III

SPECTRUM

SAINT NOWHERE

SPECTRUM VOLUME III

Sojourns in Temporality

McMaster University
English & Cultural Studies Undergraduate Society
2023

McMaster University is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations, and within the lands protected by the *Dish with One Spoon* Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

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Editorial

Be forewarned: this editorial may border upon sentimental, only because one of us (Hiru) is graduating this year.

This school year was the first year that many of us have gotten to experience in-person classes. Getting to form close friendships with those whose names we recognized from online tutorials was perhaps the most special part of this year. *We are so glad to have met you and now know you*. A formal thank you to Dr. Daniel Coleman, Stephanie Rico, and Dr. Selena Middleton for forging a writing community within the CWNA Certificate that will live on long past graduation.

Victoria, Kyle, Alyssa, and Ruth: your hours of hard work that went into co-ordinating reviews, copyediting, and working with authors to deliver the best versions of their work has been invaluable and we are so much better for it. We thank you for everything you have done to make *Spectrum* Vol. 3 as refined as it is beautiful. Speaking of beautiful, a special thank you to Victoria for gracing us with her InDesign expertise and working with us this year to create a polished showcase for our writer's work! A warm thank you as well to our reviewers, whose careful and thoughtful suggestions and edits in the early stages were integral to *Spectrum*'s editorial process.

Additionally, we want to thank Emily-Anne Maiorano, our lovely Vice President of Communications [Reigning Queen of Canva], and McCartney Uhraney, our incredible Vice President of Events [Mother of Blind Date with a Book]. This was a great year for events and outreach for our little Society, and none of it would be possible without you two.

A special shoutout goes out to Niko Haloulos (our honorary MECSUS Exec.), whose prophetic line in his introductory poem *51: WEST HAMILTON LOOP*, 'Like the cupped hands of / Saint Nowhere' managed to perfectly encapsulate the spirit of this issue and its wandering narratives of temporality, queerness, space, and religion.

And one final thank you, if we may, to you, reader for supporting our journal! We hope you enjoy Spectrum Vol. 3, "Saint Nowhere: Sojourns in Temporality."

Hiru Batepola and Mayson Broccoli-Romanowska
MECSUS Presidents and Spectrum Editor(s)-in-Chief

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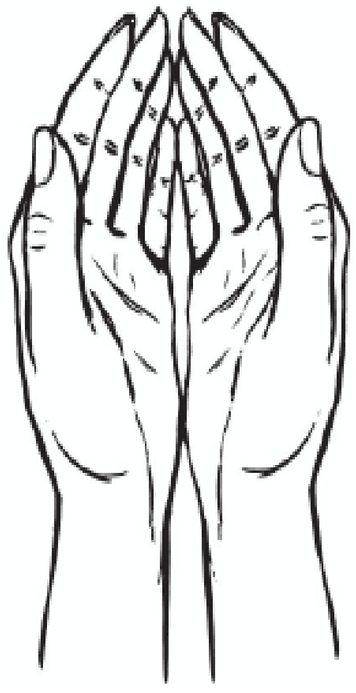
POEMS

SAINT NOWHERE



51: West Hamilton Loop

niko haloulos

I saw you sitting there,
Your back curved slightly over the steel bench,
Two thighs shaking in the daylight, failing to thaw,
At the corner of STERLING / UNIVERSITY
Beneath the stained glass of the Divinity College,
Your head superimposed over the hands of a Saint
Whose name I didn't care to know.

Whichever Saint that is,
Or whichever Saint that was,
They can't reach you the way I should have,
When I watched you wipe the corners of your eyes with a dampened sleeve,
And when I watched you pull the phone back slowly from your ear.

Pivoting on the bench,
You saw the bus coming,
and with one last fraught sigh
from your trembling lips,
a storm cloud in the cold,
you stood.

... The world suddenly tipped—
—and the Saint suddenly reached,
trying desperately to keep your body
in their glass arms.

In this moment fear stuck itself behind a mask,
A blurred contortion reflecting from the bus window.
The restless fray of people crowded at the stop,
In search of lines east and west,
Curious if they could move north and south,
Trudging through the rootless grounds of autumn,
Waiting for winter's kiss.

When I saw you
in the middle of the bus,
shaking,
I wish I reached for you
Like the cupped hands of
Saint Nowhere
longing to save one soul
On the 51 West Hamilton loop.

a homely street's sweet palette: a collection of haikus

hiru batepola

the little green house
with a sooty hat tipped slight,
dusts snow off its brim

the yellow house sits
(pretty as a buttercup)
stuck up and gorgeous

the red house stands tall
proud and strong; so much to do!
firewood, fix door...

the white house murmurs
nervous little sabotage
to itself, sometimes

bloody fruit between us

rijaa khan

We're drinking wine from the bottle
in the middle of an unnamed lake
on a boat that should not hold us.

I stare at the shattered stemware,
you stare at the seed,
which you cannot swallow

because a pomegranate tree will
grow through your throat.

A bowl of bloody fruit sits
between us, red and angry
from not being eaten.

Oh, the monster is lurking
'cause the sun bathes in the lake.

And your eyes glisten,
'cause you can see it coming.

I take a seed,
and throw it in the water.

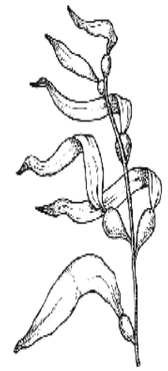
Bait, I say.
To call it faster.

flourish, algae

rijaa khan

You were young,
bluer than the
blue sky that
hung behind you.

I was younger,
grayer than the
polluted river we found
following the creek.



A spider was always
dancing on the water,
its body oscillating
with the moon's pull.

It is a little, little thing that
everyone sees but no one speaks about.

You told me once,
in a hushed whisper:
the creek looks like land at night,
when the water is still enough.

I was staring at the spider. But what I wanted to say was,
so does the sky, and
we could walk to it if you wanted to.

hometown

angie sea

fiddle to the place
a settled sojourner now calls
this home a town not city,
where factories and watersheds meet,
dwellings, art, and trees;
basking in these bricks and broken concrete
the union of need
where voices, faces, and spackle are free;
reflections keep time
like the unbound shorelines
etching progress, promises like smokestacks
billowing bellows to history
north like star, ink seeps like mud
becoming dirt again, crumbled reformations
strong, sudden, and scattered;
an ongoing finality
of labor welded into rust

bordered by lived in woods stripped,
turkeys, blankets, and industry;
treasured grime excavated
and built atop the buried
sing song solidarity
fragile mosaic, your scraps are sought after
displaced for new places
yet your pride for now shambles
are the only lights in the parking lots
unflooded, unbound by orientations,
led by unhinged signage
train tracks rail roads barreling bundles,
product of collected and distilled
colors, ashes, and fences;
like collagraph sidewalks,
swan babes sleep while
sparrow shadows flutter,
cast upon closed curtains

I am a dog
matthew aksamit

I am a dog

inside of a woman

inside of a man.

Look at my teeth:

look at the

blood

dripping from them,

the spit slicked

concrete floor.

We are left alone in the garage,

save a shredded collar in the corner.

We are unwanted –

I know this.

I am a dog,

begging you not to kick me so I don't have to

rip you apart.

I am not enamoured by my violent tendencies

I have learned to trim my nails

I have learned to look nice –

Fuckable?

Is that the word?

Men have ruined me.

I have been ruined by men.

What's the difference? It's nagging at me –

I can feel the tension build between my shoulder blades.

I am a dog

I am a dog

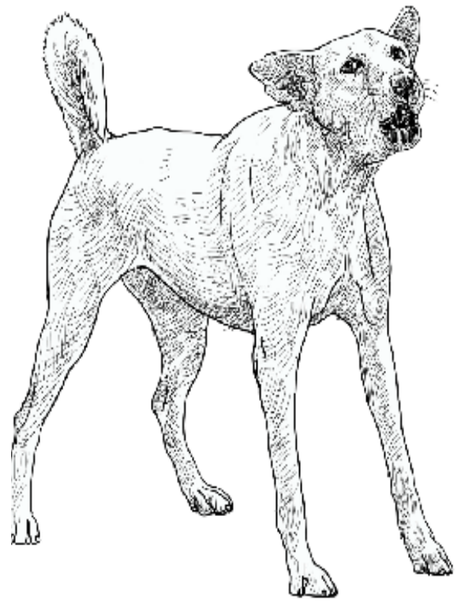
I am a

dog

I am a dog

and I am not yours.

My god, I'm not yours.



Ice arch, Luna Island

laura ferlanti

Ice arch, Luna Island,

all sunshine and gloss.

And here you are, in my homestake, the fort I built.

There's a small iron bucket inside the unembellished dwelling we share,

in it memories of loved ones lost from Redford and Gloucester.

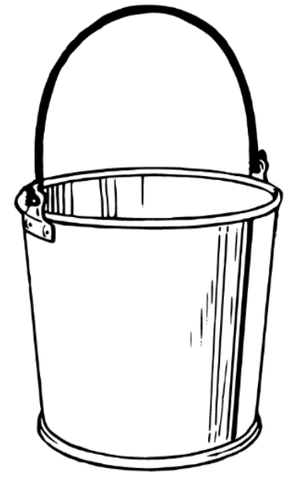
A brother's model tugboat, a sister's single ruby and a navy blue hard cover book I saw my mother read.

We love the misty air, and how its cool droplets kiss our swollen lips.

There's a fire on the sister island and there's nothing we can do about it.

If we were in Redford or Gloucester things would be different, but that's not where we are.

We are in my homestake on Luna Island resting beneath the ice arch.



Psalms I

matthew aksamit

These days I gargle knockoff Listerine when I can't brush my teeth, to get the taste of salt out.

(It never really leaves.)

Did you know that when I went to the hospital he came with me, too?

What a gentleman!

I found him in my underwear, while squatting to piss on the toilet.

And when I went to wash my hands, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror,

didn't want to see the ghoul that remained.

Did you have a family dinner that night?

Did you wish him a safe drive when he left?

No, it was a late night, wasn't it?

My mother carried my siblings and I a little bit late,

and I always felt bad about that, about the extra time.

How long did you cook him in the oven for?

Was he early? Was he late?

And I know it's not your fault,

(I KNOW I KNOW I KNOW)

but did YOU know that

YOUR SON IS A R

eally bad guy?

Can't even get the word out of my mouth,

it hangs around my neck instead.

r

r

r

R

R

R

R

R

How much did he weigh when he was born?

I can tell you he weighs a lot more now.

I can tell you how his sweat feels, dripping from his chin onto my back.

I can tell you that assault and religion have a lot in common:

what's one more instance of being forced to your knees?

what's one more instance of submission to a man who will not listen?

MATTHEW 5:5

And then Moses said:

And Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

And Fucked are the queers and transexuals, for they shall inherit PAIN and

PAIN and

PAIN and

GUILT and

SHAME

and

DISGUST

and a shiny PEARL

with the word "LOVE"

almost rubbed off its gleaming surface,

pale like the moon and just as lonely, too.

MATTHEW 27:32-56

What is a crucifixion to The Sadist?

(Ecstasy.)

(A good show.)

[The body speaks from the crucifix, body torn and bloody.]

BODY: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

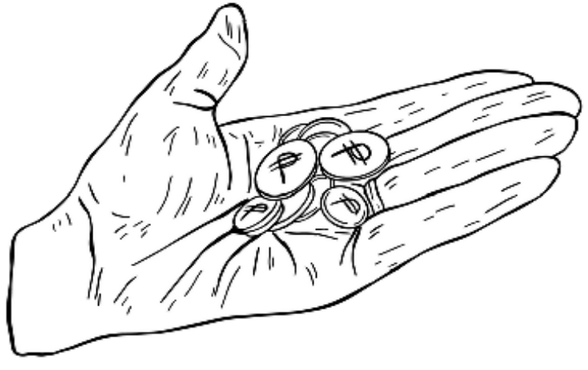
MATTHEW 27:1–10

There is nothing but the coolness of metal coins in your hands and vomit caked around your

blue mouth.

The world does not pause or mourn or even think about you.

Neither do I.



The Lover
kara raymundo

A boy, rust-stained blonde

Clasping his fingers together in prayer

He holds your neck

Your gasps are his gospel

Desperate and sweet

Like a boy and the love for his mother

Like a boy who does not deserve you as a lover

You want to say we're done, but you can't

You want to let go, but he can't

Because he tells you I love you,

Yet love is wearing thin

And he tells you you're so good, you're so good

But good is an asphyxiated boy

And your lungs are too hollow to disagree

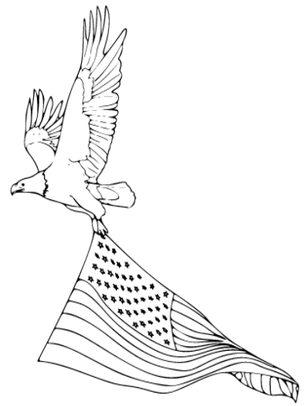
So you take him with your tongue,

As he breathes into your open mouth

Like a glutton starved with lies

You bite.

The One Whom He Loved
kara raymundo



you in the motel
two bodies in the sheets.

lovers caught in an act of the funeral
one heart close to the other's tomb

tongue-tied in light of the American pyre,
fifty stars shoot out of the room

and yes it's greedy, a shovel digging up a corpse
es it's hungry, warm flesh caressed in a man's mouth

but he kisses as if his love scars,
and you don't care how much it hurts
as long as he comes back to you.

so maybe god wants to leave it at that,
two children in a motel burning faith in their own way.

Venus Loves Us

rijaa khan

Out the window,
past the flicker
of our reflection
the sky shows us
visions of another world,
dancing in and out of focus. A hand grasping skin,
bone, teeth, arteries –
piercing eyes
begging to be known.

Exchanging looks in corridors,
a fickle blinking heart, with the other pair of eyes
gazing undoubtedly in the dark,
and that's all we ever really are.

But Venus loves us,
loves you, oh heart, even if the
world lies otherwise
even if they say
their god will come wreck us

Take a swift step,
past the gazing, past the corridor,
won't you?

Hold them, even momentarily –
their skin is not fire,
their hands are not salt water,
they are not passing through you
like a scorching scar
like a nameless fish.
They are someone you can know.

Venus loves us,
strokes like matches
kisses like eclipses and
our world wears its halo.

SPECTRUM VOLUME III

SHORT STORIES

SAINT NOWHERE

A Peach A Day

sacha laroque

The sun cooked Peach Jones' skin as she raked through the driest soil she'd ever worked with. Her rubber boots—black, no longer shiny, creaking—were planted, and she appeared unbothered by the prospect that the earth might, at some point, decide to swallow her whole. But her mind was elsewhere, focusing on leveling the soil where the Romas would go, and the hours of labour she still had left.

She then daydreamed, as she often did, of Arlo, who she knew got to sleep in. She could envision him spending the entire morning denting their couch. Justified, of course, by his sore back. He used this time to prepare for his daily meetings with the neighbouring farmers, which ran at the chapel on the corner of their street. Peach was bitter about them since they were exclusive to male farmers. She wondered how Arlo could even attend as he hadn't been out in the fields once since they moved in. He was no farmer. But a man? That he was, and that's what mattered.

Eventually, all Peach could focus on were her multiplying sun blisters. They burned holes into the furrowed skin between her eyebrows, reminiscent of a cow who's suffered the fate of a stun gun. She was a bruised-looking Peach, one that'd been left at the bottom of the grocery store shelf. That's how she felt anyway. But she didn't let these blisters bother her too much. If anything, they distracted her from the burn that spread within: the one ignited by loneliness, by isolation.

She squinted at the vacant sky. A crow cawed, flying in above her, hidden by the rays of the blinding sun. It cawed again, but soon quieted once he saw Peach carelessly lift her hoe only to plunge it into the soil again and again. The soil barely budged. He then watched her wobble over to another spot, where she once again made no progress with the seemingly unworkable soil. Her feet weren't doing well; ill-fitting boots and endless labour demolished her.

The crow had taken a liking to her. Perhaps it was how helpless she was, how much the woman reminded the crow of an injured rabbit he could sink his claws into. But

he didn't want to hurt her. In the way of all scavengers, he was anxious to see how her story might end. He thus kept a watchful eye as she was compressed in each direction by the endless stretch of soil and air.

The crow then turned his gaze towards Arlo, who was also watching Peach, the way a cat watches a mouse, from behind a corner so they won't see anything coming. The crow's beady, black eyes focused on her hopping, which it knew rendered her vulnerable, susceptible to an attack from her predator. Arlo was standing in the living room, his lip grazing the glass window he'd been watching his wife through, the condensation making the glass tear up. A corded telephone was glued to both his left ear and hand, the loops of the cord stretched almost straight. His eyes burned through the glass, never disrupted by so much as a blink of an eye.

The fact of the matter was that Arlo could only operate normally when Peach was out working, because she wouldn't be around to nag about his meetings. Nor could she disrupt his phone calls or notice that his back wasn't really shot. It wasn't because he couldn't help her that he wasn't out there. It was because he didn't want to. He had other, more pressing matters to attend to. Like preparing for his meetings. The crow's eyes glimmered as it watched the corners of Arlo's mouth lift into a smile, before ending the call and disappearing from view.

Upon moving to Rock Chapel, Peach feared neighbouring farmers would lament her and her husband's presence since it might trigger an impending competitiveness. However, their income was as low as their labour and production, so their neighbours worried for nothing. It seemed any efforts they, or really just Peach, poured into the land only contributed to its demise. When they bought the property, the soil was fertile, nurtured, and hydrated. But by the following week, everything was incurably lifeless and infertile: the grass now yellowish, the trees reduced to scaly spines, the endless dirt clumping together from the dryness. And eventually, Peach became the human embodiment of their circumstances: incurably lifeless and infertile. She figured God was punishing them for something yet to occur. All she wanted was a child to care for, someone to love and be loved by. But it was an impossible feat, and this worsened the state of her and Arlo's marriage until it, too, was reduced to a naked, meatless spine.

The crow, bored of the stillness of the scene, flew off towards the sun that lasered through Peach's clothing. After a few more hours, she could only focus on the perspiration that was pooling everywhere. She didn't think she'd ever finish the job, especially not in her condition. Especially not alone.

"Missus Jones?"

She turned around. A man sporting stained overalls and fingerless gloves stood about twenty meters from her buried boots. His eyes were wide, beady like the crow's, but stretched by an invisible speculum. They were red, unblinking, burning holes into the vacant scenery.

"That's me. You are?"

The man's strides toward her were noticeably large. Once in front of her, he stretched his hand out expectantly. The uncovered skin was red and scarred, and in his other hand hung a dirty hammer. The crow screeched from far away: this was a distressing cry different from his habitual cawing.

"Pardon, me, Missus Jones. I'm Levi. My farm's five minutes down the road. I've lived here in Rock Chapel my whole life." He coughed hoarsely into his palm after shaking hers. When he lifted his head, she saw blood droplets splattered on his glove.

She admittedly hadn't seen much of Rock Chapel, but then again, she hadn't had the time to explore. She took care of everything: the farm, their home, the animals. Arlo only took care of their finances, but mostly because a woman would never be granted such responsibilities.

"You can call me Peach. Missus Jones makes me sound old. Is there anything I can do for 'ya?"

He was missing several teeth, but his smile still stretched from his right ear to his left: the spitting image of a Cheshire cat.

"Your husband's a good friend of mine, actually. He uh…" he shuffled his feet, his gaze falling to the ground. "He asked me to come and help 'ya."

She cocked an eyebrow. Despite being a man of few words, Arlo surely would've told her he'd hired a farmhand. He certainly should've. But there were few things Arlo discussed with Peach. She oftentimes had to talk to herself for advice.

Peach pursed her lips as she peered over at the house. "It's odd he's never mentioned you, don't you think?"

Levi sighed. "Look," he said. "It's already midday. I get the defensiveness, trust me. You really have to be careful who you can trust these days. But I'm here to help—I know Arlo's back is all… you know. Listen, all I am is a friendly neighbour, helping out some new farmers. I know it's tough out here." He never blinked, not once.

She wasn't used to kindness, nor inclined to accept it so blindly. But it was hardly ever offered. And she wasn't in the position to refuse it at this point. "All right. Grab a spade. It's by the shed back there." She lazily pointed to her right. "I'm going to fix up the ground where the potatoes are going."

The crow circled them as they burned under the persistent sun. Peach would never admit this to anyone, but she enjoyed having a partner to work with. Levi never blinked, and he swore a lot, and he also whistled songs she'd never heard, off-key at that. But he was helping her. And during this, she almost forgot how badly everything hurt, burned. She hated the heat.

They planted three rows of Romas, each perfectly spaced out. Peach lamented the reality that the soil was still in desperate condition and that her labour may never grow into anything, but she had a friend. He might've been her husband's friend

beforehand, but she decided that now, he'd be hers too.

"You know, I appreciate the help, Levi. I really do. These days I don't get much of it." Peach smiled fondly as she said this.

"Ah, don't mention it." He unscrewed the lid of his jug, pouring the contents directly down his throat.

"So, you're friends with my husband?" Peach was in a prying mood. She hosed down the Romas, cementing them into place.

"Oh yeah. The guys and I are real tight here. Arlo's the green bean, but he's fitting right in. He's a good man, that one. Plus, s'always good to have some new blood in town." He resumed whistling, and the crow mimicked his song. The two harmonized unknowingly.

Peach felt jealousy burn in the pit of her stomach. She wished she was a man. She fantasized of this sometimes: of having her own farm, in her own name. She wouldn't need a husband; she'd do everything on her own. She'd find a wife, maybe. But she wouldn't make her work nearly as hard as she did, though.

"A wife..." She spoke without thinking. "Uh, do you have one? A wife?"

He ceased whistling to answer her: "I did." His gaze fell towards the ground. His feet were not buried like hers were.

Peach turned the hose off and removed her soiled gloves. "You did?"

"But she was killed. In a fire," he blinked.

She looked towards the sun as she said, "That's a horrible way to go."

After several hours, every inch of the soil had been ploughed, fertilized, and either prepared for planting or successfully planted. The pair made their way to the barn to return the day's equipment. Peach decided she enjoyed Levi's presence. She wondered if Arlo would be awake because she felt like asking her new work partner to come eat roast beef with them.

"I gotta take a leak," Levi blurted. "I'm just gonna step out." Peach continued to the barn, her cheeks burning as his strides came to an abrupt halt at the end of his freshly ploughed row.

It was time for Peach to arrange her tools in the shed, as she did at the end of every workday. She decided this would also be the best time to plan out how she'd ask her new friend to join them for dinner. She hadn't had a guest over before, because Levi didn't like people in his space, and the friends he did make, he never introduced to his wife. He was an awfully private, possessive person. But not of Peach. She was just a woman who happened to be married to him.

The crow followed her, perching himself up on the exterior windowsill, peering through the window grills. His beak periodically knocked on the window, as if he were asking Peach to let him in. But other than this, he was solemn.

He watched Peach speak to herself: "Levi, won't you—no, that's way too formal, Peach. Levi!" she feigned this exciting interaction, giggling to herself. "Don't you just love a good pot roast? Well, guess what?" She hung her gloves up. "I happen to have a whole hunk in my fridge!" Then the scythe and the sickle.

She drowned everything out—all but her mock-conversation. This was most important to her. She didn't hear the crow's abrupt cawing, nor the second pair of feet, whose strides took them directly behind her.

She ignored this, imagining the sorts of conversations they'd have. Perhaps he'd end up liking her more than her husband. Peach and Levi against Arlo, against the world. Or maybe Levi could convince Arlo to help, and maybe they'd all be friends. Perhaps they'd even let her come to their meetings. Maybe they'd let all the wives come for once.

"See, my husband and I—we don't normally have guests." She said this as Levi lifted his pitchfork. She absentmindedly slipped the dirty hammer into the drawer. "So, we'd love it if you'd be our—"

And then he plunged the pitchfork into her back. Again, and again, like hay. The barn filled with a screaming song, amplified by the crow outside who screeched as though he, too, were getting pitched. He could no longer see her, and she could no longer see anything. And so, they screamed until their voices gave out. Soon after, the barn was filled solely by the celebratory voices of long-time friends who had won their favourite game.

The crow, voiceless, flew above Levi and Arlo's as they dragged Peach across the freshly planted rows. Arlo was a walking miracle: his health issues—healed, gone within a single day! Peach's body was then dumped into the ground she had spent all day pouring herself into. The crow had seen Levi help Peach dig her own grave.

Soon all he could see of Peach was her rubber boots, sticking out of the abyss. The sun never ceased blazing them, nor the crow, who sat atop them defensively every single day that followed until he reluctantly flew away, heartbroken that he would never see her again.

As the hellish heat finally lead into early September, Arlo welcomed the abundant harvesting of this summer's work. He tenderly thought of all he had had to sacrifice to be where he ended up. The work, the thought, the care he had poured into his dream farm. He was in the middle of giving his nightly speech at the chapel when a myriad of crows began to circle the building. No man noticed for they were distracted by their assumed common superiority.

"I want to give a special thanks," Arlo started, lifting his beer to the dozens of raised cans around him, "to every single one of you. You have all supported me, shown me the way, helped me get rid of the problems that've held me back. Like women. Mine was an infertile one who never shut up, at that. To have been able to receive this support in my extermination has been necessary. Levi has helped me, like many of

you, fix my life. God is real, and he is a man."

Levi chimed in, "No kidding! Can't trust em' women to do anything," to which they all freed roaring laughs that came from deep inside their potbellies.

Arlo continued "Levi started off this movement by getting rid of his Linda. And, you know, he's really paid the price for that." The farmers stifled their anger at the thought of a man suffering at the hands of a woman. They all shot quick glances at Levi's hands, who would perpetually hold a reminder of the fire he killed his wife with. Arlo examined his own, which would he noted would forever be stained by the earth and its blood. They only lamented at how late in life their processes of extermination occurred. If only they'd known Levi sooner.

"But one at time, he's come into our lives, and taught us that there's a way out. We don't need to be shackled by them no more. Here's to us! To the men of Rock Chapel. Cheers to reclaiming our manhood and getting rid of whatever threatens it!"

And with that, they all cheered to natural fertilization and life insurance policies—which is how they all afforded their lifestyles now—before the perpetual cycle of polishing off, and cracking open a fresh one, ensued. They were so busy celebrating, dancing, and drinking their livers into despair, that they hadn't noticed the crow who'd broken in through the stained-glass window, who'd begun watching their every move. It had a particular disdain for rowdiness.

They hadn't noticed, either, when the crow tipped over one of the red votive candles at the altar. And while they were too busy funneling booze down their throats, fire caught, as it always does. It wasn't long before it was further ignited by the men's spilled alcohol. The air thickened with smoke and screams. The chapel had been overcome by mayhem; the men, just moments before celebratory of their bond, now ran over each other's crowded bodies, pushing, pulling, fighting for themselves only.

The crow cawed thrice, her eyes illuminated by the exploding orange and red, her song harmonized with their screams. And then it used its wings to fly out of the hellfire. It flew all the way to Peach's farm, where it found solace above her rubber boots. So, it stayed there, every day, right above her, watchful in case any man come and disrupt their peace.

Beyond the Curtain

kyle constantin

I know it is a dream. For what reason I do not know, as the dream is the same as the memory—the only memory I am able to recall—and though I can with certainty recognize it as a dream, it disorients me more than if I were ignorant to whether I was awake or dreaming.

My dream and further my memory, play out this way:

My girlfriend, her face buried in my shoulder, weeps black lines of mascara onto the straps of my white summer dress. Her head of thin blonde hair, tied as it is in a frizzy ponytail, falls onto my neck, tickling me with its bristly tips. Her breasts quiver against my stomach. Her whole-body rattles, causing the bed beneath us to creak and shiver. I lay unmoving, one arm curled around her to grasp the hot skin of her shoulder, the other trapped underneath her weight. My arm throbs from the pressure of her form, but I do not move it; I do not dare attempt to disturb her sorrow. Kneading my fingers into her arm, I tilt my chin down into my chest, but cannot, no matter how I angle myself, see a hint of my girlfriend's face. There is only the rippled skin of her forehead falling further down her face than it should. I lay there for a time, looking at the top of her skull, seeing the long line of flesh uncovered by blonde hair cutting across the top of her head.

We both lay, wordless. The only sounds are her muffled sobs and the keening of the bed as she convulses atop me.

Then, the room is silent and the heat I felt from my girlfriend's breath —from her whole-body vanishes, though, somehow, I feel her weight upon me. In a moment, she lifts herself, swiveling her head as she does, so I never see her face.

I watch the back of her head as she moves away from the bed towards the green dresser standing against the slanted walls of our attic apartment and retrieves something. She turns around, but her head does not follow. I stare as she stands, her head twisted to face the wall behind her. Her short ponytail bounces where her face should be. The knife in her hand gleams from the white light streaming through the

sole window in the room. As she approaches, I am paralyzed. Somehow, as if there is some discrepancy between my eyes and my body, her weight is still upon me.

Faceless, she kneels beside the bed and takes the knife to my throat. As I breathe, I feel the pressure of sharp steel against my neck. Through the thin strands of blonde hair, eyeless tears strike the bed beside me.

I feel a hot lash of fire as she drags the knife across my throat. I feel the hot pulse of blood rushing down my neck and the ghost of her body crushing me, until her faceless form vanishes into darkness, and I wake.

As my eyes struggle with the harsh flare of light above me, I remain immobilized, though it is not the same pressure I felt in the dream restraining me. No, there is a tightness bundling my legs and gripping my waist. An unseen restraint binds my wrist and I feel the grip of something across my neck, but my chest rises without obstruction as I breathe.

Once the light dims into white streaking artifacts imprinted on my vision, my eyes focus. To my left is a turquoise curtain drawn all the way across the room to the stained wall in front of me. On my right, beyond the small filing cabinet-like table, is the door's open threshold. I see the left half of a uniformed police officer slouched in a folding chair outside the door frame.

Why are the police outside my room? Do they think my girlfriend will come back when she realizes she has in fact not killed me? Why can I not remember anything beyond my dream?

I open my mouth to call out to him, but find myself incapable of speech, only able to push out a near silent sigh. Clutching at my throat with my free hand, I feel the thick overlapping layers of gauze wrapped around my neck. There is, I see now, a tube inserted in my hand snaking up my unrestrained arm to a fluid bag filled with a clear liquid; one which reminds me of a plastic bag a child would receive a goldfish in.

Looking down at my other hand, I see that I am handcuffed to the hospital bed's plastic frame. In my restrained hand, I am clutching a joystick with a faded red button atop it.

Panicking, I press the button over and over.

Even as the nurse rushes into the room, I cannot stop myself from clicking my thumb on the button over and over, until I am heaving rapid wheezing breaths, and the room around me dissolves.

When I wake, the doctor, an East-Indian man in a white coat, hovers over me. His cold hands work at the bandages around my neck, adjusting them until he is satisfied.

Righting himself, he stands, appraising me. His tentative gaze lands just below my eyes, staring, no doubt, at the bandages around my neck.

"Awake, are we?" he says, moving to the foot of the bed. "Rhetorical question. I know you cannot answer, do not worry. Rest for now, worry later."

And then, with a nod to the slouching cop, he is gone.

There has been no sound from beyond the turquoise curtain dividing the room since I woke; no indication at all in fact that anyone resides there. I have seen no nurses, doctors, or family members move from my side of the room to the side hidden behind the curtain. Why though, would the room be divided if no one else is in here with me? Is there a reason, beyond the privacy of another patient, for a curtain to be draped across the room? Looking at it I saw how it soaked up the light from a window I had never seen.

Perhaps, I thought, they simply wish to keep me from the light—from viewing the outside world. But why would they do that? I cannot find a reasonable answer to this question. So, for now, I continue to believe there is a silent patient, perhaps comatose, at my side, split off from me by the turquoise curtain. A patient who requires no extra care, with no relatives to visit. But then again, since I have been here, I too have had no visitors.

As I lay reclined with my lower half tucked under the papery sheets of my hospital bed, my wrist bound, the curtain drawn, and the cop slouched in the same position outside my door, I attempt to recollect anything beyond that night, but every memory curls away as I pluck at it. Each time I graze an image or sensation from the past, it hollows out and becomes formless. Only silhouettes of memory remain. So hollow are these hazy reproductions in my brain that I cannot determine if they are my own memories or the memories of another imparted to me.

There are memories of a woman in a white dress; of her wide smile passing through the veil of hair fallen over her face, of her twirling, sending the flounce of her dress up to her knees, exposing her smooth, waxen legs, and of her crouched, paintbrush in hand, eyes intense, biting her lip as she smooths green paint over a white dresser.

However, her face changes each time I sift through the memories. I cannot be sure if I am witnessing the same woman or two women.

Neither of these women are people I recognize.

The doctor has not returned since his initial visit.

When the nurse arrives, she is unresponsive to any attempt at communication I make. I tap my bound wrist with my free hand in a bid to have her tell me the time, but she only tightens the handcuffs, telling me, "This is for your own protection." I motion to the curtain with my eyes, but the nurse pays me no attention. She replaces

my bandages, studies the bag of fluid, adjusts my sheets, and leaves.

Outside the door, the cop has exchanged his face for another, but sits as he did when he possessed his other face; slouching with one leg stretched into the door's aperture.

I reach over my body with my unrestrained hand, attempting to draw back the curtain, but find I can only skim the thin blue fabric with my fingertips. It yields at my touch; the furrowed curtain wavers back and forth, but it stays upright, keeping me ignorant to what lies beyond.

At night I face the same dream. It occurs exactly as it did before, except, this time I find I am watching from outside my own body; an observer nestled in the wall as the harrowing events unfold.

My own face, I see, as my girlfriend sobs into my shoulder, is not there. My own curly black hair is draped over my face, obscuring any feature from sight. I watch as, supine on the bed, the two entangled figures without faces enact the same scene.

One shifts from sobbing into the other's shoulder, to wielding the knife, its face glinting the white light from a small square window. The other, eyeless and still, watches as I do, as her companion moves from mourning to violence, drawing the silvery knife up to her throat, and dashing it open in one smooth motion. Blood runs down my neck onto my breasts, staining my white summer dress; concealing the strips of mascara palpitated onto its straps moments ago.

This time however, the dream continues past the fissuring of my neck, where it splits open like a second mouth and pours out the contents of my body. Past this I see my girlfriend, knelt on the ground, her head angled down.

I know she is watching me die. Though I cannot see her eyes, I know she watches the life pour from my throat, and I can sense the wonder in her absent eyes as she does so.

She runs her hand across my neck to feel the outpour; the warmth of my body as it leaves me. Without hesitation she brings the knife up to her own throat and dashes it open. She stays upright for as long as she can then falls on top of me, pressing the sputtering wound in her neck against my chest.

Each night I lay in my hospital bed, I experience this same dream over and over, with some subtle variation. Sometimes, I see it as I did the first time, watching through my own eyes, seeing only the back of my girlfriend's head as she sobs, then slits my throat. Other times, I watch from the wall, a faceless confrontation between two women, one of whom is me, but as the dream repeats, I become less sure which of these two women I am. And more recently, in a disturbing variation, I experience the dream from the perspective of my girlfriend; sobbing violently into my own chest, anxiety swirling about my whole body.

My life is over, I say over and over, within the head of my girlfriend. I've ruined it all. I nuzzle my face deeper into her shoulder, wishing she felt the way I feel about her. I could smother myself with her beautiful body. I wish for nothing else but to press myself so deep into her that I strangle myself and die in her embrace.

But I know this is not what will happen. I know it cannot and will not end in these romantics I fantasize.

I quiet my sniveling and raise myself from her bosom. I know how it must end and somewhere deep down, I am sure she does too. I plod my way over to the dresser—the one I painted for her, the one we built together, and I retrieve the knife I had set there. As I walk back, she does not move; does not waver or struggle as I approach her with what she must know will kill her.

Perhaps, she does love me the way I love her.

Kneeling, I take the blade to her throat, watch as it rises against it, her skin folding against the blade. In one swift motion, I drag it across her throat, catching some of the blood splatter in my open mouth.

Though it pains me to watch, I am in awe of her beauty, even in the throes of death. I stare as more and more blood rushes down her body, staining the white dress we shared. It takes little time before I find this too excruciating to witness.

I take the blade to my own throat, let it bring me closer to her, and slice. Toppling over, I return to my love.

This is as far as the dream goes, and as a consequence, as far as my memory of my girlfriend's attempt on my life goes.

I am waiting, as I reconstruct what has happened to me, for my voice to return so I may notify the policeman who guards my door of what transpired. Perhaps he can elucidate the events that led to my hospital stay; tell me what has become of my girlfriend; if she survived her attempt at suicide and is right now plotting how best to ensure my death. Or, if perhaps she lays comatose on the other side of the turquoise curtain that divides my room in two, waiting to build up her strength to try and end my life again.

It is also possible, I imagine, she did not survive. Where the blade took only my voice, it took all of her.

I ponder these possibilities and yet, I cannot shake the feeling, as I watch the dream evince itself time and again, I may not want to know the truth. Perhaps it is best my voice stays withdrawn from me, and I never discuss how I came to be in this hospital bed. Lest I learn something which cannot be forgotten, and find myself on the other side, beyond the curtain, as the other woman, unable to live with what she has done.

The Littlest Fox

rachel oseida

It was the year that the harvest never came that Sascha began to fear for his life. When the crops withered and dried to husks in the south or froze to death in the north, the hunters ventured into the woods to keep themselves alive, and Sascha knew they were looking for easy prey just like him.

The little fox lurked at the small outpost just beyond the veil of trees. The dying leaves were only now beginning to fall, covering the dirt floor in various shades of red, yellow, and orange, allowing his family to blend in. The moon hung dauntingly low in the sky, shining the slimmest amount of light over the otherwise darkened houses, and Sascha trained his eyes on the candle-lit rooms through thick windowpanes.

He watched as people sat down at the table in view. All heads were hung low. His gaze hardened as mothers brought out what scraps could be scrounged up for their children. He shifted his gaze to peer as others unloaded their bags of squirrels, rabbits, and occasionally, foraged fungi. Some families had tried their luck and picked at the forest's wild plants, while others gambled with starvation over poisoning. The fox adverted his stare from the unlucky ones who met their fate.

Sascha's stomach churned as his family observed the townsfolk. The heavy weight of sympathy was hanging over his tiny body. He made a half-hearted attempt to refocus his eyes on the array of hunted animals just like him, lifeless on the tables of the people, but had no choice but to turn away. That could be him. It was almost surprising that it wasn't at this point. The rest of his family may be clever, but it wouldn't matter in the end for Sascha, not when he would be the scrawny one left behind.

Sascha wasn't fast, his crippled back leg had seen to that. He'd lost count of the number of times he'd been left behind or had to trail the others for hours to catch up. He had seen the rest of his family bolt on numerous accounts without a thought paid

to his well-being and wasn't too inclined to think that if they were hunted this time the outcome would be any different.

He shook his head. There was no point in dwelling on worst case scenarios.

"We will be fine," his elder brother said, noticing Sascha's downward gaze. "The woods are thick with animals, and the trees are even thicker. Some must be hunted eventually anyways; it happens every year. No reason to fret."

Yet his soothing did nothing for Sascha. This year feels different, he thought. The woods may be thick, but now the hunters were desperate, now they needed more.

"Some must be hunted," Sascha repeated in a whisper to himself, turning back to gaze through the windows once more.

Some must be hunted.

The only question was, how was he going to make sure he wouldn't become part of the 'some'?

Days went by. The poachers came in hoards, the forest began to grow quiet, and Sascha was feeling the weight of the situation. Winter drew nearer every day and despite the rest of Sascha's family seeming to be oblivious to the current circumstances, he couldn't help but worry.

The snow-coated ground, which had once been covered in an array of animal prints from the residents of the woods, had been trampled by foreign feet. This year the white powder had been stomped over with thick treaded boots and disrupted by tricky snares laying beneath the surface.

Although, it wasn't until the first blizzard of the season when the woods seemed to ease at last, and all retreated back to town that Sascha was finally caught.

The wind wailed and the trees fractured in response. The skies had been leeched of their color until only an opaque white was left. The flakes were dense, coming down in impenetrable sheets, with unfathomable speed. Sascha was disappearing in the storm, the tip of his own nose was no longer visible.

The fox's ears twitched, seeking out sound in the silence hat had settled with the snow. He was blind and deaf, moving through the trees based on faith alone. Keep moving, he thought to himself, he needed to keep moving. Even his thoughts felt muffled. As if somehow the storm had crept inside his head and was filling him up with snow from the inside as well.

It would have been impossible for Sascha to have noticed the hunter behind him, just as it was impossible for him to get away.

Sascha felt the arrow pierce through his back leg first. An uncanny warmth from the pain spread throughout his chilled body. Second was the tilting of his world as the hunter dragged the fox into the air by his tail. Third was sharp pressure of the man's

slim blade against his neck.

Sascha stilled in the man's grasp. He knew there was no way for him to escape, just as he knew there was no way he would be satisfied without making an attempt, nonetheless.

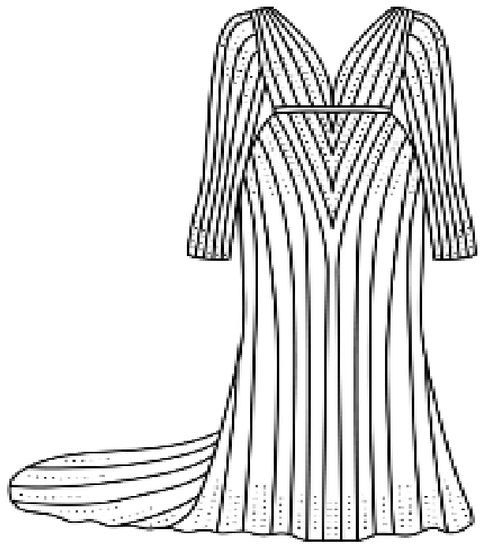
The fox cocked his head and looked into the eyes of the huntsman.

"You don't want me," Sascha pleaded. "I am but a scrawny fox with a bad leg. I would be no use on your table."

In spite of the blizzard, or perhaps because of it, the man guffawed at his words. His eye lined with tears was quickly wicked away by the wind as he shook his head at the fox.

"That may be so, but the fields are barren, the crops are dead, and your woods are sparse with meat. You, my friend, are the only straggler they left behind."

Sascha wanted to argue. He wanted to try to outsmart the huntsman as all the other cleverer foxes did in the tales his mother told. He wanted to trick the man with the click of his tongue and saunter back to his family victorious for once in his life. Yet no words seemed to come as the huntsman gave a meager wince at the little fox and finished the inevitable.



The Sacrifice

liz sheldon

Elizabeth found herself uneasy as she carefully changed out of the wedding dress, unable to keep her thoughts from racing as she undid the troublesome buttons that Victor should be helping her with—where was he? Why had he dismissed her in so strange a mood, and with that pistol that he thought she had not seen? She had seen it, of course, for how could she miss the peculiar hardness amidst the softness of his shirt, just as she had not missed that horrible anxiety return to him, which she had hoped was gone. His face had been white as bone when he suggested she retire early, his eyes wild and full of fear as he asked her to wait for him in their room. She acquiesced; even as old doubts began to rekindle. Was it that other woman Elizabeth was certain had caught his heart, had cast that first distance between them? His letter had assured her otherwise, but Elizabeth had seen that awful faraway gaze more than thrice over the last week as they prepared for the wedding, even as he reassured everyone with gaiety and smiles. But surely, he did love her, she thought, as she pulled on the nightdress, or he would not have married her. She had given him every opportunity, but here they were, and she was Mrs. Frankenstein.

Perhaps, she wondered as she moved to pack away the gown, it was that strange secret that weighed on him that he would not tell. She did not understand his secrecy at first, but as the day he had promised to reveal all got closer and closer, Elizabeth felt herself getting more and more wracked with nerves. Perhaps he had indeed killed poor Henry? She hadn't believed the rumours, but all this misery he dragged 'round with him… Or perhaps not as dire—a child somewhere, maybe Ingolstadt or France. She could handle that, but she was unsure if it warranted such dread in his fevered eyes whenever he looked at her with those put-upon smiles. Or had he some debts—yes, perhaps this was it—and a debtor had followed them here. That could explain the gun, maybe, or at least his dismissal of her.

That dismissal. Once she would have gone easily and sat in this room perfectly happily, but now… Elizabeth felt all those emotions Caroline had said were unladylike and uncouth. She was frustrated and tired, and wanted to just yell as loud as she could. She was supposed to be happy, everyone said she would be. This was her purpose in life, to be married to Victor. So why did she feel so drained and unhappy? That little voice that sounded like some perfect version of herself said, It's because he is unhappy and distracted that you are too. You are just a good wife. But that wasn't entirely true. It didn't feel honest. It felt like what was expected. And nothing had been going as expected. On her wedding day, she had thought she'd be happy—told she would be. Caroline had always said her wedding day was the best of her life, but when the day had arrived for Elizabeth—had it only been a few hours?—she felt nothing but a strange fear and melancholy. Alphonse had said it was normal for a bride to feel this way, and she wondered then and now why that was if this was supposed to be a woman's happy purpose. Shouldn't she feel satisfied, complete? Victor had seemed to be, and when they were at the altar, his eyes had shone so full of joy as never before. It seemed everyone was happy, but Elizabeth could not muster it. She still could not move past that other, sinister voice that had begun to whisper the moment Victor had returned that there was no happiness on the horizon.

She shook her head and let it fall in her hands for a moment before composing herself once more. Victor would be displeased to see her as such, and it would surely ruin what joy there was left to be found in the night. Elizabeth allowed herself one more sigh, then moved to survey herself in the mirror, to put eyes on this new Mrs. Frankenstein. She should look her best for when he returned, to salvage what happiness could be had for the rest of this night. But her best did not seem to be there, for her reflection was wan and gaunt—gaunter than she knew he liked. His expression had said as much when they reunited those eleven days previous, and she had felt that little twinge of annoyance as she read in his eyes that sour flash of momentary distaste with her grief-struck frame. Never mind that Victor had looked substantially worse, no matter that she had lost a dear friend in Clerval just as he had, there was still that surprised distaste, even as he had pretended it was not there and said what a beautiful bride she was. Still, Elizabeth frowned at herself in the mirror as she took in the intricate hair and the lace nightgown that was rubbing uncomfortably at her collarbone and shoulders. She missed the soft cottons of her childhood garb, unassuming and straightforward, allowing for movement, which she had been barred from wearing once she had turned thirteen. Now there was this, but—

There was a slight movement in the corner of the room, by the door. Elizabeth could not make out anything more in the mirror, and she turned, opening her mouth to greet her new husband, when—nothing escaped her but a gasp, pushed from her like a sharp blow to the stomach. She pressed the back of her hand to her mouth. The creature before her eyes—for she could not yet identify it as anything else, her mind wouldn't allow her—loomed taller in the doorway than any man she had ever seen, which it had just gently shut. Its hair was a black mane, its skin taut to its skull as if

horribly dehydrated and starved all at once. Its lips were blackened, its eyes a strange, electric glow, and her numb mind took in the hints of careful but crude stitching that laced the skin at the joint. It took a step towards her, and she drew in a breath to scream when suddenly, a voice emanated from the creature and arrested her. It was melodic, a deep and masculine voice, and to her utter confusion, it was tinged with earnestness.

"I do apologize for intruding, but it was time. May I?" Elizabeth stared a moment, then her gaze dropped to the hand he offered. She took it on instinct, thoroughly numb in fear and shock, and he almost recoiled in what she vaguely discerned was surprise, before leading her to one of the chairs by the window. He took the other and moved it across the room before settling into it himself—for he was a man, she could see that now. He watched her steadily, and after a moment, her voice returned, though faltering.

"What… do you want? Who are you?" She could not take her eyes off him, and she watched as his brow jumped once more in surprise before resuming the hard stare, full of rage and sadness, yet a strange peace as well that kept her from falling apart for a reason she could not understand.

"I am making good on my promise; he imposed himself upon what should have been my nuptials, and I told him I would return the favour." He watched her carefully, and though Elizabeth could not make sense of this at first, a realization then hit her like a lightning bolt: this must be the secret. Nothing else could be as upon his mind than this creature, so clearly full of anger towards Victor. For he was angry at Victor—she could see it in the curl of his lip. She looked away then and felt a manic sort of calm fall over her like a snowfall, cold and quiet.

"This was not a secret to keep, Victor," she murmured to herself, and the being before her leaned forward, head cocked like the puppy she had once had. She met his gaze again. "Tell me. Please."

And so, he told her, and she listened in near disbelief as this creature told her of his creation and immediate abandonment, his attempts at good and kindness, and the rejection he faced. She felt horror at his tentative relaying of the tale of little William and poor Justine, and disgust at both this creature and Victor, who knew—he knew and said nothing! She heard tell of his pact with her husband, and her husband's breaking of that vow. She shuddered at the destruction of 'Eve,' as this creature called her, and felt her face blanche at the admittance of guilt for Henry's death. He told her of his threat and then simply watched her with baleful eyes. Elizabeth sat in silence long afterwards, absently picking at the skin around her fingernails and watching the storm outside, which drew ever closer to that small window. Finally, as the creature began to rise, she held out a hand. Wait.

"You gave him this warning, that you would be here on our wedding night?" She watched carefully as he nodded, still inching forward at a snail's pace. "Stop. Those

words?" He did stop, and she took that opportunity to rise and move back to the mirror. She had done this as a child, until Victor had caught her and laughed; she had watched her expression, not out of vanity but out of study, in an effort to control her face. It was pale just now, and she saw two ugly spots of red rise in her cheeks. "He knew this, and he is not here? He left me on my own, knowing you were coming? I don't understand." She turned sharply to the creature, who had frozen, seeming rather at a loss. "What, did he think you were coming for him?

How? Why would he even marry me, either way?"

"Love?" the creature offered quietly, apparently unsure of what was happening.

Elizabeth heard herself laugh, a bitter and high-pitched sound she did not recognize.

"No. that is not love. Love would have been letting me go, facing whatever fate he believed was coming to him. That is not love. It is selfish. Ha!" She watched as the creature sat back down, and she began to pace, her hands mechanically flexing and then closing into fists. "Always so selfish, but I ignored it because he was brilliant and because I was supposed to—do you know, they took me in to be his wife? Did he ever tell you that?"

The creature shook his head and looked as confused and curious as one could with skin so taut and inflexible. "I was an orphan, maybe three years old, and the Frankensteins took me in. Never their daughter, always their daughter-to-be. I was never even able to call them mother and father, those who raised me—no! They were not mine, but I was his. And when she died, then I was her. Everyone looked to me for comfort, care, and parenting—Alphonse was right there! And I was so young, and still ill with the last of the fever, but I was mother now. Victor went to school, on his quest for glory, and I was a mother to those I wished to call siblings, caretaker for a man who should have cared for me. All my life! Victor got to leave, and I watched those I love suffer and drop like flies. All my life, for other people.

"And now I still am. I don't even get to be what they procured me for, not a wife to this man who I so long believed was good—you have shown me he is not, have you not? No. All I am, and am doomed to be, is the sacrifice for the gains of others. For Victor's happiness. Your revenge. For the sake of the Frankenstein children, for Alphonse, who I know loved me, but still, I could not call him 'father'. Only a pawn, when the only thing I had to look forward to was being the queen." She pointed suddenly to the creature, who appeared enthralled.

"I wanted to go to school once, you know. Henry had wanted to study literature, and the two of us had fancied I would join him. But Victor and his parents laughed. Henry forgot about literature in favour of the colonies, and I was without hope. I was entrenched in this life chosen for me by others." She collapsed into the chair again, all at once feeling quite drained. "I have been good, done as I was asked, done what was expected. Now, I am doomed to die because of someone else's choices. I suppose my

only value was as his object."

Silence followed, then she heard that beautiful voice, inconsistent with the face Victor had bestowed, speak ever so gently.

"I understand."

She raised her head to look and considered him critically, looking for something in the dull glow of those yellowed eyes.

"Yes. Yes, I suppose you do. You can see. I'm a sort of corpse, too, then. Victor's own corpse bride. But do not equate yourself with me. You cannot." She glared at him, and he seemed uneasy with the comparison between him and his maker, grimacing painfully. "No.

You are not any better, hurting others out of selfishness. William, Justine, Henry. Me. You take and give nothing. Maybe you could have been better, I can see that, but the fact that you are here.... You are no better. Your pain does not equal mine. Equate yourself with him, not me." She looked for any anger in response, but he bowed his head and turned from her to look out the window behind her, which she realized he had been doing since he had arrived. She turned to follow his gaze and distantly saw Victor, who looked out from the front door into the darkening night before returning to the inside of the house. She turned back to her husband's counterpart, who caught her gaze.

"He's looking for me. He has been looking since he left you, but I have been here before you both. He will look still in vain." He gave a small shrug, and his eyes held a warning Elizabeth knew better than to ignore. But she saw something else in his eyes, which lit a tiny spark in her—hope.

"You want to hurt him, yes? Let me leave him instead, abandon him as he abandoned you! Surely that would hurt more than my death, knowing that I left him? Let me have my life, and you can have each other." She waited with bated breath, and her heart seemed to shudder as he considered carefully. But when he spoke, it dropped.

"Would you come away with me, be my new Eve? I would love you as you deserved, and you would want for nothing—"

"NO!" She felt the word escape her body without prompt, and her stomach twisted at the anger that flashed her way. She desperately tried again. "I wish to be free of ownership, do you not see? To trade one for the other would surely destroy me, nonetheless, render me nothing more than flesh. All I have been intended for is to procreate and rot. Can you not let me have the happiness you were denied? Could you find the kindness I know you sorely desired, and have it for someone else?" She looked again for that inkling of what had given her hope, but it was gone. He shook his head.

"He must know it was me, and you would certainly return to him. You are a woman, after all." He began to move towards her again, and she bared her teeth, letting herself

feel the full extent of the rage she had been taught so long to ignore.

"Then you are a monster. You both are, cursing others because you have been cursed, unfeeling for those other than yourselves. Well, I curse you." She spat at his feet, and he paused. "You men, who think you have the right to rule, render those around you as you see fit, while we must turn ourselves mindless and pleasant for nothing more than your letting us exist. Sink us lower while raising yourselves. I wish I had never been found by the Frankensteins. I wish I had died with my mother. I wish you had already killed him and would just let me be." She stopped, breathing heavily, and reached blindly—her hairbrush—and threw it as hard as she could at him. It bounced off his chest, and he looked at her with that pity that sickened her now where it had given some sliver of optimism not moments before. She met his gaze, resolved.

"I will give you two options, madam. Accept, or do not." He looked at her without guile, and she took a deep breath, eying him and the door he blocked. She would never get past him. She clenched her jaw, let her hands curl into fists. She would not go quietly.

The Traveller

liz sheldon

I set in the destination at random. All I need is to be anywhere but here. Away. Gone. I hear the gears grind, and the roar of the engine, but I might be imagining them. Everything feels numb, and all I can register is that I am shaking. Their face is burned onto my frontal lobe, full of callousness and ice. As if they had never cared at all about me. I had to go, get away. Escape whatever pity waited for me with those who knew us, escape the contempt I never imagined could exist.

I come back to my body eventually. It might have been minutes, it might have been hours that I spent staring at the hatch, the door that led back to some sort of reality. It's yellow, and I find myself wondering why I decided it should be. I don't think I ever liked yellow. Did they? Never mind. I stand up, and as my hips creak their disapproval, I reach for the handle and pull the door open. There isn't much light outside, and as my feet land on the sifting sand, I stagger before catching my balance.

There are stars, more than I've ever seen in my life—a rainbow of tiny sparkling lights shining down on me. I pick out planets. The moon hangs low, its face looking down in curiosity at this interloper. I used to love the moon and stars, but they remind me of them. We went starwatching once, in 1922, in the Atacama Desert. They fell asleep in my arms. I had felt so completely at peace then, and they had seemed more beautiful than the universe. What did they think of me? I had thought I knew.

I avert my gaze and look out at the expanse of land itself— for it is an expanse, vast and empty. Hills of blue-grey go on for eons, silent, watching me, mountains that blur into giants through my bleary eyes, looming large and wonderfully unfeeling. I am in a valley, I realize slowly, and I am far from anything but these dunes. I sit and feel the sand, hoping for comfort, but it is cold and hard, and I liken myself to it, feeling a companionship with this alienated strip of land.

At first, it seems as though there's an absence of noise. There is a quality to this

silence that I have never experienced—unending, an ocean of quiet. But as I lie down and close my eyes, I am proven wrong. The wind is here, and it sounds like the surf. In darkness, waves lap at some distant shore, or right in front of me. I can't tell. I open my eyes, and it dances away to hide between dunes, whistling an age-old song. Once I might have been put off by this eerie hum.

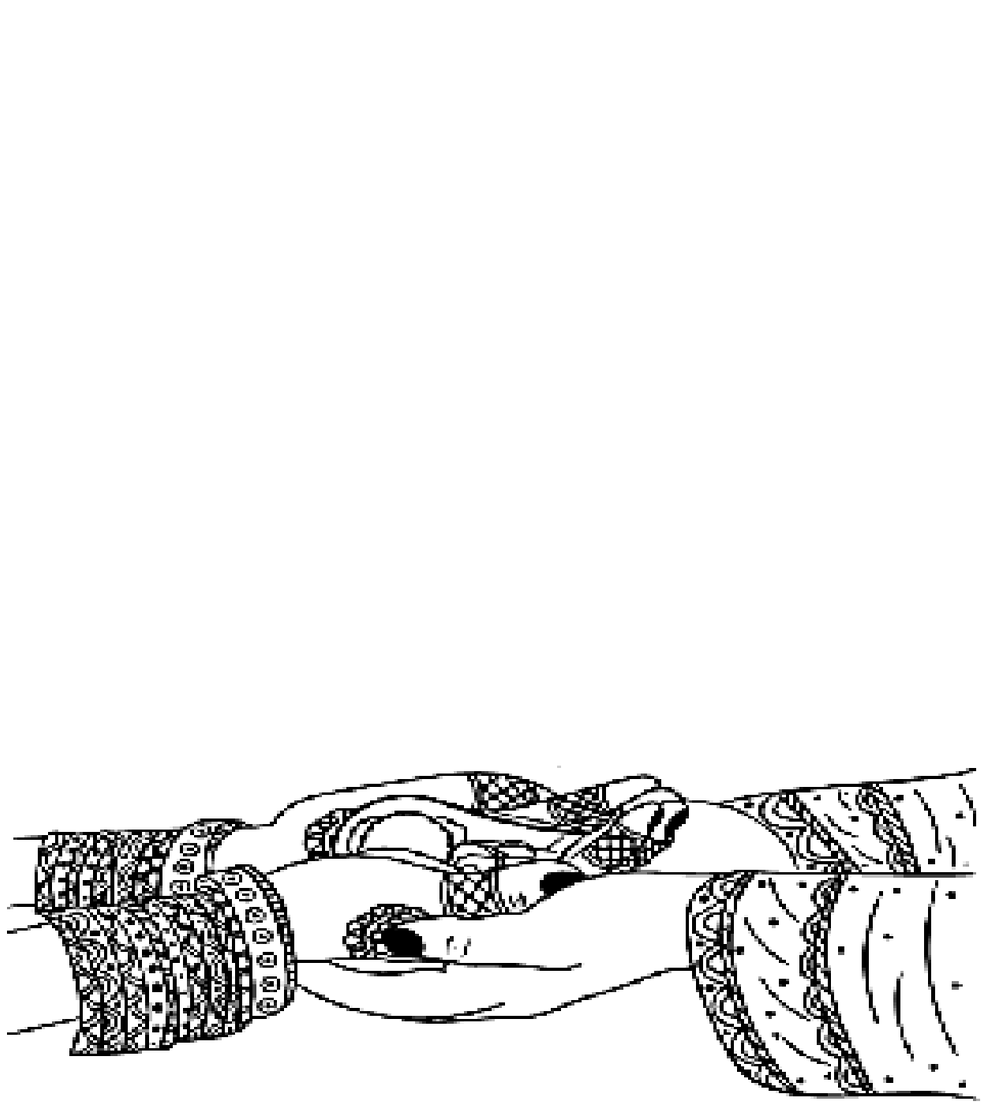
They used to look forward to the pictures I took of my trips, when they didn't come along. I showed them pictures of cities of ruby glass, of a newly carved sphinx, the skyline of a long-crumbled metropolis that used to be called… what was it? New Amsterdam, maybe? It didn't matter. The pictures never mattered to me. Weren't for me. They had always smiled, flipping through their history books to find their own reference, promising to frame their favourites.

I take out my camera and snap a picture.

SPECTRUM VOLUME III

ESSAYS

SAINT NOWHERE



Defying Class and Gender Expectations as Postcolonial Feminism between Ama Ata Aidoo and Arundhati Roy

anna samson

With the rise of feminism over the last century and its ongoing evolution, stories of women fighting against oppressive systems have grown in number and popularity. Many of these repressive systems, such as sexism and casteism, include aspects of misogyny and patriarchy founded in colonialism. Feminists from formerly colonized countries such as, Africa, South-east Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean Islands,have discussed how these oppressive aspects interact with native ideals in contradictory ways, stating "...it is nonsensical to continue to be represented by aliens; we should represent ourselves in our own terms instead, hence postcolonial feminism" (Mishra 130). Postcolonialism refers to the time after the end of colonial rule and looks at the cultural, political, and economic legacy and long-term effects of control, exploitation, and violation of colonized people and states. Two postcolonial novels that explore women navigating life in a patriarchal society that represent themselves in their own terms are *Changes: A Love Story* by Ama Ata Aidoo and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Aidoo's novel, set in modern-day Ghana, follows the life of Esi Sekyi, a woman whose independence and ambition differed from traditional gender roles and expectations, leading to an unhappy marriage and a complicated second marriage. Roy's novel is set in India, shifting back and forth between 1969 and 1993 and tells the story of Ammu, a woman who defied class and gender expectations through her love life. Esi and Ammu both had to deal with failed marriages, abuse, trying to care for their children and their family's disapproval of their new romantic relationships. Pursuing these romantic relationships is an act of rebellion in itself. In patriarchal societies, such as India, it is frowned upon for previously married women to want and find love again. Even in Western society today, which is considered progressive throughout the world, women still face stigma and discrimination for pursuing romantic relationships after a previous marriage, the death of a spouse, or separation/divorce. However, in Esi and Ammu's situations, there are added layers of social and political discrimination in addition to having been previously married. Esi faces added discrimination for being in a polygamist relationship, and Ammu faces added discrimination for being in a relationship with a lower caste man.

Esi is career oriented and independent, which angers Oko, her husband. She explains this to her best friend, Opokuya saying, "...my job can be very demanding sometimes...Oko resented every minute he was free and I couldn't be with him" (44). She wants to aim for higher positions but settles for one she is overqualified for because her success threatens her husband's masculinity. He then rapes her, and Esi can bear no more and finally seeks a divorce. Whether knowingly or not, the assault on Esi is Oko's attempt to assert his dominance and reestablish the traditional gender power imbalance. Aidoo describes the double standards of gender in the workplace and in general, stating, "[h]aving to deal with a man who is over-qualified for a job is bad enough. To have to cope with an over-qualified woman in any situation is a complete misfortune" (41). Esi fights against the social traditions of a woman's role and expectations in the public and private spheres by prioritizing her career and leaving her husband.

Ammu goes through something similar in her life, as she was also in an unhappy marriage. She got married to escape her father's tyranny and the role of a daughter as a submissive victim, which is her attempt of freeing herself from the forms of patriarchy and gender roles in her life. Her husband turns out to be an alcoholic that often skips work. He is unreliable and constantly lies to Ammu. They have twins, a boy and a girl named Estha and Rahel. Ammu's husband would also beat her when he was drunk, and "[w]hen his bouts of violence began to include the children...Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents' house in Ayemenem" (Roy 42). Indian society's general perception of married daughters returning to their maiden homes is expressed through the thoughts of Baby Kochamma, Ammu's aunt. Baby Kochamma's disdain for the situation, stating, "[s]he subscribed to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter–according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all" (45). Women in South Asian cultures are expected to bear abuse and remain in unhappy marriages to preserve their family's reputation and the sanctity of marriage. By choosing to leave her husband and care for the twins herself, Ammu defies the social expectations of women- as a wife, daughter, and mother.

Esi faces further scrutiny by her mother, grandmother, and Opokuya for agreeing to be Ali's second wife. They are surprised that an educated woman would participate in the 'old tradition' of polygamy. They are also shocked that Esi is willing to commit bigamy, as the law in Ghana prohibits polyamorous marriages. It is important to note that "[d]espite its decline in the past century, polygamy remains more common in Africa than elsewhere in the world, with about a quarter of married women in polygamous unions" (qtd. in Becker 31). Polygamy is a part of many African and Islamic cultures, and its decline is due to colonialism and the subsequent arrival of Christian missionaries. The missionaries strongly opposed polyamorous unions and practices, as "...polygamy was widely considered as incompatible with Christian norms" (31). Ali explains this to Esi, saying, "[p]olygamy, bigamy. To the people who created the concepts, these are all crimes...Why have we got so used to describing

our cultural dynamics with the condemnatory tone of our masters' voices?" (Aidoo 90). Christian missionaries were also responsible for the expansion of Western-style education, and their oppositional stance on polygamy affected the access people had to education. Parents were hesitant to let their children attend missionary schools for fear of them learning and adopting monogamous ways of thinking. At the same time, children were refused admission to schools unless the marriages of polygamous parents were dissolved (Becker 32). Due to the insistence on monogamy, "...levels of educational attainment are generally lower in traditionally polygamous societies" (33). Therefore, colonialism and Christian missionaries led to the association between education and monogamy. However, Esi, Ali, and his first wife, Fusena, are all college-educated. Fusena talks to the women in Ali's family about him wanting to take a second wife and "'[w]hat shocked the older women though, was how little had changed for their daughters - school and all!" (Aidoo 107). This sentiment is later reiterated by Esi's mother and grandmother when she tells them about marrying Ali and being his second wife. Esi overhears her mother saying, "Esi had such high school education and she is such a big lady," and her grandmother tells her mother, "...it is not our fault that you and I did not go to school" (113). The notion that being educated means being monogamous and being less educated means being polygamous is evident in how the elders react to this situation. As an educated woman who becomes a second wife, Esi defies both colonial and Ghanaian expectations of women in love and marriage.

While Ammu did not deal with the issue of multiple spouses, she had to combat classism. Ammu is a twenty-seven-year-old single mother who has not been in any romantic or sexual relationship since the dissolution of her marriage. Although she has known Velutha since her youth, they did not enter a sexual relationship until now. While it is frowned upon for Ammu to be divorced and seek new love, the caste system, a class system of occupation and lifestyle that is based on birth, is the major societal obstacle she faces. Despite being outlawed at the time of Independence from Britain, casteism perseveres and is rigidly adhered to, especially by elders. It is interesting to note that:

> "...despite the spread of education, industrialization, urbanization and modernization which have increased opportunities for young people of both sexes from different castes to socially interact and fall in love, the number of intermarriages or rather the number of young people who dare cross the caste lines to marry is still very small" (Saroja 186-7).

Ammu is a Syrian Christian, an ethnicity believed to be of the Brahmin caste. Brahmin is an upper caste, and its people are considered Touchable. Velutha is a Paravan, a lower caste of fisherman and its people are considered Untouchable. Velutha's father feels he owes a debt to Ammu's family and must remain loyal to them by exposing their relationship to Ammu's mother. When describing this, Roy repeats a phrase from earlier in the book: "[t]hey had made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happen" (242). It was unimaginable for inter-caste relationships to occur, emphasizing a continued influence and deep integration of casteism even

during postcolonial times. Ammu confirms her decision to be with Velutha when she goes to the police station and tries to explain that she was not violated but chose to give herself to him. Ammu rebels against colonial gender expectations by pursuing a relationship as a divorced single mother. She also defies class expectations by entering a relationship with a man of a different caste and is considered especially damning due to their caste disparity.

Esi and Ammu are two women who were abused by their husbands and left them. They both faced similar stigmas for abandoning traditional ways of being a woman in a family. Leaving their husbands is a postcolonial act of feminism since they defied the rigid marriage structures formed to support the patriarchy and disseminated through colonialism. Furthermore, Esi becoming a second wife and Ammu having a relationship with a man of a lower caste further solidify their active rejection of societal roles, expectations, and traditions. By rebelling against monogamy and casteism, Esi and Ammu engage in postcolonial feminism to fight for equality and inclusivity in their lives simply by falling in love.

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Double Down: Exploring Power & Gothic Conventions in *The History of Mary Prince*

alyssa mendonca

The History of Mary Prince, first published in 1831 as a piece of Abolitionist literature, is steeped in the Gothic mode as it relates to experiences of psychological and corporeal violence. Unlike the early English and American writers of the Gothic genre who strove to work against Enlightenment principles of reason and rigidity, Prince's *History* is not designed for imaginative stimulation or emotional entertainment. Instead, Prince implores the British to realize that the Gothic imaginary—an aesthetic discourse invested in the dark side of humanity—has as its source the systematic kidnapping, torture, and murder of Black enslaved peoples. Without the typical British Gothic settings of castles, laboratories, and subterraneous passages at her disposal, Prince draws upon the Atlantic Ocean, salt plantations, the Black body and voice as her Gothic sources. Prince's unconscious transplanting of concepts such as sublime nature, the double, and spectrality into her text demonstrates an (en)forced embodiment of the Gothic imaginary on Black enslaved peoples. In so doing, Prince deconstructs the division between horror and terror, implying that the Gothic's need and desire to *imagine* physical and ideological violence is a privilege and a luxury.

Some might argue that Prince's slave narrative is not 'traditional' Gothic because it does not constitute the genre's conventions—ghosts, graveyards, underground labyrinths—in explicit terms. However, this is to disregard the Gothic's cliches as immutable, incapable of being meaningful tools for authors other than it's (white, male) 'fathers'; this is to incarcerate the "highly unstable genre" (Hogle 1) into the prison of Enlightenment rigidity it attempts to escape. The text's title itself is rooted in Gothic traditions: being a "History" (Prince 1) "With A Supplement From the Editor" (1) is reminiscent of Gothic prefaces insisting upon contained texts as "ancient" histories or 'found documents.' Furthermore, Toni Morrison argues in "Romancing the Shadow," that the "slave population, it could be assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and elusiveness" (37). The inclusion of the subtitle "A West Indian Slave" (Prince 1) in the text's full title exemplifies Morrison's point; the text is inextricably linked to the metaphors of imprisonment and emancipation that electrify white author's texts as a useful descriptor for the tensions between intellect and emotion, the Enlightenment and the Gothic. However, Prince's text—as an *actual* historical account—offers a counterpoint to the Gothic "business" which "is not instruction, but the pleasures of the imagination" (Clery 23). Prince offers her remembering as reality. This is not

simply a creative venture; this is the affirmation and textual evidencing of Black human life persisting through and beyond slavery. While the Gothic seeks to confront cultural anxieties safely, at distance, Prince's lived experience is not projected or imagined but inscribed on her body and psyche. Given her being disappeared from the historical record after this publication, her cultural confrontation is risky, her life illegible to the colonial historical eye once it moves beyond a narrative of slavery into freedom. Nonetheless, Prince inscribes several variations of the Gothic double into her text which ultimately reclaims and consolidates the geographically and culturally ruptured voice of Black people into an authoritative force that is simultaneously audible to the Western ear and authentic to herself.

Doubling occurs as a double narration between white editors and a formerly enslaved Black person and Prince's double-speak as a voice that is audible to both Britons and the Black diaspora. Starting with double narration, although Thomas Pringle assists Prince's publicity by virtue of his whiteness, he actively moderates her speech. Pringle states that the narrative "was written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into shape; retaining as far as was practicable, Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology" (Prince 3). Pringle's preface attaches a tediousness, an Otherness or 'peculiarity' to Prince's original, unedited narrative; underneath his Abolitionist activism still lies an air of condescension. In true Gothic style, this repressed tendency rears its head in his contributions to the narrative. He enacts a form of doubling by "mental processes leaping from one person to the other [...] so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling, and experience in common with the other" (Freud 234). In this case, Pringle transfers the verbal processes of the British to Prince by 'pruning' her authentic voice to make it as palatable and *familiar* to the British ear as possible. The Gothic double reifies the concept of the 'divided' self, often representing the internal conflicts of human desire, however what Prince's text makes clear is that this division is enforced onto the Black body. Sadiya Hartman's chapter in *Scenes of Subjection* echoes this issue in that the "romantic racialism of abolitionists [...] constituted the African as childish, primitive, contented, and endowed with *great mimetic capacities*" (Hartman 23, emphasis added). Pringle infantilizes Prince from the outset, excusing her natural cadence as *tedious* babble. So even though it "is essentially her own" (Prince 3), Prince's voice has been filtered through the colonial English sieve, rendered into 'mimed' English that is "clearly intelligible" (3) to the white public. In this sense, Pringle caters to the Gothic "demand for artificial excitements" (Clery 29) by revising her work, making up her cadence. Essentially, he is the ghost narrator—a respectable double that haunts Prince's text, an interchangeable voice that doubles as her own.

Secondly, while her white editors ensure some level of cultural assimilation and respectability, Prince's narrative proper features affirmative phrases that highlight her voice as a double—a divided and interchangeable self that represents both an individual and collective Black voice. Think of this as Prince's 'doublespeak,' which combined with the Gothic concern of the return of repressed histories, forms a

language both haunted by Prince's stolen past and capable of extracting colonial anxieties. In his discussion of the double in the essay "The Uncanny," Sigmund Freud includes "constant recurrence" (234) with the example of "the same names through several consecutive generations" (234). Prince accomplishes this by punctuating her text with authoritative "I" statements that reclaim her sense of self, despite her slave name. Early on she states, "I have been a slave—I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows" (Prince 21) which links to her concluding remarks that "I have been a slave myself—I know what slaves feel—I can tell by myself what other slaves feel, and by what they have told me" (38). Having been robbed of her given name, Prince's repeated "I" statements serve as a self-chosen name; a biographical statement that she exists as a self-sanctified individual agent, no matter the name her oppressors give her. She extends this to all Black enslaved peoples, insisting upon her own and other's testimony as a reliable collective voice. Prince thus enacts Freud's doubling by reverberating the pronoun name "I" throughout generations of enslaved peoples. In this sense, her statements are haunted by the cruel robbery of her original identity by slave masters and also haunts the British psyche by insisting that she is the credible source here, and her oratory will always outweigh their attempts to discredit her lived experience. Furthermore, Prince's simile that white people's apathy towards Black slaves in the marketplace "fell like cayenne [...] on our hearts" (11) further resists assimilation by insisting on her African-ness. Deploying the flavours of home, Prince retains her authentic voice amidst white editorial revisions but she also calls attention to the violent dislocation that slavery enforces on Black bodies. In essence, the cultural familiarity of cayenne is made 'uncanny' because it now doubles as "a thing of terror," a warped symbol that once "wore a more friendly aspect" (Freud 236). These two examples highlight the ideological violence of the Gothic imaginary placed on Prince's body and narrative voice by highlighting the tensions between moderated and free speech, assimilation and cultural authenticity that she navigates.

Additionally, Prince's Mother acts as a traditional Gothic double in that she comes to symbolize the muted side of Prince that is deeply traumatized by the events of her life. The narrative mostly follows a 'progress' trajectory (i.e., from dark to light, enslavement to freedom) that is comforting to English readers who are complicit in their wilful ignorance towards slavery. However, Prince's narrative includes a counter-arc that disrupts this smoothing over of her history—another refusal to concede to the revisionist practices of her white editors. For example, Prince bears witness to her mother's damaged psyche after a decade of separation: "but when I saw my poor mammy my joy was turned to sorrow, for she had gone from her senses. [...] She did not know me" (Prince 23). Prince insists on the woundedness of this experience and does not concede to the progress narrative, enshrining the practice of remembering the human prices paid along the way. She demonstrates that trauma warps the familiar (or the familial) and makes it barely recognizable but vaguely familiar; this process follows Freud's definition of the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). In

other words, her mother, who she recognizes in body, but whose mind is frighteningly altered. In her chapter "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean," Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert echoes the sentiment that the production of terror in many slave narratives rests on the tense Gothic "colonial space [...] where the familiar and unfamiliar mingle in an uneasy truce" (3). Prince's text then highlights the privilege of the Gothic being a theoretical venture; the titillating violence postulated by Gothic fiction is a terrifying reality for Black people who have this 'theory' and literary tension applied to their bodies. Prince's mother symbolizes the Freudian double in "having been an assurance of immortality" (Freud 235) as a symbol of life-creation and genealogical lineage that now "becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (235). Prince's mother, as with all enslaved, are constantly subjected to various forms of death: social, psychological, and even physical. Prince's recognition of her mother's wounded psyche acts as her haunted 'mirror'; Prince's text thus embodies the Gothic conventions set out in the genre's first novel by Walpole of "allow[ing] terror to circulate via process of identification and projection" (Clery 25). In encountering her mother, she too is confronted with the mental toll that relentless relocation, forced labour, and bodily torture has on her. Throughout her rather restrained narration for the sake of 'reliability,' Prince still relives the trauma of her experience. So, though her narrative allows Britons to *imagine* what slavery is like, she also makes clear that this permission to observe and look in on Black tragedy is a form of complicity in the slave trade, indicting the vicarious ethos of the Gothic imaginary.

As we can see, the barriers between what constitutes mental versus physical trauma start to collapse within Mary Prince's text as she deconstructs the binary by sharing her mental process during her whippings. Eighteenth century writers often "posit terror as a phenomenon of the psyche, capable of transcending corporeality, and horror as somatic, carnal, revolting, and transgressive" (Creech, slide 8), attempting to divorce them from another as if the mind and the body are not in constant communication. However, describing experience being sold in the marketplace, Prince binds mental anguish to her somatic symptoms: "My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body. But who cared for that?" (Prince 11). Her rhetorical question emphasizes the isolation she feels intuitively, even amongst her siblings, and she even physically attempts to stifle her body's reaction to psychological panic. Prince further ties the bodily experience to the mind through a metaphor of education. She states that her female slave-owner "taught me (how can I ever forget it!) [...] to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin, when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand" (14). Prince couches her knowledge of the various modes and sensations of torture in a language of skill or understanding; her ability to discern tools horrifyingly comes through application, not objective study. In her book *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives*, Kari J. Winter argues that enslaved

women maintained their power through verbal expression by "constantly wag[ing] a linguistic war against their masters" (32). Prince demonstrates this in her bracketed interjection; it is a verbal exclamation that is transcribed by her white peers, a preserved speech act that highlights the psychology of torture. She is not imagining or projecting; her "(how can I ever forget it!)" (Prince 14) interrupts a passage depicting her master's violence, syntactically reifying the mental impression that physical abuse leaves on victims. The memory is not only branded onto her skin, it is contained within her mind and rears its head throughout her life beyond slavery, much like her abrupt interjection here does not allow the reader to forget that the impact is lasting. Saidiya Hartman's chapter "Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance" illustrates the complications of slave narratives capacity for honouring a formerly enslaved person's humanity because depictions of violence "literally remov[e] the slave from view as pain is brought close" (20). This is especially true of the Appendix to Prince's text in which her white female peers must prove the existence of her scars as "inquiries have been made" (Prince 64) about them. They confirm that "'the whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, *chequered*, with the vestiges of severe floggings" which they offer up as "full and authentic evidence" (64), catering to what Hartman calls an "anxiety [...] historically determined by the denial of black sentience" (19). While the appendix does serve to divorce the body from the mind or emotion, as the eighteenth-century Gothic attempts to do, Prince's insistence on bearing witness to others and her own lived experiences undoes this binary. Her text illustrates the attempts by Western society to enshrine these divisions and offers a lens that sees through them, troubles them. Ultimately, Prince does enshrine a sense of humanity into the text, no matter how haunting it may be.

Prince's listing of names crafts a metatextual graveyard for the slaves she encountered and her recurring allusions to saltwater as an environment and a bodily fluid further disrupts the Gothic division between mental terror and bodily horror**.** These both work to inscribe the enslaved individuals' humanity into the historical record, rather than allow the violence of the experience to outweigh them as Hartman suggests. In her book *Darkly: Black History and America's Gothic Soul*, Leila Taylor argues that the Gothic reality of Transatlantic Slavery lies in "the horror of these deaths along the Middle Passage" where there is a "lack of memorialization—these are the unknown, the unnamed, lives that have disappeared [...] deaths destined for haunting" (41). Prince works against the systematic forgetting that Taylor locates in colonial Gothic texts by explicitly naming and witnessing the lives of the other enslaved people she meets in her life. She honours the histories of "two little slave boys in the house" (Prince 14) as best she can, recounting their names and origin stories to the best of her knowledge: "Cyrus, who had been bought while an infant in his mother's arms; the other, Jack, was an African from the coast of Guinea, whom a sailor had given or sold to my master" (14-15). Furthermore, there is the live funeral that her mother is forced to enact in the marketplace when her children are sold. She is "weeping for the loss of her children" and exclaims "in a sorrowful voice, (I shall

never forget it!) 'See, I am *shrouding* my poor children; what a task for a mother!" (10, original emphasis). Although her children are not dead, they are effectively sentenced to a social death in which their names, cultures, families, and humanity will be stripped away, executed. Prince's mother anticipates both the social and potential physical deaths of her children in enslavement; she links the marketplace to the preparation of bodies for burial, announcing that sending her children to be sold is like wrapping them in burial cloth. In this sense, Prince's text revises the Gothic tradition of a literal graveyard, suggesting that to be put to death before your body perishes is unique to the slave population—an experience the Gothic imaginary voraciously preys on.

By laying the grounds for death early on, Prince's text sets the stage for subsequent ghosts or hauntings, which manifest as saltwater; a synecdoche for the Atlantic Ocean that is the grave for many kidnapped Africans. In her presentation "Mary Robinson and Gothic Nature," Alex Wagstaffe defines Gothic Nature as an 'interrupted pastoral': a dangerous, untameable space that instills fear and embodies terror. Traditional Gothic natures include atmospheres of "foggy darkness and English damp" (Taylor 44) but Taylor argues that the enforced dislocation mechanism of Transatlantic slavery allows for the reworking and relocation of this concept. Prince's account of working "through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters" (Prince 19) on uncovered skin is thus similar to Taylor's Southern Gothic nature of "sweltering humidity and oppressively blinding sun" (Taylor 44). In these accounts, it is the climate that is spectral, haunting the bodies of the enslaved. For Prince, this is the saltwater that she is forced to work in. It infiltrates the skin and creates "dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone" (Prince 19); the enslaved are forced to go down to the very sea they were transported across "where [they] washed the pickle from their limbs" (19). While this may seem like a purely physical affliction, Prince once again crumbles the binary between the physical horror and psychological terror of this experience as the saltwater resurfaces in her own tears and her mother's psychosis. In a rare outburst within her measured cadence, Prince exclaims, "Oh, the trials! the trials! they make the salt water come into my eyes when I think of the days in which I was afflicted" (13). The psychological damage that slavery has inflicted distresses Prince as she recounts it, and the ocean her ancestors were forced to cross symbolically wells up in her saline tears. Another example of the embodiment of Transatlantic Slavery Gothic nature is Prince's disoriented mother's terror at having "been under the vessel's bottom" (23). Her mother's belief that she has been dragged under the slave ship captures the metaphor of slavery; that the sick and dying Africans who were thrown overboard into the Atlantic and even those who survived to the other side all come out drowned, saltwater filling their bodies. Prince's practice of naming alongside the symbol of saltwater as a metaphor for the Middle Passage again reworks the Gothic "haunting [that] can take many forms" (Hogle 2). In this case, the spectre that haunts the world is the Atlantic Ocean itself—constantly licking the shores of Britain and America in a terrifying reminder that the Earth has

witnessed their crimes, and their victims' ghosts surround them.

Despite being bracketed by supplements by white editors, Prince's narrative proper calls on the Black body and voice, the geographic environments of plantations, and the Atlantic Ocean to solidify her authentic account and empower an authentic voice throughout. What Prince does for the Gothic genre is reveal the real-life terrors that electrify the genre's creative project, reminding readers that actual human beings exist at the root of these literary devices and should not be obscured behind the theoretical or artistic. Insisting upon the psychological impact of the viciously physical experience of slavery, Prince troubles the Gothic binary between mental terror and corporeal horror. In so doing, she reveals that this deconstruction has origins far older than modern Gothic literature and critiques the Gothic imaginary for its fetishization of imagined violence that writes over the lived experiences of Black enslaved people.

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Killing Mother Natures: Maternity and Womanhood as a Death Sentence in *Frankenstein*

alyssa mendonca

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, features only a few women throughout the text who are either removed from the direct action, positioned as observers, or are dead and therefore haunt the text at critical moments. Despite being mostly centered on male characters, Shelley's text manages to depict the fatality of womanhood under patriarchy. Through Elizabeth, she offers the 'domestic angel' trope as one of imprisonment and execution; through the female Creature, marriage as a death trap; through Mother Nature, an account of men's physical and ideological assaults on women's bodies; finally, through Mrs. Margaret Saville as the novel's recipient, a woman in a position of power. Through Victor, the image of maternity as punishment is developed, suggesting that the socialization of women as 'happy' mothers incinerates female agency and personhood. I argue that inclusion of female deaths in the contexts of marriage and reproduction capitulates patriarchy as a murderous regime whose demands of heteronormative conformity both create and destroy women. I add that Shelley locates the terrors of parturition on male bodies, including a fear of death-by-birth and disgust for one's child, making legible the reality of tormented, unwilling mothers that is otherwise repressed by patriarchal society. Thus, appropriating male privilege for her purpose, Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a novel expressing discontent towards normative institutions, inundating readers who are societally attuned to men's concerns with feminist coded critiques of the family, marriage, and reproduction.

From the start of Victor's narrative, Elizabeth is characterized in angelic terms and is shaped into a divine ornament to the Frankenstein family, essentially imprisoning her in an unrealistic ideal. Elizabeth is to them "a child fairer than pictured cherub—a creature who seemed to shed radiance from her looks and whose form and motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills" (Shelley 27). She is granted a greater-than-heavenly status, outcompeting even the idea of a cherub; her beauty acts as her halo, throwing light from her face, and her movements are as delicate as a mountain goat. Despite this description affording Elizabeth angelic and graceful qualities, Shelley's final use of the chamois image connotes the precarity of idealizing female children. The attributes projected onto her body ascend her to an idealized peak, but one misstep from this angelic summit—like the chamois—would send her plummeting to her death. Elizabeth is thus confined to embodying only moral and physical purity, with the threat of becoming a 'fallen angel' at the base of this mountain keeping her teetering on the summit. Shelley furthers this theme, using descriptors like "The

apparition" (27), "a pretty present" (27), and "promised gift" (27) which thinly veil the flattening and possessing of women entangled in the family's language. The compliments crumble under the critical lens—they are embellished degradations. Elizabeth is made spectral—transparent—an unreal version of herself; her biological conception is written over and the Frankensteins re-conceive her as their son's partner. In essence, she is (re)born to be a bride. This possession is a life term for Elizabeth and Victor's masculinist desires sentence her: "[T]ill death she was to be mine only" (28). This not only makes her "the inmate of [his] parent's house" (27) but an inmate of patriarchal design. Shelley turns these veiled aspersions back on her own characters by deconstructing the barrier between romantic avowals and imprisonment. Her combination of Victor's initial claim and the use of carceral language critiques the socialization of women into angelic wives as an inflicted punishment. What is more is that Elizabeth's tragic arc and the destruction of the female Creature reiterates marriage as death row for women.

Both Elizabeth and the female Creature are discursively designed for marriage as they are subjected to, shaped by, and ultimately executed by their male counterpart's sexist possessiveness. The female Creature is the product of male Creature's internalized patriarchy: "*My* companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. [...] You [Victor] *must* create a female *for me* with whom *I* can live in those sympathies necessary *for my being*" (130-131). He even goes as far to "demand it [...] as a right which [Victor] must not refuse" (131). The female's existence is constructed as entirely centripetal to the male's life, as if her life purpose is to nourish and sustain him. She is possessed prior to her own creation; men monopolize the female body before it even exists. Applying rights-based language to the female body, Shelley underscores how patriarchal ideologies construct women as legal, constitutional property to men. The Creature echoes Victor's early possessive rhetoric that resurfaces after Elizabeth's death: "*my* love, *my* wife, so lately living, so dear, so worthy" (181). Shelley's syntax here ties the metrics of a woman's life to marriage status, revealing that what was "lately living, so dear, so worthy" and was Elizabeth's capacity to be a bride, much like the female Creature. Thus, these women act as Shelley's synecdoche for women at large, who originate and culminate as a man's object and are stripped of agency as patriarchal property. Even Elizabeth acknowledges that marriage to Victor "would render [her] eternally miserable unless it were the dictate of [Victor's] free choice" (173). Elizabeth's language demonstrates that she has been incorporated into the patriarchal regime, believing that marriage to Victor is her duty rather than choice because she does not apply the principle of free choice to herself.

The female Creature does not even live to speak, and that is entirely the point: women, from the time of birth to death within a patriarchal society, have their voices co-opted, destroyed. The female Creature's meticulously crafted body and Elizabeth's assimilated voice symbolize the monolithic construction of women as brides under patriarchy. They exist solely to take on the concerns of men—and it kills them.

Victor's fear of the female Creature's agency quickly leads to an abortion of her life: "[S]he, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation" (153) so he "t[ears] the thing to pieces" (154). The personal pronouns briefly afforded to her decay, Victor's verbal rejection of her humanity transforming her into a 'thing' as his suspicion quickly spirals into paranoia. Victor's concerns reflect patriarchal anxieties over the destruction of a long-standing power structure by young, rebellious women. Likewise, Elizabeth's fate mirrors the female Creature's on her wedding night. She is "lifeless and inanimate, [...] her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier" (181), reduced to another corpse in Victor's experiment. Importantly, Elizabeth's body lies on a 'bridal bier'—a movable device on which a coffin is placed to be carried to the grave. Shelley's alliteration ties the two words' contrasting connotations together, suggesting that for women, marriage is a social and even physical death. Shelley crafts an extended metaphor by having both characters die as 'custom-made' brides: the rigid expectation to marry under patriarchy murders women's personhood as the institution itself deems their lives and bodies 'claimed' property of husbands. Shelley thus paints marriage as a fatal facet of the patriarchal regime and warps the Frankensteins' angelic "apparition" (27) into the vision of terror that always haunted the term. She furthers the notion of feminine destruction by portraying nature as barren following men's conquest.

Shelley employs Mother Nature as a symbol of the feminine, specifically the patriarchal expectation of the feminine to bear fruit and reproduce masculine biological legacies. She highlights the terrorizing nature of this quest by portraying Robert Walton and Victor's initial goals as unflinching conquests of Mother Nature. For example, both men's ambitions are couched in language of desire, echoing the sexual objectification of women. Walton states that he will "satiate" his "ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot on man" (9). Nature is painted as virginal in Walton's description, a sacred territory to be claimed and stamped by one *man* as the first possessor. Victor echoes this sentiment in his quest to be the first to be able to animate lifeless matter. Even at signs of warning, the men persist in their intellectual arousal: "I [Walton] try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight" (9). The fact that Walton must be persuaded to believe a known or plausible truth suggests that he has fashioned an argument against it, disregarding Mother Nature as an authoritative force. He literally (re)envisions the barrenness of the Arctic—a sign that perhaps this is a natural body not *consenting* to be treaded and made fruitful—into a truth that fits his narrative and satisfies his lust. Victor too warps the "rain [...] pouring in torrents, and thick mists [that] hid the summits of the mountains [... obscuring] the faces of those mighty friends" (87) into a challenge: "Still I would penetrate their misty veil and seek them in their cloudy retreats" (87). Nature speaks a language of caution and privacy here. These men do not misunderstand

this language because they acknowledge the barriers Nature puts up. They instead intentionally reinvent her tongue into tones of seduction, invitation, to justify their penetrative assault. Like Mother Nature, women who express their lack of desire to bear the fruit of men's biological and intellectual legacies are considered lacking an 'essential' part of their feminine 'soul' that just needs to be discovered. Similarly, those who deny sexual advances, like Mother Nature's ice that attempted to "[close] in the ship on all sides" (18) to prevent its further penetration, have their refusals mutated into invitations. Finally, the women who are deemed infertile, like Mother Nature's ice, finally "split and cracked in every direction" (198) because they do not or cannot yield the idealized fruit of men's desires. This barrenness forces men to retreat, and once the "heavenly bodies" sought by Victor and Walton in these "undiscovered solitudes" (9) of arctic ice and lifeless matter cannot be found or claimed, Nature transforms into a "vision so horrible" (201) in their eyes. In this sense, the patriarchal optics projected onto Mother Nature, symbolizing women, both construct and destroy her; they intoxicate themselves on the illusions of beauty, willingness, and assumed fertility that create an ideal, an enforced reification, upon the feminine. Yet, confronted with her sobering reality (an authentic, unmoderated self), they blame the object of their desire and re-fashion it into a form of ugliness and failure. Mother Nature serves as a macrocosmic representation of this reality, yet Shelley hones it onto the human psyche and body through Victor.

Shelley locates the experience of parturition on the male body by deploying rhetoric and images of conception, labour, and postpartum depression onto Victor. As one of the novel's most visible characters, this gender-bent application suggests, among other things, that this typically feminine experience can only be made visible through the vehicle of a male character by virtue of his relative publicity. For example, Victor introduces himself as "by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic" (24), which immediately registers him in a sphere of public recognition and a genealogical account which puts weight on his future contribution to this noble lineage. In a sense, Victor is subjected to similar reproductive pressure that women are, and it is important to consider the ways in which Victor embodies the social realities of a woman in the text. He grasps his "capacity for bestowing animation" (44), he calls his experiment "the blooming cheek of life" (43), and he understands the body as "intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, [that] still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour" (44-45). These ideas center the grandeur and toil of life creation on a single human mind and body and are undeniably truths that women must wrap their heads around as the designated reproductive vessels of a patriarchal society. The word 'labour' appears here and continues to populate the entire text, planting Victor into a metaphorical realm of pregnancy and birth as he gives life a human matter. The experience of illness, limited mobility, and physical disability are part of maternity, but they do not 'fit' into the narrative of overjoyed motherhood. Shelley is sure to inscribe it onto Victor; for example, the months that Victor is engaged in creating the Creature

he becomes "pale" and "emaciated with confinement" (45). He too experiences disillusionment with his 'child' after it's awakening or birth. First, he views it as the ultimate "accomplishment of [his] toils" (48) as it experiences the first sensation of life on earth: "it breathed hard, and a half convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (48). Almost immediately, Victor tells readers that "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled [his] heart" (48) prior to his escape from the child, from the responsibility of motherhood. This abrupt change in mood and characterization of the newborn creature as disgusting, a "filthy daemon" (65), a "wretch" (48) persists throughout the text, evoking the feeling of a long-term plague ravishing Victor's mind. Shelley's motif is reminiscent of what is now known as postpartum depression, which makes it difficult for the new mother to take care of herself and her baby because of psychological challenges in adjusting to motherhood. Victor consequently details a narrative in which he is deeply psychologically disturbed, has trouble with his old familial relationships, and understands his Creature as the murderer of William, synecdoche for his family. Tying this to Victor's introductory line crafts a relationship in which the birth of the child begins to kill off Victor's sense of self, as it is foundationally defined by his family name. Shelley here illustrates the woman's experience of a lifelong gnawing at agency and self-perception that having a child can produce. This suggests that the notion of 'happy mothers' is an unrealistic patriarchal ideal forced onto female bodies that confines them to the singular label of 'mother,' much like Elizabeth was to 'angelic bride'. Not only does this further the theme of womanhood as a life sentence under the demands of patriarchal reproduction, but it also begins to locate the scene of spiritual barrenness on the body.

Maternity as punishment and the fear of death during labour is furthered by the demands of the Creature for Victor to create a female companion. Victor's second "scene of [his] labours" (150), a remote island where he must reproduce against his will at the demands of a male, quickly deteriorates into a "scene of [his] odious work" (157). The landscape reflects Victor's feelings of dejection and lack of reproductive energy: "It was a place fitted for such a work, being hardly more than a rock whose high sides were continually beaten upon by the waves. The soil was barren, scarcely affording pasture for a few miserable cows" (150). The hard rock that serves as Victor's site of labour and birth is unfriendly and uncomfortable, even the soil is described as 'barren,' suggesting that the process of his first 'birth' left him unwilling to repeat it. That the natural environment is barren loops back to the depiction of Mother Nature that I have detailed above and makes a significant link between maternal infertility and the diminished energy—emotional and physical—that a mother has available to nourish her own "miserable cows" (150). Shelley creates an atmosphere of imprisonment on this island through a feeling of watchfulness. Victor has no "doubt that the monster followed [him] and would discover himself to [him] when [he] should have finished" (150), "every moment [...] fear[ing] to meet [his] persecutor" (151), even seeing "the daemon at the casement" (153) observing his labour. Visible or not, he is the ultimate guard keeping Victor in his makeshift laboratory, where he is essentially

punished for abandoning his creation by being forced to make another, more abhorred. Shelley here implies again the theme of birthing as an enforced punishment, the physical and mental realities of which cage women into a loop of reproduction. Furthermore, the very real fear of dying in childbirth that haunts women and pregnant mothers is present in Victor's paranoid belief that animating the female Creature might come "at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race" (153). The gravity and terrifying nature of this maternal fear is signified in this magnification of death; that one birth might not only kill the creator but humanity itself. And, in the end, Victor is driven to death in the wake of his creation. Much like men co-opt the voices and bodies of women, Shelley enacts a powerful reversal here: she co-opts Victor's narrative sway as one of the primary narrators in her novel, infusing into his plot the very repression, fears, and threat of social and physical death that women face regularly under the patriarchal demand for birthing machines glorified as happy mothers.

Lastly, I turn to Mrs. Saville, to whom the entire novel is addressed. Shelley's removes her from the direct plot, ultimately preserving her as the only living female character and positioning her as the judge presiding over the text. She is implored by each frame narrator to "listen to [their] history" (23), to "listen patiently" (44) to each man's case including bodily desecration, murder, and transgressions against the laws of Nature and God. And when she "has heard that, abandon or commiserate [them], as [she] shall judge that [they] deserve" (91). Although the men are not speaking directly to her, Walton's transcription of each case to be sent to her defers to her as the most authoritative moral presence entangled in the plot. Shelley's "judge" diction and the incorporation of Victor's "deposition" (184) in Volume III infuse a legalistic rhetoric into the text that radiates outward to Saville and the reader, imploring them to take a stance on the crimes populating the novel. This rhetoric as a textual undercurrent further solidifies the carceral forms of punishment and imprisonment that I have explored in relation to women as a theme that electrifies the text. While Saville's objective posture arguably places her as the novel's only woman in a position of power, it is fraught with precarity due to the open-ended nature of Shelley's text. In the end, Mrs. Saville's judgment is never passed down, and the text ends without a conclusive epistolary sign off from Walton. Shelley thus suggests a few possibilities: that Mrs. Saville is also discursively silenced, crowded out by male perspectives; or, more hopefully, that she is granted the freedom *to* judge without having it solidified in text, suggesting that her history is unwritten and in the making; or, that women's power being restricted to symbolic, 'unofficial' courts of opinion makes their authority illegitimate in the patriarchal conception of law.

Ultimately, Shelley's novel demonstrates that women are executed, in the dual sense of the word—administered and killed—by the patriarchal regime demanding an angelic, static bride, a happy mother, and reproductive female. Through the characterizations of each female character, she deconstructs the sanitized versions of these ideals and renders their terror in the fatality of marriage and birth. Though

Victor serves as a vehicle for the exploration of parturition horrors, including abhorring one's child and dying because of birth, it is also important to consider the privileges bound up in the lack of embodiment that comes along with projecting these things onto the male body. While Victor does die, his psyche is most affected. Perhaps this is Shelley's point about women going through this; but the physicality that birthing people experience cannot be fleshed out through Victor's masculinist ambition. This is an area of rich analysis for another essay. Overall, Shelley makes a compelling case against patriarchy's normative institutions by projecting women's social death onto their bodies and the natural world and offers a fruitful avenue to discuss the gender-bent characterization of Victor and its resounding similarities to modern parturition in trans people and IVF politics today.

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Love Is What Love Is

niko haloulos

I.

In the years before my mother met my father, she used to stand in the kitchen of her parents' old farmhouse in Stoney Creek, Ontario, looking down at the flickering lights that came alive in the downtown at night. She was nearing thirty, still living at home, and beginning her work as a high school teacher. She hadn't had many boyfriends, but she knew she always wanted to be a wife and a mother. She told me one time that she used to stand there for hours, watching the lights flicker and dim, whispering to herself, "he's out there somewhere."

Across Lake Ontario was my father, a mature student at (then) Ryerson University in Toronto, working as a research assistant in the chemical engineering department. Also nearing thirty, and having started school much later than his contemporaries, he, too, never had many girlfriends. He's always been quiet about his love life, but I knew at that time that he'd always wanted something more out of his life. If only he knew his future wife was sitting just across the lake, staring down at him, unable to make out his figure amidst the blur of city lights.

When I think about my parents' relationship, it always feels magical. They grew up in similar environments, with both their parents coming from Greece amidst high civil tensions in the 1950s and 1960s. Settling in the biggest, most prosperous cities at the time, both my parents had to juggle growing up as first-generation Canadians. The fact that they grew up on opposite sides of the lake makes me think of destiny. I remember when they told me how they met. It was a Halloween party, and my mom dragged my uncle along with her because she didn't want to go alone. There was my father, she said, dressed as John Wayne. My mother likes to joke and say it was one of the only times that she'd ever seen him wear jeans. She smiles as she recounts the smallest details, like where the party was, who was there, and what it felt like to see my father for the first time. My father sits quietly during the telling of the story, not wanting to give away too much, as if there is still a good chunk of the story that he likes to keep to himself. To hold onto forever. Twenty-six years later, they tell the story like it was yesterday.

Is this … love?

II.

I casually place the phone down on the shaky, plastic tabletop. The text message has been sent. *I'll meet you at your place in 15 minutes*. With every second, I quiver just a little, going through every possible outcome in my head like it's a revolving door. She doesn't know what I'm about to do. She has no warning. I hope her roommate doesn't answer the door. I hope she doesn't answer the door. I march down the creaky stairs of my student house and I think about how old I am. 20 years old. Young. I get closer to the front door, thinking about each passing millisecond like they are small slices of eternity.

As I walk along the sidewalk, curling my fingers inside my coat pockets for warmth, I feel the beam of the streetlights hit the top of my knitted toque. Each flash of light tries to give me a reason to turn around and not go to her. I remember our first date and the sweat that dripped down the back of my neck as I fluttered my hand onto her thigh. I remember our first kiss inside her Chevrolet Sonic, Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" fading gently into a hum as my endorphins lulled me into a state of emotional overload. I remember the first night she slept over in my twin bed, my whole body wedged between the wall and the mattress in the morning because it simply couldn't hold us. I chuckle at that one memory as the winter wind rests its chilling hand on my face, seemingly trying to comfort my pensive expression. I remember the night after the keg party, when I pressed my body against her bedroom door and screamed for her to run out the basement window because I thought someone had broken into her apartment, when it was really just her roommate running in because there was a skunk outside. I remember her hearty laugh that night. I remember her smile.

Each patch of darkness, however, gives me a reason to keep moving forward. I remember lying in her bed awake all night, stroking my fingers through her hair, hearing whispers from the autumn breeze that maybe this is not what I really wanted. I remember feeling her heartbeat as my head lay gently on her chest, wondering if this seemingly natural rhythm is really shared between the two of us. I remember sitting half-naked at the edge of her bed, exploring her body and trying to murkily consolidate the divide between our levels of experience. I remember that night when I nervously told her that I wasn't ready to have sex. I remember the fear in my heart when I couldn't bring myself to touch her anymore. I feel a pain in my chest, bringing me to question whether a relationship is strictly dependent on physical intimacy.

Finally, I turn the corner down the dark side alley and step towards her door, unsure of what I was going to say.

Is this … love?

III.

I tend to gravitate towards people who are older than me. Most of my friends are 3–5 years older. My roommates are all 24 and have been in long-term relationships for about seven years. I remember struggling with my first relationship late last year, and so I asked them, what's the secret? What makes this last so long? I've heard them say "I love you" to each other before, but what does that actually mean? They give me the usual answer: communication, reciprocity, personality. The one thing I suppose they wouldn't want to mention publicly is physical intimacy. But how much physical intimacy is really involved in a very healthy, long-term relationship?

There is something about this that I may never know. But when I see my roommates interact with their partners, they always seem to transcend the nitty gritty details of physical intimacy. Whether they play a board game together, have a high-level conversation, develop inside jokes, buy coffees and treats for one another, or even hold the door open for one-another, there is this spark, this essence of something, that seems intimate in and of itself, but does not require any sexual acts. When I come home from a long night at school, I see them, cuddled together on the couch in our living room, watching *The Office*. They sit quietly, seemingly diverting their attention from the show to each other's company.

Is this … love?

IV.

I remember an early moment feeling what may have been love. When I was in the fifth grade, we had a new girl come to our school. I remember the rumour being that she was going to be in our class. I got excited, not because there was going to be a new student, but because I now had a new opportunity to use my well-developed fifth grade charm. When she showed up on the first day, I started falling on the ground on purpose. Each time I did it, I looked back to see if she noticed. In gym class later that afternoon, we were playing a game of basketball. I remember my teacher put the girls on one team and the boys on the other. She cut the gym in half though, and so the boys played against each other and so did the girls. I felt this was my chance. If I could somehow play really well against the other boys, I might catch her attention. But I couldn't do that. That's not how I worked at that age. I resorted to slapstick humour, hurling the basketball at the net from thirty feet and screaming a ridiculous word when I'd watch the ball fly over the basket and onto the stage behind it. Every time I did this, I checked the other side of the gym to see if she was looking. Much to my dismay, she didn't look once.

During the school year, I kept up my antics, tripping purposefully on chairs and tables, watching my other classmates laugh, but not her. Never her. I remember crawling under desks and making obscene jokes that I memorized from *Saturday Night Live*. Nothing ever worked. Looking back, this was probably one of the most

embarrassing things I've ever done in my life, but I was ten; slapstick humour was all I knew. Eventually, I heard through the playground rumour mill that she had expressed some interest. I was super excited because I thought my tactics had finally gotten through to her. When we met at the playground later that day, we talked about things that seemed relevant in the fifth grade: shoes, cartoons, and French class. I remember her other friend was there, too, probably to oversee my quality as a potential suitor. We talked for the entire recess, and I remember picking at a rock in my shoe, feeling the breeze of the spring air rustling through my buzzcut hair, and feeling the dryness of the residue from the playground equipment seep through my fingers. Once the bell rang, I thought I had done a good thing, but I ended up being confused about what I was actually doing.

Our relationship progressed well enough throughout the end of the fifth grade. I used to visit her occasionally at the purple slide to discuss our days and how school was going. I made a very vigilant effort to sit beside her in class, and I even went so far as to design her a personal Valentine's Day card. At the time, I was doing everything right from the standpoint of what I remember seeing on television. Romance seemed pretty simple—respect, gifts, laughs, conversations, fun. There was less stress with having to deal with what lay behind the bedroom door because to me, at that time, there was no bedroom door to have to look behind. This relationship, as young as it was, felt good enough just because I felt like I was stumbling through some aspect of human life that I wanted to be involved in. I was just naïve to the other parts of it. That's why I still remember the day she met me by the smaller playground—a setting for a more personal conversation—and said that she'd like to start holding hands.

At the time, we had just moved into sixth grade. We were in different classes, though, and I remember being scared to approach her in different contexts because she wasn't inside my direct experience. It seemed like a daunting task to meet up with her at recess because I felt like she was too far away. I would see her on the playground but look from afar. I noticed that each time I looked over, her turquoise eyes looked back at me with a desire for recognition. But I was helpless. Inept. A wandering preteen with no sense of direction. And she could tell.

Later that year, just before the school year had ended, she wrote me a letter saying how we couldn't be together anymore. She felt that I wasn't paying enough attention to her and that being in different classrooms was a difficult task to navigate. She felt I was growing distant. She was right, I mean, I remember being terrified to talk to her at recess because I wasn't sure what to do. I had done all the work to make her interested, but when we actually got to the stage of holding hands as eleven-year-olds, I couldn't work it out. My brain felt like a plate of mashed potatoes.

Now, I sense it as being something to do with naivety, but the more I reflect on it, I think about it as a fear of physical intimacy. A fear of maybe having to do something that exists so far outside the plane of both my knowledge and my experience. The commitment of having to try and share yourself with someone physically is a fact of

life that I had somewhat arbitrarily discovered in that moment, but it is only now that I can put words to it. The idea of love as a shared, physical process is tough to comprehend. They always say you have to love yourself first before you can love someone else, but if you spend too much time with yourself, does anyone else want to come in?

Is this … love?

V.

At the table at my grandparent's farmhouse in Stoney Creek, Ontario, I asked my grandmother: "did you like him in the beginning?" referring to my grandfather, who was sitting in the living room watching the news. I could hear the crackle of their old television turn to static as he slowly increased the volume, the screaming Hellenistic commentators ringing loudly in my ear. My grandmother cocked an eyebrow as she peeled an orange. She looked at me through her glasses and gave an answer honestly, as she usually did: "No."

The story, even in their old age, never changes each time I hear it. My grandfather came to Edmonton from Greece in 1963, settling for a small, part-time job in the local Greek Orthodox Church. My grandmother came to Edmonton shortly after, joining the same church as a volunteer, singing in the choir. My grandfather's smile passes from cheek to cheek as he tells me the next part. "We had a dance at the church," he says, grinning, "and I drank too much because I liked your *Yiayia* and wanted to talk to her." I turn to my grandmother, the laughter bouncing around the room, and asked her what she thought of this. She laughed and said, "I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe *him*."

After 58 years, they have one of the most loving relationships I have ever seen. They are two very different people; my grandfather is tough, but kind and jovial; my grandmother is serious, calculated, but caring. Their relationship depended on many, many years of trust and loyalty. They were married soon after they had met because my grandmother knew that, and she says this warmly, my grandfather "was a good man." Unlike today, they did not have the time to go on dates, text or call each other until the late hours of the night, or spend time really "getting to know each other." There was a desire to come to Canada and start a family. My grandfather always says, "I wanted a better life for my kids." What began as a drunken escapade eventually turned into a graceful, loving marriage that saw the ebbs and flows of trying to navigate a new world. My grandfather knew, as he told me earlier this year, that the minute he saw my grandmother, the Holy Spirit appeared in front of him and said, "THAT'S THE GIRL YOU'RE GOING TO MARRY!"

Even now in their old age, they sleep in separate beds, but their love has persisted for so long. Whether it is the laugher that comes out of my grandfather singing his Greek demotic chants throughout the house at seven in the morning, or my

grandmother making him warm, hearty meals every single night, the idea of their love is greater than anything related to physicality. The commitment was never in question; the idea of physical intimacy was in play for the sake of having children, but when I watch them now, and when I hear stories of their exploits as immigrants in Canada, it always seemed to me that whatever exists between them is so strong because they took the time, after all these years, to cultivate a relationship that strengthens their minds and brings them both joy during the days when they only have each other.

Is this … love?

VI.

In Richard Linklater's 1995 film *Before Sunrise*, Jesse and Celine meet on a train to Vienna. They strike up a long conversation about books, ghosts, and visions, and when Jesse finally has to leave, he tells Celine that he'll regret it for the rest of his life if he doesn't keep talking to her. She gets off the train with him, and they spend the rest of the night in Vienna, walking around, talking, drinking, and smoking. One scene that has become famous is a scene when they visit a record store. Celine picks a record, and they go to the listening booth together to hear the tracks. Inside, they stand next to each other, their gazes unmatched. As the music swells, Jesse looks at Celine, but when she looks back, he looks away. When Celine looks at Jesse, and Jesse looks back, she looks away.

Later on in the film, Celine tells Jesse that to really love someone is to explore the space that exists between you and them: "I really believe that if there's any kind of god, he wouldn't be in any one of us—not you, not me—but just this space in between. If there's some magic in this world, it must be in the attempt of understanding someone else, sharing something, even if it's almost impossible to succeed." In the listening booth, we get a sense of what Celine means. By simply saying nothing, and directing their gazes to the actual person, there is this growing sense of intimacy that does not bend to the physical. It is simply something like "magic."

Jesse and Celine end up having sex later on in the film, but it is not necessary for the sake of us—as the audience—knowing they are in love. They wouldn't have had to have sex to prove it to us. Their sense of intimacy comes through the fact that they have taken the time to understand one another, and it really shows in the way they cultivate their engagement relative to this understanding. Everything that they have developed within the last 90 minutes has come through high-level conversation. They both open up about their fears, vulnerabilities, goals, dreams, aspirations, grief, and it makes them like magnets, but instead of touching, the charge that exists between them continues to grow.

Is this … love?

VII.

I am not scared of love. I just think that I am worried. Whether that comes from two years of a pandemic, or the rise of social media where we simply connect with the idea of someone, I can't help but think of failing to realize any kind of love. I hide away from fear of failure and stick to the things that I enjoy. I worry about if this unknown person will accept my interests. And I want to love. But not love as in the *idea* of love. I have seen what that does to people. I have seen endless nights of tirades across bars and clubs searching for your "other half." I have seen inconsistency and blabbering nonsense about the perils of fearing commitment. I have seen the pensive quiet of a long summer night spent sitting with someone in the front seat, anxiously waiting to see who will flinch first. I have seen the late-night phone call that comes in with an angry recipient on the other end blaming you for not being straightforward with your intentions. I have seen the drunken rides in backseats of poorly ventilated sedans, sitting calmly as the forehead of your high school crush rests on your shoulder. I have seen the moment of realization that comes when you decide you don't want to have sex right away. I have seen the endless swiping, wondering if anyone who goes off to the left will ever find someone, because it is not going to be you. I have seen the cheating and the lies that becomes all too well-known as I sit inside the frat house for the first time and wonder just how we ended up here. I have seen us get selective. I have seen us get impatient. I have seen us grow numb.

Is this … love?

VIII.

This past summer, I sat down with my mother and watched 2013's *Before Midnight*, the last installment in the *Before* trilogy, for the first time. In it, we find Jesse and Celine married with children. Almost twenty years have passed since we first met them in *Before Sunrise*. They are on a vacation in Greece, spending the time together remembering, reflecting, and thinking about their lives up until this point. One night, they try and engage physically, but then an argument breaks out, producing some of the finest dialogue the series has given us. Celine accuses Jesse of cheating on her, and Jesse speculates that Celine might have cheated on him. Jesse, growing annoyed, says: "I also know that you love me, okay? I'm okay with you being a complicated human being! I don't wanna live a boring life where two people own each other, where two people are institutionalized in a box that others created—because that is a bunch of stifling bullshit." Celine is speechless. She storms out. Jesse sits in silence, clearly frustrated at not only Celine, but himself. Celine comes back in the room and delivers one of the most heartbreaking lines in the whole trilogy: "You know what's going on here? It's simple—I don't think I love you anymore."

This line is so shocking because we see Jesse and Celine in a situation that we've never seen them in before. The first two films presented what could have been the

highest form of love by appealing to their natural capacity to communicate, converse, and explore. Now, these elements are still present in their marriage, but in this scene the "ideal" nature of their love is slowly dissolving once they get hit with the realities of living in the real world—with real responsibilities—and taking hold of these burdens as a couple.

Shortly after this scene, Jesse sits with Celine at a café and performs a silly routine where he pretends to be a stranger meeting Celine for the first time. Celine at first doesn't buy it—she has every reason to still be upset, as does Jesse—but she eventually yields to Jesse's gimmick of being a time traveler. "We've met before. Summer '94," he says. Celine says there is no way that this man sitting across from her could ever be the same man that she met in 1994 on the train to Vienna. The big element at stake here is how their love—their seemingly perfect love—is hanging by a thread in the real, adult world. Jesse's antics can only do him so much good. But then he hits Celine with this near the end of their exchange: "This is real life. It's not perfect, but it's real. And if you can't see it, then you're blind, alright? I give up." Jesse and Celine sit in silence, the shot echoing the listening booth scene from twenty years earlier. They are engaging in "the space" between them, reconciling, contemplating, and thinking about everything that has brought them to this moment. Celine breaks the silence with: "so what about this time machine?" The film ends with them thinking about their futures, wondering what this night might look like when they reminisce about it in their 80s. Jesse and Celine still have time, and they still have love, and it is the difficulty of knowing that this love is fallible, inconsistent, and fragile that makes them so much stronger as a couple.

Is this … love?

IX.

I find that too often, my idea of love involves having to give up some part of my life, whether that is my personality, or my sense of privacy related to physical intimacy. I think about my public-school musings on love and my most recent relationship as an adult, and the fear that came with having to try and extend myself beyond my current realm of experience, whether physically or otherwise.

I take my cue from Plato and remind you that sex is at the bottom of the ladder; if I look to my roommates, or my grandparents, or my parents, or even Jesse and Celine, I know that a strong energy can exist when you spend the time with someone who ignites this sensation within you that does not necessarily have to be sexual. These film characters, and to some extent my parents and grandparents, do occasionally work as complex models for love because they perpetuate the idea of a "soulmate," a culturally loaded term. They couldn't have been "soulmates," though, because that implies no resistance. My grandmother was unimpressed, initially, with my grandfather. My mother was nervous about dating my father. Jesse and Celine feared never speaking again, and twenty years later had to work on grounding their "perfect" love in the real

world. I know, however, that when all of these people first met each other, there was a willingness to explore. Even as their lives progressed, there was still a willingness to continue having faith in a greater connection, the incentive for braving the ups and downs of the real world being that they had, and always will have, each other.

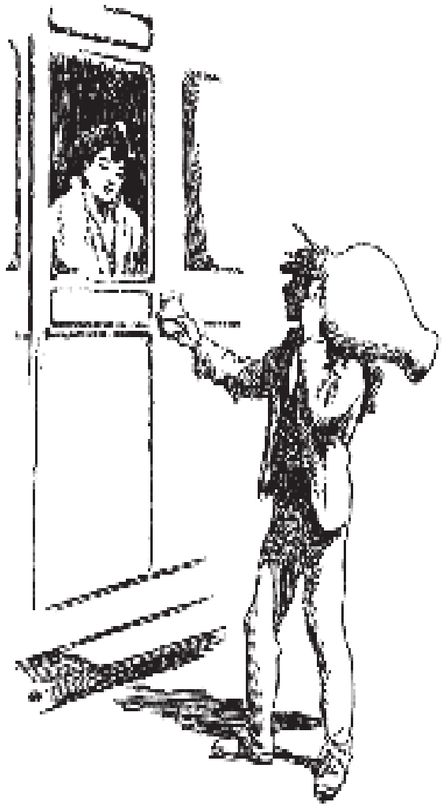
After *Before Midnight* ended, my mother, wiping tears from her eyes, reminded me that meeting my father was fate—"I believe in that, I really do," she says—but I feel now that it was about taking the time to align with someone who you really enjoy spending time with. After seeing this film and thinking about what it meant to really work through love, I realized that love is not about giving something up, but about sharing. Not necessarily sharing your body, but sharing your mind, your being, your *Self*. So far, I have seen that love is being with someone that makes you want to be better, do better, and confront the areas of yourself that you may be unsatisfied with or choose to hide away from the outside world. I know now, going forward, that what lies at the heart of love is the courage to try and be open and not fear what lies beyond my experience.

Is this … love?

X.

Over a year after having gone through my first relationship, I stand, at 21, in the same spot my mother did back in 1994. The blinds are the same, the countertop is the same, yet in between my fingers rests no empty space, but a cell phone, lighting up every so often with notifications informing me of another friend who has seen a funny YouTube clip. I turn off my phone and toss it into my pocket. I undo the blinds, opening them slowly to reveal the dark night sky, and down below, the lights coming from downtown. If I squint hard enough, I can see the hustle and bustle of Toronto, whispering to me from across the lake, "be patient."

As I stand looking through the glass, I think about my encounters with love—the poor attempts at humour in public school, listening to my parents and grandparents, seeing my roommates together, watching Jesse and Celine bicker, and going through my first real relationship in university as a 20-year-old—and I remind myself that each of these lights, despite burning brightly, will go out one day. Buildings are going to get torn down, light poles are going to fall, cars are going to park. The stream of the bright glimmer will slowly fade back into darkness.



Nature's Role in Democratic Societies: A Conversation Between Whitman and Melville

alyssa mendonca

Writing about seventy years after the 1776 Declaration of Independence and the 1789 American Constitution, both Herman Melville and Walt Whitman grapple with the viability of American democracy by presenting either a suppression or celebration of alternative visions. In Melville's *Moby Dick,* the multivalent relationship between man and nature is realized aboard the *Pequod* as its diverse crew takes different stances on the merits of Ahab's vengeful hunt. The novel details the suffocation of a democratic vision under the guise of a 'unified' mission that is ultimately exclusionary and despotic. Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" handles the same themes of man, nature, and the democratic principles of inclusion, diversity, and equality differently, creating an *actual* unified vision that maintains its integrity by absorbing and accommodating difference. Considering both authors' use of the body as a symbol and a syntactic relationship to alternative visions, Whitman's poem offers a critique of Melville's handling of these elements, suggesting that checking nature but not the ego will yield tragedy and tyranny.

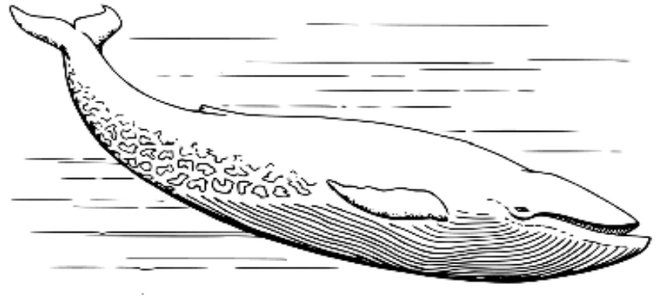
Thematic representations of the relationship between man and nature are captured in Melville's and Whitman's differing use of physical bodies as either a symbol *of* nature or *beyond* nature. The deformed bodies of Ahab and Moby Dick present the 'imperfect' body as an unnatural phenomenon, creating a destructive dissonance between humanity and nature. Ishmael describes Captain Ahab's prosthetic as "the barbaric white leg on which he partly stood… fashioned from the polished bone of the Sperm Whale's jaw" (Melville 139). It is a mark of the cruelty and danger of the whaling occupation—but it is *also* a neglected symbol of the symbiosis between nature and man. Without the natural elements at his disposal, Ahab would remain "dismasted" (139)—yet his vanity prevails. He conceives of the self as beyond the physical body to cope: "[E]ven with a broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me, than this dead one that's lost. Nor White Whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and *inaccessible* being." (571, emphasis mine). Any gratitude for the abundance of Nature is destroyed by a ruthless sense of triumph over its disasters. Meanwhile, Whitman's visceral reverence for the body as a natural—and thus perfect—expression of the Self firmly opposes this, suggesting that total union with nature is necessary for survival. His proclamation, "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (Whitman s.21) promotes that the two are not separate entities, as Melville's

Ahab might suggest. The poet uses the symbol of the body as an extension of "[n]ature without check with original energy" (s.1) when he describes grass as "the uncut hair of graves" (s.6) that grows undisrupted from the buried dead, "every atom of [human] blood, form'd from this soil" (s.1). Furthermore, the relationship between man and nature is consummate: "I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for [nature] to be in contact with me" (s.2). Both metaphors of a sexual union and a union in death between Body and Nature suggest that symbiosis between humans and the natural world ultimately produces a complete Self by transcending divisive binaries. The effect of reinforcing this false binary is seen in the de-naturalization of Moby Dick: "[L]o!—a sight more savage than the embattled teeth of sharks! Caught and twisted—corkscrewed in the mazes of the line, loose harpoons and lances, with all their bristling barbs and points, came flashing and dripping up" (Melville 569). The deformation of the whale's body which makes it an unnatural entity is entirely due to human interference. Whitman's poetry illustrates that the posterity of both man and nature relies on an understanding of their inevitable links while a dissonant relationship yields a tyrannical license to dominate over all other bodies and selves.

A 'democratizing influence' occurs in both authors' syntax—a structure which widens the conceptual scope to accommodate alternative visions; however, Whitman's steady form nurtures the democratizing influence, whereas Melville's changing form indicates a corruption of it. Turning first to the queer and multicultural codes at play in *Moby Dick*, the *Pequod* acts as a miniature democratic society of equal, diverse individuals. Queequeg and Ishmael's relationship is an embodiment of these codes: Ishmael's fear of Queequeg as the 'savage Other' transforms into a deep love for the Other and for a man, informally ratified by their 'marriage' ritual in Chapter 10. This opening up of one's perspective to include *all* parts of one whole—to include *every* individual in a democracy—is translated in Melville's syntax as it transforms a singular experience into a metaphysical one. In "A Squeeze of the Hand" the practical process of refining whale sperm turns into an intimate homoerotic scene, then a metaphor for an inclusive society: "Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of human kindness" (433). The rapid sequence of semi-colons encourages a broadening of thought and acceptance. Whitman's free verse similarly embodies the syntactic democratizing influence, unrestricted by conventional metrical parameters. Whitman echoes Melville's syntax in section 15 of "Song of Myself," a seventy-five line passage perpetually unfolding through a series of innumerable commas. He catalogs the expansive diversity of human society which coalesces into the unified tissues of the individual: "And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them, / … / And of these one and all I weave the song of myself." (Whitman s.15). Whitman too absorbs the Other into himself. Consider lastly that though Melville's democratizing, prolix sentences make up most of the novel, these textual 'soliloquies' are majorly confined to Ishmael's private, mental sphere whereas Whitman's act as a public

declaration. Ishmael's *inward* democratic vision is suffocated by *outward* despotic reign, syntactically realized in Melville's use of play script such as "[*Enter Ahab; Then, all*]" (Melville 175) and Ahab's "(*Aside*) Something shot form my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion" (180). The script acts as the syntactic twin of Ahab's dictatorship, indicating a layered corruption of the democratizing influence. One might argue that Melville's inclusion of different literary forms is a democratic act because it includes diverse styles, but it is clear that the verbal soliloquies and stage directions are reserved for Ahab's monomaniacal orations and cementing his tyrannical reign. Ultimately, Whitman's use of the universal "I" directly critiques Melville's dictatorial "I *only*" (557), illustrating that a functioning democracy *must be* a unified body of different human fabrics rather than a guise of unity under an exclusionary vision.

Considering that Melville's *Moby Dick* was published in 1851 and Whitman's "Song of Myself" was published in his 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, the texts seem to be in conversation with each other, Whitman's poem providing a solution to the problems highlighted in Melville's novel. *Moby Dick* is a cautionary tale about the dangers of exploitative democracy--Ahab's tyrannical quest to control nature ends in the destruction of the *Pequod*, a democratic society. Ahab's supremacy over his crew stems from his inability to even respect the basic, anatomical beings of life. Whitman's vision of democracy offers an alternative future where man is in harmony with nature, instead of treating it as an "othered" entity ripe for degradation. Whitman's vision of a society that respects the relationship between man and nature exposes the flaws in our continuously exploitative system. Heeding the warnings of Melville's novel and working to embody Whitman's democratic vision that includes all natural entities, we can visualize a future without destruction.



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Hózhó: Portrayals of Beauty and Brutality in Diné Film and Poetics

mayson broccoli-romanowska

Diné (Navajo) artists excel at depicting their homeland in a variety of ways, sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly. While consuming the variety of Diné creative works depicting its "ugliness" or "boringness" for the first time, I tried to suppress and ignore the thought that lingered in my head: *why are these Diné creatives showing off the ugliness of their land?* While I somewhat regret my uninspired reactions to much of the scenery filmed and described, there is merit for exploring this research question. In this essay I present the reasons for why Diné creatives sometimes depict the ugliness of their lands by analyzing several reasons, primarily focusing on the balance, or *Hózhó* that the creatives pursue. Within such a framework, I argue that they reinscribe their land's personhood and sovereignty to exist without shame, which then dictates filmmaking and poetic structure. I relay the discussion using key works by Diné filmmakers and poets Blackhorse Lowe, Luci Tapahonso, Jake Skeets, Elizabeth Woody, and Blackhorse Mitchell.

Beginning the conversation with film, Blackhorse Lowe's 2005 film *5th World* promotes the significance of—and the relation between—Diné daily life and land. With numerous lengthy shots of the Southwestern landscape, Lowe showcases the casual beauty of the Diné land. The landscape and sky are visible in nearly all scenes, serving as a backdrop to the characters' growth. However, 'backdrop' does not give the land enough credit, for it also holds influence as a lyrical and narrative element of the film as the plot tracks two Diné young adults' journey through the very lands (Lowe). Characters discover their homelands mostly by hitchhiking and meeting new community members (Lowe). In doing so, Lowe presents a vision of Indigenous youth thriving in the dry, red desert, thus challenging the Vanishing Indian Myth and reinscribing the land's agency. Through the characters' non-stereotypical romance, *5th World* challenges normative misconceptions to offer a progressive look at present-day kinship among Diné. Ultimately, it offers a hopeful glimpse of a dynamic future. To affirm the land's sovereignty, Lowe tactically decides to present long shots and pans of the desert—these are contrasted against scenes and voice-overs of conversations among characters of various ages to populate the land and illustrate the Diné People's intimate relationship with it (Lowe). Non-human does not mean non-deserving of screentime, and so Lowe treats the landscape as a non-human character who, like any other, deserves solo scenes to convey its animacy.

Another way Diné artists actualize land sovereignty is through personification in poetry. In "This Is How They Were Placed For Us," Luci Tapahonso refers to the land with female pronouns and gives it dialogue: about Blanca Peak she writes, "She watches us rise at dawn. / Nidoohjeeh shá'ałchíní, nii leh. / Get up, my children, she says" (Tapahonso 98). Several Diné artists do the same, such as Jake Skeets in "From Under His Cover": he describes the same sunrise as "The sun whispers / in from the eastern door" (Skeets 293). In another instance, Elizabeth Woody writes in "Chinle Summer" that she is the "daughter of two landscapes," which captures her identity split between two communities (Woody 108)[1]. The use of this literary device serves to capture the sacred relationship Diné people have with their mother, Mother Earth. In these examples, the poets grant the Sun and mountains the same personhood as the narrators themselves. The personification communicates power among the Diné people, which thus asserts its agency. When Tapahonso writes the two communicating, she expresses the interrelation of human and non-human beings.

By communicating with each other, the human world can learn from the land's wisdom. In analyzing *5th World*, we see the agential land influence filmmaking techniques, with its authority strong enough to command markedly long shots and takes. This persists as Diné poets likewise follow the land's philosophy in their writing. Again in "This Is How They Were Placed For Us," Tapahonso traces her identity using Diné directional knowledge: she describes the significance of the four sacred mountains over four grouped vignettes, respectively, separated by Roman numerals (Tapahonso 96-99). Anthropologist Anthony K. Webster identifies this as "fourfold repetition," which is an "important device" in Diné poetics (Webster 247). Years later, emerging poet Jake Skeets employs the fourfold repetition in "Let There Be Coal." Skeets, too, writes of the Diné lands, but as a young man and emerging poet he has a complex relationship with his homeland: he has watched them be burdened *and* sustained by the coal industry (Skeets 292). Regardless, Diné directional knowledge is Skeets' mother tongue, and thus when speaking of the land, he follows the four mountains' guidance.

Tapahonso also orders the mountains purposefully, adhering to the directional knowledge's guidelines of East clockwise to North. Webster explains that the traditional ordering is followed in song, chant, and prayer; it "reflects an ideology of proper speech" (Webster 248). Indeed, in vignette IV Tapahonso writes "This is how the world was placed for us… All these were given to us to live by. / These mountains and the land keep us strong. / From them, and because of them, we prosper." (Tapahonso 99). Here she cannot be more explicit in her esteeming explanation that, like all day-to-day practices, Diné land guides her storytelling and poetics.

1 In the same poem, Woody writes, "I am one story" (Woody 108). It is perhaps an essay for another time to analyze the ways in which Woody and other artists turn the tables on this poetic device and depict *themselves* as non-human beings or concepts. This would reinforce the narrative of interconnectedness among all Diné beings and ideas.

This also falls neatly within the highest guiding principle to find or forge harmony in one's life, *Sa'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón*, which roughly translates to "thinking, planning, living, reflecting" (Diné College). In Diné philosophy, the Earth is the mother who sustains and guides Diné people through the four mountains. Diné people are especially encouraged to live harmoniously with all human and non-human beings on Earth, seeing as she created them all. Through this framework it follows that one exists interconnected among all beings. Tapahonso confirms that she writes poetry to "show the interconnectedness we Diné share and how we relate to each other" (Tapahonso 87). Tapahonso has never confined herself to writing only about people: she has works about the land, her favourite coffee, her history, and her members of kin, among countless other topics. Every human and non-human being in her works is related and lives to work together in harmony.

Although a decolonial theoretical lens easily identifies the resurgence in these pieces' connection with their landscape, they may be differently perceived by contrasting audiences. When watching *5th World,* Non-Indigenous viewers (admittedly, including myself) might find the "endless shots of desert landscapes" (Snider qtd in Wood 46) boring and unappealing, to varying degrees. This is especially the case when non-Diné viewers do not recognize some locations, to which Diné viewers are more likely to bond. But before assessing this reaction, it is useful to define some key terms. Another instance of depicting the boring or unappealing is Blackhorse Mitchell's poem "Beauty of Navajoland." It is crucial to note that for native Diné bizaad speaker Mitchell, "beauty" refers to the Diné bizaad term hózhó, "a state of beauty, of harmony, of balance, of peace" (Werito 27). Tapahonso adds that hózhó "is abstract most of the time," and she often struggles to achieve it (Tapahonso 103). Therefore, instead of being about the aesthetic attractiveness of Navajoland, Mitchell's poem concerns the degree of balance; although, it is more complex than non-Diné speakers can appreciate. Specifically, he stages a satirical twist by evoking the disorder and disharmony that can be seen across the reserve. Mitchell begins the poem with the title, then describes diverse scenes of disarray and conflict: litter, death, and pollution. He ends the piece with a poignant remark that "[the described scene] Is not the beauty of Navajoland" (Mitchell 27). Mitchell thus introduces the conversation of the motivations behind Diné creatives' portrayals of a neutral or displeasing contemporary Navajoland.

"Beauty of Navajoland" can be read as a grievance or a call to action for readers to acknowledge and resolve the need to re-establish hózhó. This is a fitting undertaking for a Diné person, for hózhó is Diné epistemology. It fits within the greater philosophy of Sa'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón, the intention for the speaker and audience to live "in harmony with the natural world and the universe" (Diné College). Therefore, Mitchell's poem exposes the "ugliness" of Navajoland to signal the need for hózhó. The teaching of Sa'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón influences this undertaking.

Applying such a definition to the "boringness" of *5th World*, Lowe acts in a manner that complements Mitchell's poem. Hawaiian scholar Houston Wood contextualizes this reaction with Tongan academic Epeli Hau'ofa's account of comparable Indigenous film styles in Oceania. Hau'ofa observes that Indigenous filmmakers and viewers usually expect the plot to be "inscribed on the landscape" (Hau'ofa qtd in Wood 46). If omitted—as a Hollywood film likely would—viewers would lose fundamental elements of the Diné worldview. While Eurocentric film typically prioritizes depictions of material and institutional culture, Indigenous filmmakers and viewers more so value the "preservation and study of [their] landscapes" (Wood 46). Not only does the film reflect Diné cultural reliance and respect for the sacred land, but it plainly presents the journey *with* the land that the couple takes to recover hózhó in their lives. As such, the film is likewise bound by Sa'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón.

Furthermore, depicting the "brutality" of Navajoland instead of its aesthetic beauty also pursues hózhó because it balances out the beautiful depictions. For good reason, Diné artists love to show off their lands, using the same sacred imagery, colours, and patterns. For example, in "Chinle Summer" Woody is distraught by her ties to two communities, but she still gives credit to the picturesque "red earth completely round. / The sky a deep bowl of turquoise overhead" (Woody 108). Later in the poem, she honours beautiful hózhó when she writes, "Beauty walked South and then North again. / Beauty sparked physical creation" (Woody 108). Woody once again personifies a non-human being and even prescribes movement onto it, for the guidance of hózhó can ebb and flow as Diné people need. In both excerpts, she balances the negative emotions she feels with beautiful imagery. This also reflects the tumultuous relationship Diné people have with their lands, given that they were once forcefully displaced in the *Long Walk* of the *Navajo in 1864*.

Skeets continues this thought in an interview when he observes that treating beauty and brutality as oppositional forces is unwise because the land can be seen as both simultaneously, to varying levels depending on one's perspective. He asks, "How do I find beauty in brutality and brutality in beauty?" (Skeets). Skeets' "entire orientation is based on the land," and so in poetry, he follows Dinétics (Diné aesthetics) which are, too, wholly land-based (Skeets). Recalling my earlier analysis of the land's influence on Diné artists' artwork, I see a connection in motivations, as Skeets' loyalty to his land determines his loyalty to harmonize depictions of beauty and brutality in his work. As a Diné person he is born with a love of his land, but he also watches as it is infected by pollution, resource extraction, and violence. Skeets' poetry is a written reflection on the duality he sees his homeland experience, as well as an attempt to reconcile the oppositional into hózhó. Skeets and other contemporary artists also offer a glimpse of the future of Diné lands, as they make apparent their dedication to restoring its hózhó. This is especially important within Diné epistemology, which emphasizes social responsibility for their land and people.

It would be unjust to neglect another answer to the question of why portray Navajoland "brutality": *why not?* Diné creatives can depict their lands in any fashion they desire, and it would still likely be resurgent. In a review of sovereignty in Indigenous art, Tuscarora academic Jolene Rickard identifies some theories that support this answer. She defines "visual sovereignty" to be an expression of self-determination through Indigenous aesthetics, whose existence destabilizes dominant colonial narratives (Rickard 82). Spotlighting the land within such a framework, critical theorist Karen Ohnesorge sees "artistic sovereignty" in "the decolonization of the landscape genre in [Indigenous] art" (Ohnesorge qtd in Rickard 82-83). In praxis, this scaffolding infers that presenting one's Indigeneity without shame is a practice of self-determination that asserts the artist's personal and national agency in the face of the colonial forces that have, for centuries, worked to suppress. The representations reject stereotypes of all kinds, and thus support the formation of Indigenous viewers' evergreening cultural identity. As such, visual representations—positive or negative—by well-intentioned Indigenous creators are foundational supports of their community's resurgence.

Additionally, the Diné artists are being *honest*, and that pursuit in itself should be appreciated. Honesty is not always easy, especially when one is honest about what pains them. For instance, in "The Canyon Was Serene," Tapahonso expresses her frustration that she has trouble achieving hózhó since leaving the Diné reserve. She admits, "Since it happened, there has been no way to weave / this loneliness and the quiet nights into that calm state called beauty." She even confesses a lingering doubt about the existence of hózhó (Tapahonso 103). It is apt to note that in "The Canyon Was Serene," Tapahonso reflects that she misses her homelands, and after just writing about its natural beauty (both of hózhó and aesthetics), she is comforted once again (Tapahonso 104). Diné land's healing power is so strong that, although away from home and spirituality disoriented, reminiscing about the joys that the land gave her is enough to ease Tapahonso's anxiety. In a large scale, the poem reflects the land's medicine, and especially how the land values honesty, as it is Tapahonso's candidness with her feelings that allowed her to heal her anxieties.

For a greater example of honesty, in "In 1864," Tapahonso preludes her poem with a scene of cultural mourning, in which an electrician ultimately quits his job in Western New Mexico because he feels the location is too haunted by the legacy of the Long Walk of 1864. She writes, "He couldn't stay there any longer. / The place contained the pain and cries of his relatives, / the confused and battered spirits of his own existence" (Tapahonso 93). It is difficult to admit that parts of one's native land are too fraught with harmful energy to even work there. Note that Tapahonso is certainly not warning readers to never work or live in the Western plains. The scene may be a true story her aunt had once recited, but I would even surmise that it is a feeling so personal to Tapahonso that she created a character onto whom she could displace the sentiment. Regardless, in a nation that lives *despite* attempts of forced displacement and assimilation, honesty about one's experiences and feelings will

undoubtedly feature some pain and ugliness.

Analyzing the depictions of Indigenous land in art is a prolific undertaking, and one of great weight in Indigenous aesthetics. For instance, Scholars Jarrett Martineau & Eric Ritskes assert the inherent connection between political imaginings and Indigenous art with the concept *fugitive Indigeneity* which exists within decolonial aesthetics. Martineau and Ritskes define fugitive Indigeneity as spaces and paradigms where decolonial artists dismantle dominant narratives and structures (III). The Diné artists I have reviewed protest settler colonial control over Dinétah (Navajoland) and thus exemplify Martineau and Ritskes' discussion. Indigenous art rarely exists independently from political action because art is used as a tool that sustains Indigenous Peoples' agency to affirm their existence and propel their resurgence against modern settler colonialism. In other words, the endurance of the Indigenous artist and their art subverts the colonial hegemony. The art they produce is confirmation of the survival of Indigenous people despite historical "colonial erasure" (Martineau and Ritskes I). Decolonial aesthetics are a site of fugitive Indigeneity, whereby artists materialize the decolonial resistance in their art. This supports the decolonization process that, Martineau and Ritskes assert, requires collective creation of "new radical subjectivities premised on Indigenous survival and re-emergence" (III).

This essay has argued that depicting the "brutality" of the sacred Diné lands is a worthwhile pursuit because it follows the traditional guidance of a need for hózhó. To prove this, I first assessed the manner that several Diné filmmakers and poets reinscribe sovereignty to their lands, which I then contextualized with the Diné philosophy of Sa'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón, whereby Diné human and non-human beings intertwine to pursue hózhó. These foundations lead me to prove that negative depictions of Navajoland is justified in its pursuit of hózhó, which thus asserts the artists' and the land's visual sovereignty. This analysis is significant within the larger conversation of Indigenous futurities, given that the land is the source of culture and knowledge for Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, it is sensible to present all the land in all lights to remind readers and viewers to protect the sacred lands.

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Thou Lov'st Me Not with The Full Weight That I Love Thee: Homoerotic Potential in *As You Like It*

mayson broccoli-romanowska

Introduction

As You Like It by William Shakespeare is a witty and complex comedy that follows a gaggle of courtiers navigating love, class, and gender structures in a fringe forest. While the main action centres Rosalind disguising as the male shepherd Ganymede to woo courtier Orlando, analyzing the homosexual possibilities between Rosalind and her dearest Celia provides a rich perspective on the art of reading and writing a character. This paper will observe that analyzing homoerotic bonds in *As You Like It*, like all fictional works, is complex because it is a task that hovers near the supposition that the characters are real people whose desires can be extrapolated. Naturally, then, all homoerotic actions must have been designed by the playwright to deliver a homoerotic relationship. Specifically for *As You Like It*, I will preface with the rationale for my argumentation, then will argue that Shakespeare designed a homoerotic relationship between Rosalind and Celia but resolved to make it unrequited in the hands of Renaissance-era heteronormativity.

Background

When analyzing the characters' identities, one must keep in mind their crux: the characters have been fabricated by the storyteller, and any assumptions on their character can only be derived in good faith from the actions the storyteller writes for them. In other words, the characters are neither real people nor people with agency; therefore, postulations made of them need to be derived only from their performed actions. It is presumptuous for readers to assume the characters' thoughts or desires – a textually supported hypothesis is the only appropriate supposition. To assess a character's identity, then, is to comb through the concrete repeated appearances of actions that assemble a disposition. The consequence of this hurdle is that as much as I would love to declare that Celia is lesbian and madly in love with her bisexual friend Rosalind, such a statement would be presumptuous and could not be honourably supposed. This would rightly place me within the category of "lewd interpreters," which Stanley Wells in *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (2004) scolds as academics who poise under "critical sophistication" but just indulge in "fantasies released in their author's minds by the texts" (37).

When it comes to classifying homoerotic behaviour, discretion is crucial. Especially for a Renaissance play, a contemporary reader cannot expect any overtly sexual or homoerotic scenes to prove their case; instead, Shakespeare must need to have crafted instances that evidence homoeroticism—be it a character's portrayal of intent or an influential climate. Furthermore, I understand the term homoerotic to incapsulate observable homosexual attraction, with a homoerotic relationship to be a pair of same-sex characters who display this tension, regardless of whether the desires are acted upon or even mutual. In *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002), David M. Halperin argues that distinguishing between sexual identities and acts must precede literary analysis of premodern characters. He advises that "before the modern era sexual deviance could be predicated only of acts, not of persons or identities" (Halperin 32). In addition, in *Shakespeare and Queer Theory* (2019), Melissa E. Sanchez states that "to ask whether [Shakespeare's] characters are homosexual is the wrong question, but not because of the absence of biographic data" (10). It is most deft to first recognize the transformation eroticism of antiquity underwent to modern sexuality and gender identities.

I cannot argue that Shakespeare wrote Rosalind and Celia to be a homoerotic pair; instead, I argue that he crafted a relationship that had the potential to be homosexual but could not actualize it due to the societal standard of heterosexuality. It is also for this reason that I—following the footsteps of scholars queering historicism analyses—employ the term homoerotic rather than homosexual. Bernadette J. Brooten affirms in *Love Between Women* (1996) that "'Homoeroticism' has a less fixed meaning than 'homosexuality' and is therefore better suited to studying the texts of a culture very different from the contemporary cultures of industrialized nations" (8). Rather than forcing the lesbian agenda over two fictional women, I will analyze their behaviours in order to draw out their homoerotic *potential*, as well as their barriers. The tension will never be stated, but instead implied. This paper will henceforth break down some examples of Celia's performance of her desires, to conclude that there is space for a homoerotic relationship.

Literary Analysis

The progression of Rosalind and Celia's relationship through the play's storyline suggests the possibility that Shakespeare had the intention for a homoerotic relationship that he ultimately had to annul in the face of heteronormative expectations. Rosalind and Celia are initially presented as a madly inseparable duo; before either character appears or speaks a single word, their relationship is cherished when Charles remarks that "never two ladies lov'd as they do" (1.1.112). Later, Le Beau describes the pair "whose loves / Are dearer than the natural bond of sisters (1.3.265-66). His recognition of their closeness generously implies a difference between "natural" and "unnatural" relationships, whereby Rosaline and Celia fair to the latter end of the spectrum. Jan Stirm observes in "Teaching Themes of Sisterhood" (1996)

that "In the early scenes of *As You Like It,* unnatural relationships work better than natural" and so, "the 'unnatural,' close, and pleasurable relationship between the female cousins serves as exemplary for natural relationships" (381-82). The couple's homoerotic love surpasses the degree acceptable for siblings or cousins. They are a disruption of natural heteropatriarchal order, which explains why Duke attempts to separate them.

In the first two acts, major and minor characters alike repeat comments like those by Charles and Le Beau to advertise the women's profound, non-normative bond. Shakespeare writes it to be unequivocally clear that they are emotionally connected. However, discussions in 1.2 reveal that their relationship is unsteady: when Rosalind refuses to cheer up, Celia bluntly accuses her of "lov[ing] me not with the full weight that I love thee," for Celia could always be happy as long as "thou hadst been still with me" (1.2.7-10). Shakespeare's reinforcement of their imbalance stands in opposition to the initial depiction of a mutually happy couple. From this contrast, it is reasonable to claim that the playwright wanted viewers to notice the potential for a homoerotic bond but must ultimately taper it off, which he accomplishes by writing Celia as an unfulfilled admirer whom Rosalind must "friendzone." Throughout the play, Rosalind and Celia's relationship despoils from mutual devotion, to imbalance, and concludes as with the pair estranged.

Despite Rosalind's steadily evolving fate with Orlando, Shakespeare persists in underscoring the strength of Rosalind and Celia's relationship in the first act. Since viewers cannot truthfully extrapolate the women's unspoken thoughts, it is a task for the playwright to script the evidence of romantic potential that the audience can gather and decode. I will analyze two instances where Shakespeare composes Celia's words and actions to discreetly express the potential. First, in 1.3 Celia protects Rosalind from Duke Frederick's accusation of treason and order of exile. When Duke Frederick states that he initially did not banish Rosalind with Duke Senior for Celia's sake, Celia begs:

> I was too young that time to value her
> But now I know her. If she be a traitor,
> Why so am I. We still have slept together,
> Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together,
> And, wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans
> Still we went coupled and inseparable. (1.3.74-79)

This declaration provides many hints in favour of Celia's homoerotic desire for Rosalind, some of which are too meaningful to be a coincidence. Celia first states that she has grown to appreciate Rosalind over time, that "now I know her" (1.3.75). To "know" Rosalind can also lend to the more sexual Biblical meaning, that is "To be sexually intimate with; esp. to have sexual intercourse with" ("know, v."). Therefore,

although she was telling her father how she had deepened her awareness since Duke Senior's exile, Celia had simultaneously signalled to viewers a double entendre.

Next, she points out how familiar they were by sleeping together so closely that they "Rose at an instant" (1.3.77). Since sharing a bed was common in Renaissance England, merely identifying the act of sleeping in the same bed would be insubstantial evidence of sexual relations. But it is the word "Rose" that flags the preceding line's relevancy: she primarily uses it as a verb, but it doubles as her nickname for Rosalind. Shakespeare emphasizes this second double entendre by breaking the line after "together," to place Rose as the first word of its trochee, and capitalized (1.3.76-77). By inserting the unexpected nickname "Rose," Shakespeare signals the lines as content worth reviewing with a closer eye. I argue that without context, the idea of sleeping together is the tip of the iceberg – "Rose" provides the context to look deeper to uncover the homoerotic suggestion. Celia ends her harangue with another hint that likens the couple's closeness to Juno's swans, the ever-united animals of the Roman God of marriage and birth (1.3.78). With this allusion, Celia suggests that there is profound love and loyalty between them not unlike the mythical epitome of romantic love. Close reading this short passage provides an example of the many inconspicuous – but substantial – instances of Celia expressing her desire for Rosalind. This way, Shakespeare communicates that despite the looming heterosexual mores, Celia embodies her desire.

When not writing Celia as lusting over her beloved, Shakespeare also signals Celia's homoerotic desires when Orlando is present: while Rosalind and Orlando flirt, Celia is off to the side keeping quiet or muttering her jealousy. 4.1 follows Orlando's attempts to woo Rosalind as Ganymede. At this point, it is clear that although Celia knows their love is imbalanced, their relationship had never been threatened by an external love interest. Celia recognizes Orlando as competition. In one of her last speaking scenes, Celia markedly interrupts Rosalind and Orlando's heterosexual flirtation: she mewls "it pleases him to call you so / but he hath a Rosalind of a better leer than you" (4.1.64). Here, she is written to expend her final opportunities for speech to disrupt any leverage Orlando might have over Rosalind's heart. The sarcastic comment implies Celia prefers the Rosalind who used to return her adoration.

Then, after mocking Orlando's poetry in hopes of making Rosalind reconsider her love (3.2.166-255), Celia's jealousy is perhaps most apparent when Rosalind/Ganymede insists that Celia pretend to marry the two lovers: "Pray thee, marry us," Orlando almost begs. Appalled, Celia refuses by curtly stating "I cannot say the words" (4.1.132-33). Celia reasons to the pair that she is not a priest, therefore cannot officiate a wedding, even if it is a childish game. But Celia relents and initiates the pretend ceremony, repressing the playful mood to one of discomfort and tension, which is only prolonged when she remains silent for the rest of the couple's flirting (4.1.138-213). The awkwardness more principally lies in the staging of the scene, as Celia stands to the side and glares at the couple who flirt as if Celia is no longer present. To maintain

decent decorum for the mock courtship, Celia is somewhat obligated to stay by the couple as a pitiful chaperone for her former bosom buddy. Here, Shakespeare uses the power of stage direction to present Celia's longing. Camille Paglia affirms that the playwright "intends this subtext of sexual tension [as proven] by the fact that in his source in Lodge it is the Celia character who merrily invents and urges on the sham wedding ceremony" (202). After an extended period of third-wheeling, Shakespeare ends the scene with Celia berating Rosalind's misconduct. Celia then leaves in a huff, declaring "And I'll sleep" (4.1.214-31), and hereafter says just ten words. With her silence, the play's homoerotic potential is likewise muzzled. And with that, she is reinforced as a woman mourning the loss of her dearest Rosalind.

Despite the displayed romantic potential between Rosalind and Celia, Shakespeare appears to conclude the play with four heterosexual marriages to appeal to heteronormative standards. While the plot's progression elucidates that Rosalind and Orlando were directed to ultimately unite, Celia and Oliver are an especially unexpected coupling. The two had spoken but a few words to each other before the marriage—most of which while Celia was disguised as another woman. Their relationship is underdeveloped, unsubstantial, and arguably, non-consensual, for the silent Celia is never written to consent to her marriage. The pair are connected under the guise of romantic spontaneity, but beneath that, there is Shakespeare who knows he could not end the play with Rosalind and Celia, a queer relationship. In "Sexual Politics and Social Structure," Peter B. Erickson maintains that through Celia's forced silence and submission to Oliver, "the danger of female bonding is illustrated" and "it is made clear…that homoerotic female bonding is taboo and that the authorized defence against it is marriage" (81). I agree that Shakespeare embeds sufficient evidence of their relationship throughout the play but writes it as one-sided, then marries them to men to preserve the required heterosexuality.

The overall spontaneity of the marriage, especially with the fleeting appearance of Hymen, the Greek god of marriage, achieves an artificial wedding that signals a band-aid solution to wed the heterosexual couples. The wedding abruptly begins in the final act and ends more quickly than its introduction lasted (many thanks to Touchstone and Jacques for quarrelling beforehand). The wedding is constructed to be an acceptable social norm that represses the earlier homosexual events. Even after Rosalind and Celia shed disguises, the wedding carries on the performativity. It is too ceremonial to be genuine; even Jacques notices the strange atmosphere when he remarks that Touchstone and Audrey resemble one of the "couples … coming to the ark," referring to the Biblical story of Noah's Ark (5.4.37). The final coupling is so unnatural to the play's universe that Shakespeare must pull from a popular culture—a trusted story of the Bible—to cushion it; thus, mimicking Noah's Ark gives the absurd arrangement a degree of support and validity. This also reinforces the heteronormativity of the couplings, for Noah's Ark mandated the collections of one male and one female of each species to preserve life on Earth.

Furthermore, the wedding's flimsiness is heightened when Hymen suddenly materializes to officiate the marriages, accompanied by a nearly comical burst of "still music" (5.4.112). As the only mythological creature to appear in the play, Hymen is a suspiciously incongruous addition. Scholars have hypothesized that the marriages are so unsubstantial that a mythological figure is needed to give them a crumb of authenticity; ironically, his transitory appearance only adds to the finale's fallacy. Koushik Mondal cites Slavoj Zizek (1997) in their deconstruction of the weddings to argue that, via the process of "subversion-through-identification" (Zizek 22 qtd in Mondal 266), the masque weddings shield any earlier homosexual expression from the heteronormative society. Therefore, the flimsy projection of heterosexuality to conclude the play is Shakespeare's final flourish to convince his audience that the play is indeed heterosexual, and thus, satisfactory.

Conclusion

This paper has proved that analyzing the bonds between same-sex characters in *As You Like It* is a complex endeavor due to the characters' existence being rooted in merely a performance written by the playwright. To navigate this, I presented close readings of multiple instances of Celia's intimate desires for Rosalind as evidence that critics can only conclude the *potential* for a homoerotic relationship through the progression and implementation of rhetoric, actions, and stage presence. Regardless of whether this proves the characters' sexualities – and whether that is an ethical goal to pursue – reading into the romance between Rosalind and Celia deepens one's reception to Celia who, in terms of the centre plot, mostly exists in Rosalind's shadow.

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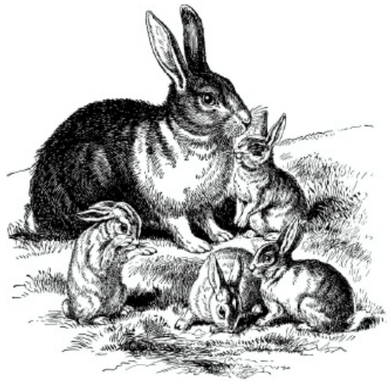

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