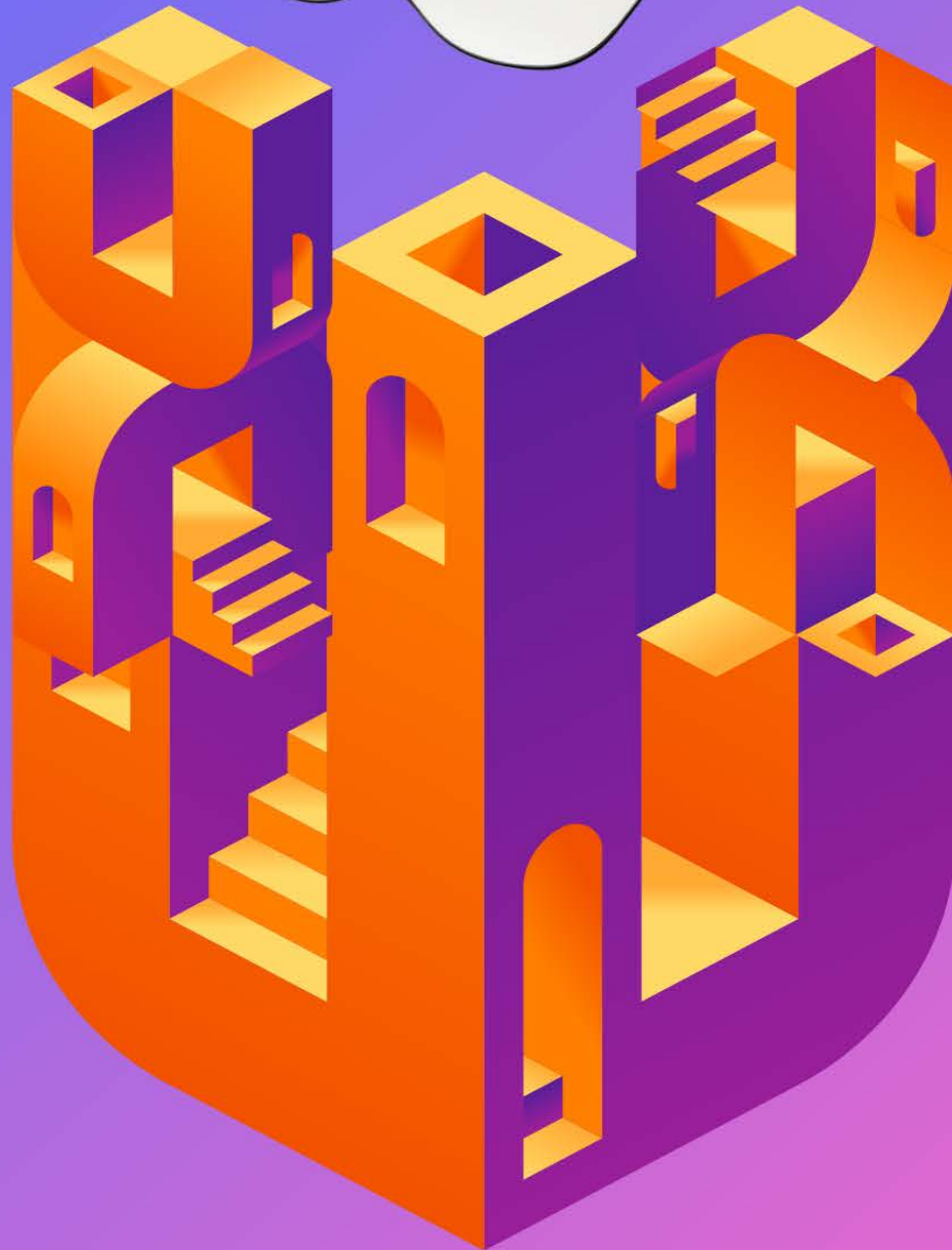


Double Space



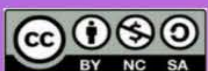
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Editorial

Now on its fifth publication, this Spring 2026, 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 has 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 year, our chosen theme is "Perspectives", which includes an extensive array of topics that each essay explores in detail. We aim to showcase often-debated opinions and interpretations of texts such as *American Psycho*, *Dawn* or *The Haunting*. This theme allows the authors to share their findings and takes on feminism and gender, politics, and the anxieties that such topics have reflected in literature over the years. As our society changes, so do our attitudes towards certain issues, as well as our perspectives on historical events and humanity as a whole. Technological advancement and changes in social structure throughout human history have produced unique people with distinct mindsets, and sharing these perspectives with one another allows us to better our society and define each person as an individual. The order of the essays reflects their respective topics and juxtaposes differing opinions from separate authors, thus allowing the readers to gather the information provided and form their own argument.

Our first creative piece, “Death of the Palindrome”, and the three following essays focus on conceptions of gender, offering feminist criticism and intersectional viewpoints on traditionally patriarchal or androcentric ideas. “Cumha”, the Eoin Murray Memorial Prize winner, acts as a divider after which the works dive into issues of human identity, imperialism, and postcolonial perspectives. The final essays discuss societal ideals and their dark sides and include examples from medieval and modern mythologies as well as metatextual experimentation with history itself.

We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to create this year’s edition of Double Space along with an exceptional team of authors and editors who are the backbone of this journal. We would like to thank you all for your hard work and cooperation, and congratulate the contributors on their wonderful essays. We would also like to thank the lecturers who provided answers to our difficult questions about must-read books, which will hopefully help and inspire future writers to share their work and be included in Double Space. 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. Finally, thank you to the ever-dedicated Double Space team—copy editors, social media managers, web designers and liaisons, you have done an exceptional job, we couldn’t have done it without you!

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

—Your Co-Editors-in-Chief, Vilma and Michal

Featured Essays



Death of the Palindrome

Milo (Marlowe) Stone

The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Highly Recommended

*“A mother, or a passionate wife necessarily has a closed heart,
for it is turned away from the world. A single emotion, a single
creature, a single face, but all is devoured...Quite a different
love disturbs Don Juan, and this one is liberating. It brings
with it all the faces in the world...”*

- Albert Camus, ‘The Absurd Man,’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Typographical note for the reader:

Action is in [brackets].

Baby (narrator) speaks on the left.

Baby (character) speaks on the right, in *italics*.

He speaks on the right, in **bold**.

Scene 1 (Baby as the Mother, and the Passionate Wife)

[In (His) Home. Night. 1942.]

[He is sitting on a black leather La-Z-Boy in the corner. There is a quiet, black creature, resting in a cage to His right. Baby is sitting at the dining table, looking out the window, watching people pass her by on the streets. Their cold, streetlit figures like wet pappus drafting across the night. Her hand caresses her stomach, which peeks out of her nightdress like a little moon. She 5 sings out, like birds at dawn.]

You are my sunshine...

...cold moonlight reaches like a finger

into *Home*, colour is revealed

as if it was a marble rabbit 10

from a gentleman's hat.

[Baby's eyes follow the finger.]

...my only sunshine...

...Four walls with perched birds

and immortal flowers, crooked 15

wooden floors, a peeling white

ceiling, turning a slight yellow.

Home. Him.

She gazes at her wedding ring;

a slight tarnish in the crevasse 20

where silver meets her flesh.

...you make me happy...

...She noticed he leaves His each

morning on the bedside table—

—Enough, Baby! I'm trying 25

to complete this. I can't focus

with your nonsense.

It's not nonsense. I'm singing

for our Baby.

It can't even hear you. 30

She can. The doctor says so.

Doctor said it was a she?

No. I have a feeling.

[He begins to mumble to Himself in a masculine tongue Baby does not understand.]

Ablata at alba. 35

Baby watches those sounds contort

themselves through His teeth, phantom

escapees. They reshape into origami

birds and burn like moths in the dying

light; the lamp's light drapes over 40

His head. His head; carved by the shadow

that bleeds into it.

What are you saying?

Trying to figure out the answer.

Out loud? 45

Yes. It helps me.

With what?

This puzzle.

What does it mean?

What? 50

What you said. Ablata—

Let me have my own things.

I'm just curious.

Maybe I can help.

Don't be ridiculous. 55

Scene 2 (The Symmetry of Isolation)

[Late Evening.]

[Baby begins to set the table. There is silence that He holds Home captive under.]

I've ironed your shirt

for tomorrow.

[She watches Him turn the page of the newspaper. At this moment, Baby's ears don't catch the sound of the paper being thrown against the air, but Baby can feel the sensation of it, ringing through her body.]

Did you see your coat?

I embroidered your name

on the inside

so you wouldn't lose it.

[Baby watches Him as He reads, His eyes caught on the words for just a moment longer than they should be. There is a bottle of Schlitz to His right. His white shirt is unbuttoned, revealing a naked chest. Baby tries to imagine a beating heart within Him.]

She traces His face with her eyes, attempting 15

to draw out an answer from His lips and clouded eyes.

It is the face of a swan with His long nose, tilting

low, as if to breathe in the ground on which

He walks. Fine bone skin, dark eyes. Eyes swallowed

by his cheekbones. His skin is marked less by age 20

and more the stress of thought; A mask of–

[Dog whines. Baby stops fiddling with the ring on her finger. She begins to hum softly as she renews her thought–]

–marriage to Him is no different

than the clipping of a bird's wings, 25

the breaking of a racehorse's leg;

An assumption so palpable it tastes

like His dry kisses, lips bent like stiff

arms of a corpse.

Baby! I can't concentrate with 30

all that noise. Stop it.

[Baby stops humming. He flips back the page, and starts again from the beginning.]

That's the newspaper from yesterday.

I'm aware.

He reads in silence, as if the world 35

is His secret that He can consume

and keep ruminating in his cold stomach.

He must be fat with secrets;

[Dog begins to groan. Baby feels a kick in her belly.]

Shh...Baby. I'm sorry. 40

Baby believes that thoughts go

straight to her baby like red

wine. She doesn't want to poison

her baby with the memories

of Mama throwing the bottle, 45

glass scattering like child's cries—

It's all the same! The same!

as her gold watch slipped

down her thin, draping

arm. 50

Thoughts are like vermin,

they stretch out in crypt

entanglements, knotted

tunnels that hide behind

skin and underneath feet. 55

Baby wants perfect thoughts,

immortal like walls with perched

birds and symmetrical flowers.

[He puts the bottle up to his mouth, which is slightly ajar, and waits a moment before drinking, tasting the space between air and glass on his lips.] 60

What is a palindrome?

[He makes Baby wait. He takes a long sip. 3 big swallows, as if He was swallowing air.]

The act of bending

language into symmetry.

[Dog moans. Dog catches her gaze.] 65

Dog is two big, black, eyes

in a cage. Pupils reflect an opaque

labyrinth, the contorted silhouettes

of Home. A carnival mirror, Baby

thinks of the memory that can only 70

murmur her childhood. To Baby,

even her nostalgia, the opening

and closing of the heart's valves,

is just as strange a creature.

[Baby picks up the vase in the centre of the table.] 75

I asked you to bring me new flowers;

I hate looking at dead flowers.

You said they're more fragrant

when they're dead.

That doesn't mean I like it. 80

Make up your mind, Baby.

You never listen to me. It's not good

for the baby.

What isn't?

Dead flowers. 85

Doctor say so?

I wished you'd just consider—

[Dog drones a baritone hum rolling into a whine. He rises from where He is, and opens Dog's cage.]

Dog lurks, marking the walls. 90

Its nose, like fingers handling

the symmetry of the pink flowers.

That black dominance, looming

interrogation.

Tell Dog to stop. Dog doesn't listen 95

to me.

Dog is fine.

[He says nothing to Baby. He flips the page back, and starts reading from the beginning. Baby starts to sing a lullaby, even though it is morning.]

Enough! 100

[Baby flinches. Dog listens to His command, returning back to his cage. He gets up.]

I'm going to bed. Feed Dog,

wash the dishes.

He disappears from Home like a thought

that fell across Baby's mind before she 105

realised it was falling; petals withered

by morning.

[Baby removes the plates from their places on the table, and brings them back to the sink.]

There is a silence in Home that covers Baby

like a straight jacket, now that the ticking 110

of His wristwatch is gone. It is Dog's whine

that replaces it. Baby leaves Dog's bowl empty.

Albert Camus' 1942 essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (*Myth*) introduces the concept of the 'absurd', which he describes as the "confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world," and as "between an action and the world that transcends it" (Camus 28, 30). To simplify for clarity's sake, the absurd is the conflict between life and the inevitability of death, the temporal significance of an individual's actions within the mortal frame of their life. Absurdist literature explores this existential conflict of futility often through the individual, and through the use of fragmented narratives, alienation, and employment of irony. However, what I found when reading absurdist literature is that the vast majority of authors, especially of those well known (e.g. Camus, Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco, etc.), are male, and their narratives' perspectives lean towards the androcentric. The origins of "Death of the Palindrome" (*DotP*) came first from a draft of a poem called "Fabergé", which sought to explore the absurd through a feminine lens. The poem follows a pregnant narrator contemplating her role in the destruction of life (e.g. through the consumption of an egg) in order to create life, and how one would willingly create life, when confronted with the knowledge of its inevitable destruction. This feminine perspective of 'absurd creation' is somehow missing from Camus' essay, where he only acknowledges the form of artistic creation as resistance to the 'absurd.'

My desire was to explore absurd creation, a term Camus coined to describe how humanity continues to create, despite its ultimate insignificance. However, I would do so through a feminine lens, where the absurd creation is not of art, music or literature, but is the creation of life itself. In this synthesis essay, I will first go into the exploration of the origin and initial intention behind characters and other aspects of *DotP*. Then, I will explore the change in intention for *DotP*, which sought to challenge Camus' 'absurd man' by creating an 'absurd woman'...

A drastic change to the structure and intention of *DotP* came when drafting the third draft. I felt as if the absurd was lost in the poetic, so I had re-read Camus' *Myth* in order to re-familiarise myself with the absurd. It was then that I came across a quote in the chapter "The Absurd Man":

A mother, or a passionate wife necessarily has a closed heart, for it is turned away from the world. A single emotion, a single creature, a single face, but all is devoured...Quite a different love disturbs Don Juan, and this one is liberating. It brings with it all the faces in the world... (73)

The absurd man is the individual who lives his life according to this aforementioned "confrontation," according to Camus. He is a man where "life will serve life," with life being "measured by its sterility" (68, 69). What Camus means by sterility is the quantity of experience within an individual life. The absurd man lives his life prioritising the quantity over the quality of experience. One of the three examples he proposes as having the qualities of the absurd man is that of the literary figure Don Juan.

Camus argues that if an individual were to live according to absurdism, an individual would strive for quantity over quality in regards to their experiences—with Don Juan, his means of seduction. His way of loving, womanising, coincides with absurdist ideology. By loving more, rather than completely, the absurd man is able to, in theory, experience more life within the confines of corporeal beginning and end. The absurd man believes intimacy to be futile in an absurd world, so he strives to fill himself with the love of different women. Camus compares this

kind of love to that of an archetypal mother/wife, whose love Camus implies is imprisoning, as it “has a closed heart,” and is “turned away from the world” (73). Camus does not talk of the mother/wife figure as an individual, but rather references this figure in terms of her love for the absurd man. Her love restricts him from knowing the world in its multitude. Thus, Camus portrays women as lives to be consumed by the absurd man, void of identity beyond their relation to him. Camus ignores the feminine perspective, but also fails to recognise the relationship between the act of loving and the creation (of identity). Where Camus ignores the mother/wife figure, I realised that I wanted to create a narrative that gives her agency, that integrates her into the absurd...

In order to now execute this change in intention, I first realised that I had to change the structure. When starting the third draft, I realised that the structure I had used for the previous two drafts was not achieving what I needed: clarity. I needed to ground these characters less in the poetic landscape and more in realism. I also wanted the setting to be less poetic and more explicitly domestic. This would provide a good foundation for this interrogation, as it is Baby’s space as the mother and wife, but also under His patriarchal gaze. I decided to use elements of dramaturgy, and this ended up completely transforming *DotP*. Each scene began with a description of the setting and action, instead of throwing the reader right into the poem. Not only does this ground the narrative concretely, but it emphasises the fragmentary nature, so subtly yet powerfully. When reading the final draft of *DotP*, I can feel the scenes become more like blinking frames of a film or a play-performance than just a poem suspended in white space, drifting to and fro the others that lie adjacent...

For the most part, there remained a continuity between drafts of the character’s intended representation... however, irony revealed that the absurd man, in his androcentric world, may be

resisting the absurd, but to the absurd woman, he is the absurd. Thus, He is “the unreasonable silence” of an all-consuming universe that Baby must struggle to resist.

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Patriarchal Conditions of Absolute Reality: Reclaiming *The Haunting*

Bláithín Smiddy

The Patricia Coughlan Award

Winner

In Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, the unknown and "uncanny" inner workings of Hill House terrorise and seduce Eleanor Vance to her destruction (Downey 22). The house's sway over the minds of readers and critics has proven similarly compelling. The modern psychoanalytical reading of its abnormal manifestations posits that the traumatised Eleanor is either hallucinating or projecting her mental instability onto the house; the latter case orderly codifying supernatural aggressors into nothing more than metaphorical extensions of a very human psyche (21). However, Jackson's narratological layering resists reductive interpretation – a wholesale psychoanalytical slant neglects the autonomous identity of the house itself; its capacity to *project* and not solely be *projected onto*. The stifling parental temperament of Jackson's house is as maternal as it is paternal. This is potentially of private relevance to Eleanor in view of her debilitating decade-long vigil by her mother's bedside, but equally to incubate public post-war alarm about the self-centred dynamics of the nuclear family (Pascal 464). Robert Wise's 1963 film adaptation, *The Haunting* – though sensitive to the effectiveness of Jackson's immaterial

haunting – does not cohesively map the novel’s ambiguity onto its narrative. Film visuals cannot slip between the subjective folds of author, narrator and character like literary descriptions do; scenes are presented uniformly without the authorial mediation of details. This, however, may be a blessing in disguise in view of the cultural import of Wise’s venture upon the cusp of second-wave feminism. In sliding from Jackson’s midpoint towards a more undeniably supernatural sentience – and in figuring this sentience as specifically patriarchal – Wise negates psychoanalytical pitfalls and demonstrates his awareness of the house’s capacity to project cultural anxieties unmodulated by Eleanor’s private repression, thereby validating the house’s *oppression* of her and reclaiming the authenticity of the “American haunted house” (Downey 21).

In the preliminary stages of his opening monologue upon Hill House’s history in *The Haunting*, Dr Markway’s assertion that “It was an evil house from the beginning; a house that was born bad” is resoundingly more front-and-centre and assured than the attitude of his novelistic counterpart. Dr. Montague offhandedly suggests to his assistants that “it might not ... be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad” and then freely admits that, in Hill House’s case, “whether its personality was molded by the people who lived here, or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start are all questions I cannot answer” (Wise; Jackson 70). Wise and screenplay writer Nelson Gidding posits Dr Markway as the film’s authoritative voice – a man of historical, factual learning – and his crisply delivered voiceover is given further credence by its contrast with Eleanor’s meandering, “I”-centric internal monologue, first roadcast a few short scenes later and indicated non-diegetically by soft *legato* playing upon strings accompanied by an eerie chime lullaby. This gender-biased authority becomes typical not only of Dr Markway and Eleanor’s relationship, but also of their ghostly doubles amongst the Crain lineage. The nighttime murmurings that Eleanor is privy to in the novel – the “steady low ... voice”, the “small gurgling

laugh”, and the “little soft cry” of a child – are recreated to the letter by Wise but for one pivotal distinction: the gender of his speakers cannot be left to the imagination (Jackson 161–2). The “steady” voice, “too low for words to be understood” but commanding nonetheless, is unmistakably a man’s – the inane laughter, a woman’s – whilst the hysterical cries are those of a young girl. The voices also overlap such that the man appears to reprimand the woman and girl, recalling Hugh Crain’s implied mistreatment of his wives and daughters (161). The film’s confirmation of Hill House’s reputation – through the mouthpiece of authority of Dr Markway – as being intrinsic to the house itself, preceding its occupation by Hugh Crain and *causing* rather than arising as a result of the misfortune of his family, roots it firmly in the tradition of the “American haunted house” that the novel groups as only one possibility alongside psychological explanations. The Old-World gothic edifice, haunted by the *presence* of past figures, cedes to the New-World two-storey at the centre of which lies an infinitely more discomfiting recess of the *absence* of human history; it is primed to fill itself with the advent of the narrative’s unworldly protagonist, powerless to fight its influence (Downey 21).

From Eleanor’s arrival at Hill House in *The Haunting*, Wise innovates formal filmmaking techniques to frame it as overpowering her upon a plane of significance operating distinctly above and beyond her own subjectivity. The same cannot be said of the novel, in which Jackson’s unstable focalisation often renders it impossible to detangle Eleanor’s accurate inferences about her relationship with the house, her misconceptions, and the objective narratorial information (Ashton 269). As Eleanor winds around the house’s fateful driveway, her whimsical daydreams are left in the dust. The score’s timbre grows more earthy, though its lower woodwind sequence against syncopated strings remains long-winded as it approaches a *rescendo* – a spine-tingling final echo of Eleanor’s theme upon strings as her eyes fill with horror that is undercut by the blast

of a trumpet as she brakes abruptly. The *staccato* trumpets and crashing cymbals of the patriarchal house drown out the delicately feminine *legato* strings of her mind and barrel towards a new *crescendo*. When she is treated to her first *tête-à-tête* with the house, pinpricks of the blinding white light of Wise's infra-red film are reflected in her starry-eyed expression as she begins to fall "under the spell of the house", her instinctual horror becoming tempered by awe (Wise). In the novel, Eleanor inwardly praises a little girl's insistence upon drinking only from her special "cup of stars" and jealously guards her own "cup of stars" – her quirks (Jackson 21–2). As the house lights up her eyes with stars in *The Haunting*, she becomes blind to her own individuality, enticed by the prospect of belonging to a larger cause – even if it is to serve the patriarchy. Shot-reverse shots between an internally monologuing Eleanor and the house's features are augmented musically through antiphonal dialogue; the house's theme is echoed softly upon woodwind whilst the camera lingers upon Eleanor before it cuts away to the house, and a strident answering iteration sounds. Wise selected Ettington Park Hotel in Warwickshire – the historic seat of the Shirley family – for exterior shots of Hill House in *The Haunting*, and showcases its tableaux of past Shirley matriarchs here in close-up shots; they readily stand in as the imposing forefathers of Hugh Crain ("Eatington Park").

Eleanor's appraisal of the house is conveyed through low-angle point-of-view shots – she *perceives* that the house is domineering and watchful, the camera zeroing in upon its Neo-Gothic window arches that eerily resemble a pair of heavily lidded eyes – and this perception is then cemented as a reality by high-angle extreme close-up shots of her face from the house's point of view (Hodges Holt 162). She blinks rapidly under the scrutiny of what the audience is assured is a real and sentient threat by the simple fact that they are staring Eleanor down through its 'eyes'. When Eleanor, now after days of exposure to and at risk of being seduced by this patriarchal tyrant

she still insists is “vile”, wanders onto the balcony adjacent to the phallic library tower, she first averts her eyes – before her curiosity reigns supreme, and she rakes her gaze along its length (Wise; Hodges Holt 162). The camera cuts to the tower’s bird’s eye vantage point and from here makes a frenzied descent upon Eleanor, sending her reeling into the arms of Dr Markway – the male lover in Wise’s film only, and a voice of reason to counter the female’s hypersensitivity (Hodges Holt 164). The physicality of Eleanor and Dr Markway’s relationship in the film lends a streamlined tangibility to Jackson’s shadowy complex of overbearing patriarchal forces – Dr Markway grasps Eleanor’s arm upon the balcony, out of a desire to restrain her as much as comfort her. When Grace Markway’s entrance brings a swift termination to Eleanor’s patriarchal purpose, Dr Markway dispassionately manhandles her as he insists that she leave without delay. When Eleanor begs Luke to allow her to remain at the house – adding that “All it will cost you is just my keep” – he, too, is particularly deriding: “Sorry, honey, but you’re not the type I keep” (Wise). Eleanor fears that she has been found wanting by the ‘male gaze’ – including that of the house itself – at every turn; her punishment is that “[Mrs Markway] has my place. It isn’t fair” (Wise).

Eleanor – like the viewer – relies upon Dr Markway for navigation through the house’s “uncharted wastes”; she confesses to him her growing worry that “every cursed bit of the haunting ... is all in my mind ... [that] all three of you are in my imagination. None of this is real” (Wise). His response – that such a psychological explanation is incidentally “the easiest way to dismiss the supernatural” – is curiously perceptive in view of the psychoanalytical slant that would dominate *Hill House* criticism from the late twentieth century onwards (Wise). However, Theodora – whose queer-coding, unlike Eleanor’s, translates clearly from novel to film – poses a threat to Eleanor and Dr Markway’s heteronormative dynamic. Even though several of her more flirtatious remarks towards Eleanor are reassigned to Dr Markway – “How pretty you look this

morning ... This curious life seems to agree with you” – Eleanor’s uncharacteristic outburst towards her first friend as the film nears its climax demonstrates the degree to which her patriarchal climate is shaping her worldview (Jackson 137). When Theodora dismisses her hopes regarding Dr Markway, Eleanor coldly remarks that “The world is full of inconsistencies ... Nature’s mistakes, they’re called – you, for instance” (Wise). In a turning point in Eleanor’s decline as she climbs the library’s rickety stairway, it is Dr Markway and Luke who direct Eleanor to “be very, very careful” and “Stand perfectly still!”; the once level-headed and assertive Theo is at a loss to contribute anything beyond a frenzied cry of “Nell, do what they say, please!” (Wise).

Jackson’s novel famously opens by declaring that “No live organism can continue for long to *exist sanely* under conditions of *absolute reality*; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to *dream*” (3; emphasis added). Eleanor’s dreaming or fantasising, then – her method of coping with her lack of personhood and crumbling familial relations – is, by the logic of the novel’s world, a physiological indication of her sanity (Ashton 270–1). However, complications arise from the novel’s tenuous distinction between these dreams – which Eleanor is painfully *aware* are not reality – unconscious hallucination, and objectively supernatural events (270). She clearly signals her self-awareness during her journey to Hill House, for instance, when she tells the captivating oleanders that she will resume her fantasy about them “another day” (Jackson 20). As the novel nears its end, a motherly voice beckons Eleanor as she slips through the house and inevitably arrives at the library’s stairway – Eleanor experiences this manifestation as supernatural reality rather than a self-indulgent fantasy about her deceased mother. From the reader’s perspective, however, the possibility of hallucination is left open-ended because – unlike the oleander sequence – Jackson’s narration embeds no cues as to the depth of Eleanor’s self-awareness. In Wise’s film, the distinctions between the roles of fantasy, reality and hallucination in Eleanor’s breakdown are

clear-cut. Eleanor – and the viewer – is made all-too-aware that Eleanor’s burgeoning relationship with Dr Markway was only ever a fantasy, not a reality, by the arrival of his wife. To Wise’s unequivocally sentient and oppressively patriarchal house, Eleanor’s failure to deliver upon the promise of a heteronormative relationship is unacceptable, and it is an *external* possessor that guides her to the stairway (Hodges Holt 168). There is no guiding motherly voice that could be construed as an *internal* hallucination or projection on Eleanor’s part as a product of her personal trauma.

The culmination of Wise’s embrace of Hill House as a malignant oppressor in its own right – capable of possession – is the climactic scene of Eleanor’s car barreling into a tree in the driveway following the team’s banishment of her from the house. In Jackson’s novel, Eleanor exhibits ambivalent desires in the build-up to her death. She deliberately aims her car at the tree – “I am really, really, really doing it by myself” – but then questions too late “*Why* am I doing this?” (Jackson 245–6). The conflict appears internal – the death, a suicide – but the fact that she dies in a similar manner to Hugh Crain’s first wife could be indicative of the house’s direct influence. Wise takes pains to visually parallel their deaths: a shot of a still spinning wheel of the overturned carriage in Mrs Crain’s case, and a car in Eleanor’s cuts away to a shot of each victim’s lifeless hand. Mrs Crain wears a bracelet featuring ornate geometric detail – a ready extension of the house’s Neo-Gothic architecture – and Eleanor, a watch; though not clearly visible in this shot, it can be seen flashing upon her wrist as she drives. This proliferation of endlessly spinning and ticking loops in the *mise-en-scène* reinforces the narrative’s fatalism and Eleanor’s lack of agency – she has been living upon borrowed time, shackled to a cycle that is doomed to repeat itself. Wise and Gidding – likely discouraged from portraying their heroine’s suicide – frame such an explanation as definitive (Schneider 170). The wheel of Eleanor’s car spins of its own accord,

despite her protests, and as she swerves to avoid the sudden appearance of Mrs Markway, the wheel holds a course straight into the same tree that sealed the fate of Mrs Crain – the camera then cartwheels into stills of the house’s smug silence. Mrs Markway – the woman Eleanor is pitted against by the house – says herself, “I don’t even know how I got out here” (Wise). The house’s theme – usually employed when the house is in frame to serve as its ‘voice’ – echoes in the background as the camera captures Dr Markway’s declaration that “[the house] didn’t want [Eleanor] to leave and her poor, bedevilled mind wasn’t strong enough to fight it” (Wise). This conflation of the two ‘voices’ reminds the viewer that though Dr Markway is framed as the story’s romantic hero, his actions consistently overlap with the house’s aggressively patriarchal designs upon Eleanor. After summoning her there to begin with, he encourages her attachment to him despite his marital status – before casting her aside upon realising that he can no longer control her “for the sake of the experiment” (Wise).

The post-Enlightenment ego seeks to internalise a threat rather than accept it as operating beyond and even superseding human control – ghosts, in realising the uneasy balance that Freud underscores between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, are no longer welcome in the archetypal haunted house (Downey 22). Enfeebling Eleanor’s tragic arc to hopeless mental derangement from the outset clears the house of culpable oppression, landing the haunting’s onsequences squarely upon her own shoulders. Jackson’s painstakingly crafted ambiguity is critically expounded as a method of marginalising ghosts – when what it truly does is *invite* them to Hill House; whether or not the reader will permit them to cross its threshold is their affair. Though Wise’s film – which necessarily inclines towards visual horror – does not reproduce Jackson’s ambiguity, it does respect it; as Wise’s Dr Markway pithily puts it, “When we become involved in a supernatural event, we’re scared out of our wits just because it’s unknown.” Wise’s reclamation of the

“American haunted house” and its cultural monsters – which he allows to simply *be* monsters – also suggests, perhaps, that psychoanalysts are reaching for a sophisticated reading of the *Hill House* narrative in entirely the wrong direction (Downey 21).

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Feminist Critique of Fairy Tales

Evelina Bosaite

The Patricia Coughlan Award

Highly Recommended

According to Barbara G. Walker, “[traditional fairytales are] filtered through centuries of patriarchal culture and show little respect for women, except as young and beautiful ‘princesses.’ Only to be decorative is the customary female function in these old stories” (4). Similarly, Rona May-Ron observes, “In France, Charles Perrault fashioned Cinderella into a paradigm of compliancy and virtue at the end of the seventeenth century; in nineteenth-century Germany the Grimm brothers silenced her; and, in mid-twentieth-century America, Walt Disney transformed her into the epitome of cloyingly sweet female passivity” (145). Ironically, the literary fairy tales that are now predominantly associated with male authors, such as Perrault and the Grimm Brothers, were originally part of a tradition initiated by women. As Lewis Carl Seifert notes, “a woman—and not Perrault—initiated the vogue of fairytale writing that lasted, roughly, from 1690 to 1715” (Seifert and Haase 56). These early female-authored tales featured more positive portrayals of women, trying to “defend and perpetuate their own locus of cultural authority”, which male authors later constrained into narratives of compliance and passivity (Seifert qtd. in Crowley and Pennington 299).

As these scholars suggest, traditional fairy tales like “Cinderella” have long reflected and reinforced patriarchal values, particularly in their limited and unfair portrayals of female characters. However, in recent years, these tales have been subverted, revised, and reimagined to reclaim agency for both readers and female protagonists. As fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes posits, “[c]reated out of dissatisfaction with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales [...] the feminist fairy tale conceives a different view of the world and speaks in a voice that has been customarily silenced” (*Don’t Bet on the Prince* 6). This essay compares the traditional, male-adapted versions of “Cinderella” by Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers to feminist reinterpretations. It explores how gender constructions were crafted by male authors and later challenged through feminist revisions of plot patterns and tropes (such as female passivity and lack of agency, the Magical Helper, the Wicked (Older) Woman, and Marriage as Conclusion) as well as characterisation (“Fairy Tale Tropes”). In their original forms, these tropes reinforce a vision of gender dynamics that perpetuates compliance and dependency in women.

In this case, these narrative conventions are considered through the lens of feminist literary criticism. One of them is female passivity and lack of female agency. In both versions of “Cinderella” by the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault, both Cinderellas are portrayed as passive and submissive. It is first important to note, though, that such gender-biased patterns stemmed from the need for both Perrault and the Grimm brothers to put their own ideas and ideologies about gender constructions in these tales. “By appropriating oral tales largely from female informants and reworking tales from books and texts that were sent to them, the Grimms chose words, expressions, and narrative forms of development that provided for rational cohesion and a reward system that justified male domination within the bourgeois public sphere” (Zipes, *From Enchanted Forests* 105). Similarly, with regards to Perrault’s work, according to Lilyane Mourey,

Perrault's suppressions, omissions or additions to the folk tales allow us to conclude that he did not see his task as restoring them in their authenticity. Those stories which he found interesting and amusing became above all the privileged places where the man, the politician, and the academician could put his ideas and his fantasies to work in a leisurely way and sometimes to make caricatures.

(qtd. in Zipes, *The Art of Subversion* 46)

Here, it can be observed that through these didactic versions of the tales, the Grimms and Perrault tried to establish the phallogocentric notion in their own society, that males should dominate, and women should stay compliant and passive—“[t]he male acts, the female waits” (41). Therefore, the inferior role that these writers assigned to female characters is evident through several techniques: fairy tale tropes, characterisation, and plot patterns.

If we first examine Grimms' version of “Cinderella”, we can immediately see the religious values of the two brothers. First and foremost, the main heroine is made passive and subservient through religion: “[d]ear child, if you're good and say your prayers, our dear Lord will always be with you and I shall look down on you from heaven and always be with you. [...] She was always good and said her prayers” (Grimm 117). It is evident that she fundamentally has to be good, first and foremost, instructed by her faith. Interestingly, nowhere in this version is it mentioned that male characters should follow the teachings of religion. Hence, it could be said that the male authors simply subdue Cinderella's character through didactic narration and exploitation of religion. Furthermore, in this same adaptation, Cinderella is also constricted through submission to her father. From her two other sisters, she is the only one that asks not for jewels or dresses, or

other things associated with femininity, but rather something associated primarily with her father: “‘But you, Cinderella,’ he asked, ‘What do you want?’ ‘Father,’ she said, ‘break off the first branch that brushes against your hat on the way home and bring it to me’” (117). One might think that this showcases not a stereotypical woman but rather a realistic one—a woman who is not necessarily interested in material paraphernalia typically associated with or attributed to women. However, in the Grimms’ version of this tale, Cinderella’s father is alive, but seemingly does not have a perfect relationship with his daughter: “‘[d]on’t you have another daughter?’ ‘No,’ said the man, ‘there’s only puny little Cinderella, my dead wife’s daughter, but she can’t possibly be the bride’ (121). It is evident here that the father does not even call Cinderella his daughter. Therefore, it could be said that in some way, Cinderella is tied to the unloving father figure, but since he does not truly love her, it becomes more of a trap than a relationship. She is internally forced to be a submissive daughter, because “[i]f she fails the obedience test, she is punished” (*The Art of Subversion* 41). Moreover, with another trope of the Magical Helper, Cinderella in the Grimms’ version is rendered passive through the use of the bird sitting on the olive tree: “Three times a day Cinderella went and sat under it, and wept and prayed. Each time a little white bird would also fly to the tree, and if she made a wish, the little bird would toss down what she had wished for” (118). This trope limits the female characters’ agency. In other words, this means that her success depends on external forces rather than her own achievements.

In the case of Perrault’s version, just like the Grimms’ story, Cinderella has no say in the Prince’s choice because of a sense of female passivity and lack of agency in the tale. Throughout the story, there is almost no mention of Cinderella’s independent feelings. The readers never find out whether the heroine actually loves the Prince. However, on the other hand, we know that the Prince has feelings, and he also has the power to choose the wife for himself:

“[...] he must surely be deeply in love with the beautiful girl to whom it belonged. [...] a few days later the Prince had an announcement made [...] that he would marry the person whose foot the slipper fitted”—“the fitting into the shoe is viewed as a trap rather than a triumph” (Perrault 138; May-Ron 149). Cinderella is chosen as a wife, rather than entering into the marriage by mutual consent, choice, and love. Additionally, in Perrault’s version, as opposed to the Grimms’ one, the magic, rather than religion, limits Cinderella. “Her godmother told her that she must take care, above all else, not to be out later than midnight [...]” (134). Not only does Cinderella not achieve success and love by herself with the same trope of the Magical Helper, but she also becomes restrained by such help. Furthermore, at the end of Perrault’s “Cinderella”, there is “The Moral of the Tale” that posits:

But that is not enough, unless you know
How best to use such precious gifts: you need
A godfather or godmother to show
What you must do in order to succeed.

(Perrault 141)

It is apparent from this “Moral” that readers, especially women, are taught to have some other person that would help the women succeed. This insinuates that they cannot achieve anything without an external source.

Conversely, in feminist revisionist versions of Cinderella, the passivity and lack of agency as well as the trope of the Magical Helper are either questioned, ridiculed or subverted. A good example of such a reimagination of “Cinderella” is “The Tale of the Shoe” in Emma Donoghue’s book *Kissing the Witch*. Here, instead of being reliant on the supernatural helper, such as a godmother or a bird from an olive tree, Cinderella has agency to make decisions for herself: “[n]obody made me do the things I did, nobody scolded me, nobody punished me but me”; “And then, because I asked, she took me to the ball” (2). It is evident that in Donoghue’s version, Cinderella has full liberty to choose her own fate. She is also characterised as a more complex character rather than a two-dimensional one, because even if no one controls her or limits her actions, Cinderella does so herself. Perhaps, in a way, Donoghue still wanted to keep a hint of internalised oppression against women present in our society: “I could hardly hear him. The voices [in my head] were shrieking yes yes yes say yes before you lose your chance you bag of nothingness” (7). Secondly, the figures that oppressed Cinderella in the version by the Grimms and Perrault are either absent (the father) or are not taken seriously (the Prince): “I had barely time to wipe my mouth before the prince came to propose. Out on the steps he led me, under the half-full moon, all very fairy-tale. His long moustaches were beginning to tremble; he seemed like an actor on a creaking stage” (6). It can be observed that Donoghue eliminates any external factors that could get in the way of Cinderella’s freedom. Rather, Cinderella herself is the only one that might be limiting her—a realistic and complex experience for many people.

Additionally, in another revisionist text, “Petronella” by Jay Williams, the author puts the main female protagonist into a society that is no less oppressive than the real world or the Grimms’ and Perrault’s tales. However, Williams’s reimagining of the princess is even more evident,

because her brave, self-reliant, and assertive figure is contrasted with the marginalising world in “Petronella”:

‘If you think,’ she said, ‘that I’m going to sit at home, you are mistaken.

I’m going to seek my fortune, too.’

‘Impossible!’ said the king.

‘What will people say?’ cried the queen.

‘Look,’ said Prince Michael, ‘be reasonable, Pet. Stay home. Sooner or later a prince will turn up here.’”

(qtd. in Zipes, *Don’t Bet on the Prince* 55)

In contrast with Donoghue’s tale, Williams’s main heroine is still oppressed but no less determined and resilient. Furthermore, the Magic Helper here is a man, rather than a woman. The old helper is not omniscient or omnipotent, so Petronella must do most of the work to pursue the Prince on her own. Besides, the Prince is the one that is portrayed as dependent, shallow and passive: “[w]ould you mind stepping aside? I’m trying to get a suntan and you’re standing in the way”; “[The Prince] stayed on, and on, and on. I didn’t like to be rude to a guest and I couldn’t just kick him out. I don’t know what I’d have done if you hadn’t dragged him away” (56; 59). In this partial reimagination of “Cinderella”, the roles of women and men are switched, and we get to see men as helpers, not only antagonists (the old helper), but also as characters who embody all of the negative traits usually attributed to female protagonists.

Moreover, other tropes usually present in fairytales, especially “Cinderella”, are the Wicked (Older) Woman and Marriage as Conclusion. Both of these narrative conventions pit women in the fairy tale against each other. Additionally, the marriage as conclusion also adds to the commodification of the heroine as well as usually leaving other women secondary. Therefore, in the end, one woman is left less happy than another. In the Grimms’ version, one could say that even though the Prince and Cinderella do marry at the end of the fairy tale, it can hardly be called a happy ending. This is because throughout the story, readers observe the possessive and intrusive behaviour of the Prince: “Whenever anyone came and asked [Cinderella] to dance, [the Prince] would say: ‘She is my partner’”; “[...] he wanted to find out about the beautiful girl’s family. But she managed to slip away from him and bounded into a dovecote. The Prince waited until Cinderella’s father arrived and told him that the strange girl had bounded into the dovecote” (Grimm 119). It could seem that Cinderella just wants to escape from the Prince. This again puts the heroine into a passive position and the male character into a pursuing, active, and dominating role. Without a word about her feelings for the Prince from Cinderella, the more perceptive audience might be questioning whether the ending is actually positive when the main female character has been treated like an object that could be had and possessed. Furthermore, the sisters as well as the stepmother are portrayed as evil and manipulative. The sisters take away Cinderella’s beautiful clothes and the stepmother promises to allow the heroine to go to the ball with impossible conditions, and at the end Cinderella still has to sneak out with the help of the bird. This suggests that women are supposed to compete with one another to win a man.

Similarly, in Perrault’s version, the sisters with their mother are characterized as either sly or shallow: “[Cinderella’s] father was completely under the thumb of his wife”; “[the sisters] could talk of nothing but what they were going to wear” (130, 131). Moreover, the other women are

portrayed as anxious and insecure, comparing themselves to Cinderella during the ball: “All the women were studying her hair and her dress, so that next day they could look the same themselves” (134). Just like the Grimms, Perrault pits women against one another in the pursuit of the ultimate reward: a man. This suggests that women’s interactions, and even their lives, are centred around men, who become the cause of their rivalries. In the end, a gender-biased, didactic contrast is created between good and obedient Cinderella and evil sisters and the stepmother.

Interestingly, in revisionist versions, the tropes of Marriage as Conclusion and the Wicked (Older) Woman are either completely removed, mocked or quite vividly subverted. For example, in Anne Sexton’s poem *Cinderella*, the idea of a ball, to which the female characters go to win over the Prince, is ridiculed: “Next came the ball, as you all know. / It was a marriage market”. It is evident that Sexton acknowledges the absurdity and unfairness of women being rated, chosen, and then possessed by a man. They do not really have a say in such “transactions”. A woman is either chosen by the Prince or not. Additionally, regarding the marriage-as-happy-ending trope, in Donoghue’s “The Tale of the Shoe”, instead of marrying the Prince, the heroine ends up with her godmother: “How could I not have noticed she was beautiful?”; “I threw the other shoe into the brambles, where it hung, glinting. So then she took me home, or I took her home, or we were both somehow taken to the closest thing” (7–8). It could be observed that in this feminist version the heteronormative ideas that are persistent in popularized versions of “Cinderella” are questioned and disrupted and Cinderella is given much freedom for self-discovery. A happy ending does not have to be marriage, and also not necessarily with a man. And lastly, in relation to both tropes, in Judith Viorst’s little poem, “... And Then the Prince Knelt Down and Tried to Put the Glass Slipper on Cinderella’s Foot”, the happy ending with a wedding is removed altogether and there are no other female characters to rival with. The speaker, Cinderella, has enough liberty and agency to

change her mind about the Prince and the marriage, and to portray him as a mundane figure—not perfect, but rather one who might not be a good partner for everyone, at least, definitely not for the persona of the poem. Also, because Cinderella plans to lie about the slipper, she is also characterized as a simple human being with her own flaws and vices. It could be said that such characterization does not pressure the female character and the young readers to be perfect and to be liked:

I really didn't notice that he had a funny nose.

And he certainly looked better all dressed up in fancy clothes.

He's not nearly as attractive as he seemed the other night.

So I think I'll just pretend that this glass slipper feels too tight.

(Viorst qtd. in Zipes, *Don't Bet On The Prince* 73)

In conclusion, the tales discussed in this essay overturn the traditional tropes we know so well, from passive damsels to villainous stepmothers, granting female characters, and readers, the ending they deserve. Instead of reinforcing narratives where women are constrained by societal expectations, these stories allow their protagonists to reclaim agency, independence, and choice. By reversing familiar patterns, they show that strength and bravery can coexist with femininity, and that women are not merely obstacles or prizes in a male-centred journey. As Jack Zipes reminds us, “We tend to forget the tales in which women are strong, intelligent, and brave, and outwit men” (*From Enchanted Forests* 94). These modern retellings do not just subvert old

conventions—they offer a celebration of women’s autonomy, reshaping fairy tale endings into ones where freedom and empowerment are finally possible.

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**Locating Gender: How Setting and Community Impact Gender Expression In
Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby***

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Department of English Undergraduate Awards (3rd Year)

Highly Recommended

Queer kinship provides a safe space for those whose gender identity diverges from their assigned sex at birth. Without the backbone of a community, queer people are often misunderstood by cisgender or heterosexual individuals and, in some instances, become victims of hate crimes. To exist as a visibly queer person is socially challenging in the sense that “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on [...] social norms” (Butler 2). The “social norms” Butler mentions refer to societal gender expectations as “norms are what govern ‘intelligible’ life, ‘real’ men and ‘real’ women. And that when we defy these norms, it is unclear whether we are still living, or ought to be, whether our lives are valuable, or can be made to be, whether our genders are real, or ever can be regarded as such” (Butler 206). This hesitation and disregard for queer identities is the unfortunate reason many individuals tone down their true gender expression or remain closeted. This suppression of identity is created by an outside force and can therefore be prevented with a change in setting. Community, for queer people, has the ability to allow individuals to fully express themselves in a safe environment, as the addition of love and understanding enforces a notion of self-acceptance. In Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch*

Blues and Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby*, the setting and community, or lack thereof, directly impact the gender expression of characters Jess and Amy. Their gender identity remains constant while their location alters their ability to comfortably present themselves accordingly. With the use of Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*, I will examine how Jess and Amy present themselves in spaces where they are either wanted or unwelcome.

In *Stone Butch Blues*, the character of Jess experiences discomfort visualising her gender expression in heteronormative settings. The lack of other queer individuals and the heteronormative climate in her high school restrict Jess from feeling comfortable in her masculinity. This environment produces an element of shame as the individuals around Jess ridicule her masculine attributes. Jess is often taunted and harassed by her peers. She describes one instance: "As I walked through the high school corridor a group of girls squealed as I passed, 'Is it animal, mineral, or vegetable?' I didn't fit any of their categories" (Feinberg 24). Jess' association with gender queerness isolates her from the heteronormative community around her, leaving her feeling vulnerable. They believe her "gender seems at odds with [her] sex ([her] apparent masculinity or androgyny is at odds with [her] supposed femaleness)" (Halberstam 24). Heteronormative society believes that your gender expression should match the sex you were assigned at birth, and they become distrustful of those who reject their notions of gender roles. Jess attempts to conform to their standards when she wears a dress to school (Feinberg 46) after previously detailing her distaste for dresses: "My mother had been informed that I could no longer attend temple unless I wore a dress, something I fought tooth and nail" (Feinberg 16). Therefore, her decision to wear a dress to school had little to do with her own comfort and entirely to do with the ostracisation her masculinity is met with. The incentive to belong is damaging to both her mental and her physical well-being as her fellow students verbally and sexually abuse her due to

their bigoted ideology. Her discomfort is palpable when she states: “I made a vow to myself before I fell asleep. I promised myself I would never wear a dress again,” (Feinberg 59). Jess’ ignorant fellow students create a hostile and claustrophobic environment where she feels she must attempt to adapt to their ideals or make herself smaller. She goes as far as to state she felt “imprisoned in these halls” (Feinberg 53). This imprisonment refers both to her inability to leave the location and lack of freedom in gender expression, as it is crucial to acknowledge that Jess’ gender runs deeper than a surface-level performance. Gender is an integral part of her personhood. Similar to others who diverge from the cisgender “ideal”, their gender expression is imperative to their survival: “To say, however, that gender is performative is not simply to insist on a right to produce a pleasurable and subversive spectacle but to allegorize the spectacular and consequential ways in which reality is both reproduced and contested” (Butler 30). Butler describes the pitfalls of misjudging the gravity of a person’s gender identity. The idea that gender is a choice or exists as a superficial trait that someone may successfully suppress is responsible for the criminalisation and harsh treatment of gender non-conforming people. This ideology encourages Jess’ peers in their ridicule of her gender expression. Her self-perception suffers under the influence of their mistreatment and ill-informed judgement; she states that “whatever the world thought was wrong with me, I finally began to agree they were right” (Feinberg 23). Jess’ high school peers discourage her from embracing her masculine identity and leave her feeling insecure and alone. The heteronormative setting and lack of queer community negatively affect Jess’ gender expression due to a lack of both safety and comfort.

In the location of the gay bar, “Tifka’s”, Jess is able to embrace her masculinity and develop her butch identity. The queer community within the bar rejects heteronormativity and welcomes expressions of gender queerness. Jess is exposed to individuals presenting themselves in ways she

had always envisioned for herself. Specifically, her introduction to Butch Al leaves a remarkable impact on her: “It happened in a flash, but a glimpse of this woman had floored me. Butch Al was a glance at power, a memory I was afraid to hang onto and afraid to let go of” (Feinberg 29). In “Tifka’s”, Butch Al is celebrated for all the masculine traits that Jess has been ostracised for. For Jess, Butch Al initiates a revelation that she could exist as her masculine self while still receiving love and community. This realisation gives her the reassurance to accept her nature. Contrary to the high school setting, Jess’ gender queerness within the gay bar contributes to her sense of belonging rather than rejecting it. Butler details the experience of leaving behind an environment that has exceptionally rigid gender rules: “if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred” (Butler 3). One must look elsewhere for gender recognition in order to survive and prosper. Jess’ natural ability to fit in with the lesbian community gives her a sense of belonging that allows her to gain confidence in her butch identity. At last, her internal self-perception begins to manifest in her manner of gender presentation. After Jess is introduced to Butch Al and her femme, Jackie, they act as queer mentors for her:

Al and Jackie groomed me. Literally. Jacqueline gave me haircuts in their kitchen. They took me to get my first sports coat and tie at the secondhand stores. Al combed the racks, pulling out sports coats, one after another. I tried on each one. Jackie would tilt her head, then shake it. Finally, Jackie smoothed my lapels and nodded in approval. Al gave a low whistle of appreciation. I had died and gone to butch heaven! (Feinberg 32)

Jess thrives in an environment where she may express her butch identity. The masculine additions of the sports coat, tie, and haircut bestow a euphoria on Jess in regards to her gender presentation. Throughout this process, Jess' comfort and safety are prioritised by the fellow queer individuals from the bar. The presence of the community in which Jess received through "Tifka's" actively affects her gender expression in a positive manner. This development is integral to Jess' well-being as the community teaches her how to become a butch and, therefore, become comfortable in her skin. In regards to gender identity, Butler states: "The question of who and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge" (215). By educating Jess on what it means to be a butch, Al and Jackie are aiding Jess in the formation and expression of her gender identity. The queer community within the gay bar encourages Jess in the expression of her masculine identity by offering an understanding and accepting environment in which she can thrive. The queer setting, void of heteronormativity, positively affects Jess' gender expression as she gains the confidence and toolset in order to present as masculine as she desires.

In *Detransition, Baby*, the character Amy finds a sense of gender euphoria and escapism when attending the drag store, "Glamour Boutique". Here, she is able to freely express her femininity due to the encouragement of the trans individuals working in the store. In particular, Amy's exposure to Jen, a trans woman, enacts both awe and envy as she observes her ability to perform femininity: "Jen was obviously a true transsexual. Amy had never met a trans girl in person, and her fascination with Jen bordered on painful. Look at her. She looks like a girl. She sounds like a girl" (Peters 143). In Jen, Amy can visualise the possibility of her own transition. This safe space provided by fellow queer individuals allows Amy to forget society's strict gender rules, if only for a short period of time. Amy feels recognised as a woman, as if she is finally being seen for who she is. The need to be perceived is integral to an individual's self-perception,

especially for those whose identities contrast traditional societal views on gender and sexuality. Butler draws attention to how “if part of what desire wants is to gain recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well” (Butler 2). This specific form of gender recognition is only possible when surrounded by like individuals. Jen is able to perceive Amy properly as she understands the experience of living as a transwoman. Amy feels as if she has found a space where she belongs; among other trans people, she is able to be kinder to herself and decompress. Inside “Glamour Boutique”, Amy’s gender expression is altered in a positive manner as she allows herself to indulge in the feminine clothes and accessories the store has to offer, as well as the female camaraderie that accompanies such activities:

Glamour Boutique got fun after about half an hour. The clerk introduced herself as Jen. As Amy’s jitteriness faded, Jen actually began to help Amy with clothes. The sense of women advising each other on outfits, of her inclusion of this feminine rite, nearly overwhelmed Amy. It was more than she could’ve hoped for. Wearing the breast forms and bra, she wanted to try on everything—not just the fetish clothes, items she’d only ever seen online—but simple dresses as well (Peters 140).

The location provides Amy with a chance to explore femininity first-hand. This development in Amy’s gender expression is significant, as an individual’s gender identity is something that causes great discomfort when not effectively expressed. Society’s enforcement of gender norms is especially damaging to trans individuals. Butler acknowledges this: “these norms produce distress and discomfort, whether they impede one’s ability to function, or whether they generate sources of suffering” (95). These rigid gender norms have prevented Amy from presenting as a woman in her everyday life, leaving her with mental anguish and severe bodily discomfort. “Glamour

Boutique” and the trans community within supply Amy with a safe space to express her femininity by allowing her to feel normal (for once) and not as if she is an oddity. The inclusive setting benefits Amy’s gender expression in a positive manner, as she is able to present her identity without notions of guilt.

Years later, Amy makes the decision to detransition as she believes living as her assigned sex at birth would simplify her life by alleviating social difficulties. This new identity, Ames, is presented at a new job, where she is able to present as a cisgender man with no expectations of external gender turmoil. Ames turns the location of his workplace into an environment where he must suppress his femininity and, therefore, his trans identity. He makes this choice in hopes of creating a safe space for himself, free of harassment and anxiety. However, Ames cannot alter his true identity, no matter the pain it causes him. He describes his motives to his boss and lover, Katrina: “I got sick of living as trans. I got to a point where I thought I didn’t need to put up with the bullshit of gender in order to satisfy my sense of myself. I *am* trans, but I don’t need to *do* trans” (Peters 98). This explanation “implies there is something to ‘being’ trans that is not wholly subsumed by ‘living as’ trans” (Hammes 11). Since Ames associates his experience as a trans woman with ostracisation and cruelty from cisgender society, he believes he can simply present as the masculine Ames, while internally identifying as the feminine Amy. The workplace becomes the origin of the Ames identity and is therefore in direct association with his gender de-evolution. Ames projects the notion of trans expression as a hardship onto his workplace as he makes the decision to hide his true identity out of self-preservation. His gender expression is negatively affected at his place of work with his amplified masculine presentation. It is acknowledged that “three years have passed since Ames stopped taking estrogen” (Peters 14), and all the masculine attributes that were once suppressed came flooding back. Ames is acknowledged as a cisgender man in his office, as his physical presentation and his mannerisms now exhibit masculinity.

Furthermore, the incentive behind presenting as a cisgender man lies solely in Ames' surroundings and the gender norms in which society promotes. The significance of his decision to alter his gender expression lies in the devastating truth that Ames still identifies as a woman internally. This extent of self-suppression leaves queer individuals feeling both shameful and isolated. Butler, in reference to gender queer individuals, states: "I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable" (Butler 4). This mentality mimics Ames' methodology for his detransition, as he also craves recognition of his trans identity yet can no longer stand the way in which he is treated in relation to his queerness. His life as Amy acts as his sincere self, his most accurate presentation in identity: "When Amy transitioned [...] there was just her. She and her body were one in the same. Every sensation simply belonged to her, unmediated" (Peters 316). Whereas, life as Ames exists as a result of the pain inflicted upon Amy. Referring to Amy's pre-transition body as a "dog", Ames reflects on his decision to detransition: "But, without a dog to hurt for her, on her behalf, her life as a woman arrived with pain; pain that had to be endured, withstood, pain that was the same as being alive, and so was without end" (Peters 316). In a way, Ames exists as a way to protect Amy from the world, to keep her safe from both the harsh nature in which she treated herself and the cruelty that society projects onto trans people. Ultimately, Ames' work setting marks the location of his detransition. The office enforces the return of his masculine presentation as he surrounds himself with cisgender colleagues, therefore negatively impacting his gender expression.

In *Stone Butch Blues* and *Detransition, Baby*, Jess and Amy's gender expression is impacted by their setting both positively and negatively. Although their gender identity remains constant internally, the presence of a supportive or harmful environment directly alters their confidence in their gender presentation. The relationship between location and gender brings

attention to the idea of normativity: “normativity refers [to] the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal ‘men’ and ‘women.’” (Butler 206). Both Jess and Amy suffer under this ideology as society enforces an ideal that diverges from their own. In her high school, Jess’ gender expression is negatively affected as the heteronormative setting enforces traditional gender values. Her attempts to feminise herself, wearing dresses and making herself smaller socially, take a drastic toll on her self-perception. Jess’ gender expression recovers when she attends the gay bar, “Tifka’s”. The queer community grants her safety and allows her to gain confidence in her butch identity. Amy has a similar experience in the drag store, “Glamour Boutique”. The trans employees instil her with confidence and visibility, allowing her to fully express her femininity. However, her office job acts as the location for her detransition as she purposefully surrounds herself with a cisgender and heteronormative environment. Amy’s gender expression is negatively affected as she becomes Ames in an effort to protect their trans identity from society’s harsh treatment. Location and community encourage an integral discussion concerning gender expression as they hold the power of either encouragement or discouragement in regards to a queer person’s presentation. While identity is entirely in reference to the individual experience, outside forces impact the manner in which this identity manifests in one’s physical expression. This raises the consequences as the ability to be recognised directly affects a person’s mental and physical well-being. The enforcement of adhering to gender norms proves to be dangerous in its lack of consideration for creating a place in society for anyone who diverges from this norm. Queer people should not be collateral to society’s ideals and gender norms. It is necessary for their identities to not only be acknowledged but also embraced.

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Cumha

Ellen Ní Chonchúir

The Eoin Murray Memorial Prize

Winner

The postage stamp is apple red

(you've never liked the green ones)

tightly trimmed in paper lace

and pressed upon the envelope

I licked

and neatly sealed.

Glue-taste tacky on my tongue—

not like the apple-sweetness

promised to me by the paint—

coats my hands

in sap, in syrup,

warms my skin

where you should be.

Spanish rain is also cold,

and thick with eucalyptus.

The trees stoop slow and low

to offer fruit from bending branches—

so heavy with the orange

weight, the roundness.

All around us

citrus mist

fills the fountain with its freshness,

with its sugar.

And every hour from the gutter

clouds are split in cracks of white,

and the wishes thrown to water

blink and wink

and turn to light.

At night

I leave the window open

to let it breathe hot air

into the room, into the stillness

where I stew

in sounds of traffic,

sounds of men

clinking cobblestones,

their bottles on the brick.

A pigeon split wide open

on the steps—a seagull picks

a seagull pecks

under the streetlamps,

enshrined

in yellowed pools.

I wish that you were here

so I could tell you how I slept,

to watch you drink hot coffee,

burn your tongue,

eat a pastry—

brush from folds of clothes

flakes of butter,

glowing gold

like the sun that falls in strips

across your cheek,

across your lips.

The light that warms your skin,

where I should be.

Problems of Disease: Laying Down the Law in “The (Mis)Adventure of the Dying Detective”

Bláithín Smiddy

Department of English Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year)

Highly Recommended

By the time of his 1913 short story “The Adventure of the Dying Detective”, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was endeavouring to upend the sorely tried-and-tested Holmesian formula in approaches which would only grow more experimental throughout his remaining stories. The mystery of “The Dying Detective” appears to revolve around the reduction of Sherlock Holmes himself to the state of vulnerability of one of his ailing clients – yet the reality, as Holmes slickly reveals it, sidesteps any meaningful transgression of conventions; in fact, its effect is to indulge the inexorability of Holmes’s pre-eminence and stretch the formula more thinly than ever. The “tropical” expert Culverton Smith, set up as Holmes’s double as well as his adversary, is consigned to the butt of Holmes’s joke upon Holmes’s dissolution of his scheme – the latest in a remarkably long line of disillusioned “returned colonials” against which Holmes has triumphed (Doyle, “The Dying Detective” 934; Siddiqi 233). Despite the patterns of return migration between the Commonwealth and metropole that prevailed amongst British settlers and their descendants during

his career, Doyle relentlessly “Others” his returned colonials – to the extent that, in the manner of Smith’s comically ill-proportioned frame, their physicality testifies as strongly as their actions to the stunting effects of liaising with ‘natives’ (233). ‘Official’ and grotesque bodies within the bands of empire defy the black-and-white division of colonial versus native – the native body subjugated by British imperial society is, by the same logic, as fundamental to it as that of the imperialist himself. Without the yardstick of an appropriately segregated “Other”, the “Self” retains no measure of its own superiority – the binary shirks from the truly grotesque imperial body; that of the lower-class, itinerant, colony-bound white (239). This figure – picking up native mannerisms, garb and diseases – exposed class distinctions *within* the ruling stock to be as polarising as those between the illusion of that ‘homogeneous’ ruling class and its colonies (240). The body of the “poor white” is uncanny and grotesque, not because – as in the native body – it deviates from an accepted standard, but because it *undermines the legitimacy of that standard*, and threatens – rather than affirms – the imperial hierarchy. Transgressiveness and grotesqueness defined in these terms emphasise the sense of carnival relative to ‘official’ culture as being not so much its ‘difference’ as its ‘*same difference*’ – ‘official’ culture is unmasked as being as performative and riddled with ironies as its carnivalistic underbelly. Holmes – lauded by his unswerving companion Dr John Watson as “the foremost champion of the law of [his] generation” – routinely criticises his biographer for infusing his accounts with “colour and life” to the obscuration of “that severe reasoning from cause to effect” (Doyle, “The Final Problem” 480; “The Copper Beeches” 317). In practice, however, Holmes devotes a curious amount of his brainpower to ratcheting up the melodrama of his solutions and is not above operating “outside the pale of the law” for the greater good (317). His flair for performance and disguise enables him to submerge himself within the lower classes in the process of defending them. He thrives, too, upon the

unpredictability and subversiveness of his methods – in the minds of friends and foes alike – and craves the unorthodox case that satiates his particular mental cravings over any summons of state; indeed, in the absence of such cases, he resorts to stimulants to escape “the dull routine” of normality (*The Sign of Four* 90). As the metropole at large languishes without actively controlling its colonies, the imperialist detective cannot thrive without ‘Eastern’ criminals to overpower – and, as Smith and other returned colonials wander the peripheries of imperial society, so too does Holmes circumvent the limitations of the ordinary Watsonian gentleman. Liminal figures like Smith draw out the contradictions and ironies inherent in Holmes’s own nature and set his allegiance to the legislation of his “great city” into competition with a more carnivalistic sense of justice (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 693).

“The Dying Detective” opens with Watson – in endeavouring to do justice to Holmes’s impositions upon the saintly Mrs Hudson – stressing the “eccentricity and irregularity” of Holmes’s modus operandi; not least the “singular and often undesirable characters” with which he consorts, contributing to the “atmosphere of violence and danger which [hangs] around him” (932). For Doyle’s purposes, however, this recapitulation of Holmes’s flaws serves as a segue into news of his illness, reminding the reader of the mortal behind the “perfect reasoning ... machine” (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 161). A distraught Mrs Hudson relays to Watson that Holmes “has been working at a case down at Rotherhithe ... and he has brought this illness back with him” (932). London’s East End – a hub of imperial maritime trade notorious for its poverty and overcrowding – brought lifestyles that colonials associated with distant Eastern colonies into discomfiting proximity (Francis). Here, Mrs Hudson seeks to shore up the East-West binary by characterising the event of Holmes’s infection not in relation to its source, but its foreignness to their side of town. As Watson is met with the “deplorable spectacle” that Holmes presents, the averseness of

his reaction – both mentally and physically – hints at an agent at work beyond the frank concern of a friend (932). Holmes’s “gaunt, wasted face” induces “a chill to [the] heart” of Watson; when he endangers himself by approaching the infected man, Watson is “repulsed” by Holmes’s “look of furious anger” (932–3). At Holmes’s “horrible scream” upon seeing Watson handle the contaminated contraption sent by Smith, Watson’s “skin [goes] cold and [his] hair bristle[s]”; this escalates to a “paralysed” state as he catches “a glimpse of *a* convulsed face and frantic eyes” which he cannot even bring himself to name as Holmes’s (934; emphasis added). The true horror of the situation lies not in the sentimental threat to Holmes’s life but in the paroxysms of an alien disorder in an authority presumed untouchable – the condition in question being so medically nebulous yet distinctly Eastern that its biological symptoms shade into physiognomic Orientalist tropes. Watson’s mind compulsively returns to synecdochical signifiers of Holmes’s grotesqueness; he variously references Holmes’s “long”, “thin” and “incessantly ... twitching” hands and fixates above all else upon his “venomous eyes” – the Oriental’s ‘slanted’ eyes being a hallmark of their “Otherness” (932–3). When Watson announces his intention to fetch a specialist, Holmes experiences a momentary “tremendous outflame of energy” and intercepts Watson with a “tiger-spring” – catering not merely to the Western conflation of Eastern man with beast, but also the stereotype of the capricious and crafty Oriental (934). Holmes diminishes into an infantilized, effeminized shadow of his former self; Watson – having earlier told Holmes that “A sick man is but a child, and so I will treat you” – departs to implore Smith’s assistance “full of the image of this magnificent intellect babbling like a foolish child”, and hears in his wake “Holmes’s high, thin voice in some delirious chant” mingling with the womanly “weeping” of Mrs Hudson (933, 936; Shen 7). Watson comes closest to unconsciously acknowledging his biases in his interpretation of Holmes’s fluctuating speech patterns; it is Holmes’s “brutality of speech, so far removed from his

usual suavity” that ultimately determines for Watson “how deep was the disorganization of his mind” (Doyle 935). Hours later, however – despite the fact that Holmes’s “appearance ha[s] changed for the worse” – Watson observes that “the jaunty gallantry of ... speech” of the consummate Briton has not faltered altogether in him; that “To the last gasp he would always be the master” (936). A certain “jaunty” resolve is indeed echoed by the assonance that punctuates Watson’s latter remark – even at Holmes’s lowest point, Doyle is careful not to render his venerated detective irredeemable (936).

Holmes maintains from the story’s outset that it is an obscure “coolie disease from Sumatra” which afflicts him – “a thing that the Dutch know more about than we, though they have made little of it up to date” (933). This assertion frames the metropole as the healthy, robust heart of civilisation – unblemished by even the abstraction of such a base disease – whilst eastward remoteness from London correlates with an increased risk of exposure. The continental Dutch are not quite as pure-blooded – though the disease remains more foreign than familiar to them – whilst its birthplace of Sumatra lies, of course, in the Far East. In an effort to dissuade Watson from examining him and discovering his farce, Holmes reminds him that he is “only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications” – and, whilst spoken from a false position, Holmes’s words ring true at the level of the general practitioner’s powerlessness to reckon with the East’s “strange pathological possibilities” (933–4; Harris 447). In Doyle’s contemporary colonial discourse, differentiation between “exotic” bio-contaminants – be they drug, poison, weapon or disease – could be unduly nominal, and Smith, whose study and weaponization of the disease upon his Sumatran plantation had “some rather far-reaching consequences”, belongs not only to Doyle’s “returned colonial” group but also its subset of the “exotic poisoner” (935; 449). These “medicocriminal” confluences invite analogies of Holmes’s

and Watson's practices of diagnosis and containment – yet it is with specialists like Smith, villainousness aside, that Holmes is indelibly doubled by Doyle (934; 447). As Holmes intimates to Watson, “the man upon earth who is best versed in this disease is not a medical man, but a planter” (Doyle 935). Holmes's ensuing portrait of Smith as “a very methodical person” who – with “the benefit of his unique experience of the disease, the investigation of which has been his dearest hobby” – Holmes “cannot doubt ... could help me” can be read as a parody of the typical Holmesian client's flattery of his own expertise (935).

Watson's reflexive impression of Smith's residence is one “of smug and demure respectability” – nestled amongst “a line of fine houses”, “its old-fashioned iron railings, its massive folding-door, and its shining brasswork” are “All ... in keeping with a solemn butler who appeared framed in the pink radiance of a tinted electric light behind him.” (936) Boasting a refined English blend of old and new-world infrastructure, this idyllic suburban scene disarms Watson – the forthcoming revelation of Smith's true character, however, taints Watson's misjudgement with retrospective irony, doubling down upon the unsettling notion that Holmes's successful detection of an ‘Eastern’ miscreant hiding in plain sight “in the heart of London” is the exception that proves the rule (939). Indeed, armed only with the wits of the ordinary working man, Watson's “humble name and title d[o] not appear to impress Mr. Culverton Smith” – and Smith's opinion does not improve as, to his “shrill cry of anger”, Watson forcefully enters his study (936–7). It is difficult to pinpoint where Smith's physical abnormalities begin and Watson's heavily Orientalized reading of his features ends; he has “a great yellow face” – the phenomenon of the “Yellow Peril” being current in Europe – that is “coarse-grained and greasy”, which, together with his “heavy, double-chin” and “tufted and sandy brows”, amount to a wildly unkempt appearance (937; Hashimoto 53). Smith's “two sullen, menacing gray eyes” – “glar[ing]” belligerently at Watson – reflect the

Orientalized eyes of Holmes right down to their colour (Doyle 937). The singular image of “a small velvet smoking-cap poised coquettishly” upon the “pink curve” of Smith’s “high bald head” invokes the West’s feminisation of the East and stock figure of the Eastern temptress (937; Shen 7). Watson concludes his assessment with a caricatured contrasting of Smith’s “skull ... of enormous capacity” with his “small and frail” body, “twisted in the shoulders and back like one who has suffered from rickets in his childhood” (937). Smith boasts the head of a schemer, no doubt – yet his body, struggling to outgrow its childhood form, handicaps and regresses him; Watson refers to him cavalierly thereafter as “the little man” (937). Paradoxically, the “Otherness” that Smith’s grotesqueness *signifies* is framed as a consequence of his adult residence in Sumatra. The text forgets itself, subconsciously ascribing a backwards inevitability to Smith’s fate – the East’s influence becomes so fundamentally altering, its construal of ‘rational’ time so loose and mythic, that Smith’s Eastern present glimmers through his Western past.

Upon informing Smith that Holmes is “desperately ill”, Watson is met with a mirror’s reflection of Smith’s “malicious and abominable smile” – yet when Smith spins abruptly to face Watson, his features express “genuine concern” (937). Watson attributes the change to “some nervous contraction” – as with Holmes, the Orientalized Smith is ‘two-faced’ and volatile (937). Smith proceeds to confront the text’s doubling of himself and Holmes by metaphorically equating their roles:

“‘[Holmes] is an amateur of crime, as I am of disease. For him the villain, for me the microbe. There are my prisons,’ he continued, pointing to a row of bottles and jars ... ‘Among those gelatine cultivations some of the very worst offenders in the world are now doing time.’” (937; Harris 448)

Surprised by Watson's communication that Holmes believes Smith to be "the one man in London who could help him", Smith "start[s]" and his "jaunty smoking-cap slid[es] to the floor" (937). The smoking-cap's roots as a Turkish invention appropriated by Victorians – taken in conjunction with Watson's earlier pertinent use of "jaunty" to extol the Britishness of Holmes's speech – steep the image in the uncanny cultural fallout of a crumbling East-West divide (937). Watson attempts to salvage Holmes's racial and social status in Smith's eyes by specifying that Holmes's interactions with diseased Chinese sailors in the East End's docklands were strictly for the purposes of "some professional inquiry" (937). Smith concludes their meeting, however, by unconsciously underpinning the similarities between himself and Holmes's predispositions; "I very much resent any interruption to my work, Dr Watson, but this case is certainly exceptional. I will come with you at once." (938) Dispense with the honorific and such a sentiment could just as readily be attributed to the detective himself.

When Watson returns to Baker Street to await Smith's arrival, he finds, "To my enormous relief", that Holmes's condition has "improved greatly" (938). Yet the good doctor's criteria for improvement are curiously non-physiological – he is quick to qualify his assessment by noting that "[Holmes's] appearance was as ghastly as ever" (938). The crux, for Watson, lies in "all trace of delirium ha[ving] left him"; though "it is true" that he speaks in a "feeble" pitch, his words are inspired "with even more than his usual crispness and lucidity" (938). As Holmes himself puts it in "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone", "I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix." (1014) For Watson, the quality and rationality of Holmes's speech – as evidence of his

sterling Britishness to the core and fitness for his special duty – overwrites the narrative implied by his grotesque exterior. In debriefing Watson following his discussion with Smith, Holmes queries:

“‘Did he ask what ailed me?’

‘I told him about the Chinese in the East End.’

‘Exactly!’” (938)

Here, Watson, however incidentally, cuts the middleman – the disease as a metaphor for Eastern contagion – out of the picture, and instead the Eastern vagrants *themselves* are figured as being Holmes’s problem. Once Smith arrives at the scene, Holmes panders to his gloating so as to trick him into confessing to the murder of his nephew, Victor Savage, which, using the language of imperialism, Smith as good as does. His imagery of “an out-of-the-way Asiatic disease in the heart of London”, felling “a strong, hearty young fellow” in his prime, warns of the spread of a detrimental infection born out of dealings with Eastern colonies (939). Yet Smith’s remark that it is “very surprising” that Savage should have contracted it – meant as a glib vaunting of his handiwork for Holmes’s benefit – bears greater significance than he ascribes to it; the fact that it is “very surprising” testifies to such a disease’s *failure* to circulate within such a story (939; Harris 460). Ultimately, Smith infects Savage alone, and manually at that – with this singularity serving as Holmes’s key to identifying the culprit; his mimicking of its unique symptoms, his key to drawing that culprit out. To expedite the project of state-sponsored containment, which he assigns to his detective, Doyle fine-tunes every minute movement that Holmes – and, indeed, his

adversaries – make; yet this runs the risk of exposing its artificiality such that it undermines its own credibility (Harris 460).

The perfunctory *dénouement* of “The Dying Detective” sees Doyle’s agenda begin to erode its dramatic quality. Holmes’s voice sinks “to an almost inaudible whisper” as he manoeuvres the unwitting Smith into signalling the police before unveiling his deception by breaking into “his natural voice” (940). Watson rejoices, Smith – suddenly the weakling of the scenario with the “dry, rasping” voice – finds that himself and Holmes’s dynamic has been reversed, and the story’s temporarily topsy-turvy world rights itself with alarming haste (940). Though Holmes has concluded his performance, he dispenses with none of his theatricality as his waiting policeman approaches right on cue – “Halloa! halloa! Do I hear the step of a friend?” – following which:

“... the door opened, and Inspector Morton appeared.

‘All is in order and this is your man,’ said Holmes.

The officer gave the usual cautions.

‘I arrest you on the charge of the murder of one Victor Savage,’ he concluded.” (940)

Judged against the conventional Holmesian *dénouement*, this truncated exchange strikes some rather parodic notes – “All is in order” to such an extent that Doyle feels no need to actually relate those “usual cautions” which the faithful reader will long have been subjected to; yet the effect of this is to rupture the artistic integrity of the story *as a story* that accordingly lacks the self-awareness to outline its own events (940). Holmes breezes through his final explications,

reassuring Watson that his puppeteering of him was owing to – in his archetypal British frankness – “dissimulation find[ing] no place” amongst his “many talents”. The detective himself, it seems, escapes such assessment, treading the fine line of channelling the duplicity of the “Other” into a just cause without ever straying too far (941).

Holmes puts “The Dying Detective” to rest with the knowledge that “a very satisfying effect” has resulted from the “pretence I have carried out with the thoroughness of the true artist” (941). Yet so very self-satisfactorily thorough is it that there emerges “something ... which mar[s] its perfect beauty” (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 733). As Holmes “chuckle[s]” his way through a pontification to Watson about how Smith – and indeed, Watson himself – could hardly have failed to fall for his scheme, Watson is not alone in any resentment he may harbour (940). For the reader, it is as though the text is attempting to play them (and itself) for a fool – it deridingly dismisses the presence of an Eastern threat that has up until that point invaded its every corner. As Doyle concentrates on debunking this threat in the world beyond his story, the story itself slips from under his nose into that same uncanny territory which is so abhorrent to the officials of the empire. His air-tight plots may seal up Eastern symptoms in fiction, but they fall short of selling containment as a real-world possibility – and, moreover, of isolating the essence of Holmes himself from that of the ‘unofficial’ agents against which he is matched (Harris 463). Even his celebrated career has seen instances where “I have done more real harm by my discovery of the criminal than ever he had done by his crime. I have learned caution now, and I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my own conscience.” (Doyle, “The Abbey Grange” 646) Watson, as Holmes is so fond of telling him, “see[s], but ... do[es] not observe” – a “champion of the law” Holmes may be, but even his closest companion never quite perceives that he is first and foremost a law unto himself (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 162, “The Final Problem” 480).

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Silent Voices

Morpheas Hadjigeorgiou

The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Highly Recommended

Postcolonial scholarship tends to present J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* as a subversive retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and, more importantly, as a text that exemplarily posits the problem of subalternity in twentieth-century literature. Although Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—the scholar who first defined the subaltern as a subject banished from speech—has only mentioned *Foe* in passing, the novel is pregnant with issues that correspond to the problem of subalternity (27). Coetzee's lucidity and deep destabilising insight are made apparent through a rhetoric that centres the narrative around not one but two subalterns. Subalternisation (by that, we mean the process through which a subject becomes a subaltern) is not only reserved for Friday—a slave whose seemingly endless dwellings in the confines of subalternity are the result of having his tongue violently ripped out of his mouth—but also extends to Susan Barton, a female castaway whose constant efforts to publish her testimonies are continually dismissed by the man who she hoped would help her write them. My plan throughout this essay is to examine

both cases of subalternity respectively to each subaltern's onto-political position in or outside language.

In order to adequately analyse the phenomena that constitute each subaltern in *Foe* as such, we must first begin by examining the subaltern whose conditions allow for brief entries in the world of language. I speak, of course, of Susan Barton, the subaltern-narrator whose only access to language is the text through which she reveals her inner experience to the reader and, therefore, makes herself more decipherable to the analyst than her mute companion Friday does. I say the only access to language because even though she speaks, her words are rarely taken into consideration by the other male characters: "I spoke fervently, I believe, but Crusoe was unmoved" (Coetzee 17). Susan Barton's subalternity is the direct result of her banishment from men's language. In an interesting passage, Barton expresses her inability to write "the truth" and asks for Mr Foe's help: "Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth (I see that clearly, we need not pretend it is otherwise)" (51). The subtle and clandestine depth of this passage can be illuminated and elucidated through its cross-examination with the texts of Martin Heidegger and Hélène Cixous. In his essay "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger establishes the essence of truth as the ability to correspond freely—that is, through speech—with a being, without depriving it of its freedom: "truth is the accordance (homoiōsis) of a statement (logos) with a matter (pragma) [...] The essence of the correspondence is determined rather by the kind of relation that obtains between the statement and the thing [...] *The essence of truth is freedom*" (120, 121, 123). When Susan Barton asks Foe for the "substance [essence] of the truth," the reader must not read her plea matter-of-factly, for a tragedy is signified in her statement, a

muffled cry that mourns her freedom. The freedom to speak is the freedom to engage openly with Being—the freedom to invent subjectivity and relay subjective truth as such.

The loss of freedom for Barton is synonymous with subalternisation, an exclusion from what post-structuralists came to define as phallogocentrism. In her essay “Castration or Decapitation?” Hélène Cixous provides insight into Barton’s subalternisation by reminding the reader that:

woman is said to be [...] outside language [...] she is outside the Symbolic because she lacks any relation to the phallus [...] The phallus, in Lacanian parlance also called the “transcendental signifier”, transcendental precisely as primary organizer of the structure of subjectivity, is what, for psychoanalysis, inscribes its effects, its effects of castration and resistance to castration and hence the very organization of language. (45–6).

Barton’s inability to attain the essence of truth renders subjectivity inaccessible to her; therefore, the prospect of working within men’s language (which was, at the time, the only language in text) becomes, for her, an impossibility. Since speech (logos) is the tool of the free and “the power we wield against death,” it becomes imperative to examine the moments in the novel where Barton’s banishment from speech ensures her non-freedom (Agamben, “On the Limits of Violence” 109). Early on in the book, when Barton is still relaying her account of her experiences on the island, simply and lucidly, she gives a testimony wherein she confesses that Cruso had raped her: “I pushed his hand away and made to rise, but he held me. No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he. But I thought, He has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desire? So I resisted no more but let him do as he

wished” (Coetzee 30). Not only is consent not given, but Barton is unable to voice even the smallest remark of protest. “No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he,” she says (30). But her powerlessness, her lack of strength, we cannot attribute to a mere physical triviality, for man will always deal the deathliest and most powerful blows because he has a “phallus”—the “primary object of the structure of subjectivity” and the sword he “wields against [the] death” of his phallogocentric kingdom which he finds personified in every feminine other (Cixous 46; Agamben 109). In phallogocentrism, there is no space for a woman’s will. A woman’s volition is made to yield to man’s, therefore becoming homogeneous and indistinguishable from it, so that what the woman calls rape, man comes and provides a “corrected” statement which presents the event with the phrase “making love”. This is the cruelty to which the woman subaltern is subjected to; not only is she brutalised, but she is forced to forget her brutalisation and instead recount it as something that “passed between” her and her aggressor (Coetzee 30).

It is important to remember that subalternity for Barton is not a rigid and permanent ordeal. Moments of freedom can be granted to her in contexts wherein she is fortunate enough to engage with more benevolent patriarchs: “One night at dinner—I ate all this time at the captain’s table—he whispered in my ear that he would be honoured if I would consent to pay him a visit in his cabin afterwards, for a glass of cordial. I pretended to take his offer as mere gallantry, and did not go. He pressed me no further, but continued to behave as courteously as before” (Coetzee 42). The dynamic in the nexus of language remains the same, for man is still the sovereign of language. The change, however, consists of asking for consent. This simple asking—something that brutes like Cruso or Foe never took it upon themselves to do—is nothing more but an invitation to language, a place wherein the woman subaltern voices an emphatic and final “no”

and in so doing, de-subalternises herself. Creating and de-creating the subaltern consists of two processes founded in and around the same domain: language. Barton *is* and *is not* a subaltern. Her condition is not one of permanence but one of contingency. She dwells on the threshold between language and non-language, subalternity and non-subalternity, freedom and non-freedom. The sovereign that keeps her out of language is the same as the sovereign that “courteously” admits her in language. His law is a law of contingency, a law solely dependent upon the “mood” of man. Through this power of man’s banishing and including the (subaltern) subject from and into language, the patriarchal imperialist nexus of language opens itself up to the reader as the ontological imperative constitutive of the tyranny of phallogocentrism.

Surprisingly, Barton’s subalternity is perhaps more lastingly subverted through a different, more dubious process than the contingent invitation to language. We must not forget that the narrator is Barton herself, a woman subaltern who, in the very act of writing, manages to transcend subalternity. However, *Foe* is not the work of an archivist. *Foe* is a work of fiction. Its narrator is none other than its author operating through a persona—fictive and imaginary.

Therefore, it becomes difficult to examine whether we can conclusively state that what occurs in the novel is a true de-subalternisation through the act of writing, for as Spivak puts it: “For the secular imagination, that transcendental narrative is just that, a narrative, singular and unverifiable. When it is set to work, it enters the arena of the probable” (23). The de-subalternisation taking place in Susan’s writings cannot be verified outside of fiction but is nevertheless valid in the space of literature. The challenges of writing de-subalternisation are manifold. Subalternity is a concept that has been solidified both in theory and in literature; however, a revolutionary praxis of de-subalternisation is a riddle that remains somewhat unsolved. Writing the subaltern through a subaltern persona is not a work of actuality—that is, it

does not disclose an indubious method of de-subalternisation since it is an experience that cannot be verified outside of literature—but of imagination. Though fiction in this context is definitely of use: “This is why Aristotle said *poiesis*, or making-in fiction, was *philosophoteron*—a better instrument of knowledge—than *historia*—because it allowed us to produce the probable rather than account for that which has been possible” (Spivak 23). As long as literature dares to dream a probable way out of subalternity, it serves a revolutionary purpose. The practice of writing a text that is constitutive of a dream that dreams the de-creation of the subaltern is demonstrative of a hope for the vindication and redemption of those who have been wronged by the tyranny of language and history.

Now that the conditions that make manifest Barton’s subalternity have been brought to the surface, the reader has an adequate understanding of the essence of her narrative, which makes possible the analysis of the other subaltern: Friday. Friday’s inability to speak signifies an element of barbarism to Barton; a sign that bears with it the history of an impenetrable cruelty: “It was no comfort that his mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as some other mutilations are hidden by clothing), that outwardly he was like any Negro” (Coetzee 24). What is particularly distressing about Friday’s scar is that, unlike most other stigmata, the absence of Friday’s tongue renders him completely inaccessible. The most archaic function of logocentrism is that it relays and expresses Being. The knowledge of experience, to know what one (or the other) experiences—is impossible to attain without language. Friday is, therefore, a perpetual enigma. However, Barton recognises a base (not in the insulting sense), primary, and animal desire in Friday: “Friday's desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do too” (146). Barton here is not guessing. Friday has very adamantly expressed, though not through speech, his basic desire towards life: “At daybreak he would set off with his fishing-spear;

returning, he would put his catch down beside the stove, gutted and scaled, and then retire to a far corner of the garden, where he would sleep curled on his side like a cat, or else play over and over again on his little reed flute a tune of six notes, always the same” (27–28). It soon becomes apparent that music is, for Friday, the system in closest proximity to language: “if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music” (96). However, the emotional capabilities of music must not be confused with the deeply illuminative eloquence of language. It is impossible to de-subalternise Friday through song.

By having his tongue cut out of his mouth, Friday has been forever condemned to silence. Therefore, if one ought to think about Friday’s relationship to language, one must closely examine the relationship between language and silence. In a very brief segment of his essay “On Language as Such and On the Language of Man,” Walter Benjamin contemplates the muteness of nature as the essence of nature’s language:

Nature [...] is mute. [...] It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language (though "to endow with language" is more than "to make able to speak"). This proposition has a double meaning. It means, first, that she would lament language itself. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of man—not only, as is supposed, of the poet—are in nature). This proposition means, second, that she would lament. Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language. It contains scarcely more than the sensuous breath; and even where there is only a rustling of plants, there is always a

lament. Because she is mute, nature mourns. Yet the inversion of this proposition leads even further into the essence of nature; the sadness of nature makes her mute. In all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to communicate. That which mourns feels itself thoroughly known by the unknowable. To be named—even when the namer is godlike and blissful—perhaps always remains an intimation of mourning. (72–73)

It is imperative to understand that Benjamin's proposition here is that the speechlessness of nature is a kind of language; more specifically, it is the language of mourning. If we understand Friday's speechlessness to be identical to the language of nature, then his subalternisation becomes easier to comprehend. Friday, deprived of language, can no longer be considered among the rest of men. Friday is without language and more akin to nature than he is to letters and words.

The naturalisation of man, posited as a method of subalternisation, was first proposed as a concept by Giorgio Agamben in his book *The Open: Man and Animal*. In this book, Agamben argues that even though the distinction between man and animal is produced by language, this is not due to language being an inherent biological characteristic of man. Rather, he says, language is “a historical production which, as such, can be properly assigned neither to man nor to animal” (36). In a chapter titled “Anthropological Machine,” the philosopher describes a method through which those in power have utilised the threshold between man and nature as a strategy whereby one category is collapsed into the other:

we have the anthropological machine of the moderns. As we have seen, it

functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus*, or the ape-man. And it is enough to move our field of research ahead a few decades, and instead of this innocuous paleontological find we will have the Jew, that is, the non-man produced within the man, or the néomort and the overcomatose person, that is, the animal separated within the human body itself. (37)

From every perspective, the dismembering of the tongue is what produced within Friday a *Homo alalus*; a man incapable of speech. Since Friday is forced to dwell forever in the muteness of nature, he has become inseparable from it. This also explains Barton's unease over Friday's dwellings in the realms of men:

I shiver as I watch Friday dancing in the kitchen, with his robes whirling about him and the wig flapping on his head, and his eyes shut and his thoughts far away, not on the island, you may be sure, not on the pleasures of digging and carrying, but on the time before, when he was a savage among savages. (Coetzee 93–94)

The term “savage” best signifies the zone of indistinction between the human and the natural that Friday is forced to dwell in. His language, being the language of mourning, the language of nature, provides all the evidence needed to explain Friday's subalternity as a condition that ensures that man's exclusion from language is synonymous with man's exclusion from Being. Through this process, Friday has been animalised in ways that Barton never could have been. His total and irreversible expulsion from speech forces unto him a silence that renders his

consciousness incapable of being the object of any knowledge. His thoughts cannot be penetrated by analysis. One can only assume that since he is mute, he mourns.

However, there is an aspect of language that does not belong to speech. A language that can only transpire in writing. This is the language Jacques Derrida considers in his *Of Grammatology*. Instead of following a tradition of metaphysics which privileges a way of thinking about Being as “presence”, Derrida proposes the trace, which is itself the sign of a lost presence. The absence of Friday’s tongue is a lost presence. The scar in his mouth is the “trace”. In a most surprising turn of events, in his re-colonisation by Foe, Friday is perhaps gifted a new chance: writing, or the language of traces and signs. When we read the final pages of Foe, we must do so with an ambiguous and open mind. On the one hand, a commanding, oppressive tone arrests the text: “Nevertheless, Friday has fingers. If he has fingers he can form letters. Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech” (Coetzee 142). We even sense cruelty because Barton wishes again to protest but cannot access the voice or the strength to do so: “Finding it as thankless to argue with Foe as it had been with Cruso, I held my tongue, and soon he fell asleep” (144). But what if writing is the only way through which Friday can be de-subalternised? Derrida very simply posits the problem as such: “What threatens [logocentrism] is indeed writing” (99). Though the native character of his tongue, his dialect, will never be accessed, Friday finds an exit from subalternity through writing. And is it not Friday’s prospective acquisition of the faculty of writing that Susan Barton passionately envisions when, in the final pages of the book, she writes:

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores

of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (Coetzee 157).

Though we can sense the tone of ambiguity with which the close of the book is written, Foe's assertion that "writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech," must be commended and looked upon more favourably, since writing is the only thing that can save Friday (142). The conclusion of *Foe* presents a paradoxical resolution, one that intertwines emancipation with renewed captivity. While Friday's entry into the language of signs suggests a liberatory possibility, this moment is undercut by the tragic fate of Susan Barton, who is compelled into an unwanted marriage. Her forced union with Foe mirrors the union with Crusoe that she tried to liberate herself from, only the matrimony takes place in a different setting. Thus, the novel's ending does not offer a clean break from subalternity. Both Friday and Barton, in different ways, remain ensnared; Friday by the ambiguities of his role as a "savage" subject in a British-bourgeois household, and Barton by the patriarchal constraints that keep her suspended under the constant pressure of an imminent subalternisation. In this light, *Foe* resists a triumphantly cheap narrative of liberation. Instead, Coetzee chooses to expose the persistent and insidious ways in which power confines its subjects, even in their moments of seeming escape.

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Critical Posthumanism, the Human Condition, and the Issue of Consent in

Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn*

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Department of English Undergraduate Award (2nd year)

Winner

Octavia E. Butler's 1987 science-fiction novel *Dawn* may be said to redefine the human in ambiguous terms as a constructed identity, rather than a concrete biological categorisation, by extracting the human species from the earthly world of its own construction and resituating it in an extraterrestrial posthuman context. The concerns of this essay will be discussed with principal reference to Thorsten Botz-Bornstein's 2012 article on "Critical Posthumanism". In this article, Botz-Bornstein identifies locating "the human in the posthuman" as a primary task of Critical Posthumanism (Botz-Bornstein 20, 22). He notes that in the early nineties, the World Transhumanist Association declared that "humanity will be radically changed by technology in the future" and forecast the possibility of "redesigning the human condition" (Botz-Bornstein 22). This essay aims to analyse the ways in which Butler redesigns, or at least recontextualises, understandings of the human condition in a posthuman sense. Botz-Bornstein asserts that the "posthuman condition" is not restricted to the "replacement of body parts with technological

items” but also concerns “a change of consciousness” affecting “all mental states”, including that of “eroticism”, which is transformed under the epithet of “techno-eroticism” (Botz-Bornstein 23, 24). The issues of human identity and consent in a posthuman, techno-erotic environment are central to Butler’s *Dawn* and will be explored in this essay with relation to anthropocentrism, controlled reproduction in nonhuman animals and the role of coercion in oppression. Lilith’s characterisation as a “traitor” to the human species will also be evaluated in relation to these key issues.

Botz-Bornstein comments that, in principle, “there is no reason to call the posthuman reality "posthuman" because, after all, it is a project led by humans” (Botz-Bornstein 25). Indeed, the posthuman threat to humanity, by way of replacement or interrelation, posed by the nexus-6 replicants in Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (DADES)* is one for which humanity itself is answerable. The same can be said of the cloned Grist Sisters in Larissa Lai’s *The Tiger Flu*, and even the revived dinosaurs of Michael Crichton’s *Jurassic Park*. In comparison, *Dawn* represents the circumvention of human input and the imposition of a transhuman future the human species has not initiated or by other means consented to. The transhuman future represented in *Dawn* is unique in the sense that it is imposed by an observing alien species, the Oankali, and informed by an understanding of the human condition that is alien to mankind’s own self-image. The Oankali are themselves difficult to define or comprehend, and frequently obfuscate the boundaries between alien, animal and machine. Their features are described using various comparisons to familiar nonhuman animals, while their ship, instruments and vehicles are composed of nebulously sentient, expediently adapted organisms, prompting Lilith to ask “what useful tools would they modify human beings into?” (Butler 13, 53, 94, 157, 65). In *Dawn*, even the most humanoid aliens act as biological machines, fulfilling specific, predetermined vocations;

as Nikanj tells Lilith, that as “Dinso”, it was bred to work with her (Butler 91). Against this backdrop of definitional obscurity, the term “human” floats throughout the narrative, set apart by very little except humanity’s own anthropocentric desire to preserve its somewhat intangible identity.

Within the narrative realm of *DADES*, the human is defined relative to the android as a sort of “specialized category of being that has exclusive access to empathy” (Vinci 3). Luba Luft, the replicant opera singer retired by Rick Deckard and Phil Resch, muses that she considers the human “a superior lifeform” by virtue of this empathetic ability (Dick 106). As opposed to the replicants of *DADES*, the alternate, nonhuman lifeforms of *Dawn* are characterised by their extensive additional capabilities, rather than by a comparative lack. These additional abilities include a far greater capacity for emotional exchange and communication, bordering on telepathy (Butler 119, 228). In this sense, the unenhanced human in Butler’s *Dawn* occupies a position of inferiority that is unfamiliar on Earth and even in much science fiction. Botz-Bornstein describes how successive scientific discoveries regarding the nature of our existence, genetics and place in the universe have rendered humanity more cognizant of its relative peripherality, but the “digital revolution” uniquely demonstrates that reality itself is “not a stable platform” and is instead “manipulable, prone to all sorts of combinations and hybridizations” (Betz-Bornstein 23). This instability and potential for hybridisation are explored in *Dawn* as the Oankali grant Lilith additional capabilities, including an “eidetic memory” and the ability to shape her physical environment (and, therefore, reality) at will. These changes set her apart from other humans and render her humanity suspect as a sort of biological cyborg, both “animal and machine” (Haraway 434).

Botz-Bornstein writes that “closely linked to” posthumanism are “ambitions to make life eternal” and comments that “as we understand the body's repair process at the genetic level”, we will be able to “advance the goal of maintaining our bodies in normal function” (Botz-Bornstein 22). Providing exposition in the third chapter, Jdahya tells Lilith that “barring accident”, she’ll live “much longer than a hundred and thirteen years” and spend most of her protracted existence “biologically quite young”, while her children will live “longer still” (Butler 25). This effect is realised through observation and experimentation by the gene-splicing, third-gendered ooloi of the Oankali species, which regard Lilith’s genetic predisposition to malignant cancers as a “talent” rather than a defect, and intend to employ these cells beneficially (Butler 22). In this way, the Oankali represent the fulfilment of distant and futuristic human goals under unexpected terms, exotically hyperbolising mankind’s own scientific interests and technological ambitions.

Transhumanism is a philosophy which advocates the scientific “enhancement of human intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities, the elimination of disease and unnecessary suffering, and the dramatic extension of life span” (Wolfe xiii; Yoo 662). Jihun Yoo writes that the “posthuman subject” is “an entity created out of a transhumanist impulse—an impulse to enhance every aspect of human biology” (Yoo 662). *Dawn* depicts the consummation of a transhumanist impulse originating outside of humanity (which, on its own, is oriented towards self-destruction) and prompts the question, how much can the human being be altered before it ceases to be human? Botz-Bornstein writes that “Critical Posthumanism must be concerned with paradoxes” (Botz-Bornstein 23). Among these, Butler’s *Dawn* yields Theseus’s Paradox, a paradox which explores the relationship between an object’s identity and its components, and the consequences of replacing these components over time. This paradox has been met with various proposed resolutions, none of which are plainly endorsed within Butler’s narrative. Instead, an

ambiguity of definition is permitted to endure. Like Lilith, the reader is entreated to accept the dissolution of conventions and the absence of merciful certainties, as Nikanj assures her that, by no fault of her “intelligence”, she will “never” fully understand the Oankali, no matter how much “more information” she is granted (Butler 125).

Botz-Bornstein reflects on the role of the Western mindset in humanist thinking and finds that “the distinction between humans that have a soul and animals that have no soul does not exist in non-Christian cultures” and, consequently, posthumanism is “received in these cultures with less concern” (Botz-Bornstein 27). The idea that the differences dividing the human from the nonhuman are largely cultural and belief-based rather than objective or meaningful is relevant to *Dawn* and its posthuman view of humanity as it gradually corrodes the boundaries between human, alien, animal, and machine.

Dawn foregrounds parallels between the treatment of humans by the Oankali and the treatment of nonhuman animals by humanity that imbue its neo-colonial narrative with additional critiques of speciesism and human dominion on Earth. It establishes that the Oankali possess a supernatural intelligence and generational memory that vastly exceeds that of mankind, placing them in a position of intellectual superiority. This superiority grants them a claim to authority in terms of acting in the interest of humanity, even when this interest is at odds with the wishes of individuals among the human species, aligning with precedents set by humanity in their dealings with nonhuman animals. The oppressive nature of this dynamic is outlined during moments in which Lilith feels trapped, violated or otherwise distressed. She explicitly notes the ways in which humans have breached the bodily autonomy of nonhuman animals on Earth, saying “we did things to them—inoculations, surgery, isolation—all for their own good. We wanted them healthy and

protected—sometimes so we could eat them later” (Butler 35). If the humans in *Dawn* are thus understood as occupying the role of livestock on Earth, the invading Oankali are rendered a mirror to humanity, and criticism of the alien is effectively transmuted into criticism of mankind. The vegetarian diet promoted by the Oankali contributes to this reading of the text, as this detail encourages consideration of alternative modes of living that do not necessitate animal agriculture. Butler’s analogous descriptions also extricate the circumstantial position of humanity on Earth from any potential definition of the human condition, as the human is removed from any self-secured seat of judgement and placed in the unfavourable position of inferiority and vulnerability typically assigned to nonhuman animals.

Botz-Bornstein describes the concept of “sensus communis”, introduced by Immanuel Kant in Section 20 of his *Critique of Judgment*, as the human ability to judge according to the same “feeling”, particularly in the realm of aesthetics, wherein judgements are often both subjective and universal (Botz-Bornstein 25). He writes that these aesthetic judgements are deemed “transcendentally valid” through “paradoxical sensus communis” (Botz-Bornstein 25). The unanimous human aversion to the aliens in *Dawn* can be understood in this fashion, as a subjective but transcendentally universal human experience. By this reasoning, the coercion and assault of individuals by the Oankali may be seen as a broader assault of the human species, which expresses clear and invariable abhorrence at alien “crossbreeding” (Butler 44). However, human rejection of the Oankali can also be seen as a new but unexceptional fear of the Other, characterised narratively by Lilith as a “true xenophobia”, which may, and must be overcome, to ensure the survival of humanity in whatever sense it may continue to exist (Butler 24).

Botz-Bornstein refers to Gregory Stock's *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism*, and his assertion that the "progressively deepening union between humans and machines is symbiotic" and will eventually develop into a "planetary creature" (Stock 53, 60; Botz-Bornstein 24). The Oankali, as advanced biological machines, epitomise this assertion. They describe a commitment to a mutually beneficial exchange or "trade" that is as fundamental to them as the human body's commitment to breathing (Butler 45). The threat of this trade lies in the promise that humanity "will change" and become hybridised in the process (Butler 44). When asked, "what will our children be?" Jdahya admits only that they will be "different" (Butler 45). Explaining the trade, he describes the exchange of "genetic material" as an exchange of the Oankali's own "essence" (Butler 43). This understanding of genetics as the "essence" of a species suggests that the loss of human identity associated with assimilation into another species should be well understood by the Oankali, and likely is (Butler 43). The division of the Oankali on board the ship into distinct groups, some of which will have "no direct contact with humans", suggests a relative desire for partial preservation of the species in its present state, where this option is denied to mankind (Butler 37, 91). Botz-Bornstein, referencing Katherine Hayles, describes how "bioengineering" establishes "a posthuman body", but the "coupling" of "human cognition" to "machinery" is what makes the construction of "posthuman beings" possible (Hayles 3; Botz-Bornstein 23). This understanding of the posthuman subject suggests an optimistic sense in which the human mind or soul can continue to exist within a hybridised physical body. Two questions thereby arise as to whether or not Lilith's mental sense of her own humanity is a sufficient qualifier, and, if so, is openness to enhancement humanity's only hope for survival in a posthuman world? Butler's *Dawn* appears to stress the need for adaptation in a technologically changed environment, and points to the affirmative in both cases.

The issue of consent is omnipresent in the novel, developing in nuance as the plot unfolds. At the time of Lilith's introduction to the Oankali, she feels utterly powerless, and observes that "her flesh could be cut and stitched without her consent or knowledge" (Butler 5). She also notes that "cooperation" is "her only currency" (Butler 7). Later, having met Nikanj, she directly accuses it and the Oankali as a whole of employing coercion to ensure human cooperation (Butler 91). The issue of consent becomes ever more relevant as Lilith develops an understanding of her role in the Oankali's plan for humanity, a role she does not want or choose, except in refusing a singular opportunity to commit suicide at the start of the novel (Butler 46). She personally identifies her role as that of a "Judas goat", a farmed animal selected and trained to lead others of its kind to slaughter, and rebels against this role by entreating her fellow humans to "learn and run" (Butler 172, 132). In this sense, Lilith cannot possibly be considered a "traitor" as, despite having been coerced to act in the interests of the Oankali, she passionately defies them in ways that are feasible and productive. Her lack of recklessness and patience in the absence of opportunity are simple indicators of her intelligence and experience, which, regrettably, reflect negatively in the eyes of her uninitiated human companions.

While many of Lilith's capitulations can be understood as battles judiciously avoided in the greater fight for humanity's independence, others can be understood in terms of her experiences as a victim of isolation, oppression and coercion. Lilith's ultimate controversial act, "stripping naked on the battlefield to lie down with the enemy," is understandably perceived as betrayal by observing humans, but in reality reflects a condition of grief and isolation as she attempts to heal her only remaining companion on the Oankali ship (Butler 265). Notably, earlier in the text, Lilith realises that she has been intentionally led to spend most of her time with Nikanj, as the Oankali

correctly anticipate the formation of a traumatic bond in the absence of human company, a plot she calls “manipulative” (Butler 80).

Understandings of the Oankali in terms of the oppressive dynamic between humans and nonhuman animals, with particular relation to controlled reproduction, are especially relevant to the issue of consent. Lilith refers to the Oankali’s plans as a “captive breeding programme” and identifies herself as a “nearly extinct animal” (Butler 94, 67). She once again details the ways in which humans have neglected consent in their dealings with nonhuman animals, including “forced artificial insemination”, “surrogate motherhood”, and “the implantation of unrelated fertilised eggs”, often succeeded by the emotional distress of separation from offspring at birth (Butler 67). Parallels between the intrusive intermediary role of the ooloi in human reproduction and the intermediary role of the human veterinarian or scientist in the controlled breeding of nonhuman animals likewise become apparent, especially as Nikanj assures Lilith that its motivations do not include sexual attraction, but rather an intense biological fascination with the human species and the desire to ensure “good, viable” genetic mixes (Butler 91, 116, 173, 43).

Botz-Bornstein quotes British writer J.G. Ballard as having expressed that “organic sex, body against body, skin area against skin area, is becoming no longer possible” as the “overlay of new technologies” extends throughout human life and alters “the interior design of our sexual fantasies” (Barber 157; Botz-Bornstein 24). The interference of the Oankali in human reproduction can also be understood, in this sense, as a futuristic, techno-erotic alteration of human relations that makes mankind dependent on the machine as a neutral third party.

Botz-Bornstein's article stresses the crucial dichotomy between reality and virtual reality in a posthuman context, the latter of which "represents the idea of a nonphysical space enabling man to grasp the world as a whole" (Botz-Bornstein 25). He asserts that the "technological" means by which mankind's desire to experience all of reality "immediately" is fulfilled inadvertently creates a "second hand reality" that "closely resembles a narrative" (Botz-Bornstein 26). In the very first chapter, Lilith realises that her ability to ascertain her own reality is greatly restricted. Having been kept "ignorant", she decides that reality is whatever she perceives (Butler 1). Having finally freed her from this state of informational deprivation, the Oankali induce Lilith to accept an implausible alien reality that substitutes her own natively perceived reality and exceeds what she is capable of discerning using her own human senses. Later, Lilith reflects that in order to "keep her sanity", she learned to accept things "as she found them, adapting herself to new circumstances by putting aside the old ones" (Butler 148). This ability to accept second-hand information, both verbal and sensory, is not a coping mechanism instilled into the newly Awakened humans in Lilith's charge, and therefore not something they are capable of sympathising with. As a result, her acceptance of the Oankali's contended reality is unfairly misinterpreted as allegiance.

Further complicating the concerns of the text, the Oankali have a psychoanalytic ability to interpret the subconscious desires of their human captives, and this ability is accepted by Lilith by the time she chooses to sleep with Joseph in a state of unconsciousness (Butler 191). This decision, which clearly contradicts human understandings of consent, means that she is not a blameless heroine. However, her actions do not render her a "traitor" either, when understood in the context of her conditioning by the Oankali and the virtual simulacrum of reality she has been groomed to accept.

To conclude, Butler's *Dawn* poses a future in which anthropocentrism is upended, and humanity is subjected to the treatment of nonhuman animals on Earth. In this posthuman context, the Oankali represent the fulfilment of transhuman goals of scientific, genetic and technological enhancement, and the consequential blurring of definitional lines. This blurring points to an understanding of the human as an ambiguous, constructed identity, rather than a distinct biological categorisation. This essay finds that the issue of consent is explored in a nuanced manner, as complicated by humanity's own scientific pursuits and the potential for future technological interference in human sexual intercourse. It also finds that Lilith is not a traitor but a victim of coercive oppression that attempts to secure an independent future for humanity within her means, and an emblem of the human condition as it, too, may be adapted to persist in the posthuman subject.

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**“God defend me from such a shame!”: Exploring the Incompatibility of
Chivalric Ideals and the Honour Code in Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur***

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Highly Recommended

Honour, or *worship*, is a concept omnipresent in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*—it cannot be escaped, and its impact is impossible to ignore. The downfall of the Round Table and the Arthurian world as a whole is often blamed on the sacrifice of a shared honour-based system in favour of entertaining the grievances and vengeful feelings of individual knights. McCarthy explains that when the knights of the Round Table “are no longer motivated by a code of honour but by private feelings of hate, the situation inevitably deteriorates and the relentless decline into disorder is the result of a mixture of ill luck and ill will” (46). However, Benson introduces an opposite view, arguing that “the Arthurian ideal of fellowship is destroyed by the Arthurian ideal of honour”—in essence, the chivalric society contains the seeds of its own destruction (231). It is crucial to establish that the honour code of the Arthurian world is mostly centred around public opinion; its main concern revolves around “responsibility and reputation rather than virtue”, and it does not necessarily align with morality (225). This essay will discuss how the honour-shame

framework, which characterises and upholds the Arthurian chivalric ideals, proves itself too inflexible in the face of complicated relationships and clashing obligations of love and loyalty and how, as a result, central concepts and forces of the Arthurian world turn against their original purpose.

In *Le Morte Darthur*, Lancelot's choices and actions illustrate perfectly the difficulties (and the eventual impossibility) of reconciling a strict honour-based system of conduct with human nature in its changeability. Lancelot knows that the love he shares with Guenivere is flagrantly dishonourable and admits to her that "the boldness of you and me will bring us to shame and slander" (*Morte* 404). Although engaging in the affair is an inherently shameful act in itself, Lancelot is aware that he cannot flee from his situation: once he has chosen to involve himself with the Queen, it would bring even greater dishonour on both of them if he were to abandon her company completely. Therefore, despite the conflicting layers of conduct, his only option is to navigate the tangled situation within its current boundaries and remain loyal to Guenivere even at the cost of his loyalty to his fellow knights. In fact, Lancelot's affection for the Queen is defined similarly to the loyalty between knights—when the two are inside Guenivere's chamber and besieged by a group of knights, she describes a situation reminiscent of fellow-knights in a skirmish: "[...] and it might please God, I would that they would take me and slay me and suffer you to escape" (472). So all-encompassing are the ideals of chivalric conduct and honour in Malory's text that even Lancelot and Guenivere's romantic and erotic love is defined by knightly fellowship: has Lancelot simply replaced the love of his friends with a similar form of love from Guenivere? If Lancelot wants to retain his honourable reputation, he is obligated to "assert the good name of those for whom he is responsible, even (perhaps especially) if he knows that they

do not deserve it”: the only thing that matters is how his conduct is deemed by others (Benson 225).

Lancelot and Gawain’s interactions throughout the text of *Le Morte Darthur* work as a demonstration of how the obligations of chivalric honour eventually corrupt central Arthurian concepts of loyalty and fellowship. When the Round Table is enjoying its days of glory, Lancelot and Gawain are often mentioned together: united in opinion and nearly equal in nobility, they are presented in close fellowship as King Arthur’s closest knights and confidants. They are portrayed as exhibiting virtuous and chivalric behaviour *as a team*: Lancelot and Gawain both offer to help Gareth when he arrives in Arthur’s court, despite the fact that his identity is still unknown, even going beyond what is expected of them as they defend Gareth from Sir Kay’s jibes and offer him food, lodging, and money (*Morte* 121–2). In doing this, they are protecting and nurturing the chivalric ideal, which Gareth embodies, extending their knightly fellowship to a stranger whose nobility has not yet been attested to. Later on, as the illicit affair between Lancelot and Guenivere becomes increasingly more apparent, Gawain still asserts that he “will never be against Sir Lancelot for one day’s deed”—indeed, Gareth and Gaheris also adopt this stance and refuse to speak ill of Lancelot to Agravain (469). Gawain’s good faith starts to become strained at last as the affair is finally brought to public attention in full, but he still attempts to salvage the oncoming breakdown of the Round Table and keep up appearances as best he can: “though it were so that Sir Lancelot were found in the Queen’s chamber”, he tries to suggest to Arthur, “yet it might be so that he came thither for no evil” (478). However, as honour is based on reputation and is “all about appearance”, painting over the truth will simply not do anymore (Benson 231).

The final stage of this corruption of chivalry and fellowship is presented in battle after Gareth's death has derailed any hope of reconciliation: Lancelot refuses to kill Gawain in order to preserve his honour, while Gawain cannot entertain even an idea of an outcome which would not result in a death, be it Lancelot's or his own—each knight is equally convinced that he is doing what is right and honourable (*Morte* 502–5). The honour code becomes a hindrance to human nature; the fixed binary is incapable of housing the fundamentally human traits of indecisiveness, flexibility, ambivalence, or changes of mind. The rigid obligations render the behaviour of the knights a corrupted version of ideal chivalric conduct. Lancelot's insistence on not taking Gawain's life on the grounds of his principle "never [to] smite a felled knight" seems a mutilated mirror image of Dame Lyonet begging Gareth to leave Sir Persant alive, a mockery of the bygone days of glory in which he imagines the presence of a lady by whose command he would have to refrain from killing his opponent (503). Gawain, in contrast, is desperate for the vengeance his familial ties require him to enact and is only fighting to kill or to be killed; what Lancelot perceives as a chivalric manoeuvre is from Gawain's perspective a cruel prolonging of the inevitable (505). Both knights are holding onto a familiar framework that has benefited them tremendously in the past, but has become inoperable in a society with opposing sides and increasingly muddled, subjective positions. As heartwarming as it would be to witness Gawain realise the futility of civil war through the emotional impact of Gareth's wrongful death and turn it into an instrument for generating peace and harmony between the factions, it is simply not a possible outcome in a world ruled by the absolute opposition of honour and shame. "To do the honourable thing may well be self-destructive"—it is indeed self-evident to Gawain that his fraternal love compels him to avenge his brothers' deaths by battling with Lancelot "till the one

were dead or yielded”; two options of which Gawain will only be satisfied with one (Benson 226; *Morte* 502).

Malory uses the simple rule of three to effective ends. The triple pattern is used for different purposes, and it works beyond and between the text of *Le Morte Darthur*, setting a repetitional and episodic pace to the narrative structure, which the reader adjusts to and eventually starts to anticipate. “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney”, among others, includes a series of threes: during the first half of his adventure, trying to prove himself in preparation for his big battle with the Red Knight of the Red Launds, Gareth kills three knights—two unnamed knights guarding the river as well as Sir Perard, the Black Knight—and defeats three others—the green Sir Pertolepe, the red Sir Perimones, and Sir Persant of Inde; all three brothers to the dead Sir Perard (*Morte* 127–8, 130, 133, 136). A similar pattern is formed by Lancelot’s three successive rescues of Guenivere later in the text. The first rescue takes place when she is wrongly accused of the murder of a knight and about to be burned at the stake; the second one is necessitated by Meliagaunt’s kidnapping of Guenivere; the third and final rescue is again from death by fire, although this time the accusations of treason are proven true (412–3, 459–60, 480–1). The number three thus carries a feeling of balance and completeness throughout Malory’s text. Deviations from the rule are often noticeable and abrupt, drawing attention to pivotal moments and changes in the narrative.

A glaring bypass of the rule of three happens in “The Death of Arthur” when Gawain approaches Lancelot, seeking to avenge his brothers’ deaths (*Morte* 501–5). The fights between Lancelot and Gawain could be expected to mirror the three rescues of Guenivere, especially as Lancelot’s third mission directly causes the death of Gareth, the most beloved brother, whose demise sparks Gawain’s vengefulness (480). However, Malory defies the familiar pattern of three

and instead changes the story's perspective completely by cutting off the narrative after just two rounds of battle and turning the focus on Mordred's plans to wed Guenivere. The Caxton print makes this amputation of the expected pattern even more abrupt; he works the disconnect in the text into a more distinct structural divide by separating the text after the break into a completely new book (505). This unfulfilled expectation is a structural reflection of the inevitability of the narrative: as the Arthurian world and its fundamental concepts collapse on themselves, the familiar structure of the story starts to break apart with it. However, this is not the first instance of an unfulfilled expectation of narrative structure in *Le Morte Darthur*—Malory first uses this technique much earlier, in “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney”. When Gareth and Dame Lyonesse have been trothplighted, the young lovers attempt a secret nighttime tryst but are interrupted by a mysterious knight of apparently magical origin (152). The ensuing fight is constructed according to Malory's usual formula: the two knights battle furiously and, although severely wounded by his opponent, Gareth manages to win. In ten days' time, the ordeal is repeated, although this time with changes that are mirrored by the violent encounters between Lancelot and Gawain later in the narrative.

When Gareth battles his unknown opponent for the second time, he is so forceful in his attack that “his old wound brast[s] again on bleeding” (*Morte* 153). The reopened wound incapacitates him and, although Gareth is soon restored, Malory ends the episode on a rather eerie note: “the leeches said there was no man that bore the life should heal him thoroughly of his wound but if they healed them that caused the stroke by enchantment”—the first fight has left a mark on him which will hinder his strength and ability indefinitely, a wound which will never truly heal unless it is treated by the magic which dealt it (154). However, this unsettling revelation is quickly counteracted as the narrative cuts off and moves on to describe a great tournament and Gareth's

eventual marriage, as well as his inclusion in the fellowship of the Round Table—the semi-prophecy is not brought up again but is instead buried under a mountain of glad tidings displaying the very best the Arthurian world has to offer. Similarly to Gareth, in his first battle with Lancelot, Gawain suffers a wound which reopens in the second fight and later again in battle against Mordred’s troops (503, 505, 508). The wound eventually kills him, although Gawain blames “mine own hastiness and my wilfulness”; likewise, Gareth’s impatience and use of excessive force cause his injury to worsen (508, 153). The similarities between Gareth’s tale and Gawain’s combat with Lancelot, the latter set firmly in the final days of the Arthurian world, reveal that the components of the end are present in the text from very early on; just like Merlin’s prophecy foretelling Arthur’s downfall by his son looms over the whole narrative, this unfinished episode hangs in the air as an uneasy reminder of the fragility of peace and balance (23). On the other hand, the differences between Gareth and Gawain’s episodes show that there is still a strong contrast between the Arthurian world before and during its collapse: although Gareth hears some unsettling news, his injury and its strangely supernatural nature can be forgotten in favour of fun and fellowship, whereas Gawain actively suffers from his injury longer and dies as a result of it.

Parallels between Lancelot and Gareth can be drawn by analysing where their battles with Gawain and the mysterious knight, respectively, are situated on each knight’s personal timeline. Gareth, at the time of battling the unknown magical knight, is at the very beginning of his life as a knight: he has only recently been knighted and has been traversing the land on a mission to save a noble lady, making a name for himself in preparation for the final battle (*Morte* 123). After defeating his opponent, the oppressor of Dame Lyonesse, he has just made a promise of fidelity to his beloved (151). In contrast, Lancelot’s battles with Gawain are situated towards the end of his chivalric career: he is the most appreciated and admired among the knights of the

Round Table, to the extent that Gareth, the ideal knight-to-be, demands to be knighted by him and none other (125). By this point, Lancelot has also experienced a lengthy and tempestuous affair with Queen Guenivere, the consequences of which their whole world is currently living through—his history and reputation are drawn in sharp contrast to the young and inexperienced love of Gareth and Lyonesse.

Gareth's quest to prove his competence and nobility is recounted as the story of a courageous and honourable young man, an exceptionally good knight who seems a fine addition to the Round Table. He proves not to be without fault, however, as he and Lyonesse plan "to abate their hot lusts" in secret after their troth-plighting—as mentioned above, their transgression is halted by the appearance of a magical knight, sent by Lyonesse's sister, Dame Lyonet (*Morte* 152). Throughout Gareth's journey, Lyonet occupies a crucial position; essentially, she upholds the chivalric ideal and acts as an enforcer of the Arthurian honour code. Her aim is to develop and preserve Gareth's honour and virtue along his quest, critiquing and questioning his ability in order to push him to become better, moulding him into the perfect knight with insults and a hostile attitude. However, it is in the romantic and marital phase of the adventure that the importance of Lyonet's role reaches its peak, as she must keep Gareth in check to prevent a careless and improper act that would sully the honour of the young lovers as well as their loved ones, including Lyonet herself (McCarthy 60). Gareth's magical opponent, a product of Lyonet's "subtle crafts", is an embodiment of her determination to distract Gareth and Lyonesse, and the unidentified knight acts on her behalf to prevent them all from falling into shame and dishonour (*Morte* 152).

Similarly to Gareth's mystery opponent, Gawain is attempting to uphold the chivalric ideal by acting as his brothers' avenger; he is desperate to deliver the consequences caused by the

absence of a Lyonet-like figure in Lancelot's earlier life. Gawain's single-minded determination to get revenge or die trying invites the reader to think of an alternative to the wretched civil war—if Lancelot and Guenivere's disastrous romance had been disrupted before it could cause damage, could the factionalism and fighting have been avoided? In Gareth's tale, Lyonet's conduct reveals her awareness of the dangers of a young and passionate love left uncontrolled, and it could be argued that she is trying to prevent the development of a new Lancelot–Guenivere arrangement; in Malory's text, Gareth's tale immediately follows "A Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake", on whose very first page it is established that "Queen Guenivere had [Sir Lancelot] in great favour above all other knights" and that he, in turn, "loved the Queen again above all other ladies days of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry" (*Morte* 95). Similarly, Gareth has already proven his devotion to Lyonesse in battle, as well as through their trothplighting, and his feelings have been thoroughly reciprocated (143–5, 151). However, Lyonet remains adamant that this passion will not be allowed to stain their reputations: she knows that, even in the 'high summer' of chivalry where heinous deeds can be excused by abundant and easy forgiveness, there are some acts which will eventually have inevitable consequences (146). Just as Gareth is an example of what Lancelot *should have been*, Lancelot is what Gareth *would have been* had Lyonet not intervened in Gareth and Lyonesse's illicit plans—the two knights are mirror images of each other, representing how the same principles that uphold the Arthurian world will cause its unavoidable downfall.

In conclusion, the honour-shame opposition underpinning the Arthurian world upholds the central ideals of chivalric society but eventually proves to be too strict a binary to be combined with human fallibility and ambivalence; this ultimately leads to the collapse of the Round Table, caused by the very ideals it was founded on. Lancelot and Guenivere's love illustrates how an

honour code cannot accommodate mutable human loyalties; its dependence on reputation and public opinion keeps the honour code somewhat disconnected from morality and results in situations where what is honourable might be counterintuitive. The interactions between Lancelot and Guenivere also emphasise Malory's ideals of chivalric fellowship and loyalty, which remain strong even in romance. The development and decline of Lancelot and Gawain's friendship demonstrates how ideals of love and fellowship become corrupted in the text as clashing loyalties and obligations of honour start to develop; every individual thinks they are doing the right and honourable thing, unaware of the increasing conflict brought on by the division of the Round Table and the consequently increased subjectivity of opinion, as well as its consequences. The breakdown of the Arthurian world is also depicted through narrative structures and the portrayal of time: parallel deviations in narrative structure bring to the fore how the components for the collapse of chivalric society are present from the beginning of the story and underpin the whole narrative, but they also mark the decline of the Arthurian world, contrasting chivalry at its most ideal with its breaking point. The mirroring of Lancelot and Gareth further emphasises these similarities and differences between the real and the ideal, once again functioning as a reminder of the inevitability of the downfall of the chivalric world.

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The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Winner

Elitism, in its many guises, promises transcendence—a rarefied existence beyond the mundanity of moral constraints. However, beneath its veneer of privilege lies a corrosive machinery that consumes even those who believe themselves its masters. Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992) and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), though separated by aesthetic and ideological sensibilities, converge on this singular truth. Tartt's ivy-clad scholars and Ellis's Wall Street financiers alike are ensnared by hierarchies that equate worth with exclusion. These novels expose elitism as a self-replicating machine that simultaneously empowers and entraps its adherents. Through a comparative analysis, the argument develops that elitism operates through three interdependent mechanisms: establishing exclusionary hierarchies, creating insulated environments that sustain them, and cultivating complicit participants who recognise but cannot escape the system's corruption. While Tartt explores intellectual elitism within academia and Ellis dissects material elitism under capitalism, both novels reveal how ostensibly distinct forms of

privilege unite in their dehumanising effects. This study employs Nietzschean theory not just as decoration, but as a diagnostic tool. In *The Secret History*, the Hampden group's obsession with classical antiquity reflects Nietzsche's distinction between Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos, as they attempt to live beyond morality through aesthetic and intellectual refinement. Likewise, in *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman's fixation on domination, control, and surface-level perfection turns Nietzsche's will to power into an empty spectacle, a parody of individualism stripped of any authentic self-definition. Through the integration of this philosophical framework, one can ascertain that elitism sustains itself by co-opting the very tools—philosophy, intellect, self-knowledge—meant to transcend it. These systems are not demolished by contradiction or critique; they survive by absorbing and neutralising dissent. Both Richard Papen and Patrick Bateman, in their different registers of passivity and psychosis, serve as emblems of this process. Their trajectories demonstrate elitism's most insidious quality, which is its ability to maintain dominance by co-opting even those who perceive its flaws. Elitism operates as a system that transforms aspiration into predation and self-awareness into complicity, functioning as a gatekeeping mechanism that fosters detachment, reducing ethics to a transactional calculus where beauty, intellect, or wealth excuse cruelty.

Elitism manifests in *The Secret History* as intellectual superiority, where exclusivity is tied to aesthetic and scholarly refinement. Hampden College's insular classics department, led by the enigmatic Julian Morrow, "his own little academy of ancient Greek, student body five, six including [Richard]", functions as a cult of brilliance that operates as a self-contained world (Tartt 31). Sophie Mills highlights the unrealistic speed at which the students acquire ancient Greek, framing it as a marker of intellectual superiority (14). This rapid progression, Mills argues, is "distinctly unrealistic" for even advanced students, creating an image of Classics as a rarefied

skill accessible only to a gifted few. The language itself is romanticised as transcendent: ancient Greek is described as “innocent of all quirks and cranks”, a “special language for secret communication” that distances the group from the “sluggish and alien” modern world (Tartt 200; Mills 14). Such passages suggest that Greek is not merely studied but worshipped, reinforcing its role as a tool of exclusion. Here, elitism is not merely about intelligence but about constructing an identity so rarefied that it exists beyond ethical reproach. This self-authored morality moves beyond good and evil in pursuit of self-determined values. Ironically, it also creates an inner and outer circle within its readership. Certain readers will grasp far more of the layered literary and philosophical references, curating a privileged vantage point that aligns them with the novel’s characters. This replicates the very elitism the text scrutinises. Furthermore, the inner circle’s elitism is inseparable from their wealth. Henry, Francis, and the twins embody a “scholē” enabled by affluence. Their tastes reflect aristocratic decadence, which clashes with Richard’s financial struggles and Bunny’s “vulgar sponging” (Mills 15). Financial precarity marks the pair as outsiders, excluded from the inner circle’s ‘pure’ scholarship. Their social flaws are inherently linked to their financial status, denying them full acceptance into the group; Bunny’s practical reasons for studying Greek (to “cure” his dyslexia) deem him “not a ‘real’ Classicist” (15). Richard, meanwhile, begins studying Greek out of convenience, as a “humanities requirement” at his first college, rather than innate passion (Tartt 9). As such, Julian reinforces this hierarchy, favouring students who mirror his elusive ethos. Tartt’s implication of *Übermensch* is clear: Classics are reserved for the rare souls born into privilege, not those who aspire to it. In contrast, *American Psycho* presents elitism through material signifiers—designer clothing, exclusive restaurants, and physical perfection. Patrick Bateman’s world is one of relentless competition, where status is quantified rather than earned through intellect, “surface, surface, surface, was all that anyone found

meaning in...this was civilisation as I saw it, colossal and jagged..." (Ellis 375). It epitomises the herd mentality Nietzsche despised, where status is defined by consumerist dogma rather than authentic self-creation. Ergo, Wall Street's superficial "masters" are Nietzsche's ultimate slaves (*On the Genealogy of Morality*). Bateman's failed Übermensch persona, an obsession with perfection collapsing into parody, exposes the void at the core of capitalism. Much like *The Secret History*, this system operates on a transactional view of morality: "I'm creative, I'm young ... society cannot afford to lose me. I'm an *asset*" (Ellis 3). In Bateman's case, his victims—women, homeless individuals, and social inferiors—are deemed expendable because they lack the capital to matter in his world (Welsh). Both novels illustrate how elitism reduces morality to a cost-benefit analysis. The Greek class's belief in their aesthetic superiority allows them to rationalise Bunny's murder as a necessary act to preserve their aesthetic self-image. Similarly, Bateman's violence is an extension of Wall Street's dehumanising logic, where people are valued only for their economic utility. Like Nietzsche's 'higher men', they mistake their isolation for genius, but their pretence of 'creating values' betrays a baser instinct—the fear of losing privilege, that is, the fear of losing control. The key difference lies in how each novel frames elitism's justification. Tartt's characters cloak their pretension in philosophical profundity, while Ellis's characters openly embrace their supremacy. However, both systems operate on the same principle that superiority grants immunity from moral accountability. The Übermensch ideal, when distorted by elitism, becomes a license for moral transgression, whether draped in classical allusions or Armani suits.

However, elitism does not exist in a vacuum. It thrives in closed systems that reinforce its values while shielding adherents from external accountability. In *The Secret History*, the Greek class's seclusion fosters a collective delusion of grandeur, where Romantic idealism justifies violence. The students are essentially cut off from the rest of the college, as "having a

great diversity of teachers is harmful and confusing for a young mind...after all, Plato had only one teacher, and Alexander”, and the extent of their education hangs on Morrow’s every word (Tartt 31; Mills 16). Their isolation is not merely physical but ideological; within this bubble, “a thriving black petri dish of melodrama and distortion”, actions are judged not by societal standards but by the group’s internal aesthetic logic, where beauty and intellect excuse infraction (Tartt 378). This idea is established early in the novel as the class discusses the Greek idea that often “bloody, terrible things are sometimes the most beautiful...Beauty is terror”, an antiquated ethos that cannot exist in modern society unless given the privilege by privileged individuals to do so (42). The group's effacement of the outside world underscores how elitism justifies the exclusion, and even the elimination, of those who fail to meet their rarefied standards. Their claim to Nietzschean self-overcoming is revealed as a sham. They are not creators of values but prisoners of their arrogance. *American Psycho*’s Wall Street presents another sealed ecosystem, where capitalism’s relentless competition erases individuality, and Bateman’s hollow mimicry of elite signifiers like fashion, “I’m wearing a four-button double-breasted wool and silk suit...by Valentino”, and dining, “I resort to...ordering...an arugula Caesar salad and swordfish...”, reveals the absurdity of mistaking status for self-creation (Ellis 180, 167). Weinrich suggests that status derived from superficial markers renders people “completely interchangeable, just like the brand-name commodities, which generate their presence in the first place” (70). The constant cases of mistaken identity, colleagues confusing Bateman for others and vice versa, illustrate how the system reduces people to interchangeable cogs: “if I were to disappear into that crack, say somehow miniaturize and slip into it, the odds are good that no one would notice I was gone. No...one...would...care.” (Ellis 226). This system does not merely permit brutality; it incentivises it by rewarding those who fully embrace its dehumanising ethos (Weinrich 71). Both novels depict

environments where insulated value systems override conventional morality. Romantic idealism becomes a twisted justification for murder, while capitalist competition reduces human worth to market value. The Greek class and Wall Street both operate as echo chambers that reinforce their logic until outsiders cease to matter, exposing how easily exclusivity can curdle into monstrosity when left unchecked.

Elitism does not merely corrupt those at the centre of its power structures, it also ensnares those on the margins who aspire to join them. Richard Papen and Patrick Bateman both serve as unreliable narrators whose liminal positions fuel their destructive aspirations. As neither fully outsiders nor genuine insiders, they can see the flaws in the elitist systems they inhabit, yet their desire for belonging, or rather the illusion of it, renders them complicit. Their unreliable narration exposes the seductive power of elitism, demonstrating how even those who recognise its emptiness cannot entirely resist its pull. Richard's introduction, "I had never seen New England or Hampden College until I was nineteen. I am a Californian by birth and also, I have recently discovered, by nature", immediately establishes his class alienation (Tartt 7). Unlike his wealthy peers, Richard lacks the financial and social capital to belong effortlessly in such a world, making him an eager participant in the group's crimes as a means of securing his place. His lies about inheriting money, dressing to match their "uniforms"—tweed coats, silk scarves, and antiquated accessories—are a performative embrace of elitism (3). It is an attempt to erase his "drab" working class origins and mimic the carefree privilege of Henry and the others (Mills 15). However, Richard's moral ambiguity is central to the novel's tension; he acknowledges their cruelty but still romanticises their world. This duality reveals the seductive power of elitism. Even when Richard recognises its dangers, he remains complicit, unable to reject the allure of belonging. Bateman, by contrast, is an "insider" who embodies the very system that hollows him out. His infamous declaration, "I simply

am not there”, captures his existential emptiness, a product of Wall Street’s soulless materialism (Ellis 377). Unlike Richard, Bateman has the wealth and status his world demands. Yet, he is emotionally and psychologically alienated—“though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours...”—unable to form genuine connections (376). His unreliability peaks in the confession scene, where his inability to distinguish reality from fantasy emphasises the instability of his identity. Is he a murderer, or is his violence another yuppie fantasy? The novel refuses to clarify, mirroring the unreality of the world he inhabits. Bateman’s irony lies in his self-awareness. He obsessively mimics the shallow culture he critiques, and this mass of “details” obliterates rather than defines his character in the traditional sense (Young 96). His complicity is not aspirational, like Richard’s, but pathological; he is both a product and a perpetrator of the dehumanising machine. Tartt and Ellis construct protagonists who are trapped by the very systems they critique. As such, both narrators expose the paradox of elitism as simultaneously alluring and corrosive. Richard sees the moral decay of Hampden’s elite but still yearns for their validation; Bateman recognises the emptiness of Wall Street but remains trapped in its excess. Even as they demonstrate a haunting self-awareness about the corruption of their respective worlds, they cannot escape its gravitational pull. Richard’s passive complicity and Bateman’s existential spiral reveal the delusion of control while ensuring destruction. Their arcs serve as dark reminders of how privilege, once internalised, becomes inescapable. A quiet, retrospective horror marks Richard’s narration: “A moi. L’histoire d’une de mes folies (the story of one of my follies)” (Tartt 7). He understands that his allegiance to the group has narrowed his life to a ruinous narrative dictated by their ideals, yet he remains bound to it. Richard’s passivity is his defining trait. He does not orchestrate Bunny’s murder, but he also does nothing to stop it. His tragedy lies in his inability to imagine an alternative. Elitism has so thoroughly shaped his

desires that he cannot conceive of a life outside of its confines. Bateman's self-awareness, on the other hand, is even more acute and, so, even more futile. His admission "...there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory" captures his hollow core (Ellis 376). Unlike Richard, he does not seek validation; he knows the world he inhabits is meaningless. However, this realisation only drives him deeper into violence. The novel's final image, a sign that reads "this is not an exit", is less a moment of clarity than a surrender to the void (399). The novel's circular structure, ending mid-conversation as it began, confirms the inescapability of his condition; Bateman is so enmeshed in capitalism's logic that he has no self left to resist it. Both protagonists' arcs reveal their worlds' corruption to them, but this knowledge does not empower them; it imprisons them further. That is to say, under the influence of elitism, self-awareness does not lead to change; it co-opts complicity.

Thus, while superficially distinct, Tartt's academic setting and Ellis's financial world reveal the same underlying dynamics: hierarchical systems that convert privilege into moral license, insulated environments that normalise these arbitrary values, and compromised participants who sustain such a system. The novels' enduring cultural resonance stems from their prescient understanding of elitism's adaptive resilience in preserving its exclusionary power, regardless of its context. More importantly, both works demonstrate that under an elitist regime, traditional markers of agency like self-awareness and critical thinking become not tools for resistance but further instruments of entrapment. This is particularly relevant to the cultural afterlife of these novels in revealing shifting perceptions of elitism. Despite its cult status, *The Secret History*'s lack of major adaptations speaks to its ambivalent relationship with elitism; its romanticised academia resists easy translation, reaffirming its exclusive nature. It is a curious absence, perhaps tied to the difficulty of illustrating its lush, nostalgic prose into visual form

without glamorising it. *American Psycho*, meanwhile, has proliferated through adaptation: Mary Harron's 2000 film, which inspired countless "sigma male" memes, strips Bateman of irony and renders him aspirational. The divergent fates of these texts suggest something about the cultural legibility of the critiques they posit. Bateman's transformation into a digital icon reflects how easily satire can collapse into celebration under capitalism's logic. At the same time, *The Secret History*'s resistance to adaptation may signal its danger, as indicated by the prominent 'Dark Academia' subculture that accompanied the novel's resurgence among a new generation—its beauty too seductive, its critique too entwined with allure to safely package. From this, new questions arise. What do our modern Batemans and Richards look like? In an era of digital capital, influencer culture, AI-powered curation, and crypto wealth, how have systems of elitism evolved? What forms do exclusion, detachment, and complicity now take in the algorithmic age? If Patrick Bateman is now a TikTok icon and Richard Pape a Pinterest aesthetic, how do we critically engage with these flattened afterlives without perpetuating the same elite mythologies we hope to dismantle? Can irony survive virality, or must resistance seek new forms altogether? Such questions urge us to examine not only how elitism has endured into the digital age, but how it has mutated. In a world where identity can be tokenised and curated, what becomes of self-awareness? Does complicity still require proximity, or has technology expanded the mechanisms by which we become entangled in systems of harm? Though unresolved, these provocations underscore the necessity of re-evaluating literary critique in an era where cultural artefacts are perpetually remixed. Engaging with these afterlives uncritically perpetuates the systems they purport to dismantle. In our contemporary moment, as inequality intensifies and elite institutions face unprecedented scrutiny, these novels offer a sobering reminder that systems of privilege seldom collapse under the weight of their contradictions but endure by making participants of us all. In

this sense, the novels function as black mirrors, reflecting unchecked privilege's real-world consequences; they distort perspective, erode agency, and trap even those who see through them. Its greatest power, however, is its ability to make outsiders believe they want in, no matter the cost. Privilege is sustained not only by power structures but also by the human condition. Desire, beauty, intellect, community, and self-creation—these qualities that define the human experience also render elitism both bearable and even aspirational. Understanding this dynamic is the first step toward resistance. That imaginative leap away from dominance and toward connection may be literature's most radical offering.

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On Ethics and Aesthetics: The Poetic Justice of Kimberly Campanello's

MOTHERBABYHOME

Hannah Fitzgerald

Department of English Undergraduate Awards (3rd Year)

Winner

Considering the contemporary state of the national poetic landscape, Samuel Beckett, in his 1934 essay “Recent Irish Poetry”, delineated a distinction in creative perspectives between “antiquarians and others”: the “younger Irish poets [who] evince awareness of [...] the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook [and] [t]he thermolaters [...] adoring the stuff of song as incorruptible, uninjurable and unchangeable” (Beckett, 70). Evoking the friction between impetuses of cyclicity and evolution in the twilight of the Irish Literary Revival and the nascent consolidation of the nation state, Beckett’s espousal of the necessary “breakdown of object” by the visionary force of the creative “other” echoes through the poetic innovations of Kimberly Campanello’s conceptual “poetry-object”, *MOTHERBABYHOME* (2019). Created in parallel with the Irish government’s Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, Campanello’s work enters a metatextual play with the legal doctrine of the State, forming a “report on the Report” through poems composed entirely of text taken from historical archives and

contemporary sources related to the Home. Precipitating a breakdown and reconstruction of legal object, Campanello's disruptive poetics challenge the "incorruptibility, uninjurability and unchangeability" of institutional power in a Beckettian spirit which fragments the impregnable aureole of sanctity upheld by administrative authorities. Decrying the injustices perpetuated by the government's inadequate treatment of its legacy of institutional abuse, the poet further offers an alternative poetic justice which constructs a memorial to the victims while evoking the pending necessity of redress for survivors, thus achieving a dialectical state of monument/discourse through formal experimentation. Analysing Campanello's counter-report, this essay will investigate the protean potential of poetry in treating subjects of memory, inheritance and legacy, through which a collective overture for advance beyond the recurring spectre of national History is composed.

Examining the representational power of the Irish literary archive, Lucy Collins attests that "[a]rchives play an important role in preserving literary history, but they also have the potential to change that history [...] [b]y facilitating the preservation and arrangement of these materials, archivists support new ways of interpreting and communicating historical and artistic processes" (Collins 187). Engaging in a docupoetic work, Campanello challenges the dominative rhetoric engendered by the Commission report through recourse to the archive; presenting herself as a semiotician of the real whose personal poetic voice is subordinated to the nexus of voices she gleans from the narrative margins, weaving a foregrounded discursive interplay which undermines the singular authorial imprimatur of either State or poet. Public and institutional voices are juxtaposed, conjoined and reflected in argument and conversation. The individual poems which comprise Campanello's greater poetry-object, therefore, constitute what the poet referred to during a reading with Poetry Ireland as "asemic writing"; words and phrasal snippets are refracted, redacted, overlaid and interwoven in an intricate poetic process of poststructuralist lacework.

The unusually capitalised and italicised title of the poem, *MOTHERBABYHOME*, evokes a nullification of subjectivity through the contraction of nouns, and a loss of semantic meaning through a bleeding of words evokes the senselessness of the euphemistic title given to the institutions. Similarly, legalistic language of the Commission’s report is pared back, reworked and arranged starkly to expose the loss of meaning engendered by language alienated from its source, as exemplified in the lines:

another option outlines
a number of options
the other option opts for the
other, “more intrusive” option

Devaney Mary 02/01/1946 21 days

Here, the repetition of “option” and the assonance of the “o” sound degrade the legalistic language of the Report into a meaningless tongue-twister, evoking the sense of incomprehensibility and dissociation produced by bureaucratic terminology, which nullifies the human subject it governs, bolstering its own authority through the sombre aesthetics of formality. Anaphoric loss of meaning espouses an expression of the sham concealed by the labyrinthine force of legalese, as the actual inexistence of any “option” is precipitated. The reflexivity of Campanello’s reworking thus imbues the legalistic text with a self-conscious horror as to its own dehumanising machinations, aware of the injustice it both describes and encodes through the splicing of emotive phrasing such as “more intrusive”, recharging the dispassionate legal language through confrontation with alternative, archival texts and the voices which echo outside of its frame. In other instances, legalistic language is similarly cut with snippets of

survivor testimony, regenerating linguistic meaning to reveal truths unheeded by the Commission. Such is the case in the lines:

Article II. her bowel would protrude

from her bottom they

would just

push

her bowels back

inside her

Juxtaposing the majesty of the authoritative precept invoked by “Article II” with the discomfiting personal account which immediately follows, the reader experiences an epistemological shock as the enlarged, bold rendering of the legal clause extends into the account of survivor testimony, stretching the tonal weight of law to the minor subject. The dispassionate legal syntax which defines the authoritative language of justice is thus disrupted as Campanello splinters the normative morphology of official doctrine to reframe the human subject affected by its ruling, reinforced by the echoing anaphora of the feminine personal pronoun, “her”, “her”, “her”, “her”. The incitation of the Commission’s language becomes ironic and discrediting, as “her bowel would protrude” is implied as state-sanctioned by the “[a]rticle” which precedes, radically confronting the reader with the unjust actuality of the history in a censure of institutional practices both within the system of the Homes and the contemporary concealment of such through the dissociative “legalistic, administrative, religious language inextricable from such operations of power” (Mulhall 431). Individual and communal memory thus interrupt legal language through the disruptive technique of the splice, signifying a rupture of the present by the

disturbing force of a repressed past which has not been consciously confronted. In interrupting the Commission's dominant narrative through this temporal resurgence and making explicit the editing technique of the cut through the ambiguous and sudden nature of the textual splicing, Campanello reinscribes an unneglectable awareness of the survivors who are othered, hidden and repressed by the legal narrative, forcing a lucid confrontation of past and present. The singular faux-objectivity asseverated by the Commission report is fragmented into a plurality of subjectivities which attest breath-takingly to the human consequence of the "Homes" in a cacophony of contestation, rendered in the arresting visuals of one poem which arranges ten "I"s in a gravestone scatter, mirroring of the later lines:

varying lengths and heights off the ground, and are all placed at irregular
intervals
these are headstones
and are all that is left

Rendering visible the editing process of textual production, the implication follows that the apparently "seamless" Commission narrative is a product of hidden cuts which the poet illuminates through the resurgence of the expurgated. This impels readers towards a confrontation with the denied truths of the history that the government maintains editorial control over. As insufficiencies are revealed in the dominant modes of discourse and the monopoly of narrative, justice thus finds an equivocation with a pronouncement of truth and an interventional reframing of the marginal.

Campanello defines her project in an introductory biographic statement on her website as a "preoccupation [...] with language to 'change states' [...] changing our understandings of law

and the State [...] and changing its own state as each word shifts and morphs with every use and encounter” (Campanello). Employing the legal document of the Commission report as poetic fodder whose articles may be shredded, questioned, deconstructed and transformed, Campanello reaffirms legal texts as sites of public discourse and commits the Report to public trial. Enfranchising the individual in the search for redress against the institutional, the poet thus proclaims the nature of the nation-state as potentially metamorphic as her revisory, reorientative poetics. Though she abstracts language through her asemic collage technique, Campanello’s poetry is simultaneously grounded in the intersection of corporeal and political materiality, lending the plainest, most syntactically complete language of the poetry to the pellucid equivocation of Catholic doctrine and State power:

“The Bon Secours Hospital Group, run by the Bon Secours sisters, is the largest provider of private healthcare in the State to segregate those who had become sources of evil, danger and expense to the community”.

The refractory imperative of further pieces simultaneously denounces the pervasive sociopolitical power of the Church, condemning the injustice perpetrated through the poet’s anaphoric technique, which questions and derides the ironically vitiated meaning of the Order’s name in the lines:

religiosity.
knew already.
handful (literally)
in seventies

wouldn't have
competence
to be good Bon good Bon good Bon good Bon
good Bon good Bon good Bon

Secours Shiels Patrick 27/01/1931 4 mts

Campanello's condemnation of injustice is thus as flagrantly direct as it is poetic and pluriform, denouncing the implied evil perpetrated by the Bon Secours sisters, as well as simultaneously evoking the prevailing need to deliver justice to the survivors still affected; the separated end word "Secours" concurrently pronouncing a plea for help. Further countering the potential abstraction of the poetry is the inclusion on each of the 796 pages, in minuscule superscript, of the name, date of birth and age of death of each infant at the Tuam site, including the title page, where Campanello's own name is overlapped by the words "Derrane Patrick 22/08/1925 5mts" (X 20). This is such that the majority of the poems feature only the short evocation of an infant's corpse, surrounded by the blank page, which tumefies the silence surrounding the death. Evoking decades of hush, the elisions of narrative and the extended delays which characterised the publication of the original report, a quiet proclamation of injustice builds through the whiteness of absence and the accumulative weight of Campanello's poetry pages.

Offering a testament and monument to victims and survivors of the St Mary's Mother and Baby Home at Tuam, the physicality of Campanello's poetry-object contributes to the narrative on justice she weaves as well as the act of justice she furnishes. Printed on A4, loose-leaf sheets of vellum (Darcy, 40), the sinuosity of the poetry material evokes the bodily subjects at the heart of her work, reminding us ceaselessly that this is a history composed of and concerned with the

legislated bodies of women and the loss of their infants. Both the etymological and historical associations of the material similarly evoke the nexus of violence and authority, as the original veal skin substance has traditionally composed revered tomes such as the Book of Kells and the Gutenberg Bible (X 18). A translucent material, vellum lends Campanello's poetry-object a ghostly effect which works in tandem with the absence of full stops in the poems to refuse a cessation of dialogue or allow any narrative closure, dissolving the ability to "turn the page" on history while simultaneously implying the transparency of her work in comparison to the Report. Stored in a handcrafted oak wood box, each of the six objects assumes an identity which is both intricate and monumental, as elusive, involuted poems complicate and challenge the monopolised state narrative on justice; the box they are contained within lending a megalithic significance. A cradle/coffin duality is evoked which both reflects the horror of infant deaths and embodies the dialectical nature of Campanello's work: at once memorialising history through the erection of physical monument, and also reinvigorating it through the washing and reviving of the deadened, calcified language and modes of discourse which become prescriptive, euphemistic and meaningless in legal treatment of history and tragedy. The physicality of the box demands presence, conferring significance to its contents through its crafted status as a relic or an object of virtue, valorising the voices of the marginalised through committed artistic treatment, and amplifying and imposing their denunciation of injustice in the material realm. On the dedicated page of her website, Campanello emphasises that "[t]he location of the graves of 796 infants and children who died in the Home between 1926 and 1961 is unknown", and as such, the receptacle of the poems forms a belated casket which offers a delayed justice, the self-conscious limitations of which are a haunting monument to the horror of unresolved histories of institutional violence. Campanello thus changes a state of forgetting, abandonment and denial into one of conscious remembrance, restitution, and socio-politically disruptive representation which refuses the all-

justifying potential of Church-State narrative control; exemplified by Ailbhe Darcy who notes that Campanello repeats and reorganises the words of Father Pádraig McCarthy, who wrote in the Catholic journal *The Furrow* that “burial in an unmarked grave does not necessarily mean “disrespect” to the dead. Usually it means the people concerned had other priorities on their minds at the time” (Darcy 41).

Writing, crafting, and performing against the “automatic and dehumanised” rendering of language and impersonal treatment by the State report (Darcy 45), Campanello’s poetic justice is engendered by deliberate, reflective, and reverential processes. The poet’s creation is a work of endurance and commitment, taking five years to complete, as attested during her reading for Poetry Ireland. Similar dedication is demanded of the reader, as both textual and physical elements of Campanello’s piece deny passive consumption, refusing an artistic or commercial domestication of historical violence which would undermine the foregrounded imperatives of justice and redress. The asemic writing of the piece disrupts normative syntax and semantic sense, as words are splintered, italicised and hyphenated ambiguously, while punctuation is also employed unorthodoxly, as in the poem:

The,practice.was

Kelly Mary 06/12/1925 6 mts

to offer no pain re lief as suf-fering was
regard.ed

as part *ofher*

punishment

The disruptive typography slows the poem's consumption, forcing a deliberative approach from the reader, which reinstates the respect denied to the victims and survivors of the institutions, as well as evoking the frustrating difficulty with which the archival information is accessed. The practicalities of the physical poetry-object work in tandem with this, as evidenced by Campanello's three-hour-long video recording, in which she performs the experiential encounter her work effectuates. The physical weight of the object is burdensome, and the loose-leaf nature of the sheets demands a contemplation of how to handle and eventually reconstruct the narrative, implicating the public in symbolic reflective work. Reaching into the funerary shape of the box, which disturbs normative modes of literary encounter, implying a sort of exhumation, the reader is implicated in what Campanello refers to in her website's prologue to the piece as an "excavation of voices". In this sense, the public advances from an easy consumption of narrative to engaged agency in the creative and contemplative process, "from passive witnesses to active seekers of justice" (Darcy 44). In her video, Campanello is barefooted and repeatedly assumes kneeling, prayer-like positions, as she pronounces her poetry in reverential stillness. Demanding enduring attentiveness over the extended length of the performance, and further constructing a contemplative imperative for the audience, "[t]he intentional density and intensity of Campanello's performance also speaks to the difficulty, if not futility, of seeking justice for crimes committed by and guarded by church and state" (Swanepoel 202). In a third movement, the pragmatic accessibility of the poetry-objects similarly works to confer to Campanello's counternarrative regarding the institutional authority and mystic incorruptibility of the legal document. The reservation of the poetry-object in research libraries engenders a ritualistic, bureaucratic process of encounter, such that "[i]n first [physical] form, the inconveniences are all still there, resistant and resilient. These awkwardnesses should be considered a part of the reader's encounter with the artwork itself" (X 15-16). Such is the way in

which Campanello reflects on and questions the ethics of the Report she writes back to, unveiling the injustice engendered by the difficulty of access through her artistic reproduction, which represents an ironic mimicry. The haunting spirit and subversive power of Campanello's poetry-object thus marries the palpable commitment and compassion that characterise her intellectual engagement with justice (Moi & Johnson 3), revealing the injustices implicit within State handling of its institutional history, offering a form of poetic justice through representative, attentive and commemorative work, and rupturing the monopolisation of sanctioned narrative by interceding in legal text to render public the discourse on in/justice.

In conclusion, poetry, as a protean medium, induces the rehabilitative potential of language in *MOTHERBABYHOME*, treating memory, legacy, and history through regenerated forms of liberal discourse to the construction of a nascent image of an evolved future. Diverging from established conventions through experimental formal techniques as well as disrupting dominant national narratives surrounding the mother and baby institutions, Campanello offers a renewed social and artistic vision based on a representative commitment to marginalised voices and expurgated truths.

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Meet the Team

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"A dream is not reality, but who's to say which is which?"
— Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice Found
There, Lewis Carroll