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Living Literary Others

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Introduction:
Living Literary Others (and its Post-Linguistic Challenges)

by Susan Yi Sencindiver

By art alone we are able to get outside ourselves, to
know what another sees of this universe which for him
is not ours, the landscapes of which would remain as
unknown to us as those of the moon.

– Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*

We can never escape ourselves; we can never know the other and perceive their
universe from their point of view – except, according to Proust, through art. Through
the imaginative power of literature, we can encounter the thoughts and emotions of
another. Through the immersive nature of absorbed reading, we can put ourselves
into the place of an other, whose environing and inner realities are capable of being
experienced with a keen liveliness and palpable presence. And through the sensitive
critical inquiry of narratives explored through the other's eyes, as presented by the
collection of articles in this issue, we may heed to the ways in which such seeing,
sensing, and vividly living the lunar landscapes of literary others enhance an
empathetic understanding of otherness.

This Proustian conviction, however, meets opposition when taking into
account the influential body of scholarship that has gravitated towards a notion of
otherness as radically Other, unthinkable, unrepresentable, and resisting
conceptualization. This body's strong force of attraction has been exerted by thinkers

such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, who, stressing the irreducibility of absolute otherness, exhort that the moment Otherness is articulated in positive terms it is drawn into the orbit of the self-same whereby its alterity is eclipsed (Levinas 1969, 121). Their caution is not unrelated to the debates on, for example, the limitations of an epistemological purview bounded by socio-culturally specific circumstances, the longstanding philosophical bugaboo of other minds consequent upon the impossibility of experiencing another's experience – and this epistemic limit in accessing the minds, motives, and sensations of others, to rehearse a Freudian truism, includes our own as well. In this light, the claim of the unparalleled ability of fiction to voice, imaginatively enter, and vicariously live the affective, experiential, and mental lives of others is a false promise; disillusioned, we may question whether representation, let alone knowledge, of the other is possible, and whether such an endeavor is even ethical.

Especially owing to Levinas's ethical appreciation of otherness (1969) and Derrida's re-reading of Levinasian ethics of hospitality (1999; 2000; 2001), otherness has been earmarked a cardinal ethical category. For Levinas and Derrida, the hospitality towards the other is unconditional, the ethical obligation infinite; and to prevent converting and vitiating the other, defined by and for itself, into an other-than-self, they contend that otherness must always be recognized as Altogether-Other. On these grounds, then, ethically relating to the other and the literary attempt to narrate, recognize, and understand the other are mutually exclusive courses of action since in the process of describing and grasping otherness, one is also producing it, reshaping it to reflect one's own image. Tracing the conditions for the rise of human rights in the late eighteenth century, the cultural historian Lynn Hunt points to literature, reading novels in particular, as a formative force on account of its ability to produce "imagined empathy," that is, to imagine that "someone else is like you" and

that "their inner experiences are like one's own" (2007, 32, 39). Yet this faculty fostered by literature, following a Levinasian line of thought, would constitute an unethical act to the extent that such an empathic understanding presumes that the other is knowable, is like me, and subsumes the other to one's own horizon of understanding: If grasped, the other would not be Other (1987, 90); and in sympathy "through which we put ourselves in the other's place," he warns, difference is annulled whereby the Other is merely known "as another (my)self, as the alter ego" (ibid., 75, 83).

Against these critical efforts insisting on the absolute difference of otherness, its unethical and impossible representations, the contributions of this issue, in contrast, emphasize the political urgency, ethical imperatives, and new insights to be gained by doing precisely the opposite, but of course not without attendant dilemmas. Granted, the vigilance of subjectivist and constructivist stances is vital in order to detect the dangerous reductions and imperial assimilations of the other to the self; yet the unfortunate effect of this discursive turn in literary criticism is a paralyzing hermeneutic anxiety and deadlock: The critic is ever cautious yet inescapably guilty of violating the fragile singularity of the other, and ever conscious of the impasse of being restricted to, yet dependent on, contextually specific systems of understanding and reductive closures that are necessary to render possible any kind of meaning production, to render the literary other coherent even though this coherence is an imposed construct.

In contrast, the collection of articles in this issue offers a refreshing antidote to the disabling inertia generated by the fear of reading the same into and thus infringing and distorting the other's reality. Recognizing the fact of finite human understanding does not entail that we are blocked from any knowledge whatsoever or from partial and provisional understandings of the other; epistemic access is limited not

prohibited. Yet precisely on account of the limited access to other minds, imagination becomes a precondition for empathy. This is what renders literature pertinent to studies on otherness: a quintessentially imaginative activity, literature and its unlimited range of characters accommodate a means to envision not only fictional others but also "what another sees of this universe which for him is not ours," to momentarily plunge into other contexts removed spatially, temporally, and culturally from ours. Instead of seeing a single world, that of our own, Proust contends that it is by virtue of art, "we see it multiplied," worlds "differing more widely from each other than those which roll round the infinite" (1949, 247).

This inextricable link between fictional characters and their worlds is taken up by **Anna Jones Abramson**'s "**Authors and Others**," which considers the ways literature invites empathy not only by reading but writing it: the creation of a character involves not only the creation of their world but also the author's transport to the space of the other's experience. By putting Levinas as well as the scholarly accounts on otherness by Mikhail Bakhtin, Geoffrey Harpham, and Judith Butler, among others, into dialogue with J.M. Coetzee's self-conscious novel *Elizabeth Costello*, Abramson's article alternately queries, challenges, and elaborates upon the premises of aforesaid theories in an endeavor that reinvigorates the theoretical debates on the role of otherness in ethics. More specifically, by way of *Elizabeth Costello*'s self-reflexive contemplation on the relationship between an author and her literary character/s, Abramson considers this relationship as a productive prism by which to explore the precarious ethical encounter between self and other – not in terms of hospitality – but through an inverse ethical movement into foreign spaces, where the other is met on their own territory. Analyzing how authorship is consistently framed in spatial, sensuous, and kinetic terms, Abramson argues that authoring a character requires not merely imagining but radically *inhabiting* another

being, who, moreover, does not simply issue from the self but is anchored in another world. While this notion of *inhabiting* an other and the affect-charged space of their experience constitutes an exemplary ethical model, Abramson cautions that Coetzee's text, given its ethical equivocacy, precludes any moral prescriptions. Additionally discerning the ethical perils entailed by imaginatively inhabiting the minds and worlds of others, Abramson concludes with a discussion of the ethical contradictions implied by the act of inhabiting and their significance in *Elizabeth Costello*.

Several of the aforementioned subjectivist and constructivist accounts are also based on assumptions that can be challenged: namely the categorical dichotomy between sameness and difference, self and other, knowledge and ignorance, epistemology and ontology; assumptions which include the notion that the self and representation are exclusively informed by a self-same logos admitting no residues of otherness – which basic psychoanalytic tenets have long contested – and that such representation is incapable of integrating new and different perspectives, and thus implies a solipsistic entrapment in linguistic narcissism, in which, invariably mediated, the other's unadulterated voice is garbled and misheard. On the other hand, as Bakhtin (1981) illustriously argues, literature does not mediate the voice of the same: the literary text presents not one unified voice, static and smoothly coherent; rather, the porous body of the literary text is inhabited by multiple voices consisting of characters, narrators, authors, heterogeneous contextual and intertextual echoes: a cacophonic chorus embodying a heteroglossic friction of interests. Challenging the simplistic binary of sameness and difference, Sten Pulz Moslund similarly contends that while representation undoubtedly "cannot *re*-present pure Otherness or Difference," neither can it entirely expel difference or "repeat the Same again … without any alteration." Consequently, "[t]here will always be a degree of change, newness and difference in any act of representation" (2011, 191-2).

Related objections reverberate in the critical turn in recent years towards new materialist and post-linguistic thinking which questions the philosophical tradition of conventionally treating ontology and epistemology as distinct concerns; and this reappraisal is consequential for an understanding of otherness inasmuch as their alleged incommensurability, or the primacy of epistemology and its limits, has formed the foundation for mainstream approaches to otherness. Thinkers such as Karen Barad, Slavoj Žižek, and Julia Kristeva before them, theorize in different ways the entwined relations between meaning and matter, word and world, in their respective notions of "agential realism," the Real, and the semiotic. Here, however, it is important to stress that the subjectivist's recognition of the gulf between the other in itself and its mediated manifestation for us is not to say in turn that s/he considers the other's reality as reducible to and having no effects on discourse. In other words, what is at stake according to subjectivist thinkers in representations of the other pertains to epistemology not ontology. Wary of specifying content to anything "outside" discourse, textual idealist variants of poststructuralism warn that non-discursive entities or matter are not objects given in advance prior to their discursive articulations but are the concealed extensions and effects, rather than the hidden cause, of culture and discursive practices from which they, moreover, receive their pre-cultural ascription. Yet such discourse theory, according to Žižek, neglects the unsymbolizable beyond discourse, that is, the category of the Real, which must be taken into account when considering that what is excluded forms a *constitutive* outside shaping the very limits, contours, and thus coordinates of a given discursive framework. The subject is not irreversibly and entirely overwritten by the social and cultural nor is language the sole constitutive element of the social field. Implicitly questioning the homogenous consistency and globalizing reach of a self-same logos that purportedly precludes otherness, Kristeva, similarly, disputes a conception of

language as "a strictly 'formal' object," in other words, a static, closed differential sign system which "defers any interrogation of its … 'externality;'" instead defining it as a dynamic signifying *process* on account of the lingering presence of this very "externality" in the shape of the semiotic which continually erodes and remakes this process (1986, 90). Barad cautions that in prioritizing discursive over extra-discursive concerns, failing to theorize their relationship, and solely attentive to the limits of discourse, textual idealists inadvertently reinscribe the very nature-culture dualism they sought to deconstruct (2007, 35, 64, 192). Deeming the extreme positions of a relativist poststructuralism and objectivist positivism as untenable seeing that they exclusively consider "*either* the discursive or material nature of practices" (31; original emphasis), Barad instead proposes "agential realism" as an alternative, an "onto-epistemological" framework theorizing material-discursive practices (146*ff.*), in which "[n]either discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior," nor are they "reducible to the other" (152). Likewise emphasizing the inseparability and intricate mutual entailment between discursivity and its outside, Žižek counters the conventional reading of Lacan as the "philosopher of language," who endorses "all the false poetry of 'castration', of some primordial act of sacrifice and renunciation, of *jouissance* as impossible;" instead, as the Lacanian notions of the lamella and surplus-enjoyment affirm, it is impossible to eliminate its tenacious excess and effects (1996, 93). Yet the Real, Žižek warns, should not be understood as some underlying ultimate referent behind or beneath a discursive veil, but rather as the residue and deficit internal to yet at the same time irreducible to symbolization (2007, 135-37).

Analogously, we cannot know otherness in its raw, pristine form, but not because its alterity is anchored in some unchanging fixity whose elusive essence forever eludes us, nor on account of the inaccuracy of representation owing to the

arbitrariness of the sign and endlessly deferred signified of a self-enclosed signifying system. Both these accounts, moreover, presuppose a firm division between representation and objects of representation. Rather, otherness cannot be known in absolute pristine terms to the extent that there is no such pregiven, eternal objective reality of otherness existing a priori and independent from its discursive articulations and localized material conditions. In contrast to a realist approach that presumes otherness to be an autonomous entity demarcated by determinate boundaries passively pending to be represented, albeit imperfectly (cf. Barad 2007, 55), a textual idealist account highlights the historically specific contingency of otherness understanding it as relational positioning or a cultural construct determined by the arbitrary structure of relations in a given discursive system. Yet the latter approach, as Žižek and Butler remarks, fails to consider the impact of the constitutive outside and the productive aspect of discursive practices, that is, how repeated regulatory practices performatively generate the effects of fixity and discrete boundaries, whose congealed residue comes to be known as substance (Butler 1993, 9). In a post-linguistic account of the entanglement and mutual conditioning of discourse and residues not culturally produced, the distinction between absolute Otherness and otherness colonized by the sign of self-same is nonviable. Neither a bounded self-contained entity nor solely an ideational or social construct, otherness, following a Baradian line of thought, is amorphous, processual, entwined with and reshaped by contextual variations and thus necessarily a heterogeneous, open category. Phenomena, Barad writes, are "the *ontological* inseparability of agentially intra-acting components;" and intra-action, as opposed to interaction, Barad continues, "recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action" (2007, 33; original emphasis). In the phenomenal flux, perpetual becoming, and meetings of multiplicities, events, and actions, the provisional

differential bounds of selves and others, correspondingly, are the result of and continually reconfigured by the intra-actions of entangled discursive and material practices.

In the remaining articles presented here, otherness is not seen as a monolithic, homogenous category. Together, they illustrate how the forms and processes of otherness unevenly emerge and are enmeshed in contextually contingent dense intersections of social and material relations. Each consists of a situational analysis examining how a particular configuration of otherness is constituted not by its simple binary opposition to the same but by specific complex constellations whose boundaries marking difference alternately congeal, liquefy, and blend together in a variety of ways. Accordingly, it becomes impossible to isolate an othered component as such, rather, otherness is conceptualized as a provisional nodal point consisting of numerous and dynamic interfaces that cut diagonally across various imbricating and unstable identity parameters, such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class, which are not considered in isolation from each other. This renders the othering processes, and modes of resistance correspondingly, a more intricate phenomenon more difficult to dissect and analyze given the recognition that these various forms of othering and discrimination do not merely monolithically reinforce or "double" oppression, so to speak, but that these oppressive measures along with their opposition interact in manifold ways, taking on very specific forms in specific cases.

Straddling social and literary studies, "**The Internal Other**" by **Mélanie Grué** examines the ambiguous white trash position in Dorothy Allison's literary work and the ways in which her fiction neighbors critical whiteness studies by interrogating the homogenous conception of normative whiteness. Given that the white body has been conceptually coded as the template of normalcy and universality, a distinctive feature of white cultural identity has been its very

indistinctness and invisibility; and thus, as an "unmarked" race, the complexity of this identity category has only received fleeting academic attention in the past. In contrast, Grué illustrates how Allison reveals the social domain of whiteness to be internally inconsistent, volatile, and frayed by heterogeneous disunity as a result of white trash individuals "marked" with intermingling social and racial data. Forming an unstable sub-group neither same nor other, white trash, Grué argues, forms a threatening otherness internal to and disrupting the clear-cut demarcations of white identity governed by middle class interests. Drawing on the thought of Kristeva, Grué maintains that the category indeterminism of white trash renders it exemplary of the abject. Ineffectually aiming to harness the threat of contamination posed by white trash, they are reserved a confined space in which their regional specificities and behavioral features are racialized, vulgarized, stereotyped, and pigeonholed.

Demarcations of whiteness are also destabilized by transcultural and migration contexts; for example, with the influx of Jewish immigrants to the U.S., **Nevena Stojanovic** notes, distinctions between Jewishness and Anglo-Saxon whiteness were drawn to emphasize difference over sameness. These very stereotypes of othered interstitial identities, however, may be appropriated: Stojanovic's "**Like Eliza Rachel Félix**" explores the ways Louisa May Alcott's potboiler *Behind a Mask* accentuates the performance of liminal otherness as possessing the potential to challenge and reshape the established social order. Reading the savvy ploys of Alcott's protagonist, the governess Jean Muir, in light of Daphne Brooks's notion of "eccentric" and "off-center performances" as well as Michel de Certeau's "tactics," Stojanovic argues that Jean applies her clever skills as an actress not only to the tableaux vivants she stages to entertain her wealthy employers but that these extend to "off-stage" everyday performances. In both these on- and off-stage performances, moreover, the instability of class, gender, and ethnicity, as they pertain to the liminal

figures of the governess and Jew especially, are tactically finessed to aid her social ascent and destabilize the cultural center dominated by the English aristocracy and patriarchal interests. Seeing that Jean is likely modeled on the French Jewish actress (Eliza) Rachel Félix, the latter is a key figure, Stojanovic contends, by which to understand Alcott's ambivalence towards the growing Jewish presence on American soil: ascribing Jean with Rachel's personal characteristics and stereotypical Jewish traits, Alcott's portrayal of Jewishness, Stojanovic asserts, is "allo-Semitic," anti- and philo-Semitic at once, thus embodying an intriguing dynamic in which Jewish difference is celebrated and objectified in intricate ways in the ultimate pursuit of furthering a feminist agenda.

Likewise attentive to how the discursive span of otherness channels a multitude of warring and contradictory ideological inflections, "**Of Monsters and Men**" by **Donna Mitchell** examines the repercussions of unconventional gender-bending bodies and ambiguous sexualities for family dynamics, which assumes a supernatural monstrous guise when refracted through Gothic fiction. Especially focusing on the role of absent mothers and unnatural children in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, Mitchell argues that the integrity of gender and familial identities within these Gothic realms is relentlessly breached as evident by the replacement of "natural" mothers with deficient male substitutes and children with monstrous creations. Just as these gender and familial identities are doubled, usurped, perverted, and revealed to be unstable categories, the volatile fears and desires they elicit correspondingly become menacingly indistinguishable. As such, these ambivalent emotions together with the imbricating, contradictory effects of an unnatural parent-child relation are entangled: a postnatal antipathy for the newborn is inextricable from the monstrous child's resentment of its creator; this, in turn, is linked to the bereavement of cherished mothers and children who,

subsequently resurrected and immortalized, become objects of horror; and a woman's inability to fulfill her maternal potential is ambiguously censured, entails fatal repercussions, yet ensues from male desire. At once strangely subversive and conservative, these Gothic portraits of unnatural families challenge the conception of the traditional family based upon the essentialist model of the procreative couple, yet the destructive outcome consequent upon eliminating potential "natural" mothers implicitly dictates motherhood as woman's primary function. Ultimately, Mitchell contends, these stories articulate the challenges of motherhood, female agency, and the child's struggle for autonomy within domestic spheres dominated by male supremacy.

Focusing on Guillermo Reyes's memoir *Madre and I*, **Ed Chamberlain**'s "**Spectacles of Otherness, Space, and Sexuality**" also explores the imbricating forms of othering which Reyes experiences as a queer Chilean migrant living in the U.S and as a result of his illegitimacy and unknown racial ancestry. The discriminatory practices and shame recounted in Reyes's narrative, Chamberlain contends, are largely effected through spectacle and the spectacular. Objects of public and his own anxious scrutiny, Reyes's ethnicity, hirsute body, and sexuality is framed by spectacle giving rise to social and psychic costs for well-being. Yet while spectacle functions as a primary vehicle for othering, this very spectacle can, in turn, be reclaimed and appropriated for own ends. Seeing that, as Suzanne Keen (2006) observes, the empathy induced by reading fiction is conditioned by a number of narrative techniques that may enhance or impede it, the empathy for fictional others hardly translates into an empathy for those others encountered in everyday life. Neither is fictional empathy automatically a moral good, as Joshua Landy points out, offering an indiscriminate imaginative identification with Nabokov's Humbert in *Lolita* as an example; nor is it a given that empathy leads to subsequent compassion

or stirs us to action (2010, 224). Yet empathetic literary representation and Reyes's story of personal pain, felt experience of discrimination, and hope, Chamberlain avers, nevertheless engender a path that aids an appreciation of different social realities, the challenges of coming out, and the struggles that queer migrants face, and thus constitutes a tacit form for political activism.

Just as there are limits to fictional empathy, literary texts, reflexive of the values, biases, and tensions of the social body, also register the failures of imagination in the promotion of a select worldview that presents certain privileged cultural preferences and standards as universal, oppressive conditions as just, perpetuates stereotypes, thus hardening rather than deliquescing the lines between selves and others. As a medium of power, agency, and authority, narrative can both serve to legitimize hegemonic interests and function as a vehicle for social justice and protest. Acutely aware of this elasticity of narrative power, **Martin Woodside**'s "**Composing and Performing the Self**" examines its instrumental value in relation to hybrid identities in M.T. Anderson's young adult novel, *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing*, which chronicles the life of Octavian, a highly educated African American slave born and raised in Boston, and subject to an educational experiment intended to determine whether Africans possess equal intellectual abilities as Europeans. Indebted to a conceptual framework chiefly provided by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Woodside's study traces the obstacles to and intricate processes of self-authorship that Anderson's young protagonist must navigate to attain meaningful self-actualization: given that Octavian occupies a subaltern position and Western institutional forces shape his selfhood, he endures a fraught double-consciousness characteristic of the experience of African diaspora in the West, who must negotiate the plight of being simultaneously internal and external to the socio-cultural making of Western modernity. Despite or possibly on account of this doubled

consciousness, Octavian, Woodside maintains, succeeds in maneuvering competing tools for self-fashioning: rhetorically adept, he strategically reclaims the written word in an oppositional narrative to compose the self yet this medium is recognized as a compromised form tainted by an imperial legacy. While music and performance is seen as promising a more effective means for resistance and realizing self-conscious maturity, Woodside lastly considers whether such an opposition between music and word, speech and song, is tenable.

Elizabeth Lowry's "**Close Encounters and the Culture Industry**" also probes how various configurations of otherness emerge from and are intricately conditioned by the dark side internal to the progressive ideals of modernity and the Enlightenment. Drawing on the scholarship on the genre patterns and rhetorical tropes of twentieth-century alien abduction and contactee narratives, Lowry reads these close-encounter narratives and their characteristic differences within the theoretical framework provided by Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The discrepant genre tendencies of abductee and contactee narratives, Lowry maintains, reflect a crucial difference in their tacit worldviews governed by dissimilar socio-cultural values, which in turn condition the distinct ways in which abductees and contactees are othered, the latter meeting less adversity than the former. Employing Horkheimer and Adorno's critical terms "myth" and "epic" as analytical tools by which to understand these narratives, Lowry argues that the scientifically oriented abductee discourse, much like epic, adopts the principles of Enlightenment thinking based on the ideas of progress, mastery over nature, verification, and positivism, and seeks to differentiate itself from and invalidate the contactee account, which, in contrast, is shaped by a fantastical mode roughly corresponding to mythical thinking. Focusing especially on the ideological implications of the abductee narrative, Lowry contends that precisely because this

narrative, eager for social and scientific legitimation, accepts the premises and practices that exclude it, the abductee's experience of marginalization and disempowerment is aggravated. Reverberating with the tenor of Horkheimer and Adorno's scathing indictment of the Enlightenment bedrock of modern Western society servicing hegemonic forms of social control and economic subordination, extraterrestrial contact narratives, Lowry suggests, bespeak of the ache inflicted by as well as the struggle against the dehumanizing and alienating aspects of modernity's administered life, instrumental rationalism, and culture industry, in whose indifferent grip individuals are rendered passive, powerless, and deprived of agency.

A shared theme of this issue is seeing and feeling from the other's perspective, a practice which may cultivate an understanding of how others are also selves. Contrary to Levinas's claim, empathetically living the other through literature, or "inhabiting" to use Abramson's words, need not necessarily collapse difference. On the one hand, imagining oneself into the experiential lives of others may involve a self seeking its mirror image in the other, presupposing and projecting a sameness in mental and emotional states, claiming a common ground that is in fact under the jurisdiction of the self. On the other hand, this does not necessarily exclude the fact that empathy can at the same time be other-oriented: empathy does not only involve imagining how *the other is like us*, but availing oneself of such imagining precisely as a means to imaginatively reach how it is *to be like the other*, that is, the self may be sought in the other ultimately in the interest of reconciling and fine-tuning a comparative sentiment in an effort to appreciate, move toward, and meet the other. Given that one is only ever admitted to one's own experience, in empathy, the self may identify with the experiential reality of the other through and by drawing on their own reservoir of accumulated life experiences not to assimilate but to approach the other. Although each individual life history is contextually specific, unique, and thus

would, on the face of it, inhibit identically feeling what the other feels, one does need "to feel the other's feeling," Arne Johan Vetlesen argues, to grasp "how the other experiences the situation he or she is in" (1994, 8). Neither does empathy presuppose nor demand that the other be identical to myself. Empathy, as opposed to identification, Vetlesen maintains, recognizes "the otherness of two persons, of their difference and distinctness as something to be maintained rather than annulled" (ibid., 204).

However, as Luce Irigaray cautions, while the strangeness of the other must be respected, the difference between two must not be absolute. Unlike Levinas, who understands the infinite alterity of the Other as necessitating a non-relation (1996, 16), a radical gulf segregating self from other, Irigaray questions whether we can meet the other when s/he is exiled into an inaccessible realm. Neither does she find the notion of hospitality adequate in an ethical encounter with the other to the extent that the guestroom is often figured as its principal spatial trope. Probationally welcomed and sequestered to an enclosed guestroom, an asylum, or ghetto, the other does not co-exist with us (2011, 112). Instead, she stresses the need to move beyond indoor bounds, to conceive an alternative space to meet the other: at a cross-road where there is "no longer anything of one's own" and "nothing yet in common," and where "the world which is proper to each one" is also not demolished (ibid.). Rather than requiring distance and incommensurability, an ethical relation to the other, Abramson likewise notes, may be figured by the notion of a shared space in which difference is not effaced but preserved. Irigaray deems the mutual contact implied in "meeting" promising since it defies both unity and separation, an interface akin to bodily touch where two meet not in a loss of distinction but a joining in difference. Yet when leaving our home to meet the other, she warns, we must remain faithful to ourselves and not forget our dwelling: "To return home to ourselves is necessary"

(115) in order to escape fusion and remain two. The "essence of empathy," correspondingly, as Vetlesen writes, "lies in one subject's *retaining* rather than abandoning his or her own standpoint and identity in the course of his or her own endeavor to recognize the other as other" (1994, 204; original emphasis). Accordingly, an empathetic move towards the other must sustain a tension between sameness and difference.

When returning home, however, one might not be the same as before one embarked on the imaginative literary journey in sharing the experiential lives of others since it entails a risk: not simply that the other is rendered same, but the becoming-other of the same in the act of reading and momentary identification, a risk that the reader is touched, affected, and emerges transformed. "Meeting with the other," Irigaray writes, does not only call for a "fidelity to a past and openness to a future, but also a participation of the body, of feelings and of mind." How we relate to the other, then, is not merely a matter of knowing, but a matter of feeling with, and a matter of matter. Or rather, in a post-linguistic gesture, the intimacy involved in "[t]ouching or being touched" when meeting the other "cannot be approached with the hand or understood with a concept": In this touch, the other should neither be reduced to "a mere body" nor be perceived "only as a cultural vehicle;" instead, we must "meet and share with our whole being, our embodied being" (2011, 117-118). Seeing that empathy concerns feeling with others, feeling what we believe to be the emotions of others, and thus includes modalities other than the epistemological, the poverty of knowledge on account of the other's untranslatable nature does not entail the diminishment of the richness of affect and sensuous experience. Literature, comparatively, is not only a medium of words, but a medium for affect and sensation. Although "[y]ou cannot read affects, you can only experience them," as Simon O'Sullivan says (2001, 126), you can read and be affected. Challenging what he

views as the hermeneutic regime governing the humanities and arts, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in his polemic *Production of Presence* summons a bodily and presence-based engagement with the arts, in which we pursue not the meaning/s of an art work but how it affects, touches, and moves us. Mikel Dufrenne points out that although the things and states a word refers to are obviously not materially present, and while the felt immediacy the word is capable of conjuring is not comparable to the sensuous qualities of things, it can nevertheless summon an affective presence (1973, 137). Consequently, when literature is also considered as something other than representation, then affectively living the experiential lives of literary others is not a false promise.

"My own eyes are not enough for me," C.S. Lewis writes towards the close of *An Experiment in Criticism*, "I will see through those of others." In this respect, literature is essential inasmuch as "[l]iterary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality" because, as he explains, "in reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself … I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see" (1961, 140-141). To this multeity of myriad eyes, literary criticism adds an extra pair of eyes revealing, filtering, shaping, or bringing into existence subtleties and nuances of the literary spectra which would otherwise possibly remain unseen or not exist. While it is impossible to fully relocate the angle from which one views, reading literary criticism, seeing with the critic's eyes, is to absorb new angles, other perspectives, and expand one's range of view, which may help hone the ethical sensitivity enriched by literary imagination. These additional telescopic eyes together with the multiplied affect-charged worlds of literature, consequently, do not distance us but brings us closer to living literary others.

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Authors and Others:
The Ethics of Inhabiting in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*

Anna Jones Abramson

Background

J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) interrogates the problem of alterity or "otherness" so central to both twentieth century ethical theory and literary studies. In the following discussion I pursue this cross-disciplinary preoccupation by putting Coetzee's text into dialogue with prominent theorists of otherness, such as Emmanuel Levinas, Geoffrey Harpham, Judith Butler, and Mikhail Bakhtin.[1] I begin by pointing out that the relationship between an author and her fictional character bears much in common with the ethically fraught encounter between a subject and other. More specifically still, ethical and literary conceptions of the other revolve around a distinct language and model of *inhabiting*. I trace how language of space, place, territory, and architecture helps to establish authorship as a consistently spatialized act of inhabiting (not just imagining) the other. Inhabiting pushes imagination beyond familiar models of sympathy and perception by demanding a more radical sort of investment in other bodily, affective, proprioceptive, and environmental spaces. It

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[1] I would like to gratefully acknowledge the guidance of Dorothy Hale, whose work and class on ethics and narrative first introduced me to these works.

follows that for an author, character-drawing becomes a kind of world-making. In this way, the formal work of the author has much in common with what a range of twentieth century theorists propose as a distinctly ethical sort of action – movement into foreign spaces. In Coetzee's novel, this precise process of inhabiting emerges at the heart of the most ethically productive *and* transgressive acts. I point to the centrality of inhabiting in such sharply divergent moments throughout the text in order to make the case that a spatialized ethics of inhabiting functions not as a straightforward moral prescription but as the fundamental mode through which authors encounter literary "others." I argue that inhabiting emerges as a privileged term because it uniquely accommodates conflicting demands recurrent across a range of twentieth century theory in ethics as well as narrative. In what follows, I provide some broad theoretical background on the significance of space in the ethics of alterity; in the second section of this article, I offer my own specific intervention through the lens of Coetzee's novel.

The sheer frequency and consistency with which ethical and literary theorists employ the language of "inhabiting" would hardly be important if the particular use of the word did not reveal something crucial about the problem at hand. I believe it does. In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum portrays reading itself as an ethical act. In the case of both the reader of fiction and the fictional Jamesian characters she discusses, perception emerges as a crucial ethical good. Yet even Nussbaum's privileging of perception reveals a mode of engagement that extends well beyond a conventional subject-object divide. Nussbaum's "perception" seems to be a placeholder for a more radical form of imaginative access. By turning to the language of "inhabiting," she is able to articulate a three dimensional mode of perception. In a discussion of two characters in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1904), she writes:

> We see them drawing close in understanding by seeing where they come to share the same pictures … we discover all at once that we cannot say whose image for their situation this is. We can only say that it belongs to both of them: each *inhabits*, *from his or her own point of view*, the world of the same picture…the same created world … separated by an 'exquisite tissue' (Nussbaum 1992, 153; added emphasis).

In this passage, to share a perceptual experience is to inhabit a common space. What the two characters truly share is not an object to be perceived but a multidimensional structure to inhabit. Importantly, while the picture is shared, the "point of view" is not. In other words, these subjects share a structure for viewing; they do not, however, view from identical standpoints. We should pause here to recognize that shared space does not automatically engender a common point of view or erase perceptual differences between subjects. In fact, there is a sense that this particular mode of sharing space *preserves* distinct points of view: "an exquisite tissue" sustains difference. What is more, the picture is a creation – a fiction – a "world." Instead of perceiving the picture from a distance, these characters *inhabit* the picture. This term redirects us from the transience of perceptual impressions to a structured space in which one presumably takes up residence. Interestingly, then, Nussbaum lingers on this visual image only to subtly *reject* visual aesthetics as a model for ethical action. It is not perception in and of itself so much as the possibility of subsequent active engagement it provides that Nussbaum wants to point out. Thus the kind of acute and penetrating perception that Nussbaum hails as ethical requires a commitment to inhabiting a world rather than mere awareness of it.

Significantly, the space that James's characters come to share is jointly created. In this way the picture is constructed by a process of imagination akin to joint authorship: "we cannot say whose image this is." Thus co-inhabiting draws very close to the notion of co-authorship in the sense of two subjects sharing a world that

they have created. Spatially entrenched lines of ownership dissolve even as an "exquisite tissue" continues to sustain some sliver of distinction. Nussbaum expands upon this idea when she notes how the characters

> [f]ill, by an effort of imagination, each other's gaps. And they move from contiguity in images to the inhabiting of a shared picture that expresses a mutual involvement … A short time later she presents him with a picture into which he 'could enter' (ibid., 159).

This is a model of communal imagination that preserves distinctions, in fact *requires* distinctions so that individual subjects may "fill in the gaps" of others. What is more, the shared picture is not held at a distance but is instead a space to "enter" into. The sequential progress implied here – "*they move from* contiguity in images *to* the inhabiting…" begins to suggest a distinctly *narrative* trajectory that extends beyond the single image. While the first description evokes two spectators standing in front of a work of art ("contiguity in images") the move to inhabiting signals a more radical form of shared experience ("mutual involvement"). The spectator of visual art begins to look more like the reader of narrative.

   Nussbaum's model of inhabiting shared pictures reveals an attempt to accommodate what at first might seem conflicting impulses: the desire to unite subjects in a shared space *and* the need to preserve the distinctions between them. This problem of safeguarding distinctions between subject and other resonates across the work of twentieth century ethicists with radically different theoretical commitments. Levinas, for example, develops a theory of alterity in which the "other" is fundamentally "unknowable," someone we see face to face and yet cannot "possess, grasp, [or] know" (1987, 75, 90). For Levinas, recognition of the other therefore *requires* distance, an understanding that the "other is in no way another myself" but rather "something that is absolutely other." "I see the other," Levinas

writes, "But I am not the other" (75, 74, 42). Levinas's work reveals the danger inherent in a confrontation between self and other, raising the question of how two distinct beings can survive an encounter without some sort of annihilation. In Levinas' thought, if I employ a sympathetic model of relating to the other, I risk merely converting the other into a duplicate of myself. And yet I also risk losing what defines myself as a distinct being. Levinas articulates this problem when he asks, "how, in the alterity of a you, can I remain I [?]" and "how can a being enter into relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?" (91, 77). Given the ethical pitfalls that emerge in an encounter with the other, we inevitably run into problems concerning language and representation. For Levinas, it is insufficient to regard an intersubjective encounter in terms of the model we might employ when relating to a foreign language: the "unknown is impossible to translate" (67). Yet given the inadequacy of this linguistic metaphor for approaching what is alien, how can we conceive of narrative techniques that seek to represent the other?

Perhaps the problem has less to do with language per se and more to do with the kind of erasure of difference and distance implied by the term translation. We might better begin to understand narrative as that which *preserves* something foreign in the other, and requires our own entry into foreign space. In terms that resonate with the work of Levinas, Gayatri Spivak suggests that fiction prompts us "to imagine the other who does not resemble the self" (2004, 23). Spivak helps us see how the use of narrative to create common spaces does not necessitate the discovery – or forced creation – of commonalities. In other words, various thinkers seem to convene on the insistence that shared space is in no way the equivalent of sameness. Shared space is a much more messy kind of encounter that does not guarantee the arithmetic duplication or enforced equality implied by a more colloquial sense of "common ground." Spivak regards fiction as "an event – an indeterminate 'sharing' – between

writer and reader, where the effort of reading is to taste the impossible status of being figured as object in the web of the other" (ibid., 18). Spivak's model asks us to imagine a *de*familiarizing experience in which we ourselves become the objects embedded in a larger structure. We are involved, but we are also somehow fundamentally alienated: we must enter into a relation not only with the other but with the entire "web" of his being, a web in which we play no part other than object. This notion echoes the idea of inhabiting as a sort of *surrender to foreign places*; it is not sufficient to perceive what is alien from a safe point of removal. This surrender further informs the inadequacy of traditional perceptual models (organized around the "point of view" of a subjective "I") when it comes to the ethics of otherness. Inhabiting has less to do with what we see or how we understand than it does with where we are, in what space we move. There is a fundamental willingness to be propelled outwards here. Thus while perception often aspires to a kind of subjective mastery, inhabiting just as often indicates a form of submission. The essential discovery here is that shared space might represent something quite different from common ground as it is conventionally understood. The sharing of space is a fundamentally alien and disorienting experience – perhaps we do not find ourselves "at home" but find ourselves willingly ejected from home.

In a somewhat similar vein, Butler imagines a sharing of space that is not violent or intrusive; the aim of activism for Butler is "to cross cultural barriers in a nonimperialist fashion" (2003, 203). The consequence of this non-imperialist crossing is "that we must do without a notion of common language." Here, Butler shares the concerns of Levinas and Spivak that an "imperialist move … claims to find itself in the other" (ibid., 206). The challenge, then, is to cease searching for ourselves in the other and instead attempt a different kind of movement toward rather than away from otherness. Thus we begin to see that the other is consistently figured

in negative terms: not me, unknowable, not the speaker of my language. The question remains: how can we represent this other in words? What role might narrative play in this seemingly "impossible" task – an encounter that does not collapse distinctions?

Bakhtin approaches these questions of alterity and foreign spaces through a social-linguistic paradigm. While Levinas focuses on the face-to-face encounter, Bakhtin describes those moments in which "several 'languages'… have established contact and mutual recognition with each other." For Bakhtin, an individual subject's language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (1981, 295, 293). Interestingly, Nussbaum provides us with a model in which "*we cannot say whose image it is*," and Bakhtin suggests that language is always "*half someone else's*," existing on the spatialized borderline between subject and other. While for Nussbaum point of view is perceptual, for Bakhtin it is fundamentally linguistic: alterity involves "the possibility of other linguistic points of view" (287). Here, language is the basis of social perception as a process that is shared yet nonetheless preserves distinctions. Bakhtin's work thus puts pressure on a common presupposition concerning authorship: the notion that one can speak in one's "own" words, or that words can belong exclusively to a given author. Bakhtin's novelist is ethical not because he represents his own language but because he attempts to "speak in an alien language" or to represent "another's speech in another's language" (287, 324). Bakhtin's notion of "hybrid construction" – an utterance combining two speech types or styles – allows multiple languages a shared space. The novel serves to "sharpen … our perception of socio-linguistic differentiations" (287, 366). Thus via Bakhtin we again arrive at the paradox that shared space is a radical form of preserving – rather than abolishing – differences. Shared space is where differences meet and interact, not where they resolve.

Bakhtin specifically characterizes linguistic encounters in terms of space and territory. Language invoking ownership and property alerts us to the potentially imperialist or invasive nature of using someone else's words:

> not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them … Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's intentions (294).

Here we can really begin to anticipate some problems for the novelist who must venture into alien linguistic worlds and also potentially claim, appropriate, or seize the language of another. Words are not just objects to be used but spaces that function like other territories. Is it possible for language to remain in a borderland characterized by constant flux and sharing, or does an author inevitably seize language, despite its resistance, and make it his own? Is it possible for different authors to share worlds, to draw on each other's languages, to rewrite each other's texts? And additionally, how can a novelist represent a subject who inhabits a radically alien world? In creating a character, does an author find a way to speak for or with the other? One overarching problem seems to be that while we have a distinctly spatialized language for imperialist invasion of the other's territory, we have a less developed vocabulary for an *alternative* kind of shared space. It is to this problem that I turn in my discussion of *Elizabeth Costello*.

In what follows I make the case that an author's relationship to her character provides an ideal test case for the more abstract-sounding "encounter with the other" so pervasive in twentieth century ethical theory. In *Elizabeth Costello*, authors regard

inhabiting as both a formal and ethical demand. Characters are not just portraits of subjects but entire *worlds to be inhabited*. While the bulk of my argument rests upon the specific instance of character as other, it is worth first noting that Coetzee's text reveals additional forms of authorial encounters with the other. For example, it is not just the character who presents as an other, but also *other authors* whose works materialize as habitable spaces. Literary tradition itself is consistently spatialized: the canon must make space, reserve space, refuse space – and allow for authorial sharing of space. In a radio interview, Costello's remarks concerning *The House on Eccles Street* illustrate the ethical treachery involved in rewriting another author's work:

> [Interviewer]: Critics have focused on the way you have claimed or reclaimed Molly from Joyce, made her your own … challenging Joyce, one of the father-figures of modern literature, on his own territory.
>
> [Costello] No, I don't see myself as challenging Joyce. But certain books are so prodigally inventive that there is plenty of material left over at the end…
>
> [Interviewer] But … you have taken Molly out of the house – if I can continue with your metaphor … where her husband and her lover and in a certain sense her author have confined her (Coetzee 2003, 12-13).

The image of Costello on Joyce's "own territory" is particularly significant here. While Costello denies that the encounter is confrontational in the way that Moebius suggests – not a "challenge" – she does not dispute the idea of *territory*, the notion that in creating a fictional world for his characters Joyce has also carved out a world for himself as author. Thus in order to write *The House*, Costello must in some sense travel to foreign territory; she must inhabit an alien world and write from there. In so doing she risks losing a degree of authority. But is this territory really the possession of Joyce –can a single author truly be said to own exclusive deeds to his literary space? Indeed can an author *be* literary space? After all, we often speak of authors as

places: "In Joyce," "navigating Joyce," "getting lost in Joyce," and so forth. In pointing to the "prodigally inventive" nature of Joyce's work, Costello seems to suggest that the former author has left room – space – for continued creative intervention. The novel's constant dramatization of intertextuality plays on this idea that authorship involves not only locating one's own place in the literary canon but also a wilingness for radical *dis*location. We tend to think of authors as transporting their readers to another world, but authors themselves are continuously transported to territories and spaces carved out by other authors. This means that part of the work of authorship is first finding room in the crowded space of literary tradition, moving to that foreign place, and then continuing to create from within a new habitation.

As we have begun to see, Molly is not the only one who inhabits a certain 'house of fiction'; the author herself is engaged in the task of taking up residence in various fictional worlds. Given the ethical risks involved in entering the fictional habitations created by other authors, it might seem preferable for an author simply to retreat behind sturdy fictional walls of her own construction. Indeed, there is tension throughout the novel between Costello's assertion that "[w]e can't go on parasitizing the classics forever" (14) and the simultaneous need to communicate with other authors and texts, to enter into a literary tradition no matter how crowded the shared "house" or "picture."[2] Indeed, we come to see that there is no such thing as complete

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[2] And even if originality were possible, it is not at all clear that it represents an ethical good to strive for. Costello's son John articulates the idea that,

> at a certain level we speak, and therefore write, like everyone else. Otherwise we would all be speaking and writing private languages. It is not absurd – is it? – to concern oneself with what people have in common rather than with what sets them apart.

John's sense of private versus shared languages here echoes Bakhtin's notion of perpetually colliding languages. In both cases, language is social and thus to share language is not to foreclose creativity or appropriate the words of another but instead to find common ground, indeed to *choose* common ground over "what sets them apart." The very notion of a "private language" troubles the

insulation from other worlds and other words. John, for example, reflects that "[a]s he thinks these words, other words echo at the back of his mind: the words of one of William Faulkner's characters" (31). This notion of *other words* opens up the potential of *words-as-others*.

The notion that reading words is itself a kind of encounter with otherness takes on an additional dimension when we take fictional characters into account. At the risk of stating the obvious, characters are made out of words. After all, a character is in essence the particular arrangement of words in a text. Characters are also "others" in the broader sense that they represent alien subjectivities. They may be fictional, but that only makes them all the more clearly *not us*. Thus the relationship between an author and imagined character is a particularly productive site for exploring alterity. The fundamental task of a novelist is, in terms reminiscent of Levinas, *to imagine an other that is not me*. "It is the otherness that is the challenge," Costello says, "Making up someone other than yourself. Making up a world for him to move in" (12). Note the implication here: imagining the other is contingent upon a willingness to imagine an *other world*. To simply deposit an imagined other in one's own familiar world is not to succeed in imagining alterity at all because the other is inherently one who does not inhabit that world. I read Costello's two sentences here as part of the same statement: "making up someone" and "making up a world" are not two discrete tasks but part of a single process. Thus while an elementary approach to literature separates the novelist's formal work into distinct categories such as "character" and "setting," here it becomes apparent that these are inseparable tasks.

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fundamentally communicative and representative functions of language. In John's formulation there is something "absurd" about the very idea of linguistic privacy, something outrageous in the thought that language can ever be a private place or property.

The stasis implied by a conventional term like 'setting' belies the sort of *activity* always inherent in an experience of inhabiting space. What is more, Costello must create not just a static place to deposit a character but a space "for him to move in." In other words, the creation of a character requires the carving out of multidimensional space and not just the painting of an appropriate background. It is, moreover, only by first putting a *distance* between herself and characters that Costello is poised to move into their fictional worlds. Representing otherness is then, at least initially, a *denial* of common ground, a resistance to sameness. Thus in pointing to the otherness of both character and world, Costello echoes Levinas: "I see the other. But I am not the other" (Levinas 1987, 42).

If we imagine a scenario in which author and character inhabit the same world, we could think of them as sharing space but not sharing being. However, in this realm, Costello exceeds Levinas in her conception of what is possible. Authorship provides the model for a creative rather than destructive encounter with the other. Costello claims very specifically – and repeatedly – that she inhabits her characters. She believes that it is conceivable "to share at times the being of another" (Coetzee 2003, 23, 79). Yet how could we possibly share *being*? Is it not "otherness" as opposed to "sameness" that Costello privileges?[3] In "The Philosophers and the Animals," Costello suggests that

> [t]here is no limit to the extent to which *we can think ourselves into the being* of another. There are no bounds to sympathetic imagination. If you want proof, consider the following. Some years ago I wrote a book called *The House on Eccles Street*. To write that book I had to *think my way into the existence* of Marion Bloom … the point is, *Marion Bloom never existed*. Marion Bloom was a figment of James Joyce's imagination. If I *can think my way into the existence* of

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[3] Elsewhere in the novel, Costello certainly articulates the fundamental breach between subjectivities: "*[t]he utter, illimitable difference between what is in her heart and what Nurse Naidoo would see*" (ibid., 154).

a being who has never existed, then I *can think my way into the existence* of a bat (80; added emphases).

Here, imagination is far from a static mental process accomplished at a distance from its object. Instead, the act of imagining is necessarily active: "think my way into" suggests a painstaking effort at movement, a sort of digging deeper or pushing closer. Thus Costello sets out to travel to foreign territory, and it is precisely that imaginative moving out of self, towards another, that inaugurates the being of the other. That her novel is titled *The House…* is no coincidence; her task is to inhabit the entire structure of a character's world. This process then relies on both distance and intimacy: Costello does not draw the other into the folds of her own existence but instead travels to the site of another being. This capacity to meet the other on his own territory provides additional evidence for the appeal of inhabiting as an ethical model. The author does not play host to character; to the contrary, it is the author who finds herself in a foreign environment. Here, a significance for narrative in particular begins to come into view: this is a process that requires sequential movement in which the author creates a character as a sort of world and then moves into that world as new habitat. New worlds are carved out not only in space but in time as well – sequentially, bit by bit, chapter by chapter. Costello's discussion also makes a strong case for the use of fiction as a framework for ethical encounters. The fictional character is a prime model for otherness because it represents a radical acknowledgment of one that is different – so different it does not even exist. By comparison, a bat seems even closer to the human reader. An encounter with a fictional character thus relies on the "submission to the impossible" advocated by several of the ethical theorists we began by consulting.

Inhabiting also captures something corporeal and affective: "the way that people live in their bodies" (44). It is this proprioceptive mode of inhabiting that provides the

basis for animal-as-other throughout Coetzee's text. Indeed, critics including Don Randall have suggested that "Coetzee's animals [are] the principle figures of the other – the other whose full recognition is the source and foundation of ethical awareness" (2007, 213). When we are confined only to *thinking* our way into the other, animals remain off-limits. When tethered to a conventionally cognitive model, imagination leaves us confined by the limits of what can be thought. Yet inhabiting captures a more radical and insistently physical mode of moving away from self; it requires *felt* presence in space. Costello suggests that in the poem "The Jaguar," Ted Hughes is

> feeling his way towards a different kind of being-in-the-world … we know the jaguar not from the way he seems but from the way he moves … The poem asks us to imagine our way into that way of moving, to *inhabit that body … not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body* (Coetzee 2003, 96; added emphasis).

The precise language of inhabiting again revolves around movement; we must 'think our way into that way of moving.' "Feeling his way" again suggests a narrative trajectory and yet one centered on an embodied and affective register. It is important to note, however, that Costello does not claim that this process of inhabiting allows for *communication* with the animal. It allows specifically for a less conventional form of "knowing." Thus when Costello's debate opponent argues that "[d]iscussion is possible only when there is common ground" (112), he misses the fact that it is not discussion or communication that Costello defends as possible: "When we divert the current of feeling that flows between ourself and the animal into words, we abstract it for ever from the animal … It falls within an entirely human economy in which the animal *has no share*" (96; added emphasis). Costello suggests, then, that while we might need linguistic common ground to communicate socially, we need something

quite different when it comes to the mode of contact necessary for literary representation: a shared "sensation of being" (78), a kind of baseline sentience shared by all living creatures.[4] We thus have a gesture here towards literature's non-representational possibilities – its capacity to bypass realistic content in favor of a desired effect.

That a "*current*" exists between the two beings helps reinforce the idea of a kind of atmosphere or radiating aura we have seen throughout – a being's existence overflows its physical borders and therein lie important possibilities for a nonimperialistic sharing of impersonal, affect-infused space. This current of feeling between the two is not reducible or locatable to either subject. It fundamentally exists in the space between; it is spatialized but not localized. This evocation of flowing currents reminds us that the "world" that is the other need not be placid; its atmosphere might in fact be quite volatile. We enter into that turbulence of the other-as-world; we allow our feelings to move us. This capacity to *be moved* – so essential to affect as well as empathy – again reveals a different understanding of a term like 'setting.' Indeed the critical turn towards affect in recent years repeatedly builds from this precise recognition that the colloquialism of "being moved" extends beyond mere sentimentality to a specifically corporeal and spatial understanding of motion.[5]

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[4] Randall (2007, 210) suggests that *Elizabeth Costello* prompts us to "expand the sphere of our community beyond the bounds of the human."

[5] Brian Massumi has played a key role in reenergizing the work of Spinoza as well as Deleuze and Guatarri. In "Notes on the Translation" to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Massumi (1987, xvi) translates "Affect/Affection: Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment in* Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies)." Eric Shouse's "Feeling, Emotion, Affect" (2005) similarly emphasizes the centrality of movement: "the pleasure that individuals derive from music has less to do with the communication of meaning, and far more to do with the way that a particular piece of music moves' them."

Thus, Costello claims, "we are for a brief while the jaguar … he takes over our body, he is us" (98). Inhabiting in this way extends certain restrictive boundaries imposed by a standard understanding of imagination; it is not just something we picture mentally or entertain hypothetically but something we do bodily. Interestingly, though, it is the jaguar who assumes the active role here: 'he takes over our body' rather than the other way around. Inhabiting, it seems, can be passive: we can *be inhabited* just as we actively inhabit others. In both cases, though, movement is a necessary component of the process. It is not just the perception – not just the acknowledgment or the Levinasian recognition – but the movement to a new space.

Here the concept of inhabiting also opens onto a richer understanding of Coetzee's metafictional devices and their implications for the role of the critic. *Elizabeth Costello* is structured around a series of fictional and nonfictional frames with several chapters taken from public lectures Coetzee had previously delivered. I see this deliberate crossing of generic lines as a careful construction – another of Coetzee's habitable structures – that does more than serve as a convenient mode of packaging the author's own beliefs and theorizations. Coetzee's several layers of mediation themselves create spaces for the reader/critic to inhabit. When we encounter a pronouncement on good and evil or one of Costello's own critical readings, we explore these issues as embedded in a larger fictional world rather than stand alone moral prescriptions awaiting our approval or condemnation. Such intricate metatextuality further creates the sense of distance and constant deferral that requires us to explore ethical matters as a series of spaces rather than rooted positions. We inhabit the worlds and worldviews of various characters, but we also inhabit an entire discursive space created in the process, one that is irreducible to any one character or author – fictional or imagined. Therefore, if we simply read Costello as a mouthpiece for Coetzee, we are essentially tearing down the fictional scaffolding that is an

integral part of the ethical project as a whole. Critic Derik Attridge similarly stresses that for Coetzee ethics needs fiction; he cites the many instances in which Coetzee delivered public lectures in the form of fictional narratives. On these occasions, intellectual audiences expected a direct articulation of Coetzee's ideas but were met instead with ideas mediated through the fictional persona of Costello. Attridge writes:

> [W]e have no grounds for taking this [Costello's view] as Coetzee's position … what he has done is to imaginatively represent what it might be like to feel this way (or, rather, to come to feel this way at the end of a long career as a novelist) …what we encounter are not these characters' beliefs, but their believings; we undergo their speeches and arguments as events, and we share, momentarily, the process of articulating feelings and ideas (2004 11).

That the language of inhabiting reverberates so strongly in Attridge's scholarly prose is a testament to Coetzee's work of dissolving generic boundaries and bringing all of us, critics included, into the folds of a shared world. Coetzee wants us to encounter the novel's intellectual content not as abstract theorizations but as *ideas that populate a fictional world*. This sort of encounter with ideas in their own habitats – the fictional worlds in which they thrive and capture a given character's worldview – produces a distinct effect on the reader/critic. Instead of merely being exposed to or lectured on a given perspective, we are asked to temporarily inhabit that way of thinking. The critic's obligation to "think" thus takes on a phenomenological component, turning the ethical mandate to sit with an idea into an obligation *to live in it* as a world.

The imperatives to "think one's way into" and "feel one's way into" thus begin to merge – much like the effort to inhabit the jaguar. We are accustomed to accepting that fiction moves us, but here it becomes possible to grasp how the critic is not just a thinking but also a feeling creature. By "feeling" I mean something quite distinct from emotional sentimentalism – not an instinctual release of feeling but the difficult

and painstaking work of feeling one's way into an other world. The intriguing thing here is that the significance of feeling persists even in the context of a drastic move away from a sympathy-based model of ethics. In this regard, Coetzee's notion of ethical inhabiting participates in contemporary efforts to rethink the role of the critic in affective terms. For example, in precisely the kind of spatialized and active language we have been tracking, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe affect theory in terms of a critical commitment to "[m]ore than discourse. We want [scholarship] to touch, to move, to mobilize readers … to show what affect can *do*" (Seigworth and Gregg 2010 24). I would suggest that affect theory's focus on a work's nonsignifying elements – such as rhythm, texture, tone, or mood – puts the critic into a visceral/sensual mode analogous to that of the author feeling her way into the jaguar. Seigworth and Gregg suggest that such affective investments make shared space possible:

> Whatever the futures of affect theory might portend, it always and already calls for a critical practice – what Lefebvre called a 'theory of moments' – that must seem to imaginatively/generatively nudge these moments along … in the clumsiness of bodily adjustments and in worldly accommodations barely underway. That is, these affective moments – at once all-powerful and powerless – do not arise in order to be deciphered or decoded or delineated but, rather, must be nurtured … into loved practices of the everyday as perpetually finer-grained *postures for collective inhabitation*" (ibid., 21).

This willingness to undergo bodily strain and 'clumsy' maneuvering contrasts with a more conventional understanding of what both ethics and criticism are all about: firmly taking a position. This precise sort of clumsiness reflects the effort to accommodate one's body to new worlds and spaces just emerging. The implied awkwardness speaks to the bodily effort to inhabit a new space, no matter how foreign or poor the fit may seem.

For Costello, a failure or refusal to think one's way into the being of another amounts to an ethical transgression with extreme repercussions. She suggests that the "[t]he horror [of the Holocaust] is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, 'It is *they* in those cattle cars rattling past'…They did not say, 'It is I who am in that cattle car'" (Coetzee 2003, 79). Here, Costello draws on the same language of 'thinking one's way into' that she employs to describe the construction of a fictional character. In both cases, it is not sufficient to observe or imagine from a safe distance. The truly ethical encounter requires a form of inhabiting: moving one's self into the cattle car rather than watching it go past. Mere observation preserves the safety and immunity of distance and therefore will not suffice. Thinking here is not purely cognitive but is instead physically active – we do not *think of* but rather *think our way into*. Thinking becomes a way of moving, allowing us to transport ourselves into the cattle car. Therefore it is only from the effort required to position one's self *inside* that cattle car that we can make the statement: "It is I." The mere fact of the utterance also seems important. This is perhaps a speech act in which to say "It is I" in some sense affirms it. It is not only the content of the utterance that matters but also the highly *spatialized structure* from which it is uttered within the cattle car. To say anything from outside those walls – no matter how sympathetic in content – would be to miss the fundamental necessity of inhabiting the space of the other's experience.

Here again we see that we simply cannot separate the inhabiting of the other subject from the inhabiting of an other space. Others do not exist independently of their worlds. Thus to access an other requires acclimating to another atmosphere. This model distinguishes itself from a telepathic channeling of interiors (such as the brain) and instead involves a surprisingly exterior mode of feeling the other's surrounding world.

Costello's insistence on movement into the cattle car resonates powerfully with the finding of scholarly work conducted elsewhere which found that

> the experience so often cited by visitors to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as the most powerful is that of standing inside the railway car which had actually been used in the transports to the camps (Hirsch and Suleiman 2003, 80).

Why is standing in the railway car so powerful in both cases? I suspect it has much to do not only with authenticity and materiality but also the surrender of one's self to a foreign structure. Other spaces are not just backgrounds for other subjects but constitutive of their experiences – something the concentration camps make brutally clear.

Yet in "The Problem of Evil," the ethical virtue of inhabiting another world gets flipped on its head. The process of penetrating into a distant, profoundly alien space loses its ethical value and becomes instead the ultimate ethical *transgression*. In a lecture that seems to squarely contradict the ethical virtue of inhabiting we have just looked at, Costello suggests that

> Certain things are not good to read or to write. To put it another way: I take seriously the claim that the artist risks a great deal by venturing into forbidden places … because I take seriously the forbiddenness of forbidden places. The cellar in which the July 1944 plotters were hanged is one such forbidden place (Coetzee 2003, 173).

Costello's subject is *The Very Rich Hours of Count Von Stauffenberg*, a (real 1980) novel by (real) author Paul West, about the thwarted 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler. Interestingly, Costello's ethical critique of West draws on language that we have seen elsewhere in this discussion. In this way it seems as if unethical and ethical authorship themselves convene on common ground. This shared language centers on a highly spatialized conception of entering or penetrating distant spaces. Costello

specifically condemns an act of movement – "venturing." This language of transgressive motion recurs throughout the lecture in various forms such as "wander[ing]," "invad[ing]," and "enter[ing]" (161, 174) to name a few. The notion here is that certain spaces are "forbidden," essentially *off limits* – a claim that at first glance seems to radically contradict the idea espoused in "Philosophers" that "there is no limit" to thinking our way into another being. Yet this is not exactly a contradiction. Costello does not deny her earlier suggestion that inhabiting is limitless but actually reaffirms it. West's ethical transgression is not a failure of imaginative inhabiting; if anything it represents the height of (dangerous) imaginative power, a point where ethical potential tips over into unethical reality. Costello suggests that West has failed to limit himself, to impose restraints on a limitless imagination. Yet how is this form of trespassing so different from inhabiting the body of another or entering into the "territory" belonging to James Joyce? How can the author who insists on the possibility of inhabiting the bat and tiger also so forcefully defend the idea of "forbidden places"? Could it surprisingly be the case that Coetzee associates ethics with authorship in order to advocate the *limiting* of imagination, rather than its unobstructed freedom?

I think it is far more likely that Coetzee wants to avoid this precise process of transforming inhabiting into merely another name for familiar ethical or literary values. The novel resists any temptation to map inhabiting onto a moral code or set of prescriptions – one way or the other.[6] What it does instead is make inhabiting an issue that is at stake in ethical encounters of all kinds. In other words, inhabiting cannot be reduced to a simple rule or single valence.

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[6] See David Atwell (2006, 25), who asserts that "Coetzee resists fiction's being made to deliver usable ethical content." Thorsten Carstensen (2007, 91, 81) similarly suggests that the novel "[c]elebrates … eternal dissensus" and refuses to "provide narrative closure."

Of course, we are still left wondering if some forms of inhabiting are more ethical than others. In her assessment of West, Costello notes several peculiarities about the particular mode of inhabiting. One issue concerns death as a supremely personal event. Costello spatializes time itself when she suggests that "[t]heir last hours belong to them alone, they are not ours to enter and possess" and "*[d]eath is a private matter; the artist should not invade the deaths of others*" (Coetzee 2003, 174). The last bit of time belonging to these individuals is configured as a distinctly personal space: to enter it is inevitably to possess it, in some way to take over the rights of ownership. These are private moments – private property – that "do not belong in the light of day" (159) and should not be shared – and here note how "shared" is now taking on the secondary sense of being *represented*. When we expose ourselves to that which is foreign, we also expose a bit of foreignness itself – some part is exposed to the light of day.

Costello's concern is not only with the violence inflicted upon represented individuals but also with the effect on the author himself. Once again this problem is figured in spatial terms. "Can anyone," Costello asks, "wander as deep as Paul West does in the Nazi forest of horrors and emerge unscathed? Have we considered that the explorer enticed into that forest may come out no better and stronger for the experience but worse?" (161). Some pages later she states: "I do not think one can come away unscathed, as a writer, from conjuring up such scenes" (172). In another strikingly inverse reflection of "Philosophers," the problem becomes not a matter of inhabiting but of *being inhabited*: "Through Hitler's hangman a devil entered Paul West" (167). By invading the space of others, West has himself been invaded. Here, the bidirectional possibilities of inhabiting constitute a major peril. The reader, too, is complicit in this crime of trespassing: "violence was done to her but she conspired in the violation" (181). Thus the problem with shared space persists but common ground

becomes a dangerous reality rather than an idealized aspiration. While "Philosophers" highlights the problem of authors getting *into* a foreign space, "Evil" considers the opposite problem: how can an author "come away" from a foreign world? Is inhabiting a reversible process? Just how nomadic is the ethical author or reader? Here, the previously discussed bodily commitment to moving outside one's self reemerges in sinister terms and with little hope of return. The sense that one can be lost or trapped inside an evil world further reinforces this idea of both fiction and ethics as spaces.

Compare the striking similarities in the language Costello uses to describe the ultimate ethical action and unethical action in "Philosophers" and "Evil" respectively:

> [Philosophers]: I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his execution (111).

> [Evil]: word by word, step by step, heartbeat by heartbeat, I accompany him into the darkness (174).

In both cases, Costello describes a process of shared movement, a motion in which the steps of the subject and other fall into indistinguishable unison. This is a matter of feeling every aspect of experience down to its very proprioceptive rhythm. The crucial difference, of course, is that in the former case we walk with the victim of execution while in the latter we walk with the author who speaks for the executioner. Taken together the two passages do not provide a coherent moral prescription, but they do reinforce the sense that moving into foreign spaces is fundamentally at stake in ethics as well as in narrative. Ethical action hinges not only on where one *stands* but how and where one *moves*.

Yet given the perplexing discrepancies throughout the novel – most visible, I think, in "Philosophers" and "Evil" – readers continue to wonder where Costello (and

Coetzee – who overlaps with but is not the same as his fictional author) "really" stands on these ethical issues.[7] We have seen that movement plays a central role in ethical problems, but the novel does not wholly abolish the notion of some ethical stance, a position, or viewpoint. Thus in the face of such glaring contradictions, we find ourselves struggling to determine where Elizabeth Costello and J.M. Coetzee stand. If the author is able to move in and out of not only fictional worlds but spheres of ethical values as well, are we left with no choice but to decide that Costello has no discernible position at all? Should we assign her what the character Norma refers to as "the kind of easy, shallow relativism that impresses freshmen" (91)? When we put the somewhat conflicting narratives of "Philosophers" and "Evil" side by side, we lose the ability to locate Costello in the sphere of a particular set of ethical values. It seems possible then that the capacity to inhabit foreign worlds and minds is fundamentally a refusal to commit, a refusal to stake out and claim certain ground as one's own. The ethical risk, then, is that we lose the commitments that come with the act of unambiguously stating where one stands – note how the matter of ethical "positions" is a spatialized model of ethics too, but one that relies on rootedness rather than motion. If the work of the author is to continuously displace herself, that is, propel herself into an other world, does the author become emblematic of that individual who escapes commitment and by extension ethical responsibility? Or is there something ethical about this precise process of displacement?

The novel's final full chapter dramatizes these questions and contradictions. By this point, we have seen Costello inhabit the worlds of other authors, other characters, and multiple contradictory ethical viewpoints. All of these others reemerge in some sense in the text's concluding section. While West's work evokes

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[7] Perhaps this indeterminacy is the point. Carstensen (2007, 82) suggests that the novel records a "multiplicity of reality."

the feeling that "*no one has been here before*" (174), the prevailing sentiment in "At the Gate" is that *everyone* has been here before. Costello finds herself in a world that is "too literary" (225), a space that intensifies the Bakhtinian notion that "our speech is filled to overflowing with other people's words" (Bakhtin 1981, 337).[8] The final chapter is a struggle to locate Costello in this world of literary canonicity and in relation to her own contradictory beliefs and ethical viewpoints.

In the closing chapter, Costello finds herself in a purgatory suspended between worlds: this life and the next, fiction and reality, her own language and that of others. She locates herself spatially and architecturally in a Kafkaesque world: "[t]he wall, the gate, the sentry…" (Coetzee 2003, 209) that is also more generally a familiar literary space. She notes the presence of the "square to give its verisimilitude, the reality effect" (212).[9] Thus by the novel's final chapter Costello finds herself in *a world written by other authors*. "Is this someone's idea of what hell would look like for a writer," Costello asks, "or at least purgatory: a purgatory of clichés?" (206). Costello's irritation echoes the struggle of authorship throughout the novel: "[h]ave they not the wit to come up with something new?" (204). But the question is also whether, in a world such as this, Costello herself has something new to say. When she defines herself as a "secretary of the invisible," for example, she quickly adds "not my own phrase" (199). Can an author venture into other literary worlds and retain her own voice, something of herself? This question echoes a related

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[8] Carstensen (2007, 91) compares this multiplicity to what "Bakhtin calls 'discursive polyphony,' [but] *Elizabeth Costello* will never reach this state of utter certainty. As there exists no dominant voice of an omniscient author reconciling adversarial opinions into a universal synthesis, Coetzee's novel is open to an infinite number of disparate readings and celebrates its own provisional nature."

[9] A clear echo of the novel's first lines: "There is first of all the problem of the opening," the novel begins, and goes on to call our attention to the rules and conventions of genre, "[t]he blue costume, the greasy hair, are details, signs of a moderate realism. Supply the particulars, allow the significations to emerge of themselves" (1, 4). Of course this outright attention to the work's constructed fictionality in some way undermines the very project of realism – in a sense destroys the verisimilitude it creates.

problem introduced through Paul West: can an author who has ventured *into* a world ever hope to venture *out*?

If that is the major problem for authorship in "At the Gate," the related ethical crisis revolves around the imperative to unequivocally state one's beliefs. The final chapter explicitly raises the question, what is Costello's position? Is there any one place that she stands? How can we understand the oscillating movements we have traced throughout? We can think of this problem as particularly urgent after inhabiting has emerged as both ethically productive and problematic. In Costello's testimony, we encounter only additional inconsistencies:

> I am open to all voices, not just the murdered and violated … If it is their murderers and violators who choose to summon me instead, to use me and speak through me, I will not close my ears to them, I will not judge them (204).

This is of course a striking revision of Costello's previous statements. In "Evil," for example, Costello specifically takes issue with the fact that West "gives the butcher a voice" (168). In so doing, she articulates the kind of perpetual shifting we have seen throughout the novel: "*I maintain beliefs only provisionally: fixed beliefs would only stand in my way. I change beliefs as I change my habitation or my clothes*" (195). The use of "habitation" here highlights one aspect of inhabiting that I have thus far only alluded to: its potential impermanence. Inhabiting, in many cases, signals only the temporary taking up of residence. There is something pragmatically sparse about habitations. Perhaps it is the narrative progression between different habitations that holds ethical promise.

In "At the Gate," entire belief systems become habitable structures rather than abstract principles. Costello moves from one habitat to the next. Yet she resists claiming ownership of these beliefs. When prompted by the judges, it seems that Costello could easily claim any belief as her own, that is; she could construct a

fiction. Instead our protagonist commences a painstakingly difficult writing process. In fact, it is in this chapter that we get one of our only glimpses of Costello actively writing. More specifically, it is here that we see her *revising.* In this moment, both the ethical and authorial meanings of the term "revision" begin to merge. Revision is not a reckless unchecked freedom – it is more like the freedom to change habitations. Costello suggests that her drafts are "revised to the limit of my powers," but interestingly, the judge – from whom we expect an insistence on finality – suggests that "there is always one more revision to do" (199). Thus in the final chapter we cannot say which revision is the "true" statement any more than we can determine which viewpoint is truly Costello's or Coetzee's.[10] This sense of limitlessness echoes Costello's earlier suggestion that inhabiting is sympathetic imagination with 'no limit.' In this sense inhabiting and revising seem to share a similar resistance to closure that unites the ethical and literary. Costello's statement following one of these revisions informs our understanding of this indeterminacy: "My answer is, both are true. Both. And neither. I am an other. Pardon me for resorting to words that are not my own, but I cannot improve upon them" (221). Costello seems to exist in some sort of borderland here. I think we can make some sense of the way this statement manages conflicting impulses if we think back to the section "Philosophers." There, Costello suggests that inhabiting is in some way to temporarily achieve the impossible, to sustain contradictions. In that lecture, she insists that it is in fact possible to imagine death: "For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, *I am alive inside that contradiction*, dead and alive at the same time" (77; added emphasis). Thus, while in many respects, *Elizabeth Costello* affirms the Levinasian belief that "I am not the other," there are fleeting moments in which

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[10] Carstensen (2007, 91) suggests that "[a]s someone who 'no longer believes in belief,' Elizabeth embodies the postmodern condition."

the subject does become the other and shares in the being of another. There is a brief moment in which *I am an other*. It is possible to speak (and to write) not only across distances but *from* a distance. The very idea of living 'inside' a contradiction again evokes the spatialized, architectural language I have been tracing throughout. Ultimately contradiction *itself* becomes a habitable structure. And if contradiction is a structure to be inhabited, we can begin to think of the entire text – with its glaring contradictions – as one such structure. The fact that inhabiting emerges as supremely ethical yet also unethical in the novel further consolidates this idea that inhabiting allows us to take up residence *within a contradiction*. To hold two radically different viewpoints is in a sense to surrender one's self to an entirely different world, structured by different organizing principles and physical laws. The only conceivable structure of a contradiction is a fictional world. Houses of fiction provide architectural support for contradictions.

Elizabeth Costello thus gives voice to the pervasive and troubling suspicion that there is something impossible about both ethics and narrative. Coetzee's novel takes seriously the assertion that we cannot represent or share the being of an other - and yet – we "live the impossible" (Coetzee 2003, 77). This language of impossibility resonates across diverse works of ethical and literary theory. For Spivak, fiction allows us to "taste the impossible status of being figured as object in the web of the other" (2004, 18). For Harpham, we can find "some identity, however minimal, with the unimaginable other" (1999, 5). For Levinas, the other is "an unknown that is impossible to translate" (1987, 69). And for Butler, some parts of the other "cannot be fully known" (2003, 208). The process of inhabiting temporarily turns contradiction into a space to be inhabited rather than an obstacle to be surmounted. If ethics is about living the impossible, fiction seems a pretty good place to start.

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The Internal Other:
Dorothy Allison's White Trash

Mélanie Grué

Introduction

As early as the 1790s, the American South was singled out in an intellectual and cultural discourse revolving around the material body (Watson 2012, 12). Indeed, in the early days of the American Republic, the material facts of race, class, and gender questioned the fictions of a disembodied, ethereal subject and were used to delimit a space of national belonging (ibid., 10). The colonial tropes of depravation were displaced onto the southern states, whose poor white inhabitants were characterized by "drunkenness, lechery, indolence, gluttony, violence, thick impenetrable accents, and creolized dialects" (ibid., 12). These traits were first found in the Southern Humorists' obscene, undisciplined, excessively embodied characters, and in later Southern writing the poor whites remained the objects of extreme representations: "They drink to excess, disfigure each other in brawls, lust openly after inappropriate people, eat clay, stage elaborate pranks that physically abase their victims, and in general exhibit a bodily excess and indiscipline that flouts bourgeois norms of bodily etiquette," Watson remarks (2012, 14).

Born in a poor white family in South Carolina, Dorothy Allison is both a victim of and an heir to these representations, as the subaltern characters she creates are the targets of a typically Southern physical and ideological violence.

Indeed, the definition of white trash by the middle class combines objective data and myths, leading to the creation of a threatening social "Other" who should be confined to a real and imagined space of abjection. The white trash group is the victim of fixed representations and seems to be condemned to wander in social and human limbo because it fails to match the cultural ideals. As she describes the ambiguous white trash position, Allison questions the conception of normative whiteness and enriches the discourse developed by whiteness studies. As we shall see, whiteness is often associated to invisibility and perfection, and is considered a guarantee of social superiority. However, Allison's white trash questions the homogeneity of the white group; at the same time white and poor (a characteristic associated to Blacks in the traditional South), the white trash can be considered an internal danger, spoiling the dominant white group. This threat, I shall argue, requires the creation of a specific space, designed to welcome the white trash aberrations, and aimed at protecting the clean, pure middle class from contamination.

Neutral, normative whiteness: the fantasy of purity

Social theorists have reflected upon the reasons that make the white group a dominant and normative category. Explaining how the white race is constructed in the collective imagination, Richard Dyer examines the implications and connotations of whiteness, remarking that the studies on "race" conducted prior to the publication of his own work (1997) did not focus on the white race *per se*. Indeed, white people had very often been depicted as being the neutral representatives of a human norm, so that the term "race" had only been applied to non-white groups: "Other people are raced, we are just people," Dyer explains (1997, 1), noting that white people see themselves as "unmarked, unspecific, universal" (ibid., 45). Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz also remark that the invisibility of whiteness has made the neutral white body a template in the

evaluation of other bodies (1997a, 3); and Ross Chambers exposes the negative consequences of this conception when he remarks that the other races, compared to unmarked whiteness, are found abnormal and incomplete (1997, 189). Since it is linked to transparency and normalcy, whiteness is considered an unremarkable characteristic, as suggested by the very title of Chambers's article, "The Unexamined," which encapsulates the idea that until recently whiteness had not been an object of study because it did not deserve the theorists' attention. Conversely, the other races have been scrutinized and controlled because they were aberrant: Social science borrows from linguistics the terminology of marking, only to associate it with the notions of deviance and abnormality. A symbolic reading of the visibility of races thus suggests that the unmarked groups (whiteness, in our case) are equated with normality and domination, which exempts them from being studied. Chambers coined the term *unexaminedness* to qualify this privileged position (ibid., 188). On the contrary, being marked means being deviant, inferior, and deprived of power (ibid., 189). However, the equation of whiteness with domination has its limits, and the general considerations of whiteness forget to point to the diversity of the white group. The white race is not a homogenous category, the members of which share the same cultural identity (Hartigan 2005, 188-89). On the contrary, the smooth definition of whiteness hides fundamental differences within the group.

Revealing the heterogeneity of the seemingly unified white group, John Hartigan, Jr. explains that "[u]nderstanding how whiteness works requires grasping how the visage, speech, and actions of certain whites can so disturb notions of belonging and difference that they are simultaneously marked as white yet expelled from the privileged social domain of whiteness" (2005, 59). The appearance and behavior of certain white people are precisely what led to the creation of a ladder of acceptability within the white group, a distinction that presupposes the definition of a normative form of whiteness and the targeting of

some personal or regional specificities (physical distortions, dialects, manners and local customs, for instance) as being symptoms of deviance from the white norm. Consequently, the various groups constituting the white race are also submitted to the marked/unmarked division which is usually applied to races. It could be argued that, compared to the paradigmatic white middle-class individual, some sub-groups within the white race are "raced," their purity being tinted, or tainted, by certain demeaning characteristics.

Strategies of categorization

The distinctions made within the white group liken certain people to the inferior races, but they are mostly based on class considerations. Certain class-related traits allow the creation of sub-categories within the white race according to socio-economic status. Physical appearance and social position thus mingle in that creation, sometimes leading to the clear distinction of barely distinguishable classes.

For example, David Reynolds synthesizes two sociological studies carried out in the Deep South in 1941 and 1978, which show how the lowest social classes systematically attempt to distinguish themselves from one another on the basis of appearance and behavior. In his work, Reynolds reveals that the will to create hierarchies results in the multiplication of levels of value, and insists that classification is subjective, each social class evaluating itself and others according to its own criteria (qtd. in Docka 2002). In such a process of categorization, the white trash is a social model in opposition to which the other poor white groups define themselves, insisting on their own respectability. The despicable white trash group is placed at the bottom of an artificial social ladder which distinguishes the "good poor" and the "bad poor" according to subjective definitions. When considering the additional social levels created among the

poorest groups, Reynolds thus differentiates the "physically and morally clean" people and those "not clean in either respect" (qtd. in ibid.).

The white trash is then turned into an economic scapegoat, "the low other" (qtd. in ibid.), and the categories of *good poor* and *bad poor* "claim to describe the innate, inevitable, immutable essence of devalued or stigmatized groups" (Baker 2000, 118). Yet in fact, as Baker remarks, "these categories serve to rationalize and justify the domination of one group by another" (ibid., 118). John Hartigan, Jr. expresses the same idea when he analyzes the expression "those people," stating that it "encodes the selective, exclusionary strategy of projecting a delimited form of difference – whether in terms of race, class or gender – that allows a normative center to operate" (2005, 3).

The distinctions described above find an echo in Dorothy Allison's introduction to her collection of short stories *Trash*, where she defines two conflicting figures: the "good poor" are "hardworking, ragged but clean, and intrinsically honorable," contrary to the "bad poor," the group her family belongs to (Allison 2002 vii). She explains: "We were men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours and bearing too many children; and children with runny noses, watery eyes, and the wrong attitudes" (Allison 2002 vii). Similarly, her memoirs *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* open on a compilation of terms used to define her social group: "Peasants, that's what we are and always have been. Call us the lower orders, the great unwashed, the working class, the poor, proletariat, trash, lowlife and scum" (Allison 1996, 1). The comparative expression "lower orders" makes of the white trash an internal Other in the poor group, a category which requires additional delimitations in order for the honest, better poor not to be "contaminated" by the low morals and depraved way of life of the unworthy white trash.

Dorothy Allison exposes the workings of class relations in the South and denounces the unfair categorization she and her family were the victims of. She precisely describes the strategies of othering and debasement developed by the Southern middle class in order to marginalize the white trash and assert its own worth. In the majority of her writings, she draws a line between the white trash characters (avatars for her own family) and the southern community which despises them. Most evidently in her first novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), the white trash are the targets of verbal and social violence, confined to the bottom of the social and human ladder, considered unworthy of attention. Quite interestingly, the white trash heroine Bone is obsessed with the color white, an obsession which makes clear her feeling of exclusion from the sphere of social normality. Bone mentions the color white when she compares herself to her middle-class cousins, literary heroines, and fairytales characters. She grants importance even to the slightest white details, be it when she despairs of not looking like the "princesses with pale skin" or "Scarlett with her baking-powder cheeks" (Allison 1993, 206), or when she sets herself apart from the family circle, painfully envying her wealthier cousins' "white nylon crinolines" (Allison 1993, 208). Bone defines herself in complete opposition to the pale, fragile heroines, when she remarks that she is "as dark as walnut bark," "part of the trash down in the mud-stained cabins" (206), and deplores that "no part of [her is] beautiful" (208). Beauty, delicacy and paleness are closely associated with social status, and the close attention Bone pays to the differences between herself and the worshipful girls reveals her feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Finally, Bone quickly becomes friends with Shannon Pearl, an albino girl whose extreme whiteness provokes disgust in other people, and fascination in Bone. Shannon's parents are in a better financial situation than Bone's, and the girl's whiteness is an ambiguous marker of social superiority: even though Shannon is the victim of appearance-based scorn, her translucent skin is turned into a symbol of pre-

eminence. Indeed, when commenting upon this unprepossessing characteristic, Shannon's mother turns the defect into a symbol of perfection, Shannon's clearly visible veins becoming "fine blue blood vessels" showing against "the ivory of her scalp," itself compared to linen (155). Blue blood associates Shannon to the refined and pure aristocracy, a symbolic perfection which is conveyed even by her name, Pearl. Bone is thus surrounded by fictional characters and real people whose appearance constantly reminds her of her inferior status.

If Bone creates for herself a scale of values based on color, her mother Anney is placed at the bottom of the ladder by people who rely upon factual and imagined characteristics. Anney is a poor, uneducated waitress, who has to put up with demeaning remarks that place her at the bottom of the moral, economic, and social ladder. In the description she offers of Anney's feelings towards stigmatization, Allison translates the social hierarchy into a visible, physical hierarchy: Bone remarks that Anney "hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground" (3), conveying an image in which Anney is physically dominated by people of a higher rank. The community's opinion is encapsulated in a short enumeration of insults, "*No-good, lazy, shiftless*" (3), which Bone compares to a "stamp" being affixed to her mother (3), conveying the violence of the categorization process by comparing it to an act of branding. The terms chosen by the community to define Anney perfectly correspond to the white trash characteristics developed in the American collective imagination, and listed by Kelly L. Thomas: "lazy workers, irresponsible parents and citizens, domestically incompetent, excessive and often perverse in their sexuality, and unsound in consumer practices" (2002, 168). This broad generalization, like Allison's enumeration, reveals the constructed nature of the "bad poor" and the exaggeration that characterizes the instrumental definition.

As David Reynolds explains, the tendency to create new levels within a group is an approximate enterprise aiming at asserting one's social and moral superiority (qtd. in Docka 2002). Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper also question the objectivity of these representations and remark that hegemonic power does not simply manipulate differences between individuals or social groups. Rather, it produces and reproduces differences to create modes of social and spatial division that contribute to the perpetuation of its authority (Hooper and Soja 1993, 184-85). The need to maintain domination leads to artificial definitions, so that social categorization appears as a subjective process, requiring the invention of social norms that will allow the perpetuation of the dominant group's superiority. Social norms are thus performative, established and perpetuated through repetition.

The white trash as cultural aberrations

White trash is "the most visible and clearly marked form of whiteness," Wray and Newitz observe (1997a, 4). Although it partly relies upon verifiable economic and social data, the process of categorization which creates the white trash also depends upon myths and stereotypes anchored in the collective imagination (Baker 2000, 120). White trash is thus not so much a socio-economic as a *cultural* category, composed of devalued individuals to whom real and fantasized characteristics are applied. Sylvie Laurent remarks that the poor white trash arises from "a cultural conception" according to which poverty consists in a "series of noble or despicable behaviors and values" (2001, 151-52).[11] For Laurent, "white trash" is an indicator that the definition of poverty has to do with discourse more than with economic realities. The poor white trash is an imaginary individual, who is used to "ward off the fear of alterity" (ibid., 152).[12]

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[11] My translation.
[12] My translation.

Since whiteness is associated with domination and privilege, poor whites are a discursive anomaly and a social aberration whose definition combines privilege and destitution. In her essays, Allison also analyzes the process of rejection of the Other: She denounces the development of a "politics of they," stating that "human beings fear and stigmatize the different while secretly dreading that they might be one of the different themselves," a fear that leads to a vicious circle of oppression (Allison 1994, 35). She further explains that class stratification results from the certainty that one's well-being depends on the oppression of others (ibid., 36). The expression "the politics of they" conveys the idea of a division of the American society according to norms which exclude some individuals from the circuits of normality. The pronoun "they" creates a level of abjection which confirms that the individuals it designates are set apart from the dominant, normal group. Allison's considerations find an echo in Annalee Newitz's argument that a monolithic, stereotyped Other is created when a class feels that it is losing control of the categories of "good" and "bad," its anxiety leading to the creation of negative images of whiteness (Newitz 1997, 133). The insulting expression "white trash" connotes dirt and uselessness, suggesting the white trash is human waste, an embarrassing and symbolically messy group which has to be distinguished from the pure white middle class.

Dorothy Allison also illustrates how the white trash deviate from the pure white norm when, in her poem "Upcountry," she describes how her uncles' pickups were "parked aslant in the yard" with "bottles that rocked from board to rim/shotguns point down beside the gears" (1991, 10). The neighbors' attitude and merciless looks speak for themselves: "I watched the neighbors squint their eyes/'no count, low down, disgusting'" (ibid.). The trucks parked aslant and the rolling bottles symbolize the uncles' deviation from the social norm, while the insults point to social inferiority as well as to metaphorical dirt.

Blurring the frontiers: the contaminating white Other

Situated at a crossroads between races and classes, the white trash is the victim of an economically motivated racism. It forms an unstable group within which whiteness and blackness, privilege and poverty are mixed, race being used to explain class. The oxymoron *white trash* qualifies the unspeakable and puts it at a distance. As Kelly L. Thomas explains, white trash is "the proverbial black sheep of the white flock" (2002, 169), composed of individuals who are not white enough, and whom Wray and Newitz call "the white Other" (1997b, 168). The white trash subject is thus abject, if we recall Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection as that which perturbs an identity, system, or order (1983, 12). It is not the absence of cleanliness which makes something abject, but rather the fact that limits, positions, and rules are questioned and displaced. The abject is thus ambiguous and mixed (Kristeva 1983, 12).

The white trash indeed perturbs an order and questions the frontiers of race and class, thus interrogating the superiority of the white race. Matt Wray qualifies the expression "white trash" as a "boundary term" (2006, 41), which blurs racial, social, economic, and symbolic boundaries, and expresses a tension "between the sacred and the profane, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, cleanliness and dirt" (ibid., 2). The recurrence of terms relating to the threshold in Wray's study signals that white trash is at the crossroads between different categories. He points to a "disturbing liminality: a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other," and concludes: "*White trash* names people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order" (ibid.). If Wray suggests that white trash is neither one term nor the other, John Hartigan, Jr. affirms that white trash is *at the same time* one and the other when he explains that "though 'white trash' first appears as a form of otherness, its most troubling aspect is its dimension of sameness" (2005, 60). This definition echoes the definition Kristeva offers of the

figure of the Jew as the unbearable, abject conjunction of the One and the Other (1983, 217). Like Kristeva's Jew, Hartigan's white trash is at the same time the One and the Other, the dominant and the inferior, displacing the frontiers of class and associating notions that should be kept distinct. The unthinkable subject is the object of fantasy, rejected because of the instability it provokes. Signified by the notion of dirt, white *trash* accomplishes a transgression that operates at the level of the body, provoking physical disgust and abjection, and polluting the space of normality.

The feeling of abjection in turn reinforces the negative cultural productions concerning the white trash, thus maintaining a vicious circle of fear, representation, and abjection. Indeed, exaggerated representations play an important part in the construction of a despicable Other, as already pointed out by Frantz Fanon, who affirms in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the racist creates his inferior by setting up discriminatory practices denying the colored man his value and turning him into a parasite (1976, 75). As Fanon remarks, the colored body is submitted to a reconsideration, a thematization when submitted to the white man's gaze. In this comparison process, the black man no longer owns his body, which is dismembered, colonized, and made incomplete, the object of what Fanon called a "myth of the Negro" (ibid., 94). Sara Ahmed explains that the assimilation fantasy – the fear that the Other might absorb the subject – justifies violence against the Other whose mere existence becomes a threat to one's life (2004, 64). The representation of the Negro as a cannibal brute in Fanon's myth echoes the representation of the white trash individual as dirty, contaminating waste; in both cases, the dominant white group is under threat, either of being eaten or of being polluted, so that by exacerbating the Other's strangeness and making him abnormal and monstrous, the white group operates a holding off which must guarantee the group's integrity. Stereotyped, erroneous representations protect the

group's integrity while at the same time justifying acts of violence (Ahmed 2004, 64).

Allison also illustrates the collapsing of race and class when *Bastard Out of Carolina*'s Bone and her albino friend accompany Shannon's father as he prospects Greenville County to hire Gospel singers. During one of their trips, Bone is startled by the beautiful music and powerful voices of a colored church choir, and suggests that Shannon's father hire the singers. Shannon's answer, "'An't no money in handling colored,'" makes clear her opinion about colored people, yet the girl goes one step further when she replaces the neutral term "colored" with the racist slur "niggers," making black skin prominent to the point that the artistic value of the choir is forgotten (Allison 1993, 170). This episode is an efficient demonstration of the similarities between racial and social stigmatization. Indeed, Bone is shocked by Shannon's openly racist remarks because the racist slur reminds her of the insults she has to face daily. When the girls start to argue, a parallel is quickly established between the colored Gospel singers and Bone's white trash family, as the focus of the argument shifts from the singers to Bone's social status.

Shannon turns class into a tool to demean Bone, telling her that "[e]verybody knows [her family members are] all a bunch of drunks and thieves and bastards" (170). She uses the insult "trash" several times, suggesting that trashiness is a sort of malediction and that Bone belongs to an immoral lineage which she cannot escape: "'You … you trash. You nothing but trash. Your mama's trash, and your grandma, and your whole dirty family…'" (171). When Bone answers Shannon's insults and starts her own demeaning rant, she shifts the focus back to race, revealing how closely related race and class are where stigmatization is concerned: "You bitch, you white-assed bitch," Bone exclaims, committing to the division of the white group instituted by the middle class and perpetuating the division to her own advantage (171). The adjective "white-assed"

here applies to Shannon only and takes on a negative connotation, so that Bone voluntarily excludes herself from the white group she suddenly rejects and despises. She willingly positions herself in-between the races and classes, in a limbo between white privilege and black inferiority. After making Shannon a representative of the racist white group, she kicks red dirt onto the girl's skirt and colors it. The act has a strong symbolic reach, since Shannon becomes as dirty as Bone's "whole dirty family." The distinction between the two girls is definitely blurred when Bone trips and falls into the dirt which colors her hands, thus abolishing the social and racial hierarchy by making both girls red as dirt. The shift from open racism to class hatred, from the black gospel singers to the white trash girl, only mirrors how class- and race-based insults can be juxtaposed, and reveals how shifting the frontiers of race and class can be when focusing on white trash.

The space of the Other: white trash heterotopias

The process of othering which targets white trash is completed with the creation of specific spaces designed to welcome them, quarantine areas aimed at preserving the purity of the dominant white group. Michel Foucault describes the "crisis heterotopias"[13] designed by primitive societies as "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (1998, 179). These heterotopias were created to welcome people whose physical condition prevented them from living with the community (aging, menstruation, childbirth), but later on individuals have been assigned a place in this social space because of moral or

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[13] Foucault first proposed the concept of heterotopia in the preface to *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), expanding on the idea in a 1967 lecture entitled "Des espaces autres." This lecture was published in revised form, shortly before his death, in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984), translated as "Different Spaces."

behavioral characteristics. Thus the creation of heterotopias is linked to the notions of norm and deviance, whether they refer to the body or to morals.

We can easily associate Foucault's and Erving Goffman's studies in a reflection about quarantine spaces. Indeed, in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman studies the social codes of categorization and the influence of stigmata on social identity, explaining that "[s]ociety establishes the means of categorizing persons" and decides what attributes are ordinary and natural for each category (1970, 11). In Ancient Greece, "stigma" were signs inscribed on the bodies of slaves, criminals, or traitors, whose moral anomaly was made visible during a ritual. Blemished and polluted by cuts and burns, they were to be avoided (ibid., 11). Goffman opposes "stigma symbols" with "prestige symbols," both used to classify individuals according to their worth (ibid., 59) and to decide whether they should be socially acknowledged. Moreover, according to Foucault, the heterotopias of crisis were progressively replaced by "heterotopias of deviation," which welcome the individuals who deviate from a certain norm (1998, 80). Besides, Judith Butler argues that it is the individual's very humanity that is questioned in the process of categorization, the norm being associated with the notion of dignity (2004, 2). She writes that "sometimes the very terms that confer 'humanness' on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and the less-than-human," and concludes that the recognition of the individual as less than human "does not lead to a viable life" (ibid.).

Furthermore, each individual's position on the human ladder conditions their possibility to move freely within a highly regulated symbolic or physical space. In Foucault's study, the individual is "constrained to enter […] or has to submit to rituals and purifications" (1998, 183). Butler and Goffman, on the contrary, never consider the process of holding off as a privilege; isolation is a punishment that does not require any ritual or purification; rather, it is the

marginalization of the spoilt individual which allows the purification of the social space. When applied to whiteness, these considerations allow us to define the possibilities opened up by racial identity: Sara Ahmed explains that whiteness grants bodies a certain worth (2006, 129) while at the same time allowing them to move freely because it "trails behind" bodies which do not have to confront their whiteness as a remarkable characteristic (ibid., 132). Ahmed explains that "[t]he white body in this way expands; objects, tools, instruments, and even 'others' allow that body to inhabit space by extending that body and what it can reach" (ibid., 132). Conversely, the whiteness of white trash bodies is a characteristic that has to be confronted. As Wray and Newitz affirm, social and economic data racialize the white trash body which, contrary to hegemonic forms of whiteness, is marked as being at the same time white and trash (1997b, 169-170), thus making whiteness palpable, an obstacle to the free circulation of bodies within the social space. Kelly L. Thomas remarks that the distinction between "good poor folk" and "poor white trash" depends not so much on physical appearance as on behavior, the bodies of white trash losing their worth and being "coded as trashy" when they are linked to uncontrolled reproduction, perverse sexuality and laziness (2002, 169). Wray and Newitz state that white trash is considered as "something that must be discarded, expelled, and disposed of in order for whiteness to achieve and maintain social dominance," because of its ambiguous status: "White trash lies simultaneously inside and outside whiteness, becoming difference within, the white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness" (1997b, 169-70). Wray and Newitz here expose the impossibility of purifying the white group: the very status of white trash prevents the middle class from rejecting it completely, since white trash has its origins in the group. It thus constitutes a persistent internal threat.

Allison also divides space between normality and otherness, and reveals how people are segregated according to their social status. Deploring the fact that the white trash lives are not as worthy as everybody else's, Allison, in the essay

"A Question of Class" (1994), describes how one of her cousins was sent to jail when he was eight years old. After being caught breaking into payphones with another boy, he was arrested and sent to the county farm, while the other boy was sent back to his parents. The episode makes clear the unfair treatment inflicted on the white trash child, and how social status matters in the unfolding of the individual's life. A member of the Other social group, Allison's cousin is given no chance at all: "He never went back to school, and after jail he couldn't join the army" (1994, 29), whereas the other boy, a member of the "clean, well-dressed, contemptuous" dominant group is spared (29). Allison explains: "We were trash. We were the ones they built the county farm to house and break" (29), thus denouncing the huge gap that separates the white trash from the middle class. The county farm could be compared to a dog pound where the unwanted or stray animals are cooped up; the bodies of the socially deviant individuals are displaced, locked up and isolated, made docile and harmless.[14]

In an episode of *Bastard Out of Carolina* devoted to a family gathering, the white trash girls have tea on their own in the backyard. They are called "Anney's girls" (Allison 1993, 101), a demeaning designation that deprives them of their identity, and are not allowed to enter their middle class uncle's house, whereas their cousins are free to run "in and out of the house, loud, raucous, scratching their nails on the polished furniture, kicking their feet on the hardwood floors, tracking mud in on the braided rugs" (ibid.). The girls are an unnamed Other, deprived access to the space of social privilege for fear they might pollute it, yet quite ironically the privileged cousins are precisely those who bring dirt inside the house and contaminate the preserved space. To borrow Ahmed's expression, the cousins' bodies expand into space (Ahmed 2006, 132), but Allison denounces the unfair segregation by describing them as reckless, dirty animals

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[14] I borrow the expression "docile bodies" from Foucault, who thus describes the bodies that move in a scrutinized and controlled environment (2010, 159).

who literally mark their territory. The threat does not come from where the uncles expected it and pollution stains the preserved space, no matter how careful they are. Thus, contrary to the healthy separation of the living, the sick, and the dead in a city contaminated by the plague, where space is enclosed, divided, and surveyed (Foucault 2010, 230), the setting up of a disciplinary organization in Bone's uncle's house fails to preserve the purity of the territory. Space is divided up but not enclosed, the disciplinary order fails and contamination occurs despite careful isolation.

Conclusion

The construction of an abject subject in the American collective imagination is a social and cultural process, the result of facts as well as myths and stereotypes. Dorothy Allison illustrates this process of othering as well as the process of creation of a space of abjection, dedicated to welcome the unwanted individuals. The marginalization and stigmatization of white trash people reveal the anxiety of the middle class, whose fear of being polluted by the white trash leads to attempts at isolating the dangerous, internal threat. Allison's heterotopias in fact point to the fear of losing control, and to the need to define some individuals as less-than-human in order to reassert one's superiority and worth. The devalued white trash subject is an object of fantasy for the dominant community, an undesirable Other within the social and cultural space. Bearing the stamp of otherness, white trash people are visually distinguishable and physically put at a distance from the sphere of normality. However, despite the constant attempts at marginalization, and the extreme care with which white trash individuals are rejected, the threat of pollution and contamination can never be completely avoided. As exemplified by the confrontation episodes in Allison's works, the blurring of race and class, as well as the failure to enclose spaces properly, lead to the inevitable spoiling of the protected territory. By illustrating the persistence of white trash, or the

contamination by the middle class of its own reserved space, Allison enriches the social and whiteness studies, revealing that social categorization is not only artificial, but also unfair and unnecessary. As she writes about the cultural, imaginary, and spatial distinctions established between human beings, she denounces the conception according to which some lives can be constrained and made "unlivable," and condemns the social processes by which the human is made alien.

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Like Eliza Rachel Félix:

Enacting Change in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask*

Nevena Stojanovic

A great success at the time of publication, Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask* received renewed interest after Madeleine Stern's recovery of it in the 1970s. Initially published in the *Flag of Our Union* in 1866, under the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard, and set in mid-nineteenth-century England, the novel depicts the relationship between Jean Muir, a Scottish governess of dubious background, and her employers, the wealthy Coventrys. Throughout the novel, Jean is portrayed as a skillful actress: not only does she successfully stage a few tableaux vivants, or living pictures, in order to entertain her employers, but she effectively "acts" in everyday life as well. Towards the end of the novel the reader realizes that she was a professional actress in France. Although economically and socially inferior to her hosts and employers, Jean manages to outsmart them through her shrewd and deceptive stories and performances, eventually securing her financial stability by marrying the head of the Coventry family, the old Sir John. Literary scholars have mostly analyzed sensational elements in the novel (Hackenberg 2008, Butterworth-McDermott 2004), class conflicts in the Coventry household and society (Schewe 2008, Fetterley 1983), women's curtsy and professionalism as adopted "masculine" skills in the prime of the

ideology of domesticity (Elliott 1994), and the significance of women's participation in nineteenth-century parlor theatricals (Chapman 1996, Dawson 1997). What remains unexplored, however, is the connection between Jean's tableaux vivants and her broader cultural mission as well as the connection between Alcott's model for the protagonist and the protagonist herself. I contend that in *Behind a Mask*, Alcott emphasizes the instability of ethnicity, specifically Jewishness, and class, specifically governesses, in order to challenge the dominant, Christian and patriarchal social order. Similar to Alcott's other potboilers, *Behind a Mask* is set abroad, but the novel alludes to the issues of American society, particularly the increasing Jewish presence on American soil and women's resistance to patriarchy.

The narrator's early remarks reflect Alcott's allusions to Jean as a performer of Jewishness and a member of the class of governesses. Alcott's first and most important hint of this kind occurs at the beginning of the novel, when the narrator compares Jean to Rachel, or Eliza Félix (1821-1858), the internationally known nineteenth-century French Jewish actress, famous for her support of women's emancipation and pride in her Jewish ancestry. After one of master Gerald's early arguments with Jean, the narrator notes that Jean, while responding to her employer, looked at him "*with a gesture like Rachel. Her eyes were grey, but at that instant they seemed black with some strong emotion of anger, pride, or defiance*" (Alcott 2004, 7; emphasis added). Alcott was familiar with Rachel's acting. In 1855, Rachel performed in the United States, and Boston was one of the places in her tour ("Foreign Actors on the American Stage" 1881, 524; Stokes 1996, 68). Alcott was in Europe in 1865-66 (Showalter 1988, xxi), while Rachel was still considered the most outstanding tragic actress on the old continent. Though Rachel was glorified everywhere, her detractors often labeled her avaricious in order to denigrate her as a successful public woman ("Rachel" 1855, 199; Stokes 1996, 70). In order to create

Jean, Alcott borrows Rachel's histrionic skills, types of roles, and personal characteristics such as shrewdness, determination, and vitality, which were also ascribed to Jews in the nineteenth-century racial science and popular culture.

Alcott's second important hint announces her experimentation with the figure of the governess. Jean enters the Coventry household as a new governess, a liminal figure so convenient for the radical mission that Alcott assigns to her. The Coventrys are not aware that Jean's appointment as Bella's governess is just a performance that helps her achieve her goals. At the beginning of the novel, Gerald condescendingly speaks of Jean and other women of her social status even before he meets her. When his cousin, Lucia, offers to tell him about the new governess, he exclaims: "No, thank you. *I have an inveterate aversion to the whole tribe*" (Alcott 2004, 3; emphasis added). The word "tribe," though it usually has an ethnic connotation, here refers to the class of governesses, who were, just as Jews, regularly perceived as a group apart. I argue that through these hints and allusions, Alcott relays the message of attempting to reshape the predominantly Christian and patriarchal cultural center.

Jean's savvy performances of Jewishness in a constraining cultural theater help her move from a poor governess to a rich aristocratic lady. The protagonist's social ascent reveals the cultural potential that the figures of the Jew and the governess have in Alcott's vision of society: the potential to challenge and reshape the established social order through their liminality. Combining Daphne Brooks's concept of "free movements" through "off-center performances" and Michel de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" (policies and actions of the powerful) and "tactics" (ruses of the powerless), I will consider Jean's performances in the Coventry household a tactical intervention in the cultural center dominated by the English aristocracy. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that though Alcott praises Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish cleverness, determination, and vitality, she simultaneously

exposes (stereotypically) Jewish treachery to the scrutiny of the readership. Drawing on Bryan Cheyette, who is indebted to Zygmunt Bauman, I argue that Alcott's presentation of Jewishness is "allo-Semitic," that is, simultaneously philo- and anti-Semitic, revealing her complex, ambivalent attitude towards the increasing Jewish presence and agency in the United States.

Alcott, Feminism, and the Liminality of Class and Ethnicity

Alcott's family was a strong influence on her passion for feminist causes. As Madeleine Stern notes in her introduction to *The Feminist Alcott: Stories of a Woman's Power*, "Feminism was in Louisa May Alcott's genes" (1996, vii). Her parents, Bronson and Abby May Alcott, firmly believed that "woman suffrage" was the most important reform of the day since women were economically and legally subordinated to men (ibid., vii). Louisa's parents' dedication to feminist causes served as a stimulant in her struggle for women's rights later on. In 1868 Alcott became a member of the New England Woman Suffrage Association, which inspired her literature on female emancipation in the 1870s (Showalter 1988, xxiii). Her dedication to feminist causes is evident in her newspaper responses, letters, and novels, particularly potboilers. In her letter to Lucy Stone, a famous fighter for woman suffrage, Alcott asserts, "I am so busy just now proving 'woman's right to labor,' that I have no time to help prove 'woman's right to vote'" (quoted in Stern 1996, xix). Alcott's letters to Boston's *Woman's Journal*, "the only woman suffrage paper published in Massachusetts," prove her devotion to women's rights (Stern 1996, xix). Though Alcott's letters and pamphlets testify to her feminist agenda, her most creative way of advancing feminist ideas was fiction-writing, particularly her posthumously discovered potboilers, published anonymously or pseudonymously

mostly in the 1860s, the decade of the bloom of Victorian sensation novels, whose melodramatic plots thrilled audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

The 1860s was the decade in which the courtroom became a popular venue for the uncovering of familial intrigues, sins, and felonies, and though these titillating occurrences were regular concerns of sensational journalism, they were most dramatically rendered through the sensation novel. Nineteenth-century commentators on literature considered the sensation novel a genre intended for audiences with no sophisticated taste in literature. As Lyn Pykett points out, authors of sensation literature centered their plots on crimes committed by excessively impassioned and psychologically deviant characters (1994, 4). Similar to popular theatrical melodramas, this genre exposes the down side of family life, challenging the common perception of home as one's haven from the outer world. The opposite sexes' different views on marriage and family, Victorian "gender roles," as well as women's social positions, rights, and emancipation are common concerns of Victorian sensation literature (ibid., 10). Furthermore, these novels deal with legal issues pertinent to Victorian family and marriage. Their characters are involved "with wills and the inheritance of property, with the laws of bigamy and divorce, and with issues arising from women's lack of legal identity and rights" (ibid.). Even though sensation novels typically end with ideological closures that support official metanarratives, they do challenge Victorian social mores (ibid., 13). Questioning the established social boundaries and investigating the fears and problems arising from such actions, the sensation novel exposes dark aspects of Victorian life to the scrutiny of its readership, implicitly calling for organized social actions of resistance.

Inspired by her British contemporaries, Alcott easily adopted the conventions of the genre and created a great number of thrillers, or gothic tales, all of which are set in European countries or the Caribbean. Among her most popular potboilers are

"Pauline's Passion and Punishment" (1863), "A Pair of Eyes" (1863), "A Marble Woman" (1865), "V.V.: or, Plots and Counterplots" (1865), "The Fate of the Forrests" (1865), and "Taming a Tartar" (1867). As I have previously mentioned, despite foreign settings, all of Alcott's thrillers deal with or allude to the issues pertinent to American society of the day. In her sensation fictions, filled with female characters' explicit and implicit rebellions against their male counterparts, Alcott raises her voice against men's dominance and calls for the organized feminist action.

In *Behind a Mask*, Alcott's protagonist accepts an appointment as a governess, and the figure of the governess in nineteenth-century transatlantic literature regularly embodies various social conflicts. The governess is a liminal character who, according to T.J. Lustig, "epitomizes nineteenth-century anxieties concerning social and sexual borders" (1994, 149). This figure blurs class distinctions. Sometimes the governess's parents are "merchants, civil servants … officers, and clergymen" whose social status has deteriorated, and sometimes her parents are "farmers or tradesmen" who progress in social hierarchy (Broughton and Symes 1997, 14). When governesses worked in socially ascending families, they represented "status symbols for their employer as teachers of their children" (ibid.). They were expected to obey the rules and preach the values of the family they worked for, but they were simultaneously humiliated by their masters. The fact that the governess was located, as Christine Doyle puts it, "in some nebulous place above the level of servant but below the level of family," was the underlying reason for the common belief that she was outside of the established social spheres (2000, 146). Through her employment, the governess encroached on the land of men, and through her adherence to high moral principles, she occupied the space of female chastity and docility. The governess's class and gender liminality catalyzed the appearance of the literary tropes of the governess as an asexual, virtuous woman and as an unscrupulous

sexual predator (Broughton and Symes 1997, 178-179). Furthermore, as Elizabeth Schewe points out, "Because the governess was a relative stranger accepted within the borders of the family, for Americans she likewise embodies the threat of racial and immigrant others within the borders of the nation" (2008, 579). Thus, the governess in transatlantic literature was a figure loaded not only with various class, gender and sexual fears and desires of the dominant social order, but with that order's ethnic and national anxieties as well.

Behind a Mask was published between the two waves of Jewish immigration to the United States (1820s-70s and 1880s-1920s), and the increasing Jewish presence on American soil triggered Christian responses. As Matthew Frye Jacobson explains, with the amalgamating influx of various European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was difficult to determine the borders between different kinds of whiteness: "one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites" (1998, 6; original emphasis). With the rise of theories of development in the second half of the nineteenth century, from evolutionism and counter-evolutionism to the eugenic school and sciences of mind and mental capabilities, Jewish people attracted popular scientists, who arduously tried to detect, describe, and define Jewishness as distinct from Anglo-Saxon whiteness. As Jacobson explains, physiognomic features such as "skin color, nose shape, hair color and texture, and the like," or in Blumenbach's terms, "the fundamental configuration of face" were "visible markers" of Jewishness and were considered recognizable "signs" of "an essential, immutable, inner moral-intellectual character" (ibid., 174). By the Civil War, Jewish immigrants had been considered distinct based on their faith, and not on their "blood" (ibid., 177). However, the Civil War and its aftermath witnessed the rise of the severest anti-Semitism. Subsequently, Jewish features did not just help Christians recognize Jews "in their greed (or their Jacobinism or their infidelism or their treachery)," but the

Jewish "physiognomy itself" became associated with Jewish "essential unassimilability to the republic" (ibid., 178). According to Jacobson, Jews were a target of sciences of development not only because of various possibilities for interpretations of Genesis, but also because of their devotion to blood, ancestry, and belonging, which was an essential value of various nationalist movements on the old continent (ibid., 179).

The American vernacular and visual culture quickly appropriated stereotypical descriptions of Jews in ethnographic studies. As Michael Dobkowski's study entitled *The Tarnished Dream: The Basis of American Anti-Semitism* (1979) demonstrates, anti-Semites often portrayed Jews as perpetrators, usurers, sources of social degeneration, and unassimilable aliens. However, stereotypical portrayals of Jews were not exclusively anti-Semitic; philo-Semitic presentations were present in the public arena as well. According to Jonathan Karp, philo-Semites viewed the (stereotypically) Jewish characteristics that marked the whole group as "compatible, useful, employable, and even exemplary, without, at the same time, being threatening" as highly commendable (2011, 218). The oppressed non-Jewish ethnic minorities considered Jews a paragon for their own social elevation. For instance, African American activist and philo-Semite Booker T. Washington believed that Jewish "economic self-help and mutual assistance" were the crucial characteristics that African Americans had to acquire in order to progress and prosper like Jews (ibid., 216). In spite of many denigrating portrayals of Jewish people in popular culture, philo-Semites cast Jews as a praiseworthy model for American citizens.

Besides the social significance of the Jewish presence on American soil for Alcott's choice of Rachel as a model for the protagonist in *Behind a Mask*, there is an interesting biographical fact that explains Alcott's interest in Jews. Although Alcott's mother had "the Sewalls, Quincys, and Hancocks" among her ancestors, "her father,

Colonel Joseph May, a Revolutionary veteran and a pillar of the First Unitarian Church," was of "indistinct" origin (Elbert 1997, xv). Drawing from Madelon Bedell, the Alcotts' biographer, Sarah Elbert asserts that the Mays were the progeny of John May, who immigrated to America in 1640 and who had worked as a "shopmaster" in England (ibid.). His last name had two spelling forms: "Maies" or "Mayes," and he could have been of Portuguese descent (ibid.). This last name entails his Jewish ancestry as well, and Bedell speculates that among the first Mays who immigrated to America were "Portuguese Jews who fled the Inquisition" (quoted in ibid.). Louisa and her mother had "dark hair and eyes," and Louisa described her skin as "sallow" or "brown" (quoted in ibid.). Unlike the two of them, Bronson had "blond" hair, "blue eyes," and was of Anglo-Saxon descent (ibid.). He was convinced that "Anglo-Saxon 'races' possessed more spiritually perfect natures, were generally 'harmonious,' and had more lofty intellects than darker-skinned people" (ibid.). Bronson was grounded in the contemporary beliefs that different groups were marked by certain hereditary features that helped them prosper or led them to disaster (ibid., xvi).

Alcott's family's views of descent and belonging as well as the popular scientific racism contributed to the author's approach to the issues of ethnic identity. As a girl, Louisa considered herself "moody Minerva" and was very different from her sister, a "blonde artist who combined work and pleasure in a more easy-going style" (ibid.). Jean Muir is a unique hybrid construction that emerged from Alcott's experimentation with ethnic mixtures and liminalities. Jean is blond and delicate, with grey eyes, and thus reminiscent of what Bronson considered individuals of Anglo-Saxon descent. However, the expressiveness of her piercing eyes, her invincible determination, and her passionate and clever performances are reminiscent

of the grand Rachel, and more broadly of the stereotypical portrayals of Jews, and of Bronson's descriptions of Louisa and her mother as willful and fiery beings.

Alcott's own interpretation of Rachel through the creation of Jean Muir reveals the author's ambivalent relationship with the figure of a Jewish person. As Cheyette has convincingly argued, in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English and American literatures, the Jew is often loaded with both positive and negative desires of the dominant, Christian, social order (1993, 6; 1996, 11). According to Cheyette, the Jew reflects "the possibility of a new redemptive order as well as the degeneration of an untransfigured past" (1993, 6). Very often the Jew can simultaneously belong to "both sides of a political or social or ideological divide" (ibid., 9). Therefore, the image of the Jew is fluid. As Cheyette explains, "Even within the same 'character,' the otherness of 'the Jew' was such that s/he could be simultaneously 'male' and 'female' and 'black' and 'white' and ultimately … both 'philosemitic' and 'antisemitic'" (1996, 11). Drawing on Bauman, Cheyette underlines the importance of "the term *allo-semitism*," which encompasses "antisemitism and philosemitism as two relatively distinct aspects of a much broader process of differentiating Jews from other human beings" (ibid., 14). The figure of the Jew is simultaneously an embodiment of Christian ideals and aspirations as well as an incarnation of Christian anxieties and trepidations. Following Cheyette's convincing argument, we can say that Jean Muir is an allo-Semitic character. Her determination to achieve her goals in a male-dominated society reflects Alcott's approval and praise of Rachel's support for feminist causes, but Jean's extreme shrewdness and callousness sometimes elicit the reader's criticism of allegedly Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish shortcomings.

As a remarkably successful public woman, Rachel was interesting to contemporary biographers, theater critics, and journalists, who often spoke of her

Jewish ancestry and her pride in it. As a daughter of a Jewish peddler, who had connections with the Hebrew community in the Marais, Rachel developed a strong sense of belonging to her ancestral culture (Stokes 1996, 68). Nineteenth-century journalistic descriptions of Rachel's countenance were often imbued with stereotypical perceptions of Jewish people. For instance, a contributor to the August 14, 1841 issue of *The Dramatic Mirror, and Literary Companion* depicted Rachel as follows: "In person, Mademoiselle Rachael [sic] is of middle stature, slightly, but beautifully formed; and her head is of Grecian contour, with features regular, though petite: *the only indications of her Hebrew-parentage are the jet-black hair and lustrous dark eyes*, which appear small beneath their low level brows" ("Mademoiselle Rachael [sic]" 1841, 3; emphasis added). Evidently, this writer found it necessary to detect and mention the (stereotypically) Jewish characteristics in Rachel's physique, which testifies to the nineteenth-century vogue of racial profiling and classification. Rachel constantly endured severe anti-Semitic offenses (Stokes 1996, 68). Some of her contemporaries labeled her as materialistic and manipulative, noting her lack of attachment to men ("Rachel" 1855, 199; Stokes, 70).

A famous anecdote with a Catholic Archbishop highlights Rachel's Jewish pride. According to the author of "Louis Philippe and Mademoiselle Rachel," published in the December 1854 issue of *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature (1844-1898)*, during one of Madame Récamier's "literary mornings," Rachel performed several excerpts from Corneille's *Polyeucte*, playing the role of Pauline, the dedicated wife of the Armenian nobleman who chose to convert to Christianity in the time when Christians were prosecuted in the Roman Empire ("Louis Philippe and Mademoiselle Rachel" 1854, 529). Following her husband, Pauline accepted Christianity as well. Before Rachel was about to exclaim Pauline's famous line, "Je vois, je sais, je crois!" (or, in English, "I see, I know, I believe!"), an

esteemed Catholic Archbishop had entered the salon, interrupting her performance (ibid.). Even though the Archbishop kindly apologized for his intrusion, Rachel refused to continue her performance of Pauline's conversion to Christianity. Instead, she announced with dignity that she would perform a few sections from Racine's *Esther*, which she did passionately, "thus remain[ing] … faithful to the Jewish religion" (ibid.). After the Archbishop graciously commended her performance of Esther, "Mademoiselle Rachel made a most charming obeisance, and answered, her eyes lowered, but with firmness, 'Monsieur, je crois!'" (ibid.). The anecdote testifies to Rachel's devotion to Judaism as well as to her ability to easily change attitudes towards her viewers and successfully shift dramatic roles in front of them.

Rachel's most remarkable influence on contemporary French theater was her revitalization of the classical tragedy through an emphasis on the importance of women in different nations' histories. Through her impeccable performances, Rachel reshaped the tragic stage, dominated by men, from playwrights to stage workers to tragic heroes (Stokes 1996, 66). She enriched staged tragedies by giving power to female characters whose roles she performed. For instance, in Rachel's performance of Camille in *Horace*, "the political battle was counterpointed by the sexual": although Camille was a delicate woman, she was victorious in the battle owing to her manipulation of men (ibid., 83). Her presentation of Phèdre, especially her "ghostlike" appearance on the stage, emphasized women's irrepressible eroticism and their "disruptive power" (ibid., 104). In Madame Girardin's *Judith* (1843), Rachel attempted to refresh and enrich the well-known "biblical" story with the contemporary tragic style (ibid., 68). Rachel was capable of portraying the complex personalities of powerful women, by highlighting their bravery, wisdom, love and passions.

By portraying Jean as Rachel, Alcott assigns her character a unique mission: Jean accomplishes her goals through her conscious performances both on and off the stage, proving that women's will and agency are reliable tools in their struggle for a place in patriarchal society. By ascribing Rachel's determination, acting skills, and roles (particularly the role of biblical Judith) to Jean, Alcott opens a path for the governess's social mobility and encourages resistance to patriarchy. As much as the reader admires Jean's acting skills, s/he also notices her callousness in the struggle to climb up the social ladder. Similar to all the protagonists of sensation novels, Jean is not a fully likeable character. If Alcott integrates Jean's/Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish agency and cleverness in her vision of progressive womanhood, she simultaneously exposes to the scrutiny of her readership Jean's/Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish materialism and unscrupulousness, even though she explains that these traits have resulted from an unjust social hierarchy.

Behind a Mask

Prior to writing *Behind a Mask*, Alcott traveled around Europe as a paid nurse and companion to an ill friend (Showalter 1988, xxi). She visited Britain and especially enjoyed the English countryside, which very likely motivated her to set the plot of the novel in an aristocratic household close to London. The Coventry home became a site for Alcott's experimentation with class, gender, and ethnicity, portrayed through the protagonist's everyday performances as well as her staged tableaux vivants. The first four chapters of the novel portray Jean's daily performances as a governess, through which she tries to manipulate the Coventrys by appealing to them in different ways. The fifth chapter concentrates on the three tableaux that Jean consciously stages in order to accelerate her final success. The last four chapters depict the aftermath of Jean's tableaux, revealing the outcomes of her artistry and artfulness: Jean outsmarts

Gerald, her young master, by marrying his uncle and the head of the Coventry family, Sir John. The novel thus fully presents Jean's gradual and skillful rearrangement of the established hierarchy in the aristocratic world.

Jean's intervention in the Coventry household and nineteenth-century British and American cultures in general can be explained through a theoretical model consisting of Brooks's concept of "self-actualization" through "off-center performances" and de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" and "tactics." In her study of African American performances in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century transatlantic world, borrowing Carla Peterson's concept of "empowering oddness," Brooks examines performances of race and gender that African Americans invented in order to "move more freely" (2006, 6). Suggesting that such performances can be called "eccentric," Brooks notes that, according to Peterson, one of the meanings of the word "eccentric" actually "extends the notion of off-centeredness to suggest *freedom of movement* stemming from the lack of central control and hence new possibilities of difference" (ibid.). Avoiding "constrictive race and gender paradigms" prescribed by the dominant, white, social order, the characters that Brooks analyzes "rehearsed 'off-center' identity formations to disrupt the ways in which they were perceived by audiences and to enact their own 'freedom dreams'" (ibid.). Since these characters could not be easily detected in their "off-center" actions, Brooks calls their performances "opaque," pointing out that such performances emphasize "the skill of the performer who, through gestures and speech as well as material props and visual technologies, is able to confound and disrupt conventional constructions of the racialized and gendered body" (ibid., 8). Drawing on Brooks's argument, I contend that disguising herself in the uniform of the governess off the stage and dressing herself in the clothes of Judith, a suffering damsel, and Queen Bess on the stage, Jean

manipulates the Coventrys, moves freely through their circles, accomplishes her personal goals, and destabilizes the established order in the cultural center.

De Certeau's cultural theory helps us understand the dynamic between the wealthy and powerful Coventry aristocrats and Jean as a marginal other. As de Certeau points out, a "strategy" is "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power … can be isolated. … [I]t is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other" (1984, 35-36). Spaces delineated by the strategies of the powerful are penetrated and reshaped through tactical operations of the Others. In de Certeau's words: "The space of a tactic is the space of the other … It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids … In short, a tactic is an art of the weak" (ibid., 37). Relying on her performance skills on and off the stage, Jean uses unique opportunities for initiating changes in the structure of the Coventry family, opening a path for similar changes in society as well.

Alcott's representation of the dynamic interaction between the English aristocracy exemplified in the Coventry family and Jean, the Scottish governess depicted as the legendary Jewish actress, reworks a number of aspects of British and American cultures. In terms of ethnicity, the social milieu that Jean enters exemplifies the space of the English social prevalence. In terms of class, the Coventrys represent the wealthy gentry, the owners of land and social privileges that Jean seeks to appropriate by marrying an affluent aristocrat. The aristocracy's derision and stereotyping of governesses are strategies that the dominant social order exercises in order to distinguish itself from the "menacing" Other. In terms of gender, the system

that Jean eventually subverts is based on male dominance.[15] Lady Coventry, her daughter Bella, and niece Lucia live on the money that Gerald and Edward inherited from their late father. Women's access to money is secured mostly through marriage or inheritance. The fact that the Scottish governess seeks to create some space for success in the predominantly English society, makes her an ethnic Other. Her determination to move upward in the British class hierarchy, or to change her social position from the temporary position of governess to aristocratic proprietress, marks her as a threat to the current class stratification. Furthermore, Jean's performances of Jewishness make her an ethnic Other in both Britain, critical of Disraeli's access to power, and the United States, permeated by post-Civil-War anti-Semitism. Finally, her defiance towards powerful men in the household marks her as a courageous woman fighter against patriarchy. Jean's on- and off-stage performances help her move forward in her battle for women's rights, higher social rank, and wealth, and her performed Jewishness is the most important insignia on her fighter's body.

Jean Muir's arrival is depicted as a theatrical event. Gathered in their living room, the Coventry family, consisting of Lady Coventry, her sons Gerald and Edward (the younger son), Bella, and Lucia, are awaiting the appearance of Jean Muir. The Coventrys are reminiscent of an audience for a parlor theatrical, waiting for the curtain to lift and the show to begin. While the others await Jean's arrival with eagerness and curiosity, Gerald does not look forward to meeting Jean at all. As mentioned earlier, when Lucia offers to tell him about the new governess, he disapproves of the entire "tribe" (Alcott 2004, 3). Gerald's remark sets the pattern for

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[15] Elliott's article (1994) focuses on the possibilities and restrictions of Jean's (and women's) authenticity and of very few occupations for women of the day. Fetterley's article (1983) investigates the connections between Jean's art of impersonation and survival as a woman in men's world.

his distrust of Jean's charm and good manners in the first half of the novel since he believes that affected amiability is a common feature of the whole class.

As soon as Jean arrives, the Coventrys examine her just as spectators examine an actress. In the narrator's words, "everyone looked at her then, and all felt a touch of pity at the sight of the pale-faced girl in her plain black dress, with no ornament but a little silver cross at her throat … But something in the lines of the mouth betrayed strength, and the clear, low voice had a curious mixture of command and entreaty in its varying tones" (5-6). Jean's modest uniform is a prop that helps her elicit an emotional response from the viewers of her off-center performance under the mask of the governess, but what impresses her audience most is her inner strength, aided by her charming voice and self-confident posture. In order to prove that she can be an excellent piano teacher, she plays old Scotch tunes, but almost faints out of hunger and weakness. Even then, Gerald distrusts Jean's sickness, alluding to the whole scene as acting. He whispers to Lucia: "Scene first: very well done" (7). Gerald's comment announces the interaction between Jean and himself: Gerald will be a keen observer and interpreter of Jean's performances.

At this point of the plot, Jean's power as an actress is revealed through her artful responses to the Coventrys' comments and requests. Overhearing Gerald's remark, Jean retorts with "Thanks. The last scene shall be still better" (7). Jean's statement suggests that her everyday performances of the duties of the governess are going to be well-planned and purposeful. As stated above, the narrator emphasizes that, while responding to Gerald's comment, Jean pierced him with her eyes like the grand Rachel (7). As Jean's targeted audience, Gerald is stricken with her effective conveyance of resistance and pride. Through the narrator's words Alcott explains that "Young Coventry was a cool, indolent man, seldom conscious of any emotion, any passion, pleasurable or otherwise; but at the look, the tone of the governess, he

experienced a new sensation, indefinable, yet strong" (7). Jean's successful change of mood and tone is evident on the same evening, when Jean, after her bitter exchange with Gerald, speaks sweetly and gently with Mrs. Coventry. When the old lady proposes the initial one-month appointment to Jean in order to see whether Bella would like her, Jean replies softly, saying: "I shall do my best, madam" (11). The change in her voice and attitude is superb. The narrator emphasizes that "One would not have believed that the meek, spiritless voice which uttered these words was the same that had startled Coventry a few minutes before, nor that the pale, patient face could ever have kindled with such sudden fire as that which looked over Miss Muir's shoulder when she answered her young host's speech" (11). Here Jean's clever adjustment to different targeted audiences is reminiscent of Rachel's successful changing of roles in front of Madame Récamier and the Catholic Archbishop.

Jean's acting skills are especially evident in the moments when the narrator discusses changes in Gerald's perception of the governess. Gerald's initial remark about the class of governesses motivates Jean to teach him a lesson about women's power. Jean succeeds in gaining the favor of Bella with her informed lessons (20-22), Mrs. Coventry with her serving of tea and plucking and arranging of flowers (8, 17), Edward with her kindness to his horse (16), and Sir John with her sophisticated conversations (13-15). The catalyst of Gerald's softening towards Jean is the episode in which she takes care of him after Edward stabs him in an outburst of fury. After Gerald asks Edward to temporarily leave the Coventry residence since Edward has fallen in love with Jean, who has rejected his advances, Edward attacks his brother (36). However, Jean jumps in to prevent the second stroke (36), takes care of Gerald before the doctor comes (36-37), and when Gerald sends for her later, she appears in his room in a light summer dress (40). Such a significant change in her clothing style makes Gerald see Jean as someone more complex than his stereotypical notion of the

governess. The narrator informs us of the effects of Jean's new off-stage performance on Gerald as follows: "A fresh, gentle, and charming woman she seemed, and Coventry found the dull room suddenly brightened by her presence" (40). Jean's different look makes Gerald recognize the other side of her persona − that of an attractive woman capable of triggering the interest of an aristocrat. Jean's performances as a liminal figure who pleases and serves are opaque, off-center actions. She chooses these tactics in order to make the territory of the mighty her own. The only real role that Jean plays in the household is the role of the professional actress. Aided by the vast assortment of props adjusted to different situations, Jean creates a fertile soil for planting new seeds in the existent system. Heralded by the aforesaid off-stage performances, the series of Jean's on-stage shows helps her defeat Gerald.

Alcott's choice of tableaux vivants as a parlor theatrical through which Jean announces her radical feminist mission was not incidental since in the late 1800s and early 1900s progressive women used this performance genre in order to call for resistance against patriarchy. Though initially performers in living pictures were mostly men who posed as ancient statues and heroes, as time passed and taste in tableaux production shifted towards presentations of literary scenes and paintings, women became leading participants in the genre. As Mary Chapman points out, in the nineteenth century, tableaux performers were mostly women, and since men who took part in the performances were cast as wanderers, "observers," or "voyeurs" whose "gaze" towards actresses "framed" the "scenes," tableaux vivants often served the dominant social order as tools for the reassertion of patriarchal ideology (1996, 29-30). By representing literary, historical, biblical, and mythological figures as well as the scenes from well-known paintings, such as Titian's, Velasquez's, or Degas' portraits of women, performers aimed at motivating their spectatorship to adopt the

patriarchal values invoked through a tableau (ibid., 33-35). However, as Chapman notes, living pictures gradually abandoned an emphasis on female "virtues" and signaled a possibility of "social mobility": by inspiring women to behave as stylish figures in tableaux, the authors of tableaux manuals "promised" their readership an acquisition of a sophisticated "taste" and thus social "elevation" (ibid., 28-29). In order to stage scenes from outstanding paintings, female tableaux performers sometimes exposed their almost naked bodies in front of an audience, which caused controversial debates about the role of tableaux in nineteenth-century American society, simultaneously opening the space for women's usage of tableaux for progressive and subversive causes (ibid., 26-27). Evidently, this genre of performance was used to reinforce the values of the dominant social order as well as to challenge and resist them.

The series of three tableaux vivants, which occurs in the middle of the novel, encapsulates Alcott's crucial messages about women's agency and emancipation and vehemently moves Jean towards her final success.[16] By playing the role of Judith, Jean emulates Rachel's tendency to represent well-known heroines in order to emphasize the importance of women for national progress. By pausing as the suffering damsel, Jean reflects Rachel's inclination to perform the characters of the wooing women devoted to their partners and thereby attracts Gerald even more. By performing Queen Bess, Jean reminds us of Rachel's inclination to stage female rulers and secures the triumph in her mission against male dominance. Jean's tableaux fruitfully conflate the counterfeit with the real, announcing Jean's agenda

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[16] For a brief analysis of gender implications in the first two tableaux only, see Chapman (1996). For an analysis of dramatic literacy as a tool for the domestic negotiations done by middle-class women (and Jean Muir in particular), see Dawson (1997). Dawson concludes that by staging heroines and rebels, tableaux posers influenced the viewers' perceptions of their bodies. For an analysis of *Behind a Mask* as Alcott's allegorical reflection on writing, of Jean Muir as an allegorical presentation of sensation literature, and of the roles of Jean's tableaux in the allegory, see Hackenberg (2008).

regarding class and gender in everyday life and affirming Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish positive characteristics, such as cleverness, adaptability, and determination. The role of Jean's tableaux is thus twofold: they invert the traditional ideological purpose of the genre –the endorsement of patriarchy – by inviting the women in Sir John's drawing room and women readers of the novel to stand up for their rights, and they simultaneously cast Jewish women, particularly Rachel, on whom Jean is based, and Judith, whom Jean stages, as models for other women fighters.

The first tableau announces Jean's gender mission and reflects Alcott's affirmation of the ancient Hebrew heroine. As Elaine Showalter argues in the introduction to *Alternative Alcott*, the author's description of Jean's performance as Judith was likely influenced by Horace Vernet's famous pictorial rendering of Judith's story titled *Judith and Holofernes* (1831), in which Judith murders Holofernes, who has sexually assaulted her (Showalter 1988, xxx). Jean stages the tableau in Sir John's house, and in this aristocratic space, in the role of Judith, she decapitates Holofernes. The narrator's descriptions of the tableau testify to Jean's acting talent: she is not effective in real life only, but on the stage as well. In the narrator's words, "She [Jean in the role of Judith] was looking over her shoulder towards the entrance of the tent, with a steady yet stealthy look, so effective that for a moment the spectators held their breath, as if they also heard a passing footstep" (Alcott 2004, 52). Jean's look keeps her audience mesmerized and suspenseful. Her make-up and facial expression help her convey Judith's anger: "She had darkened her skin, painted her eyebrows, disposed some wild black locks over her fair hair, and thrown such an intensity of expression into her eyes that they darkened and dilated till they were as fierce as any southern eyes that ever flashed" (52). Jean's darkened complexion and eyebrows as well as artificial black locks help her evoke an image of

a Jewish person, usually described as darker than Christians in nineteenth-century British and American popular cultures. The protagonist's emphasis on Judith's image and fierce look suggests that she pays special attention to the character's distinctiveness, pride, and resolution, all of which are reminiscent of Rachel's portrayal of Judith and other heroines.

Echoing Rachel's emphasis on women's heroics, Jean impresses the audience, particularly Gerald. The narrator informs us that when someone in the audience asks: "Doesn't she look as if she really hated him?" Gerald replies: "Perhaps she does" (53). To Gerald, the tableau successfully blends the biblical plot with Jean's contempt for abusive men. Having heard about Jean's unsuccessful romantic relationship with his acquaintance Sydney, Gerald believes that in her tableau of Judith and Holofernes, Jean stages her own revenge against her former lover. The narrator explains that "It was not all art: the intense detestation mingled with a savage joy that the object of hatred [that] was in her power was too perfect to be feigned; and having the key to a part of her story, Coventry felt as if he caught a glimpse of the truth" (53). While Gerald believes that Jean's performance of Judith is fueled by her anger towards Sydney, he is not aware that through this carefully selected tactic Jean vehemently advances along her off-center route to success in the cultural center. Unlike the popular heroines of the tableaux vivants, such as Beatrice Cenci, Charlotte Corday, and Fatima Bluebeard, who were sentenced to death for acts of violence against men, Jean, in the role of Judith, decapitates Holofernes without being punished for her crime (Chapman 1996, 32-38, 43). Through this living picture, she manages to do what she is not allowed to in everyday life – murder an abusive male leader without being incarcerated and sentenced to death – which means that the living picture provides her with a space for the presentation of her agenda in the patriarchal home and society.

Through Jean's masterful rendering of biblical Judith, Alcott praises the Hebrew heroine's radicalism.[17] By placing Judith's story at the beginning of Jean's series of tableaux and by modeling Jean's performance of Judith on Rachel's rendering of famous female fighters, the author emphasizes these Jewish women's audacity and progressiveness. In the decade when Alcott vehemently advocates women's rights to work and to vote, the legendary Jewish heroine and the phenomenal French Jewish actress, both of whom are internationally known for their support of women's causes, serve her as paragons. Alcott's portrayal of the first tableau is philo-Semitic, and she respectfully notes the importance of these Jewish women for the future female emancipation.

The second tableau announces Jean's fight for class mobility. In this living picture the governess plays the role of a suffering damsel who dies in the arms of her Cavalier lover, performed by Gerald. The damsel is murdered by the Roundhead soldiers who pursue her lover. The narrator describes the scene as follows: "One arm half covered him [Gerald/the cavalier] with her [Jean's/the damsel's] cloak, the other pillowed his head on the muslin kerchief folded over her bosom, and she looked backwards with such terror in her eyes that more than one chivalrous young spectator longed to hurry to the rescue" (Alcott 2004, 54). Though this tableau casts Jean in the role of a wounded and powerless woman, it does attest the protagonist's cleverness. Aware of the fact that the progressiveness of the first tableau vivant made Gerald notice her hatred towards the oppressive men, Jean plays submissiveness in the

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[17] See Margarita Stocker's Freudian analysis of female characters based on Judith in the 1860s sensation fiction in Britain (1998, 160-165). According to Stocker, in this genre of literature, the reincarnated Judith serves as "the culture's uncanny" (ibid., 165). As Stocker explains, "a representation of the uncanny should, by Freud's account, register both the potency of instinctual drives and the Law (the ego/society, that renders them forbidden). As simultaneously murderess, siren and divinely appointed avenger, Judith registers precisely this combination of the instinctive with the punitive" (ibid).

second one. Here again the real and the counterfeit are conflated: Gerald/the cavalier is not intimidated by the governess/the damsel who dies in his arms, and by playing the role of the Cavalier he descends from the pedestal of his high social rank, which opens a possibility for his marriage proposal to the governess in everyday life. Gerald even confesses to himself that "Many women had smiled on him, but he had remained heart-whole, cool, and careless, quite unconscious of the power which a woman possesses and knows how to use, for the weal or woe of man" (55). The selected quotation reveals the fact that Gerald acknowledges women's agency and that they can succeed in their confrontations with men if they choose the right tactic.

Jean is aware of her influence on Gerald in this tableau, which helps her continue her subversive mission. She congratulates herself as soon as she notices the effects of her acting on Gerald: "She felt his hands tremble, saw the color flash into his cheek, knew that she had touched him at last, and when she rose it was with a sense of triumph which she found it hard to conceal" (55). The tactic of acting as a wounded woman enables the protagonist to move a step closer to the shift in gender power in the novel. This opaque, off-center performance of female fragility helps Jean entangle Gerald in the cobweb of her artfulness, misleading him to think of her as softer and frailer than she really is and enabling her to increase her influence on him and the family relations. Through this tableau Jean again does what she is not allowed to in everyday life – rest and die in the arms of the Cavalier played by her employer. The scene attests the author's approval of the protagonist's (stereotypically) Jewish adaptability in the fight against her condescending employer, which gives this tableau the philo-Semitic touch.

The last tableau announces the realization of Jean's goals. The character that Jean represents, Elizabeth I of England, or Good Queen Bess (1533-1603), was Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's daughter, famous for keeping her country immune to

civil wars that afflicted many kingdoms on the old continent at the time, for resisting "the massive military threat of the Spanish Armada," and for her charismatic persona (Hulse 2003, 3). Rachel performed the role of the Catholic Queen Mary Stuart ("The Drama" 1855, 447), whom Queen Bess executed for high treason, but she did not play the role of Bess, the believer in the freedom of religious worship and the supporter of Protestants. However, Alcott's choice of Queen Bess for Jean's final tableau is not incidental. By playing the role of the admired female ruler, who advocated national unity and religious freedoms, Jean emphasizes the potential of female leadership for the building of a better society. When Lucia asks Jean to play Bess because she is supposedly "the only lady with red hair" (Alcott 2004, 56), though in actuality because Lucia wants to separate her from Gerald, Jean accepts the invitation and secures an ultimate victory.

Unlike the previous living pictures, Jean's tableau of Queen Bess occurs in a secluded corner of the living room, and Gerald, who restlessly decides to look for tardy Jean, is the only witness and spectator of this living picture. As Gerald finds Jean alone and pensive, just as she planned, the narrator informs us that "She was leaning wearily back in the great chair which had served for a throne … Excitement and exertion made her brilliant, the rich dress became her wonderfully, and an air of luxurious indolence changed the meek governess into a charming woman" (57). This description suggests that the real and the counterfeit harmoniously conflate in Jean: her costume and indulgence in luxury make her reminiscent of upper-class women. Jean is so effective in her presentation of Bess that she even appropriates her royal posture. Enchanted by Jean's appearance, Gerald offers his help in case she is concerned about something. This is the moment when the tableau vivant ends, and Gerald and Jean's dialogue leads the plot towards the final resolution.

Jean's answer to Gerald's question reveals her awareness of the radical potential of the conflation of the staged event with everyday life. The protagonist states: "This dress, the borrowed splendor of these jewels, the freedom of this gay evening, the romance of the part you played, all blind you to the reality. For a moment I cease to be a servant, and for a moment you treat me as an equal" (57). Jean is closest to her success in this opaque, off-center performance. She is an eminent English sovereign, more powerful than Gerald himself. Gerald approaches Jean as an equal human being while she is openly under a mask, and not behind it. The blurred boundaries between the counterfeit and the real in this episode are the catalyst for the crucial changes in the family dynamic, and such a conflation of the fabricated scene with everyday life through the instability of the assumed roles is a unique tactic of off-center performativity.

As soon as Jean's brief silent performance of Queen Bess is over, she completely conquers Gerald's heart through an off-stage trick – a fabricated story of her life – thus making him her blind-sighted marionette. Acknowledging the kindness of Gerald's concern for her worries, Jean lies to him about her misery: the son of her previous employer, Lady Sydney, who was madly in love with her, whose advances she rejected, and who wounded her with a knife in a moment of despair and anger, now seeks revenge against Jean and says that only a marriage to an honorable man could save her (60). Jean does not want to be blackmailed by Sydney nor does she want to marry Gerald's brother, Edward, who is also in love with her (61-62). Instead, she accepts Gerald's offer of his friendship and services (62). She wants to make him feel like her gallant protector, and she assumes the posture of a tragedienne when she reflects on her life. In the narrator's words: "She sprang up, clasped her hands over her head, and paced despairingly through the little room, not weeping, but wearing an expression more tragical than tears" (62). Gerald is enchanted by Jean's

effective, off-stage performance of the suffering woman so that "Still feeling as if he had suddenly stepped into a romance, yet finding a keen pleasure in the part assigned him, Coventry threw himself into it with spirit, and heartily did his best to console the poor girl who needed help so much" (62). By making Gerald believe that she is a wrongly accused creature that desperately needs his help, Jean tricks him into the role of the protective cavalier even off the stage. All these final acts are Jean's tactics that, as she hopes, will help her become wealthy and powerful.

Though Queen Bess is a good choice for Jean's victorious tableau and Rachel is a good model for the rebellious Jean, there are crucial differences between Alcott's protagonist and the two famous women. Like Queen Bess and Rachel, Jean does not feel any attachment to men. Instead, she manipulates men in order to achieve economic stability. There is a significant difference between Queen Bess (and Rachel) and Jean. While Queen Bess and Rachel manage to unite conflicting factions owing to their charismas, Jean does not want to keep the members of the Coventry family together. On the contrary, she tricks Gerald and Edward into a fight, which results in Edward's departure from the estate and Jean's unimpeded manipulation of Gerald. Furthermore, the protagonist deceives both Gerald and Sir John by claiming that she is an abandoned daughter of the late Lady Howard, making the gentlemen believe that she is a noblewoman with a miserable fate (49-51). Thus Jean's conquest of Gerald through the last tableau is followed by her final and crucial off-stage performances, loaded with deceit and unscrupulousness. While the first two tableaux have the philo-Semitic tone, the last one, accompanied by Jean and Gerald's conversation and Jean's "war-mongering" in the Coventry family, reveals anti-Semitic undercurrents.

Though Jean succeeds in her radical mission against patriarchy, her constantly seductive and deceitful attitude towards men, particularly towards Gerald, sometimes

comes across as excessively harsh. After Jean makes a deal with Sir John accepting his marriage proposal, she still wants to keep Gerald enthralled just in case her plan with Sir John fails. During Jean and Gerald's conversation, Jean's eyes are "full of a brilliancy that looked like the light of love" (89). Since the reader knows about Jean's prior arrangements with Sir John, the aforesaid description of her eyes reveals her conscious manipulation of Gerald. However, when she realizes that Gerald is completely under her control and that Lucia has no power over him, Jean feels sorry for the unscrupulous behavior towards them (90). Although determined to punish Gerald for his initial remarks about governesses and triumph in her social-climbing endeavors, Jean is aware of her schemes that have helped her move forward towards the realization of her plan. In the narrator's words, "for now that her own safety was so nearly secured, she felt no wish to do mischief, but rather a desire to undo what was already done, and be at peace with all the world" (90). But, despite this brief insight into Jean's almost repentant soul, the protagonist never forgets Gerald's original condescending attitude towards her. Once again, Alcott's language confirms Jean's persistence in teaching Gerald a lesson about women's agency.

However, Alcott later justifies, or at least explains, Jean's craftiness and materialism as results of the cruel social hierarchy. When Edward unexpectedly returns home and gives Jean a check under the condition that she should instantaneously leave the Coventry household, the narrator informs us that "No word accompanied the gift, yet the generosity of it touched her, for Jean Muir had the relics of a once honest nature, and despite her falsehood could still admire nobleness and respect virtue" (96). If Jean is treacherous and avaricious, she is such because of the social context which she stems from – the context which favors privileges and rights based on birth. The governess who performs Jewishness on and off the stage in order to accomplish her agenda relays complex messages about the author's responses to

the Jewish presence on American soil. Alcott praises the (stereotypically) Jewish determination, vitality, and dexterity, but Jean's and the (stereotypically) Jewish treachery and passion for lucre, even though presented as products of the unjust social structure, are still exposed to the scrutiny of the readership to some extent. Jean Muir is thus a complex allo-Semitic character.

Through her careful selection and execution of tactics, Jean accomplishes her personal goals, rising from a governess to an aristocratic matron. As Sir John's wife, she ends up more powerful and wealthier than all the Coventrys around her. She manages to outsmart Gerald, which she emphasizes when she asks him, "Is not the last scene better than the first?" (108). Despite the fact that the Coventrys exercise strategies such as stereotyping, derision, condescension, and allegation in order to keep Jean in the place that society has designed for her, through her tactics Jean manages to manipulate and defeat them on their own terrain. A poor and marginalized woman without noble ancestry becomes the mistress of Sir John's estate, sitting on top of the familial and social hierarchical pyramids. Though she had to fight for her goals through her incognito off-center performances, once she executes her final tactic by marrying Sir John, she wins a place in the cultural center and starts living without a mask.

Like the other sensation novels of the day, *Behind a Mask* registers the contemporary social fears, particularly anti-Semitic and patriarchal fears, and offers a sensational resolution to the depicted problems. If the governess manages to marry well and stay in the family which she has tried to divide, and if she behaves honorably in the future, then the ideological closure invites forgiveness, understanding, and integration. If the protagonist accomplishes her goals and lives happily ever after even though some of her acts are treacherous, then Alcott does not punish this performer of Jewishness. Registering shortcomings in Jean as a performer

of Jewishness, Alcott does not vilify Jewish immigrants; instead, she emphasizes their virtues and skills, inviting a more comprehensive reading of Jewish characters or characters that perform Jewishness.

What then can we conclude about Alcott's presentation of Jean? She certainly accomplishes her goals, but she does that through her marriage to a wealthy aristocrat. Some critics have argued that her marriage to Sir John reinforces the ideological *status quo*, pointing out that the only way in which poor women can ensure their economic stability is by marrying affluent men.[18] I would conclude that by ascribing Rachel's features, roles, and acting style to Jean, Alcott propels the idea of a progressive woman from the margins who delineates her own space of action in the cultural center through a series of artfully designed and executed tactics.[19] Subtitled *A Woman's Power,* the novel illuminates the importance of women's self-awareness in the processes of liberation and emancipation, which Rachel highlighted in her glorious performances and everyday life. By inviting non-Jewish women to emulate their Jewish counterparts' proven behavioral formulas, the novel promotes otherness as a paragon of resistance to backward social standards and a source of cultural progress.[20]

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[18] Butterworth-McDermott (2004) concludes that Jean perpetuates the conventions of the patriarchal society depicted in the novel.

[19] Fetterley (1983), Elliott (1994), Dawson (1997), Schewe (2008), and Hackenberg (2008) have also emphasized that Jean serves as a paragon of resistance to patriarchy.

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Of Monsters and Men:
Absent Mothers and Unnatural Children
in the Gothic 'Family Romance'

Donna Mitchell

Introduction

This article explores how the conventional parent-child relationship is challenged and subsequently subverted in both traditional and modern Gothic literature. Traversing the texts of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), and Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (1976), it traces the genre's formation of absent mothers and unnatural children and their position within the Gothic family unit. Specifically, it analyses how these texts illustrate feminist concerns regarding the objectification of women and gender inequality within the domestic sphere, and in particular, how they present juxtaposing issues associated with motherhood, such as the effects of postnatal trauma and the challenges associated with the woman's inability to fulfil her maternal potential. The repercussions of replacing the natural mother and child with monstrous creations are considered through existing scholarship on the Gothic as well as various aspects of psychoanalysis and feminist theory. These approaches are applied to the four texts, which vary in their historical and socio-cultural contexts, but collectively they demonstrate the various struggles that are encompassed within the woman's familial role. Shelley and Perkins's texts examine the psychological and

emotional effects of motherhood, and consider how postnatal trauma can result in a temporary or permanent maternal absence in the child's life. Additionally, Shelley, Jackson and Rice's texts present versions of children whose very existence challenges the law of nature. In both *Frankenstein* and *The Vampire Chronicles*, the male protagonists become parents to a new creation who inevitably suffers from an existential crisis that leads to a dangerous resentment of its creator and patriarchal bindings. The 'child's' eventual rebellion against the parent illustrates how the literary Gothic offers tales that challenge the power relations of the traditional family unit, and question the stereotypical qualities associated with each gender and their corresponding parental roles. Underwritten by essentialist models of gender, the conventional family is based upon the procreative couple, and so the family is ripe for the Gothic's penchant to subvert fixed definitions and normative gender roles. Given that this literary genre is populated by a profusion of doppelgangers and other supernatural creatures, sexually ambivalent and unnatural characters, it is unsurprising that it also revolves around the unnatural family. However, the struggles of the various creatures within these texts are both relevant and universal because they relate to the consequences of creating life and the ensuing bonds that form within the family.

Man's elimination of the natural (m)other

The figures of absent mothers and unnatural children arise when the traditional family unit is challenged by the subversive nature of the Gothic genre. The mother, who is usually a fundamental presence in their child's life, is suddenly removed, while the newborn creation becomes an anomaly of the natural order. These shifts challenge the reader's assumptions of the characters' identity and present them with a different version of conventional familial roles. One such example is that of the parent-child model in *Frankenstein*, which offers the reader

an alternative maternal figure and illustrates the deadly consequences of eliminating the natural mother. The story can be viewed theoretically as a social depiction of the world of absent mothers that Hélène Cixous discusses in "Sorties". She blames the phallogocentric ideology for this maternal absence because it confirms the female position as the 'Other' in social and linguistic terms, through the dominance of masculinity in the construction and meaning of language in both speech and the written word, which coincides with man's identification with the 'Self'. This is the foundation of her criticism and the reason she appeals for a specifically feminine writing, an *écriture feminine*, in order to inscribe the female body and difference in language and literature, and thus to raise woman from her social position beneath man. Shelley's decision to create a literary world of absent mothers anticipates Cixous's plea for women to: 'write about women and bring women to writing ... through their bodies' (Cixous 1975, 3-14) because it focuses the reader's attention specifically on the female body and difference by means of its reproductive ability and the effects of postnatal trauma. By allowing the reader access to what is essentially a maternal experience, Shelley offers a text that emphasises the importance of the female role within the family unit, which in turn, suggests that she also deserves a social status that is equal to that of her male counterpart.

Victor's study of 'the causes of life' (Shelley 1994, 49) awakens his desire to mimic the female act of childbirth by 'giv[ing] life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man' (ibid., 51). In this, he is likened to Dr. Schreber of Sigmund Freud's *Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia,* who had similar aspirations (Veeder 1986, 91). Schreber, however, believed that in order to achieve this task and be able to bear children, he must be emasculated and transform himself into a woman as he felt that 'already feminine nerves had entered into his body, from which through direct fertilization from God, [new] men ... would issue' (Freud 1903, 2). This creates a blurring of gender

that results in a problematic identity that is neither male nor female as the lone parent must now fulfil both components of their creation's parental unit. This dilemma is epitomized by Victor in *Frankenstein* as he struggles unsuccessfully to nurture or love the Monster after his birth. He speaks of his admiration for the Monster's physical beauty during its assemblage, only to proclaim his repulsion when it is finally brought to life. This illustrates the mother's wariness of her newborn, as discussed by Simone de Beauvoir, who argues against the existence of a maternal 'instinct'. She describes how a young mother can feel threatened by her baby, and that it is her 'attitude ... and her reaction to [her new situation]' (de Beauvoir 1997, 526) that decides whether she will accept or reject her child. While the text offers no explanation for the Monster's ugliness, this development contradicts Victor's previous claim that 'his limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful' (Shelley 1994, 55). Psychoanalytically, this implies, as argued below, that the Monster's transition to the grotesque can be read as Victor's perception of him, which is due to the aforementioned attitude and reaction of the parent to the newborn. The shift in his opinion occurs at the exact moment of the creature's rebirth: when 'the beauty of my dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart' (ibid.), which suggests that Victor may have simply confused the beauty of the dead parts with the beauty of the whole organism (Baldick 1987, 33-5). The overwhelming antipathy that Victor feels for the awakened creation causes him to reject his child; an act which Ellen Moers considers the most powerful and also the most feminine in the novel. She links it to postnatal mythology, namely the natural revulsion against newborn life that encompasses the guilt surrounding birth and its consequences (Moers 1974, 81). Victor's trauma at this afterbirth makes him unable to nurture, or even name his creation, and this henceforth becomes the motive for the Monster's revenge. This gives further evidence of how any action carried out by him deflects back to Victor, whose inability to manage the Monster's terrible deeds after he has

abandoned him is best defined through de Beauvoir's study of the mother's struggle to control the infant and how this is a senseless task as she cannot possibly manage 'a being with whom [she is] not in communication' (de Beauvoir 1997, 531).

In an effort to appease his Monster, Victor promises to create a female companion as both a peace-offering and as a plea to end his rampage. His actions can be viewed as a subversion of the typical 'family romance' since his behaviour in this instance illustrates a parent who wishes to gain freedom from his child. But his inability to complete the task for fear that 'she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight in murder and wretchedness' (Shelley 1994, 160) bespeaks of an attempt to control the female and to ensure that her sexuality is not awakened. His reason for refusing her creation voices the fear of femininity that is a common feature of many Gothic texts. Furthermore, it illustrates Cixous's argument that patriarchy always demands for 'femininity to be associated with death' (Cixous 1975, 13) as both subjects are unrepresentable. Victor's destruction of the female Monster portrays this patriarchal demand because it eradicates any remaining semblance of femininity in the text, which subsequently creates a fixed connection between female identity and death. It can also be argued that Victor's failure to complete the task of her creation is due to his unacknowledged unwillingness to let his Monster go. Arguably, this separation anxiety stems from the death of his natural mother, Caroline, since this severed mother from child, a split that threatens to be repeated by a female companion for the Monster, who would then have to honour his word and abandon Victor. Additionally, this female Monster in her finished form would be a companion for his original Monster, which leads to the possibility of a sexual union between them. The procreation of this new species would be dependent on her ability to carry and deliver their progeny, which highlights the ability, and in this case, the threat of her reproductive organs. These factors monopolise her

embodiment of a monstrous version of motherhood, as well as a simultaneous new version of womanhood over whom society has no power. Victor assumes that her freedom and strength, which are traditionally male qualities, could entail deadly consequences for male supremacy as her lack of dependence on men would suggest a coinciding inability to fit the traditional mould of motherhood. This can be read as a threat to the social structure of the conventional family unit and would define her as an outsider similar to the primitive figure of the [original] 'native' whose corresponding lack of compliance with social order makes him / her 'the enemy of values … the absolute evil' (JanMohamed 1983, 5). Furthermore, man's inability to properly manage her would also mean that her sexuality would be uninhibited and similar to that of the overtly sexual 'native woman', who epitomises wild and animalistic behaviour as 'the native *is* the earthly' (Veeder 1986, 82). This practice of containing femininity is explored in Cixous's theory of 'antilove', which designates the patriarchal suppression of female sexuality by teaching women insecurity and self-hatred from a young age, as well as encouraging them to fear their own sexuality and scorn promiscuous women:

> As soon as they begin to speak ... they can be taught that their territory is black; because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous ... Men have committed the greatest crime against women ... they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies (Cixous 1975, 5).

The creation of this 'Dark Continent' ensures women's inability to achieve a proper understanding or love of their bodies, and promotes the idea that men must always govern and control women. As the female Monster would be a new version of this 'Dark Continent', whose conquest is not guaranteed, Victor must subsequently ensure that she does enter the world of patriarchy. He is successful in doing so until Shelley Jackson resurrects the character in her hypertext, *Patchwork Girl*, which can be read as a female response to this act through the

creation of a sequel to *Frankenstein* that encompasses a contrastingly strong maternal presence.

Patchwork Girl's resurrection of the female monster

Cixous endorses feminine writing as the solution to the predicament of 'antilove' as 'woman has never had *her* turn to speak' (Cixous 1975, 7). She believes that the presence of female works in literature will 'bring the "Other" to life' (ibid., 20) and re-introduce the woman to herself by 'giving her access to her native strength' (ibid., 8). This will see her finally embrace the 'Dark Continent' of her sexuality, but she warns that it can only be done when women heed her advice to 'write your self. Your body must be heard' (ibid.). She emphasises the importance of female writing's responsibility in addressing the taboos associated with woman, and stresses the inclusion of the mother's voice in literature by linking the notion of feminine writing to the image of breast milk, claiming that 'there is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink' (ibid., 9). Jackson fulfils this request through her definitively feminine hypertext, which reawakens the female creation and replaces Victor with Mary Shelley as her maternal creator and lover. It examines the complex familial and romantic relationship between these two women and traces the influence that this loving relationship has on the female Monster during her quest for identity. The blurring of boundaries in the nature of their relationship changes the dynamic of the 'family romance' to one of co-dependency and as such it can be viewed as the antithesis of the broken parent-child bond in *Frankenstein*. The text also traces the origins and personal histories of her various body parts for she believes that 'we are who we were; we are made up of memories' (Jackson 1995). Its format symbolises her self-professed claim that 'I am a mixed metaphor' (Jackson 1995) as it is made up of five main sections that contain a variety of links and lexias, which allow the reader to dissect and re-assemble her as according to their chosen

sequence. Furthermore, the shared history of the text's many women answers Cixous's plea for feminine writing and highlights Jackson's deliberate blurring of identity and gender, thereby leading the reader on an introspective journey that challenges traditional and social constructions of these features.

Shelley's ability to succeed where Victor failed affirms Cixous's notion that female mythology or 'the Dark Continent' is 'neither dark nor unexplorable' (Cixous 1975, 13). In order to highlight the bonds of sisterhood in the text, the female Monster becomes a symbol of women's reclaimed identity and is known simply as 'the Everywoman,' who tells her audience 'I am like you in most ways' (Jackson 1995). This label highlights her anonymity, which is a fairy tale trait that defines a nameless character as 'the Everyman' in order to allow the reader to identify with his struggle and evoke sympathy (Bettelheim 1991, 40). As the story unfolds, the Monster becomes a double of the reader, as she represents the '*Unheimliche'* or repressed monstrous potential, in all beings (Brooks 1982, 217). This doubleness is reinforced by the fact that the narrative consists of a chorus of the female voices that make up the Everywoman's unnatural identity and is a direct contrast with the male narrative voice of *Frankenstein*. By giving a voice to the various parts of her collaged anatomy, Jackson highlights the equality of all women and the bonds of sisterhood: for 'if she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are whole' (Cixous 1975, 17). The fact that the hypertext's story has no fixed sequence gives further proof of the Everywoman's unconventionality and forces the reader to engage with unfamiliar territory by exploring its disordered layout. The subversion of this traditional aspect of the story, as well as the narrative structure and the nature and name of the main heroine, creates a text that examines the ambiguous nature of female identity and sexuality by presenting the reader with a chorus of distinctive, female voices through that of Shelley, Jackson, the Everywoman, and the (mostly) feminine appendages. The deliberate multivocality of these female narratives emphasises how the power of femininity

is revered and celebrated in *Patchwork Girl.* The subject matter of this text is particularly significant when it is compared to the repression of the female figure through the absent mother and the silenced female figure in *Frankenstein.* Shelley's ability to resurrect and nurture the Everywoman portrays a world that firstly confirms the importance of re-examination of the repressed female position, and secondly highlights the need for women to be the instigators of this change. This starkly contrasts the silenced female Monster in the male narrative of *Frankenstein*'s world, and Jackson's story thus creates a new legacy and freedom for the forgotten female Monster of Shelley's text. It also highlights the ability of the child to successfully develop and prosper when it has a happy and healthy relationship with its parent.

Removing the Other mothers from *Frankenstein*

In addition to the elimination of this potential mother from *Frankenstein*, all other mothers are gradually removed from the text. Caroline secures Elizabeth's role as the replacement when she 'endeavour[s] to resign [herself] cheerfully to death' (Shelley 1994, 41), and on her deathbed tells Elizabeth to marry Victor. Her demise promotes Elizabeth to her new position within the Frankenstein family. This replacement role as the family's matriarch signifies the ultimate union of both women's identities – an aspect of the story that is best illustrated in Victor's nightmare on the night of his Monster's birth. This dream sequence indicates a warning of future repercussions as it is riddled with repressive images of death, decay, sexuality and woman (Botting 1996, 102):

> I thought I saw Elizabeth in the bloom of health [but] as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death: her features appeared to change, and I thought I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms (Shelley 1994, 56).

The fusion of the two women in this imagery is an example of how identity within the Gothic genre can often be unstable, whereby one character can be replaced by another, usually the perpetrator of their death. Elizabeth's transitional maternal identity is further demonstrated by how her time before Caroline's death was largely spent on the periphery, patiently waiting for her opportunity to secure an important position within the family unit. Additionally, the ambiguity of her status as Caroline's double is suggested from the very beginning of her time with them when she is affectionately called Victor's 'more-than-sister' and Alphonse's 'more-than-daughter' (ibid., 34). These terms are evidence that she is simply 'the substitute who is always in the ready position' (Rickels 1999, 293), and illustrate how, in the world of *Frankenstein*, one woman must die so that another can self-actualise. Caroline's introduction of Elizabeth to Victor when he was just a young boy encourages the male possessiveness that is persistent throughout the novel; as Victor declares: 'she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift ... mine to protect, love, and cherish ... a possession of my own ... since till death she was to be mine only' (Shelley 1994, 34). In this sense, she is immediately defined as Victor's prized possession and inferior other half, thereby demonstrating Cixous's claim of how society positions women below men. This attitude is also evident in Rice's text where Lestat and Louis's objectify Claudia by dressing her in extravagant clothes and curling her hair so that her doll-like beauty is emphasised and celebrated as a reflection of their family. Elizabeth's relationship with Victor is one of inequality that emphasises her situation as the outsider of his family, and so she takes on a servant-like role. The ambiguity of their familial roles as siblings, 'cousins', and a betrothed couple is a direct result of Elizabeth's adoption, which unavoidably defines part of her identity. According to Jane Gallop, who likens Elizabeth to Freud's Dora, because 'the servant is so much a part of the family that the child's fantasies (the unconscious) do not distinguish 'mother or nurse'; [ultimately,] she must be expelled from the family' (Gallop

1982, 145-7). This suggests that her eviction from the family unit is predetermined as soon as she embraces her servant-like status. Furthermore, her composite identity as a double is two-fold, as she not only serves as Caroline's double, but also as that of the Monster, who later murders her. The conflict that occurs between these two characters is a direct result of Victor's rejection of the female figure in his domestic life, both through his hesitation to marry and recreate naturally with Elizabeth, as well as through the creation of his Monster (Knoepflmacher 1982, 109).

Victor's subconscious preoccupation with the death of the maternal figure is also shown in this nightmare sequence, which symbolises the ultimate sacrifice he must make in exchange for the formation of a female Monster, as Elizabeth's death is a necessary exchange for 'the transformation of a corpse into a living being' (Baldick 1987, 49). Moreover, the dream foreshadows Elizabeth's fate at the hands of the Monster, who kills the new bride, and in doing so fulfils his promise to 'be with [Victor] on [his] wedding-night' (Shelley 1994, 163). This terrible fate is predicted in the nightmare sequence. There is both a necrophilic and Oedipal significance to this event, as Victor only embraces her after she has transformed into his mother's corpse. It can be considered a foreshadowing of their eventual union when Victor later holds her corpse after she has been murdered by the Monster. These two occasions are the only times that the couple unite due to the shadow of death that follows the potential mother, Elizabeth, throughout the story. She can even be defined as the catalyst for absent mothers in the text. As a carrier of death, she is firstly responsible for the death of her own birth mother, who according to the plot-change in the 1831 version of the novel, dies of blood poisoning from residual placenta. This tragedy mirrors Shelley's own tragic birth that cost Mary Wollstonecraft her life, and also portrays the common belief in many primitive societies that the placenta is the baby's twin, and so must be cared for until it has fully decayed as 'every baby is shadowed at

birth by a dead double' (Rickels 1999, 282). Secondly, Elizabeth can also claim responsibility for the death of her adoptive mother and Victor's birth mother, Caroline, who catches her scarlet fever when nursing her back to health. The nature of this disease is especially significant because it represents Elizabeth's ability not only to contaminate and eliminate her sexual rival, but also to take over her role afterwards (Veeder 1986, 114). Her inadvertent rampage continues with the alternative mother figure of the nanny, Justine, whose death sentence is secured unintentionally by Elizabeth's testimony, as she is subsequently charged with William's death, for which Elizabeth fruitlessly claims responsibility. This destruction of maternal figures is repeated once more when the Monster murders Elizabeth, and in doing so, removes the last surviving Frankenstein woman and prospective mother from the text. In the same fashion that Elizabeth kills a maternal figure only to become her replacement, the Monster, in turn, becomes Elizabeth's replacement double. The blurring of their characters has already been anticipated by Elizabeth's earlier self-accusation in her insistence, on three occasions, of her responsibility for young William's death because she gifted him with the locket that attracted the attention of the Monster, who then murdered him (ibid., 168). The mother's absence extends beyond the Frankenstein household, and is witnessed by the Monster during his time in the wilderness. Here, he encounters the De Lacey family, and notes the sombre atmosphere that surrounds their home, describing them as a 'good' but 'unhappy' family unit that shares an unspoken sorrow, which seems to be the mourning of their mother. Their household is especially significant as it represents the typical home of the novel that has a father-oriented family whose members never mention the absent parent (ibid., 158).

The consequence of a deficient substitute for the mother figure is examined simultaneously within the concept of the sibling rivalry that is portrayed by the Monster's eventual jealousy of Victor's blood relatives. Bruno Bettelheim

discusses how special attention given to one child simultaneously insults and belittles another excluded child, as the fear of comparisons and subsequent inability to win the parents' love inflames sibling rivalry (Bettelheim 1991, 40), and in the instance of *Frankenstein*, prompts the 'excluded child' to murder his creator's younger brother, William. This character is especially important because he was inspired by Shelley's second deceased child, who was one of three Williams in her life. His name and appearance, as described in the novel, are identical to the portrayal of her late, infant son (Knoepflmacher 1982, 93). Her personal connection to him is similar to Victor's, who is portrayed as a parental figure to him more so than as a sibling. As the locket that William wears around his neck symbolizes Victor's affection and pride in his natural kinship with the young boy, so the Monster considers him to be his sibling rival in terms of Victor's parental love and acceptance. His actions are also incited by his jealousy of William's experience of the maternal love and affection that has been denied to him by Victor, and acknowledges that he will be 'forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow' (Shelley 1994, 138). The Monster can be defined in psychoanalytical terms as a projection of Victor's unconscious urges, which would then suggest that the murders of Elizabeth, William, and Justine are enactments of sibling rivalry (Baldick 1987, 47). Bettelheim expands his argument on this matter by stating that while all young children are occasionally jealous of their siblings, often this develops further into a resentment of their parents for the privileges they enjoy as adults (Bettelheim 1991, 9). This parental jealousy is illustrated in *Frankenstein* by the Monster's bitterness at his father's romantic relationship with Elizabeth, as well as his other familial bonds. It is also the predominant factor in the downfall of the family unit in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles,* which mimics the world of *Frankenstein* through the existence of an absent mother figure, as well as its creation of an unnatural child in the form of Claudia. Once again, the rebirth of an unnatural creature occurs as a

result of the male desire to create new life. And once again, poor relations and resentment between the parent and child lead to the destruction of the family unit and to the pursuit of vengeance for disturbing the natural order of life and death.

Rice's eternal child

Parental jealousy is the core issue of Claudia's dysfunctional relationship with her father figures in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Claudia represents the figure of the eternal child as her adult psyche is trapped forever within the body of a young girl, which leads to an inevitable resentment of her parents' adult form. Her character is inspired by the author's deceased five-year-old daughter, Michele, who died of leukaemia the year before Rice wrote the first novel in the series. She reincarnates Michele through the character of Claudia, a six-year-old orphan that enters the novel as one of Louis's victims and is given immortality by Lestat, who wishes to create a family unit of his own. This act echoes that of Victor in Shelley's text as a male character has once again created his own unnatural progeny without a female input. As parents to Claudia, Louis and Lestat do not fulfil the traditional, separate maternal and paternal roles; instead they make up various parts of the parental unit. This results in a dual persona of both mother and father figures. Together, they outline the mother's dual aspect and can be defined through the Freudian and Kleinian principle of splitting and the ancient Roman myth of the 'Janus face' as theoretically developed by Bettelheim, in which the mother is divided into the role of the good (and usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother. Despite the mother's role as the all-giving protector, she can also become the cruel stepmother if she denies the child's wishes (Bettelheim 1991, 67). In Rice's text, the wicked stepmother is represented by Lestat, who acts as the 'Janus face' of the good mother, who is represented by Louis. This clear division reassures the child that the monstrous impostor is an independent entity to the kind-hearted, original mother (Warner 1995, 212); and correspondingly in

Rice's text, such a division allows Claudia to separate and discern her parental figures in order to decide which one will make her best possible ally.

The Gothic 'family romance'

This desire to gain emancipation from Lestat and Louis is a natural stage of Claudia's childhood development and exemplifies Freud's notion of 'the neurotic's family romance', which is a fantasy system that occurs during the 'liberation of an individual, as [they] grow up, from the authority of [their] parents' (Freud 1909, 237). This phase is essential for the child's self-awareness and social skills, but inevitably creates tension within the family unit. Nonetheless, Freud dismisses this side-effect as a necessary conclusion since 'the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations' (ibid.). This process begins at a young age when the child sees the parents as their 'only authority and the source of all belief' (ibid.), whom they desperately wish to emulate. However, as their intellect develops, the child compares their own parents to others, thus destroying their former belief of the parents' exclusivity and causing the child to become quite critical of them. This development occurs in unison with the child's Oedipal experience, thus making sexual rivalry an added factor to the dilemma; for example, the 'boy is far more inclined to feel hostile impulses towards his father than towards his mother and has a far more intense desire to get free from him than from her' (ibid., 238). Their fantasised desire to replace the real father with themselves as a superior model is a direct consequence of the child's nostalgia for 'the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women' (ibid., 240-1). The 'family romance' occurs twice in Claudia's development: on the first occasion, she casts Louis in the maternal role and focuses her energy on replacing Lestat as the dominant head of the family unit by freeing herself and Louis from his grasp, and on the second

occasion, she casts Madeline, the doll-maker, as her new mother figure and wishes to replace Louis's parental role by leaving him to start a new life with Madeline as her parent and protector. This is a traditional depiction of the family romance to the extent that the wish for freedom comes from the child's natural desire to gain independence from parental figures, and it occurs only when Claudia has confidence in her survival without them. This emphasises the importance of self-reliance in relation to the child's progression towards adolescence and a functional adult life, which in turn, highlights how the reverse 'family romance' of *Frankenstein* has such a traumatic effect on the Monster. In this case, the parent's choice to separate himself from his child causes so much pain partly because it occurs at such an early stage when the Monster, as the newborn, is still reliant on Victor's nurture and care. Although the Monster can be defined as an unnatural creature, his hatred towards Victor for committing this crime of nature is a very human reaction, and is one that stresses the importance of healthy relations within the 'family romance' for the continuing development of the parent-child bond after separation has taken place.

Claudia's desire for freedom comes from an awareness of her powerless position within the family, which is her greatest concern and proves to be a major catalyst for her steady descent into madness. Her fathers' joint desire to control and condition her according to their own specifications epitomises the female's struggle for autonomy within a domain of male supremacy. The innocent disguise of her youthful appearance masks the inner turmoil of her adult mind, and lulls them into a false sense of security as she plots a way to gain back her freedom and seek vengeance for their crimes. Her helpless situation mirrors the anonymous narrator's condition in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), who also manages to hide her resentment towards the dominant patriarch in her life, while silently deciding on how she will govern her own fate. Gilman's text traces a young woman's mental deterioration caused by postpartum depression,

when her physician husband, John, recommends the rest cure that proves pernicious for her psychological condition. This simultaneously illustrates both his lack of knowledge with regard to postnatal trauma and his ability to govern her treatment regardless. The power relations of the family unit within this text mirror that of Rice's as in both instances the male characters govern the fate of the female characters and infantilise them despite their adult status.

A magic doll

Claudia's exact definition within the female spectrum is quite ambiguous. Although her mind continues to develop, her body remains that of an eternal child. Her failure to gain a new physical identity over time anticipates her inevitable demise considering, as Bettelheim points out, 'only if the maiden grows into a woman, can life go on' (Bettelheim 1991, 234). Claudia can be viewed as a personification of this statement as her inability to reproduce or even evolve into adulthood proves to be her downfall. She becomes increasingly despondent about her physical entrapment and wishes to encompass a woman's form. However, her later attempt to literally attach a woman's body to her decapitated head leads to her death, as discussed in further detail below. The disconnection between her behaviour and her childlike appearance becomes clear from a very early stage of her life, and is immediately tracked by Louis. Even as a new-born vampire, he notes her newly sensual beauty and how 'her eyes were a woman's eyes, I could see it already' (Rice 1976, 104). He uses the contrasting descriptions of her child's mouth and porcelain skin with vampire eyes, to portray the complex disorder of her composition. As Louis's obsession with her grows, he becomes fixated on 'how she moved towards womanhood' (ibid., 112) within a child-like shell so innocent in appearance. She is compared to a doll incessantly throughout the text, and this association, Rice admits, was intentional as it emphasised the paradoxical blend of 'innocence and beauty with a sinister quality' (Ramsland

1995, 107) which Claudia conveys. Recalling her continuous development over the years, Louis claims that soon 'her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes' (Rice 1976, 113). He confesses his discovery to Lestat, telling him that 'she's not a child any longer ... I don't know what it is. She's a woman' (116-17). As Claudia's anger reaches its pinnacle, she finally reveals an awareness of her terrible fate to have gained 'immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form' (283). Despite Louis's understanding of her inner struggle, she condemns him for his ignorance of the morbid conclusion, asking him: 'did you think I'd be your daughter forever? Are you the father of fools, the fool of fathers?' (225). His awareness of the disharmony between her mental state and outer appearance causes him to feel helpless about her situation, and so he attempts to ease the pain of it by simply spoiling her like a young child. Furthermore, his incapacity to address the problem adds to Claudia's mounting frustration, and encourages her to begin her plans for revenge. Her ability to do so without any hint of remorse illustrates how she has now completely departed from her previous innocent and pure youth; it also marks the maturation of her state of mind. Louis and Lestat's participation in the downfall of Claudia's mental health mirrors that of John's in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. As already mentioned, the men in both texts have complete power over the women's wellbeing and so they act as the main (albeit, unintentional) contributing factor to their descent into madness. The events of both tales reflect the power that men once had over the financial and psychological states of female family members, and subsequently make a strong connection between a silenced female voice and the issue of female madness.

Claudia's entrapment within an infantile physique is evident in her existence as a 'white, porcelain-like doll' (Ramsland 1995, 107), whose parents dress her only in 'pastel ribbons over puff-sleeved white dresses, tiny bonnets, and lace gloves ... making her look like a doll' (ibid., 71). As Rice's vampires are

physically incapable of becoming aroused or engaging in intercourse, Lestat and Louis do not have a sexual identity and so cannot be attracted to Claudia. Therefore, this practice serves only to perpetuate the façade of her role as the child within their 'perfect' family unit. Many years after her death, and despite her resistance to the charade, Lestat still upholds this false version of her legacy as he continues to think of her as 'a perfect little doll, captured immutably in [all] her childhood glory' (Rice 1976, 108). Her imprisonment is symbolised by the many dolls that Louis and Lestat give to her throughout her immortal life. While she initially loves them as a child, she soon becomes fascinated with destroying them as she sees them to be a symbol of her own social misrepresentation, claiming that 'yes, I resemble her baby dolls ... Is that what you still think I am?' (224). In an act that portrays her frustration with her own immature body and also foreshadows her own horrendous annihilation, she crushes a porcelain lady doll in front of Louis to illustrate her discontent (225). This act continues to haunt him afterwards, and he raises the issue later when he asks Madeline, the doll-maker: '[is that] what you think her to be, a doll?' (289).

Claudia's revenge

Claudia spends her immortal life mourning, not only the loss of her mortality, but also the love of her biological mother, as demonstrated by her hunting patterns. Louis reveals that 'she did not kill indiscriminately', but 'seemed [rather] obsessed with women and children' (115). Her decision to exclusively hunt mothers and daughters illustrates her fixation and jealousy of the bond between these women, who represent an intimate experience that she has been and always will be denied due to her immortal child-like form. Similarly, the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* becomes fascinated with the female figures that she sees 'creeping all around the garden' (Gilman 1997, 12), and quietly cherishing her freedom within the natural world, which makes her own entrapment even more

unbearable. Their shared obsession of these particular female figures suggests that they specifically seek out women through whom they wish to live vicariously because they embody the missing elements of maternal love and freedom in their lives. They search for external projections of themselves when their conditions worsen, as illustrated by Claudia's compulsive destruction of doll-doubles, who are an exact 'replica of me, [and] always wear a duplicate of my newest dress' (Rice 1988, 214). Likewise, in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator becomes increasingly fascinated with the imaginary woman of the wallpaper, who 'crawls around fast ... takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard' so as to 'shake the pattern' (Gilman 1997, 12-3). From a certain perspective, both characters gain a measure of freedom from their imprisonment by the end of the texts; Claudia succeeds in gaining her independence from Lestat when she poisons him and slits his throat, claiming that 'he deserved to die ... so we could be free' (Rice 1976, 154). Her ability to overturn the infantilisation of her situation illustrates how she has evolved into her role as avenger for her captivity. Likewise, Gilman's narrator defeats John by freeing herself of his mental restraints, 'in spite of [him]', and by pulling off 'most of the paper, so you can't put me back!' (Gilman 1997, 15). While her defiant actions are more subdued than Claudia's, they are still a significant rebellion against the constraints of male supremacy within her marriage. These strategies and events represent the determination of their struggle, as both women superficially adjust their behaviour to meet the expectations of their male counterparts while also hiding certain habits that would be met with disapproval. Their success in finally dismissing the feminine trait of passivity and embracing the 'masculine' attribute of action by seeking vengeance gives further evidence of the shared gender ambiguity of these characters by the end of their stories.

Lestat, Louis, and the reader of *The Vampire Chronicles* are all led to believe that Claudia meets her death after a short trial in the Thèâtre des

Vampires, where the coven find her guilty of the ultimate vampire crime: the attempted murder of her creator. Her crimes against Lestat see them condemn her to the final death. However, in a much later text of *The Vampire Chronicles*, the vampire Armand confesses his participation in the true events of her demise, which proves to be a morbid reversal of the birth of the Monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as well as the Everywoman in Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. Armand recounts how Claudia's body had been disassembled in death as she had begged him to relieve her of her childish anatomy. He tells how, on her request, he decapitated her so as to re-attach her head to the body of an adult vampire and give her the form that she had always desired but instead created 'a writhing jerking catastrophe' that was 'a botched reassemblage of the angelic child she had [once] been' (Rice 1998, 271). Unable to reverse the damage and finally succumbing to his suppressed jealousy of Lestat and Louis's love for her, he leaves this spoilt version of Claudia out into the sunlight to be destroyed. This suggests that his attempt to move Claudia's evolution towards a stage of maturity was always doomed to fail as the doll-like figure can only exist in youthful and passive terms. Additionally, it portrays the child's inability to successfully endure crucial developmental stages without the input of a devoted parent who wishes for the child to eventually gain independence from them.

Conclusion

The destruction of the incomplete female Monster in *Frankenstein,* and of Claudia's dismembered body in *The Vampire Chronicles,* as well as the imprisonment of the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, illustrate the various measures taken by representatives of the patriarchal order to maintain control of the female figure in terms of her physical and sexual identity. However, it is the fictional figure of Mary Shelley in *Patchwork Girl* who reclaims this identity firstly by her reconstruction of the female Monster and secondly by their ensuing

relationship. The lack of animosity in their bond in comparison to those found in Rice and Shelley's texts shows how it is possible for the alternative family unit to function once the demands of each role are understood and fulfilled, and power relations evolve in response to the child's development in order to prevent infantilisation. Victor's previous pursuit to be the sole progenitor blurs the division that separates the sexes, which illustrates the deadly cost of replacing the natural mother with a defective substitute who fails to fulfil the responsibilities of either the mother or father figures. As it is mainly the female characters who suffer the fatal consequences of this mistake, these texts highlight the social concept that considers motherhood to be the woman's primary function within the domestic sphere. Victor's hesitation to marry Elizabeth and father her children removes her potential to fulfil a maternal role within the text. In this sense, her character mirrors Claudia because the reproductive fates of both women are governed by men who, despite their love, objectify them and fail to regard them as equals. This practice inevitably leads to their (inadvertent) mistreatment and a male disruption to the natural order that secures the death of the potential mother: Elizabeth dies at the hands of Victor's creation on the very night that may result in her pregnancy, and Claudia dies during an attempt to attach herself to a female form that may give her the strength to create the vampire progeny that her original childlike state could not. The terrible events that follow their elimination emphasise the importance of the female position to the proper maintenance and balance of both the domestic and social worlds within the texts. While Elizabeth and Claudia represent women who have been denied their maternal prospects, Victor and the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* portray the antithetical difficulties of the female condition with the domestic sphere. Their characters portray the emotional and psychological strain of the female experience of postnatal trauma and how it can have a coinciding effect on the parent-child bond that can result in the mother's physical or psychological absence from the child.

Collectively, the texts that are discussed in this article illustrate how the aforementioned feminist issues of objectification and gender inequality within the domestic sphere, as well as the struggles surrounding the notion of motherhood, are and have always have been a persistent feature of the female condition for many women regardless of their socio-cultural context.

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Spectacles of Otherness, Sexuality, and Space in

Guillermo Reyes's *Madre and I: A Memoir of Our Immigrant Lives*

Ed Chamberlain

In the wake of the 1973 Pinochet coup in the nation of Chile, thousands of Chilean people migrated to the United States of America. Since that time, critics such as Rody Oñate and Thomas Wright have studied this phenomenon and have suggested that these migrants wanted freedom from the threat of persecution, militarism, and violence in their home country (1998, x). This is not to say that these migrants' travels to the U.S. should be considered a simple, straightforward means of attaining a better life experience, but rather scholars interpret this mass migration and its results as reflecting a meaningful set of desires and urgency. To theorize these exiles' motives, roles, and triumphs in the U.S., researchers have turned to studying the art, testimonies, and writings of Chilean migrants; however, there is a noteworthy segment of this migration which still mostly remains undertheorized. This understudied enclave consists of Chilean people that have migrated to the U.S. and self-identify themselves as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). In particular, the gay migrant writer Guillermo Reyes eloquently speaks to the aforesaid issues in his recent memoir *Madre and I: A Memoir of Our Immigrant Lives*, which primarily describes his settling into the U.S. with his mother María in

the 1970s and 80s. Published in 2010, his revealing memoir offers a very insightful and sophisticated commentary on the challenges that Chilean migrant people face in their journeys to and through the U.S. Furthermore, while Reyes's text addresses many of the same issues that other exile narratives discuss, his work goes further by focusing intensely on the interplay and social implications of singular bodies and landscapes in both the cultures of Chile and the U.S.

To gain a more refined understanding of Reyes's memoir and its implications, this article adopts an integrative approach and builds on the criticism of researchers that offer critiques of the social and cultural dynamics that have led to the forms of othering that constitute the experience of Reyes and other LGBTQ migrants. In particular, this article builds on the groundbreaking work of social critics that have examined the ways in which daily experience is influenced by spatial dynamics and the attendant sentiments of those milieus. That is to say, my research is informed by the insights of scholars that have examined the lived experience of intersectionality and the roles that spectacular phenomena play in shaping the lives of American and Chilean people. The research of luminaries, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Guy Debord, provide a foundation for explicating the interlocking experiences and spectacular forces that create the social challenges and triumphs that are depicted in Reyes's memoir *Madre and I.* These perspectives provide a means to speak to the ways that queer migrants feel and imagine the constraining social dynamics of Chile and the United States, which frequently lead to the othering of unconventional bodies and sexualities. In writing about his ethnicity, hirsute body, and sexuality, Reyes reveals the manner in which some public spectacles and intersecting systems of oppression lead to a pernicious social menace and oppression; however, rather than accepting these conditions with passivity, Reyes's text utilizes the social dynamics of the spectacle as a means of challenging and subverting the ingrained expectations and

ideals connected with these spaces. By showing the heightened scrutiny and the uncomfortable self-consciousness created by the spectacle, Reyes's narrative asserts that spectacles create potentials for danger and pleasure that urge us to think more carefully about the challenges and ethics of human migration, social behavior, and writing.

Configuring the critical lens

A critical analysis of Reyes's memoir *Madre and I* requires readers to examine how the phenomena of human migration and self-identifying oneself can be conceptualized in terms of spectacular relations that are shaped by myriad intertwining elements, including the inculcated attitudes of spaces, which include classism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia. To theorize these elements, this article considers the spectacular from several angles, including how the spectacular elements of Reyes's memoir can be understood in terms of commodification and theatricality in particular. In terms of the former, the French theorist Guy Debord offers one of the most focused and substantive studies in his influential monograph *The Society of the Spectacle*, which provides a productive starting point for analyzing Reyes's depicted connections between embodiment, the human image, and social power. While Debord speaks of the spectacle in several ways over the course of his work, he mainly explicates the spectacle as being based in a "social relation" that has ties to myriad sectors of human experience within the age of the mass media and capitalist production (1967, 4-11). Yet this relation is not without problems as he cautions that the spectacle is a set of relations that can lead to particular privileges and, as he says, "subjugation" (16). For example, he contends: "In the spectacle, one part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it" (29). Such superiority, he suggests, is enabled by the spectacle, whereby we see "all human life, namely social life as

mere appearance" (11). In effect, our world's current economic and social system is predicated on relations of appearance, in which one segment of the society gains a kind of superiority through their appearances.[21] While this superior status could be conceptualized in several ways, his theoretical perspective provides a way of explaining the superior status that often is accorded to "the beautiful" and "the captivating" that are showcased by profit-driven forms of mass media, such as Hollywood film; but these particular ideals of beauty or normality are also dependent on and dynamically negotiated in relation to a given audience. While Reyes is at times shown as being a member of his favorite films' audiences, he himself enjoys an audience: his memoir's readers and those spectators, such as his cousins, who surround his textual persona within the story's plot (2010, 66). I argue that while these moments in the memoir where Reyes himself becomes an object of public scrutiny and the dramatic performances discussed in his memoir are both featured as being spectacular in nature, such spectacles may involve clashing outcomes and unlike processes such as idealization or denigration.

By building on Debord's thought, I contend that an exclusive notion of beautiful embodiment within the mass media in the U.S. has a powerful effect on Reyes himself, who struggles to come to terms with the disconnect between his own so-called "ugly body" (107) and that of "beauty" (7), which is exemplified in the men, movies, and women that he adores throughout his memoir. As Reyes says, "Those Hollywood triple features had shaped us ... we were the ones specifically settled in the belly of the Hollywood beast, albeit without the glamour" (82). Here, his words suggest a self-reproach seeing that he cannot meet the impossibly high standards of

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[21] Since Debord at times conceptualizes his perspectives in abstract ways, it is possible to apply his work in various contexts. In the case of my article, I extend his theory in a somewhat unconventional way, applying his work to literary contexts. My interpretation of Debord's work does not speak to all of his approaches; rather, his commentary has provided a source of inspiration for this article.

physical embodiment and aesthetics promulgated by mass media spectacles. Yet these events, I argue, inspire him to take ownership over the spectacle. While Reyes cannot undo or challenge all mass mediated spectacular forms, nor the social relations they enfold, he is able to manipulate the spectacular for his own interests and as a means for self-expression in his work as a playwright and memoirist. In the process, Reyes works towards creating a more ethical, inclusive, and hopeful vision of twentieth-century queer migrant life.

Utilizing the work of the cultural critic Daphne A. Brooks, who has analyzed the spectacular elements of black popular performance culture (2006, 32), we can discern some of the hope Reyes finds in spectacle. In her study, Brooks shows how the spectacle of theater performance can be understood as a "revisionist" and "transformative" artistic practice that can challenge some ingrained social structures such as hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy (183). Like Brooks, Reyes envisions the spectacle as a tool that can be employed to advance the dialogue on the challenges and injustices that people of color experience. That is to say, through spectacle, artists and performers can garner the public's attention about the difficult realities that people of color frequently face, and thus use the spectacle as a means to challenge dominant social relations and mainstream representations that consign people of color to otherness. Seen in this light, Reyes moves beyond the negativity that Debord associates with the spectacle in his endeavor to create more positive social possibilities for migrants and other marginalized people.

While Reyes's text implies that there are positive and rewarding results that may come from engaging in the creation of spectacle, his text, as explored in more detail below, remains attentive to the fact that spectacles also can commodify, sexually objectify, and produce the constructs of ethnic and sexual otherness. Not unique to Reyes's text, this derisive representation of migrants' bodies and

unconventional sexualities in the news media is often framed by spectacle, as exemplified by the 1999 media firestorm surrounding the young Cuban Elián González's migration to the U.S. as well as the public "outing" of the British pop singer George Michael in 1998. In these events, images of González and Michael were mediated repeatedly, creating a dramatic, sensationalized display of their bodies. Readers of Reyes's text may observe a similar kind of spectacularization of ethnic and sexual otherness, where Reyes shows how his ethnicity and sexuality intersect in an acutely felt public scrutiny.

Given that Reyes's work is concerned with the adverse effects of discrimination that pertain to both queer and migrant identities, this article makes use of the critical frameworks that are used to elucidate the human experiences of intersectionality, which have been theorized by critics such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993), Patricia Hill Collins (1998) and Candice M. Jenkins (2007), among others. In these studies, the authors provide a means to understanding what Jenkins calls "doubled vulnerability," which comes about as two forms of identity, such as gender identity and ethnic identity, are devalued or targeted by a group or individual that supposedly holds greater privilege (2007, 16). Although Crenshaw, Collins, and Jenkins address the intersectionality of women of color, we can nonetheless apply their critical frameworks in order to make sense of Reyes's case. Through considering the ways that Reyes's ethnicity and sexuality interlock in the circumstances of the public spectacle and related contexts, we can ascertain the social implications of Reyes's memoir. By considering how ethnocentrism, homophobia, and racism collude, we gain a more accurate portrait of the socio-political forces that are at work within the contexts of Reyes's memoir and those of other migrants that similarly struggle with oppression in Chile and the U.S. For example, while

explaining the constraining social pressures that he experiences upon arriving in the U.S. with his mother, Reyes reflects on these moments by saying:

> My mother bought the American Dream in full but later realized, with her limited English yet boundless energy, that her accomplishments in the consumerist, competitive American tradition would be "limited" to being a good mother ... I was her only son and inherited her yearning to have it all ... I can only take on so many issues, as the heir of this much energy, drive, and dysfunction, and can barely work through the limitations of my own character, especially the other black mark upon my character aside from my illegitimacy, which is my queerness, a source of pride for some, but a burden nonetheless that requires the clearing of yet another set of hurdles, not to mention the clearing of throats among more conservative observers – bastard, queer, foreign. Three strikes and you're out (2010, 8-9).

Reyes's reflection illustrates the intersecting demands of a new cultural landscape that are near impossible for queer migrants like him to meet. In particular, the American ideals of heterosexual coupling and English language acquisition greatly limit his options, forcing him to alter his daily course of action, including his self-presentation. To subvert these frustrations, readers see Reyes find enjoyment in the escapism and spectacle of movies, which provide an alternative experience where his imagination can run wild. In particular, Reyes explains that when he was young, he would re-imagine events in his own way, and he explains this by narrating a moment between him and his mother. He writes, "'*Te armas toda una película,*' my mother once told me about what I did with a simple tale. I regurgitated it back as a movie with big stars, a large budget and Cinemascope. I would keep up strange tales into my teens" (21).[22] This conjuring of the spectacular allows him to construct a more self-serving story that is conducive to his own interests and exists outside of the realm of reality that is molded by intersectional forces that he cannot control himself.

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[22] The phrase of Reyes's mother translates as "You make everything into a movie" (21).

To explicate these intersectional forces implicit in Reyes's text, we must recognize the polysemy that is bound up with these provisional identity categories. For example, in using the term "queer," I remain mindful of its multiplicity of meanings. I utilize the term "queer" as a means of referring to the experiences of bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender, and other unconventional sexualities. In this context, I follow the lead of other researchers that envision the term queer as an umbrella term that speaks to a set of similar circumstances that millions of people face daily in this predominantly cisgender and heterocentric world. However, I remain attentive of the fact that this terminology also can present some drawbacks since at times it can be viewed as erasing the particularity of humanity's diversity. Certainly, a similar kind of multiplicity can be located within the concepts of ethnicity and race, yet the feelings, history, and politics that give shape to these ideas tend to be subjective which thus requires researchers to avoid universalisms. Keeping this dynamic in mind is necessary for studying Reyes's memoir because while my study can speak to some of the aforesaid multiplicity, it cannot address all of the challenges that migrants face, nor can it account for the array of experiences that Reyes and his mother encounter. Nevertheless, readers observe that Reyes's narrative delivers a perceptive commentary on the physical hardships and inner anxieties caused by intersecting forms of discrimination as well as a history of the unjust circumstances that queer migrants face both in their country of origin and after arriving in the United States.

Reyes's work expounds on the wearisome circumstances that he encounters in several natural and human-made spaces that are shown to be constraining, uncongenial, and traumatic. These inhospitable spaces, including his private home in Chile, schools, and public beaches rigorously demand the migrant – Reyes – to conform to several dominant cultural ideals, which include beauty, fair skin, heterosexuality, and masculinity. As his memoir shows, these spaces and their

inhabitants directly and obliquely discipline his queer migrant body. This disciplining takes place because the dominant cultures of Chile and the U.S. largely regard Reyes's body, desires, and behavior as being "other." He is viewed by those around him as being effeminate, overly hirsute, racially indistinct, and a "bastard" since he was conceived out of wedlock (Reyes 2010, 18). In showcasing his body as such, Reyes's text effectively transforms his body into a site that invites reflection whereby readers are urged to examine the ways in which living in a cultural landscape obsessed with American ideals can entail some nettlesome social repercussions.

A youth's experience with alterity

Reyes's memoir leads his readers to understand his unique position of otherness by beginning with the challenges that he experiences as a youth in both Chile and the United States. To understand how Reyes lives in fear of social rejection in the U.S., it is necessary to recognize how the social stigmatization of "queer others" starts at an early age in Chile. When Reyes is approximately five years old and living in Chile with his family, he experiences two events that show him how Chilean culture equates effeminate behavior and homosexuality with wrongdoing. At this early age, Reyes expresses a desire for a doll that he admires when his family goes to the town's feria, which is a community fair. However, when he asks for the doll, his family members express shock and concern, thus casting him as the family's other. In this social relation, his family has become an audience and jury that discipline him through stigma and shame. Due to Reyes's young age, he had never thought of the play with dolls as inappropriate behavior for a boy like himself. When he pouts and cries for the doll, his grandmother gives in, purchasing it for him. After he wakes up from his nap and receives the doll, she tells him, "If boys make fun of you, just don't come crying to me" (13). His grandmother, who occupies a position of authority in

the family bespeaks how the Chilean majority culture views boys who play with dolls as queer or improper. In this moment, the pressures of patriarchal ideology cause Reyes to experience vulnerability because he is not performing the cultural ideal of Chilean manhood effectively – despite the fact that he is only a child. Even so, while Reyes does not respond to his grandmother's comment, he does react with happiness upon receiving the toy: "Overjoyed, I hugged the doll lovingly, then held it in my arms, rocked her, and turned her sideways to burp her and calm her down, and prevent her from crying" (13). Rather than implying wrongdoing, we may read Reyes's text as showing that the young boy cares for the doll in the way that a parent cares for a child. Interestingly, this moment shows the young Reyes as fulfilling the role of the caring, ethical parent that offers unconditional acceptance and love, which are two key feelings that many queer youth often long for in their families and social circle.

   After reflecting upon this childhood experience, the adult Reyes explains how his national experience as a Chilean person intersects with ideals of gender. He connects the significance of the doll to a larger national debate on governmental authority. In linking these two, readers see that the people's dislike of deviations from political and gender ideology create vulnerabilities and strife that threaten to undermine the well-being of the family and nation. Now in his adulthood, Reyes reflects on these moments in the following:

> My attempt to play with a doll, even just one, affronted the sensibilities of my family, and yet for some members of it, my grandfather in particular, the subsequent blitzkrieg of our own armed forces against alleged enemies of the state became a glorious act, a restoration of manhood, patriotism and stability in our lives. I was too young to have understood the alarm and shock to a boy's enthusiasm for a doll, but I will have an entire lifetime ahead to calculate my manhood in the wake of the knowledge I began to absorb at the time. Something,

including military resistance, was in the air, constantly demanding rigid conformity and loyalty" (14-15).

In this national conflict, Reyes sees the forces of Chilean masculinity warring to gain control. In much the same way, Reyes's family wants to control Reyes's gender performance and create the same kind of "conformity and loyalty" to the macho Chilean ideals. By the same token, Reyes's decision to pair this doll incident with the blitzkrieg suggests that there is potential for an attack – that if he does not maintain the ideals of his family and nation, then he could suffer a similarly destructive end. To a surprising extent, his family and home space, which people typically understand as being a safe sanctuary, actually presents the threat of discrimination and shaming. Confessing rather than hiding past childhood shame, Reyes uses it to inform his readers about the great need to respect the world's diversity of sexualities.

After Reyes's mother María migrates to the United States from Chile, she decides to bring her son for the sake of providing a better life and preventing him from being "an orphan" (78). This mother-son relationship is vital for both parent and child, especially since Reyes's father (who is María's lover) has removed himself from them. Because of this somewhat unusual family dynamic, the young Reyes invents stories about his father to prevent others from seeing him as a "bastard." This misrepresentation of his life mirrors other forms of dissembling and hiding that the young Reyes engages in over the course of his narrative. Readers observe this trope of hiding in various instances, but one of the most significant manifestations of this phenomenon is the way in which Reyes reflects on his experiences of being hirsute.

During the years of his adolescence, he notices that his body is beginning to change, but instead of becoming like that of most adult men, his body becomes ostensibly "monstrous" because, as he explains, "Hair did eventually envelop and over-power my entire body" (107). In this instance and elsewhere, Reyes's excess

hair is explained as being a constraint and a source of "*Nausea, panic, trauma*" (100; original emphasis). He experiences these paralyzing sensations in his gym classes and public showers, where he feels his body faces greater public scrutiny and that his body hair almost has become a kind of spectacle since it seemingly draws people's attention. Although Reyes never suggests his excess of follicles is pathological, it appears that he does come to have an affliction known as Body Dysmorphic Disorder, which results from his own anxieties about his physique as well as his belief that his body deviates from conventional notions of beauty (106). Like many people, he self-diagnoses himself as having this disorder after searching for answers about why he feels so embarrassed about these physical matters. This becomes clear when he explains that as a youth, he wears "long pants and long sleeve shirts ... and 'long sleeve pajamas' to cover the hair that began to take over his physique" (102, 116). In describing his hair's growth as being a kind of "take over," Reyes demonstrates the way that the human body is a site (or space) that cannot be controlled, and without the power to control himself, he experiences pain, shame and stigma.[23] His only recourse is to hide his body to evade the pain created by the culture's dominant ideals. In doing so, his portrayals of these events and feelings craft a strong exposé, showing how the U.S. culture perpetuates privileges for those that embody dominant physical and social ideals.

In his memoir, Reyes utilizes several significant metaphors to speak to these ideals and signal the disquieting idea that his body feels inhuman to him. In particular, Reyes describes his body as being that of a "beast" (103). For instance, Reyes explains that one of his American schoolmates insults him by calling him a "hairy

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[23] Psychologists, such as Michael S. Boroughs, Ross Krawcsyk, and J. Kevin Thompson (2010), show that sexual minorities, such as gay men, experience a disproportionately high incidence of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). They show how people who are diagnosed with BDD experience anxiety about their appearance and fixate on some perceived defect, such as body weight or looks.

ape" after he has been seen naked in the showers at school (108). Through these circumstances, he suffers shame because he is made to feel different (108). In a place of learning there is, ironically, a lack of empathy for Reyes's situation. Cast as a spectacle, Reyes experiences the effects of the mainstream media that has constructed a very narrow vision of physical beauty and normality. Although Reyes himself expresses distaste for this public scrutiny and the spectacles that result from heightened attention, he nevertheless shows a love for other forms of spectacle, namely the artistic kind.

Throughout his memoir, Reyes highlights his love of dramatic performances and film, including *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *El Cid* (1961) (37). It is through these moments that Reyes comes to see the productive possibilities created by artistic forms of spectacular productions, and arguably this enjoyment contributes to his own self-development as an artist and playwright later in life. Most interestingly, as Reyes witnesses these spectacles, we see that he finds a means to suspend the rules of his humdrum daily life and thereby experience a pleasing form of spectacle that is created through the escapism of mainstream filmmaking. The theatrical spaces of performance and puppet shows enable Reyes to side-step the lack and drudgery that he faces daily (65-66). For instance, as a young boy in school, Reyes and his classmates worked with a teacher to perform a series of songs about the fight for Chilean independence, and this team effort reveals to him that there is more to life than being known as the fatherless child. Reyes tells his readers, "The fact that we created a spectacle, did it in an organized manner, rehearsed it meticulously, and then presented it to the rest of the school, which applauded us, seemed miraculous to me" (74). His descriptor of "miraculous" speaks to the way that this performance functions as a formative and powerful guidepost, in which he finds hope for a more artistic and creative future. Through creating our own spectacles – on our own terms

and in critical ways – we may find a more satisfying sort of collectivity in spectacles, hence avoiding the unethical dynamic that can be created by those aiming to disparage someone's cultural or sexual difference.

Embracing the spectacle

After Reyes's early engagements with spectacular dynamics, which showed him both the pain and the pleasure of public experiences, Reyes assumes ownership over his self-representations and memories, allowing his readers to see that coming out can lead to a greater openness and understanding among people. By depicting these moments and helping the reader understand his motivations, Reyes invites empathy with his situation and understanding for queer migrants like him. Reyes's coming out scenes challenge the heteronormative, white ideologies that inform the cultural ideals of embodiment and sexuality in Chile and the United States. Reyes mounts this challenge by building on the coming-out genre that arose during the 1980s and 90s. During this time, the editors Susan J. Wolfe and Penelope Stanley published the first major collection of works that addressed the experience of disclosing one's sexual identity. Their collection *The Coming Out Stories* paved the way for many more people to write and publish their personal experiences (Stanley and Wolfe 1980). The story of Reyes's memoir *Madre and I* mirrors the formula of the coming-out genre because Reyes utilizes the self-disclosure process as a means of breaking the silence about his own emotionally difficult experiences with physical shame and bodily difference. As in most coming out stories, Reyes reflects on what the disclosure of his secrets would involve and accomplish. His text implies that despite the challenges of coming out, there could be some benefits to doing so. Reyes's situation is an example that reflects some of the longstanding debates and critiques of scholars working in the field of queer studies. Critics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have shown the way in

which coming out – or leaving the closet – may not be as simple as it seems, and there may be limitations to and problems associated with coming out (Sedgwick 1990, 70). By and large, I interpret Reyes's coming out – as a hirsute, gay migrant – as being a means to spur further conversation that can effect change.[24] This idea parallels the activist work of another famous public figure: the activist Harvey Milk. In one of his speeches, Milk explains: "I will never forget what is known as coming out. I will never forget what it was like coming out and having nobody to look up toward. I remember the lack of hope" (1982, 362). Milk's comment about the importance of role models and hope reminds us of the challenges that stifle the young Reyes. His text also reminds us that many young queer people today lack mentors and face great uncertainty about who they can become in the future. We need only recall the suicides of the American youths: Justin Aaberg, Billy Lucas, and Tyler Clementi, all of whom are believed to have killed themselves in the year 2010 because of the unendurable humiliation and pain of gay-bashing (Savage and Miller 2014). To a similar extent, the people of Chile witnessed the extreme emotional and physical difficulties that queer men often face through the lens of a young man's beating and death. A young gay Chilean man named Daniel Zamudio was attacked viciously by several anti-gay men, and this violence led to his demise several days later. This attack became a spectacle unto itself in both Chile and other parts of the world, inspiring readers and viewers to reflect on the attackers' unethical and unjust actions. Numerous stories of Zamudio's attack circulated on various blogs and websites, thus raising awareness of the perils that queer people face within the nation of Chile. In studying these events, I find that these narratives suggest that in the U.S., Chile, and beyond, there often exists a lack of alternative and positive narratives (or

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[24] The scholar Amy Rees-Turyn (2007), for instance, argues that coming out to others (or living one's desires openly) is a simple, yet important form of activism.

possible futures) for young people to consider and follow. In the same way, with there being relatively few inspiring narratives in the mainstream media or public libraries, it remains difficult for many youth to imagine how one's present life of struggle could develop into a more healthy and robust future experience. Consequently, coming out narratives such as Reyes's text can be seen as playing a role in not only being a resource that could help queer youth, but also his narrative can be interpreted as cultivating a form of compassion and understanding among heterosexual, white readers that have yet to ponder the exigencies of queer migration.

Although Reyes's physique causes him to hide his body and embrace a rather ascetic philosophy of "sexual repression," he ultimately breaks outside of his self-imposed limitations by exploring his sexual identity in more verbal terms (Reyes 2010, 153). When he attends high school in the U.S., he begins to develop feelings for a Korean American friend Eugene, and after some thought, Reyes is compelled to come out to him in hopes that Eugene might return his affection. His desires drive him to approach his friend, even though he puts himself at risk by outing himself to a schoolmate. When the two young men speak, Reyes says:

> "By any chance," I asked him, "are you gay?"
> The denial was immediate, loud, and unmistakably panicky. "No!
> Absolutely not! No Way!"
> That was clear.
> "Why are you asking?"
> "Because I think I'm in love with you."
> I give him credit for not running away (111).

As we see here, not only does Reyes come out to Eugene as gay, but we also see Eugene come out to Reyes as heterosexual – to firmly establish his own identity as a heterosexual. In the process, Eugene's actions speak to the ways that personal desires are bound up with concerns about how the public sphere perceives a person. While

Eugene could have rejected Reyes, we instead see a kind of understanding. Reyes explains that it was much more affirming: "As an only child, it was crucial to develop this type of bond as well, and for a teenager who spoke of suicide, it became a lifesaver" (111). Coming out to Eugene and befriending him gives Reyes an emotional boost. He can be honest without having to live in shame, and this gives him the comfort and confidence that he needs. This scene with Eugene may not be indicative of all coming-out experiences, but it demonstrates the manner in which the feeling of social acceptance often has the effect of empowering and legitimizing queer people who have been diminished on numerous occasions because of their sexual difference.

The text intimates that these coming out experiences lead to social openness and stronger social bonds. For instance, as he becomes more comfortable in discussing the difficulties experienced in connection with his hairy physique with his friend Eugene, he also becomes more comfortable with himself: "I explained to him the entire history of how and when this habit [of hiding himself] had started ... Something worked" (113-14). His observation that this coming out "worked" tells us that communication and finding allies can be beneficial for queer youth of color, who sometimes face greater difficulties due to the doubled vulnerability inflicted by homophobia and racism (Hunter, Rosario and Scrimshaw 2004, 225-26). In addition, when we study the conventions of Reyes's *Madre and I*, we observe that coming out occurs in several ways over the course of the narrative, and this coming out is not solely limited to disclosing one's sexual orientation. Reyes's text offers proof of Esther Saxey's belief that the coming out process takes place in a slew of ways (2008, 2), such as how Reyes discloses his inner, physical image to others. Reyes explains that he undergoes a unique kind of coming out when he enters into a relationship with two men during his study abroad experience in Italy. He travels to Italy during his

college years, which also happen to be the era of Ronald Reagan's conservative administration, which speaks to the political energy that was in the air (2010, 164). Reyes travels to Padua, Italy, for "almost a year" to study the art of creative writing, and in the process, he makes new friends who open his eyes to the positive aspects of sexuality (154). In this international space, which reads as being a positive form of spatial otherness for Reyes, he allows himself to explore his physical desires. After coming out to the two men, he reveals his body to them during a sexual encounter, thus creating a double coming out. In the process, one of the men – Stefano – repeatedly says "You are beautiful" (165), which validates him and allows him to enjoy the experience. In this other space of Italy, he escapes the hold of the mainstream media spectacle that suggests a hirsute, migrant body is unappealing. Notably, his escape from the conservatism of Chile and the U.S. also allows him to escape his own personal constraints and explore another kind of sexual ethics that moves beyond the limitations of his cultures.

During Reyes's trip to Italy, he experiences his first public male to male kiss with a bisexual, Mexican American man, also named Guillermo. This public kiss functions as both a spectacle and coming-out within the narrative inasmuch as this scene is witnessed by an audience of party-goers, but instead of showing this spectacle as a source of tension, it enables Reyes to step further outside of his comfort zone where he has hidden his body and sexuality for years. Reyes writes: "The Other Guillermo was drinking with his buddies, both male and female, all laid out on the bed. He drew me to him and locked lips with me and everybody there laughed. It was essentially my first male-to-male kiss" (156). By not rejecting this man's kiss, Reyes and the others present at the party legitimate the act as being an acceptable, pleasurable, and worthwhile form of living. This "Other Guillermo," who is akin to a queer mentor for our narrator, symbolically frees Reyes from his constraints by introducing him to

Milan's gay nightclubs. After this initial public coming out, our narrator becomes intoxicated from a single beer and finds himself kissing another man in public. This moment is powerful for Reyes because it creates a kind of euphoria – the extent of which becomes clear when he says he "walked on air on our way back to the hotel" (159). This moment and space allows for another kind of coming out, which tells us that such disclosure is anchored to a context and that disclosing one's sexual identity is an on-going process. His encounter leads him to become a regular at the club scene in Milan, which offers a kind of intimacy and social belonging that he is unable to find within his own family in the U.S. or Chile. However, upon returning to the U.S., we see Reyes's earlier patterns of self-othering and repression surface again, which suggests that the U.S. cannot claim a civic or moral superiority – in other words, by rising above anti-gay attitudes or homophobia – because perceptions of beauty and homophobia continue to remain culturally and geographically specific. For Reyes, his hometown in the U.S. still appears to be a place where he cannot be himself. The memoir *Madre and I* tells us that, despite its vaunted status as a multicultural site of inclusion, where everyone supposedly can pursue the American Dream, many U.S. spaces continue to appear or feel largely intolerant of LGBTQ life.

In the United States, Reyes is unable to come out to his mother, María, let alone discuss the subject of sex, and this inability to come out of the closet perpetuates a boundary between them. Reyes explains his situation by describing his mother: "She could make crude jokes about sex … But she could never seriously discuss with me any issues of desire" (228). Reyes's regret about their lack of communication is ostensibly exacerbated by how he puts restrictions on himself in a space that can be queer-friendly. Reyes explains: "It mattered little that, in Hollywood, we lived in an environment of open sexuality … My mother and I were innocents in a sea of decadence" (229). Although these two are ostensibly innocents,

Reyes leads us to consider the limitations that are created when people are entrenched in cultural traditions and cannot come out to one another about their feelings. By situating himself and his mother in their place of residence – Hollywood, California – Reyes shows us that he lives a rather paradoxical life, which deviates from the norms of a very liberal town. In narrating this contradiction, Reyes signals the ways that social ideals of normality create affective boundaries that can be deleterious to social relationships.

Ethnicity and race in Reyes's memoir

Within several portions of Reyes's memoir *Madre and I*, the subjects of ethnicity and race are explored and linked to matters of sexual identity in meaningful ways. Reyes begins this discussion of ethnicity and race by speaking about his own family's unique identities and history. While his mother self-identifies herself as being white, Reyes largely views his absent father as being "non-white" due to the so-called darker color of his complexion; consequently, this mixing of racial identities leads Reyes to reflect on the subject in several situations (44). The exact make-up of his father's ancestry remains unclear since his father only visits with the young Reyes on a few occasions, and in these conversations, they largely avoid discussions of ethnicity and race. Similarly, this moment alludes to Reyes's own complicity and preconceived ideas about ethnicity and race – from which no one is exempt. Reyes's memoir raises the question: In what way does his father's so-called non-white color play a role in his own personal experience? The work of the scholar David A. Hollinger lends a framework for making sense of this dynamic insofar he documents how some thinkers envision a color-line based on an ideology of hypodescent, even though this way of thinking is not always operative in other parts of the world (2003, 1370). Reyes further contextualizes the matter by saying, "Chileans have a peculiar

attitude about race ... They consider themselves white if they are only partly white"
(44). Reyes's statement about the "peculiar attitude" connotes a disconnect in views –
that while certain people may see themselves as white, others may hold different or
opposite viewpoints. In categorizing the Chilean attitude in this way, Reyes raises
questions about what ethnicity and race means for his culture and family. Reyes must
negotiate several socially constructed ways of discussing ethnicity and race both at
home and while he travels abroad. In such situations, not everyone understands the
implications of category indeterminism in relation to ethnicity, race, or sexuality; and
this lack of knowledge fuels denigrating and humiliating situations. While Reyes
never arrives at a definite understanding of his ethnic or racial identity, we see that
these moments cause him to question his identity and how it relates to other aspects
of his life. This idea becomes clearer as he visits different locations, and these spaces
each lead to situations that offer another take on how ethnicity and race intersect with
sexuality.

In a couple of situations, *Madre and I* shows how Reyes's supposedly
unconventional body becomes a locus of desire for various people. In these moments,
his suitors envision his body in racial terms, thus exoticizing him. For instance, Reyes
seeks out "the liveliest gay scene in Italy" (2010, 162) in order to have fun, avoid
homophobic spaces, and find people with whom he can connect. When he meets a
potential suitor in Italy – who will later become his friend and sexual partner – the
man asks Reyes: "Where are you boys from? China? … Well, you're exotic looking,
whatever you are" (163). The Italian man's interpellation of Reyes's ancestry has the
effect of putting Reyes's body under heightened scrutiny. By calling out his body in
front of others, his body is shown to be beautiful – as having a spectacular quality –
because of its desirable appearance. Although some might view this man's
appreciation of Reyes's racial and sexual identity as being acceptable, Reyes's text

makes us ponder whether this appreciation is demeaning and reductive to the extent that the Italian man's statement could be interpreted as a racist comment shaped by desire. While Reyes might have thought that he was escaping the problematics of homophobia by going to this club, he contends with a suitor that ostensibly conducts a kind of racial profiling. To pigeonhole a person as being a particular ethnic or racial identity can have the effect of omitting other elements of a person such as their sexual identity. Such reductions can cause irritations or other undesirable feelings because human beings self-identify themselves in many ways that often cannot be perceived at first glance. A similar phenomenon occurs in another part of Reyes's life when he visits Mexico. Upon meeting a young man, Reyes learns that the man actually desires him in a similar way. This young man, named Armando, regards Reyes and says to him: "I like men who are whiter than I am" (251). In this moment, Reyes's race is read as being white and more desirable in sexual terms. Through Armando's words, whiteness is eroticized, while dark skin is devalued, which reveals the way in which perceptions of ethnicity and sexuality are bound up with one another and ultimately lead to the exclusion of people of color. These moments are evocative of the complex ways in which people of color are routinely "outed" publicly as having certain ethnic or racial identities, and in cases like Reyes's, these "outings" are often erroneous because ethnic and racial identity are difficult (if not impossible) to read in a way that actually accords with people's understandings of themselves. Reyes's experience likewise reveals how a person's preconceived ideas and the interpretation of physical image may skew the way in which people think about the relationships of beauty, ethnicity, race, and sexuality.

What Reyes's *Madre and I* shows is both the challenges of coming out as a hirsute, queer migrant, as well as the importance of providing mentorship to those who struggle with the hardships of coming out in a world that frequently has little

empathy for the grim circumstances that young, queer people of color encounter. What my research shows is that we cannot assume that the challenges of coming out are always the same or easily reconcilable. Reyes's text suggests that we must remain cognizant of the reality that many young queer people of color face: difficult questions of how one identifies in ethnic and racial terms as well as demeaning insults such as when Reyes is called "maricón" (that is, faggot) by his classmates (51). *Madre and I* asks us to think about how we care for each other, urging us to confront the bigotry that denies people of their dignity. Consequently, Guillermo Reyes's memoir intimates that we must think critically and be thoughtful as we explore these experiences with otherness, which can be contradictory.

In effect, Reyes's text indeed relays the idea that we must to come out *in support* of each other in public spaces where there are greater social risks. In the same way, his narrative suggests that we must be mindful of the way in which we engage in spectacles because they have the potential to hold great power and significance in the public sphere. As a result, his memoir urges us to think about our daily actions and approaches to public life; therefore his work could be read as initiating a discussion about the norms and ethics that guide our societies. His memoir connotes that if we wish to create a more egalitarian world where all people are valued and welcomed, we must be empathetic and mindful of our actions. Lynn Hunt, one of the leading scholars of human rights, contends that "Empathy only develops through social interaction," and she goes on to show that this social interaction is not limited to the real world (2007, 39-40). As Hunt suggests, people can "extend their purview of empathy" through reading texts, and in the process, readers like those that study Reyes's memoir may gain a stronger ability to understand the challenges that queer migrants encounter. Through this empathy and reading pieces of writing, such as memoirs, we become more attuned to the ethics of our social interactions. Therefore

Reyes's memoir provides a helpful space to explore the ethics of everyday and spectacular situations, which continue to have a profound impact on the ways in which we understand the bodies and identities of ourselves, our families and many others.[25]

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Composing and Performing the Self:
Double-Consciousness and Octavian Nothing

Martin Woodside

M.T. Anderson's two volume young adult novel, *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation* (2006, 2008), has been widely praised for its pointed reexamination of early American history. Specifically, in filtering the novel through the voice of the seventeen-year-old slave Octavian, Anderson has been lauded for re-imagining familiar historical events from an outsider's perspective. In making Octavian both protagonist and fictional author of his novel, Anderson represents various configurations of the outsider, all of which offer a sustained meditation on the process of discerning and or constructing subaltern consciousness and identity. Anderson structures his narrative mostly out of Octavian's own recollections, written as he looks back on his strange upbringing in the Novanglian College of Lucidity. Rather than simply presenting a child's perspective, an African-American's perspective or a slave's perspective – all of which, the novels do present – the narrative's intricate structuring of double-consciousness serves to emphasize and complicate the production (and reproduction) of these perspectives. As such, Octavian's ongoing negotiation of identity becomes increasingly complex through the course of the two books, developed through the twinned processes of writing and

performing the self. This article reads these twinned processes in light of Paul Gilroy's writings on double-consciousness and diasporic identity – along with the phalanx of theorists woven though Gilroy's work – processes which become fully articulated through Octavian's persistent efforts to negotiate his alterity via a diverse set of tactics. Configuring and balancing Octavian's selfhood through both language and music, Anderson's novels provide a sustained meditation on the problematic nature of authoring the subaltern self and the significant role music and musical expression can play in this undertaking.

In Anderson's novels, Octavian's writings are folded into a multi-form narrative that is less written by M.T. Anderson than, as the first volume's title page indicates, "collected" from a compendium of sources, personal letters, newspaper clippings, and, primarily "the Manuscript Testimony of the Boy Octavian" (Anderson, 2006). These words stand in sharp contrast to a similar inscription in the beginning of Anderson's second volume, which keeps the narrative conceit alive but notes that the "source material" has been "drawn from the Manuscript Testimony of *Octavian Gitney*" (Anderson, 2008). By Volume II, then, Octavian is no longer a boy, and for that reason this article focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the first volume, "The Pox Party." In that text, Octavian demonstrates a concerted effort to mine his consciousness in ways that comment both on the early work in the field of child studies and Western notions of identity and self-authorship.

As the reader comes to understand and witness Octavian slowly discover for himself, the boy is a slave. His mother was purchased when pregnant with him and brought to the college in 1759. Born there, Octavian becomes the subject of an experimental pedagogy intended to prove whether or not Africans possess the same human faculties as their white masters. Writing back to his elusive childhood, Octavian becomes both child subject and adult observer, working doggedly to

recreate his own consciousness. He notes, in one of his manuscript's first entries, that it "is ever the lot of children to accept their circumstances as universal, and their particularities as general" (Anderson 2006, 4). But Octavian records these words at the age of seventeen, at which point he knows the circumstances of his childhood to have been anything but universal. The "youth" Octavian has already lost this child vision of himself, confessing, "[I can only] imagine that I was a silent and solemn child" (2006, 7). Why, then, does he expend so much time and exertion in such imagining?

In one sense, Octavian's fascination with his child self betrays how childhood became organized as a clearinghouse for the adult imagination. As Holly Blackford explains, at the turn of the 19th century, developmental psychologists and modernist writers alike came to believe that "while human consciousness should be studied in the child, the precise nature of a child's insight will forever elude, and yet require the interpretation of adults" (Blackford 2007, 372). Blackford describes the figure of the child as an ideal resource for early modernist writers such as Henry James. Foregrounding James's narrative technique in her evaluation of the birth and growth of developmental psychology, Blackford describes how the child became fertile ground for the adult imagination. Expanding on James's famous metaphor of the House of Fiction, where a single pair of eyes is stationed at a single window and granted a limited perspective to the world within, Blackford argues that, in the early 20th century, the figure of the child comes to be "the supreme example of a consciousness upon which many apertures opened, but upon which no objective viewpoints could" (2007, 385).

In fact, as Dorothy Hale argues, for James, real life "can never actualize value because it has no point of view, no appreciative capacity; it can yield an "interesting particle" only when something or someone in life matters *for* someone" (Hale 1998,

32). Returning to the metaphorical House of Fiction, Hale maintains that "the character is a window in that house, not the scene upon which the window looks" (1998, 43). Of course in Anderson's portrayal, Octavian Nothing is both. As author and character he is stationed at the window, gazing into the scene of his own (recollected) childhood, straining to articulate the boundaries of his child self.

Anderson's layered construction of Octavian as both object and subject, creator and created, comments not only on how identity might be perceived through figurations of childhood, but also on how ideations of the self are constructed at the most basic level, issues central to Nikolas Rose's efforts to interrogate fixed ontological notions or "regimes" of the self. Rose describes one dominant understanding of the self as "coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography." He argues that the commonly held conviction that "we possessed an identity" was developed from this conception of the self (1998, 3).

Rose labels this notion of the self a decidedly Western conception, stressing that the "invention is a historical one rather than an individual phenomenon" (1998, 2). In divining the sources of this invention, Rose focuses on the "psy" disciplines, most prominently psychology and psychiatry, explaining, "they have brought into existence a variety of new ways in which human beings have come to understand themselves and do things to themselves" (1998, 2). He constructs a "critical history" of the psy disciplines to challenge their powerful tautology of the self, a history that does not merely account "for a particular and often somewhat dubious group of sciences – it is part of the history of the ways in which human beings have regulated others and have regulated themselves in the light of certain games of truth" (1998, 11).

The framework Rose establishes for his re-historicization of the self provide a useful lens for an analysis of Octavian's persistent attempts to fix a "coherent" and "bounded" self through mining childhood consciousness. Rose builds this framework on Michel Foucault's analysis of institutional mechanisms and how they discipline the individual, explaining, "Foucault argued that the disciplines 'make' individuals by means of some rather simple technical procedures," and these procedures rely, at the most basic level on observation. In schools or factories, people are gathered together to be observed so that "these institutions function in certain respects like telescopes, microscopes, or other scientific instruments; they establish a regime of visibility, in which the observed is distributed within a single common plane of sight" (Rose 1998, 105).

This rhetoric of discipline maps neatly onto the child studies movement, in particular the practices of developmental psychologist James Sully. Child studies emerged as a sub-field of psychology in the second half of the 19th century; and Sally Shuttlesworth points out that Sully and others eschewed a heavy reliance on statistical data in the favor of more "individualized studies" based on intensive observation. Importantly, these observations provided insights that extend far beyond the child being observed. Shuttlesworth argues that Sully and others envisioned child studies "at the heart of a whole range of disciplines," wherein "the individual "child is thus to be studied not simply for its own sake but as entry point for all the emerging historical disciplines of evolutionary biology, and psychology, anthropology, and historical philology" (Shuttlesworth 2010, 269).

For much of "The Pox Party," then, Anderson seemingly adopts Sully's methodology. He emphasizes the importance of observation in Octavian's attempted self-authorship, while having Octavian repeatedly look to his child self as a site of recovery, a key to unlocking who he is and was. In one scene, Octavian recalls an

early scene where Pro Bono, a household slave who will later become a father figure, pinches Octavian violently, whispering ominously that he "must learn fear." Octavian writes that "In such episodes as these, I began to ponder the mystery of who I was, and what this might mean" (Anderson 2006, 24). Octavian's description reproduces a conventional cultural narrative of growth or development: the casting off of ignorance in the assumption of knowledge. Looking back on his childhood ignorance, he writes,

> I, now, with the vantage of years, am sensible of my foolishness, my blindness as a child. I cannot think of my blunders without a shriveling of the inward parts – not merely the desiccation attendant on shame, but also the aggravation of remorse that I did not demand more explanation, that I did not sooner take my mother by the hand, and – I do know what I regret. I sit with my pen, and cannot find an end to that sentence (Anderson 2006, 37-8).

This moment is significant. Octavian laments the ignorance of childhood, but more specifically, he laments the missed opportunity, the inability to mine his child consciousness. If he had asked questions then, he might have answers now. Blackford, writing about Sully, highlights his idea "that nothing was lost in the child mind" as the child embodied "a germ of consciousness" (2007, 370). Following the line of thought, and in keeping with the tenets of early child studies experts like Sully, Octavian spends the better part of the "The Pox Party" searching for that germ of consciousness, trying to write that latent "truth" into being. Notably, in this moment, he is struck by the immense difficulties of the project. He cannot find the words and cannot name the thoughts.

As Volume I progresses, Anderson highlights Octavian's increased difficulty in establishing a viable subaltern self through the kind of observational methodology Shuttlesworth describes. In fact, the more Octavian discovers about the social world around him, the more distant he feels from this project to recover his child self. This

growing distance pushes Octavian toward an increased awareness of his abject subject position. Midway through the novel, the college is threatened with financial ruin and Mr. Gitney must hand over its management to a group of outside investors, and, specifically, their designated overseer, Mr. Sharpe. This change holds profound consequences for Octavian. Mr. Sharpe makes the boy his valet and persistently reminds him of his slave status. Through Mr. Sharpe's abuses, Octavian becomes increasingly aware of how his identity has been inscribed by difference, and he starts to consider the limits this marginalized subject position places on his ability to give voice to the self.

Anderson singles out an exchange between Octavian and Pro Bono to highlight these escalating tensions. Pro Bono advises Octavian to carry a letter from his master with him at all times, one explaining that he is free to be out in the city on his own. Octavian nods affirmation, but Pro Bono quickly reprimands him, "Don't nod when there ain't a need to nod, see? You got to be blank." He explains that their masters indulge in "the exploration of themselves, going on the inner journey into their own breast. But us, they want there to be nothing inside of. They want us to be writ on. They want us to be a surface" (Anderson 2006, 136). This invocation of the blank surface stands as one of the text's many references to John Locke's *tabula rasa*. As Pro Bono sees it, the blank slate presents an opportunity for the appropriation rather than the actualization of the self. He argues that the subjugated slave's only avenue for meaningful agency is to embrace this blankness, allowing oneself, in the process, to become invisible and, perhaps, to draw some small power from being beyond view.

Octavian struggles with this idea throughout the course of the two novels. By the end of Volume II, he can finally construct agency through the kind of blankness Pro Bono describes. In "The Pox Party," Octavian seldom addresses these struggles

directly. Instead he describes the growing awareness of his subaltern status as a product of growth. After one severe beating from Mr. Sharpe, Octavian admits that, to some degree, "this demotion from scholar to servant simplified my lot, for as I had passed from childhood to youth, it would have been increasingly awkward for me to act as a lordling in that house" (Anderson 2006, 38).

No longer a child, Octavian claims to know too much to play the role of lordling. Crucially, what (and how) he knows has been informed by the strange pedagogy imposed upon him, crudely derived from the broad tenets of Enlightenment rationalism. In their lessons, Octavian's masters consistently emphasize the power of reason and the importance of objective observation. As Volume I progresses, Octavian sees the hypocrisy less in what he is being taught and more in those teaching it, a point underscored by the novel's recurring references to Locke. While Locke has often been associated with the idea of autonomy and the power of individual choice, Ruth Grant argues that he understood reason to be largely mediated by "custom," or the power of cultural practices to shape individual behaviors. As Grant describes it, Locke considers custom "the primary determinant of human behavior," acting through the transmission of "received opinion' handed down from generation to generation" (2012, 611). This received opinion wields its greatest power during childhood, wherein, as Locke saw it, the largely innocent child acquires "opinions from trusted adults, who are the authorities in our lives" (Grant 2012, 611). Those adult authorities play a pivotal role in securing Locke's vision of society based on reason, and, by raising Octavian in a toxic environment, his masters have clearly failed in this role.

Coming to grips with this hypocrisy, Octavian discerns that the self may not be discovered, while he hopes it still may be composed, written into being. What is more, he believes that his distinctive training at the college, wedded to the uniqueness

of his upbringing, makes him ideally suited for this task. As he writes, "brought up among the experiments and assays of those artists and philosophers, I was taught the importance of observation" (Anderson 2006, 9). This theme runs throughout the text, strengthening the connections between Octavian's narrative and the modernist technique practiced by Henry James and others – a technique that, as Blackford and Shuttlesworth point out, grew out of the ideological consolidation Rose locates in his history of the psy disciplines. Octavian, like James, begins to imagine his author-self looking back at childhood, attempting to consciously structure meaning out of observation rather than introspection.

Examining Octavian both as author and character, one discerns in this shifting perspective not merely a commentary on modernist literary technique but a potent metaphor for Paul Gilroy's wholesale revisioning of the modernist narrative. Gilroy offers the theoretical framework of "The Black Atlantic" for this broader project, explaining how the "intellectual and cultural achievements of Black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of the Enlightenment and its operational principles." As such, he argues, the history of modernism needs to be read with those Black Atlantic populations as deeply enmeshed in – rather than merely subject to and subjugated by – the "grand narrative" of progress, from the Enlightenment to the Industrial Revolution and beyond. Gilroy announces that the "time has come for the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves' points of view" (1993, 48). M.T. Anderson's construction of Octavian Nothing as author/protagonist reads like a direct response to Gilroy's call.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy reconstructs the modernist narrative alongside and through reevaluations of a number of prominent African-American artists and intellectuals, whose efforts at self-authorship are clearly echoed by Octavian Nothing.

Assessing Frederick Douglass's abolitionist writings, Gilroy argues that these texts rework and transform Hegelian formulation of the master-slave dialectic, so that "the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of inhumanity on which plantation slavery depends" (1993, 63). Harnessing the power of negation, Douglass manages to "express in the most powerful way a tradition of writing in which autobiography becomes an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation" (1993, 69). Later, in his chapter on W.E.B. Du Bois, a pivotal figure both for Gilroy's argument about the Black Atlantic and this article's assessment of Octavian Nothing, Gilroy describes Du Bois's writing as "a systematic account of the interconnections between Africa, Europe, and the Americas" harnessed to construct a "narrative of black suffering and self-emancipation in the United States" (1993, 121). Gilroy argues that Du Bois had a firm "desire to demonstrate the internal situation of blacks" as "firmly locked inside the modern world that their coerced labour had made possible. To this end, he carefully displayed a complete familiarity with the cultural legacy of western civilization" (1993, 121).

Unsurprisingly, the construction of this kind of African-American perspective, the achievement of a "self-emancipated" voice, one attempting to "create" the self, while coming to terms with being "locked inside" a world-view largely imposed from the top down, proves to be a fraught process. For Gilroy, and for numerous influential Africanist thinkers, that process is best articulated by way of Du Bois's description of double-consciousness. In a much-discussed passage from the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at

> one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois 1961, 16).

This passage has been subjected to countless interpretation and re-interpretation, with much of the discussion centered on whether this "veil" of double-consciousness functions as an effective tool for self-actualization. Gilroy is quick to sidestep that debate, arguing, "it matters little, at this point whether this 'second sight' is a true privilege rather than some sort of disability." Noting that Du Bois gestures to both possibilities in different parts of the passage, Gilroy emphasizes, rather, the "seventh son" reference as proof that "Du Bois's list is derived from a reading of Hegel's philosophy of history and is taken from a text which is also the occasion for Africa's expulsion from the official drama of history" (1993, 134-5).

Certainly, these observations seem pertinent to Octavian and his evolving sense of self-authorship. Unsure of who he is or what he is supposed to be, uncertain if, in fact, he ever was a child, Octavian positions himself as a collector rather than a creator of words. He realizes that the text, as an instrument for locating consciousness, is itself a compromised form. Grounded, as Gilroy suggests, in the abject position of the slave, while also conversant in "the cultural legacy of western civilization," Octavian draws on unique resources in manipulating and employing that compromised text, recording his own words, alongside the words of Mr. Gitney, his mother, Pro Bono, and others, while simultaneously gesturing to his distance from those words.

Through this process, Octavian (and, of course, Anderson) highlights the difficulty in locating consciousness while, at the same time, he becomes a masterful rhetorician, adroit at managing myriad linguistic strategies to demonstrate the

injustice of the experiment he has been subjected to. If the text proves ultimately unyielding of the single "truth" he seeks, Anderson nonetheless shows Octavian employing it as a powerful commentary on his status as other. For instance, Anastasia Ulanowicz points out that Octavian reveals he is a slave "precisely forty pages into the narrative," forcing "the reader to return to the ominous imagery contained within the novel's prologue." Through this revelation, Ulanowicz argues, "the reader is able to understand exactly why Octavian is contained squarely within the wall surrounding his childhood garden, and why this wall is constructed to keep him and others from 'running'" (2011, 279). As author, of course, it is Octavian who orchestrates this reveal, priming the reader's delayed awareness to maximize its emotional impact.

Fully engaged in the process Du Bois describes, by means of which he becomes more conscious of himself as object, as experiment, and as servant, Octavian learns to see himself as others see him. Yet, victimized by the denial of selfhood, as in Du Bois's description, he struggles to write selfhood into being. In this guise as author, Octavian's efforts can be read against a long tradition of African American literature that, as Madelyn Jablon puts it, "has always theorized about itself" (1997, 21). In tracing a tradition of black metafiction, Jablon invokes Henry Louis Gates's theory in arguing, "black literature, oral and written, is extremely self-conscious, aware of itself as artifice, as fabulation, and in relation to existing literary or aesthetic traditions" (Jablon 1997, 21).

For Gates, black writers create metafiction through "dialogue with literary predecessors" (quoted in Jablon 1997, 21). Cut off from those predecessors, Octavian follows Du Bois's model, adapting both the language and referents of his white masters to his own ends. In the early pages of his manuscript, Octavian considers the morality he was taught at the college, stressing: "Kindness, humility, piety, respect for other human creatures" (2006, 12). Rather than rejecting these as his oppressors'

beliefs, he embraces them to an extent they cannot – injecting his voice, in a move Gilroy would surely approve of, into the modernist narrative. These virtues, Octavian writes, "are the great desiderata of all who pursue virtuous action, and it matters not whether those who preach them heed their own advice" (2002, 12). As he strains to recall his childhood and the "ghastly purpose of that dim college," Octavian offers a word of caution – to the reader and himself – that serves as an *ars poetica*: "We must curb our fury, and allow sadness to diminish and speak our stories with coolness and deliberation." To drive this point home, Octavian quotes Horace, as the English translation reads: "Rule thy passion, for unless it obeys, it rules you" (2006, 13). Octavian employs this rhetorical device repeatedly, first making a point and then invoking a classical allusion to support it. In this way, the classical figures that represent the pillar of his Western education become a potent tool for Octavian, a site of resistance for those left out of the dominant Western cultural narrative.

Nonetheless, it cannot simply be ignored, despite Gilroy's hesitance to take up the subject, that the Negro's "second-sight," as Du Bois clearly states, "yields him no true self-consciousness." As Hale explains, Du Bois's analysis reveals the "catastrophe of hegemonic power relations" violating "the inner sanctum of consciousness." On one level, "this very invasion gives the 'Negro' a certain power over his colonizers, the power to represent, if only to himself, the limitations of hegemony as an objectifiable point of view" (Hale 1998, 214). Then again, Du Bois points both to the power the Negro has and the power he does not have, the seeming inability to engage in meaningful self-actualization. Ultimately, what access can Octavian have to the realization and performance of true self-consciousness – setting aside, while not discounting, Rose's caveat about the viability of such an entity? After his own sobering assessment of the (then) status quo, Du Bois goes on to write about the "history of the American Negro" as a "longing to attain self-conscious

manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self (1961, 17). How is that truer self to be realized?

At this point, it becomes critical to analyze not only the various possibilities for self-actualization but, also, different modalities that might help realize those possibilities. As Jablon and others suggest, the act of writing, of composing the self remains central to African American culture and its practitioners. Nevertheless, both Hale and Gilroy question writing as a useful tool for achieving double-consciousness, and they pose formidable challenges to the feasibility of the written word as a tool for African American actors in authoring the self. Hale locates a paradox in the pervasive critical conflation of Du Bois's double-consciousness with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of double-voiced discourse. This conflation, Hale argues, is highly problematic, as what differentiates Bakhtin from Du Bois is the allowance each makes for the oppressed subject's potential for meaningful self-actualization. For Du Bois, these opportunities for self-actualization are desirable but rarely achievable. "Through the figure of the veil and the metaphor of sight," Hale writes, Du Bois "sets in motion, but leaves implicit, a variety of conflicting notions about how socially constructed identity might work and what its significance might be" (Hale 1998, 207).

For Bakhtin, Hale suggests, the path forward is much clearer. In his mind, "the novelist" remains the "ideal human agent." He, as "the master of linguistic mastery, is able to practice the appreciation of alterity; to realize his own identity by displaying the linguistic identity of others, but giving voice to the social voices in language" (1998, 201). Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse suggests that "just as the voices of competing ideologies reside within the form or body of language, so individuality can itself be expressed through these voices" (1998, 210). Hale expresses considerable skepticism about this kind of "individuality," skepticism warranted by, as Gilroy himself points out, Du Bois's own conflicted statements

about double-consciousness. In fact, Hale suggests, rewriting these uncertainties through Bakhtin's convictions about double-voicedness threatens to erase any meaningful sense of African American identity. "When double vision is read as double voice," she argues, "the distinguishing feature of all African American identity comes to define all subaltern identity" (1998, 220).

Likely, Gilroy would share Hale's skepticism of this process, and his assessment of African American culture prizes the musician over the novelist, moving away from the primacy of the written word as the arbiter of black cultures. To Gilroy, written culture has been persistently over-emphasized through the history of these cultures, so that we lack a nuanced understanding of how "art, particularly in the form of music and dance, was offered to the slaves as a substitute for the formal political freedoms they were denied under the plantation regime" (Gilroy 1993, 56-7). What is more, he argues, in opposition to "the Enlightenment assumption of a fundamental separation between art and life, these expressive forms reiterate the continuity of art and life, celebrating "the grounding of the aesthetic with other dimensions of social life" (1993, 57). Gilroy's strongest statements about music and African American culture urge the reader to focus greater attention on the "distinctive kinesics of post-slave populations" in order to facilitate a full understanding of the traditions of black performance and diaspora musics. All in all, he argues, Black music "has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words – spoken or written" (1993, 76).

Gilroy is certainly not the first critic to focus on the importance of orality and musicality in the development of African American culture. In *Long Black Song,* Houston Baker Jr. describes how "black American culture was developed orally or musically" first, and perhaps foremost, describing this culture as one "never characterized by the individualistic ethos of white American culture." He claims that

"Black American culture is characterized by a collectivistic ethos," so that "society is not viewed as a protective arena in which the individual can work out his own destiny and gain a share of America's benefits by his own efforts" (Baker, Jr 1972, 16). These articulations of "black American culture" clearly inform Gilroy's work, though in theorizing "the Black Atlantic" he is not as adamant as Baker, Jr. in setting black American culture against white American culture. Rather, Gilroy expresses interest in how black music allows the lines "between self and other" to blur, so that "special forms of pleasure" can be "created as a result of the meeting between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others" (1993, 79).

These observations hold special relevance for Anderson's *Octavian Nothing* and Octavian's efforts to locate a self both through words and music. While he continues the practice of writing the self into being throughout Anderson's novels, that process becomes an overtly rhetorical project, one employed as a tactic, to borrow a term from Michel de Certeau, whom Gilroy turns to in framing the importance of music to African American cultural expression. "Culture," de Certeau argues, "articulates conflicts" to ends that "alternately legitimizes, displaces, or controls the superior force." Developing "in an atmosphere of tensions, and often of violence," these cultures facilitate "tactics of consumption, the ingenious way the weak make use of the strong," and "thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices" (de Certeau 1984, xvii).

Octavian's Western education, reconfigured through the written or composed self, is ultimately deployed as a tactic to challenge the institutional forces that have terrorized him. This methodology becomes clear at the end of the Volume II. Having survived slavery, and the ruin of the college, Octavian substitutes his manuscript for the daily log book his former masters kept of his behavior. As such, Anderson concludes Volume II by having Octavian replace the records of the experiments

conducted upon him with a new text, rewriting the "official" history of his childhood. In this act, Anderson presents Octavian's written self as a meticulously manufactured record meant less to reveal the author's true self than the horrifying injustices that self has been subjected to.

The power of this rhetoric, along with Octavian's masterful use of it, resonates not only through the words he uses but also through those he does not. In one of the first novel's most harrowing moments, Octavian confronts the gruesome remains of his mother's autopsied corpse; the vivid scene is followed by several blotted-out passages. Ulanowicz argues that the blotted-out page "not only visually intensifies the trauma experienced by the protagonist but metaphorically stands for the forcible 'blotting out' of slaves' sense of history and identity." The crossed out words suggest "that for every surviving account of slaves' experiences and for every attempt made by slaves to preserve a sense of history and identity, there were countless lives and stories rubbed out of the 'master narrative' of American history" (Ulanowicz 2011 288-9). By preserving those blotted-out pages, Octavian does more than enact a powerful metaphor for those rubbed out lives; he demonstrates a firm sense of authorial self-control and the ability to employ his traumatic memories to powerful rhetorical effect.

In keeping with Gilroy's arguments about music and Black Atlantic culture, Anderson's deployment of Octavian suggests that a truer version of the self can more easily be performed than written. As "The Pox Party" goes on, the importance of music in Octavian's ongoing identity construction becomes increasingly important. From the book's beginning, learning the violin has been part of Octavian's classical training, and he has an affinity for the instrument. However, Octavian's connection to music becomes even stronger after he becomes Mr. Sharpe's property. Octavian's new master makes a number of changes to Octavian's educational training, changes

that comment revealingly on the roles language and music play in his ability to understand and project ideations of selfhood. Most prominently, Mr. Sharpe orders a change in the method of the boy's language instruction. Octavian, Mr. Sharpe insists, has been "nourished on narrative," which, he explains to Octavian's tutor, Dr. Trefusis, "is precisely what we wish to wean him from." The experiment, Dr. Sharpe explains, should "determine whether the subject is capable of growth in his rational faculties. That alone. This would constitute growth away from his hereditary savage nature" (Anderson 2006, 130).

To this end, Mr. Sharpe outlines a plan to teach Octavian in fragments, a plan Dr. Trefusis claims will ruin the boy. And, of course, this is precisely the point. The experiment has already demonstrated significant growth in Octavian's rational faculties, turning him from an asset, in the broader cultural project of legitimizing the institution of slavery, into a liability. Seeking to nullify these results, Sharpe denies Octavian the classical narratives he has proven so adept at processing and employing, and the voice he has so effectively developed.

Mr. Sharpe's comparative lack of interest in Octavian's musical training is notable and revealing. For Octavian, after his other lessons have been stripped down, music becomes a critical tool for self-expression. Noting that "Mr. Sharpe could not abide music," Octavian continues to practice his violin, sequestered "in the top of the house," far from his master's quarters. In these practice sessions, Octavian finds a crucial outlet: "In this secret music, I could tell those tales I was denied, and there being no text, none could read whether I spoke of docility or insubordination" (2006, 147). This notion of a "secret music," unbound to any text, reverberates with Gilroy's argument about the importance of music to black culture during slavery and the ability, developed against the brutal oppression of enslavement, of black musicians to perform the self.

Octavian's use of music here also provides another potent example of a De Certeauian tactic, a point aptly demonstrated once Mr. Sharpe discovers the boy's private music sessions in the attic. Mr. Sharpe makes no efforts to suppress Octavian's music, as he did with the boy's burgeoning sense of written and spoken expression, giving weight to Gilroy's argument about their perceived potency. Eventually, he does seek to use Octavian's musical ability for his own gain, to turn it into a product that can be packaged and sold. As Octavian explains, Mr. Sharpe "had arranged for me to play as a soloist for a subscription concert," a venture that, if successful, would continue "throughout the rest of the season." Through these performances, he explains, Octavian can "pay back the College of Lucidity for the kindness shown in feeding and clothing" him (Anderson 206, 148).

Mr. Sharpe's arrangements for this performance, and Octavian's ultimate response to them, do much to illustrate the potency of music as a tool for self-actualization and the way, as de Certeau explains, the weak can manipulate the strategic impositions of the strong into tactics of resistance. Mr. Sharpe plans for Octavian to perform "The Devil's Trill," and he dresses Octavian in a costume suggestive of the devil. He even publicizes that Octavian had developed his musical abilities "through conversation with the Devil at a crossroads" (Anderson 1993, 150). Octavian's mother objects strenuously to this crass marketing, and even Mr. Gitney acknowledges that the idea "seems somewhat irregular" (1993, 151).

Of course, Octavian has little recourse to refusal. Instead he uses performance to voice his objections to Mr. Sharpe's instructions, which, he records, "stood before me like a rebuke of everything I loved in music." Octavian proceeds to play "the first movement like the lolling of a suicide's head in the tub, the corpse lukewarm, the roseate water lapping at the slackened lips" (1993, 151). He renders the melody as "adorned in equal measure by the harshness of tone and a dismal, languorous

mistuning with which I plagued all but the uneasy cadences." Octavian records that he played the second movement, "like the kicking of a turtle headed spawn in a woman's womb." By the third movement, his "tone was dry and hoarse, a febrile scratching." He plays "the trill itself," meant to be "rapid and triple-stopped" as "an insect rattle, almost inaudible," conjuring "the air ateem with carrion flies, swooping, crawling, rejoicing in Beelzebub their Master" (1993, 152).

The subsequent applause is muted. Mr. Gitney praises Octavian, but Mr. Sharpe reacts harshly, telling him to enjoy sitting since "in a half an hour, my back would be too striped to admit of any respite whatsoever." At first, Octavian takes no pleasure in this act of resistance, his thoughts running to "how I had, in anger, entertained the Serpent" (1993, 152). Looking back, however, he notes "with pleasure that I marked – that many in the convocation had found my rendition not without merit." He reports that some young men approached him, "vowing that I had spoke more of the vile institution of slavery in my few moments of sonata than all the preachers of Boston in a year" (1993, 153). Notably the power of Octavian's musical performance is amplified by his ability to use written language to extend the rhetorical power of that performance through words. Anderson cannot have us "hear" Octavian's music; rather, he relies on intricately lyrical prose to convey the powerful impact of that music. In doing so, Anderson showcases not only Octavian's musical fluency but, also, his ability to package his performance as an eloquent indictment on the evils of slavery – one that uses written language while simultaneously gesturing to its limits.

At the same time, Octavian's ability to speak through music in this scene is reminiscent of Paul Gilroy's analysis of the Jubilee Singers. Gilroy notes that, in stark contrast to performers of blackface minstrelsy, the "Fisk singers constructed an aura of seriousness around their activities and projected the memory of slavery outward as

the means to make their musical performances intelligible and pleasurable." With this music, Gilroy argues that "Black people singing slave songs as mass entertainment set new public standards of authenticity for black cultural expression" (1993, 89). Through his performance of "The Devil's Trill," Octavian engages in a similar form of projection, albeit with very different results (no pleasure is intended or felt by the audience). Appropriating the music of an Italian composer, configured by Mr. Sharpe into an emblem of Octavian's status as a commercial product, Octavian creates a vehicle to project the grim realities of that status outward in a way that proves empowering and effective.

Octavian's performance speaks, as Gilroy suggests, to the potency of non-verbal forms of communication in African American cultural expression and to the viability of de Certeau's delineation between strategies and tactics. At the same, Octavian's own uneasiness, bordering on shame, about his actions, reveals a certain ambivalence regarding his ability to perform the self and the willingness to employ that self as a tactic. Anderson highlights this ambivalence through Octavian's ongoing difficulties in negotiating the processes of composing and performing the self. For the majority of "The Pox Party," these notions remain tangled and uncertain, and Octavian never completely shakes the idea that his childhood holds that germ of consciousness and by tracing his consciousness back to the source, he can find out who he is.

This tension comes most powerfully to light in the scene where Octavian recalls his mother's death. In her final moments, he sits by her side as she laments being born, "half a world away." Unlike the literary predecessors Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls upon, Octavian has no access to his mother's homeland. He writes, "I could not imagine the face of my grandfather, my grandmother, whom I have never seen." The absence of this knowledge pains him, intensifying as he speculates whether or

not "an image of my father, blank to me, beckoned in her fancy in a house where I might have grown." As his mother nears death, Octavian becomes increasingly desperate to recover some portion of this lost past. His mother, up to this point, has only offered him fantastic stories of their African homeland. Before she dies, he insists, "I will, *know one true thing.*" He implores her "not to tell me children's tales of panthers pulling chariots" (Anderson 2006, 218; original emphasis). In this moment, Anderson shows Octavian aligning himself fully with the objectivist doctrine of his masters/teachers; the self can only be recovered and the germ of consciousness discovered through the excavation of some objective truth.

Ultimately, Octavian's mother offers a truth that challenges these ideological constructions of knowledge and self: "For the people of your nation, Octavian, all speech is song" (2006, 219). This statement provides powerful redirection to Octavian, ultimately leading him to reconceptualize his ongoing project to excavate the child self. Indeed, at the end of Volume II, Octavian acknowledges his mother's truth, allowing him to conceive of his written self-excavation as a performance in its own right, one with a clear sense of purpose and audience.

Fully recognizing these various ideations of the self as acts of performance, Octavian approaches the kind of double-consciousness Paul Gilroy argues for. Through "music and its rituals," Gilroy argues, "we can approach identity as neither a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers" (1993, 102). The notion of identity, then, is to be seen as neither fixed nor performed. It can be both and neither. In theorizing his vision of black identity, Gilroy argues for a new understanding of diaspora, one that attempts "to specify differentiation and identity in a way which enables one to think about the issue of racial commonality outside of

constricting binary frameworks – especially those that counterpose essentialism and pluralism" (1993, 102).

At the end of Volume II, Anderson appears to have Octavian embrace this logic and the collectivist ethos Baker Jr. discerns at the core of African American culture. In the final chapter, Octavian writes of "friends, now gone, who have traveled by my side and dropped away," and he announces the desire to be their "praise-singer." Looking back and forward, Octavian states, "I know not what we have been; I know not what we are, but I know what we might be" (Anderson 2008, 561). Octavian's consistent emphasis on "we" suggests a turn away from the authorial "I," in itself a turn away from the concept of the self Rose ascribes to the ideological hegemony of the psy disciplines. As his story nears an end, Anderson emphasizes not how Octavian's identity has been constructed, as through those disciplines, but how it may be constructed in ways that are dynamic and interdependent.

If Octavian looks to the future as a "praise singer," he clearly sees his written "self" as finished. In the final chapter, appropriately named "Tabula Rasa," Octavian revisits Locke's idea of the blank slate, claiming that his own life "hath been one long forgetting, the erasure of what was drawn, a terrible redaction" (2008, 561). He leaves the record of that redaction, now the "official" record of his childhood, affirming this act of creation through an act of negation. With that gesture, Octavian signals his intention to successfully negotiate a sense of identity as a musician and not a writer.

This decision suggests a strong affinity with Gilroy's vision of an empowered diasporic identity. Gilroy describes how a "countercultural sense of the inability of mere words to convey certain truths inaugurates a special indictment of modernity's enforced separation of art and life as well as a distinct aesthetic (or non-aesthetic) standpoint." Music, he argues, "is the best way of examining this final aspect" (1993,

124). Octavian appears to be precisely the kind of countercultural agent Gilroy exhorts, achieving a doubled consciousness that actualizes the latter's notion of a dynamic, truly diasporic identity. Nevertheless, if music holds the key to realizing that identity, the seemingly parallel processes of writing and performing may be more deeply intertwined than Gilroy suggests.

Abdul JanMohamed provides compelling evidence for that notion in his analysis of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass, he notes, "invokes the power of the blues and ascribes to it a central role in his eventual understanding of the horror and power of slavery. The structures and functions of the 'wild songs' that he hears as a child … can be seen as the model for his narrative." In fact, JanMohamed claims, those songs "provide the form as well as the substance of his narrative." At the most fundamental level, JanMohamed suggests, "the blues and the narrative preserve and communicate a knowledge of the slave's sociopolitical condition; they store rudimentary knowledge for future reconsideration." Finally, JanMohamed insists that, for Douglass, "these songs contain a knowledge of slavery that is superior to other forms of knowledge about the same subject" (2013, 151).

Like Gilroy, then, Douglass posits music as the most suitable vehicle for communicating the true "knowledge of slavery." Importantly, though, JanMohamed suggests that it is actually Douglass's fluency in multiple modes that gives voice to these truths, that the power of Douglass's narrative comes from how the act of writing reveals and responds to the "wild songs" he heard as a child. Likewise haunted by childhood memories, Anderson's Octavian Nothing works from a similar model, integrating his mother's instruction that all speech is song with his own mastery of written language. Ultimately, Octavian demonstrates that the child self may not be recovered as objective truth, as Sully and others in the early child studies movement suggested, but that figurations of the child can be employed as vital tools

for self-fashioning. Projecting the past through the present, Anderson uses Octavian's interrogation of his child self to construct a powerful model of subaltern identity, one that works through a complex interaction of performing and composing the self to achieve a diasporic vision archiving the voices of the past, while opening channels for those of the future.

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Close Encounters and the Culture Industry:
The Rhetoric of Extraterrestrial Contact and Alien Abduction Narratives in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

This article takes up the subject of an "othered" group comprised of people who claim to have had experiences with extraterrestrials. People who claim to have interacted with aliens typically describe those experiences in one of two distinct ways. In the "contactee" narrative, the extraterrestrials encountered appear to be fully human, but are unusually attractive. Contactees describe their experiences as being positive and spiritual in nature. By contrast, "abductee" narratives cast the alleged extraterrestrials as being humanoid, yet frightening, with large misshapen eyes and hairless gray or green skin. These extraterrestrials have come to be described by UFO researchers and researchers of alien abduction narratives as "gray aliens" or simply "grays." Both contactees and abductees are "othered" in the sense that they are often considered to be delusional. However, although contactees and abductees are treated as being mentally imbalanced, contactees are far less perturbed by this diagnosis than abductees. Typically, contactees form their own insular communities or small cult-like groups in which they hope to again communicate with their alien friends. In

contrast, abductees live in fear of being revisited by their abductors, feel that they are ostracized by friends and family, and are used to advance the varying agendas of conspiracists.

In this study I explore the cultural implications of twentieth-century alien abduction (or abductee) and contactee narratives as they have been discussed in scholarship. While contactee narratives are relevant to this article in that they inform social attitudes toward abductees, the abductee narrative will be the primary focus of my work. The scholarship that I examine, in particular that of Jodi Dean, John Mack, and Susan Clancy, presents alien abduction and contactee narratives as following specific narrative patterns. Abductee narratives, which emerged from contactee narratives, are treated as a genre. For this reason, when I refer to "abductee" or "contactee" narratives, I am speaking not about specific stories so much as about generalized trends and rhetorical tropes that have been noted in previous scholarship. Further, I use Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) to situate abductee experiences within discourses of "otherness." Applying Horkheimer and Adorno's theories to my subject matter helps to reveal the social conditions that often cause an abductee to feel "othered" by mainstream society. Abductees are alienated, pressured to "fit in," and their experiences are not taken seriously. "Othering" begins within Western colonial discourses that determine what is "normal" or "natural." The process of othering is one that enforces conformity and determines who is representative of a particular culture and who is not. Drawing on Horkheimer and Adorno's scholarship, I contend that "othering" as we know it begins with a Judeo-Christian construction of socioeconomic progress reflecting an ideology of linear cultural development that is fostered by a set of privileged epistemologies. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno explore the genesis of what we consider to be progress and its attendant preoccupation with empirical knowledge.

Our constructions of empirical knowledge are reflected in what Horkheimer and Adorno term "the culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 94); that is, a hegemonic power structure that exists across social institutions and is perpetuated by mass media. The culture industry is the means by which capitalist ideology is advanced and ensures that the populace remain passive consumers. In a larger sense, all citizens are alienated from themselves and disempowered, but because the culture industry keeps them in a state of false consciousness, they are unaware of their situation. Alienated from himself and experiencing a sense of disempowerment, the abductee in particular can be understood in terms of the vexed subjectivity that Horkheimer and Adorno define as being a consequence of the "culture industry," a power structure that regulates our actions, emotions, behavior, relationships, and belief systems. Abductee narratives are typically framed and received in the public sphere in a manner that seems to invite both identification and aversion. To some degree, we are invited to sympathize with (if not pity) abductees, but always from a distance. I argue that reading scholarship on abductee and contactee narratives with respect to Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the culture industry indicates that abductees are othered in ways that pertain to hegemonic power structures. Abductees find themselves marginalized, alienated, rendered passive, and dismissed because their narratives and constructions of self do not conform to the culture industry's ideals. This study contributes to otherness in the sense that it draws attention to a marginalized community that is rarely acknowledged as such.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno assert that enlightenment thinking arose from a desire to dominate the frightening and unruly world of nature. This produced a state of consciousness that the authors refer to as "mythology" – that is, a more ordered and hierarchical version of nature – one in which there is a division between the gods and humankind. Mythology, in turn, gives

rise to the "epic" age, which represents a further ordering and taxonomizing of mythological principles as well as humanity's movement toward achieving greater subjectivity. Epic becomes positivism, or "enlightenment," which takes the notion of control and subjectivity to such an extreme that it eventually leads to social disintegration. It is the threat of this social disintegration, perhaps, that has spurred in us a desire to return to a simultaneously alluring and terrifying mythic past (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 20).

With this in mind, I use Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of enlightenment thinking as a rhetorical lens through which to interpret typical features of contactee and abductee narratives and their reception in the public sphere. Reading scholarship on abductee narratives with respect to Horkheimer and Adorno's theories on positivism and in particular, their theories on the culture industry, opens up a rhetorical space in which to discuss how abductee narratives are shaped and controlled within the twentieth century public sphere. Using Horkheimer and Adorno's model of the progression of myth to epic, I argue that contactee narratives can be read as myth and abduction narratives can be read as epic. Since epic arises from myth, and since abductee narratives (which began in the 1960s) evolved from the contactee narratives of the 1950s, contactee narratives are to myth what abductee narratives are to epic. In contextualizing these narratives, I consider what they might mean in terms of their social and cultural implications as well as their constructions of otherness.

In a culture that has increasingly privileged empirical knowledge over other ways of knowing, it is not difficult to understand why contactee narratives are considered to be purely fantastical. By the same token, it is easy to see why so many contactee narratives are self-contained: myth "neither requires nor includes any possible verification outside of itself" (Matheson 1998, 287). In a culture shaped by a

scientific establishment which is in turn influenced by politics, myth is believed to be the province of the uneducated – as evidenced by the lowbrow "mythology" that appears in tabloid newspapers (Carr 2006, 163). But myth seems so far beyond the scope of everyday existence that it does not occur to us to consider its assumptions. We appreciate myth because it "becomes impervious to scientific scrutiny and gains a certain resilience as a consequence" (Matheson 1998, 284). However, much of the reason that myth is "impervious" to scientific scrutiny is because it is considered to be so far-fetched that the scientific community ignores it altogether.

The abductee narrative cannot be classified as "myth," because – unlike myth – it asks for verification and to be institutionally sanctioned. Because abductees have suffered and because their experiences as test subjects seem to be scientifically oriented, abductees tend to attempt to find meaning in their narratives by situating them within a larger conversation. With respect to Horkheimer and Adorno's paradigm: while myth is simply dismissed as fantasy, epic seeks to be accepted as part of the empirical framework of everyday life – to be recognized as "scientific." In other words, if needing or not needing external verification can be determined as the means by which to separate myth from epic, then abductee narratives – which are closely intertwined with conspiracy theories – must necessarily be conceived as epic because abductees desire social legitimation.

Abductees desire social legitimation because their worldview is overwhelmingly grim. They believe that the human race is in jeopardy, and that technology is partially responsible because "progress" courts the attention of extraterrestrials. Contactee and abductee narratives are similar in that both rely on what the theologian Ted Peters refers to as the "Myth of the Ufonauts." This myth presupposes a teleological worldview and linear progress. Either we are moving toward salvation (as in the case of the contactees) or toward certain doom (as many abductees believe). In the mind of

a contactee, the extraterrestrial is a benevolent and superhuman life form, who has pledged to help humanity avoid self-destruction. By contrast, the abductee views the extraterrestrial as unfeeling and potentially psychopathic – exhibiting no warmth or emotion (Peters 1995, 199). Worse still, these large-eyed expressionless "grays" are often believed to be in collusion with the earth's most powerful people, government and military agencies who are interested only in preserving themselves rather than protecting the human race. Insignificant human lives are willingly sacrificed by important people so that existing power-structures can remain undisturbed. As such, it is difficult to tell which should be interpreted as a bigger threat: the government that sacrifices human dignity and safety to hide the "truth" of its collusion with these technologically advanced gray aliens or the gray aliens themselves.

Myth Turns to Epic

Just as epic grows from myth in Horkheimer and Adorno's model of the forward march of scientific enlightenment, abductee narratives grow from contactee narratives. The function of epic is to "organize" myth and to become more evolved, that is, to claim more agency through the application of positivism. Contactee narratives engage a world of magic and mysticism, while abductees differentiate themselves from contactees by developing a discourse that attempts to sound objective and scientific. Abductees reflect the tenor of their experience through their descriptions of the alien abductors themselves. As such, Matheson suggests that the physical appearance of the gray aliens is a metaphor for discourses of positivism: "Their large heads are an apt indicator not so much of great intelligence as inordinate rationality, and their disproportionately large, black, pupilless … eyes could hint of sight without insight, combined with inscrutability of purpose" (Matheson 1998, 298). While intelligence suggests the possibility of compassion, "inordinate

rationality" suggests a rationalism that has exceeded its own ends and that has become dangerous because it has subverted the notion of human agency and subjectivity. Cold and emotionless, the grays work methodically through a series of unexplained procedures, treating the human body as a mere abstraction. To the grays, the human body is as inconsequential as that of a lab-rat. This, Matheson claims, "reminds us that individuality is incompatible with the demands of a 'perfect' technological environment" (Matheson 1998, 299). Although Matheson interprets abductee narratives as indicating a fear of technology coupled with the fear of a loss of individuality, it is ironic that the experience of the abductee has become so generic. It is also ironic that the recounting of an abductee narrative (when each is so similar to the next) has become a way of reclaiming personhood. While alien abduction narratives could be described as generic, the experience of the abductee is depressingly singular (Mack 2000, 241).

Although we believe that we are recognized as individual subjects, that subjectivity is tenuous at best. In the movement toward rationalism, the more we try to assert ourselves as agents, the more resistance we meet from the social institutions that control us (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 100). Indeed, positivist ideology is capable of reducing us to nothing more than a body on an operating table. In the world of myth, we struggle to become individuals because we have not yet separated from the gods – and we are subject to their whim. An epic, then, becomes an effort to formulate "progress" by claiming further individuality in rationalizing the conditions of myth. Epic destroys myth by organizing it, but the organizing principles it deploys also highlight the components of myth that make epic possible: the principles of multiplicity and unity. In moving "forward" or "progressing" from the "oneness" of myth, we attempt to distinguish ourselves from others through the antithesis of what we find in the realm of epic (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 38). In other words, in

order to become individual "selves," we rely simultaneously on principles of unity and multiplicity – and therefore cannot avoid being at odds with one or the other. We long to be part of something larger than ourselves, yet we also wish to maintain our individuality. When Horkheimer and Adorno speak of antithesis, they speak of our desire to be recognized as autonomous subjects, and as autonomous subjects we define ourselves as much by what we believe we are as by what we believe we are not. The idea of antithesis is reflected in abductee narratives in the sense that the humans involved are not only at odds with aliens who do not recognize their subjectivity; who do not respect their "humanity." But just as devastating for the abductee is the realization that he is not only at odds with the aliens, but also with a human government that does not respect his subjectivity either. In a supremely inhuman act, the government that conspires to hide the "truth" and confer an outsider status or "otherness" on the abductee. For abductees, this sense of compounded disempowerment is parlayed into an emphasis on reclaiming subjectivity once the abduction experience is over – hence the need to testify. In contrast, contactees – who are immersed in myth – do not claim to be in friction with their government, their fellow humans, or the friendly extraterrestrials with whom they are allegedly in contact.

The classic "alien abduction" conspiracy theory, which is that the government is trading human flesh for technological secrets, evokes epic in its suggestion of sacrifice. The notion of sacrifice is particular to epic because epic marks the point at which we believe that we can barter with the gods instead of merely accepting our lot: "the sacrifice itself, like the magic schema of rational exchange, appears as a human contrivance to control the gods, who are overthrown precisely by the system created to honor them" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 40). Sacrifice, then, is constructed as a form of manipulation. The government makes a human sacrifice in

order to keep the alien "gods" at bay. In this sense, the conspiracy theory narrative becomes a form of solace; it describes a behind-the-scenes effort to control the aliens and keep them away from the general public – although at the expense of an unfortunate few: "All sacrificial acts, deliberately planned by humans, deceive the god for whom they are performed: by imposing on him the primacy of human purposes to dissolve away his power" (ibid.). Horkheimer and Adorno use the *Odyssey* to explain how sacrifice plays out. Thus, the *Odyssey* becomes an epic journey of confused agencies whereby, through the process of bargaining, humans attempt to control the gods that govern them. This same bargaining is replicated in abductee narratives, but the abductees are not actively engaged in the process of bargaining – they are its unwilling collateral. And it is precisely this recognition of the self as collateral that characterizes our collective fear of positivism, which is a defining feature of epic. Distinguishing between myth and epic is significant because it accounts for the fundamental difference between abductees and contactees. Abductees are "othered" because they are a product of what Horkheimer and Adorno describe as the epic; that is, an ideology saturated with positivist values and vexed notions of agency and control. However, unlike abductees, contactees do not see themselves as being victimized, manipulated, or controlled because they inhabit the realm of myth. The analogy between myth and epic with respect to contactees and abductees demonstrates ways in which the worldview of the contactee contrasts with that of the abductee, thereby suggesting how the abductee can be understood as experiencing "otherness."

Agency and Subjectivity

"Otherness," or being labeled as "other" suggests a lack of agency and little recognition of individual subjectivity. In this sense, I maintain that contactees are less

"othered" than abductees. However, although contactees are not forced to surrender to the whims of the nameless, faceless grays, the issue of agency is also significant to their narratives. Contactees become agents who perform in the service of their "space brothers." The function of the contactee is primarily to relay and act upon messages sent from benevolent extraterrestrials. For instance, the Raelians have been engaged in a project – apparently at the behest of their extraterrestrial friends – to build an embassy on earth that the aliens can eventually occupy as part of their effort to save the human race. Contactee organizations are invariably hierarchical, usually dominated by a white middle-class man who is believed to have absorbed an alien power and now takes on a god-like status, guiding other members of the organization. Again, the Raelian movement, led by Claude Vorilhon, is emblematic of a contactee community in terms of its belief in aliens as a benevolent beings who plan to save the earth. Like typical contactee communities, the Raelians speak of willingly surrendering their agency in the service of a higher power and the creation of a more perfect world. Many contactees believe that subjectivity is a mere construct anyhow – their goal is to release whatever egotistical forces separate them from other beings so that they might be reabsorbed into the divine. An example of this, (though rather extreme) can be found in the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate members in San Diego in 1997. Sociologist Robert Balch, who, for research purposes, joined Heaven's Gate (then the Divine Precepts) in the 1970s, claims that in the cult giving up all pretensions toward individuality preceded solidifying a commitment to the cult itself. In other words, in order for a person to be brainwashed, he or she must first be complicit in the process. In a sense, one has to agree to be "socially influenced" before any real "brainwashing" can begin. Of the Divine Precepts members, Balch says, "Instead of the mindless converts portrayed in the media, we discovered ordinary people searching for truth and struggling with doubt" (Balch 1995, 140).

Further, Balch emphasizes that the primary claim toward individual agency in a contactee cult such as Heaven's Gate is the willingness to relinquish it for an ostensive greater good. In the end, the mythic struggle that a contactee must face is that of demonstrating devotion by surrendering to the gods.

In contrast, the abductee's struggle involves the reclamation of oneself: to wrest oneself away from the control of other human beings and the "gods" or from entities that are bafflingly neither human nor god. In a sense, then, the abductee's struggle for agency is to free him or herself from the dictates of an oppressive and secretive sociopolitical system. Abductees are always already compromised, not by the gods, but by fellow human beings who wish to reinscribe existing terrestrial power structures by colluding with a potential "enemy." This sense of having become a pawn in a deadly game, the sense of having been undervalued, compromised by others, and of being forced to compromise oneself are markers of what Horkheimer and Adorno refer to as the "culture industry." That is, we are rendered passive and denied agency by the capitalist machine (Dean 1998, 102).

Jodi Dean's *Aliens in America* takes up the idea of the human subject being subsumed by indifferent and relentless socioeconomic forces. Her argument of America's relationship with the technological advances of the late 1950s and early 1960s is unique in that she speculates upon the possibility of coercion and compromise within the public sphere during the Space Race. At that time, eight white heterosexual men were chosen to represent not only American interests in outer space, but the American people as a totality. These astronauts were constructed as embodying the Jungian masculine principle: practical and active – masters of their own destiny. The public could participate in the astronauts' adventure only passively: by watching television. To enhance the experience of living vicariously through a chosen few, viewers were supplied with a great deal of information about what the

astronauts were to undergo before being sent into orbit. Much of this involved medical procedures: blood was drawn and probes were inserted. Physical and mental experiments were performed to ensure that these men would survive a journey to outer space. Receiving this information gave passive audiences an illusion of control, as well as a sense of ownership over the astronauts. In this manner, viewers internalized the astronaut narrative and seized its claims of agency as a reaction against having been rendered passive by media culture (Dean 1998, 180). Dean suggests that abductee narratives are generated from reactions to this particular form of disempowerment. A similar reaction to hegemonic power structures enforced via mass media is also reflected in conspiracy theories about the moon landing. Conspiracy theorists claim that the American public was brainwashed – duped by Hollywood sets and special effects. This claim reveals a suspicion of having been relegated to an even more subordinate status than that of the passive viewer: audiences are doubly objectified when they are tricked. The notion of objectification, trickery, and betrayal reveals a mistrust of the culture industry as well as an awareness of it as an apparatus of social control.

In her work on the genesis of abductee narratives, Dean speculates that the Space Race was used to exert control over the American people, asking them to identify with the astronauts, to see themselves as explorers and adventurers rather than as consumers. In this sense, Dean casts the abductee as a kind of anti-astronaut; the objectified subject who longs to take on the last frontier. The abductee undergoes the same procedures as the astronaut, but certainly not by choice: "No abductee has ever been given a parade. Compared with astronauts they are victims, not heroes. Many are taken into space, chosen in accordance with some unknown criteria rather than through competitive tests with clear objective standards" (Dean 1998, 102)**.** Since abductees are constructed as victims, it would follow that they are sacrificed –

or sold out – by their government, while astronauts choose to sacrifice themselves in the name of progress.

Despite its speculative nature, Dean's argument is significant in that it offers an opportunity to read abductee narratives in terms of social status, which is an essential element of the abduction narrative genre. According to John Saliba, many extraterrestrial contact narratives can be attributed to "status frustration." Coming into contact with an alien is an opportunity for setting oneself apart from the herd; an opportunity for claiming subjectivity and reordering the social status quo, re-entering the social hierarchy at a different place or exiting it altogether (Saliba 1995, 215). However, while abductees may find solace in believing themselves to be "different" – to feel in some way privileged for having such a unique experience – the difficulties of living through such perceived experiences seem to outweigh the benefits. For abductees, the initial problem of "status frustration" continues indefinitely. For contactees, a "successful" extraterrestrial contact experience means gaining only enough credibility to form an autonomous group, while for abductees, establishing and maintaining ethos within the public sphere presents an ongoing challenge. Because of this, it is possible that people who believe themselves to have been abducted by aliens would find community and solace in a multitude of conspiracy theories stemming from alleged government cover-ups in Roswell and the legendary Area 51.

Contactee Narrative and Abductee Discourse

In an effort to be taken seriously, conspiracy theorists ensure that their theories are supported by "experts" in a field that believers refer to as "ufology." Mimicking the rhetoric of academia, conspiracy theorists treat ufology as an established discipline, and as such, ufology presents its own implied authority and system of internal logic:

"The insistence that there is nothing to UFOs only pours fuel on the conspiratorial fire, convincing the believers that the doubters act out of fear, ignorance, or cover up" (Bullard 2000, 188). Abductees will feel vindicated only when the "truth" is uncovered; only when admissions (and possibly reparations) have been made. Abductees are preoccupied with establishing credibility, so attempting to prove the "reality" or the "truth" of their experiences is of paramount importance. In their attempts to be taken seriously, abductees often feel that they are thwarted by government agencies and others in positions of power. They believe themselves to be watched and monitored: "The paranoid is a figure who is both inside the secret operations of society (and therefore in a position of knowledge not shared by other marginalized subjects) and on the outside as one of the marginalized and powerless majority" (Mason 2002, 47). In short, abductees are paranoid not only because they want to be believed and accepted, but because to some extent they are convinced that they have *already* been believed and denied; that they are now acknowledged not as contributors to the enlightenment project, but as a threat to it. The inside information that they have apparently gained has served only to disempower them further because they have become stigmatized.

But conspiracy theorists are also threatened by the potential destigmatization of their experiences because, if their narratives were to become mainstream, their life's work would become less unique: "Those who frequent the domain of stigmatized knowledge do so in part because it confers feelings of chosenness: only we few know the truth" (Barkun 2006, 35). According to Barkun, this means that abductees must invent more and more bizarre conspiracy theories to remain at the social fringe. The challenge for abductees, however, is to avoid straying too far from what is considered the norm, or risk not being taken seriously at all. Given this scenario it is not surprising that abductees speak disparagingly of contactees who they

feel cheapen and distort the alien contact experience, often for profit. Whitley Strieber, a well-known abductee author writes: "One of the greatest challenges to science in our age is from … people who are beginning to take instruction from space brothers. Charlatans ranging from magicians to 'psychic healers' have tried to gather money and power for themselves at the expense of science. And this is tragic" (1986, 57). Strieber who claims to have been abducted from his home in upstate New York in December 1985, published the best-selling *Communion* two years later. The fact that *Communion*, the story of Strieber's abduction experience, was marketed as non-fiction quickly became controversial. Later, when *Communion*'s sequel *Transformation* was marketed as fiction, Strieber was incensed. After insisting that *Transformation* was a "true story," he claimed: "Placing this book on the fiction list is an ugly example of exactly the kind of blind prejudice that has hurt human progress for many generations" (quoted in "Inside New York" *Newsday*, 1988). This statement encapsulates the abductee position in terms of its allegations of prejudice and a bias against truth, or as Strieber puts it, "progress."

However, although Strieber is critical both of mainstream prejudices and of contactee "charlatans" who foment those prejudices, he might well be aware of how (paradoxically) the credibility of abductee discourse relies on the existence of fantastical contactee narratives: Contactee narratives set the parameters for the abductee knowledge base and determine the purview of abductee discourse. When contactees remove the element of conspiracy from the close encounter narrative and depoliticize it, abductees and ufologists are given cues as to the kind of information they must find; the kind of image they must cultivate. They must work ever harder to cull and frame evidence that the public will take seriously. As Dean puts it, "Mainstream science separates itself from the discourse around UFOs. Serious ufologists distance themselves from contactees, channelers, hoaxsters, and 'nut

cases'" (1998, 55). The very existence of contactees lends a backhanded credence to abductee narratives and ufology. Ufologists in particular make every attempt to position themselves as mainstream scientists proclaiming that new scientific knowledge is always shunned, at least initially. Further, "UFO discourse incorporates the reflexivity and skepticism lauded as signs of the rationality and rightness of science and law. Because it adopts the very practices that excluded it, the UFO discourse has always depended on the skeptic, critic, debunker" (ibid., 55). In other words, the fact that abductee narratives are dignified by doubt lends them a credence that contactee narratives could never have. Moreover, the self-sealing rhetoric of the conspiracy theory also lends credence to the abduction narrative: if alien contact were not really happening, why would powerful entities want to deny it so vociferously? What could possibly be the reason for so much government secrecy if there was nothing to cover up? Abduction narratives become believable because they are actually scientifically investigated and doubted, rather than simply dismissed. This ironic "inclusion by exclusion" speaks to Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of epic in that epic is characterized by discourses of positivism, testability, proof, and control. Despite the fact that abduction narratives are deemed impossible, they are simultaneously given the possibility of legitimation by virtue of having received attention from the scientific community.

Finally, when considering the cultural significance of alien contact narratives, pathos must be taken into account. Perhaps even the most skeptical among us believe abductee narratives more readily than contactee narratives because we connect pain with spiritual enlightenment; that we must suffer before we can "receive" an understanding. For instance, in her book, *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Abducted by Aliens*, psychologist Susan Clancy discusses the need to take alien abduction seriously but not literally. Clancy claims that abduction narratives

provide a "way to make sense of apparently random pain" (2005, 141). Therefore, the pain that abductees feel as a result of their alleged experiences somehow makes sense of – or at least contextualizes – whatever pain they were feeling before. On some level, we can all identify with pain and with feelings of isolation and disempowerment. It is through pain that we feel our connection with others as well as our isolation – the need to return to "someone" or "something." Our personal mythologies are comforting, as are believing in the impossible, and magical thinking.

Thomas Bullard, a folklorist, asserts that the more science is used to explain life's mysteries, the more likely people are to leave organized religion (now perceived as supportive of positivism) in favor of marginal fundamentalist faiths that seem to privilege superstition over reason. According to Bullard, between 1960 and 1990, "The most outmoded elements of faith, the very myths struck down most forcefully by science and humanism, not only survived, but grew in appeal" (2000, 151). Here, Bullard suggests that an affinity for superstition and fantasy is a deliberate backlash to the increasing institutionalization of positivist views. While Dean agrees that there is movement to resist the social control wrought by positivist thinking, she also suggests that since most of us fail to understand the degree to which we lack agency, such resistance is less deliberate than subconscious (1998, 180). In the end, both Bullard and Dean suggest that "enlightenment thinking" or positivism is a political tool that is not necessarily used in the public's best interest.

Extraterrestrial contact narratives may suggest a rebellion against what Horkheimer and Adorno term the "culture industry." They may be an expression of our need to reclaim agency in a culture that has objectified us, or these narratives may signal feelings of isolation and disempowerment. Close-encounter narratives are significant in that they express a cultural and political need: the need to return to

some indeterminable point at which we were beginning to become individuals; to rediscover our subjectivity; to resist hegemony and to be affirmed of our agency.

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