Eliot utilises this connection in the structure of his poem.

However, references to myth throughout the poem also seem at first glance disconnected or only tangentially connected to the scene portrayed in the respective section. In "II. A Game of Chess", for instance, the citation of "laquearia" (l. 92) from the *Aeneid* refers to a banquet scene in Dido's palace in Corinth, a city which will appear again later. The setting

is somewhat analogous to that of the pub meeting, it also being a social scenario involving food and talk. The setting here is not so much described as signified by the barkeeper's frequent interjection between the speakers jumbled private conversations.

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,

And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot –

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. (l.165 – 170)

But apart from this similarity the Dido reference does not illuminate any relationships or seem to provide new context or deeper understanding to the scene. However, Gilbert Seldes wrote of the reading process that “gradually one discovers a rhythm of alternation between the visionary (so to name the memories of the past) and the actual, between the spoken and the unspoken thought” (138). The individual comparisons between scenes are not as important as the connections they establish firstly across the poem and then out of it between texts and traditions. Thus, with the consideration of other myths that influence the poem, a rich network of intertextuality and evocative citation emerges.

The other parts of this network at first appear similarly empty with deep meaning. Cleopatra, once part of a rich mythologised history, now resides in an enclosed space that still echoes the luxury of her life and status, but also entraps her in a paralysing, resin-like artificiality.

In vials of ivory and coloured glass

Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes.

Unguent, powdered, or liquid – troubled, confused

And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air

That freshened from the window [...]

Huge sea-wood fed with copper

Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,

In which sad light a carved dolphin swam. (l. 86 – 96)

David Craig summarises this as “an indoor, lifelessly ornate setting” (201). And indeed, her “strange synthetic perfumes” and the artificial “carved dolphin” in a “sad light” can only imitate the natural world outside, but not fully recreate it. Generally, there is the sense that these feelings or the soul behind the myth are lost in Eliot’s mimetic process: “The nymphs are departed” (l. 175), the actual subjects of myth have left a world that, after a devastating war and alarming revolution in Russia, seems empty and devoid of meaning. This empty shape that myth is made to take on here also governs the poem’s landscape, especially the marked absence of water and liquidity experienced by the barren “brown land” (l.175), “cracked earth” (l. 369). In “V. What the Thunder Said”, the speaker encounters a desolate dry landscape in which “there is no water” (l. 358). However, he can summon the mere sound of water into the poem by mere wishful thinking.

If there were rock

And also water

And water

A spring

A pool among the rock

If there were the sound of water only

Not the cicada

And dry grass singing

But sound of water over a rock

Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees

Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop

But there is no water (l. 347 - 358)

A poem can only recreate sounds, not the actual physical thing that makes them. This echo of a disappeared and insubstantial albeit vividly invoked element reflects the mythical presences in the poem. Their sounds are recreated, they are quoted to great extent every few lines and assist with the foundation of a semi-narrative red thread through the poem in the form of Ovid's Tiresias and Phlebas the Phoenician Sailor.

However, Harriet Davidson also characterises myth as self-contradicting, as the Wagner quotation "Öd' und leer" (l. 40), desolate and empty, "counters the speaker's sense of emptiness with cultural plenitude" (128). As Seldes remarked, eventually this "cultural plenitude" starts forming a pattern across the poem, communicating with both the present scene and each other. They commiserate with each other in the barrenness that they either contain or in which they are rendered by an artificial portrayal. This also relates to what Eliot writes about intertextuality in his 1919 essay "On Tradition and the Individual Talent".

No poet, no artist of any kind has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the

dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him,
for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (106)

By weaving quotes from and references to myth and other stories, Eliot precludes what he expects from his readership and indeed anyone engaging with art. He firmly places himself in the network of mythical connections and influences, claiming perhaps not equality in writing, but certainly his own importance in said entanglement of art. This is because in doing so, Eliot moves past one-sided inspiration and appropriation, and what seems at times like ekphrasis applied to texts. Rather, the “existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new” (106). And indeed, these myths start to communicate to one another across the poem as some of their differences but also similarities become apparent.

Furthermore, in the form these myths are quoted by Eliot, they already have undergone adaptation and rewriting into multiple new contexts. For instance, the Tristan and Isolde myth, made popular through the medieval romance based on even earlier stories, is here invoked by a quotation from Wagner’s operatic retelling of it.

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu,
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du? (l. 31 – 34)

Myths are also not just linked to the present, but also other myths and literary works throughout the poem. The quotation from and modification of Edmund Spenser’s *Prothalamion*, “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song” (l. 176), is itself linked to the older Greek nymphs that frame this reference.

[...] The nymphs are departed.

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

Or other testimonies of summer nights. The nymphs are departed. (l.

175 – 179)

They are made part of a larger connection, not just one large mythology of the past with the contemporary of the vanished empty bottles and sandwich papers, but several layers of myth whose reading automatically impacts readings of the other myths. There is no movement “in any direction suggesting a possible unitive perspective” (Brooker and Bentley 130), but rather an oscillating agglomeration of mythical associations.

The Fisher King, arguably the most significant and at the same time elusive of mythological figures in the poem, also features in Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*, which inspired much of the poem, including its title. It is significant that it is the Fisher King that dominates the poem. As opposed to the *Aeneid* and the Greek myths, the Fisher King is a distinctly Christian myth, involved on the Arthurian knight’s quest for the Holy Grail. The Fisher King’s own quest to regain his fertility and agency lends the poem its own apparent drive to create order amidst a cacophony of voices and images. Additionally, in the myth the Fisher King’s injury separates him from the land of his kingdom, as “before his wound, the king and his land were one, but he was not conscious of it” (Brooker & Bentley 66). This disruption of a vital, established order and subsequent effort to regain said order forms an essential part of the poem as symbols of rebirth and regrowth struggle through the poem: The endeavour to regain water in a waste land and the “stirring [of] / dull roots with spring rain” (l.

3f.) similarly evoke a barren landscape under the surface of which potential waits to be aroused again. This prevalence of water and references to fertility set counterpoints against the Fisher King's impotence. For instance, one of the women at the pub in "II. A Game of Chess" "had five [children] already, and nearly died of young George" (l. 160), suffering in her fertility just as the Fisher King does in his lack thereof. Additionally, in "III. The Fire Sermon", Eliot conjured two representatives of asceticism and self-denial.

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

Burning

(l. 307 – 311)

The quotation of "To Carthage then I came" (l. 307) traces back to St Augustine's Confessions where the full quote reads "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears" (from Eliot's own notes on the poem). These unholy loves refer to a hedonistic culture of sexual promiscuity, which St Augustine engages in. The quote used by Eliot is followed by a sequence in which St Augustine "polluted the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence and dimmed its lustre with the slime of lust" (31). Again, the myth of the Fisher King's involuntary impotence is inverted and reflected back by a story of hypersexuality and virility which is eventually given up freely as Augustine gives himself to celibacy. Furthermore, St Augustine is intermingled with the Buddha's Fire Sermon. Similarly, as Siddhartha, the Buddha lived a full and luxurious life with a child before seeking enlightenment in asceticism, including in self-imposed celibacy. This brings an apparent incongruity to the mythical network, but also creates a balance of fates that eventually reach the same point where

no more procreation occurs. Myth's symmetrical movement here suggests at least the reassuring appearance of a logical order of equilibrium in a chaotic post-war world.

It is the synaptic quality of myth that Eliot then additionally utilises to create a structure that leans on and engages in constant hermeneutic contact with other myths and literary fragments, facilitating a constant stream of inspiration and interrogation in all directions. And yet, the present poet's engagement with it also alters its nature, highlights the circular, recurring qualities of myth, the basic patterns it reflects. Themes of barrenness, infertility, and impotence in any literal or metaphorical sense resonate as much in present circumstances as in the "ancient" times. Myth thus is rendered less of an ancient presence in a contemporary poem but rather becomes part of a synaptic system of art and storytelling that shifts with every new quotation and allusion in the poem. It also reaffirms the cyclical and repetitive nature of history and human experience. The Fisher King's despair at his own lack of potency can give commiserating solace to the disillusioned man after the Great War, just as Dido in the feast episode of the *Aeneid* could communicate a similar experience of empty riches and ceremonies to Cleopatra.

The Waste Land mimics networks that are vital to our understanding of what can be loosely called out civilisation. These networks, such as history, interpersonal entanglements, myth and storytelling, and everything that connects them to each other, do not always make sense. World War One has at this point resulted in a climate of uncertainty and loss of trust in the political system. The deaths of millions of young men and the economic devastation further add to a general sense of disconnect. According to Donoghue, "the force of a myth, in its bearing upon events, is that it speaks from a long perspective and gathers into its story much experience of poverty, need, and hope" (209). Myth thus can bring order into a devastated England, not by replacing the structures that were dismantled by crisis, but rather by

establishing a network of stories and myths that collectivise the experience of loss and confusion through history. Its networks of imbalances followed by narrative equilibrium suggest an obscure cosmic balancing act that may give some sense of structure in a society after crisis. The presentation of these mythologies is objective while they themselves are deeply subjective, evoking magic, literary passion, and deeply felt tragedies. They bring into equilibrium a subjective but orderly world that is lost or in the process of being lost, while also, by their seeming irrelevance and meaninglessness, representing the present world of objectivity and confusion. To make this “modern world possible for art” (“Ulysses, Order, and Art”, 5), myth lends itself as a point of connection that embeds the present in a wider synaptic net of art and meaning.

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Lady Mary as a Dandiacal Figure

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Recommended

Lady Mary once says, “I should hate to be predictable.” (Season 3 Episode 1 1:08:22), setting, in that way, the tone of her character which has been expanded and developed since the start of the series. *Downton Abbey* is an award-winning and extremely popular TV series created by Julian Fellowes and aired between 2010 and 2015. It explores the everyday life of the Crawley family and their servants who live in a large manor house surrounded by a big estate in Yorkshire, Downton Abbey. Set in the early twentieth century (the first episode is set in April 1912), the series explores both upstairs and downstairs characters and how they go through their lives interacting with circumstances such as the First World War. One of the main characters of the show is Lady Mary Crawley, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Grantham, and possible heiress of the estate. This essay will argue the presentation of Lady Mary as a dandiacal figure by exploring fashion, class, roles and occupation, and gender fluctuation in her character and how she uses her association with the dandy to assert her power as a woman. Furthermore, Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* will be used as a point of comparison with Lady Mary, as it is another fictional dandy of the time.

Fashion is one of the key aspects of the dandy as it is a distinct feature that makes them stand out in the crowd. As argued by Feldman, “The dandy is [...] artificial in dress and deportment, always elegant, often theatrical. [...] the dandy has a defensive air of superiority that shades into the aggression of impertinence and cruelty. [...] Outwardly cold, he burns

inwardly.” (3). This could be an exact definition of Lady Mary as it will now be explored. Firstly, Lady Mary appears as someone extremely “cold, controlled and proud” (Braga 4) who does not show her emotions and uses dresses to hide them. Since the first episode, her passion for clothes is emphasised when she must go into mourning because her cousin and future fiancé dies on the sinking of the Titanic. Her first reaction when being informed by her father of the situation is “Does this mean I’ll have to go into full mourning?,” and when Lord Grantham leaves it up to her to mourn Patrick as a fiancé or as a cousin she says “Well, that’s a relief.” (Season 1 Episode 1 13:06, 13:26). However, Lady Mary’s clothes are not only a concealment for her real self and emotions, but they are also a delight to look at, she wants to be admired.

Lady Mary’s dress for her wedding with Matthew Crawley, the new heir of the estate, has extremely beautiful embroidery, and “As Michelle Dockery (Lady Mary Crawley) points out, the detail of her wedding dress is “extraordinary”” (Mattisson 13), and perfectly fits the character of Lady Mary. This dress is a form of self-assertion for her and her aristocratic family as well. As Woolf explains about Orlando when she starts being a woman, “[Clothes] change our view of the world and the world’s view of us.”, despite Orlando keeps being her own androgenic self, the change in dress means a “certain change” in herself and her relationship to the world (132). The same can be argued for Lady Mary, as clothes vary from season to season depending on how she wants to portray herself to the world. In the case of the wedding dress, it represents the beautiful and proud eldest daughter that ends up marrying the new heir of the estate for love and to secure her position in society. At that moment, the family is having economic difficulties, however, “Mary was never going to marry on the cheap.” (Season 3 Episode 1 14:13) and they have a status to maintain.

Furthermore, clothes also help Lady Mary to distance herself from the world and create a mask that helps her go through the challenges of life. The beautiful wedding dress shows her

love for Matthew but conceals the monetary disagreement that exists between them and almost stops the wedding. Another example is how dresses help Mary when she is mourning Matthew's death in Season 4. Because of grief, she has frozen herself in a mask of indifference, imprisoning herself in black clothes thinking they will keep her safe. "Where is the black one?" (Season 4 Episode 1 5:20) is her reaction when her maid suggests a deep purple shawl to wear. However, when she decides to return to the land of the living, it is reflected in her clothes and mirrored in her actions. She assumes her role as co-manager of the estate until her son is of age (Gullace 23) and depicts it by wearing an embroidered purple dress to the tenant's lunch.

Class and how "the Abbey itself deliberately functions as a microcosm for the state" (Byrne 315) make Lady Mary a dandy both accepting and challenging the various aspects of her position as an aristocratic eldest daughter. This microcosm of society is depicted in the hierarchical structure that creates the family and their servants, upstairs and downstairs. In this way, it can be argued that *Downton Abbey* "resonates with the desires, anxieties, and values of contemporary viewers" (Delsandro 515) because of its diversity in characters and plots. Lady Mary and Thomas Barrow, the eldest daughter, and a servant, are from different worlds but they are remarkably similar, and they represent how class can affect a dandiacal figure trying to sort out their "complexity, intelligence and darkness" (Byrne 322). While class frees Lady Mary in many ways, it imprisons Thomas. As a gay man in the early twentieth century using a dandy personality to build his relationships with the other servants, he is always left out and defined as a mischievous character. But "No man is an island, Carson, not even Thomas Barrow." (Season 6 Episode 8 1:02:36) as is shown when he tries to end his life because he does not see any light in his darkness. Thomas, like Lady Mary, challenges both class and gender norms which he experiences quite harshly throughout the series. Although all he suffers, he learns to sort out his darkness by accepting himself as he is. Therefore, it can be argued that

class expectations are only another way to put on a mask to hide what is shameful and painful. Because class is performative (Byrne 318), Thomas and Lady Mary create constant mirrors between them as they challenge their respective classes' expectations. She sums up perfectly why "My life makes me angry." when explaining, "Women like me don't have a life. We choose clothes and pay calls and work for charity and do the season. But, really, we're stuck in a waiting room until we marry." (Season 1 Episode 4 12:33). Although class allows Lady Mary to explore idleness, occupation, and love on her own terms, only through being in constant defiance against the constraints of her class she can attain what she wishes and not settle from the beginning to what her family expects of her.

However, class allows her much more than she sees because the world is her own, or, if not, of her class. She can be a woman "navigating oppressive gender roles" as portrayed in the series (Nesbitt 252), but she also has a position, a place to stay and people who love her despite her "brutality" when portraying her dandiacal elegance (Feldman 8). Class is both a constraint and a reason for freedom for Lady Mary and as she grows up through the series, she discovers the real power that she has even if she challenges gender norms as defined for her class. For example, when a maid is trying to blackmail her by threatening to expose her week's adventure with Tony Gillingham in a hotel, she decides to avoid her, but her father gives her some money and makes her swear she will not say a word unless she wants to be prosecuted. The maid's reaction is quite clear, "Aren't you the lucky one? But then, I suppose you always are." (Season 6 Episode 1 47:50), describing with anger how society privileges the aristocracy and that, even when they challenge their path, they have more possibilities to remain untouched.

Roles are the basis of a patriarchal and hierarchical society. As Robert, Earl of Grantham, puts it, "We all have different parts to play, Matthew. And we must all be allowed

to play them.” (Season 1 Episode 2 44:05), a traditional way to justify the class system but also a statement that can free Lady Mary to play with the roles expected of and assigned to her. With the dandiacal portrayal of herself, she explores how she can broaden her roles, and from being the eldest daughter of an Earl who must marry rich because the law does not allow her to be her father’s estate heiress, she goes on to be the manager of the estate. This long transition is important to note and analyse, as it deals with class and gender constraints of power as well as fashion. Roles and clothes are one and the same for Lady Mary and, because of that, her dresses and her actions go hand in hand and sometimes they even hide each other’s consequences. Lady Mary is a daughter, an heiress, a wife, a mother, an estate agent, and an extensive list of roles can follow, but, in the end, she is another woman fighting her way into a society that does not accept her independence.

The fact that dandyism is her way to manage her “social, economic and [...] sexual vulnerability” (Byrne 317) is exemplified in her adventure with Mr Pamuk. Lady Mary is another victim of the system of primogeniture (Bonfield 490), she needs a husband if she wants to secure her future, but she does not want to marry her parents’ choice, so she decides to show herself as a rebel. When she first meets Mr Pamuk, she is attracted to him. Dressed in extravagance and acting accordingly, they become closer as the day goes by, however, the adventure becomes serious when Pamuk shows up in her room in the middle of the night. At first, she tries to make him go away, and when he approaches her, she says, “You believe I’m much more of a rebel than I am.” (Season 1 Episode 3 28:44), seeing here for the first time her vulnerability, she is still a woman in a patriarchal world. The night with Pamuk and the fact that he dies in her bed is something that haunts Mary and destabilises her world. She is “damaged goods” (Season 1 Episode 5 29:11) so she cannot fulfil her roles as she should.

Apart from that unfortunate adventure, Lady Mary uses love and courtship to hide her

power. She has a mind of her own and she will not be conformed to the roles that are imposed on her (Mattisson 11), but she will challenge them. As seen in *Orlando*, “as long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking” (Woolf 192), and Lady Mary uses attraction to her benefit as well as Orlando uses her marriage to fulfil a personal and social need, being able, after it, to finish her poem (Woolf 194). Around Lady Mary, there are always a bunch of suitors when she is not married, and thanks to the social attention given to her suitors and her love of being admired, she can still run the estate and create her own path after Matthew’s death without receiving much criticism. Therefore, she embodies male-gendered roles despite never resigning from her dandiacal and attractive femininity.

Gender has been argued to be a point of dissidence in Lady Mary’s portrayal of herself as she does not want to embody the woman ruled by “our Lady of Purity”, “our Lady of Chastity”, and our “our Lady of Modesty”, as in Orlando’s portrayal of herself as a woman, “There is no place for [the Ladies] here” (Woolf 93, 95). Orlando and Lady Mary are not that different from each other as they both use fashion, class, and their roles to challenge gender norms and assert themselves and their power. As argued by Feldman, “Not just class but gender is hierarchical, and to challenge it is to step beyond a known culture towards chaos” (9), meaning, in this context, that how Lady Mary acts is portrayed as scary for more conservative characters because they do not know a world where a woman can have as much power as a man, for example, in the running of the estate. When she first asserts herself as the new agent, the reaction of Mr Finch, who has come to discuss the arrangements for a fat stock show, is quite telling, “Mm-hmm. I see. [...] Well, it’s a changing world.” (Season 6 Episode 2 4:08).

The example of managing the estate is an important one when analysing the gender fluctuation that we can find in Lady Mary’s character, but it is not the only one. The basis of Lady Mary as a dandy is rooted in her gender which is a challenge in itself because it is much

more than how she dresses or how she acts. “Clothes are but a symbol of something hidden deep beneath” (Moslehi and Niazi 6), and Lady Mary's use of fashion is a way to portray her true self. Orlando does the same thing when using cross-dressing, as the biographer explains it, “the true self [...] is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be” (Woolf 221). For Lady Mary, her “true self” is made from fluctuations in fashion style, class expectations and roles, but fashion is the greatest example of all because it is a visual thing. The plot about the arrival of pigs to the Abbey portrays how she manages to balance both typically feminine and masculine expectations. Dressed beautifully for the evening she goes for a walk with Charles Blake to see how the pigs have arrived and she ends up covered in mud after carrying water for the dehydrated pigs all night, “A night of discovery.” (Season 4 Episode 7 34:53). If “dandyism challenged the rigid separation of the two-sex system” (Feldman 12), Lady Mary fights against it from the inside, she may not be politically rebellious as her sister Sybil or have a London life while being the editor of a magazine like her other sister Edith, but she has a power of her own, a mind of her own, and she builds her own freedom when society is not ready to give it to her because “[...] the world is changing.” but “Not that much, and not fast enough for you.” (Season 1 Episode 5 29:51), referring to the story with Mr Pamuk. This independence that she shows from the start is developed through the different plots she engages in, as “Downton Abbey contains wholesale challenges to the conservative social and sexual order depicted in the series” (Nesbitt 254). While embodying some traditionally conservative values, Lady Mary shows herself in a constant challenge against gender norms about clothes, behaviour, and sex, using her dandiacal power to define herself as being in between the lines and to play around with a more masculine appearance, with the suitors she attracts, and with the roles she embodies.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that Lady Mary is portrayed as a dandiacal figure in

Downton Abbey, one that challenges expectations and constraints from a more conservative point of view than other characters. However, she makes changes for herself in the class and gender systems that want to define her. As it has been argued, fashion is a key element for the dandy, and it is also of utmost importance for Lady Mary. Her clothes define her as much as she defines her clothes. When discussing class, it is important to note her upper-class background and the benefits and expectations that come with it. Much related to the roles she plays, Lady Mary fights her class's definitions of women to put her own limits in the different areas of her life, fluctuating between both gender conventions to assert her power in a time when women had many limitations. Like Orlando, Lady Mary "need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet she remained herself" (Woolf 190), and because "she remained herself" she was able to use her dandiacal figure to change her own world.

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The Containment of Female Rebellion in Renaissance Drama

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Recommended

Female divergency is the defining narrative characteristic of Thomas Middleton & Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, John Lyly's *Galatea*, and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. The 16th and 17th century cultural context of regressive gender ideology is prevalent through all of these texts, yet this drawback does not automatically preclude the titular female protagonists from subverting their fictional patriarchies, although some conformities may compromise a degree of their insurgency.

In *The Roaring Girl* we are initially presented with a heroine who chafes at the social gender boundaries and appears to outright reject the concept of the gender binary altogether. Identified by the male characters as a "bold masculine ramp" (5.2.14) who physically and metaphorically threatens their patriarchal world order, Moll is initially portrayed as the consummate feminist literary figure. We are encouraged to read her vociferous "roaring girl" persona as the exception to the patriarchal rule, a conduit of pure uninhibitedness. She asserts her personal agency by seeking fulfilment in assumed masculinity: walking the streets unaccompanied, visiting alehouses, smoking cigars, and dressing in male attire. Moll's assertion that she is "Man enough for a woman" (2.2.44-45) authentically challenges the Jacobean period gender ideology, whilst simultaneously serving as an ambiguous inference upon her textually obfuscated sexuality. Most intriguingly, her declaration that marriage is "but a chopping and changing" (2.2.45) of female autonomy infers that she views the ceremonial social contract as inherently harmful to women. The provision of a metaphorical "maiden loses

one head and has a worse i'th'place" (2.2.42-4) is both sexually and philosophically explicit, portraying virginal brides as victims of legal and socially acceptable prostitution, as marriage is a patriarchal institution that innately benefits its male participants, especially in the context of the 17th century. In a sense, therefore, Moll embodies a specific brand of traditional feminism, seeming to abhor the policing of female enjoyment and nonsexual pleasure. Moll's denigration of "all men, their worst hates/And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcraft" (3.1.92-93) infers her awareness of the patriarchal proclivity of preying upon the weaknesses and social disenfranchisement of women. Miller identifies "the exchange of women as commodities operating at all levels of social 'intercourse'" (14), and we must acknowledge that the very existence of the play commodifies the biography of Mary Frith. This conditional aspect of Moll's potency as a figure of professed female rebellion complexifies her significance and suggests that, whilst her initial introduction into the literary canon was legitimately revolutionary, closer interrogation into the background of her origin and the motivations of her character may date her as a rather antiquated and underqualified feminist literary figure.

Moll's legitimate criticism of the marriage economy is textually undermined by her direct enabling of the union between Mary and Sebastian, operating as a decoy fiancée in consciously accepting his "counterfeit passion" (1.2.105) whilst simultaneously displaying a contempt for the shopkeeper matrons who attain political and social security through the marital contract and romantic desire in thinly disguised extramarital dalliances. Dollimore notes that such a neutralisation of potential female insurgency is inevitable, and even posits that this "containment isn't the reaction of power after, and in response to, the event of subversion. It's intrinsic to the process of literary representation" (71). Whilst this sentiment is not without merit, its applicability to this specific "roaring girl" is dubious considering the political significance of Moll's corporeal inspiration, Mary Frith, and the play's insidious

attempt to depoliticise her history through fictional misrepresentation. Baston perceives this “recuperation” (320) of Moll’s reputability as an intentional disintegration of the feminist ideals she ostensibly represents, declaring that “They institutionalise her; they reduce her to stereotype; they subtly undercut her political potency” (326). Crucially, the male playwrights; Middleton and Dekker, provide their female protagonist with sufficient rope to proverbially hang her rebellious ideals, weaponizing internalised misogyny to compromise an example of potential radical feminism. This materialises in Moll’s observation that “there are more queans in this town of their own making than of any man’s provoking” (2.1.333-4) when considered in conjunction with her Jacobean-approved commitment to chastity disguised as self-determining to “please myself, and care not else who loves me” (2.2.361). Whilst the latter confession may read as evidence of female asexuality, a radical Renaissance identity that does not negate emancipated femininity, the running intertextual theme of the three plays is repressed female sexuality. This social restriction in particular casts Moll as an agent of feminine conformity, as within the context of the play, true masculinity is contingent on the ability to engage in promiscuity without moral condemnation and social alienation. In this area of her transgressive “both man and woman” (2.1.190-91) identity she emerges as somewhat adrift, inhabiting a combined image of virginal masculinity, aligning her closer to a “model woman, embodying the traditional traits of femininity-modesty and chastity” (Baston 327) than a standard Renaissance male. In an attempt to dissolve her subjectivity, the playwrights appear to depict Moll as self-infantilizing, and therefore incapable of truly inhabiting a masculine essence, her assertion that “a wife [...] ought to be obedient, but I fear me I am too head-strong to obey” (2.2.39-40), insinuates that her immaturity informs her virginity, signalling an eternal occupation of suspended girlhood and undermining her decision to remain independent on her own terms. Her real-life counterpart, Mary Frith, reportedly a pimping “bawde” who was “dishonest of her body” (Court Record of Mary Frith), challenged the patriarchy in a way that

the male-penned Moll is narratively restricted from accomplishing, seemingly by virtue of imaginative origination through masculine hands.

In opposition, John Lyly's *Galatea* positions quiet feminine rebellion against the status quo as the most effective means of achieving female liberation. In this play, female protagonists Galatea and Phillida initially engage in crossdressing and gender fluidity under the orders of their respective paternal figures. This is specifically addressed within the text, with Phillida swearing to her father Melibeus that "whatsoever [he] command [she] will not refuse" (1.3.12), inhabiting "man's apparel" (1.3.15) whilst vowing that such garments would not "become [her] body nor [her] mind" (1.3.16). Lyly's utilisation of the word "become" is especially significant, as it essentially operates as a double entendre. The idea that a masculine identity extinguishes Phillida's beauty is swiftly proven false upon her interactions with Galatea. Therefore, we infer that there is a certain sense of erotica in rebelling against the gender binary. Another interpretation is that, unlike Moll, Phillida does not perceive masculinity as aspirational, valuing feminine attributes in favour of maleness, an intrinsically subversive stance in both the Renaissance era and Greek mythology. We may also consider that female characters transgressing from the status quo in the effort of self-preservation, rather than instantly submitting to a masculine godly power, is definitively an act of feminist rebellion. Their eventual commitment to their homoerotic relationship may be interpreted as the ultimate act of feminine power and autonomy, as the fate of their respective gender-determination lies in ambiguity upon the conclusion of the text, insinuating that it may be possible to forgo the performance of masculinity in order to attain agency in favour of transcendent femininity. However, this eventuality is also dependent on female virtue, as it is inferred that female love is only legitimised in chastity, and therefore, "for one virgin to dote on another" (5.3.139-40). In this sense, the protagonists of *Galatea* may be perceived as an inversion of *The Roaring*

Girl's Moll. Although Moll's adoption of masculinity is voluntary, her commitment to chastity undermines the authenticity of her ambitions, whereas Galatea and Phillida's experience with maleness is initially exclusively performative, it is their subversive lesbian passions, and therefore outsized femininity which require a masculine transformation to restore a semblance of female societal conformity.

Female rebelliousness in *The Duchess of Malfi* resides within the play's titular character and her thwarted attempt to secure and maintain political power despite insidious familial treachery. As a widow, the Duchess inhabits a unique and precarious position of female power and patriarchal target. Her insistence on her rank and status despite imprisonment solidifies the character as a formidable force, the assertion that she is "Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.102) serving as a direct opposition to her brothers' agenda of male-dominated authoritative monarchy. Her ability to exhibit confidence and dignity under duress is notable, her request that her murderers "Dispose my breath how please you; but my body/Bestow upon my women" (4.2.172) indicates both her courage in the face of death and the vulnerabilities of her feminine physique. Therefore, it is obvious that her textual social context is inhospitable and practically uninhabitable to her considerable degree of feminine ambition and agency. Indeed, the scene of her murder reminds us of the impossibility of a Duchess-reigned matriarchy. As clinically stated in an aside, "*They strangle her*" (4.2.183) effectively severing her feminine weapon of speech, the only artillery she as a female agent is permitted to access. Mahler considers the brothers' consistent undermining of their sister's authority to be a "frenzied attempt at 'sovereign' domestication" (Mahler 358). Unlike "all the other princes of the world" (3.2.135-137), the Duchess is urged to ascribe to "'discretion' and to (female) 'honour'" (Mahler 359), her power and agency dependent on the traditional female virtues of "chastity, silence, and obedience" (Abu Shihab, Al-Shra'a & Shihab 933). However, although her living form of

female agency is neutralised, spirit brutally removed from her corporeal body, this separation from a gendered state paradoxically instils her with a less abstract power to influence the play's remaining narrative. The Duchess' disembodied voice or "echo" (5.3.24) resurges devoid of physical embodiment, and for the first time in the text, actively utilises her power in a useful and effective manner. As a genderless spirit, she attempts to reiterate Antonio's speech patterns in such a format as to warn him of his impending doom, echoing urgently that her husband "Be mindful of thy safety" (5.3.42). Although the warning itself proves unsuccessful, the remnant of the Duchess nevertheless is presented as a more active participant in the concluding carnage, escaping her designated intertwined status of sacrificial lamb and imperious ruler in death, her body finally divorced from her mind.

In contrast, Lyly's *Galatea* depicts subversive femininity as crucial to women's very survival within a political system which views them as either extraneous or exploitable. We may interpret Neptune as a masculine coded deity, and his predation on beautiful virgins as allegorical to the Renaissance patriarchal society and its commodification of the social construct of virginity through the marital contract. His profession that he "hath dealt well with Beauty and Chastity" (5.3.85-86) reinforces that although the play is partially centred on the civil war between femininities, this social order thrives due to its male adjudicator. Within this context, the concepts of marriage and death are rendered practically synonymous, as the former effectively both compromises female sexual virtuosity that the Elizabethan era idealised whilst also demanding the performance of submission and domesticity from its female participants. Meyer suggests that "in Neoplatonic poetic theology, love was commonly defined as the desire aroused by the perception of beauty" and that "archetypal classical examples" of god-mortal romantic entanglements were "universally viewed by Renaissance mythographers as emblematic [...] of the death which is inherent in love" (201). Therefore, the imagery of female

sacrifice is imbued with distinctly sexual undertones of patriarchal consumption. Unlike in *The Roaring Girl*, where the shopkeepers' wives gain a degree of sexual freedom and social capital from this arrangement, *Galatea's* enigmatic conclusion implies that female political emancipation is contingent on solidarity and connection between women. Galatea and Phillida's initial deference to their fathers is rewarded by the text, and they benefit from eluding their duty as sacrificial objects, whilst their relationship is legitimised under the provision that one of the girls undergo a sex change so as to not explicitly endorse homoeroticism. Meyer recognises this caveat as a metaphorical textual remuneration for the averted literal sacrifice, stating that the "impending sex-change" functions as an intrinsic personal cost, insinuating that for a virgin to "lose her identity" and abandon femininity represents a spiritual death (202). However, we may interpret that the inconclusiveness and ambiguity inherent to the plays' final scenes suggest that our female protagonists' most notable transgressive action may be their willingness to embrace an uncertain fate which they actively choose, especially considering there is little textual evidence to determine the specific gender and sexuality of Galatea and Phillida's future relationship. Intriguingly, Galatea's closing words in the play's epilogue appear to encourage fellow maidens to prioritise female pleasure over duty, using the dubious logic that feminine lust is "unpossible to resist" (Epilogue, 11). However, should we investigate the intricacies of her speech pattern, we may infer that this internalised misogyny conceals an admission of political influence, as she notes that women "conquereth [...] all hearts but their own" (Epilogue, 12-13), perhaps subtly communicating that the couple successfully and intentionally persuaded their godly overlords to reconsider their fatal destiny and therefore indirectly achieved self-determination despite an inhospitable environment. Therefore, in this instance, the textual "containment" of the maidens' relationship may actually prove "intrinsic to the process of [its] literary representation" (Dollimore 71), due to the extremity of its

subversive homoromantic implications, not least in light of Renaissance drama's history of utilising young males to portray female characters.

Similarly, female sexual agency in *The Duchess of Malfi* is predicated on prior submission to patriarchal doctrine and gender roles, as the titular character is a widow who benefits from her late husband's demise. This financial and political power is also visited upon her male relatives, namely her brothers, specifically her twin brother Ferdinand, who simultaneously harbours a perverse sexual interest in his sister and desires to exploit the power bequeathed to her by her husband. These incestuous emotions are evinced by his voyeuristic expressions of fraternal concern, from the nauseating "imagination" that "will carry me to see her in the shameful act of sin" to the transparent and misogynistic comparison of his sister to an "Excellent hyena" (2.5.39-41) drawing upon the Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition of employing animalistic imagery to oppress and demean feminine sexuality. Her refusal to embody the reductive qualities of idealised widowhood may be considered proto-feminist considering Renaissance expectations of grieving women to resemble "a palm-tree, that thrives not after supplanting of her husband" (Keeble 253), her insistence on being "flesh and blood" resisting the patriarchy's insidious attempt to render her a "figure cut in alabaster" (1.1.445-47). This steadfast assurance of her own self-image does not falter despite the aspersions cast on her moral character due to her sexual and romantic independence. Therefore, whilst her reputation may be defamed in the eyes of her male oppressors, the rampant sexism is not internalised and the verbal assaults of encompassing the projected degeneracy of a "lusty widow" (1.3.47) do not prevent the Duchess from remaining a transgressive figure, in life or death. In that sense Mahler's inference that the "Duchess [...] sees herself as an ungended sovereign" (361) is partially correct, insofar as she resists the patriarchy's attempts to delegitimise her identity as a regent due to Renaissance gender ideology. However, we may

elucidate that the deceptive nature of her personal relationship destabilises her position as a ruler and compromises the overall wellbeing of her duchy. The Duchess' truest display of female rebelliousness stems from her desire to exist as both a political and sexual figure whilst retaining her inherent femininity. Therefore, to an extent, her often repeated refrain of being "the Duchess" is slightly reductive, as it contains her three-dimensional selfhood in an impersonal title, and therefore, similar to Moll, she upkeeps her own policing of unbridled personhood.

The intricacies of Antonio and the Duchess' relationship also offer an engrossing insight into the latter's perspective on feminine power and rebellious disposition. Notably, her view on the marital contract is not idealistic, as she has experienced both the positives and negatives of the unvarnished reality. However, her viewpoint does not align with Moll's perspective on the institution of marriage, or even the Cardinal's assertion that "The marriage night is the entrance into some prison" (1.3.32-33), believing instead that the success of the sacrament, and committed romantic relationships in general, lies in the extent of freedom a woman enjoys within the social construct. Therefore, her acceptance of a potentially oppositional reaction to her subversive attempt to achieve romantic self-determination is evident as she vows to "Let old wives report I winked and chose a husband" (1.3.55-6). The intentional assurance of this premeditated decision contradicts Galatea's defence that female lust is an innate and uncontrollable gendered condition. In addition, the gender roles transitorily inhabited by the doomed couple are advanced and possess a fluidity that quietly threaten the fixed absolutism of the play's textual context. The declaration of being "man and wife, and 'tis the Church that must echo this" (1.3.191-2) is revolutionary and may be defined as the Duchess' primary success in physically defying patriarchal restrictions on her romantic and sexual agency. Furthermore, within the private sphere of the relationship, the Duchess does not

assume the traditional submissive role of a typical Renaissance wife, indeed, initially, we perceive Antonio to exhibit the majority of such characteristics as he professes to “remain the constant sanctuary of [her] good name” (1.3.163-4), the precise duty that the Duchess herself abdicated in favour of emotional and sexual enrichment. Crucially, however, the Duchess uses her political power and superior status to elevate Antonio literally and metaphorically to position him closer to her level of social significance and power, rather than seeking the submissiveness her brother requires of her. Identifying that his “goodly roof” is “too low built” and that this inequality is a threat to a healthy relationship, she commits to “raise it higher” (1.3.120-22). Therefore, on an interpersonal and intertextual level, the Duchess is an example of a feminine agent who partly succeeds in battle against her patriarchal oppressors. We may perceive her demise as not entirely a cautionary tale of female rebellion, but a logical inevitability in conversation with the fates of the majority of Renaissance era tragic heroes. Her textual “containment” is complex and difficult to ascertain, considering that the extinguishing of her physical life force is both a generic trope of Renaissance tragedies, regardless of gender, and the irrefutably “intrinsic” value of her “echo” (5.3.24) to the “literary representation” of feminine perseverance (Dollimore 71).

In conclusion, Middleton & Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*, Lyly’s *Galatea*, and Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* present female characters engaging in ideologically disruptive activities within the context of their shared Elizabethan and Jacobean time period. Whilst Moll’s narrative “containment” practically neutralises her initial political potency, the virgin couple of *Galatea* subtly transcend their narrative confinement through obfuscation of intention and conclusion. We interpret the Duchess to achieve political and narrative sovereignty in death, however her personhood is the true sacrifice of the Renaissance tragedy’s generic conventions, as she is never designated a forename, and only attains agency as a literal echo of her former

self. We may observe, then, according to the textual evidence provided in the three plays, that female emancipation in Renaissance era drama thrives primarily in comedic and non-dramatic texts that are wholly fictional, as this dearth of realism provides the necessary ambiguous safe space for transgressive artistic output to survive the period's oppressive moralistic gender doctrine.

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Epicoene: Artificial Womanhood and Natural Manhood

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Department of English Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year) – Winner

Ben Jonson's play *Epicoene* is marked by gender transgression, featuring intelligent, independent women and a boy in disguise as a woman, all of whom are played by boy actors. However, its portrayal of non-conforming men and women results in hardly any deconstruction of gender roles. Instead, through its depiction of femininity and masculinity, Jonson's *Epicoene* presents womanhood as constructed and artificial, its boundaries permeable, while propping up manhood as natural and thus more 'real', its position unachievable for all but those who already possess it. Further, the dichotomy of superficial womanhood and legitimate manhood constitutes sexual desire as consumption, as female sexuality is equated to frivolous materialism whilst male sexuality is likened to artistic curation.

The artificiality of womanhood in *Epicoene* is evident in the play's disassembling of its female characters. Femininity is treated as a consumerist endeavor, as no more than the sum of its parts, as illustrated by Master Otter's condemnation of his wife: "her teeth were made i' the Black-friars: both her eyebrows i' the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street. Every part o' the town owns a piece of her." (4.2.80-83) and she "takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, into some twenty boxes; and about next day noon is put together again, like a great German clock" (4.2.85-87). Mistress Otter is reduced to a collection of cosmetics, as her entire person is equated to something that can be easily dismantled and put away, while her 'construction' is framed not as an autonomous act of self-fashioning, but as the decadence of London and its merchants claiming pieces of her for their own.

Indeed, while the city comedy typically acts as a site for the remaking of one's identity on one's own terms, the refashioning of the women of *Epicoene* is portrayed as an act done to them, not by them. Truewit's admonition of men seeing a woman before she is "complete and finished" (1.1.111), with the rhetorical question "Were the people suffered to see the city's Love and Charity while they were rude stone, before they were painted and burnished?" (1.1.108-110), equates women to artistic creations that are chiseled into their proper shape from a "rude" formless mass, thus characterizing 'woman' as something that is created, not as a 'natural' category. In this sense, the attitude of *Epicoene* aligns somewhat with Judith Butler's performativity theory of gender, wherein gender is not a fixed trait, but rather a process, a "modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form" (Butler 36). Further, one is an active participant in "appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities" (Butler 36), not an unwitting subject. Butler's theory differs from *Epicoene*'s portrayal of womanhood in that one engages in the process of gendering rather than being an inert canvas, but they share the core concept of gender as a construction. However, the gender construction of *Epicoene* only applies to womanhood, whereas manhood is situated as distinctly not performative and thus more 'real'.

Womanhood is posited as a construct through its disassembling, and a flexible construct at that, as illustrated by Epicoene's deception on behalf of Dauphine. The metatext of both Epicoene and the female characters being portrayed by boy actors further casts the limits of womanhood as foggy, for to the audience, the visual differences between the female imposter and the canonical women are completely arbitrary. In contrast to boys' ability to slip into womanhood as totally indistinguishable from 'real' women, women's masculine behavior acts only as a pale mimicry of 'real' men, affording them none of the supposed masculine virtues.

The most 'masculine' of women are easily restrained by even the most emasculated of men, encapsulated best by Morose's discouragement of Mistress Otter from further beating her husband by appearing with a "huge long naked weapon in both his hands" (4.3.2-4). The sword functions as an obvious phallic innuendo, with Morose, a neurotic recluse, using it to successfully beat back a woman who has assumed the masculine position within her marriage as head of household, "[reigning] in [her] own house" (3.1.29) with her husband as her "subject" (3.1.30), revealing her ostensible masculinity as flaccid in comparison to authentic manhood.

Furthermore, the cleverness of the Collegiates, the women who speak "with most masculine, or rather hermaphroditical authority" (1.1.70-71), is reduced to illusion and mere mimicry. After becoming infatuated with Dauphine the Collegiates resort to petty tactics to earn his favor, all jealously "[railing] at each other" (5.2.47), with Mavis' Italian 'riddle' revealed to be nothing more than a "plain dealing" (5.2.55), lending textual support to Truewit's statement that the Collegiates "know not why they do anything: but as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and in emulation one of another, do all these things alike. Only, they have a natural inclination sways 'em generally to the worst, when they are left to themselves" (4.6.58-62). The Collegiates, and women as a whole, are degraded as nothing but a flimsy construction, as empty vessels that need to be "informed" lest they slip into their "natural inclinations". Rather than men and women being opposite, complementary 'halves' to each other, man "represents both the positive and the neutral...whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity" (de Beauvoir 15).

Women are represented only as lesser men, for "he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (de Beauvoir 16) and are so thoroughly dehumanized that their rejection of men is presented as a

veiled plea to be dominated: “Though they strive, they would be overcome” (4.1.73). Womanhood is thus presented as a mere cage to restrain the “natural inclinations” of otherwise animalistic, subhuman creatures, with Truewit directly comparing women to “birds” and “fishes” (4.1.81). Further, men who would fail to see the construct of womanhood as simply a facade ornamenting the supposed beastly nature of women are subject to mockery, embodied by Epicoene’s questioning of Morose’s surprise at her speech, asking derisively “Why, did you think you had married a statue? Or a motion only? One of the French puppets, with the eyes turned with a wire?” (3.4.32-35). It is because of the constructedness of womanhood that Epicoene can cross the boundaries of gender while the masculine women cannot.

However, even while disguised, Epicoene’s ‘true’ masculine nature slips out, such as when she wisely advises the Collegiates against pursuing Dauphine only to be met with their shallow appreciation of his body parts (4.6.28-36). Her declaration that she’ll have “none of this coacted, unnatural dumbness in [her] house, in a family where [she] [governs]” (3.4.48-50) further implies the ‘naturalness’ of manhood, for her assumption of masculine authority and stripping away of that which is “coacted” and “unnatural” is ironic in that she is still in disguise as a woman, but poignant in that her ‘natural’ loudness and eloquence as a male, though not yet a man, is now on full display. The assertion of manhood as innate is further illuminated by *Epicoene*’s treatment of male characters who attempt to fabricate their masculinity.

Jack Daw is ridiculed on the basis of his fraudulent masculinity, as he is reliant on shallow appearances and mimicry in the same way as *Epicoene*’s women. Daw relies on plagiarism for his verses and displays little comprehension of the multitude of thinkers he names in short succession, resulting in Dauphine’s assessment of him as a “simple learned servant...in titles” (2.3.80). Daw’s “relationship to culture is one of blind accumulation. Authors' names become

commodities in a sack, goods to be poured out and displayed as the occasion arises” (Zucker 39), a relationship remarkably similar to that between the female characters and their cosmetics. Indeed, in the same way that the Collegiates have no thoughts “but as they are informed,” Daw is described as a “fellow so utterly nothing, as he knows not what he would be” (2.4.133-134). Daw is deserving of derision specifically because he engages in the supposedly feminine practice of mimicry and mindless consumption to bolster his lack of ‘innate’ masculinity.

In sharp contrast to Daw, the Gallants, though by no means the pinnacles of manhood, are able to assert their masculinity through the use of their ostensibly innate qualities to police the masculinity of others. While the beauty and intelligence of the Collegiates and the ‘wit’ of Jack Daw and La Foole, their primary sources of social leverage, are revealed to have external, fallible sources, the cleverness of the Gallants is presented as inherent. Truewit, for instance, gets no explanation for his intelligence; it is presented as simply a part of his person, to the point where his name is a synonym for cleverness. Furthermore, their ability to “make” (3.3.83) the men around them flows directly from this ‘natural’ wittiness, as Truewit is able to emasculate Daw and La Foole through his trickery, while Dauphine’s scheme unravels the manhood of both Morose and Epicoene, though temporarily for the latter. The manhood of the Gallants manifests as natural mastery over women and the lesser men who lack intrinsic masculine virtues.

The presentation of manhood as innate and exclusive, contrary to the portrayal of womanhood as a flimsy construct, carries pronounced consequences for *Epicoene*’s depiction of desire, as women’s desire for men is derided as shallow, consumerist, and even beastly. The Collegiates’ indiscriminate appetites for men and cosmetics are intertwined by Epicoene’s warning that immediately precedes their fawning over Dauphine, which cautions that the Gallants, and men generally, only “think to take [them] with that perfume, or with that lace,

and laugh at [them] unconscionably when they have done" (4.6.29-31). The Collegiates' disregard for Epicoene's warning implies their tacit agreement to being seduced by mere frivolous items, while their active itemization of Dauphine situates them primarily as unsophisticated consumers. Indeed, their ostensible lack of discernment forecloses them from the social power that resides in 'good taste', or "cultural competence" (Zucker 51), reasserting men's rightful role as "producers" of culture, as "tasteful agents" (Zucker 54) and women's as mere spectators, even in the realm of female sexuality. Just as the Collegiates' "crude opinion" (4.6.58) serves to reinforce the notion of womanhood as superficial and women as empty vessels that must be "informed" (4.6.59), denying the legitimacy of their personhood, the depiction of their desire for Dauphine as uncritical and materialistic invalidates the legitimacy of their sexuality.

The degradation of women's desire is further evident in the Collegiates pursuit of Dauphine, which casts female sexuality as base and animalistic. The Collegiates' sexual desire for Dauphine immediately dissolves their sororal bonds as they "rail at each other" (5.2.47) in order to gain his favor, with their sexuality seemingly overriding all reason and loyalty. Notably, their deconstruction of Dauphine into a collection of body parts mimics women's usage of cosmetics in the play. The Collegiates' cataloging of Dauphine's "nose," "leg," "exceeding good eye," and "very good lock" (4.6.33-36) as objects of desire, for which one could "love a man" (4.6.33), runs parallel to Master Otter's enumeration of his wife's beauty products, with the presentation of the selected features as unaugmented, innate parts of Dauphine's body contrasting with the external history given to each of Mistress Otter's attractive components and aligning with the broader assertion of manhood as natural and womanhood as artificial. Indeed, it is on account of *Epicoene's* natural manhood that the Collegiates' sexual desire comes across as grotesque, as their itemization of Dauphine

rhetorically rips a complete human being into digestible pieces. While female sexual desire is dismissed as no more than a base, consumerist instinct for its treatment of men's bodies as no more than a compilation of features, male sexual desire is granted the status of sophistication for the very same itemisation of women. Both male and female sexuality manifest as forms of consumption, but where women's sexuality is discredited as consumerism, men's sexuality is elevated as a form of artistic appreciation precisely because of the play's presentation of womanhood as constructed and thus an appropriate object for men's curation. It is from the disparate portrayals of manhood and womanhood that the double standards regarding sexuality arise, for where the Collegiates' deconstruction of Dauphine is bestial, Truewit's advice that men "should love wisely" (4.1.123) by collecting "one for the face, and let her please the eye; another for the skin, and let her please the touch; a third for the voice, and let her please the ear" (4.1.124-126) is presented as sage counsel, despite similarly reducing its objects of desire to an accumulation of parts, due to the view of womanhood as no more than an artificial construction. Truewit's declaration that a woman "is like a delicate garden" (1.1.93) and proclamation of his love for a "good dressing" (1.1.92), consequently equates women to a landscape that is deliberately cultivated for others' aesthetic enjoyment, reasserting womanhood as constructed according to men's desires.

Further, Truewit's statement illuminates the interconnectedness of male sexuality and powers of authorship, as he takes sexual pleasure specifically in the process of creating a woman through a "good dressing," much in the same way that the Gallants assert their masculinity through the making and unmaking of other men. Indeed, the Gallants' ability to "[rework] knowledge for [their] own ends" (Zucker 39) that enables their scheming is deployed for their sexual pursuits, as Truewit advises the other Gallants to manipulate the objects of their desire: "Then if she be covetous and craving, do you promise anything, and perform sparingly:

so shall you keep her in appetite still... Let cunning be above cost” (4.1.96-101). One’s attempt to shape a woman’s behaviour through “cunning” is placed at the heart of seduction, portraying male sexuality as inseparable from authorship and thus domination, which is acceptable because of womanhood’s status as a creative product. As a result of the framework of male desire as authorship over artificial constructions, the typical, though already problematic, narrative of sexual assault as an unfortunate byproduct of uncontrolled male sexuality is discarded in favor of positioning sexual assault as necessary to seduction, as not only an “acceptable violence” but often a “greatest courtesy” (4.1.75-76), as described by Truewit in his advice on attracting women. Women are thus denied basic agency in their sexuality, whilst male sexuality is inextricable not only from self-fashioning, but the ability to mould others into a more desirable form.

Arguably, Truewit advises the other Gallants to engage in the exact performativity that they mock women and lesser men for, as he instructs them to misrepresent their qualities to fit the taste of the woman they’re pursuing: “If she love wit, give verses, though you borrow ‘em of a friend, or buy ‘em, to have good. If valour, talk of your sword, and be frequent in the mention of quarrels, though you be staunch in fighting” (4.1.86-89). However, the text presents such performativity as irrelevant to their core character; rather, it is presented as stooping to women’s level, as “[approaching] them i’ their own height, their own line” (4.1.84), whereas women’s use of cosmetics, which could be cast as approaching men in “their own height” is not afforded the same assumption of interiority. *Epicoene*’s greater valuation of manhood due to its supposed innateness in contrast to the artificiality of womanhood allows for the construction of male sexuality, and even sexual violence, as more legitimate than women’s sexual desire.

Epicoene reasserts the ‘natural’ hierarchy and imagines manhood and male sexuality not only as dominance, but as the sculptor of one’s social surroundings. The Gallants are set apart from the other characters in that they have agency: they direct the actions of the empty vessels around them through their skills in authorship and reinterpretation. Furthermore, this hierarchy is presented as both fixed and natural, with the Gallants ruling through their natural wit, unobtainable to lesser men, who may only mimic it, and to women, who are more akin to domesticated animals. By denying authorship and agency, *Epicoene* engages in the profound dehumanization of those outside of the rigid boundaries of acceptable masculinity.

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An Exploration of Female Sovereignty and Genre Containment in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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Recommended

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, female insurgency is inhibited by two patriarchal social structures: the construct of virginity and the marital contract. In the case of "The Wife of Bath's Prologue", this limitation of subjectivity emerges as an enigmatic combination of proto-feminist traits contained by layers of internalised misogyny and sexist rhetoric. If juxtaposed with Griselda from "The Clerk's Tale" and Virginia of "The Physician's Tale", two emblems of traditional feminine purity whose conformity to patriarchal doctrine is their literal undoing, it may seem unlikely that female agency can fully survive, or thrive, within the framework of medieval literature. Alisoun of "The Miller's Tale" and May of "The Merchant's Tale" contradict this pessimistic viewpoint, suggesting that women's sexual autonomy is predicated on the expression of subversive, unbridled femininity. This disregard for convention in favour of the depiction of female pleasure may be attributed to the literary stylings of 'milieu' comedy. Meanwhile, "The Reeve's Tale" and "The Knights Tale" operate as a dismemberment and fetishisation of the feminine bodily form respectively. However, although it is perhaps inadvisable to wholly investigate the autonomy of fictional medieval women according to modern feminist talking points, we should not discount the autonomous potential of Chaucer's female characters, whilst recognising and deconstructing the social obstacles prohibiting their access to a state of absolute sovereign power.

The Wife interrogates her society's obsession with female virginity, reminding us of medieval society's highest authority, God, "whan he speketh of maydenhede, He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 64-65), insisting that it is men that "conseille a womman to been oon, But conseillogyng is no comandement" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 66-7). This textual distinction between Man and God is significant within the context of a culture that demands women serve their husbands as though they represent an almighty power in the domestic sphere yet demonises the "loore/ Of boldness" attributed to women "woxen [into] a wyf" ("The Physician's Tale", 71). In this vein, we must consider the true value of female virginity in the Middle Ages, and its complex relationship with the concept of chastity. As I will discuss throughout this paper, the majority of male Chaucerian characters lust for women who are in possession of a "body chast", as they prescribe to the philosophy that femininity "floured in virginitee" ("The Physician's Tale", 43-4). Some critics argue that to encompass chastity in its medieval form "is to transcend the corporeal, or in some profound sense to be rid of consciousness itself" (Bloch, 120), suggesting that a fully developed mind and body is unequipped to realize this goal. Therefore, it is unsurprising that "The Physician's Tale" suggests that ideal womanhood is embodied by a "mayde of age twelve yeer...and tweye" (30), which, for reference, places the consummate woman two years older than the Wife of Bath and four years the junior of the miller's wife upon their first marital experiences. Bloch also hypothesises that the "desire of a virgin is sufficient to make her no longer a virgin" (116), a theory which may be applicable to the courting process of those tales which revolve around heterosexual relationships. In "The Reeve's Tale", the moment we are introduced to Symkyn's daughter, she is sexualised by the narrative, which depicts her as a "wenche thikke and wel ygrowen" (3973). This lecherous physical portrait separates the young woman into her bodily parts of "kamus nose and eyen greye as glas/ With buttokes brode and brestes rounde and hye" ("The Reeve's Tale", 3974-5), already violating the sovereignty of her person, albeit

figuratively, through the misrepresentation and appropriation of her image. Similar eroticisation of the female body occurs in “The Knight’s Tale” where Palamon forces sexuality upon Emelye when “He cast his eye” (1077) upon her “fresshe” (1068) form, rendering her an object of male lust which compromises her status as a symbol of virginity. This defilement of perceived virtuosity is explicated by the “patristic totalizing scheme of desire” which denotes that “there can be no difference between the state of desiring and of being desired, a virgin is a woman who has never been desired by a man” (Bloch, 116). This vestal icon supposedly exhibits the model female traits of “humylitee and abstinence... attemperaunce and patience... With mesure eek of beryng and array” (“The Physician’s Tale”, 45-7). The tales’ textual framing suggests that such obeisant qualities are generally amiss in wives, who either “sikerly...hadde a likerous ye” (*The Miller’s Tale*, 3244) or “desiren have sovereynetee” (“The Wife of Bath’s Tale”, 1038) of self rather than submit to the objectification and subjugation of their femininity by male agents of their patriarchal social structure.

The innate misogyny of “The Knights Tale” may be attributed to the generic conventions of a “noble storie” (“The Knight’s Tale”, 3111) of the medieval variety. The tale is often associated with romance writings, a broad literary category technically defined as a “work in the vernacular” (Cooper, 63). However, such texts generally involve a specific set of characteristics, namely “narratives about high-born people set far away or long ago” whose “plots are concerned with love or chivalry” where “the vast majority have happy endings” (Cooper, 63) within the cultural context of the Middle Ages. In this tale especially, we notice many allusions to the value of conventional feminine beauty. The principal female object of male desire is identified as “fresshe Emelye the shene” (1068) indicating that her “bright” disposition is predicated on her untouched virginal status. The text transparently portrays the depersonalising power of the male gaze. When Palamoun “cast his eye upon Emelye” (1077),

he is essentially disfiguring her literary representation, repeatedly reducing her complex female anatomy to the “fresshe beautee” (1118) of her maidenhood, whilst disregarding her personal agency in favour of catastrophising that “outhur he wolde lese his lif/ Or win Emelye to be his wife” (1486). Crane argues that “one generic distinction of romance” involves positioning “women as objects of...sexual courtship, courtship as metaphorical combat, and the experience of love as integral to knightly identity” (80). Indeed, Emelye’s entire existence within the narrative functions purely to bolster the reputations of her competing “knight[s], a worthy and an able” (1241) suitors whilst simultaneously creating the conditions for their physical imperilment. The male protagonists’ experience with incarceration and exile are implied to symbolise weaponised femininity, as though “Venus sleeth [them] on that oother syde” (1332). This imagery of female sexual dominance may be a reference to Emelye’s Amazonian heritage and her former masculinised identity as a female warrior. However, we interpret that the “yonge suster Emelye” (871) of the Amazonian “queene Ypolita” (868) is disempowered by her status as a romantic interest, and that her supposed “lethal beauty replaces Amazonian prowess in battle rather than doubling it” (Crane, 81), limiting her narrative agency and fetishising her original identity. This mythological comparison is doubly significant due to Palamoun’s prior display of projectionism, relating Emelye, a human girl, to the “goddesse /Venus is it soothly” (1101-2), as it suggests that Emelye is an active participant in this Petrarchan love story, when the very structure of the romance requires her character’s total feminine subordination in order for the plot to function. Crane elicits that the tale presents a “contradiction between prowess and beauty in women” and that Emelye’s “beauty is so consonant with passivity” that the knights’ obsession with her countenance “diametrically reverses her status as Amazon” (81). This reading exposes “The Knight’s Tale” as an exercise in female subjugation where the generic conventions of medieval romance are stylistically weaponized to subdue feminine sovereignty. Therefore, it is truly Emelye who inhabits “this

prisoun moote we endure” (1185), and her captivity is signified by her narrative confinement as a “fully demilitarized” (Crane, 81) object of a patriarchal social structure.

It is important to note that within the context of medieval literature in general, and *The Canterbury Tales* specifically, virginity is less a state of physical purity than it is an idealisation of feminine spirituality. Winthrop Wetherbee asserts that this cultural philosophy is inextricably intertwined with the era’s artistic output, and that the “exaltation of women is one of the commonest conventions of medieval poetry” (80), especially romances. As previously discussed, this “idealization of...human female figures is often fundamentally exploitative”, creating the social conditions for femininity to be “subjected to a standard of purity whose very rigidity expresses the fears that lurk beneath the veneer of reverence” (Wetherbee, 80). “The Physician’s Tale” exposes the period’s depersonalising perspective on female chastity, through its provision of the human embodiment of feminine virtuosity, “Virginia”, the daughter of “A knyght that called was Virginius/Fulfuld of honour and of worthynesse” (“The Physician’s Tale”, 2-3). Similar to Griselda of “The Clerk’s Tale”, Virginia completely conforms to the social, political, and sexual restrictions placed on those who inhabit female bodies. She is described as a “mayde in excellent beautee/Aboven every wight that man may see” (7-8) who “ne lakked no condicioun/That is to preyse, as by discrecioun” (41-2), and that, most importantly, “body chast was she” (43). However, this “virtue does not profit her—if she were less an embodiment of virtue...there would be less reason to kill her” (Cooper, 249) when a “juge his eyen caste/ Upon this mayde, avysynge hym ful faste” (“The Physician’s Tale”, 123-4). This scene portrays a respected masculine authority determining that a “mayde shal be myn” (129), effectively ascertaining dominance over the personhood of a fourteen-year-old girl solely because she “floured in virginitee” (44). The situational context is reminiscent of the dynamic ascribed to Palamon and Emelye, however the generic conventions of this “cautionary

exemplum” (Cooper, 248) require a female bodily sacrifice in its most extreme and literal form. Although her life force is physically extinguished when “Hir fader... Hir heed of smoot” (254), her status as a “gemme of chastitee, in pacience” (223) dissipates in the moment that Apius “falsly jugged” (“The Physician’s Tale”, 228) her virginal purity as an opportunity for a male invasion of a female space. Therefore, in accordance with Wetherbee’s suppositions, the tale’s consistent glorification of Virginia’s purity functions as a “veneer of reverence” (Wetherbee, 80). This societal facade masks the pervasive truth that unattainable feminine virtuosity is a masculine invention that patriarchal social structures weaponize against women for the sole benefit of men. The prospect of “maydens shamefastnesse” (“The Physician’s Tale”, 55) being reduced to “live in lechery” (206) produces such a moral conundrum for Virginius that his protective paternal instincts are compromised by the threat to his daughter’s reputation. Therefore, we surmise that Virginia, who’s entire identity and very forename is defined by the concept of virginity, “is dead...as a virgin, the minute she falls under Appius' gaze” (Bloch, 121). Furthermore, the cultural context of the tale implies that “the only good virgin... the only true virgin—is a dead virgin” (Bloch, 120), indicating that in *The Canterbury Tales*, phrases alluding to feminine purity inherently police and oppress female sexuality, and that virginity as a literary motif may be construed as a signifier of impending death. This gendered subjugation is directly delineated from the gendered generic conventions of morality tales, the majority of which contain antifeminist doctrine created with the sole intention of containing and subduing female sovereignty.

The Wife of Bath’s position as a character possessing a sovereign identity is facilitated, undermined, and ultimately defined by her participation in the institution of marriage, a ceremony which requires a symbolic submission from women, specifically within the medieval context of enforced gender roles that “assigned men to the public sphere, and women to the

private” (Stoss, Abstract). This widespread female experience is decried by Alisoun as the “wo that is in mariage” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 3), the inherently female humiliation of sacrificing your very name and personal identity, reduced to a transactional object enhancing the status of male counterparts and paternal figures. The Wife of Bath represents a complex by-product of such an inhumane economic system, as she simultaneously both literally embodies and verbally disparages a concept that she occasionally merits epitomising should her marital status afford her financial, social, or political security. Chaucer’s command of colloquial dialogue imbues The Wife’s speech patterns with the informed authority of experience when she boastfully expounds that “Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 6) a possessive sentiment usually afforded to masculine subjects referencing female objects of desire. This casual declaration of feminine subjectivity through a masculine declaration of conquest confers that within the contextual constraints of medieval literature, female sexual emancipation is provincial on performed masculinity. Notably, Chaucer affords this character a forename, Alisoun, subtly alluding to the presence of a three-dimensional human within the archetype of the professional widow, whilst also forging a nominal link between her and the Miller’s wife, who shares her name. The connection between this Wife and her “gossib, dwellynge in oure toun... Hire name was Alisoun” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 529-30) suggests a friendship between her and the infidel wife of “The Miller’s Tale”, a plausible intertextual relationship considering their shared propensity for transgressive feminine behaviours. In line with the character’s eclecticism, Susan Crane describes the Wife as a “shape-shifting fairy” who consciously “deploy[s] the language and paradigms of conventional femininity” (55) in an effort to subvert the concept’s suppression and oppression of her enigmatic subjective self.

Whilst gender is a key theme explored in “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, the text also presents the complex intricacies of age-gap relationships, portraying how the interconnecting factors of seniority, sex and beauty contribute to the power and agency of an individual. The Wife, a “fourty” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 601) year old “faire, and riche...and wel bigon” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 606) woman is empowered by her experience and attractive physicality, as evinced by her husbands’ collective profession that she “hadde the beste quoniam myghte be” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 608). However, it is notable that she successfully weaponised her female sexuality against the patriarchy primarily in her youth, a time when women’s bodies are routinely policed but also commodified and fetishized. We may surmise that her objectification by the male gaze “sith I twelve yeer was of age” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 4) has left an insidious impact on her psyche, warping her worldview, and prompting her to perceive sexual exploitation as empowering sensuality. To an extent, The Wife’s self-image is comprised of the few distinctive characteristics afforded to feminine agents in the medieval period, and she unnervingly alternates between the contradicting identities of a “lusty oon” typical of a male fantasy, and the shrewish spouse of anti-feminist literary lore who “chidde...spitously” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 223). Whilst the Wife’s promiscuity may be perceived as sexually subversive, her sensuality does not threaten the patriarchal framework she inhabits, as these behaviours are mostly conducted within the marital bed, and therefore benefit the men she is contractually obliged to pleasure, despite her insistence that she retains “the power duryng al my lyf/ Upon his propre body, and noght he” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 158-9). The true precarious state of her bodily autonomy is exposed upon her marital union to Jankyn, who she attempts to transform into an object of her subjective female desire through sexualising his “paire/ Of legges and of feet so clene and faire” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 597-8). This effort backfires when he inherits “al the lond and fee” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 630) due to his social status as a male

spouse and “smoot me ones on the lyst” (634) imposing his “twenty winters oold” (600) masculine physicality on her feminine body politic. We may elucidate that The Wife’s most successful act of transgression lies in her politicisation of domesticity through her combined use of verbosity and physicality, embodying the stereotype of the scold. Through this apparent conformity to demonised femininity, she reclaims her personal agency from her abusive husband, feigning grievous injury “in the floor I lay as I were deed” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 796) and emotionally manipulates Jankyn to “yaf me al the bridel in myn hond” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 813), effectively assuming authority over her person and that of her husband. Susan Crane interprets this narrative outcome as a relatively successful “resistance to her subordinate status” (95) as a feminine agent in a masculine environment. We may interpret that performed masculinity within the medieval domestic sphere secures female subjectivity and authority, and that shrewish wives pose the real threat to this patriarchal world order where “the “fully human ideal” is finally masculine”, contradicting the old adage that “traits marked feminine can...be integrated into masculine behaviour, but the current does not run in reverse” (Crane, 21). This oppositional reading is most notably corroborated within the text by the Wife’s reflection that “I hadde gotten unto me, /By maistrie, al the soveraynetee” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 817-18) an emphatic statement of the Wife’s newly elevated status as a sovereign power within her own domestic sphere. This achievement of “soveraynetee” represents an impressive feat of self-actualisation within the cultural context of the Middle Ages.

The textual significance of Griselda from “The Clerk’s Tale” lies in her identity as a paragon of marital feminine virtue and therein, her oppositional characterization to that of The Wife of Bath. Within the innately misogynistic context of medieval literature, she represents the era’s consummate womanly ideal of “vertuous beautee” (“The Clerk’s Tale”, 211) because

“povreliche yfostred up was she” (213) and “No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne” (214). This lack of sexual or financial agency positions Griselda as a prime target for patriarchal manipulation, which eventually manifests in her new husband’s obsessive machinations intent on testing her loyalty. The theme of female submission to dominant masculinity is distinctive—within the wider context of *The Canterbury Tales* the concept appears integral to the composition of traditional heterosexual relationships— and Walter’s description of Griselda’s status within their union denotes her subordinate identity within her marital contract. Her prospective husband requires her to serve his needs, stating “be ye redy with good herte/ To al my lust, and that I frely may” (“The Clerk’s Tale”, 351-2), indicating that she perform the sexual duties of a wife despite his prior commendation of “the brest of hire virginitee” (“The Clerk’s Tale”, 219). This implies that female sexuality is only appropriate if policed and exploited by a masculine agent. Most sinisterly, he reserves the right to “do yow laughe or smerte” asserting an almost deity-like presence within their marriage and demoting her to a figure of matrimonial servitude “nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day” (“The Clerk’s Tale”, 353-4) regardless of abuses suffered within the arrangement. Derek Pearsall acknowledges these overtones of God-like authority, and states that “Walter’s presentation of Griselda to his people ‘This is my wyf,’ quod he, ‘that standeth heere’” resembles “God’s presentation of Jesus (‘This is my son...’)” (268), highlighting an intriguing connection between Griselda’s “wo that is in mariage” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”, 3) and the tribulations of Christ on the cross. This interpretation of Griselda as a predetermined figure of sufferance inherently limits her potential for autonomous action, as evinced by her tolerance of her parental alienation of her children. Her acquiescence to Walter’s abuse of power “with hertely obeisaunce”, reducing herself and her children to “Youre owene thyng; werketh after youre wille” which “Been youre al, and ye mowe save or spille” (“The Clerk’s Tale”, 503-4) confirm her characterization as a corporeal exemplum of fidelity rather than a three-dimensional fictional woman.

Therefore, we must revisit the marriage proposal and its unbalanced power dynamics which reduce Griselda's ability to realistically decline. Indeed, the Marquis utilises the innate pressures of a public scene and her financial instability to establish a dominant position in his marriage from the outset. Meanwhile, in a meta-textual sense, the Clerk exploits his female protagonist's narrative and generic confinement for his own purpose, a luxury which this avatar of feminine medieval compliance is denied. Sarah Stanbury notes that the "centering of Griselda as public spectacle, and as the focal point of multiple levels of collective and private scrutiny, evokes... the paradigm...of a masculine gaze on a woman's body" (261), transfiguring the very body of the "povre creature" ("The Clerk's Tale") into a vessel for dominative masculine desire. This possession of the feminine body politic is an act of patriarchal control, and therefore inadvertently contests Walter's own assertion that male "liberte...seelde tyme is founde in mariage" ("The Clerk's Tale", 145-6) as he unequivocally embodies the role of a sovereign power within his own, legitimising the stance that the marital contract is a "blisful yok/ Of soveraynetee, noght of servyse" for medieval men whilst operating as a gendered social prison for their female counterparts, should they commit to the subservient identity of an idealised wife.

Susan Crane contends that "the irregular treatment of women springs in part from their peculiar social definition which dictates that "men have assigned functions to perform", whereas "women's duties" solely "derive from and relate to their sexuality" (97). Therefore, we surmise that the actualisation of the feminine "desiren have sovereynetee" ("The Wife of Bath's Tale", 1038) in the 14th century is dependent on her investigation into the era's politicisation of female sexual agency. Throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer manipulates the generic sensibilities of his stories to illuminate underlying meaning and interwoven perspective. The misogynistic "auctoritee" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 1)

espoused by Jankyn in *The Wife's* elongated "*confessio*" (Cooper, 140) decries "wikked wyves" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 685) who desire autonomy afforded to masculine agents. His assertion that "Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute" (653) recalls the intertextual significance of observed femininity and the sexualised subtext involved when a man "cast his eye" ("The Knight's Tale", 1077) on a female body. However, the Wife resists the patriarchal attempt to contain her subjective femininity. She vocally confronts the medieval era's culturally entrenched sexism, declaring that

it is an impossible

That any clerk wol speke good of wyves

But if it be of hooly seintes lyves

Ne of noon oother womman never the mo ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 688-91).

This succinct estimation of the unrealizable standards consigned to feminine behaviour addresses multiple obstacles faced by female characters in *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole. Firstly, the social and cultural paradox that demands the majority of feminine agents to partake in the marriage contract, which requires wives to fundamentally subordinate themselves to their husband, whilst simultaneously demonising said female participants. Secondly, the veneration of absolute feminine obedience and chastity through the idealisation of paragons of virtuosity such as Griselda and Virginia respectively, whose total submission to patriarchal morality doctrine cause them physical and emotional distress. Finally, the weaponization of both philosophies against the average medieval woman who is expected to consume and internalise this masculine depiction of supposed female deviance. Her speech encapsulates the theory that "Women's statuses are...those of a virgin, nun, whore, maiden, wife, mother, and widow, replacing masculine functions on the social scene with the management of sexual status"

(Crane, 97). Notably, although she is nominally referred to as 'The Wife' for the majority of the text, the elder Alisoun occupies all the aforementioned societal roles applicable to a person inhabiting a feminine body, with exception of mother and nun. As discussed in Chapter Two, 'Housbondes at chirche dore [she] have had fyve' ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 6) and she firmly rejects the sexual policing of her physical pleasure, intoning that she "wol nat kepe me chaast in al" (46) respects. This intentional consolidation of personhood proves the potential for female subversion and transgression within a conventional societal framework. Crucially, it is when Alisoun "made hym brenne his book" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 816) of antifeminist literary texts that she achieves true emancipation within her domestic sphere, communicating that a degree of overt rebellion is integral to quiet female resistance. This symbolically feminist act enables her to "geten unto me/ By maistrie, al the soveraynetee" (817-8) and therein, occupy a radically subjective feminine identity.

In direct contrast to the misogynistic didacticism of "The Clerk's Tale", the central theme of "The Miller's Tale" revolves around the public conformity and private transgression of women in relation to the patriarchal construct of marriage. The issue of potential feminine resistance threatening traditional masculinity is textually interrogated as the gendered supposition of "Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold" ("The Miller's Tale", 3152) is contradicted by the neutral logic that "An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf/ Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf" ("The Miller's Tale", 3163-4), a strikingly progressive sentiment within the context of the Chaucerian era, when autonomous female sexuality was viewed negatively. Thomas Hanks interprets that "Alisoun...joins the profane and the divine" in dedicating "hir ooth, by seint Thomas of Kent" ("The Miller's Tale", 3291) to Nicholas, her paramour, "thus calling upon the resident saint of Canterbury to witness her agreement to commit adultery" (Hanks, 10). Thus, she effectively manipulates medieval religious

convention to theologically legitimise her subversive female actions, separating her transgression from that of the Wife due to the clandestine nature of the promiscuous union. This canonical association of the mystery of femininity with the divine body of Christ frames Alisoun as a subjective agent of activity rather than a passive object and implies that a woman's body does not require masculine policing or containment, a perspective which is more reminiscent of the message of "The Wife of Bath' Prologue" than that of Chaucer's traditional romances. The tale's sexual imagery, whilst undeniably provocative, does not objectify Alisoun, instead she is positioned as the conscious orchestrator of the fabliau plot, informing her true romantic partner to "'Now hust, and thou shalt laughen al thy fille'" ("The Miller's Tale", 3722), confirming her dominant role within all her affairs with members of the opposite gender. Whilst her body is undeniably temporarily trapped within the male gaze through the description that "at the wyndow out she putte hir hole" ("The Miller's Tale", 3732), her characterisation as a subjective agent of action and intent allows her to retain sovereignty of her body politic, and when Absolon "with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers" ("The Miller's Tale", 3734), her personhood and physical form are not divorced or fragmented. We elicit that Chaucer's allegorical comparisons of the character to a "hoord of apples" ("The Miller's Tale", 3267) is not merely a generic reduction of femininity to a consumptive object. Rather, we consider a "phenomenological reading of Alysoun's portrait that describes her elusive promise with particular clarity" which "directs perception sensuously to Alison, who, though not seen in her entirety, is nevertheless amply comprehended" (Woods, 177). Indeed, we may determine that female characters achieve self-actualization and exhibit personal agency more frequently within the generic conventions of comedy than romance or exemplum texts, perhaps due to an inbuilt suspension of audience belief and pre-conception.

Having considered medieval society's reductive conceptualisation of subjective womanhood, we can assert with confidence that the elusive nature of female sovereignty in *The Canterbury Tales* is attributed to its textual insistence that "A fair womman, but she be chaast also/ Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 784-5) and narrative implications that "the only good virgin...is a dead virgin" (Bloch, 120). These conflicting messages convey the medieval female struggle to successfully inhabit and exhibit subjective personhood in isolation of their association with male counterparts. Characters such as The Wife, Alisoun of "The Millers Tale" and even May of "The Merchant's Tale" partially succeed, to differing extents, at obtaining varying levels of agency within their respective personal lives. All three women seek fulfilment outside of one committed marital contract, and we note that the situational contexts of their liberation benefit from a sense of spatial liminality free of penetrative masculinity. In "The Wife of Bath's Prologue", the titular character relishes the sexual and emotional gratification afforded by the "actes and in fruyt of mariage" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 114), but refuses "swich harneys" for the purpose of "usen hem in engendrure" (136-7). Therefore, she subtly rejects the patriarchal attempt to categorise her socially and politically in accordance with her sexual status, as she does not fulfil all the obligations of a wife, does not practise virginity or chastity, and possesses a rank in society that exceeds the position of a whore. Prior to her neutralisation of Jankyn's dominative masculinity, she attains sovereignty when she "made my visitaciouns/ To vigilies and to processiouns/ To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages" and has occasion to "wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue", 555-9). This suggests that a subjective female experience is partially predicated on the freedom of individual social mobility denied her by her fifth husband as referenced previously in this paper. Meanwhile, the subjective potency of Alisoun is initially hampered by her elderly husband, who "heeld hire narwe in cage" ("The Miller's Tale", 3224), whilst May is ordered to "Heeld hire chambre" ("The Merchant's Tale",

1860) due to her husband's primal attentions. Although neither woman is a vessel of chastity by any stretch of the imagination, their respective sovereignty is restricted by their "fresshe beautee and...age tendre" ("The Merchant's Tale", 1601), and, therein, a superficial proximity to virginity as a conceptual status in regard to their appearance. However, both women benefit from the shared generic conventions of fabliau-infused romance in their tales, which manifests in the sexual agency they acquire within the constraints of their marital status as extra-marital affairs. Where tales lack feminine ambiguity and instead engage in antifeminism or misogynistic exemplar, such as "The Physician's Tale", "The Clerk's Tale", and "The Reeve's Tale", female sovereignty is subjugated, and subjective womanhood is practically non-existent.

In conclusion, we surmise that in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, female sovereignty is, to a degree, contained and restricted by medieval literature's pedestalization of feminine virtue and demonisation of female subversion. Therefore, "The Reeve's Tale", and its blatant engagement with the antifeminist themes typical of its genre, inherently undermines female sovereignty in favour of exploiting the female body through the rape motif. Crucially, this text portrays the sexual invasion of the feminine form by male agents, invalidating the medieval philosophy that women who conform to the patriarchal roles of virgin and wife receive social, political, or physical protection from malevolent masculinity. "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" provides us with a proto feminist perspective on dominant femininity within the sphere of marriage. The Wife as a character emerges as a literary figure who attains a sovereign identity through the combined performance of masculine physicality and feminine guile, transgressions which are narratively enabled by the text's thematic liminality and indefinable genre. Meanwhile, the exemplum texts; "The Physician's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale", present the suffering of a virgin and obedient wife respectively. This implies that the medieval morality doctrine is innately oppositional to female sovereignty, as both tales offer reductive, simplistic

portraits of idealised female characters who participate in the subjugation of their own subjective personhood. Whilst in “The Knight’s Tale”, Emelye’s subjectivity is contained by the sensuality projected upon her person, Alisoun of “The Miller’s Tale” and May of “The Merchant’s Tale” assert sexual sovereignty through the pursuit of extra-marital affairs whilst simultaneously conforming to political and social subordination in the form of the marital contract. Thus, we elucidate that in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, despite the Wife’s engagement with masculinity, the pursuit of sovereign femininity is inextricably intertwined with the successful performance, and often pretence, of passivity.

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“Their Defiance Lives On”: Women’s Revenge in Old Norse Poetry

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Global Undergraduate Awards - Highly Commended

David Clark states that vengeance “is of central importance to the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*, underpinning the action of each one” (Clark 173). This vengeance takes many forms, from petty squabbling between families to feuds that shape entire countries. One of the most interesting aspects of the vengeance in these poems, however, is that it is not limited to male figures. Old Norse poetry also provides frequent examples of women exacting revenge, primarily for injustices done to their loved ones. Perhaps the most notable of these female figures is Guðrun, daughter of Giuki, whose life story is presented to us in detail over the course of several poems: *Guðrúnarkviða I*, *Guðrúnarkviða II*, *Atlakviða*, *Atlamál* and others. Over the course of these poems—composed by a number of different poets, in different periods and countries—we are shown the lack of autonomy Guðrun was permitted, the choices that were forced upon her, the injustices that finally spurred her to seek revenge, and the way in which she utilised her limited autonomy to do so. What is most striking about the accounts of Guðrun’s story, however, is the way in which her brutal revenge is commended by the poets. Through their complex, powerful portrayal of Guðrun, we gain an insight into how Old Norse poets—and society as a whole—viewed the concept of women and revenge. Despite the

evident male anxieties concerning a woman's power, we see that a woman's revenge could be celebrated and praised as long as it was in response to a very particular kind of injustice.

As stated above, vengeance in Old Norse poetry is not solely the domain of men and the gods. Although it is perhaps less frequent, we do find plenty of examples of women seeking revenge, most often for wrongs done to their families. This seeking of revenge can occur directly or indirectly: sometimes the woman carries out the revenge plot herself, while on other occasions she spurs another family member into doing it on her behalf. Even in the second case, however, the desire for revenge is a woman's, and this type of narrative is generally categorised in Norse poetry as *hvot*. Ali Frauman defines *hvot* as "a scene in which someone, usually a female family member, attempts to stir a passive recipient into taking revenge for a wrong that has been committed against the household or extended kin group" (Frauman 270). Frauman goes on to explain that this "wrong" is usually the killing of a family member, but can also be "an affront to personal or family honor" (Frauman 270). It is significant that Frauman places emphasis on the household and family honour. Women in Old Norse poetry may seek revenge on behalf of their primarily male relations when the family honour is at stake, but there is little or no mention of the petty cruelties and abuses that they themselves suffer. This gives us an idea of the approach to women's revenge in Old Norse society: it was acceptable, but only under certain circumstances.

Guðrun's story is structured in such a way that we witness her suffer personal injustices almost from the very beginning. In *Guðrúnarkviða I*, Guðrun's first husband Sigurd has just been killed by her brothers Gunnar, Hogni and Guthorm, at the request of Sigurd's former lover Brynhild. Guðrun's grief for Sigurd is made clear from the beginning of the poem, when we are told that she "intended to die, / when she sat sorrowful over Sigurd" (1a-b), and that even though she "could not weep, / she was so impassioned, she might have burst asunder" (2c-d).

And yet, despite the force of her grief, Guðrun does not seek revenge for the death of her husband. Her own brothers are the cause of her suffering, and she declares that their “people and land will be laid waste” as a result (21a), but she does not actively attempt to harm them in return for the pain they have caused her. This provides us with yet another hint about Old Norse values and views on revenge. The death of Guðrun’s husband is presented as a more personal grief, rather than an affront to his family’s honour. Additionally, for her to take revenge on his killers she would have to turn against her own family. As such, although Guðrun is allowed to express anger or resentment towards her brothers over her husband’s death, we are given the impression that an attempt at revenge would not be commended by either the poets or their audience.

Sigurd’s death is only the beginning of Guðrun’s suffering. Although she does not wish to weep for him in *Guðrúnarkviða I*, the women around her are not content to let her grieve in her own way. They tell stories of their own grievances and force her to touch her husband’s corpse, not relenting until she is brought to tears. This harassment is one of the ways in which Guðrun’s autonomy is stripped away from her in these poems. She is not allowed to express emotion in her own way, but must conform to the standards of the women around her in order to set their minds at ease. The personal injustices visited on her only worsen as her story continues: in *Guðrúnarkviða II* she recounts how in the wake of Sigurd’s death her family forced her to marry Atli against her will. Her mother makes her drink a potion containing “[m]any bad things” (23a) so that she “should not remember the strife” (21b) – or more specifically, her brothers’ part in it and any animosity she might harbour towards them (Cronan 178). And although Guðrun is still insistent that she cannot “hurtle onwards into happiness” (29a) by marrying another man, her mother continues to press until Guðrun yields, stating that she has been “coerced into this by [her] kin” (34b) and that her new husband “won’t be a

husband whom [she] can love” (34c). Dennis Cronan makes it clear that Guðrun capitulates not as a result of her mother’s bribes or promises, but merely because “her objections are exhausted” (181). Finally, the description of Guðrun’s arrival at Atli’s hall at the end of the poem is grim, making it seem as though Guðrun has entered “not only a prison, [but] a place of death” (Cronan 182). Guðrun’s life has become a series of horrors inflicted on her by her family, and the poets make no attempt to hide the pain and trauma she is experiencing. And yet still we are not given any sense that she is about to take active revenge against her family, or even that the poets think she should.

In the end, what finally spurs Guðrun to seek revenge is not any injury to herself, but rather an injury to her family. In both *Atlamál* and *Atlakviða* we are told the same story: Guðrun’s second husband Atli invites her brothers Gunnar and Hogni to his home, and Guðrun sends them a message to warn them that it is a trap. When the brothers come despite Guðrun’s warning Atli has them both killed, and Guðrun takes revenge by murdering her sons and feeding them to Atli and his men. The two poems are separated by distance as well as by time: *Atlakviða* is thought to be one of the oldest poems in the *Poetic Edda* (Larrington 204) and was both composed and set in Iceland, while the more recent *Atlamál* was likely composed in Greenland. But although there are a number of differences between the poems—such as the setting and Atli’s motivations—in both accounts Guðrun’s revenge on Atli is portrayed as entirely justified. The *Atlakviða* poet details the way in which Guðrun serves her sons’ remains to Atli and his men, the uproar which follows her revelation, and the chaos Guðrun then rains down – stabbing Atli, setting the dogs loose and burning down the hall – before finishing the poem with the lines:

. . . never since has a bride

in a byrnie acted so to avenge her brothers;

she brought news of death to three great kings,

that bright woman, before she died (43a-d).

Meanwhile, the *Atlamál* poet provides even more detail about Guðrun's murder of her children, but hails her as a "formidable woman" (79a) who "did what she had to do" (79b). And like the *Atlakviða* poet, he ends his poem on a note of praise, stating that:

The splendidly born lady did all as promised;

...

Fortunate is any man who afterwards can father

such heroic children as Giuki fathered.

After them in every land

their defiance lives on wherever people hear of it (104b, 105a-d).

Despite the years and distance separating them, the poets are of one opinion concerning Guðrun's revenge. She is a "bright" and "heroic" woman who did not defy nature, but simply did what she had to do in order to avenge her brothers.

This portrayal of Guðrun gives us an important insight into the Old Norse approach to woman and revenge. Guðrun had suffered numerous injustices before the death of her brothers, from the murder of her first husband to the drugging and forced second marriage her family inflicted on her. But not only were these injustices of a more personal nature, they were also all committed by her own family members. As such Guðrun is allowed to grieve over these wrongs, even to curse her family for them, but the idea of actively taking revenge is never suggested. When her brothers are deceived and murdered by Atli, however, it is not merely a source of personal grief to Guðrun, it is also an affront to her family's honour. Crucially, it is

this injustice that first drives her to seek revenge, suggesting that family and familial honour supersedes almost everything else in the poets' minds. And although her actions and loyalty to her brothers over her husband may feed into certain male anxieties about a woman's power, the poets do not condemn her. Instead, her decision to kill her young children and weaponise her domestic duties is seen as a terrible necessity, suggesting that the murder of Gunnar and Hogni was monstrous enough to warrant this extreme of a response.

However, although Guðrun is praised for her actions in both *Atlamál* and *Atlakviða*, there are still obvious limitations placed on the celebration of women's revenge. As stated above, Guðrun is never encouraged to avenge the personal wrongs she suffers; her revenge is only justifiable when it is on behalf of her male family members. This becomes even clearer in the poem *Guðrúnarhvöt*, or *The Whetting of Guðrun*. In this poem, set years after the events of *Atlamál* and *Atlakviða*, Guðrun's daughter Svanhild has been trampled to death by horses at her husband's command. As the *hvöt* in the title indicates, this poem sees Guðrun push her sons Hamdir and Sorli into avenging their sister's death. But although Svanhild is also a member of Guðrun's family, she occupies a different position to Gunnar and Hogni. She is not a male leader or a warrior – she is a woman. And as Guðrun's own early life makes evident, the wrongs done to women are not necessarily seen as being worthy of vengeance. This is further emphasised by Hamdir and Sorli's reluctance to avenge their sister's death. Svanhild's death is not a slight to familial honour, but merely a source of personal grief. Guðrun admits that Svanhild was “the one of [her] children whom [she] loved the best in [her] heart” (15b) and that it was the “cruellest of all [her] injuries, / when the white-blonde hair of Svanhild / they trampled in mud under horses' hooves” (16c-e). The poem places greater emphasis on a mother's grief for her child than on the affront to familial honour, and as such Guðrun's revenge is not praised or celebrated in the same way. Instead, her son Hamdir warns her that he and his

brother will not survive their mission, and when they are killed in the *Lay of Hamdir* Guðrun is left alone to mourn three more of her children. The message here is clear: personal grief is not enough to justify a woman's vengeance, and slights to familial honour are generally only acknowledged when men are involved.

What is also striking about the portrayal of women and revenge in these poems is the life Guðrun leads after avenging her brothers' deaths. Although she is praised for her actions in both *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*, she does not get to live the life of a hero afterwards. Unlike many of her male counterparts in other heroic poems, she is not celebrated by those around her, or welcomed into the afterlife after her death. Instead, she tells us herself how after murdering her own sons she

. . . went to the sea-strand, [she] was enraged with the norms;

[She] wanted to reject their unyielding protection.

Great waves lifted [her], did not drown [her] –

so [she] came to land, [she] had to go on living (13a-d).

Guðrun's attempted suicide and claim that she "had" to go on living makes it clear that she does not feel any sense of glory or pride in what she has done—rather, there is simply the sinking feeling that this was what was required by the values of her time. And although she goes on living, it is clear her life is not a happy one: she loses all of her children, and ends *Guðrúnarhvöt* alone, praying for death so that she may be reunited with her husband Sigurd. The end of Guðrun's story is an important element in the portrayal of women and revenge in Old Norse literature. Although there are multiple examples of women seeking revenge, and although they are commended for it if the poets approve of their motivations, they do not necessarily reap the rewards or experience glory in the aftermath the way a male hero might.

The various composers of the above poems, though united in their praise of Guðrun, do not portray her life as one to emulate. They are willing to celebrate her deeds in literature, but imply that she may not get the same credit or acknowledgement if she were living among them.

There can be no doubt that vengeance is a central element to the story of Guðrun, no matter which of her poems we choose to look at. The positive, borderline celebratory portrayal of her revenge in *Atlamál* and *Atlakviða* offers us a potentially unexpected insight into the Old Norse approach to women and revenge: women were not prevented from exacting revenge, and in matters of family honour they could even be commended for taking a stand. However, Guðrun's story also highlights the limitations surrounding women's revenge. Vengeance was acceptable only in very specific circumstances, and personal grief or injustices were not necessarily justifiable motivations. In these poems the poets offer us a complex portrayal of Guðrun's life and vengeance, simultaneously highlighting women's options for agency in Old Norse society and reinforcing the constraints placed upon them.

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