Double Space

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Contents

Editorial 3

Featured Essays 5

Landscapes, Architecture and the Act of Return in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Marian Stout 6

Female Friendship in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Vinca Hernandez 16

The *Epicoene* Epidemic

The Representation and Performance of Gender in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

Katie Doyle 23

Womanly Men and Manly Women: Masculinity and Femininity in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

Aislinn Katherine Healy 34

'Nasty sluttish animals' and 'hermaphroditical authority': Unnatural Practices of Femininity in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

Abbie O'Brien O'Driscoll 49

Monsters and Masters: A Study of Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Julian Di Prima 55

Paternal Pressures and Artistic 'Self-Begetting' in *Ulysses*

Luca Cavallo 67

‘A Couple of Pretty Smooth Citizens’: Gender and Sexuality in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*

Shane Seamus McCormack 76

Sakaki & Snyder

Tomás Flynn 88

‘They’re just boys. Morsels. We have all the power’: Subversion of Femininity and Constructions of the Monstrous Feminine in *Jennifer’s Body* (2009)

Abbie O’Brien O’Driscoll 100

Violence and Queer Embodiment in *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous, Stone Butch Blues,* and *Detransition, Baby*

Sydney Marhefsky 112

Fantasies of Capital and Power in Contemporary Video Games

Luke Condon 123

Eoin Murray Memorial Prize

A Word from Marij 133

“Newton’s First Law”

Marij Dirkje Andrea Bernart 134

Meet The Team 136

Editorial

Now on its fourth publication this Spring 2025, *Double Space* prides itself in showcasing the academic excellence of undergraduate students in the UCC English department. The academic and creative work presented in this year's issue have been recognised under the UCC Undergraduate Award, the Patricia Coughlan Award, the Louise Clancy Memorial Prize, and the Eoin Murray Memorial Prize, showcasing a wide range of work spanning across time periods, topics, and media.

This variety of work proved difficult to define by way of a theme, but not impossible! The common thread throughout all academic and creative work is the recognition of humanity, and we at *Double Space* felt this was important to highlight in this year's issue. Our theme for this issue, Literature and Humanity, allows us to understand how even in the most tumultuous and unsure times, cultural attitudes, anxieties, and desires can be reflected within contemporary literature. By ordering our essays chronologically from oldest to newest, we aim to present how literature – and the academic discussion surrounding it – interacts with different aspects of these parameters; constructions of gender, of relationships, of nature, of the self, of society at large. From *Sir Gawain* to *Disco Elysium*, we aim to aid your understanding of the true impact which fictional narratives hold over our understanding of the world we live in.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who helped us with this year's publication! To our contributors, thank you for your exceptional work and cooperation. We would also like to thank all the lecturers who provided us with our wonderful essay tips, and for the overall fantastic work within the department. A special thanks to Dr Heather Laird and Dr Miranda Corcoran for establishing this wonderful publication, and for all the help they provided our team along the way. Last but not least, thank you to our *Double Space*

team. From copy editing to social media management to web design, we could not have asked for a better, more hard-working group!

We hope you enjoy reading *Double Space* as much as we enjoyed working on it!

–Your Co-Editors-in-Chief, Sinéad and Venus

Featured Essays

Landscapes, architecture, and the act of return in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*

Marian Stout

The Department of English Undergraduate Awards (3rd Year)

Highly Recommended

This essay will explore the texts of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, medieval poems translated by John R R Tolkien, analysing the literary uses of landscape, architecture, and the act of return. *Sir Orfeo*, Sir *Gawain*, and *the Green Knight* are dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and the poets' names have been lost over time. The poems contain themes of politics, religion, and romance, which are emphasised by the poets` use of landscape and settings in the texts. The theme of return is important to the evolution and conclusions of the texts in this essay. Sir Orfeo and Sir Gawain go on journeys or romantic quests and, by returning to their point of origin, explore the transformational moral of the poems.

According to Richmond, the depiction of landscape in literature is "a human mediation of the non-human world: a reflection and product of human experiences – mental, social, and physical – of space and place" (3). This is evident in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, where the descriptions of the varied landscapes depict cultural, political, and spiritual themes. In *Sir Orfeo*, these spaces are the cultivated orchard where Heurodis and her ladies relax, and she is subsequently abducted; and the wild forest where Sir Orfeo abandons his civilised nature to become a "woodwose" or wildman; and the otherworldly estate of the fairy King, where abductees are kept in sinister states of being.

The term landscape originated from the Old English word “land-scipe”, meaning region, district, or tract of land (Bosworth). Landscape in medieval fiction has meanings and interpretations that do not adhere to the current Oxford English Dictionary definition, “A view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance, from one point of view, a piece of country scenery” (OED). Once written as fiction, medieval landscapes have diverse mystical, political, and philosophical interpretations and uses. Landscapes can represent power, wealth, nobility, and country. Landscapes help the reader and audience comprehend the passage of time and define cultural and physical boundaries between different lands and human beings (Battle 1- 34). Landscapes may invoke mood, signify gendered spaces, and give insight into the lives of medieval people. The significance of architecture in these texts has a similar purpose to landscapes.

Castles and their surrounding lands were essential to the survival of the nobility in the chaotic political upheavals of the Middle Ages. Sir Orfeo was a “king of old” who lived in a castle in the fortress city of “Tracience”, later known as Winchester. According to Battle, the abduction of Heurodis is a political act of war, one prince against another, reflecting the ethnic differences between the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans. The resistance continued as the Normans colonised Britain, and Norman castles represented oppression and tyranny. This is meaningful to the text of Sir Orfeo as his castle is built within the fortified town of Winchester, and Sir Orfeo is well-liked by the town’s people. This, Battle argues, proves that Sir Orfeo is a true Anglo-Saxon King, a “king of old”. In contrast, the castle of the Fairy King is placed in a wonderous, beautiful, remote landscape. It is private and walled, and it is not easy to access. It is one of many castles and tours that the Fairy King rules over. Furthermore, the Fairy King loves hunting, a pastime the Normans loved. The poet describes the castle in detail; it has an outer wall of crystal, a gate and “An hundred tours ther were about, Degiselich and bataild stout. The butras com out of the diche” (Laskaya 359/61). The castle is well-protected, and its

description resembles a Norman castle, which represents Norman political power and social superiority. The poet weaves politics and power into the poem using the architecture of castles to depict the effect of the Norman invasion on the Anglo-Saxon population (8).

Tolkien tells us in his famous "WP Ker Memorial Lecture" that *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* is a deep-rooted tale and "made of tales often told before". It is also rooted in the region's vernacular and the landscape it covers, crossing borders to reach the complex conclusion of the tale. Arner suggests that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is dated between 1350 and 1400, and it was composed in Northwest Midlands, along the border of Wales, in the dialect of Lancashire and Cheshire. It was written at a time when the English were attempting to colonise the kingdom of Wales. The Welsh resisted, and the English violently oppressed them. The landscape and architecture in the text, along with the action and cultural references, promote England's conquest of Wales and their claim to the ownership of Arthur's lineage. The importance of landscape and architecture in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* is amplified by this political debate. The poem's castles represent Britain's disputed cultural and political power struggles. Battle asserts that Camelot is situated on the Welsh border in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, thus normalising the English colonisation of Wales (1-5).

Camelot is well known as a fairy tale castle and an allegory of a civilised society, according to Grimbert. The first time the castle was named in literature was in the late twelfth century by Chrétien de Troyes in his work *Chevalier de la Charette*. Chrétien is believed to be the creator of the Arthurian romance genre (1). Tolkien refers to the Gawain poet's influence of "tales often told before and elsewhere, and of elements that derive from remote times" (109). The poet blends the old myths and legends to recreate a new tale of chivalry, magic, and morality. That Camelot represents chivalry and civilised Christian society is evident as the poet sets the scene central to the tale at the "Christmas-tide" feast in the great hall. Arthur, the acclaimed king and many splendid lords are present. Bishop Bawdewyn has a prominent seat

at the table. Sir Gawain departs from Camelot and travels to another Christian castle, that of Bertilak; both castles are filled with loyal land noble ladies, knights and men, who celebrate Christmas and attend mass, thus linking both castles as Arthurian. The castle is near the chapel where Sir Gawain undergoes a test of his loyalty, fealty and goodness. The grand castles and large estates of the kings and nobles are statements of political power that justify their occupation of the landscape.

Settings in and around castles, estates, wilderness, and rugged landscapes in Medieval texts place the female and the male in different environments, which helps construct a separate gendered identity. When Sir Orfeo abandons his kingdom, he lives in the forest wilderness. Queen Heurodis is abducted from the peaceful orchard of their palace. Cultivated gardens are feminine, and wild places are masculine. The cultivated space represents the ladies' domain, where domestic duties are linked to gender and piety. They also illustrate the patriarchal dominance of the male in the social and domestic power structures (McEvoy 6). Dempsey states that the fruits grown in orchards or gardens of the Middle Ages were utilised in castle or fortress kitchens. One important purpose of the orchard was growing berries and apples, which were brewed as alcoholic beverages. Alcohol was drunk instead of water due to the low-quality drinking water. Noble women would control the domestic running of the household and supervise the growing of fruits and herbs for the castle kitchen (3). The noble ladies also used their gardens to pray and to relax, as is evident in *Sir Orfeo,* "This ich quen, Dame Heurodis same Tok to maidens of priis, two And went in an undrentide late morning to play bi an orchardside" (Laskaya 65). Sir Orfeo is a son of Demi-Gods, his mother descending from Juno and his father from Pluto. He is a King and has a wife of great excellence, "The king hadde a quen of priis" (Laskaya 51). In the grounds of castles, fortresses and homes of knights or nobles, a cultivated garden would play a part in everyday life. The use of the cultivated noblemen's

gardens reflects the socio-political order of the times as well as the status and wealth of the owners.

The Gawain poet creates varied fictional yet familiar environments and climates with which the hero, Sir Gawain, must interact, beginning with the journey from Camelot. From there, he rides through "England's realm" to the border of North Wales. As Sir Gawain continues his journey along the coast, the landscape changes to lonely and unwelcoming, creating a sense of distance and separation from loved ones, "Mony cliff he overclambe in countrayes straunge; fer floten fro his frendes, freemedely he rides" (Putter 714/5). According to Arner, Sir Gawain is moving into territory to which he does not belong. He is a stranger riding through disputed land; the poet knows that the audience will react to this information as the disputed territory is a concern of the people, which is very effective storytelling (83). The sparse use of words to cover a large area of land takes the emphasis away from the deeper meaning of landscape in the poem "Sir Orfeo". While the poet describes the cultivated area where Heurodis and the ladies play briefly, his emphasis is on using vegetation and weather to set the scene as a safe and peaceful place. The use of landscape in Sir Orfeo's journeys is minimal. The distance of his travel is measured in miles, "When he was in the roche y-go, Wele thre mile other mo, He com into a fair cuntray" (Laskaya 351). The road which Sir Orfeo travelled was "Smothe and plain and al grene -Hille no dale nas ther non y-sene" (Laskaya 354). That is a level, monotonous tract of land compared with the varied landscapes of *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*.

Sir Gawain travels through many different landscapes, forests and marshlands, some of which are terrifying. *The Cambridge Guide to Gothic Literature* states that Gothic literature is "entirely post-medieval" (Hogle 3). Yet in the description of these dark and desolate places, the mood of the poem becomes gothic, the words, a foreboding of what is to come "Nere slain with slete he slept in his yrnes Mo nights then inogh, in naked rokkes, Theras [...] and henged

high over his head in hard ysse-ikkles, thus in peril and payne and plytes ful harde" (Putter 733). Other Gothic references are evident in the text, for example, when Sir Gawain enters the area of the chapel of the Green Knight and cannot find the chapel, "Whether this be the Green Chapelle? Here might about midnight The Dele his matins telle" (Putter 2186). The author describes the setting as hellish, the chapel is an "olde cave" or "olde cragge" a chapel of "meschaunce". The skyline is filled with craggy rocks, a bubbling stream, and a sinister, derelict, overgrown "oristore".

The poet uses proto-gothic imagery in Sir Orfeo as an allegory for Christian beliefs and superstition. Heurodis' description of the Fairy Kingdom before her abduction is one of a glorious and apparently benign space. The Fairy King's magnificent castle and bountiful landscape appear almost celestial. When Sir Orfeo first arrives in the Fairy Kingdom, he first sees a vision of great beauty, "Bi al thing him think that it is The proude court of Paradis" (Laskaya 375). Once inside the gate of the estate, Sir Orfeo sees a different landscape, one that is a vision of a hellish place where almost dead bodies are lying in various states of disease and injury. These bodies of people who were in the real world "And thought dede, and nare nought" (Laskaya 390). He realises that humans in various forms of bodily deterioration and near-death had been taken from the human world and "thither by fairy magic brought." The unnatural landscape is an example of the difference between the world of the Fairies and the human world, illustrating the goodness of Sir Orfeo and the wickedness of the fairy King. The exterior is gleaming as if heavenly, and the interior is a strange, macabre and dark place.

When Heurodis Sir Orfeo's Queen has been abducted for the first time by the Fairy King, she is returned to their estate by the fairies. According to Pisani, this return has a purpose; returning Heurodis is a test for Sir Orfeo. By informing Heurodis of the time and place of her subsequent abduction, the Fairy King sets up Sir Orfeo to be defeated by the unstoppable force of the magical world (479). Thus, the audience is informed that there is a dangerous otherworld

and alien or fairy entities that defeat all human powers. When Sir Orfeo appeared in the orchard, "And wele ten hundred knightes with him, Ich y-armed, stout and grim" (Laskaya 183/4), his knights were no match for the powerful fairy magic. The fairy King's victory is the catalyst for Sir Orfeo's decision to abandon himself to the wildness of the forest, thus setting the scene for a return and restoration of what was lost in his defeat and subsequent exile. In a Christian interpretation of the poem, the decision is a self-imposed penance, pilgrimage, or punishment. The act of penance transforms the character of the worldly King Orfeo into a wise and humble ruler who has suffered in the forest for ten years. In the uncultivated landscape of a forest, the poet strips Sir Orfeo of all material sources of grandeur. Orfeo, who has descended from divine lineage, is just a man without wealth, servants, or an army. This self-willed transformation of Sir Orfeo's life to that of a beggar or a wildman reveals that his love for Heurodis is more potent than his commitment to his role as a regent: "He that hadde had castels and tours, River, forest, frith with flours, Now, thei it comenci to snewe and frese, This king mot make his bed in mese" (Laskaya 245/7). Abandoning his palace and city, he chooses Heurodis over his subjects; this decision proves Sir Orfeo's faith in his Steward and his total devotion to Heurodis as the "peerless" and perfect medieval idea of a noblewoman. Sir Orfeo's return to power and place begins when his wife rides through the forest landscape, and he sees Heurodis riding with the fairy hunting party. Following the hunting party, he gains access to the fairy king and secures her release using his divine music as a bartering tool. The journey back to the city is uneventful, and he leaves Heurodis in "lowly lodgings." Then, he returns to the city of Winchester, disguised as a beggar. The importance of his attire is essential for the moral twist of the poem to take place. Wearing a beggar's cloak, he discovers that while the city's nobility disdains a wild and common harpist, only the Stewart shows compassion (Pisani 485). Thus, the truth is exposed, and Sir Orfeo's return serves the purpose of testing the Steward and reclaiming his kingdom. The act of return reaffirms the medieval belief of the divine right of

kings and the power of the Christian belief system to infiltrate social art such as storytelling and poetry.

The dark magic of Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* contrasts with that of the Fairy King, who is a visible, yet supernatural force when attacking Sir Orfeo's realm. Morgan works her magic in secret and manipulates the Green Knight to enact a charade, which, due to Sir Gawain's chivalric and Christian righteousness, results in his death. Having passed the dangerous and sensual test of Morgan Le Fay through the Green Knight, who is revealed to be Bertilak, Sir Gawain returns to Camelot to Arthur and the lords and ladies who await his return. According to Jones, because Morgan Le Fay is a familiar character of the Arthurian medieval cycle of romance, she is a useful character for the poet to employ to bring about the disenchantment of the Green Knight and the completion of Sir Gawain's quest. She has a history and is familiar to the audience of the time. She also represents the loose morals of courtly love (39). While Sir Orfeos's return has restored peace and harmony to the kingdom, Sir Gawian's return is less triumphant. He returns to Camelot filled with guilt and shame. Gawain addresses the nick on his neck as "the lothe and the loss that I laght have" (Putter 2507). Gawain's return is filled with anxieties and remorse and is resolved by the court's forgiveness. His victory was incomplete, and his reaction leaves the audience questioning the morals of the courts and the effect of chivalry upon the men who swear allegiance to the chivalric codes.

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Female Friendship in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Vinca Hernandez

The Patricia Coughlan Award

Highly Recommended

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play that focuses on marriage and female rebellion against patriarchal authority. However, it could be argued that the play "seems rather to problematise than to celebrate marriage" (Patterson 58). When observing the different existent and upcoming partners in the play, we see that marriage can be a destabilising force only when women rebel against the patriarchal hierarchy and authority. Women are a threat when they break their silence and follow their own desires, especially when those are related to their sexuality. This essay will analyse one of the main female rebellious acts in the play, one that represents a real threat to the transaction that marriage is: a transaction between father and husband. So, the issues of female friendship and power will be analysed below. Looking at Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, Titania and her Indian votaress, and Helena and Hermia, this essay will argue that same-sex attachments need to be destroyed and women's power overcome by male authority for patriarchal rule to continue to exist in the play.

Female friendship and power in *Dream* have long been discussed, and various critics agree that the conclusion of the play "depends upon the success of a process by which the feminine pride and power manifested in Amazon warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives and wilful daughters are brought under control of lords and husbands" (Montrose, cited by Loomba 182). Hippolyta, as Queen of the Amazons, is intricately linked with rebellious feminine power as well as war and conquest. The play starts with Theseus giving the audience an account of Hippolyta's courtship, trying to change the tone of his wedding "from conquest

to celebration" (Patterson 58) by saying, "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword, / And won thy love, doing thee injuries. / But I will wed thee in another key, / With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling." (1.1.16-19). Theseus is here explicitly referring to the harm he has done to the Queen of the Amazons before she (wilfully) agrees to marry him. Hippolyta loses her power and agency when she is incorporated into patriarchal society, symbolising the destruction of the sisterhood she represents. Her character sets the scene for the rest of the female bonds that appear later in the play, and how they are also subdued through marriage.

When discussing Hippolyta and her former status of Amazonian independence, it is important to note her relationship with the moon. The moon symbolises feminine energy and the female body; Hippolyta alludes to the moon cycle to set the day for her marriage to Theseus, therefore, linking the feminine energy of the moon to male authority. "And then the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven, shall behold the night / Of our solemnities." (1.1.9-11), referring to the wedding night and the marriage consummation, when Theseus will use his "sword" to finally overpower the mare he has conquered (1.1.16). Towards the end of the play, Puck neatly sums up the moral of the story, "Jack shall have Jill. / Nought shall go ill. / The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well." (3.2.461-3), bringing the story of the four lovers back to the courtship of Theseus and Hippolyta. As argued by Boehrer, "Hippolyta's etymological affiliation with horses suggests the extent to which her relationship with Theseus is a product of warfare and conquest" (101). Hippolyta, meaning "releaser of horses" in Greek, is trapped now like the horses she unleashes. The play exposes that, without male rule through marital union, female rebellion would cause destruction.

Titania, Queen of the Faeries, is Hippolyta's counterpart in the faery kingdom. Both represent female rebellion in their position as Queens, but they are both subdued to the rule of the husband by the end of the play. Loomba has argued that "The figures of unruly women in this play […] suggest that […] female unruliness is always another country" (191), namely, the

Amazons and India. The Queen of the Faeries' main offence against her husband Oberon is her denial to surrender an Indian boy whom she loves to him. Oberon addresses her saying "Am I not thy lord?" to which Titania answers, "Then I must be thy lady" (2.1.163-4), asserting her power and agency to keep the boy. Here, however, female friendship should be considered as well as power. While Hippolyta lost her sisterhood of Amazons when she agreed to marry Theseus, Titania is still holding on to her Indian "votaress" through the boy she left her, as "for her sake do I rear up her boy, / And for her sake I will not part with him." (2.1.123; 136-7). Hackett has argued that the Elizabethans "associated India both with the supernatural and with boundless female sensuality and fecundity" (340).

This sensuality, however, has a price, especially when directed to another woman, as Boehrer has noted (107). The votaress dies and Titania's (sexual) friendship with her shifts into a maternal bond between Titania and the boy. Here, issues around marriage and motherhood arise. During her speech about the alteration of the seasons, Titania blames herself and Oberon for engendering "this same progeny of evils" that come "From our debate, from our dissension" (2.1.115-6). By recalling the cycles of the seasons, Titania is pointing out that fertility is distorted by a marital quarrel in the faery kingdom, mainly because "her union with Oberon is childless" (Hackett 343). Her wish of motherhood can only be attained when the actual mother of the boy is dead. However, Titania is a married woman and she "cannot easily assume sovereignty either over her own body or the labour of others" (Loomba 188), so she is forced, by trickery, to give up the boy and re-enter patriarchal order. By handing the boy to Oberon (4.1.55-8) and so restoring her marriage, Titania is not only sacrificing her agency, but she is also destroying the memory of her beloved female friend/lover.

Hermia and Helena's bond is torn by the same trickery that confuses Titania, and it is finally broken through marriage. As the play ends, every woman is subdued by her male mate and so, marriage is de-problematised once female rebellion is vanquished. Oberon uses a magic

flower to "reestablish his masculine authority" (Floyd-Wilson 188) over Titania but also to ensure that Hermia marries Demetrius, as her father wishes, and not Lysander, her lover. At the start of the play, Theseus reminds Hermia that "To you your father should be as a god" (1.1.47), however, she prefers to die or become a nun rather than marry someone she does not love. Hermia and Helena start feeling the cracks in their relationship when men enter their lives, having to set aside their "ancient love" for each other (3.2.215) to "make way for a new coupledom" (Loomba 197). Therefore, Hermia and Helena also must give up their female agency and their female friends/lovers to fit into patriarchal society, as Hippolyta and Titania have done. The animal element is also of importance here, as Helena describes herself as Demetrius's spaniel (2.1.203-10). Boehrer has argued that "the bestiality motif […] parallels and inverts the play's various references to same-sex communities and attachments, [which] may be understood as a nervous projection of tendencies intrinsic to the play's understanding of gender difference and heteroerotic love" (99).

Anxieties around same-sex attachments are present in the main plots of the play, which "foreground female rebellion and male dominance" (Loomba 181). Apart from Titania's account of her Indian votaress explored above, Helena's love speech to Hermia is the play's most direct address to female friendship/love. Helena references existing conceptions around conventional marriage to express her love for Hermia, giving this same-sex relation "an erotic charge" (101), as Boehrer has noted. These two girls "like two artificial gods, / Have with [their] needles created both one flower, […] As if [their] hands, [their] sides, voices and minds, / Had been incorporate. So [they] grew together […] with two seeming bodies, but one heart" (3.2.203-12). Helena bitterly recounts her relationship with Hermia when she feels betrayed by Hermia and appeals to her, saying "It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly" (3.2.217) to align herself with the men to mock her. However, at the end of the play Demetrius marries Helena,

and we never hear from her again. She seems to have left her "idyllic union" behind to enter "the union of husband and wife as one flesh" (Boehrer 103).

In conclusion, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to problematise marriage because of the need to first overcome female unruliness and female desire for nuptials to take place or for partnerships to be rebuilt. Marriage can only be celebrated when women are back in their proper place in patriarchal society and under the rule of the husband. This essay has explored female friendship and power as experienced by the main female characters in the play: Hippolyta, Titania, Helena, and Hermia. They all renounce their own sisterhoods to maintain the established social order by being parallelled with animals or tricked into being conquered. As Lysander says, "The course of true love never did run smooth" (1.1.134), and it seems unlikely that, in the setting of the play, marriage could be shown as more than an exchange of goods between the father and the husband. We will never know the course the broken female friendship bonds take after marriage; however, the play clearly states the dangers this may cause.

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The *Epicoene* Epidemic

As you read on through our next few essays, you may come to notice a common theme; gender in Ben Jonson's 1609 play *Epicoene; or The Silent Women.* It would seem the second year students of Dr. Edel Semple's 'Introduction to Renaissance Literature' module became wonderfully passionate about gender studies in the early modern period, especially with Jonson's skillfull satirisation and subversion of the gender norms of this period. So please, enjoy the adept analyses below, and note how although these three students took the same class, under the same lecturer, each was able to apply themselves to create a unqiue, original arguement in their work.

The Representation of Gender and Performance of Gender in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

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Joint Winner

Abstract:

Masculinity, femininity, and all that may exceed them: the intricate expressions and performances of gender in *Epicoene*. Within Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, the portrayal and performance of gender roles is integral for the success and operation of identities and relationships in the society in which the play is set. This review considers gender roles in the play and the ways in which the sexes may be presented and perceived within this society's public and private spaces. Masculinity and femininity, and their associated traditional roles, are both supported and challenged by the play's characters, which also has significant implications for their status in society and the home. This analysis examines Jonson's *Epicoene*, considering how male characters represent masculine behaviours, the ways in which female characters express femininity, characters that may display traits associated with the opposite sex, and how an intersection of gender is presented, with individuals having the capacity for multiple identities through the application and performance of specific characteristics. Upon analysing the representation of sex in *Epicoene*, Jonson reveals the true complexity of gender expression, and his multifaceted portrayals of characters and their representations in social and domestic space evidently contribute to the power relations and dynamics that exist in this world.

Within Ben Jonson's play, *Epicoene*, there is an evident emphasis on gender, how it is perceived, and the accompanying traditional traits that may be respected or defied. The play deals with a number of representations of gender roles and practices that either conform to or exceed societal expectations of gender. Many of these gender roles appear in the context of the home, a place where both men and women have significant duties, and within their communities and social spaces, where there is also the necessity to either conform to or challenge traditional and conventional gender roles in order to succeed and thrive in these settings. This essay will examine the role of masculinity within the home, considering characters and behaviours that exhibit stereotypical characteristics of masculinity. Similarly, this essay will explore feminine roles relating to marriage and the home, outlining desirable and undesirable traits associated with femininity and how these are performed in the play. Additionally, this essay will examine how the sexes may display traits that are primarily associated with the opposite sex, while also considering the implication of this for their representation and position in the societies and relationships in which they operate. This essay will also look at the intersection of masculinity and femininity, exploring the capacity for individualistic and unconventional interpretations of gender, defying the perceived binary of gender norms at the time in which *Epicoene* is set.

Firstly, masculinity and men in the city's society have evident stereotypical gender roles, many of which are exposed in the expression of their ideals for the home and family. In his search for a wife, and therefore, a family and heirs to his estate, Morose is adamant on finding a woman that will not disturb his peaceful life and emasculate him as man of the home: "she / has brought a wealthy dowry in her silence" (Jonson 2.5.90-1). He "revels in the thought of domestic space entirely shaped and controlled by the male householder", only tolerating the sound of his own voice and silencing any other noise that may threaten his power and peace (Trull 268). The masculinity he performs is primarily relating to the control of his house and

those in it, specifically governing a silent space, dictating the ways in which his servants communicate also, asking that they "speake not, though I question you […] answer me not, by speech, but by silence" (2.1.7-9). While he makes many efforts to "shut out the noise of the city that surrounds him" and protect the sanctuary created within his house, his quest for silence mainly refers to the silencing of others, yet not necessarily himself or his own voice, exposing a hypocrisy in his desire for silence with his unwillingness to display it himself: "all discourses, but mine owne, afflict mee, they seem harsh, impertinent, and irksome" (Zucker 49; 2.1.4-5). The intolerance for any noise but his own voice highlights Morose's "wish for a household of voiceless objects in which he is the sole agent", and the objectification and dehumanisation of those that live with him, his servants, and his wife (Trull 268). For Morose, the ideal house is governed solely by him, an attempt at performing and assuming the masculine role as ruler of the house and those that live there also. The desire to rule is echoed by other male characters in the play, and masculinity in the form of territoriality also exists with Morose's nephew, Dauphine's, desire to acquire the estate. Dauphine, as a member of the Gallants, has a strong desire for status and wishes to inherit and be the head of his uncle's estate in particular. Using Morose's greed and self-interest against him, he conceives a plan to encourage Morose to marry Epicoene, ensuring that he will eventually inherit Morose's wealth and obtain a respectable societal status, revealing that "This gentlewoman was lodg'd here by me / o' purpose, and, to be put upon my uncle" (2.4.40-1). Both Morose and Dauphine's attitudes towards each other, Morose allowing for his nephew to be "reduce[d] to poverty", and Dauphine plotting to take over his uncle's estate, display their priorities in attaining control and status and "violate the obligations owing to one's kin", placing power and wealth before family (Kay 265). Morose and Dauphine's intentions illustrate the ways in which masculinity and the desire to be head of the family or home can result in self-centred attitudes, focusing on material

wealth, their identity within their society, and how that society perceives them, over a family in which respect is not given nor received.

Further, femininity and its traditional expectations, particularly within the house or the family, are integral for the tolerance and acceptance of many women within their societies. Within the play, there are a number of qualities that women may possess and express in order to be deemed attractive and desirable as wives. Epicoene's character, prior to marrying Morose, acts as an example of the ideal, traditional wife. At first, she appears to be the perfect wife in Morose's eyes, an "admirable creature" and unlike any other, "chaste, silent, and obedient" (2.5.85; Newman 510). As Morose hates all noise and detests every voice apart from "his own, he finds a mute wife an attractive proposition" (Moulton 214). In the play, there is frequent discourse on the qualities that make women unattractive and undesirable as wives, with Truewit echoing some of Morose's distastes to "dissuade [him] from marriage" and secure Dauphine's inheritance, yet in doing so, he also highlights the confining standards that women are regulated by in society (Newman 508). Truewit lists some potential fears for Morose's prospects in finding a wife relating to her desirability, agency, and speech, including that "If she be fair, young, and vegetous, no sweetmeats ever drew more / flies", "If rich, and that you marry her dowry, not / her, she'll reign in your house", and "If learned, there was never such a parrot" (2.2.57-8, 60-1, 65). However, once Morose meets Epicoene, he finds her to be the ideal wife for him and his life of silence as she embodies all of the qualities that he desires most, despite the possibilities Truewit warned him of, but upon marrying, her behaviours change, and she adopts manners that not only trouble Morose, but also threaten his power and control of her and their home. Once they are married, she becomes loquacious and loud, rejecting Morose's control and assuming the role as head of the house: "I'll have / none of this coacted, unnatural dumbness in my house, / in a family where I govern" (3.4.53-5). Through Epicoene's newfound agency and speech, she is deemed "monstrously unnatural because [she] threaten[s]

masculine authority", and Morose's impression of her drastically shifts (Newman 507). Having first appeared to be the perfect wife for him, displaying qualities which he would find most desirable, she now exhibits behaviours which he despises, and he demonises her as his "Regent already!", saying, "I haue married a / Penthesilea, a Semiramis, sold my liberty to / a distaffe!" (3.4.56-8). With Epicoene's voice and agency, she begins to challenge and dismantle the standard by which wives must always be silent and obedient, in submission to their husbands, and the contrasting "uncontrolled female speech is therefore a threat to the entire order of gender relations" (Swift 197). Despite the reveal of her true identity as a young boy, hired by Dauphine to deceive Morose and obtain his wealth, by the end of the play, Epicoene's performance of both the desirable and undesirable traits, which may be used to define women, highlight how these behaviours are not necessarily innate, but rather, can be adopted and performed. It is evident that Epicoene in particular has the capability to express and perform traits associated with attractiveness and the positives of femininity, along with negative attributes women may be categorised by in their society and in the home.

Moreover, the representation of stereotypical traits associated with the conventions of both masculinity and femininity may not only be exhibited by their respective sex but are expressed mutually by the sexes, existing in social and domestic spaces. The Collegiates are a group within the society in which Epicoene is set that perform behaviours primarily linked to the opposite sex. These women are considered educated and independent, associated with "sexualized conduct and academic language" (Keener 133). Their money and independence give them the opportunity to "escape the authority of their husbands and create a community of female taste", which also undermines the "brotherhood of wits formed by Clerimont, Dauphine, and Truewit" (Moulton 217). They threaten masculine authority in their society, with men in the play believing that the women are "an order between courtiers, / and country madames, that liue from their husbands; and/ give entertainment to all" (1.1.75-7). They are

deemed “most masculine, or / rather hermaphroditical”, which “constitutes a threat to both the gender system and erotic practices [within] society” (1.1.79-80; Moulton 216). The Otters as a couple also challenge the traditional hierarchy of marriage. While the other Collegiates do not live with their husbands, and “cultivate power through independence”, “Mistress Otter holds her husband to a strict set of instructions within her domestic domain” (Keener 135). Within their relationship, stereotypical “domestic authority has been inverted” (Trull 270). Captain Otter is considered more feminine in his submission to his wife, acting as a representative of “failure on the part of man to live up to the ideal image of manhood” (Jabbar 37). In their marriage, traditional gender roles are overturned, and “Mistress Otter’s usurpation of the male role, … implies that … the husband is robbed of masculine agency” (Jabbar 40). Mrs. Otter’s authority and sexual appetite is recognised within their society, and she is regarded as a woman “that the / courtiers visited so often, that gave the rare entertainment. She / commands all at home” (1.4.23-5). In a society that reinforces the ideals of manhood and rejects unconventional identities, Captain Otter loses respect and honour from other members in his society as “being controlled by his wife accentuates a failure of his duties as man” (Jabbar 40). Here, Captain Otter is disgraced in both in his domestic space and in his society, a result of the reversal of the established hierarchy and power relations that exist within the conventional marriages at the time in which *Epicoene* is set, with Mrs. Otter obtaining and abusing power, and Captain Otter’s acceptance of this abuse of control. Through the depictions of some of these characteristics, there is evidence that stereotypical gender norms cannot be applied to every individual’s character on the basis of their sex alone. For the Collegiates, their societal status is achieved with their adoption of primarily masculine traits, and the Otters’ relationship functions as a reversal of the traditional hierarchy of marriage, Mrs. Otter assuming the stereotypical masculine role of authority over her husband and Captain Otter being dominated by his wife. Primary traits associated with masculinity and femininity are not necessarily

expressed only by the sex to which they are mostly linked, and therefore, these behaviours are evidently not limited to the gender by which they are most performed.

Furthermore, the boundary between masculinity and femininity is not necessarily fixed or tied to a binary, and a merging or intersection of gender can exist and thrive in society and the home. Epicoene in particular illustrates the performing of both masculinities and femininities and the way in which desirability can be reduced and eliminated upon performing juxtaposing traits and behaviours from those that are considered the stereotypical feminine ideal. The rejection of such undesirable behaviours is evident in Morose's condemnation of her changed character and his regret about their marriage: "This is / worst of all worst worsts! That Hell could have devised!" (5.4.125-6). The shift in her character and manners, or how she performs the opposing traits associated with femininity with such ease, are contextualised in the revelation of her true identity as a young boy and her deception of Morose by the play's end, and that all aspects of her character had been a performance. Epicoene's "masculine, hermaphroditical, monstrous" actions through using her voice and seeking to govern her home, are a "perceived threat to male authority", and her adoption of such varying traits, despite her true identity, may also challenge gender conventions and expectations in place in this society (Newman 509, 510). Similar to the Collegiates and Mrs. Otter, Epicoene's adoption of authority and behaviours linked to masculinity transforms her into an embodiment of all of the characteristics that Morose abhorred in his initial search for a chaste and silent wife, now deeming her a "whore" as she fills their house with "so much noise!" (5.4.127). After the truth is revealed about Dauphine's deception of Morose, it becomes clear that Epicoene's behaviours and actions, making her seem like the perfect traditional wife, an undesirable woman, or even simply female, were merely performative, they were taught to her and adopted by her: "you have married / a boy: a gentleman's son, that I haue brought vp this halfe / yeere" (5.4.204-6). Epicoene not only performs the desirable qualities associated with women, and later, the

undesirable traits linked to femininity, but her identity as a boy also suggests that these behaviours, whether positive or negative, are not exclusively attached to the female sex and rather, the capacity exists for individuals to adapt and adopt behaviours that intersect the masculine and the feminine. Her deception of Morose, as orchestrated by Dauphine, is achieved in a double sense, firstly, Epicoene shifts from silent wife to loquacious controller, and then, simply from woman to man. The complexities and intricacies to her character and her performances exemplify the ability for individuals to assume, execute, and master the multifaceted behaviours associated with any or all genders, while also challenging and defying societal and domestic expectations in the spaces in which they operate.

Upon analysing gender in *Epicoene,* and what characteristics may be deemed more masculine, feminine, or a defiance or mixture of both, it can have its own significant place and role within the home and society. For characters identifying as male, including Morose and Dauphine, their expression of masculinity through the retention or acquisition of control, wealth, and social status often dictates their behaviour and treatment of others, indicating a sense of self-interest above family. Femininity, both its desirable and undesirable aspects, are embodied in Epicoene's performance of her role as Morose's wife before and after they marry, acting pleasantly silent and unbearably loud, respectively. A defiance of conventional gender roles and the expression of opposing traits are expressed by the Collegiates, whose characteristics are considered to correspond more with masculine traits and interests, and the Otters, who display a reversal of traditional marital roles within their relationship. An intersection of gender also exists, mainly through Epicoene's hidden identity as a young boy while acting convincingly as a woman, evidently exemplifying the performance of gender, and further challenging the belief that stereotypical behaviours are inherent. Behaviours that may be linked to sex and gender are not necessarily always innate, but likely adopted based on individual circumstances, as dealt with by the portrayals of different characters in Jonson's

Epicoene. Ultimately, masculinity, femininity, or defiance of stereotypes associated with either, can be interpreted, performed, and mastered in ways that may be traditional or unconventional.

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Womanly Men and Manly Women - Masculinity and Femininity in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

Aislinn Katherine Healy

The Patricia Coughlan Award

Highly Recommended

Abstract:

This essay explores the presentation of masculinity and femininity in Ben Jonson's play *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*. The characters in the play both divert from, and act according to, gender ideals of early modern England. Epicoene's very existence blends masculinity and femininity. Morose's masculinity hides feminine traits; the Collegiates lead a masculine lifestyle in a patriarchal society; the Otters' roles in their marriage are reversed and exaggerated; Dauphine's feminine behaviour does not inhibit his masculinity. Furthermore, Jonson's work displays misogynistic views regarding the duties of a woman. Jonson's portrayal of gender can also be applied to present-day discourse, as those who do not align with assigned roles and behaviours are vulnerable to harassment and struggle. Through a close reading of the play, as well as research into social and historical contexts, this essay concludes that Jonson's characters demonstrate that gender (in this case, what is regarded as masculine or feminine) is a social construct, rather than an innate set of behaviours

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Ben Jonson's 1609 play *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman* (*Epicoene*) presents masculinity and femininity through its various characters. The behaviour of Jonson's characters demonstrate that masculinity and femininity are social constructs: they are sets of behaviours that are assigned to males and females, respectively. In *Epicoene*, controlling,

masculine women and submissive, feminine men abound. Such traits do not align with gender ideals of early modern England. This essay will focus on the ways in which the play's characters blend, reverse and exaggerate gender roles and ideas of the Renaissance in England. It will also examine how Jonson and his works can be applied to today's gender-based discourse.

The complication of Epicoene is evident in every aspect of the character. Her existence blends masculinity and femininity, much to the shock of those present both on and off-stage. As a woman, she both subverts and reinforces contemporary stereotypes and ideals. As a boy in women's clothing, Epicoene uses male knowledge and fears in order to create a convincing, yet terrifying, female character. Epicoene's troublesome nature first appears to us in the play's title and in the character's name. The word "Epicoene" (or "epicene") is taken "from the grammatical term for a common gender in Greek and Latin" (Barbour 1014). In *The English Grammar* (1640), Jonson defined "*Epicene*" as a gender "which understands both kinds: especially, when we cannot make the difference" (qtd. in Barbour 1014). Like the classical grammatical element, Epicoene "understands both" masculinity and femininity; at different points in the play, she is presented as "both". Furthermore, the play's alternative title – *The Silent Woman* – is, according to early modern English society, an oxymoron. Women were supposed to be silent, unlike men, as explained in John Daw's verse: "I know to speak, and she to hold her peace" (Jonson II.iv.119). This standard, however, went against the stereotype that women were loquacious. Their "association [...] with words" was linked to the ideal chastity and fidelity of women. Scholars have identified that "the vagina, the mouth, and the doorway of the house" were "homologous" (Swann 301). A woman's "sexual wantonness" was perceived through talking, and venturing outside her home. This aspect will later be discussed in relation to the Collegiates. Regarding Epicoene, her silence and loquaciousness

reinforce the contradiction of the play's title by blending typically masculine and feminine traits.

As a woman, Epicoene merges feminine stereotypes with masculine ideals. At first, the titular character appears to be a silent, and therefore ideal, woman, "acting at the height of female (silent) virtue" (Dressel 8). However, once she has married Morose, she establishes herself as a noisy, domineering wife. On meeting Morose, who desires absolute silence, "[s]he speaks softly" (Jonson II.v.34) – so softly that Morose asks her to "[s]peak out" (Jonson II.v.35). To his delight, she does not indulge in "a woman's chiefest / pleasure" of talking (Jonson II.v.40-41). Epicoene astounds Morose, who "wants to marry a mute woman "of any form or any quality, so she be able to bear children." [Jonson I.ii.23 – 24]" (Swann 299). As a talkative woman, she undermines this desire: as mentioned previously, talkative women were seen as sexually unfaithful, therefore "sully[ing] the medium by which male blood and property were transferred in a patrilineal society" (Swann 297). If she were to bear children, Morose may fear that they would not be his children (genetically speaking), thus putting his plan to exclude Dauphine from his will at great risk. Furthermore, in tandem with this transformation into a stereotypical woman, Epicoene adopts masculine behaviours. She questions Morose's expectations: "did you think you had married a statue?" (Jonson III.iv.34). She wishes to "govern" the household (Jonson III.iv.50) and declares that there will be no "unnatural dumbness in [her] house" (Jonson III.iv.49). Through her talkative attempts to control the household, Epicoene reinforces the nature of her name, becoming a figure of both masculinity and femininity.

As a male playing the part of a female, Epicoene (Dauphine's boy) is able to use cross-dressing and his status as a boy (rather than a man) to manipulate ideals and stereotypes when portraying the controlling character. In early modern England, boys "were not considered

'men'" (Fisher 178). Men, for example, were bearded, while boys were not (Fisher 176). This same difference was used for men and women (Fisher 166). Suitability for marriage was another form of distinguishing men from boys (Fisher 177). In *Epicoene*, the "supposed non-generativity" (or inability to "pay the debt" (Fisher 177)) of boys is a reason that they are not able to marry (Fisher 177). Captain Otter remarks that "a boy [...] is not fit for marriage because he cannot *reddere debitum*" (Jonson V.iii.175 – 176). Epicoene's non-man, non-woman position is further emphasised (and complicated) through the employment of cross-dressing.

The practice of cross-dressing occurred both on- and off-stage in England during the Renaissance. It involved "subversion" in a "system of gendered patriarchal domination" (Cressy 438 – 439). In relation to *Epicoene*, boy actors playing women was not "an unremarkable convention" (Howard, qtd. in Cressy 438): it was a source of "deep seated fears" (Howard, qtd. in Cressy 438). The practice was "disturbing to moralists and reformers" (Cressy 440); it was a "violation of the law of God" (Cressy 443). Stephen Gosson wrote that "to take unto us those garments that are a manifest sign of another sex is to falsify, forge and adulterate, contrary to the express rule of the word of God" (qtd. in Cressy 443). In *Epicoene*, the titular character's "costume deceive[s]" (Cressy 443) characters and audience alike. As a boy in a woman's costume, Epicoene is always seen as something other than a man. Furthermore, Epicoene manipulates ideals and stereotypes when playing this character. Dauphine's boy knows the ideals and stereotypes that are enforced on women, but from a male standpoint. According to Samantha Dressel, he "has natural insight into the male mind, allowing him his excellent portrayal of male fears" (24). As a woman, he brings femininity into "Morose's masculine household" (Dressel 24). As such, Epicoene is the epitome of gender-related fears and confusion of early modern England.

Epicoene is not the only character to display both masculine and feminine traits. Morose is a masculine character who becomes more feminine as the play's plot unfolds. His desire to control his house and the people around him is masculine; however, this is undermined by his love for silence, and by the other characters in *Epicoene*. Morose's masculinity is expressed through his attempts to control the world around him. King James himself believed that men were, rightfully, the dominators, the rulers (Lewalski 795 – 796). God, the king, the husband, the father: all were to be subjected to and obeyed (Lewalski 795 – 796). Morose is verbose – a trait that is accepted in men (Dressel 1). According to Mary E. Trull, his need for order is connected "closely to [his] house" (268). His living conditions, for example, demonstrate his desire for silence. Before we encounter the character himself, we learn that he lives in a "narrow" street (Jonson I.i.161) through which neither "coaches nor carts" (Jonson I.i.162) can be driven. His house protects him from "common noises" (Jonson I.i.163). Morose, as "the male householder" (Trull 268), controls his home "through a delight in the sound of his own voice and an impassioned desire to silence every other noise" (Trull 268). His masculine control will be undermined as the play continues, however.

Morose's need for constant silence, and the noisy actions of other characters, reveal his femininity. It causes him to stay indoors and hide from other people. According to Karen Newman, his "fear of noise [...] becomes increasingly gender specific" (508). It is the noise of women that disturbs him so greatly. In the city, women are associated with "urban vices – the noise, the crowd, sexuality, and consumerism" (Newman 508). As the play continues, and the noise of Epicoene and others increases, Morose's house continues to reflect his inner turmoil (Trull 268). The other, noisy characters "have rent [his] roof, walls, and all [his] windows [...] with their brazen throats" (Jonson IV.ii.116 – 117). Their noise provokes him to wear a "nest of night-caps" (Jonson IV.i.19). Epicoene's actions in particular reveal Morose's femininity. Due to Epicoene's controlling nature, Morose is left "diminished and feminized" (Dressel 10).

He finds his new wife's presence so overwhelming that he considers "geld[ing] [him]self" (Jonson IV.iv.10) and feigns impotence, or "infirmity" (Jonson V.iv.27) as grounds for divorce. He is driven to declare that he is "no man" (Jonson V.iv.41) and cannot fulfil "the duties or any the least office of a husband" (Jonson V.iv.44). As previously discussed, Morose fears that the loquacious Epicoene will "sully the medium by which male blood and property [are] transferred in [this] patrilineal society" (Swann 297). It is because of these views that he believes that declaring himself to be infertile "will guarantee the annulment of his marriage" (Swann 299). As such, his willingness to self-castrate leads to his further feminisation. By saying that he is "no man", he almost resembles the cross-dressed Epicoene. In some cases, characters such as these have "their circumstances degraded and their manhood diminished by feminizing costume" (Cressy 452). Furthermore, his readiness to become a eunuch reduces him to something less than a man: according to Bartholomew Cocles, eunuchs "are very much changed from the nature of menne, into the nature of women" (qtd in Fisher 178). As a result of the noise and actions of the other characters – in particular, Epicoene – Morose becomes so feminised that he barely resembles a masculine figure.

The Collegiates are a group of masculine women. The "college" itself is a male concept. Like Epicoene, their names reflect their masculinity. The group subverts and reinforces aspects of their society. The play's male characters fear emasculation at the hands of these women. The Collegiates reveal Jonson's own misogyny. The Collegiates' names mirror these women's blending of masculinity and femininity. Madame Centaure, for example, is "named for a hybrid beast" (Barbour 1014). Like the hybridity of the mythical centaur, the Collegiates are each portrayed as an amalgam of masculinity and femininity. Madame Haughty calls the other women by their surnames, or "the masculine form" (Barbour 1015): "I'll call you [Epicoene] Morose still now, as I call Centaure / and Mavis" (Jonson IV.iii.12-14). It is necessary to note that her masculine practice still aligns

with early modern English patriarchy: she uses the women's married names, rather than their maiden names, highlighting their status as wives, as people placed under a man's authority. As such, their names, and how they use them, are both masculine and feminine.

The "college" itself is a masculine concept. During this period, by establishing a college, women became more "assertive" (Barbour 1015) and "assume[d] male prerogatives" (Barbour 1015). They held discussions "wherever they [chose]" (Barbour 1015) and "fully indulge[d] in sexual freedom" (Trull 268). Jonson may have based his Collegiates on real women. According to Richmond Barbour, the countess of Pembroke held a "ladies' literary salon" and referred to it as "a "college"" (1015); Queen Anne (for whom Jonson wrote masques) "set a threatening precedent" (Barbour 1015) – the French ambassador spoke of "the power that she always [held] over [King James]" (Riggs, qtd. in Barbour 1015). The countess of Bedford may have been the inspiration for Madame Haughty (Lewalski 799). She used "the masculine form" when writing letters to other women (Barbour 1015). She, like her Jonsonian counterpart, "lived apart from her husband" (Lewalski 799) and "associated herself closely with the queen's subversive masques and Princess Elizabeth's oppositional politics" (Lewalski 799). The real "colleges" and the women who subverted ideals portray a masculinity that is shown in their portrayal in *Epicoene*.

The Collegiates' masculinity is perceived as a threat to men's masculinity. They parallel cross-dressed women, who, as proposed by Linda Woodbridge, used male clothing "to plead at law, [...] practice a profession barred to women; [...] to travel alone, avoid rape or molestation, and to have adventures" (Cressy 440). The Collegiates are sexually active: for example, in the play's opening scene, Clerimont's "Boy" reveals that the Collegiates "throw [him] o' the bed" (Jonson I.i.13) and make him wear their clothes

(Jonson I.i.14-15). Like Epicoene, they wish to "govern" (Jonson III.iv.50), rather than be governed. As discussed earlier, such subversion of gender ideals was unacceptable. According to Dressel, desirable male qualities were "generally seen as vice or sin in women" (1). In the case of the Collegiates, their "sexual freedom" (Trull 268) risks "male irrelevance" (Barbour 1015), as it allows them to "play the man with other women" (Barbour 1015). By establishing an independence from men, and by behaving like bad women (or good men), the Collegiates place men's power in a potentially precarious position.

The Otters are a comical exaggeration of the reversal of typical contemporary gender roles. In this marriage, man is woman and woman man. Jonson employs military language to highlight the power of Mistress Otter. She patronises and punishes her feminine husband. Their subversion of gender norms is also reflected in their home. Jonson uses military-style language to demonstrate the Otters' gender-role reversal. The name "Captain Otter" indicates this. One would presume that the captain controls his "soft and dependent" (Barbour 1008) wife as he controls an army of soldiers. A man's beard was even referred to as an "ensigne of majesty" (Crooke, qtd. in Fisher 172), or "natural Ensigne of Manhood" (Bulwer, qtd. in Fisher 172). However, it is Mistress Otter who holds power over the "soft and dependent" captain. Jonson makes further use of military language in La Foole's line, "She / commands all at home" (Jonson I.iv.26-27), emphasising her power. Clerimont refers to her as "Captain Otter" (Jonson I.iv.28), again demonstrating her powerful position in her marriage. Although it was frowned upon for women to hold power, seventeenth-century women did exercise control. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski details such women. They acted as "managers of estates in their husbands' absences [...] widows managing their own estates and those of their minor children [...] members of guilds" (Lewalski 797). As well as this, some "dominated their men by sheer force of personality or outright defiance" (Lewalski 797). Mistress Otter, like

these women, is a masculine figure in her marriage, highlighted by the use of military language.

The Otters' masculinity and femininity are seen in their treatments of each other. This is presented in an exaggerated manner throughout *Epicoene*. Jonson achieves this by contrasting husband with wife. Captain Otter addresses Mrs. Otter as "princess" (Jonson II.vi.51, III.i.1) and "follows her [...] with his hat off [...] for reverence" (Jonson II.vi.52- 54). Mrs. Otter, on the other hand, refers to their house as "my house, my roof" (Jonson III.i.27). She gives her husband a "half-crown a day" (Jonson III.i.33) as "maintenance" (Jonson III.i.35). Mrs. Otter physically punishes her husband for insulting her (Jonson IV.ii.94-107). Like Epicoene, Mrs. Otter "govern[s]" (Jonson III.iv.50) in her marriage and in her home. The Otters' behaviour in relation to each other is contrasted and therefore demonstrates their gender-role-reversal.

The Otters' house reflects the married couple. According to Trull, their house represents both "city and court" life (270). Mrs. Otter's "courtliness" (Trull 270) is contrasted with Captain Otter's "predilection for drinking games" (Trull 270). The couple "violate[s] the divisions of public and private" (Trull 270), wishing "to bring the city over their threshold" (Trull 270). This places Mistress Otter in a somewhat vague position regarding her fidelity. A wife's "chastity cannot be guaranteed unless she is immured in privacy" (Trull 270), making the Otters' public home a place of infidelity. La Foole states that Mistress Otter resembles "the rich china-woman that the courtiers visited so often, that gave the rare entertainment" (Jonson I.iv.25 – 26), rendering her home "either a china shop or a brothel" (Trull 270). Jonson's attention to the Otters' home further demonstrates their subversion of typical gender roles.

Dauphine Eugenie is a feminine man, although he does display some masculinity. Through his name and his actions, the audience sees how his femininity and masculinity are blended. Dauphine's name reflects his mix of masculinity and femininity. According to Marjorie Swann, ""Dauphine Eugenie" translates as "well-born heir,"" (300). The addition of the letter "e" puts the word in its "feminine form" (Swann 300), making him "the heir who cannot be" (Swann 300). Indeed, it is Morose's intention to remove Dauphine as an heir, which is reflected in his feminised name. Dauphine's actions throughout *Epicoene* demonstrate that he possesses both feminine and masculine qualities. Female characters point out "effeminate neatness in men's dress" (Barbour 1015), comparing them (in a derogatory fashion) to an intersex person using the term "hermaphrodite" (Jonson IV.vi.26 – 27). From this perspective, Dauphine is similar to a cross-dressed man. While some cross-dressed men were portrayed as weakened and emasculated, they were "more often rendered as proactive, virile, and effective" (Cressy 453). Cross-dressing was "a means to advancement" (Cressy 453). In this sense, Dauphine's femininity is not a cause of undoing. Indeed, by training "a gentleman's son" (Jonson V.iv.189) for a "half year" (Jonson V.iv.190) and thus deceiving audiences and characters alike, he is "applauded" (Cressy 454) for his cleverness. Trull points out that it is the gallants (namely Dauphine and Clerimont) who "possess households of freedom and pleasure" (268) by making "no explicit claim to patriarchal authority" (268). As such, Dauphine's masculine and feminine actions lead to his success and happiness in this city comedy.

The way in which gender is presented in *Epicoene* can be applied to the gender discourse of today. Jonson's views on women's behaviour and duties, as well as the panic caused by the seeming sabotage of what is perceived as natural, reflects the present day's constructs and debates surrounding gender. The Jacobean period saw a rise in misogyny. Works such as "sermons, tracts, and plays" referred to the "physical and mental defects [and]

rebelliousness" of women (Lewalski 794). The "hierarchy of being" referred to the idea that women were of a "natural inferiority to men" (Lewalski 794). Post-Reformation ideas regarding "the place of women in the family and society" (Christensen 1 – 2) are reflected in Jonson's works. Women were the "center" of the household, thus "threaten[ing] its stability" (Christensen 1). A woman's duty was to be a "locus of desire" for her husband (Christensen 2), to create a home separate from "the social and economic world outside" (Christensen 2), and to "produc[e] an heir to ensure the continuance of the household" (Christensen 2). Thus, their household duties help to place men in the centre of the home (Christensen 2). Jonson, however, portrays women who "threaten this center" (Christensen 2). These women do not abide by the duties mentioned, to the potential detriment of their husbands and families (Christensen 2). The women in *Epicoene* are no exception. As discussed, the Collegiates do not comply with the duties set out for them, causing them to be "derided by the male characters of the play" (Swann 302). They do not follow the rules of comedy for women, either. Typically, "comedy's reassertion of order neutralizes such female independence by ensconcing the heroine safely in the bonds of patriarchal matrimony" (Swann 302). However, after *Epicoene* has ended, these women "will continue to behave immodestly in the future" (Swann 302). Furthermore, Morose, as mentioned, has a particular aversion to the noise of women. He believes that women and the city possess the same traits of "sexuality and consumerism" (Newman 508).

The present day's Western constructs and debates surrounding gender identity somewhat reflect those of early modern England. To "do gender" is to "present information about [one's] gender" (Westbrook and Schilt 33). This information is used by other people to "determine [one's] gender" by "placing them in gender categories" (Westbrook and Schilt 33). In *Epicoene*, the titular character is presented as a woman and is therefore believed to be one. It is common to determine gender based on "genitalia (biological criteria) [...] in

(hetero)sexual and sexualized interactions" (Westbrook and Schilt 34). The use of biological factors is increased in "gender-segregated spaces", especially "women's spaces" (Westbrook and Schilt 35). Female spaces are perceived to be vulnerable to males "because of cultural ideologies of women as inherently vulnerable and in need of protection" (Westbrook and Schilt 35). As such, the Collegiates are shocked that their newest member, who has learned their "mysteries" (Swann 302), is a boy in disguise. Today, people whose sex and/or gender identity lies outside the traditional male/female, man/woman binaries are seen as "disruptions to biology-based gender ideology" (Westbrook and Schilt 34). They are portrayed as dangerous. Transgender women are characterised as "potential sexual dangers in gender-segregated spaces" (Westbrook and Schilt 47), and cisgender women as "generally physically weaker than men" (from an opinion piece, qtd. in Westbrook and Schilt 47). Like Jonson's Epicoene, those who do not conform to the gender binary are not only "disruptions" but "potential sexual dangers".

Taking gender to be a social, rather than a biological construct, the characters of *Epicoene*, along with those whose gender identity lies outside of the traditional binaries, can find a way to fit into society. Following from de Beauvoir's statement ("one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman" (Butler 519), Judith Butler states that gender is not "a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed [*sic*]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*." (519). Gender is created; it is "not a fact" (Butler 522). Therefore, it is not a subversive if a person has "a designated 'female' body [but does not] display traits generally considered 'feminine'" (Salih 46). Jonson's characters reflect Butler's theories regarding gender. The Collegiates repeat male-associated acts, thus blending their genders. They do not obey their societies "punitively regulated cultural fictions" (Butler 522); instead, they transgress these "fictions" to create their own identities and, as a result, gain a level of freedom. This can also be applied to Dauphine,

who, as previously mentioned, can have "freedom and pleasure" (Trull 268). Morose may not have been so ridiculed if his behaviour was not considered unnatural. Epicoene and the Otters demonstrate that men and women do not inherently act in a certain manner. Traits such as silence and loquaciousness are not innate to men or women, rather they have been forced upon, and associated with them. Women can be dominant, and men submissive, as these traits are not inherent to either gender.

Ben Jonson's *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman* displays characters whose behaviours subvert and reinforce contemporary ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity. The characters' traits do not align with gender ideals of early modern England, demonstrating that gender is a social construct. Jonson's play is reflected in, and can be applied to, today's gender-based discourse.

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"Nasty sluttish animals" and "hermaphroditical authority": Unnatural Practices of Femininity in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*

Abbie O'Brien O'Driscoll

The Patricia Coughlan Award

Highly Recommended

In Ben Jonson's comedy, *Epicoene,* preconceived notions of gender – and especially femininity – in early modern England are toyed with, critiqued and inverted. Jonson tests the boundaries and the meaning of presentations of femininity, in turn allowing modern audiences to situate the expectations of gender in the cultural sphere of early modern London. In this essay, I will demonstrate how Jonson portrays the unnatural practices of femininity in early modern society in *Epicoene*. I will do so by focusing on the female presenting characters in the play; the collegiates, Mistress Otter, and Epicoene herself. Through exploration of these representations of women in this work, I will discuss how Jonson satirises the idealised feminine form through representations of unorthodox gender transgression in his female characters. In conjunction with this, I will display how the audience can further understand the seemingly unnatural ideas of performing gender through practices of self-fashioning within the play. I will also explore the performance and inversion of feminine ideals as shown through the practice of crossdressing.

The cultural milieu of *Epicoene* was "driven by misogyny" (Moulton 216), in the same fashion as the expectations placed upon women and femininity at large in the early modern period. Jonson creates a cast of transgressive female characters which ultimately appear as "incoherent or discontinuous gendered beings [...] who fail to conform to the gendered norms

of cultural intelligibility" (Butler 23) due to unnatural presentations of femininity. The female characters of *Epicoene* continually undermine their male counterparts, in a domineering, overtly sexual fashion not typically prescribed to women. These displays of sexuality and emasculation are most notably performed by the characters of Mistress Otter and the Collegiates. These "nasty sluttish animals" (Jonson 4.2. 50-51) invert these forms of idealised femininity, opting instead for roles of power and self-expression. These women usurp the roles of men both in marriage and in sexual pursuit, defying the notion of the intertwined nature of gender and biological sex. For example, Mrs Otter exerts total control over her husband: "He is his wife's subject, he calls her princess" (Jonson 2.6. 51). This is an unorthodox relationship dynamic within the cultural sphere of early modern England, as we can see through the comedic presentation of the Otter's marriage. We consistently see Mistress Otter presented as "monstrously unnatural" (Newman 135) for threatening the "masculine authority" (Newman 135) through the emasculation of own husband, and through seizure of the traditionally masculine, dominant role in their marriage. In addition to this, we see a level of overt sexuality represented in both Mistress Otter and the Collegiates which would have been unacceptable for women in this era: "They love to be well-horsed I know. I love it myself" (Jonson 3.1. 20-21). This further emphasises the threat these women pose to the role of men and masculinity in this society through imposition of their "hermaphroditical authority" (Jonson 1.1. 77). These "masculine, epicene" (Moulton 216) qualities of both the Collegiates and Mistress Otter display to us the unnatural femininity of the city-bound women, whilst simultaneously showing us this gendered double standard regarding their behaviours. These women perform irregular acts of domination and showcases of open sexuality in an unnatural manner, when in reality they are acting on these aforementioned masculine qualities (Moulton 216), behaving in similar fashion to the plays' gallants. Moreover, we can determine that in the cultural sphere of early modern England "[w]hat is desired, or at least tolerated, in man, is generally seen as a vice or sin in

women" (Dressel), furthering our understanding of their actions as unnatural displays of femininity. The actions of these women throughout the play are there to be understood by audiences as comedic and unnatural due to the masculine nature of said actions. Essentially, their actions are not inherently unnatural or immoral, but are presented to the audience as such as these are traits that traditionally "belong to the masculine domain" (Butler 161). This by extension brands these women as cultural assailants, representing their actions as the "usurpation of multiple forms of authority" (Newman 134) and therefore are threatening in nature to traditional societal roles.

Gender presentation and performance is a crucial, recurring theme in the plays of early modern England, with *Epicoene* being a prime example of these practices. In the cases of all female presenting characters in the play, we must view them as performing gender through the practice of self-fashioning. These characters build their femininity from the ground up, as it were, taking advantage of the consumerist structures of early modern London in order to fashion their appearance in a satisfactory way. In the act of self-fashioning, "the body appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed" (Butler 12), a space where the presentation of femininity is not a fundamental trait of women, but is carefully created and performed. By considering the descriptions provided by the men of the play, we can interpret the reception of acts of self-fashioning among them as wholly unnatural and deceptive. This fraudulent fashioning is accredited as a product of the period, and most importantly a product of the urban setting: "do you ever think to find a chaste wife in these times?" (Jonson 2.2. 31-32). Early modern London was a centre for consumerism and commodification (Newman 132), and this is represented in *Epicoene* through the women we meet, and the women we hear about. In the social climate of the city where "women have been represented not only as consumers but as goods themselves" (Newman 133), it is natural that women will then begin to commodify themselves into the best possible product they can be. The women of the play show

this practice of self commodification effectively, breaking their physical appearance down into its most consumable forms. For example, when Mr Otter is recounting Mistress Otter's routine and construction of her appearance to the gallants in act four scene two, he describes her as receiving different physical attributes from different areas of London: "All her teeth were made i' the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i' the Strand and her hair in Silver Street" (Jonson 4.2. 84-86). He even reveals how "[s]he takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, in some twenty boxes" (Jonson 4.2. 88-89), describing in the most explicit sense this literal construction of her own femininity. This artificial, constructed gender seen repeatedly represented here through Mistress Otter clearly shows the irregularity of women's actions of self-fashioning in the early modern sphere, but also the irregularity of gender identity as a whole. This practice of self-fashioning clearly presents to us that "femininity is not natural to women but is rather an effect of specific practices" (Lloyd 43). Essentially, this communicates to the audience that this heightened gendered performance of self-fashioning is unnatural, even if the performance is in an effort to conform to societal expectations.

The titular character, Epicoene, presents this idea of performing gender and feminine identity in the most nuanced, literal fashion. Through the act of crossdressing, Epicoene is able to exist in an androgynous sphere of presentation, performing attributes of both femininity and masculinity as seen in other characters in the play. For instance, Epicoene also takes part in the act of self-fashioning, in a way which is naturally more important to her gender presentation as she must fashion an entire female persona onto that of a boy's body. Epicoene demonstrates to the audience the dichotomy between the ideal woman and the unnatural performed femininity of the city-dwelling women. Epicoene plays with the boundaries of gender presentation similarly to the other female characters of the play, however, Epicoene has the agency to do this in an intentional manner due to their true identity as a boy. This position allows Epicoene to be both the ideal woman, displaying the expected levels of

femininity and the unnatural, self-fashioned city woman like Mistress Otter and the Collegiates. Upon her introduction to Morose, she is presented as the perfect woman opposing the ideals of city femininity – "a divine creature! [...] a wealthy dowry in her silence!" (Jonson 2.5. 37, 88-89) – but this perfection is short lived. Soon after, Epicoene begins to act in this allegedly unnatural way, claiming her power and abandoning her silence. Having made herself "undervalued by men and over trusted by women" (Chess 85) by flipping these gender roles attributed to her, "the former silent woman has the power" (Chess 85), further emphasising the unnatural nature of the so-called natural ideals of femininity. Through Epicoene's aptly epicene behaviour, Jonson reveals to us that gender identity has been "turned on their heads" (Dressel) through this "coacted, unnatural" (Jonson 3.4. 49) performance displayed by Epicoene. Simply put, there is no way to certainly define these gender roles as natural or inherent if they can be defied so easily and frequently, as seen throughout *Epicoene,* unravelling "the [...] notion of identification" (Butler 161) through gendered terms through the heightened, borderline comical performance Epicoene puts on via crossdressing.

Based on the content discussed, I have outlined the representation of unnatural, subversive femininity in Jonson's *Epicoene*. Throughout the narrative, Jonson inverts these traditional roles of gender and femininity, whether this be as a critique of these restrictive roles, or a critique of the women who violate these expectations, creating these transgressive, thought-provoking female characters. By considering the women's usurpation of male roles, unnatural practices of self-fashioning, we can espy Jonson's intentions to present these exaggerated expectations to the audience in a comedic, satirical manner. Moreover, by exploring the manner in which Jonson's female characters act, operate, and present themselves to society, we as an audience can come to a deeper understanding of gender presentation and specifically the performance of femininity, ideal or unnatural, in the early modern period.

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"This Man Belongs to Me": Inverting Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic in *Dracula*

Julian Di Prima

The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Highly Recommended

I have been so long master that I would be master still,

or at least that none other should be master of me.

(Stoker 24)

Hegel asserts that two self-consciousnesses must engage each other to have their individuality recognised upon interacting, and the following struggle arises due to neither being willing to accept the existence of a separate, equally legitimate, self. According to the dynamic exposed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the defining moment of the battle is that in which one of the two consciousnesses decides to endanger their immediacy for the possibility of subduing the other, which – having preferred to surrender their will rather than jeopardise their life – must now yield to their new master. Within the context of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it becomes difficult to point out a specific moment in which a clear victor emerges from this struggle for recognition. Frankenstein sacrifices his actuality upon creating the Monster, as well as in their confrontation in the Alps. Similarly, the Creature puts his own personhood in peril during the very same situations, exposing his emotional state and needs for the potential reward of a companion – or indeed, acceptance from his maker. Yet neither seems to reach the level of self-awareness predicted by Hegel: Frankenstein refuses to admit the independence of his

Creature, while the Monster does not manage to abandon his need for recognition – and upon its absence, revenge – which leads to their ill-fated pursuit.

Each character takes upon himself the mantle of master, and the chains of the slave. Neither is free from the influence of the other, and both grapple with their reciprocal manipulation. Shelley brilliantly upends the dynamic laid down by Hegel by showcasing its main weakness in action: that is, the fact that no individual willingly chooses slavery rather than pursuing connection. The author creates the ideal backdrop against which her political and philosophical beliefs come together at their most impassioned, not only disproving the Hegelian principles of dominance and submission as inherent traits of humanity, but also exhibiting a profound consciousness of the nuanced, ambiguous nature of man.

But what is it that makes "man" – as symbolised in the character of Frankenstein – so deeply, subconsciously upsetting and alienating? What strings does he tug at that make the reader hyper-aware of his alienation? The answer lies at least partly in the late 18th century Enlightenment movement, and its widespread popularisation of what has become the modern conception of science, and of the scientist as a public figure. Propagating the "belief that objective detachment from the natural world is a prerequisite for the practice of science," has had long-lasting consequences, and the conviction has retained its influence well into contemporary times (Allman 127). The images of the scientist as an estranged agent of change, unpredictable as that change may be, or of the scholar high in their ivory tower, concerned with matters that transcend substantiality, or the "mad inventor" operating nefariously in their dark laboratory: all these pictures have become a part of a collective unconsciousness in the post-industrial world, and occupy a space in most forms of popular media.

The Scientist as an archetype grows to encompass the spectrum of human progress: on one hand scientists are the driving force behind growth and enhancements to life, while on the other they are seen as disaffected, preoccupied with inconsequential matters, and detached from

others, from reality, and even from themselves as corporeal entities. In recent years, a common plot device in literary and cinematographic production has become that of out-of-control scientific progress leading to destruction and chaos: it has become so prevalent to be considered a recognised trope in media studies, and its rise to popularity has been well documented (see: Schummer).

With the advancement of technology and science, the innate and self-reflected fear of losing control over oneself is combined and exacerbated by a newfound dread of creation rebelling against creator. Frankenstein – and consequently mankind – propels himself into a godlike status, occupying the position previously belonging exclusively to divinity by taking it upon himself to grant and take lives, but he does not possess the coping abilities necessary to accept that which is built "in His own image", and thus perpetrates the same cycle of abandonment as the God from the Old Testament in a desperate attempt at maintaining and reclaiming control. Enslaved to the whims of his passion from a young age, he seeks refuge in the comforting patterns of scientific endeavours: this course of action is mirrored by *Dracula*'s own "mad scientist'" John "Jack" Seward, whose own interest in medical development is unaccompanied by the necessary ethical advancement. His treatment of one of his patients, R. M. Renfield, exemplifies such a flaw in Seward's character.

"He is only nine and twenty, and he has an immense lunatic asylum all under his own care." Lucy Westenra writes of him in one of her letters to Mina Murray. "He seems absolutely imperturbable. I can fancy what a wonderful power he must have over his patients" (Stoker 66). Both socially and in the narrative, the figure of the doctor – and specifically of the alienist/psychiatrist – has been regarded as threatening, perhaps even more so than the scientist: whereas one may have a limited role in the everyman's life, the other is a reoccurring presence, and a more invasive one at that; having access to man's innermost refuge, the psychiatrist could enforce their own will over that of the patient, effectively reducing them to a state of slavery

(see: Noad). Accordingly, the Gothic genre has generally been preoccupied with a dramatised representation of madhouses and asylums, and *Dracula* is no exception in its portrayal of Seward's care, focused on the doctor's own sake rather than any patient's. He admits to throwing himself single-mindedly into his work – often to the point of obsessively internalising the language of madness used by Renfield himself, as can be seen by his declaration that thoughts of the maniac and of his possible diagnosis "buzz" about his brain, much as Renfield's own flies do in his room (Stoker 85).

While Frankenstein demonstrated the devastating effects of human ethics being overwhelmed and overpowered by ego and lust for control, Seward does not look to create his own race of men to worship him – instead, he seems content to keep Renfield under his thumb, under the guise of concern for his safety, and of scientific progress. Both men occupy a privileged position, holding power over others due to their social standing – as both are of good birth, and with enough funds to support their endeavours – occupation, and level of influence. Seward is described as an anxious, almost insecure individual in his appearances before Lucy – namely during his failed proposal – with her letters betraying a veiled annoyance at his nervous habit of playing with his lancet. As if looking to compensate for his social inadequacy, he is shown to almost take pleasure from the examining – or tormenting – of his patient:

> I questioned [Renfield] more fully than I had ever done, with a view to making myself master of the facts of his hallucination. In my manner of doing it there was, I now see, something of cruelty. I seemed to wish to keep him to the point of his madness (Stoker 72).

Possessively labelled by the doctor as "[his] own pet lunatic", and "[his] homicidal maniac", Renfield is an enigmatic and divisive figure within the novel: his origins are never expounded upon, the reason behind his presence in the asylum under Seward's care is left to the reader's imagination (Stoker 281, 85). Through the clinician's own phonograph entries – later typewritten, courtesy of Mina Harker – the readership is informed of the zoophagic and

vampiric habits of the madman, of his powerful mood swings and strange feats of physical ability. The narrative – for all that it accommodates a wide array of formats and narrators – does not allow him to speak for himself, his voice silenced both by his inability to voice his own side of the story, and by the intervention of Seward, who "[takes] away his pocket-book to look at it," once again suppressing Renfield's ability to externalise his "madness" through the fervent annotation of numbers (Stoker 83, 85).

Despite this initial appearance, Renfield is not Seward's slave as much as he is his prisoner; instead, it is the doctor himself who demonstrates a greater degree of dependency towards his patient: by controlling him, Seward seems to sublimate the need to control his own environment – especially when his belief system is challenged by the inexplicable or preternatural. He never manages to reach that emotional detachment which is so fundamental in the establishing of a master/slave relationship, as contempt and curiosity both animate his interactions and thoughts regarding Renfield. The latter appears to be – from Seward's own testimonies – far less preoccupied with the doctor, outside of his interferences with what he perceives to be his budding connection to Dracula. It is Renfield who does not object to debasing himself in front of his incarcerator in order to pursue his objective, who sacrifices his dignity and immediacy – as the Hegelian theory instructs – for the sake of a greater goal.

Fear of Seward is not the animating drive behind Renfield's actions or delusions, and it does not even seem to be a factor that the madman takes into consideration, even in his bouts of rebelliousness: he can easily overpower the doctor and his assistants (see Stoker: 122, 139, 170, 188), his strength is considered superhuman (as read in 123, 139, 339), and his folly grants his mind a degree of freedom from the shackles of appropriateness. The text suggests that his state of imprisonment is thus tied to a temporary concession on Renfield's part – who is implied by the aforementioned cues to be complicit in his own incarceration, given that he breaks away several times – and that such momentary surrender is contingent upon his true master's oath.

It is not mere freedom that Renfield seeks, but rather a manner to satisfy his craving for blood, which he believes to be key to immortality. This is his true aim, and it is exactly what he is promised – or believes to be promised – by Dracula. He reports to have seen the vampire summoning a great horde of rats, and to have heard his message that "[a]ll these lives I will give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you will fall down and worship me!" (Stoker 337). This promise is ultimately what causes him to pledge his loyalty and life to the Count, effectively forfeiting his rights and becoming his slave.

"Nulla servitus turpior est quam voluntaria", Seneca wrote – no slavery is more abject than a voluntary one – and indeed, Renfield seems to be the most wretched of characters in Stoker's narrative: he allows his judgement to be impaired and clouded by his delusions of grandeur – not unlike Frankenstein – and thus grants Dracula access to his mind and thoughts, operating as an extension of the vampire (Seneca ep. 47.17). It is a deeper and viler condition than that which Seward could dream to accomplish by confining him to the asylum, and one which allows the author to explore the delicate matter of a slave's potential connivance in their submission.

Despite the seeming agreement this posits with to Hegel's theorised dynamic, it would be misleading to take the matter at face value and deduce that Stoker must have thus been looking to corroborate the philosopher's ideas. Rather, it is vital that we examine what Renfield's role within the narrative may be, outside of his relevance to the plot: it is my belief that he represents a mirror and a doppelgänger figure opposite Jonathan Harker, which allows Stoker to highlight the variations upon the master and slave theme, and the ways in which such dynamic can be reversed. While this is only an attempt at bridging the gap in *Dracula*'s critical production, it allows for a different reading of the novel and of the importance of select characters which have been historically overlooked in pre-existing research.

Dracula begins with a rather busy journal entry by a young solicitor – only recently promoted, as the reader is soon informed. Caught in an unexpected business trip, Jonathan Harker is sent to Transylvania in order to aid a Count in his purchase and move to the property of Carfax, in England. The premise is simple enough and allows for the built of suspense as the diarist explores a foreign setting – one where all sorts of unearthly events seem to happen, where the cold rationality of the West gives way to the superstitious ways of the East. It is important to note the importance of suggestion and implication in the novel: the characters seem to share a belief that so long as something remains unspoken, its effect will be lessened, and their control over the situation may remain undisturbed. Particularly between Dracula and Harker, most of the interactions operate on two levels: explicit and implicit. The former is what populates the first entries of Harker's journal and consists mainly of legal matters that need discussing between client and solicitor, as well as tales of Transylvanian folklore with which the Count regales his guest. To the implicit level belong, for example, the non-mentions of vampirism and the unspoken threats that populate the first part of the novel. The tacit nature of the interactions between Harker and Dracula lends further credibility to the homoerotic readings of their dynamic: queerness has historically been a matter discussed almost entirely through metaphors, references, and generally a rich and developed cant or argot, even in Victorian times – especially around the time Stoker published his novel, fresh from the Wilde trials. Nothing between Harker and Dracula is explicitly stated regarding their immediate situation that is not concealed by the veneer of hospitality, and thus acceptability – all is sanitised, all is cut and edited: "within the stony fastness of Castle Dracula, censorship flourishes: Dracula reads and destroys Harker's illicit literary production" (Schaffer 390).

"[The vampire] may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come, though afterwards he can come as he please," Van Helsing mentions amidst a veritable expository overload on the strengths and weaknesses of the Count

(Stoker 288). In fact, one of the qualities which enhance the horror of Stoker's novel is precisely that of the myth of consent. Dracula's actions are profoundly tied to a semblance of consent on the part of his victim. He must be invited in, in all senses of the word: he grants his prey the illusion of control, of having a choice. "Welcome to my house!" He tells Harker upon their first proper encounter. "Enter freely, and of your own will!" (Stoker 18). And again, only a few paragraphs later: "Welcome to my house. Come freely. Go safely; and leave something of the happiness you bring!" (Stoker 19).

The accentuation of Harker's freedom of choice in entering his castle creates tension from the very beginning, and ultimately the young solicitor's first step past the threshold acts as a signature on the Masochean contract Dracula presents him with (for the definition and details of the Masochean contract, see: Christensen). His uninformed, implicit, and passive consent should not – and would not – be considered binding by the law, but the Count is no legal practitioner: Harker unknowingly accepts his terms, and thus becomes his slave.

The initial invitation needs to be further analysed in light of the loss of freedom which it implements; one is made to enter of their own will, and asked to "go safely" – although it is not clear whether the safety in question is determined by the guest or by the host, whom in the case of Harker would have seen the young man be "safely" disposed of by his brides – and finally bid to leave something of their own behind them. While the formula may be a simple relic of past hospitality, or even another way of stressing the backwards, superstitious Transylvanian ways, it can also be argued that Stoker intended – in addition to the aforementioned uses — to also foreshadow all which Harker gives – or rather, is *made* to give – Dracula: his belongings, which the vampire steals; his letters, his memories, and even the blood that is often implied to be drunk from him by the Count.

The dynamic that forms during the initial days of Harker's stay in the castle is fluid and multifaceted in the way that it portrays power im/balances. It is firstly made very clear that the

solicitor's position within the castle is one of subservience to the master of the house: even Mr Hawkins, who has sent Harker on the trip, informs the Count that Jonathan "shall be ready to attend on [him] when [he] will during his stay, and shall take [his] instructions *in all matters*." (Stoker 20, emphasis mine). The outlined rapport is an unequal one, where a dual pressure is exercised on Harker – partly by his host, who has direct power over his immediate surroundings, and partly by his employer, who instead controls his future. Particularly because he is said to be of humble origins – Mina refers to their "modest bringing up" – the influence of financial threats posed by subpar professionalism is not to be overlooked (Stoker 189). While he has been notoriously associated with the wealthy bourgeoisie (see: Hatlen), Harker's fortune is fairly recent, and his status not yet stable enough for him to be able to refuse a job, or to act in any way which may cause negative repercussions. "What could I do but bow acceptance?" Harker writes in his journal. "It was Mr. Hawkins's interest, not mine, and I had to think of him, not myself. […] The Count saw his victory in my bow, and his mastery in the trouble of my face." (Stoker 38). Dracula is perfectly aware of the delicate class position occupied by his guest and does not hesitate to use it to his own advantage, further entrapping the young man in servitude.

At the same time, Harker is initially protected by the same contract he "signed": being Dracula's guest he is entitled to a degree of safeguarding, albeit dependent on his ability to act as if nothing were suspicious or amiss. Because of this pantomime of sorts, the Count must maintain his own appearance as a gracious host, accommodating and defending Harker as required. The agreement they have stipulated feeds off the solicitor's submissive position as much as it does off the Count's dominant one: it encourages and nurtures the feelings of ownership and possession that Dracula has towards Jonathan – as verbalised by his assertion that "[t]his man belongs to me!" and "[t]o-night is mine, to-morrow night is yours." (Stoker 46, 60). The sense of proprietorship that binds the vampire to his victim is one which makes

reappearances throughout the events of the novel, linking Dracula to those he feeds off. It is important to note that the very same covetousness is not demonstrated towards Renfield, for all that he seems a much more willing servant than Jonathan, Lucy, and Mina: the madman repeatedly recognises his master and begs for his attention and favours (Stoker see: 121, 123, 124, 337-338, etc.).

What Dracula-as-master represents has been extensively argued in the academic production regarding the novel, and from the psychological to the political, very few stones have been left unturned. What Jonathan-as-slave symbolises, on the other hand, has often created more problems for the audience, both in critical literature and transmediatic adaptations. Despite the clear disadvantages, Harker demonstrates a cleverness that is often stripped from him, be it in adaptations of the novel or even in the critical literature analysing it: from the very first night at the Castle he is suspicious of his surroundings, and as the days pass he proceeds to file away all information, all potential clues on Dracula that he can find, while simultaneously endeavouring to maintain a façade of ignorance and naïveté. In short, he begins to build the case against the Count which will prove to be essential in the efforts to find and eradicate the threat he poses. His reversal of the pre-imposed master/slave dynamic is not only to be found in the methodical collection of information during his stay at the castle – which has often been the only helpfulness recognised him by the critics – nor simply by his proactive role in the search for Dracula once the Crew of Light has been established. From the moment he recognises his status as prisoner, Harker begins to morph into a figure more and more resembling of his master. He adopts his strengths, for he remains the first to have harmed the vampire, is shown to possess superhuman strength, and definitively kills Dracula with Quincey Morris; his customs, as he navigates and ultimately escapes the castle by climbing down his window in the same "lizard fashion" he had observed in his captor; his appearance, as Seward notes by writing that "he is a drawn, haggard old man, whose white hair matches well with the

hollow burning eyes and grief-written lines of his face (Stoker 451). His energy is still intact. In fact, he is like a "living flame", which echoes the "extraordinary pallor", "white hair and moustache", and overall great strength and vigour (Stoker 364, 21, 61). In an act that becomes a reclaiming of his "vampirised" – or indeed, colonised – nature, Harker reappropriates the very qualities that bound and fascinated him about his master, refusing to be trapped into a condition of slavery. Defeating Dracula once and for all, he is allowed to both start and put an end to the narrative – which has been simultaneously curated and edited by Mina, symbolising the equity and balance of their partnership – and thus establish his identity through confrontation – not prevarication – with others. Jonathan's arc allows for a reading where it is community which helps the self-realisation of the individual, and the novel demonstrates the fallacy of the master/slave dynamic by portraying the ones who fall prey to it – on either side – as the only characters who ultimately possess no voice in the telling of their stories.

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Paternal Pressures and Artistic 'Self-Begetting' in *Ulysses*

Luca Cavallo

The Louise Clancy Award

Highly Recommended

Throughout *Ulysses,* Stephen Dedalus makes every attempt to avoid the perception of his own body, and therefore his masculinity, in favour of an artistic, '[f]ormless spiritual' identity (U 166). However, the greatest challenge to Stephen's idealised self is the reality of his parentage. Stephen scornfully considers himself 'made not begotten' (U 35). In 'Proteus', he initially marvels at his birth as a 'Creation from nothing', but he sullenly acquiesces that the umbilical cord between he and his mother is the 'link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh' (35). To his mother, he is undeniably bound. However, the connection to his father, and paternity in general, is something from which Stephen feels he can break physical ties, though he may be more affected by this break than he can admit. Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that Stephen is 'obviously looking for a substitute mother' throughout Ulysses, much more so than for a father figure (52). Although I agree with Rabaté's point, I argue that images and figures of paternity still persist in tormenting Stephen's mind throughout the novel. This chapter will focus on how paternity, as part of the 'manly paradigm' discussed in chapter 1, incites a supererogatory behaviour in Stephen's approach to artistic erudition, similar to his devout religious faith as a teenager *in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. By comparing the various potential fathers who crop up in Stephen's odyssey through Dublin, including Leopold Bloom, this essay endeavours to define both Stephen and Bloom's issues with paternity as rejections to the standards of masculinity.

Stephen's own theory that paternity is 'a mystical estate' is closely tied to his abstract understanding of his body. In 'Scylla and Charybdis', Stephen adopts a protean mindset regarding his financial debts. He convinces himself that his molecules have changed in the five months since he received a loan from Best: 'I am other I now' (U 170). Though this little interlude in Stephen's head is probably his idea of a joke, it implies that Stephen feels similarly about his biological connection to his father. It is unclear how much time has elapsed since Stephen last met Simon. In 'Sirens', Lenehan meets Simon and informs him that he has spent the past few hours with Stephen. The response from the 'famous father' hearing about his 'famous son' is completely anti-climactic, and the narrator's only fitting description of the following awkward silence is 'Dry' (U 236). Simon seems both embarrassed that he hasn't heard from Stephen, and ashamed that he has not attempted to reach out, as he asks pathetically, 'have you seen him lately?' (236). While Simon shuffles away from his paternal responsibility, Stephen's molecules are changing, which he no doubt considers part of his process of growing out of biological paternity, the 'legal fiction' (186), and into a new artistic being.

The idea of growing out of one's paternal roots is, of course, familiar to the reader, as it recalls Buck Mulligan's spouted claim that 'We [the Irish] have grown out of Wilde and paradoxes' (U 17). This remark itself is contradictory, if not its own paradox, as it implies that Irish literature and culture are both beyond and indebted to Wilde and other previous Irish writers. This statement of Mulligan's proves to be vital for a broader understanding of how Stephen views paternity. Stephen wishes for his paternal lineage to be similar to, if not exactly like, the literary condition of intertextuality. Michael Murphy writes that 'it is not biological but artistic fatherhood that [Stephen] seeks. He is wrestling […] with his literary forebears' (72). The image of these 'forebears', or forefathers, is what drives Stephen to a state of supererogation in his own head. This is an excessive, obsessive focus on art and artistic creation, as Stephen feels the pressure to grow out of (in both senses of the phrase) his literary lineage.

Supererogatory behaviour is not a new feature of Stephen's character in *Ulysses*. In *A Portrait,* Stephen drives himself daily 'through an increasing circle of works of supererogation' (124), devoting each day of the week to a different sacrament or mystery of Catholicism. He carries rosary beads at all times so that he can pray even as he walks the streets (125). This younger version of Stephen, though he would argue his molecules are all changed, is not so different from the aspiring poet we meet in *Ulysses*. In *A Portrait*, Stephen prays constantly for the approval of a father, his God. In *Ulysses,* Stephen focuses exclusively on literature and art in an effort to outrun the long shadow cast upon him by his forefathers. In both cases, images and figures of paternity are what influence Stephen's behaviour above all else.

These literary paternal figures are not all dead poets. Throughout *Ulysses*, Stephen encounters men who evoke the literary supererogation that he makes his burden. The first is Myles Crawford, editor of the Evening Telegraph. In 'Aeolus', Crawford initiates physical contact with Stephen, triggering a spiral into negative supererogatory thinking. Crawford naïvely encourages Stephen's talent, claiming that he can see it 'in [Stephen's] face'. The touch of another man, as well as a reminder of Clongowes, alters the following passages to match Stephen's self-critical ego. He curses himself with the anaphora of 'See it in your face. See it in your eye. Lazy idle little schemer' (120). The men of the newsroom begin to discuss locations around Dublin and their accompanying letters. As Crawford explains that 'T is viceregal lodge. C is where murder took place. K is Knockmaroon gate' (122), Stephen is reminded of his abandoned ambition to write a series of novels that are titled with singular letters. Crawford appears as a man who imposes the masculine standard in the newsroom, where shy Leopold Bloom can 'go to hell', but he also claims to show an understanding and appreciation for Stephen's literary promise. Stephen, however, has no interest in journalism, and his mind becomes entirely occupied with extending his poem, written on a torn scrap of paper from Deasy's letter. He recalls lines from The Divine Comedy as he would recite the

Rosary in his younger years. Later in the episode, Stephen silently panics when he hears that an esteemed academic, Professor Magennis, has talked about him ('What did he say? What did he say? What did he say about me? Don't ask'). Stephen then turns to the only other 'professor' in the room, MacHugh, for a sense of paternal approval (U 125). As they walk abreast, MacHugh inspires Stephen to share his *Parable of the Plums*, with Myles Crawford traipsing behind, offering little to no insight. MacHugh becomes an image of Gorgias with his pupil, Antisthenes, to whom he relates Stephen (132). MacHugh's presence evokes from Stephen, who is otherwise convinced of his own genius, a realisation that he has 'much, much to learn' (128).

The duo of Crawford and MacHugh leave Stephen with a torn idea of fatherhood before he enters the National Library in 'Scylla and Charybdis', an episode titled suitably under this theme. In Crawford, Stephen sees power and influence, but without artistic quality. MacHugh, who appears as more of a background figure in 'Aeolus', serves as the opposite. The character who acts as a combination of these two men is John Eglinton. Under the scrutiny of his 'Eglintoneyes', Stephen's feelings and ideas surrounding paternity become increasingly baffling. Stephen's supererogation can be likened to his 'agenbite of inwit', where he repeatedly curses himself, but the difference between these two problems in Stephen's mind are their subjects. The 'agenbite' is steeped in the guilt of refusing to pray with his mother. Stephen's supererogation is founded on a sense of pressure from a paternal presence. The 'Eglintoneyes' push Stephen's mind to a breaking point, where his speech outruns his stream-of-consciousness. 'What the hell are you driving at?' he asks himself after his infamous ramble on fathers as 'a necessary evil' (186). Stephen 'persists' in proving his Hamlet theory, perhaps still riding on a wave of confidence after 'professor' MacHugh's praise. But Eglinton 'holds [Stephen's] follies hostage' (165). While this implies that Eglinton is more knowledgeable on Shakespeare, it does not necessarily mean that the *Hamlet* theory is 'folly'; rather the

connection Stephen makes between himself and the Prince of Denmark could collapse if he cannot shake Eglinton's beliefs. For Stephen, 'Shakespeare… unites art with life by seeing his fleshly son in his spiritual son' (Peery 111). Through his theory, Stephen (as Hamlet) may confirm that Shakespeare is both his literary forefather and spiritual father. He can therefore 'disarm' Simon of his position as father, and 'devise a mystical estate' upon an idealised, literary fatherhood, abandoning the masculine pressures of paternity (186). Eglinton is ultimately unimpressed with Stephen's long-winded theorising, and rather cruelly calls him 'a delusion' (192).

Eglinton's waning interest in the *Hamlet* theory directly diminishes his potential as a father figure. Stephen's resolution is to become his own father, for if he is 'made, not begotten', then he will 'beget' himself (U 177). Stephen's epiphanic 'Am I father? If I were?' (187) complements a rather self-absorbed idea of fatherhood that he bemoans in 'Telemachus': he believes that, as a male Irish poet, two fathers act as usurpers in his life. They are 'twinned as the English king and the Italian pope, who have together stolen the artist's paternal creative role' (Theoharis 586). The image of two fathers occurs repeatedly for Stephen. From as early as *A Portrait,* Stephen is the son of both Dedalus and Daedalus, as Douglas H. Parker clarifies in his shrewd note that 'Ireland is the Daedalian labyrinth and Simon Dedalus, the epitome of the country… [is] a Minos figure who must be avoided' (182). In *Ulysses*, Joyce maintains this dual fatherhood established in A Portrait, and further embellishes on the motif, for Stephen also represents Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. Among critics, the more widely accepted reasoning for this is so that Simon and Bloom may stand out as the two fathers over Stephen. However, I argue that Stephen's supererogatory, spiralling notion of 'self-begetting' is best understood alongside Ann Kimble Loux's 'trinitarian analysis' of paternity in Ulysses, for it appears that Stephen beholds paternity from a Christ-like perspective. Considering the artist as a god-like creator, Stephen's question, 'Am I father?' is answered with a parallel question, 'Am

I artist?' (Loux 282). Stephen can break the role of fatherhood from the 'manly paradigm' by imposing it upon himself. His position, as with the nature of a trinity, is of equal importance to the pairs of fathers associated with his character.

This proposed trinity of paternity certainly accommodates the 'mystical' elements that Stephen applies to fatherhood, abandoning masculinity in favour of artistic spirit. However, when Bloom is mixed within the trinity, his own ideas of paternity and masculinity become entangled with Stephen's idyllic 'self-begetting'. Compared to Simon's negligence, Bloom's attitude towards fatherhood is both mature and highly sensitive. Considering that Bloom has lost his father and his son in tragic incidents, Stephen's reckless commentary on paternity as 'mystical' and a 'necessary evil' would most likely offend him. Stephen is hellbent on his *Hamlet* theory as an explanation for not only his 'self-begetting', but also for the paternal absence in his life. In actuality, his situation is hardly comparable to Hamlet's. Brooding about George Russell's upcoming collection of young poets' verse (in which Stephen is not included), he calls himself 'Cordelia, Cordoglio, Lir's loneliest daughter' (U 172). Stephen refers to the loneliness he feels with 'that queer thing, genius' (172) and translates Cordelia, the disowned daughter in *King Lear*, to a masculine name for himself. This play does not receive half as much attention as *Hamlet* in the Library episode, but the brief connection Stephen draws between himself and Cordelia suggests that King Lear is a much more compatible hypotext for Stephen's paternal issues. 'Cordoglio' is a role suitable to Stephen's androgynous views of gender, as discussed in Chapter 2. His father has not been murdered; rather, Simon wanders through Dublin, 'singing aloud' in the Ormond Hotel, quite like how Cordelia describes her father (Lear IV. iv. 2). Similarly to Lear losing his kingdom, Simon's fortune dwindles into poverty, though both men cling to their titles and reputations. In each text, Stephen and Cordelia return from a period of exile in France, both looking to overcome their issues with paternity. So, *Hamlet* cannot be transposed to express Stephen's paternal pressures outside of

his own head, but the play responds directly to the father-son connection that grows between Stephen and Bloom. The connection appears quite simply in the famous line that both men utter separately: 'Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit' (U 135, 169). 'Scylla and Charybdis' begins shortly before 'Lestrygonians' concludes, meaning the proximity in time between each utterance of the line is strangely close.

The importance of a literary lineage in Stephen's view of paternity, as a way to escape the masculine bind of fatherhood, is something that Bloom may accommodate with his own empathy for both Stephen and Hamlet. It is generally accepted that 'Eumaeus' marks the start of Bloom and Stephen's relationship, once Bloom has rescued him from Nighttown. But father-son relationships do not begin with drunken encounters. Instead, I would argue that it is 'Oxen of the Sun', the episode focused on birth and maternity, that places Bloom and Stephen in their familial roles. The episode is similar to 'Cyclops' as a mostly male gathering, in which Bloom is the social outlier yet again. However, while 'Cyclops' is an episode steeped in testosterone-fuelled masquerade, 'Oxen' eliminates any sense of masculine anxiety or performance in favour of the episode's female-centred setting. Barney Kiernan's pub, seemingly male-exclusive, is home to a collection of hangman's pint glasses (MacHugh 314), whereas Holles Street Maternity Hospital is filled with midwives and the cries of women and newborn children (U 351). The former, masculine setting is surrounded by death; the latter, feminine setting is surrounded by birth. In this way, the issues of paternity that Bloom, and especially Stephen, have brooded over in the hours before 'Oxen' are forcefully transfigured to a maternal light,

leaving masculinity behind.

In 'Oxen', the castration complex we see in 'Cyclops' is swapped with the idea of 'womb envy', a complex described as 'the male wish to experience the joy or power they imagine is in conceiving, carrying and delivering a child […] a male's obsession with

reproducing the male self' (Perreault 305). Although 'womb envy' does appear literally in the episode, when Buck Mulligan strikes himself 'bravely below the diaphragm, exclaiming […] There's a belly that never bore a bastard' (U 365), this is a drunken joke. In Bloom's case, however, his perception of maternity takes on mystical elements, quite like Stephen's view of paternity. After Chapter 2's discussion of Bloom's comfort with his own femininity, his empathy, if not envy, for childbearing comes as no surprise. Once Josie Breen shares the news of Mina Purefoy's three-day labour, Bloom imagines the details of her ordeal repeatedly, sympathising that once the baby is born, Mrs. Purefoy will have to 'give the breast year after year all hours of the night' (U 143), quite an uncommon concern for a man who cannot otherwise relate to breastfeeding. Stephen's search for a mother, all the while tormented by images and figures of paternity, can be solved with Bloom, the 'new womanly man', as his maternal figure. 'Oxen' sees the trinity proposed by Anna Kimble Loux perfected in Stephen and Bloom's abandonment of masculinity. Stephen rejects paternity as the 'self-begetting' son. Bloom rejects paternity as the motherly figure to Stephen. The flourishing development of prose style in 'Oxen' becomes Stephen's forefathers of English literature, now developing alongside him as the Holy Spirit, no longer a shadow for his supererogatory ambitions to outrun.

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‘A Couple of Pretty Smooth Citizens’: Gender and Sexuality in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*

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The Patricia Coughlan Award

Winner

This essay will explore the overarching themes of gender and sexuality in Raymond Chandler’s 1939 novel, *The Big Sleep.* It will be shown that Philip Marlowe is a masculine, chivalric protagonist and a modern knight-like figure. The detective’s conduct will be linked to an unspoken militaristic code of honour that he and General Sternwood bond over, as well as morality. There will be arguments regarding misogyny, promiscuity, sexual orientation, the breakdown of the nuclear family, incest, erectile dysfunction linked to alcohol, epilepsy, gambling, and sadomasochism.

From the outset, Philip Marlowe is portrayed as a man of much integrity who will assist the damsel in distress, which has prompted discussion regarding the chivalrous themes of Chandler’s novel. This motif is introduced by the “broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair” (Chandler 3). The detective quips that he “didn't seem to be really trying”, implying the preference that men would favour women in such positions of vulnerability (Chandler 3). This trope takes a gendered turn in *The Big Sleep,* as the women are shown to possess much power over the opposite sex in certain instances.

Vulnerability is extended to the knight-like Marlowe, who is “trussed like a turkey [and] ready for the oven” later in the novel, as he is handcuffed and tied up, relying on female

assistance to make good his escape (Chandler 113). This represents a dramatic shift in gender power dynamics that saturates Chandler's text. Fontana observes that Marlowe "plays the role of a *modern* knight in a world where conclusive and effectual individual heroism cannot exist" (181, *emphasis added*). As a naked Carmen attempts to seduce him in his own home, he laments the chivalric masculinity that is so maladapted to the world he inhabits. However, he remains faithful to his code of professionalism and morality.

Our initial impression of General Sternwood is one of contrast. Marlowe first sees him in a self-portrait as a young military officer and regards him with much esteem and status, as he admits the General has a "look of a man it would pay to get along with" (Chandler 5). Marlowe himself is referred to as a "soldier" in instances in the novel, which implies an unspoken chain of command – a code between him and his new employer. This hierarchy is all but cemented when the detective is confronted with a wheelchair-bound and "obviously dying man" whom he must do good by (Chandler 5). *The Big Sleep* is "full of sensual images, many of them offering a grim view of human depravity", and General Sternwood makes no secret of his desire for an illicit outlet (Simpson 42). He bemoans that he must "indulge his vices by proxy" while soon comparing his environment of orchids as resembling "the flesh of men [while] their perfume has the rotten sweetness of a prostitute" (Chandler 6). The General talks candidly about his situation and regrets the unnaturalness of possessing "a couple of daughters still in the dangerous twenties" in his final years (Chandler 3).

In *The Big Sleep,* there is an underlying theme of the breakdown of the nuclear family. The General is a widower, but we do not learn how his wife passed. We learn that he holds a kind of "son I never had" affection for his missing son-in-law, Rusty Regan. Carmen and Vivian are childless, and we learn by the close of the novel that the latter's husband is deceased. The two Sternwood girls represent the children of the text. This is emphasised by the infantilised nature of Carmen, which fuels her sexual conduct and leaves her open to

exploitation. Marlowe himself is completely without family and childless. It has been suggested that Marlowe's lack of family "creates a tidy chiastic structure with the thoroughly dysfunctional families of his clients, a gulf that aids the suppression of his desire for family" (Beal 14). Marlowe, seeing himself as part of the Sternwood clan, cannot then morally give in to his sexual urges without violating the proxy familial framework established. As Beal posits, "Marlowe's repudiations of the Sternwood sisters might be better understood in this familial reading as marking trepidation for the incest taboo" (16). The detective therefore takes on the role of the brother figure of the family rather than a prospective sexual partner to one or both of the Sternwood ladies. In addition to the breakdown of the family, it is Carmen's promiscuity that "leads the family into shame and disrepair" (Fehlman 5).

Incest can be interpreted from Chandler's text, however, when Marlowe first meets Carmen. The detective remarks, "I was still staring at the hot black eyes [of General Sternwood's portrait] when a door opened far back under the stairs [...] It was a girl. She was twenty or so, small and delicately put together, but she looked durable" (Chandler 3). There is a literary device found in various texts, such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla,* where a young girl is combined with a portrait of a parent or an ancestor, implicitly pointing to an incestuous home. In Chandler's novel, Carmen is essentially a nymphomaniac, and it has been found that "63% of women with nymphomania had suffered childhood sexual abuse" (Mujawar et al. 189). Given her very apparent psychological issues, this is not an unthinkable situation in a home with no protective matriarchal figurehead present in her life. Carmen's hypersexual behaviour is "acted to cope with the internal suffering caused by trauma in the past and related psychopathological symptoms" (Ciocca et al.).

Carmen is portrayed as an infantilised child figure -- a "ditsy blonde" to which "thinking was always going to be a bother to" (Chandler 4). Marlowe is clearly not enamoured by her immaturity when he says, "You ought to wean her. She looks old enough" (Chandler

5). She is marked out as abnormal since she possesses a hand that had an unusual finger-like thumb, as if she has been sucking on it "like a baby with a comforter" her whole life (Chandler 4). Her own father describes her as "a child who likes to pull wings off flies" and recalls an education of "greater and greater liberality, [where she] ended up where she started" (Chandler 5). This is a red flag for abuse, as "[l]ow cognitive ability is another cue indicating greater exploitability because it signals ease of manipulability. Thus, sensitivity to such cues may be one design feature of male tactics for sexual exploitation" (Goetz et al.). Marlowe himself describes her as a "pretty, spoiled, and not very bright little girl who had gone very, very wrong" (Chandler 37). We can therefore see the pathology of a maladapted and abused child, with the added complication of suffering from epileptic fits, growing into adulthood as a promiscuous woman prone to high-risk situations.

Carmen's sexual promiscuity is a possible consequence of her epilepsy. Studies on the condition have reported that women have admitted to "being sexually promiscuous in their early years due to their concern that no one would love them. Sex was a means to prove their attractiveness" (Morrell and Flynn 244). Moreover, recalling the trance-like state of Carmen, it has even been found that "hypersexual persons, when sexually aroused, typically enter a cognitive "trance-like state" in which their thinking about sex and planning on how to achieve an orgasm becomes absolute, and may last in duration from minutes to hours" (Walton et al. 2243).

Carmen's oral finger sucking is a deliberate non-verbal cue to signal fellatio, and her commenting on Marlowe's height infers a correlation with penis size. Carmen's swooning before him and "going rubber-legged on him instantly" leaves the reader with no doubt as to her intentions before she flashes out of the room in a deerlike fashion (Chandler 4). Later, when she is drugged in a sexually exploitive situation for the purposes of manufacturing pornography, she is said to scream, but "without fear" and with a "sound of half-pleasurable

shock," which reminds the detective of "men in white and barred windows and hard narrow cots with leather wrist and ankle straps fastened to them" (Chandler 20).

The oral sexual cues of Carmen are present in her sister also, as the detective recalls: "She had a good mouth and a good chin. There was a sulky droop to her lips and the lower lip was full [...] She took a swallow from it and gave me a cool level stare over the rim of the glass" (Chandler 11). She is more Marlowe's taste as she arrives at his office covered up but then "peeled her right glove off and bit her index finger at the first joint" (Chandler 34). She is signalling her intentions with the removal of an article of clothing. Moreover, an even more sexually explicit nod to fellatio shortly follows with: "Very slowly she closed her mouth and looked down at the spilled liquor. She sat down on the edge of the chaise-longue and cupped her chin in one hand. 'My God, you big dark handsome brute!'" (Chandler 12).

The gun in Carmen's possession is a symbol of masculine power. Carmen "wagged a finger at me. Then she whispered, 'Can I have my gun?'" (Chandler 53). Marlowe's disregard for the emotional suffering of Agnes is an interesting insight, as she "let out a low animal wail and buried her head in a cushion on the end of the davenport. I stood there and admired the long line of her thighs" (Chandler 55). The detective partakes in a symbolic subjugation of women as he retakes the phallic weaponry and puts Carmen in a position of vulnerability akin to an animal, albeit one she is happy to acquiesce to: "I stepped past the crawling girl and picked the gun up. She [...] began to giggle. I put her gun in my pocket and patted her on the back. 'Get up, angel. You look like a Pekinese'" (Chandler 52). This is compounded by the canine-like traits she possesses, as Marlowe speaks of the "little froth at the corners of her mouth. Her small white teeth glinted close to her lips" (Chandler 52). Carmen's reacquisition of the gun is clearly cloaked in the prospect of a sexual liaison with the sleuth:

> She came close to me and took the gun out of my hand, cuddled her hand around the butt. Then she tucked it quickly inside her slacks, almost with a furtive movement, and looked around. “I know where,” she said in a secret voice. “Down by some of the old wells.” She pointed off down the hill. ‘Teach me?’ (Chandler 129).

The intermingling of the phallic gun and the attempted weaponisation of sex by the novel’s women are evident with such comments: “She lay there on the bed in the lamplight, as naked and glistening as a pearl. The Sternwood girls were giving me both barrels that night.” (Chandler 92).

There exists in *The Big Sleep* an interesting juxtaposition, or what could be more correctly called a mismatch, between Marlowe’s thoughts and his actions. Clearly, the sexualised tactics of the Sternwood sisters are having an impact. For example, on finding Carmen drugged and naked:

> She had a beautiful body; small, lithe, compact, firm, rounded. Her skin in the lamplight had the shimmering lustre of a pearl. Her legs didn't quite have the raffish grace of Mrs. Regan's legs, but they were very nice. I looked her over without either embarrassment or ruttishness. As a naked girl, she was not there in that room at all. She was just a dope. To me, she was always just a dope (Chandler 21).

Marlowe clearly reduces Carmen to the status of a sex object without agency, quite like the pornography she was replicated in. The detective has, however, at least the moral fortitude to not act on any sexually exploitative urge physically. It is not his thoughts but his actions that count.

It could be argued, however, that Marlowe releases his sexual frustration, having cloaked it as noble acts. In an attempt to revive a drugged Carmen, he comments that he “slapped her around a little more. She didn't mind the slaps” (Chandler 22). Later, he “stepped up close to her and gave her a smack on the side of the face” (Chandler 39). Marlowe observes

how Carmen “smoothed the cheek I had slapped. She smiled at me, as if I was nice to be with”, thus presenting a mutually masochistic element, or at the very least this is his interpretation (Chandler 39). This element is present elsewhere in the novel when Brody threatens Agnes with the phallic weapon by flicking the gun around in an increasingly negligent manner: “Shut your trap and keep it shut, or I'll slap it shut for you with this” (Chandler 48).

This essay posits that the relationship between General Sternwood and Marlowe points to the disabling of masculinity and implicitly foreshadows sexual impotence in the detective. Marlowe has neither children nor a relationship, and he refuses to have sexual intercourse in the story. He is clearly attracted to the opposite sex, and it could be possible that he is using professional ethics as a smoke screen for his alcohol-induced erectile dysfunction. It is known that “[a]lcohol abuse is the leading cause of impotence and other disturbances in sexual dysfunction” (Benegal and Arackal). He is sexually frustrated as a result of his condition: “I went back to the bed and looked down at it. The imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets. I put my *empty glass* down and tore the bed to pieces savagely” (Chandler 95, *emphasis added*). It would be no wonder that the “filthy name” Carmen called the detective was “whiskey dick” in reference to the inability to sexually perform while inebriated (Boston Medical Group).

We are told that Vivian is “spoiled, exacting, smart and quite ruthless” (Chandler 9). Marlowe instantly perceives the presence of a femme fatale: “She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed to be arranged to stare at” (Chandler 11). Marlowe quite literally cannot stop the association of sexual attraction to Vivian as Chandler beautifully injects a double-barrelled image into the mind of the reader: “She had lovely legs. I would say that for her. They were a couple of pretty smooth citizens, she and her father” (Chandler 14). Later he teases her by inviting her into his “boudoir” – a word that literally means “a place to

sulk", before he is left in no doubt as to her intentions as she comments on her own sister's naked image: "She has a beautiful little body, hasn't she? [...] You ought to see mine" (Chandler 36). In the end, however, she proves too "easy" for him, and she and her sister are referred to as the "non-servable" females to males seeking long-term sexual partners. She is "the bitch-temptress, immodest, coarse, and demanding. She is a promiscuous woman who, despite her sexual availability to men, is non-serviceable, because she is sexually ungovernable, indiscriminate, and selfish" (LeMoncheck 10).

Vivian, like her sister, lives dangerously, but her vice is gambling in the casino. This is a sign that she too is looking for escapism, as "gambling can often be an avoidance strategy when women are experiencing negative emotions in response to other life event stressors" (Boughton and Falenchuk 324). It is also known that "92% of [problem gamblers have received] the diagnosis of at least one personality disorder," and that "[w]omen with gambling related problems often report a family and/or personal histories coloured by trauma and abuse" (Boughton and Falenchuk 325). It is clear that Vivian has taken up the mantle of matriarch by shielding her ailing father from the horrible truth of her sister's insane murder of her own husband.

The ambiguity surrounding Marlowe's sexual orientation has long been mused over. Simpson observes that the detective "never enjoys a woman's company for long; and when he parts from a few male friends, he is permitted a tenderness of feeling at the separation that I cannot find in his partings from women" (37). The homosexual undertones are obvious within the text, but it must be said that, taking for granted that the detective is a reliable narrator, if Marlowe is attracted to men, then he is most certainly attracted to the opposite sex also. We shall therefore approach his attraction to men as part of his bisexuality. The most explicit example of this bisexuality in the novel is the example that Marlowe gives when he admits that he "like[s] the worms better. Did you know that worms are of both sexes and that any

worm can love any other worm?" (Chandler 113). The detective gives many descriptions of homosexual men as "boys", "son", "pansy", "fag", and "kids" in the novel. He deflects and maintains a heterosexual front, but the text leaves us wondering after closer examination: "A tall and very good-looking kid in a jerkin", before saying the "boy" had a "pallid handsome face with wavy black hair" elsewhere (Chandler 19, 58). Marlowe comments that he tried his best to "look like a fairy" and remarks, "You must have thought a lot of that queen" (Chandler 30, 58).

The following passage could arguably be read as an aggressive male-on-male sexual act between Marlowe and Carol Lundgren:

> 'Get away from me, you son of a bitch.' [...] 'This is a small gun, kid. I'll give it to you through the navel and it will take three months to get you well enough to walk.' [...] 'Go —— yourself.' His hand moved inside the jerkin. I pressed harder on his stomach. He let out a long soft sigh. [...] 'Get into my car, kid.' He stepped past me and I crowded him from behind. He got into the car. 'Under the wheel, kid. You drive' (Chandler 58).

Soon after, it is known that "[t]he boy came up on all fours, leering with his eyes too wide open. He coughed and shook his head" (Chandler 60). Marlowe is insistent he has an understanding of homosexuality, as he fires, "a husband to women and a wife to men. Think I can't figure people like him and you out?" (Chandler 59). The author again evokes sadomasochistic imagery as he leaves Lundgren "lying on the floor with his wrists shackled behind him and his cheek pressed into the rug" (Chandler 60).

This essay has explored the overarching themes of gender and sexuality in Raymond Chandler's 1939 novel, *The Big Sleep.* It has been shown that Philip Marlowe is a masculine, chivalric protagonist and a modern knight-like figure. The detective's conduct has been linked to an unspoken militaristic code of honour that he and General Sternwood bond over, as well

as morality. There have been arguments regarding misogyny, promiscuity, sexual orientation, the breakdown of the nuclear family, incest, erectile dysfunction linked to alcohol, epilepsy, gambling, and sadomasochism. In *The Big Sleep*, Raymond Chandler has provided us with a multifaceted work that is fertile ground for the exploration of gender, sexuality, and much more.

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Sakaki & Snyder

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The Department of English Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year)

Joint Winner

''[the Buddha] held up a flower to a group of his disciples. Mahakasyapa smiled in understanding at this silent sermon, and so received the 'seal of Dharma' […] A flower exemplifies both the beauty and impermanence of the world'.

(Harvey 222)

'Pick up anything you want!

If you love mushrooms,

You are already a billionaire'.

(Sakaki 64)

This essay examines the link between two poets; Nanao Sakaki and Gary Snyder; both Buddhists whose work was inspired by and centred on the natural world. Sakaki was a Japanese poet and traveller, a "renunciant hermit-wanderer" (Pitkin 1). Gary Snyder, his American counterpart, is affectionately titled the 'poet laureate' of ecocriticism, a field of study which analyses 'the way in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production' (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 1). The two men were friends and collaborators, and as this essay demonstrates, Sakaki deeply

affected Snyder's writing and style. This work is important as it demonstrates how studying the poetry of the relatively unknown Sakaki is essential to understanding the work of Gary Snyder. Snyder's friendship with Sakaki led to a distinct and observable shift in his writing and in his attitude towards both the natural world and spirituality over the years, as this essay demonstrates. By comparing and contrasting how the two poets expressed their fascination for both nature and Buddhism, how they link these themes throughout their poetry, and how Sakaki's influence observably affected Snyder, the essay concludes that, by studying Sakaki, we can not only detect his influence on Snyder's later work, but also compare Snyder himself against his own earlier work, a very rewarding process.

Nanao Sakaki was a Japanese poet, Buddhist, and wanderer who wrote hundreds of poems throughout his life, taking inspiration from the natural world around him. He walked everywhere, from the Japanese mountains to the Sierra foothills, all the way to the deserts of Australia. He was a "Buddhist virtuoso figure of the renunciant hermit-wanderer" (Pitkin 1). In the words of his friend and fellow poet Gary Snyder, Sakaki was an "itinerant artist […] a unique and powerful voice" (Foreword, *Break the Mirror*). The men's friendship began "on the banks of the Kamo river" in the 1960s, a chance encounter which led to a lifelong collaboration 'in the art of, not "street theatre" but what we might call "field and mountains theatre"' (Snyder, *Break the Mirror*). Snyder and Sakaki shared a deep passion for nature, visible throughout their poetry, and for Buddhism, a religion based on the ideas of rebirth, renunciation, and impermanence. There was a lifelong bond between the two poets, and Sakaki was hugely influential on Snyder's work. In this essay I will analyse how the two poets expressed their fascination for both nature and spirituality, how they link these themes throughout their poetry, and how Sakaki's influence affected Snyder. I will do so by comparing and contrasting the ecocritical and Buddhist poetics in their work, more specifically in the poems "Sunshine Orange", "An Axiom", "Sharpening a Knife", "Fifth

Deer" and "Persimmon Vinegar" from Sakaki's collection *Break the Mirror*; the poems "Above Pate Valley" and "Milton by Firelight" from Snyder's collection *Riprap*; and the poems "Old Bones" and "Bubbs Creek Haircut" from Snyder's later collection *Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

In his authoritative text *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard defines ecocriticism as "the way in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production" (1); and declares that the "poet laureate" of this field is Gary Snyder (23). His reason for this declaration is that "Snyder's youthful experiences of working as a logger […] give his writings a breadth of reference and sensitivity to people's social and material needs that is unusual amongst wilderness writers" (91). These experiences are recounted in Snyder's first collection of poetry; *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*; published in 1959, before he ever went to Japan and met Sakaki. These early works are less spiritual and more literal, based on Snyder's time spent deep in the forests and mountains of North America:

> We finished clearing the last
>
> Section of trail by noon,
>
> High on the ridge-side,
>
> Two thousand feet above the creek
>
> Reached the pass, went on
>
> Beyond the white pine groves
>
> […]
>
> Ate a cold fried trout in the
>
> Trembling shadows

("Above Pate Valley", Snyder 9).

This poem, detailing Snyder's work cutting a path through the woods to allow people to travel more easily, is explicitly ecocritical: it is obviously portraying 'the relationship between humans and the environment' as antagonistic – nature is an obstacle to be overcome by humans, something to be surmounted and destroyed so human life can continue and flourish. The environment is external, and it affects Snyder only in how it restricts and replenishes him. This attitude is not present in the writing of Nanao Sakaki, however. An ecocritical poet who rivalled and even surpassed Snyder for 'breadth of reference' to wilderness, Sakaki left his job following the Second World War and commenced "a lifestyle of intentional wandering", spending years as a "wandering *chatralwa* renunciant-hermit", living, as all such men did, "in extremely impoverished, obscure, and often non-[Japanese] surroundings" (Pitkin 6). However, the poems he wrote about these experiences are often far less explicitly ecocritical than Snyder's. There is usually no reference made by Sakaki to himself or other humans, instead writing only of the natural world around him:

a stray fox kit cries in the woods

last night a hermit crab

crossed over the channel, border

the sun walks in Libra, today

("Sunshine Orange", Sakaki 7)

This poem does not contain any mention of humanity whatsoever, discussing only animals and nature. However by studying Sakaki more deeply, it becomes apparent how his beliefs allow him to freely express both his Buddhist and ecocritical poetics together without making explicit reference to either.

Central to Buddhism and to Sakaki's poetics is the idea of rebirth – the belief that "all beings are part of the same cycle of lives" (Harvey 38). In essence, Sakaki believed that "each human being has been an animal […] in the past, and is likely to be so again at some time in the future" (Harvey 38):

> I am part of human beings
>
> Human beings / mammals
>
> Mammals / animal kingdom
>
> Animal kingdom / all creatures
>
> All creatures / Earth
>
> ("An Axiom", Sakaki 10).

In fact, "one word used to refer to the cycle of rebirths is s*amsara*, 'wandering on', which indicates that the process is seen as long and often aimless" – much like Sakaki's own wandering (Harvey 38). For Buddhists, and by extension for Sakaki, the relationship between humans and the environment becomes instead the relationship between living beings and the environment. When the poet describes how "a stray fox kit cries in the woods", for him it is an ecocritical statement – a living being cries in the woods; a child that was spiritually once human and eventually will be human again. He makes no distinction between the human and non-human in his poems: the "hermit crab" that "crossed over the channel" faced the same border as Sakaki would if he had to cross the channel. The relationship between all living beings and the environment is the same; a relationship where one is restricted by channels and warmed by the sun. As the poet notes, the sun "walks in Libra" for an animal just as much as for a human. This altering of ecocritical perspective allowed by Buddhism was not lost on Gary Snyder, who spent many years after he had become a poet studying in temples in Japan and living with Sakaki. There is a clear contrast in Snyder's poetry before and after this

time; for example the difference in ecocritical poetics between his first collection, *Riprap*, and his 1996 collection, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, is clear. Snyder had come to Japan with an interest in and some knowledge of Buddhism, but his time there deepened his understanding much further. One of the poems from this later collection, written almost four decades after *Riprap*, illustrates this point:

> Out there walking round, looking out for food,
>
> a rootstock, a birdcall, a seed you can crack
>
> plucking, digging, snaring, snagging,
>
> barely getting by
>
> […]
>
> What we ate – who ate what –
>
> how we all prevailed.
>
> (Snyder 10)

Sakaki, and Buddhism in general, had a huge influence on Snyder, and the resulting shift in his beliefs from "Above Pate Valley" to "Old Bones" is clear – by now Snyder's poetry embodied "a lifetime's lively conversation between ecological engagement and Buddhist practice" (Martin). There is no longer a clear distinction made between humans and animals: this poem could be written about any animal or any species; indeed about every animal and every species. All living beings have to struggle to survive, "plucking, digging, snaring, snagging" at each other to eat and live, a commonality that Snyder had embraced. By removing any distinction between humans and animals in his poetics, Snyder's writing was now truly Buddhist, and in fact compares more closely to Sakaki's poems than even his own earlier works. This comparing and contrasting of the two poets allows for a greater

understanding of how they each express their Buddhist and ecocritical poetics, and a clearer insight into how one influenced the other. The same can be said for analysing how Sakaki expresses the second Buddhist principle, of impermanence and asceticism, throughout his poetry.

One of the core Buddhist tenets is that "change and impermanence are fundamental features of everything […] Mountains wear down, material goods wear out or are lost or stolen, and all beings, even gods, age and die" (Harvey 57). As such, "identification […] with something […] as inherently 'mine', is a source of attachment; such attachment leads to frustration and a sense of loss when what one identifies with changes" (61). This means "the original ideal of the [Buddhist monk] was that of a person with a minimum of possessions living a simple lifestyle", a philosophy that Sakaki clearly expressed throughout his life, both in his role as 'wandering *chatralwa* renunciant-hermit', renouncing fixed abode and material comforts, but also throughout his poetry (302). For Sakaki, the best way to live is to reject the trappings of "civilised" society and instead embrace only what is necessary to survive, as an animal would:

> Nanao, sleep well tonight
>
> Blossoming crimson lily as a shelter
>
> The coral sand beach as a bed
>
> The Southern Cross as a pillow.
>
> ("Sharpening a Knife", Sakaki 9)

These are all "impermanent" things; things Sakaki cannot own or carry with him. They are free, and shared between all living beings, human or otherwise. For Sakaki, this renunciation of "human", material things gave him a deeper, more meaningful relationship with the environment. As he said in one interview; "I forget I am human being. I am an animal, that is

all. So I see coyote. I feel they are my brother my sister" (Jing). Sleeping on the same ground as every other living being allows the poet to escape any "frustration and […] sense of loss when what one identifies with changes" (Harvey 61). This is a continuation of Buddhist tradition and belief that allows the poet to move beyond an antagonistic relationship with nature – Snyder, hacking a path through forests – to a more familial, caring one:

> There, wandering – over the fallen oak leaves
>
> Black tailed deer.
>
> One, two, three, four.
>
> As the fifth deer
>
> I follow them.
>
> ("Fifth Deer", Sakaki 124).

Again, Sakaki combines his Buddhist and his ecocritical poetics to allow a deeper understanding and appreciation for both. His embrace of these tenets of impermanence and change in the natural world brings him great joy:

> Gather the fruit
>
> Cut off the bottom ends with knife
>
> Clean the skins with water
>
> Put them into a ceramic jar
>
> […]
>
> Around May Day Festival
>
> - strong smell from the jar!
>
> It's already fermented.

[…]

- pure natural vinegar.

Taste it, enjoy it, share it.

("Persimmon Vinegar", Sakaki 95).

This natural change, of fruit to vinegar, is both Buddhist and ecocritical, as an action and as a poem. By embracing this change, rather than lamenting the loss of the persimmons as they were, one creates vinegar: the profit of impermanence. By examining this relationship between the death of the persimmon fruit and its rebirth as vinegar in the context of human celebration – the May Day Festival – Sakaki creates a human attachment to this natural process, as well as a Buddhist examination of change. This concept is executed similarly in the poetry of Gary Snyder, but from a different understanding and with different results:

Working with an old

Singlejack miner, who can

[…] build

Switchbacks that last for years

Under the beat of snow, thaw, mule-hooves.

[…]

In ten thousand years the Sierras

Will be dry and dead, home of the scorpion.

Ice-scratched slabs and bent trees.

("Milton by Firelight", *Riprap*, Snyder 7)

Where Sakaki embraces impermanence, Snyder here seems to resist it, and is much more fatalistic in his treatment. This poem is from his earlier collection, before his induction into Buddhism, where he still seems to view the human-environment relationship as an antagonistic one, with nature eventually guaranteed to destroy the roads he and his colleagues build. He is attached to these structures, engendering an acute "sense of loss when what one identifies with changes" (Harvey 61). He forecasts that the area will be "dead" in the same breath as he calls it "home of the scorpion" – an oxymoron in Buddhist terms. What he means is that the relationship between humans and the environment will have changed, so that there will be no humans in the area, making it "dead" – an ecocritical view, but not a Buddhist one. By the time he published *Mountains and Rivers*, however, this had changed:

> A half-iced-over lake, twelve thousand feet
> its sterile boulder bank
> but filled with leaping trout
>
> […]
>
> A deva world of sorts—it's high
> — a view that few men see
>
> ("Bubbs Creek Haircut", Snyder 33)

The shift is clear: the lake is 'sterile' and void of life – other than the fish. Snyder's earlier anthropocentrism has disappeared, and now he too sees all living beings as alive. He specifies this is a world "few men see", rather than a world nobody sees. He is aware this is the home of the trout, a shared world he is inhabiting, like Sakaki and his deer. He is now combining his Buddhist and ecocritical poetics, and rather than his 1950s fatalism, he has embraced Nanao Sakaki's impermanent Buddhist joy.

In conclusion, Nanao Sakaki expressed his Buddhist and ecocritical poetics throughout his poetry and his life. He did this by joining and intermingling the two, following the core tenets of Buddhism to a deeper truth about humanity's relationship with the environment. The concept of rebirth removed any distinction between human and animal from his work, giving his poetry universal truth, and the concept of impermanence allowed him a more familial and familiar relationship with the natural world as he renounced material things in favour of beaches and stars. This brought him joy, in contrast to Gary Snyder, who in his first collection of poetry was an ecocritic, but not a Buddhist. This allows us to effectively compare Sakaki's ecocritical poetry against his, and identify the uniquely Buddhist elements – and the uniquely Sakaki elements. This identification means we can in turn detect the influence of Sakaki and Buddhism on Snyder's later work, and compare Snyder against both Sakaki and his own earlier work, a very rewarding process.

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“They’re just boys. Morsels. We have all the power.”: Subversion of Femininity and Constructions of the Monstrous Feminine in *Jennifer’s Body* (2009)

Abbie O’Brien O’Driscoll

The Department of English Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year)

Highly Recommended

Abstract:

This essay examines the concept of the monstrous feminine, as proposed by theorist Barbara Creed, investigating its presentation and furthermore its relevance in the 2009 cult classic horror film, *Jennifer’s Body*. My essay explores how the film’s protagonist, Jennifer, embodies this trope through her subversion of traditional femininity and the expectations attached to it, engaging in her supposedly monstrous and disruptive behaviours which further her characterisation as a monstrous feminine figure. Through detailed analysis of the film, this essay addresses the impact of patriarchal oppression and queer identity on Jennifer’s presentation of her own femininity, her inversion of gender roles, and her weaponisation of her sexuality, and by extension her femininity. It also considers the film's representation of the abject and its connection to female adolescence, emphasising the connection between Jennifer’s dual identities of both a highly monstrous and highly feminine, and further linking the concept femininity as a whole to the concept monstrosity. By applying theories of gender, queerness, and patriarchal oppression to this film, we can further come to understand how Jennifer’s cultural transgressions within position her in Creed’s proposed identity of the monstrous feminine.

The monstrous feminine, as proposed by Barbara Creed, is an ever-present trope within the horror genre, exploring boundaries of femininity and what becomes of women who dare to stray outside of social norms and expectations. This diversion from the traditional feminine role is represented through the women in these horror stories by characterising them, both in appearance and in manner, as monsters. In this essay, I will demonstrate how Jennifer Check embodies the ideal of the monstrous feminine by repeatedly inverting societal expectations of her identity and disrupting the accompanying cultural norms. I will do so by closely examining the effects which the patriarchy and queer identity have on Jennifer in the film, and then by briefly considering her gender presentation and the film's relationship with the abject. Firstly, I will discuss gender roles in *Jennifer's Body* by considering the representation of masculinity within the film and examining how Jennifer repeatedly usurps these masculine roles and subsequently belittles both the film's male characters and traditional gender roles in the process. Secondly, I will explore queer desire in the film and how Jennifer's queer desire pushes her away from the ideal feminine identity, othering her into a monstrous figure. I will also consider how the concept of compulsory heterosexuality and her abnormal connection to Needy seemingly determines her monstrous attacks, further emphasising how her queerness drives her to monstrosity. In conjunction to this, I will outline the intersection of Jennifer's sexuality with her queerness, and how she is able to weaponize the sexual desire of boys to her benefit due to her queer identity. Thirdly, I will consider Jennifer's presentation of both her gender and her monstrosity, and how the heightened presentation of these two concepts coincide to villainise her character. Finally, I will explore the representation of the abject in the film, and how this connection between the abject and girlhood furthers the characterisation of Jennifer as a monstrous feminine being.

Throughout its runtime, *Jennifer's Body* emphasises the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity to its audience, and more importantly what becomes of women when these roles

are violated. The titular character, Jennifer, embodies the monstrous, disruptive force in this case, "opposing […] prescriptions of patriarchal heterosexism" as is the role of the queer monster in film, according to theorist Harry Benshoff (226). Throughout, she is seen disrupting patriarchal gender roles through her actions, and usurping masculine roles and characteristics, with explicit examples of this masculine air of confidence present within her dialogue both prior and following her gruesome transformation: "my dick is bigger than his" (Kusama 00:45:52- 00:45:54). In addition to this, all male characters we are introduced to are belittled, humiliated, or destroyed by Jennifer, allowing her to repeatedly undermine their supposedly masculine authority despite her feminine identity. As for the usurping of masculine roles, this is seen most clearly in Jennifer's treatment of Chip. Traditionally, you would believe a teenage girl such as Needy would be inclined to prioritise her boyfriend over her friends. However, Jennifer forces her to do otherwise, to choose her over Chip: "Stop kidnapping my girlfriend!" (Kusama 00:09:49-00:09:51). Essentially emasculated, Jennifer takes on the central, dominant role in Needys life in place of Chip, fulfilling and inverting the role of the boyfriend, yet again overtaking roles which should "belong to the masculine domain" (Butler 161). We can see here how Jennifer subverts the expectations placed upon her by the patriarchy -and society at large by taking on more masculine-oriented traits and roles.

Furthermore, in her most subversive act, Jennifer turns the act of penetration around, allowing herself to embody the powerful, male position in the scenario. In Jennifer's consumption of each of her male victims, they are lured in with the promise of a sexual encounter, the promise of penetration. Instead, Jennifer is given the position of power in the situation through her consumption of the boys, usurping the traditional role of the man in the situation in an act of perverse, inverted penetration. Jennifer consumes boys viscerally in the way in which boys wish to consume her sexually, creating a new, grotesque sense of the desired penetration through her consumption. By "sating her

appetite for flesh on the school's hapless young men", Jennifer upturns what is expected of her as a young woman, continually violating these supposedly natural roles set out for her (Creed, *Return* 116). These behaviours place Jennifer perfectly into this role of the monstrous feminine, where this concept fundamentally "raises concerns of its reversal of the stereotypes associated with women's natural roles in life" (Chusna & Mahmudah 11). Through her actions both prior to and after her transformation into a literal monster, Jennifer's eroding of the foundations of these idealised gender roles villainises her regardless, displaying to the audience that while Jennifer does become a literal monster, her acts of gender subversion transform her into a monster in the eyes of society.

In addition to this, *Jennifer's Body* further inverts patriarchal ideals by subverting the trope of the ruthless male killer and the helpless female victim so often seen in the horror genre. The killer who plagues Devil's Kettle is repeatedly presumed to be a man: "We will get the man who did this to your son" as a police officer comforts Jonah's mother, and Jonah's father crying out threats: "I'll cut off your nutsack and nail it to my door!" (Kusama 00:37:00– 00:37:03, 00:37:14– 00:37:17). Through the characterisation of Jennifer as this ruthless, brutal killer who –by all preconceived notions of gender– should be a man, Kusama exposes the "instability of gender identity" (Chusna & Mahmudah 12) and the gender roles prescribed by this society. While Jennifer's murderous and violent actions are indeed monstrous, the monstrosity of her actions are further emphasised on the principle of her being a woman acting out against what is expected of her. By repeatedly subverting the expectations put upon her, Jennifer tears apart the ideals of gender, converting herself into a monstrous, fearsome figure of femininity through her actions of rejection.

Queer desire and identity are integral factors in the construction of Jennifer's monstrosity. Historically speaking, horror is a genre focused on connecting the body of the monster to cultural anxieties, placing our monstrous figures into the role of the Other. In this

case, it is “linking the queer corpus with the figure of the other” , with the figure of Jennifer Check (Benshoff 227). While Jennifer is not traditionally an Other based on physical appearance and status as an attractive white woman, she is inherently alienated and othered from this privilege awarded to her due to her queer identity. This dichotomy of cultural conformity and monstrosity within Jennifer is seen through her use of her sexuality to attract her victims. Jennifer, as a conventionally attractive woman, is valued in the high school ecosystem for her looks and sexual viability, all of which become tainted and monstrous by both her transformation and her queer identity. Each of Jennifer’ victims are lured to their demise with the promise of sexual encounters which never come to fruition. While Jennifer's consumption of the boys is inherently monstrous due to its graphic, gory nature, it can also be considered monstrous due to the deceptive, weaponised fashion in which she uses her own sexuality. Jennifer does not display any attraction to the boys which she consumes: “They’re just boys, morsels. We have all the power.” (Kusama 00:11:52– 00:11:55). She is only concerned with the power which she can exert over them. Due to her queerness, Jennifer can disconnect from her own sexuality and allow her body to become a commodity to further her own cause. This ultimately makes her a monstrous figure to men as an attractive, unattainable woman with no desire to appease them sexually for anything but her own personal gain. Jennifer does not offer up her body for the benefit of these men, but rather to lead them to their demise, displaying to the audience the cold, monstrous nature awarded to her by her identity as a queer woman.

In addition to this, her disruptive, boundary-breaking, “totally lesbi-gay” relationship with Needy furthers this alienation of Jennifer into the category of a monstrous other (00:06:18–00:06:20). For instance, the two engage in explicitly lesbian activity on screen during their kissing scene in which Jennifer is the driving force behind the sensual encounter, luring Needy in (01:00:09–01:01:09). This intense, homoerotic relationship between the two

is a disruptive force to Needy's relationship with Chip and her life. This furthers Jennifer's transformation into a monstrous queer figure by placing her in the role of the predatory homosexual. Jennifer displays an intense infatuation with Needy throughout the film, and this infatuation becomes further emphasised upon her monstrous transformation. Most notably, this obsession and perceived claim over Needy is displayed to us through the intercut scenes of Jennifer's attack on Colin and Needy losing her virginity to Chip (00:54:05–00:56:00). This unnatural, homoerotic, psychic connection between the two girls further demonstrates how Jennifer is disrupting the relationship between Chip and Needy (Creed, *Return* 114) . Jennifer disrupts the normality and heteronormative bliss of our straight protagonists as is the role of the monster in the horror genre, breaking social boundaries (Benshoff 228). Within the film "conventions of normality are ritualistically overturned" by Jennifer, transforming her into both a literal and a queer monstrous woman (230). On this note, it is indeed the homoerotic, codependent friendship between her and Needy that informs some of her feeding habits, which can be interpreted as being coded with elements of compulsory heterosexuality experienced by lesbians, a societal practice of "enforcing heterosexuality on women" (Rich 20). For example, Ahmed and Jonah –Jennifer's first victims– are respectively chosen out of convenience and social acceptability, with Ahmed being the nearest boy in her vicinity and Jonah being the ideal masculine football player. As for Colin and Chip, these decisions are explicitly informed by her obsession with Needy. Colin is complemented by Needy after Jennifer's initial rejection and is later consumed in the aforementioned scenes of psychic, unnatural connection between the two girls. Finally, Chip is clearly consumed in an act of desperation to feel closer to Needy. Since her sexual connection and desire for Needy is considered socially unacceptable, Jennifer seeks out this connection from the men Needy is involved with or attracted to. Jennifer's queer identity is a force which drives her to these monstrous, violent actions whilst simultaneously alienating her from her femininity and her

own sexuality, the characteristics which she is most valued for. Essentially, due to her queer identity and desires, Jennifer behaves in a subsequent manner which causes her to become a villainised figure, therefore furthering her characterisation as the monstrous feminine.

Visually speaking, Jennifer is repeatedly presented as an extremely hyper-feminine figure, the ideal picture of high school femininity. While this conventional, feminine beauty would usually be culturally praised and borderline worshipped, Jennifer's feminine appearance –in a complete act of gender subversion– is linked to that of her monstrous appearance and identity. Throughout the narrative, Jennifer is presented as the archetypal, all–American, "sexy cheerleader", falling into a traditional, socially acceptable, heterosexist role (Chusna & Mahmudah 12). However, in this case it is important to consider that "the gendered body is performative", and that Jennifer is performing this hyper-feminine role for her own benefit, but also in a way which heightens her monstrosity through "a continuous play with femininity" (Butler 173; Creed, *Return* 114). Simply put, Jennifer performs her femininity in the same fashion in which she performs her monstrous identity, exploiting her looks to overshadow her inherent monstrosity. At the same time, these performances serve to heighten Jennifer's monstrous traits, transforming her into a "incoherent […] discontinuous gendered being…" (Butler 23). While all gender is performative, Jennifer displays an especially strong presentation of this by demonstrating the connection between both her extreme monstrosity and her hyper femininity, highlighting the manufactured, unorthodox nature of both identities. This connection is explicitly displayed in multiple scenes of the movie, showing how Jennifer becomes more feminine and conventionally attractive with each boy she consumes (Kusama 00:41:15– 00:41:30). Performing her roles of the monstrous and the feminine to their fullest potential, Jennifer directly violates what is expected of her from a gendered perspective. In addition to this, in an act of striking juxtaposition, Jennifer is at her most feminine – in her spring dance dress when she reaches her peak monstrosity– her

jaw unhinged with teeth bared, levitating over her victims– , furthering her violation of her gender (01:28:22–01:28:26). Simply put, she is sullying her femininity with her gruesome attacks yet coming out more feminine than ever. Jennifer essentially corrupts her ideal feminine identity through this link to her own monstrosity, failing "to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility" as is expected of her, villainising herself to a greater extent (Butler 23). Although she is performing this feminine role to its fullest potential, the desirable, digestible elements of her gender are negated by her equally prominent performance of the monstrous figure which she becomes, growing ever-more intense alongside her femininity as the story progresses. To conclude, through the connection of her monstrosity and her femininity, Jennifer makes herself "unintelligible or indeed monstrous" to society through her simultaneous pollution of the feminine gender norms and embracing of an over-the-top feminine appearance (Jones 520) . Jennifer is alienated from society not only for her monstrous actions and human consumption, but for daring to violate the expectations set out for her as a result of her gender presentation, othering herself and pushing herself into the role of the monstrous feminine.

Finally, to truly consider how Jennifer becomes an Other and a manifestation of the monstrous feminine, we must explore the relationship of the abject and the monstrous feminine, and more specifically the significance of the connection between the abject and feminine adolescence as represented in *Jennifer's Body*: "The construction of abjection through portrayal of the monstrous feminine" (Chusna and Mahmudah 12). The abject is experienced in a variety of ways, with one way relating largely to "biological bodily functions", and truly, where does one encounter more gross-out bodily fluids than during female puberty? "Images of blood, vomit, puss, shit, etc.", with specifically blood tending to occur at a higher volume during puberty in the form of menstruation (Creed 214, 219). With menstruation being an already repulsive concept rejected and repressed by society turned to

an absolute extreme within the film. Through close analysis of Jennifer's gruesome actions and appearance we can come to understand how Kusama represents how female puberty leads to this monstrous, gruesome figure before us – "as normal as any girl under the influence of teenage hormones" – representing the visceral transformation from purified girl to monstrous woman (Kusama 00:03:03–00:03:07). In addition to this, the representation of the abject within *Jennifer's Body* further presents both the contrast and simultaneous link between Jennifer's gender presentation and her monstrous actions. By having these abject bodily functions turned to a gruesome extreme on the canvas of a perfect youthful girl only serves to further the disgust associated with these functions, and female puberty as a whole. Taking our first look at a possessed Jennifer on Needy's kitchen floor as an example, there is a stark contrast between the blood-covered girl before us against her conventionally feminine appearance (00:23:24–00:24:02). This representation of Jennifer's violent, gory, blood covered transformation is indicative of the process of menstruation, marking the transformation of girl to woman, furthering the ideal of women being inherently monstrous in their actions and bodily functions. On this note of the idea of a monstrous menstruation, Jennifer again references the ordeal of menstruation when she is defeated and impaled by Needy: "You got a tampon?" (01:31:16–01:31:17). This once again demonstrates to the audience how ideal, traditional femininity is foiled and corrupted -or in this case, literally destroyed- by the process of puberty. Essentially, the motif of menstruation within *Jennifer's Body* represents the destruction of Jennifer's own purified girlhood, transforming her into a monstrous, unruly woman through means of extreme, abject bodily functions. Additionally, Creed proposes that "the ultimate abjection is the corpse", which is an interesting factor to consider in relation to Jennifer as she is –technically- a living corpse (Creed, *Monstrous Feminine* 214). Jennifer is sacrificed in the woods by the members of Low Shoulder and left for dead, coming back to life as, essentially, a reanimated corpse (01:03:34–01:06:41). While

Jennifer is not represented in a rotting, zombie-esque appearance, the audience is perpetually aware of the fact that the girl before us is, in fact, a corpse. Jennfier and her monstrous identity are repeatedly linked to that of the corpse, both in her own identity as a living corpse and in her gory consumption of Colin and Jonah's corpses. This is yet another example of connecting the process of female puberty with the abject in *Jennifer's Body,* representing puberty as a destructive, disgusting process. While the use of visceral images of bodily fluids and blood within the film represents this concept of the monstrous menstruation, the representation of Jennifer's connection to corpses following her monstrous transformation highlights this destruction of her socially acceptable girlhood as she moves into womanhood, moving into the figure of the monstrous feminine. By representing this gruesome abjection through a conventionally attractive, feminine teenage girl, the audience's level of disgust is heightened by the dichotomy of these two ideals of the feminine and the visceral, therefore creating a physical and figurative feminised monster.

On the basis of the content discussed in this essay, I have demonstrated the ways in which Jennifer Check is characterised in the fashion of the monstrous feminine. Through her subversive gender behaviour, Jennifer is immediately characterised and recognised by the audience as a monstrous figure. By seizing these masculine roles and ultimately humiliating these male characters, Jennifer becomes somewhat of a cultural assailant, violating social and gender norms in acts which further other her into a figure of the monstrous feminine. Regarding her queer desires and sexuality, these acts of devotion and borderline obsession to Needy ultimately cross social boundaries of acceptable platonic relationships. This others Jennifer to an even greater extent, with her actions becoming inherently monstrous for violating and disrupting heterosexual normality, automatically villainising both her queer identity and her. As well as this, Jennifer's queer identity allows her to disconnect and utilise her own sexuality as a weapon, strengthening her ability to

terrorise men in her monstrous form. In addition, by presenting Jennifer's heightened femininity in direct connection to her monstrosity, we can come to understand her characterisation as a manifestation of the monstrous feminine both in a physical sense and a conceptual sense. Finally, the representation of the abject within Jennifer displays to us the cultural disgust with female adolescence and puberty at large. This showcase of the violent change from girl to monster is to be interpreted as the change from girl to woman, showing once again how femininity becomes a point of cultural disgust by turning this taboo process of puberty to an extreme process of bodily destruction and abjection. Ultimately, by considering the role of patriarchal pressures, queer identity, female sexuality, gender performance and abject femininity, we can come to understand how and why Jennifer Check is characterised as a rendering of the monstrous feminine within *Jennifer's Body.*

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Violence and Queer Embodiment in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, *Stone Butch Blues*, & *Detransition, Baby*

Sydney Marhefsky

The Department of English Undergraduate Award (3rd Year)

Winner

A critical reading of three contemporary queer texts, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, *Stone Butch Blues*, and *Detransition, Baby*, reveals a profound relationship between violence and the queer body. It is through histories of violence that queerness has been located in the body as a physical abnormality, as illustrated by the legacies of colonialism present in *On Earth*. Further, the 'condition' of queerness marks the queer body as a natural receptacle for violence, as inherently violable in a way that the cisgender and heterosexual body is not. However, this is not to define the queer body and those who inhabit it as an entirely passive actor in the face of violence. Jess, the protagonist of *Stone Butch Blues*, incorporates the assaults she's endured as well as the ever-present threat of violence she experiences as a lesbian into her stone butch identity. Violence is not only inextricable from queer identity, it bolsters the institutions of heterosexuality and patriarchal authority that regulate straight identity, with sexual assault serving just as much to mark the queer body as inviting victimization as it marks the cisgender and heterosexual body as an agent of legitimate violence. Indeed, the concept of the self as relational is key to an understanding of violence and the queer body, as the evidence of violence on the body can act to destabilize both the queer individual's and the wider community's sense of identity. It is because of the thick ties between the queer body and violence that their relationship must be interrogated. Failing to contend with the violence that has been inherited is to erase the pain of past

generations and to abandon those that are currently suffering. The violence that is entangled with queer identities and queer bodies need not be a shameful scar to be hidden away. The wound may be a site of violence, but it is "also the place where the skin reencounters itself, asking of each end, where have you been?" (Vuong 109).

The relationship between violence and queerness is a close and fraught one. The immediate image that comes to mind for this relationship is that of the queer-bashing, the blatant attacks committed on queer people. However, the connections between violence and queerness run much deeper. Indeed, the very way that queerness is embodied, with embodiment referring to the way meaning is interpreted from and projected onto the body and thus the self, cannot be separated from violence. The texts *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, *Stone Butch Blues*, and *Detransition, Baby* serve as fertile sites for investigation of violence and queer embodiment, as they each thread the ties between brutality, the body, and queerness. From these texts we can draw that violence and queer embodiment are deeply intertwined, as the queer body, the relational self, and the queer community are influenced, marked, and even defined by violence.

The identification of queer bodies as distinct from human bodies in general is a process completed through violent enforcement, with violence being woven into the basic fabric of queer identities. Little Dog's attempt to identify himself to Rose, his mother, as a gay man is bound up in legacies of violence, as he lacks the language to describe himself, for the "Vietnamese word for it—pê-đê—[is] from the French pédé, short for pedophile" (Vuong 103). The intrusion of the French language on Little Dog's ability to identify himself in Vietnamese is a reflection of a greater violation of colonization that has undoubtedly transformed the nation, as its social fabric was unceremoniously restitched. Prior to the French occupation "Vietnamese did not have a name for queer bodies—because they were

seen, like all bodies, fleshed and of one source" (Vuong 103). The shift from a total lack of concern for queerness to conceiving of it as an essential element of a person, as ingrained in their abnormal body, bears similarity to the development of the category in the Western world. Prior to the 19th century, queerness was not viewed as an identity, but merely as the vice of sodomy, with homosexual acts being "perceived simply as an extreme form of acts 'against the law'" (Foucault 38), akin to the crime of adultery. It was only through the "machinery of power," particularly the institutions of medicine and psychiatry, that this "alien strain" was given "an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility" (Foucault 43). The inscription of queerness onto the body is particularly notable, as medicine attempted to detect sexuality "as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom- in the depths of the organism" (Foucault 44). In Vietnam, it is not medicine, but the violence of colonialism which is responsible not only for the degradation of queerness as criminal, but also for its existence as an identifiable, distinct category. The influence of Western conceptions of queerness is exemplified by Rose's conception of Little Dog's queerness, as she reacts to his coming out by asking "when did this all start? I gave birth to a healthy, normal boy. I know that. When?". Rose's assertion that she birthed a "healthy" boy, and thus that Little Dog's homosexuality must have 'started' at a later point in his life, reflects the idea of queerness as a disease and thus fundamentally tied to the body. This separation of queer bodies from cisgender and heterosexual (cishet) bodies is not violent because of its mere proximity to colonialism, but can be understood as a violent act in itself, as the removal of queer bodies from the whole, which "is fleshed and of one source," conjures images not of neat categorization, but of dismemberment. In this way, Little Dog's embodiment as a gay man is inextricable from violence, for the understanding of his sexuality as marking him as

distinct came about through colonialism and the hacking off of queerness from the larger social body.

Furthermore, the continual perpetration of violence against queer people serves to solidify the boundaries of queer categorization, particularly by positioning queer bodies as violable and violated. Jess' passage into adulthood as a butch lesbian is marked by sexual violence, as exemplified by the violence and threats of violence that she experiences from the police. After being arrested at the gay bar Tifka's alongside the other queer people there and brought to a holding cell, Jess is menaced by two police officers, as one "[puts] his hands under [her] armpits and [lifts] [her] up, a couple inches off the floor, and [slams] [her] against the bars," pressing "his thumbs deep into [her] breasts and [jamming] his knee between my legs," before taunting her: "You should be this tall soon, tall enough your feet would reach the ground. That's when we'll take care of you like we did your pussy friend Allison (Jess' mentor)" (Feinberg 34). This encounter with the police resembles a perverse coming-of-age, as the officer's declaration that soon Jess will be "tall enough" for them to brutalize her implies that her adulthood can only be achieved through experiencing violence and that her adult body comes with an invitation to violence against her. Further, the officer's description of her age through her height recontextualizes her body not as that of a child, but as an Other. The officer's omission of her age banishes any sympathy that a child may receive, as he instead emphasizes the physical weakness associated with youth, with his lifting of her off the floor calling attention to her comparatively short height and low weight. Similarly, the officers' rhetoric shifts the blame for the violence that they inflict from themselves to Jess. The last words of the officers to Jess, "You'll be back" (Feinberg 35), erases them from the arrests they carry out, instead framing Jess' future arrests as inevitable and her fault. Indeed, Jess is a problem to "take care of," a natural criminal, mirroring the 19th century conception of queerness as not merely unlawful, but as the personification of criminality itself. The

implications of Jess as a natural criminal do not only serve to other her, for by locating the violence that they inflict in her body the police officers establish and maintain their own identities as masculine, righteous figures whose violence is not that of the criminal rapist, but that of the legitimate law bearer bringing order to a feminized, monstrous figure.

In the same way that the police officers bolster their position through their violence against Jess, the football players who rape her are performing their own coming-of-age ritual. When Jess is pinned down by the group she is "scared" by "the expressions on their faces," as she thinks: "These [are] not kids anymore" (Feinberg 40). It is as if the teenage football players are transmuted into adults through their capacity for violence, particularly sexual violence, due to the position of sex firmly in the realm of adulthood. Indeed, the rape is characterized almost as the sick play-acting of children at being adults, with Jess noting the pathetic performance through her description of a "boy huffing and puffing on top of [her]" and her surprise that "this mechanical motion what all the jokes and dirty magazines and whispers were about? This was it?" (Feinberg 40). The confirmation of her rapists' manhood runs parallel to the destruction of her own, as Jess is reduced to an object within her own subjectivity: "I didn't feel like this was my life I was living anymore. It felt more like a movie." (Feinberg 40). Indeed, Jess' rape can be conceived of as a "social murder" (Brison 18), as a victim of rape is "is defined out of existence by the rapist's attitudes and actions, which incapacitate the victim's self" (Brison 18). The destruction of the self necessitates a reconstruction, with Jess recuperating that violence as part of her identity, particularly as the violence that Jess experiences is so tied to her fledgling identity as a butch. After being threatened by the police officers, Jess insists that she is OK, causing Jacqueline, her femme mentor, to tell her that she's "a real butch" (Feinberg 36), to which Jess reacts with pride. This nonchalant, or suppressed, reaction to violence is a key part of the stone butch identity, which Jess further solidifies as part of herself in the aftermath of her rape, as she declines to

tell her friend Karla what happened to her. Jess marks this as a "turning point in [her] life," as she feels "the last brick of the wall [going] up inside of [her] that might never come down again" (Feinberg 47). For Jess, the characteristic stone approach to one's emotions, to minimize them and leave them unspoken, is borne from her experiences of violence. Further, the systemic violence against queer people in *Stone Butch Blues* means that Jess' social murder is perhaps better described as a single incident within a social massacre, as queer women as a whole are forced to reconstitute their identities.

Violence has such power to reconstitute the self and how it is embodied because the self is "fundamentally relational" (Brison 15), with violence against one person rippling outwards. The view of the self as relational asserts that one's self-conception is not located solely within oneself, but is embedded within a larger social context, as it is "both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by vi-olence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathic other" (Brison 12). The sexual violence experienced by one woman who speaks at a gay demonstration in *Stone Butch Blues* reveals its aims of not only destroying the self, but tearing asunder the social connections that nurture it. The woman tells the crowd how "these guys in [her] neighborhood in Queens" who "used to yell things at [her] and [her] lover…pulled [her] into the parking lot behind the hardware store and raped [her]" (Feinberg 323). The forceful imposition of male sexuality on an obviously queer woman aligns with the previously discussed functions of violence to bolster normative masculinity whilst invalidating queer existence, but also reflects the broader domination of men by women in society.

Further, this domination is achieved through heterosexuality, as Adrienne Rich identifies ties between the forceful imposition of heterosexuality and "male power" (640) as a whole, with the aspects that "deny women…sexuality" and "force it [male sexuality] upon them" (638) being most relevant to this discussion. Through their rape, the woman's

assailants denied her lesbian sexuality whilst violently imposing their own male sexuality. However, the most notable part of her account is that she "never told [her] lover what happened," for she "felt like [they'd] have both been raped if [she] told her"(Feinberg 323). The erasure of this woman's lesbian embodiment and forced heterosexuality not only eradicates her sense of self, but potentially her lover's as well, for embodiment as a lesbian is dependent on social interactions with other lesbians. If a lesbian's lover is not also a sapphic woman, then how can her embodiment be valid? This woman, feeling that her lesbian identity had been violated, sought to protect her partner from the unwilling contact she'd had with heterosexuality. This is not to say that lesbians who have been raped are actually heterosexual in some way, but to call attention to how rape is used to impose a facsimile of heterosexuality not only on individual queer women, but on communities as a whole, as it acts as a form of social terrorism.

The relational nature of the self, and thus the greater vulnerability to violence, is further compounded by the performative nature of gender. Much in the same way that the self is relational, gender is constructed through social actions, as it is "a kind of becoming or activity," (Butler 143) not an intrinsic essence, for there "is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 33). For transgender people, the social nature of gender as something one does rather than something one is raises the possibility of detransition as an option. Indeed, detransition typically occurs in response to experiencing violence and discrimination, or as Ames puts it: "the reasons for [detransition] [are] never complex: Life as a trans woman [is] difficult and so people [give] up" (Peters 32). Further, detransition is comparable to being a specter, as one recedes from the world, losing "the vibrancy of both pain and pleasure" (Peters 303) and becoming detached from their physical body. Those who detransition in *Detransition, Baby* also lose their community, as exemplified by William, as

he is viewed by other trans women as "pitiable and contagious," as an "untouchable" (Peters 33). His detransition is treated as a symptom of violence that has burrowed itself into his body, which trans women must shun or else risk falling victim to that same violence.

Similarly, it is not only the violence that Amy experiences that leads her to detransition, it is Reese's reaction and the subsequent altering of her self-image. After having her nose broken by Stanley, whom Reese is cheating on her with, Amy thinks of herself as "ruined" (Peters 248), focusing not on the physical pain but on the significance of her nose to her transition, as she and Reese had "fought so hard to get [cosmetic nose surgery] covered by insurance" (Peters 248). Her nose seems to transcend its status as a mere body part, as it becomes emblematic of the effort she has undertaken to become a woman, with its breaking being a firm reminder of the fragility of that status. Indeed, it is on account of her broken nose that she begins finding "many of the feminine grooming habits she enjoyed…silly," as she thinks: "Why bother with makeup when your nose lists to the left?" (Peters 250). It is as if Amy views her womanhood as a lost cause, as a broken sentimental item which only becomes more tragic and pathetic in a half-repaired state. However, what compounds the impact of her broken nose is Reese's "naked scorn" (Peters 245) for the image of Amy as "the posturing vestigial instinct of a once-male, indignant with the rage of insulted masculinity, dressed ridiculously in the outfit of a demure woman" (Peters 246). It is this image that haunts Amy, that makes the "the thought of putting on one of her cute little work outfits [strike] her as completely intolerable" (Peters 249), as she can no longer "believe" in herself as "demure" woman (Peters 249). The disgust that Reese shows for Amy's demeanor, which she sees as confirming negative stereotypes about trans women, ignites Amy's own self-hatred, which she dulls by detransitioning, for she lists "shame" alongside "fear" (presumably of being attacked again) as the emotions that she needs "a pocket of space to separate herself from" (Peters 250). Amy's detransition is indicative of the power of the

social dimension of violence, as it is Reese's scorn and her own subsequent shame that place womanhood out of the realm of possibility for her embodiment.

Both violence and embodiment are collective experiences, as the potential for one's identity and for one's victimization is determined by larger social forces. While our primary focus has been the effects of normative violence against queer people, that violence also has the consequence of fostering violence between queer people. Ames' description of white trans women as "juvenile elephants," as "fifteen thousand pounds of muscle and bone forged from rage and trauma" (Peters 99-100) highlights the cycle of violence borne from the disembodiment that results from trauma and isolation. The juvenile elephants that Ames is referring to brutalized sixty-three rhinos, behavior which he and researchers attribute to "a form of chronic stress, a species-wide trauma that has led to a total and ongoing breakdown of elephant culture" (Peters 98-99). Trans women, who have also endured a "species-wide trauma," are similarly hostile and destructive to each other, according to Ames, as they have "no elders, no stable groups, no one to teach us to countenance pain" (Peters 100). While the physical lack of elders carries some blame, it is also a failure of imagination and embodiment, as the white trans women "didn't want to deal with mothering all that, and immature white girls were too angry and self-righteous to accept mothering anyway" (Peters 101). It is the failure to reconstruct community in the wake of violence, to choose to embody mothering or mothered roles, that perpetuates violence within the trans community.

Although violence has the potential to disrupt communities and relationships, it can also function as a site of connection. The queer women of *Stone Butch Blues* have a common experience of sexual violence, which Jess recognizes and respects, at one point refraining from "[grinding] [her] thigh into her pelvis" while dancing with Yvette, a femme, as she "knew she had been wounded there" (Feinberg 32). Jess is not only considerate of Yvette's pain, she identifies with it, for "even as a young butch that was the place [she] protected

[herself]" (Feinberg 32). The violence that manifests in their bodies is the basis of a duty for caring and an impetus for solidarity, as they transmute their shared pain into potential for shared pleasure, as exemplified by Jess' observation: "I felt her pain, she knew mine. I felt her desire, she aroused mine" (Feinberg 32). The identification of their shared pain that immediately precedes their sexual desire for each other indicates that it is through the vulnerability produced by violence that they seek to connect with one another. By understanding and embracing each other's trauma Jess and Yvette open the possibility for the reformation of the bodies altered by violence, not returning them to their original state, but synthesizing the experiences of vulnerability and of connection.

Violence has been a core part of the queer body, as it is embedded within the social structures that give the body intelligibility. Queerness itself is defined through violence, as well as queer people's relationships with each other, and thus their understanding of themselves. It is only through recognition, not erasure, of that violence that queer communities may begin to rebuild, transforming sites of pain into sites of caring, whilst continually being aware of the potential for violence within the community. The brutality present in the three texts is indicative of the widespread violence against queer people, but it also serves as an example of coming to terms with that violence. The violence is named and subsumed into queer identities, as it is proven far less enduring than the queer bodies it has been inflicted on.

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Alcoholic Police Officer Anti-capitalism in *Disco Elysium*

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The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Winner

In fantasy video games, political messaging is often hidden or omitted entirely in an attempt to fully immerse players in their respective fictional worlds. Additionally, it has been observed that "game company marketing departments understand that explicitly stating hostility toward reactionary positions risks the enmity of right-wing media, streamers and online communities", a reminder that any work of art in a capitalist society is not just "an artefact, a product of social consciousness, a world vision", but also a "commodity to be consumed by an audience at a profit" (Campbell; Eagleton 59). As the creation of a video game is often a multimillion-dollar enterprise, potential risks to profitability – including narratives that push entirely against the neo-liberal status quo – are generally avoided. Perhaps for this reason, the most compelling anti-capitalist narratives in video games have been created by smaller studios without the influence of large publishers.

Independent developer and art collective ZA/UM's success with *Disco Elysium*, a 2019 "[role-playing game] seriously focused on the sociology of institutions", supports this notion (Vervoort et al. 183). *Disco Elysium* takes place in the fictional city Revachol, a small corner of the low fantasy world of Elysium and a setting crafted by ZA/UM to house commentary on neoliberal capitalism, class division, and the human condition as a whole. Players control Harrier du Bois, an unusual man and police detective who has developed amnesia after an intense alcoholic episode, but gained the ability to communicate directly with each aspect of his psyche, known as "skills". The primary goal assigned to players is to solve the murder of

a mercenary employed by a conglomerate known as Wild Pines, who was sent to disrupt strike negotiations with the local dockworker's union.

Harrier is a more defined character than many role-playing game protagonists, in that details of his past life before the events of the game are set in stone and can be gradually recalled as the storyline progresses, but he is – at the beginning – a blank slate. The game opens on a black screen, with no visual elements other than the transcript of two manifestations of Harrier's consciousness, the Ancient Reptilian Brain and the Limbic System, whose usage of the second-person address "threatens the ontological stability of the fictional world insofar as it seems it could be addressing the reader as well as the central character" (Richardson 20). As they attempt to convince Harrier to stay asleep, they reassure him by stating "You don't have to do anything anymore… Ever" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). To progress, the player must actively select the option "[Open your eyes]" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). With this, the game forces players to make a pact of sorts; to see the world as it truly is, they must opt in to the game's terms, embracing "the sense of intimate unfamiliarity" invoked by the game's "narrative 'you'", going against the status quo – represented by the Ancient Reptilian Brain and Limbic System, who want only comfort without thought or responsibility – and approach the world with a fresh mindset, forming their own opinions rather than those already embedded into human society and culture (Richardson 35). Considering that "Disco also means 'I learn' in Latin", and therefore "the game's title is a double entendre meaning 'I learn Elysium'", it becomes evident that the "ideological possibilities of second-person narration are… rich" (Richardson). In combination with the amnesiac plot device, this narrative mode facilitates the adoption of an ideologically fluid approach by players, thus ensuring the game's political messaging will be considered more carefully (O'Keefe).

Upon waking up, Harrier is quickly inducted back into a system in which "financialisation depends on the convertibility of debt and guilt" (Haines 115). Once the player

has made their way down to the lobby of the hotel Harrier was staying in, the manager, Garte, will demand payment for damages caused during his drunken rampage, telling him "You owe this establishment 130 reál." (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). Of course, it is impossible for the player to have accrued this much money at this point, so most will be forced to agree to pay this amount back over time. Failure to do so leads to Harrier being kicked out of his room and a subsequential game over screen in which a newspaper headline reads "disgraced cop sleeps in trash", and quotes Garte as saying "I don't make the rules of the game, I just play my part" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). Here, the game has neatly summarised the hypocrisy of guilt in a capitalist system; the threat of dehumanisation and ridicule is weaponised to enforce debtors to pay their dues, placing the onus on the individual, while those extracting debt shift blame to the society they live in and accept no responsibility. From the moment one is born, "to live" is nothing other than "to be exposed to and be responsible for financial risk" – neither the player nor Harrier, having just been "born" himself, has any memory of incurring these debts, but they must be paid regardless (Haines 114).

While this is universally the case for the working-class, *Disco Elysium* also points out that not only the bourgeoisie are exempt from these rules. Harrier belongs to the police force known as the Revachol Citizens' Militia, or RCM, who as "urban police officers" are "positioned between the working class and local elites", and whose duty lies not in upholding justice and safety, as is the commonly held perception, but in "executing the laws that protect an economic elite of which they are not usually members" (Irr 176). As a result of their key role in protecting capitalist interests they enjoy certain financial freedoms and privileges not extended to others. If, before speaking to Garte, the player talks to Lt. Kim Kitsuragi, Harrier's partner on the case who informs him of his police officer status, they are granted the opportunity to use their "Authority" skill to intimidate Garte and cut the debt by fifty reál; the game calls attention to the inevitable use of "the police force's paramilitary structure and

monopoly over legitimate forms of violence" for personal gain under a neoliberal ideology (Irr 176). Alternatively, Kim will allow Harrier to pawn off his "spinner hubcaps" to pay for the room, as Kim insists they are "just a vanity", but successfully using the "Suggestion" skill here grants players the insight that they are "a vanity he wouldn't mind", thereby indicating that he is giving up something of value to pay his partner's debt (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). In the "inescapable system of indebtedness" that is capitalism, debt is omnipresent; at best, it can be transmuted into a moral form, as Harrier discovers here (Kennedy and Shapiro 14). Notably, the game highlights in these scenes that debt of the material kind – and the poverty that often ensues – can only be avoided through collaboration or outside aid, thus disputing the neoliberal notion that "methodological individualism" can allow one to flourish alone (Elliot 36).

Disco Elysium allows players to accumulate currency as a gameplay mechanic, but its more realistic setting in comparison to other fantasy titles means that there can be no triumph over the free market; instead, resource management is used to highlight that neoliberal policies hinder both the struggling individual's material conditions and their mental wellbeing. Despite his authoritative privilege as a police officer, Harrier Du Bois cannot join the ranks of the bourgeoisie; money-making schemes are mostly limited to selling off personal belongings, as previously mentioned, or even litter-picking to redeem recyclables for cash. Both he and most likely the player are forced to undertake the role of manual labourer, despite not belonging to the working class. Like other games that aim to critique wealth disparity, *Disco Elysium* "immers[es] players in the active position of a person in poverty" and thereby "dispels the potential of preconceived judgments from the player", combining effectively with the second-person address to force identification and empathy with the working-class individual (McCreedy 222).

Players will need the trifling amounts they earn through these means to purchase, for the most part, performance-enhancing drugs. Almost all of the game's consumable items take

the form of narcotics or alcohol, which grant various gameplay benefits and allow players to pass skill "checks" more easily. Combined with Harrier's alcoholic tendencies, this mechanic works to critique neoliberal demonisation of the working-class for drug use by placing players in the inverse position of an addicted police officer. Rebecca Tiger believes "addiction becomes the pretext for a system of punitive social control over people whose long-standing poverty has made them objects of particular scorn"; here, the usual enforcer of this control finds himself in need of drugs to carry out his duties, forcing him to consider the hypocrisy of such a reality and thus strengthening the game's interrogation of "what it means to be a police officer when the legitimacy of that profession has become questionable" (Tiger 50; Vervoort et al. 183).

The most important of these consumable items are Drouamine, a painkiller that restores the player's health bar, and Magnesium, which restores the morale bar; both of these must be kept above zero to avoid a game over. Damage to these bars is incurred upon the failure of the aforementioned "checks", which usually entail a dice roll being generated in an attempt to beat a displayed threshold for success. Stemming from progenitors like tabletop games and adventure books in which players "use two six-sided dice to generate a set of characteristics", this gambling mechanic is extremely relevant to the game's critique of capitalism (Wake 194). The dice imagery is fitting, invoking the role of "gambling… as a socially situated effort" by working-class individuals to "regain some measure of control" in a capitalist society, but here the stakes are tied to the player character's physical and mental health rather than wealth (Amadieu and Hamilton 426). As "gameplay and game design [can] be understood as means to foster change in the institutional structures and systems that make up our societies", *Disco Elysium*'s interlinking of gameplay mechanics and societal critique here effectively highlights major faults of capitalism that must be addressed, including the reality that even ordinary day-to-day life in a capitalist society necessitates placing one's physical and mental health at risk, and that partaking in the "risk management" of basic human rights is "an inevitable tenet of the

self-responsibility propagated under free market expansion" (Vervoort et al. 194; McCreedy 221).

Almost all of *Disco Elysium*'s characters serve as vehicles for some degree of social commentary, but the most striking examples come in the form of Harrier's rare interactions with wealthy individuals. After exploring the hotel and the surrounding area, players are likely to meet Joyce Messier, a high-ranking representative of the Wild Pines shipping company with a vested interest in Revachol. A seemingly sweet old lady with an upper-class British accent and uncanny resemblance to Margaret Thatcher, Joyce is nevertheless eminently likeable. She can be found working on her boat, giving the impression of a down-to-earth individual, and will cooperate fully with the investigation, providing information and even money if asked; this is a bribe, of course, but one that appears innocuous, and players will be inclined to accept it in order to resolve their debt.

Hints towards Joyce's true nature are made much later on when the culprit of the murder, the last survivor of a failed communist revolution, explains he has seen "the mask of humanity fall from capital", and asserts that "it has to take it off to kill everyone – everything you love; all the hope and tenderness in the world" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). Joyce is a representation of that mask, the friendly face hiding an extremely sinister nature. Recognising the opportunity to sway a member of the police to her side, she will employ bribes and attempt to influence the amnesiac Harrier's developing worldview by providing only answers with a subtle capitalistic slant; she sums up human history as "quite easy: every hundred years or so our species gets together to decide what's next: who gets shot in the head and who gets the mineral rights" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). When questioned directly on capitalism and her role in upholding it, Joyce presents the system as an unalterable entity, stating "capital has the ability to subsume all critiques into itself", and that "even those who would *critique* capital end up *reinforcing* it instead"; this sentiment is echoed by critics Kennedy and

Shapiro, who write that “the dominance of neoliberal capitalism is such that it is thought to subsume our capacities to imagine alternatives” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*; Kennedy and Shapiro 1). In the interactions between Harrier and Joyce, theories laid out by Althusser and Macherey relating to interpellation are shown in practice; the individual, in this case Harrier, enters a world in which “values, myths, symbols, ideologies come to him already worked-upon”, and as a result is pushed towards believing the reality of capitalism as painted by Joyce to be the only one possible (Richardson 69).

Eventually, when Joyce flees Revachol due to the impending breakout of violence between the union and Wild Pines mercenaries, she makes the following admission: “I, too, am insane. I just hide my illness better. And I'm rich”, proving the bias and illegitimacy of her teachings (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*). Her mental state is implied to be the result of travelling through the Pale, a foggy weather phenomenon unique to *Disco Elysium*’s fantasy setting that breaks down one’s mind, absorbs human ideas and creativity and threatens to engulf the entire world into a monolithic and mundane void. The game uses its most prominent fantasy element as a metaphor for the encroachment of capitalism, demonstrating how “the progressive potential of fantasy” befits it to “engendering changes to the capitalist gestalt”: by reframing capitalism as an ongoing existential danger that urgently needs to be stopped rather than an inert fact of life, *Disco Elysium* drives home its message that change is essential for humanity’s future (Baker 437–438). With striking similarities to the climate change crisis induced by expansionist neoliberal policies, and given that members of both the bourgeoisie and working class are affected by this malaise – in addition to Joyce players can meet another elderly woman, an addled “Paledriver” who drives transport vehicles through the Pale – *Disco Elysium*’s portrayal of the Pale asserts that capitalist “labour relations entangle all parties and … damage the master as well as the slave”; humanity’s continuation down this path will lead to ruin for all, not just the working-class (Irr 177).

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The Eoin Murray Memorial Prize

The friends and family of the late Eoin Murray have established a fund to support the development of creative writing within UCC. Eoin was a poet and a musician, who valued creativity, authenticity and connection with nature and humanity, and he lived his life according to those values. With this scholarship, in association with the School of English, UCC, we hope to keep his spirit alive and to support others like him in their creative endeavours.

A Word from Marij

Marij is a final year student studying English, when asked how her poem relates to this year's *Double Space* theme, she submitted the following insightful response;

"I think my poem relates the theme of the construction of humanity through literature because it tries to explore the idea of selfhood and reality as something that sits outside the sort of clear boundaries of a Subject. I am fascinated by certain metaphysical theories that deconstruct the idea of personhood being this individual and independent thing, and I tried to incorporate some of this in my poem. The speaker here is a fluid almost non-subject that is stretched across space and time, where boundaries of what is happening and when are being blurred.

I had also read a poem by Ocean Vuong that had the line 'don't we touch each other just to prove that we are still here', and played around with that idea and how the self and reality is dependent upon others. At the end of the poem, for example, the speaker kind of comes back into themselves when the 'you' of the poem places their hand on the speaker's arm. The 'you' proves that the speaker exists.

I have been talking with people a lot about the relatedness of humanity and literature, and especially acknowledging the importance of humans as the makers of literature within modern contexts like the rise of artificial intelligence. Death of the author is stupid; it is not the language that makes something interesting, but the person behind the language. If a stranger on the streets says 'I love you' that would feel a lot different than a partner saying the same words, and I think that is what makes literature so lovely. So, when I am writing, I am trying to find ways in which to express that I am a human, and I think that that is the case, or that should be the case, for any artist."

Newton’s first law

Marij Dirkje Andrea Bernart

The Eoin Murray Memorial Prize

Winner

Though yesterday I was filled with so much energy
It would start to overflow and fit in corners where
I wouldn’t want anyone to reach. Stared too long,
until your eyes burned in our little witch circle
around the couch. I told you how fragmented
reality is as I dealt out the cards with my
hands matching the gold edge -
you asked me what I could taste in the evening
air, I said the wine tastes like broccoli
and maybe, last autumn, this exact song playing
pressed my leg against your thigh and watched
the way your breath escaped in smoke rings
again; what do you taste tonight?
I said an object that is in motion stays in motion

did you not see three people asking me

what book I am reading?

Chocolate, you said, maybe strawberries. It’s sweet.

Your hand held the glass with three fingers, as you moved

it closer to me. The sound as they clung together

clattered against the window, melting in the droplets

I liked the way I could see your breathe take shape in

your lungs. Deafening the sound of someone on

the balcony saying the more reality that belongs

to us - I think it taste like chocolate- the more we exist.

Still my eyes trying to stick themselves on skin, I had seen

the movie and read out the lines. I had heard the -

Stays in motion, had I said something about energy?

Placed you hand up my arm, and I could feel my feet

plant themselves back on the ground

Tastes like chocolate, I heard now, you had

whispered below your

breathe.

Meet The Team

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

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