

Otherness: Essays and Studies 6.1

December 2018

Edited by Matthias Stephan

Special Issue

Otherness and Transgression In Fandom and Celebrity Studies

Otherness: Essays and Studies 6.2

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Otherness and Representation

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Otherness and Transgression in Fandom and Celebrity Studies

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Otherness and Representation

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Introduction

by Matthias Stephan

The current volume of *Otherness: Essays and Studies* represents our first double issue, combining a special issue, dedicated to fandom and celebrity studies, with our 2018 general issue, the fifth such general issue of the journal.

The special issue 6.1, *Otherness and Transgression in Fandom and Celebrity Studies*, builds upon the successful international conference hosted by the *Centre for Studies in Otherness* at Aarhus University in 2014. The conference had, as its focus, both the consideration of otherness and alterity, staples of the Centre and its journal extension, as well as considerations of the liminal, boundaries normalized or constructed, constantly breached, as they are either reconsidered or, more often, simply transgressed. Leaving the subject of transgression and otherness as categories open for discussion, the conference focused on the emerging fields of fandom studies and celebrity studies, which focus on and operate functionally as related and often overlapping fields. Placing them together in the same conference, one which explicitly focused on boundaries and exclusion, on otherness and transgression, not only did the subject matter of the individual contributions explore these categories, but the considerations of these two fields was also explored and reimagined along these lines.

This special issue continues that conversation with four contributions which span the breadth of the two topical disciplines. Not only have the concepts

of otherness and transgression permeated the thinking leading to this issue, but they have remained salient in both fields in the past few years. Celebrity studies has served as a showcase of how otherness is an appropriate approach to contemporary life, with ongoing discussions of representation in film and television, the exclusion of women from prominent roles, and the marginalization of those that have dissented from prevailing notions within many industries. Movements like #metoo and #oscarssowhite have led to widespread discussions of otherness and transgression, intersectionally. Even the recent royal marriage, hailed as a demonstration of unity, can be read as controversial on a number of lines, including race and gender, as highlighted in consideration of the Duchess of Sussex's (post)feminist framing within British society (Clancy and Yelin 2018).

Otherness has been highlighted in fandom studies in recent years in ongoing discussions about the role of fandom studies scholars themselves, and the validation that parts of fandom achieve through such lenses, with calls for improved considerations of marginalized aspects of fandom discourse (Pande 2018, Wando 2015), as well as considerations of where one searches out fan scholarship. Even the platforms often used for fan works are battlegrounds of otherness, transgression and exclusion. As demonstrated in the recent changes to the popular platform Tumblr, centered on removing content that seemingly transgressed shifting norms on the platform, as well as the debate surrounding exclusion of types of fandom on Archive of our Own, the concept of othering is vital to understanding the differing attitudes at play within the field.

Opening the special issue, **Alen Ríos** and **Diego Rivera**, in “**Vulnerability and Trash**”, explore how dynamics within and outside of fandom affect the construction and otherness of various fan discourses. They contend that considerations of platform, in its structural as well as content elements, allows for an understanding of the *sides* of fandom, and that these elements are mediated through complex strategies by the readers and producers of fan content. Using a

virtual ethnographic approach, and through a focus on Stucky fandom, based on a slash pairing focusing on Marvel's Captain America universe, and specifically on Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes, Ríos and Rivera explore the contingency of fan readings, and demonstrate that fan approaches should not be considered as static, but in a state of continual reinterpretation. This, they contend, can be extrapolated beyond their topical consideration of the Tumblr platform and its prevalent Stucky fandom, to other platforms (Twitter, AO3) and is relevant in multiple fandoms.

Lucy I. Baker focuses her analysis, in "**The Other Woman**", on the AO3 platform, where she explores the dynamics found in regendering canonical characters in a series of fan fiction stories. Baker's insightful analysis traces how various factors limit and alter the reception of genderswapping stories, from the relative acceptance in fandom circles, to the limited participation in more formally published venues. This is further developed in discussing which types of characters, and within which traditional power constellations, are taken up in this discourse. Using grounded methodology, Baker contends that considering regendered characters in fan fiction allows for challenging notions of gender binarism, and questioning the defaults we associate with canonical presentation of mostly male characters, and she opens up the field for further research along other intersectional axes using a similar framework.

In "**Everyday Bro?**", through a discussion of the popular vlogger Jake Paul, **Pernille Rosenlund** and **Susanne Lisberg Jørgensen** consider the boundaries not only of otherness within Paul's vlog, but between the dynamics of celebrity and fandom studies as well. Through an exploration of Paul's use of authenticity, Rosenlund and Jørgensen explore the ways in which Paul transgresses seemingly bright lines between his veridical self and his public persona, positioning himself as both the celebrity and the fan, and even reacting to and denigrating his celebrity position from a fan perspective. Their insight into his behavior, and his use of othering to both construct his persona and his fannish

identity, allows an exploration of the phenomena of the social media celebrity in contemporary discourse, and challenges the compartmentalization of these two emerging academic discourses.

The line between celebrity and persona is not limited to social media, or to the dynamics of generation Z. In **“We Must Learn to Speak to Each Other So That We Can Embrace from Afar”**, we see that the blurred lines between writer and reader, between subject matter and text itself, are also blurred in contemporary literary as well as new media contexts. **Andrea Aramburú Villavisencio** uses Bellamy’s own exploration of her relationship with punk and avant-garde author Kathy Acker, to set up a reading which uses a different ethical dynamic, Lynne Huffer’s thinking-feeling ethics of alterity (2013), to blur the lines not only within friendship and narrative, but in how one considers interpretations of physical objects in the exploration of literary narratives. By looking at Acker’s wardrobe, and Bellamy’s performativity, combined with the shifting role of the author in the exploration of their own work, vis-à-vis the subject matter they themselves are presenting, Aramburú challenges the construction of the interpersonal and the foundation of our notion of friendship and its limitations. Just as she contends is present in Bellamy’s work, her work is also political in the sense that it challenges existing interpretation, and transgresses the norms we have come to use in literary interpretation.

Our general issue 6.2, *Otherness and Representation*, is the fifth such general issue of *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, and the first such issue since 2014. The issue presents a range of disciplines, from the historical to the literary, and each has a focus not only on otherness but also on representation. Representation is topical, permeating contemporary discourse in a variety of ways. The term is multivalent, in which it can imply a standing in for, a replacement of, speaking for (or instead of), or even simply a changed presentation of a concept, person or even community. Each of these definitions of

the concept of representation are highlighted in our eight contributions, which are spread across not only academic discipline, but national boundaries, timespans, and media.

Starting with a historical perspective, **Naomi Alisa Calnitsky** considers national representations, and othering on racial, national and ethnic grounds, in looking at the historical situation in US and Canada in the early twentieth century. **“Defining the Mexican Other”** looks at three distinct timeframes, the 1930s, the period from WWII to the mid 1960s, and the present day (1975 onward), in considering Mexican labour conditions under official programs in the US (the first two timelines) and Canada (the present day), exploring the ways the labor force was constructed, managed, considered and othered. This is done through an investigation of historical archives, as well as representation in secondary literature and media accounts. Calnitsky uses her recounting history of labor to advocate for reconsideration of the way labor and its nativist resistance is represented, with a call for more research in to the implications of her research on contemporary labor and migration practices, which remains a salient condition in US and Mexican relations in our new millennium.

Turning from the US to Syria, **Ella Mudie** discusses the representation of the various cultures at stake in the recent armed conflicts in and around Palmyra. **“Palmyra and the radical Other”** looks at discourses of heritage and culture, preservation and representation in considering how local and global cultures frame discussions surrounding the monuments and cultural artifacts of historical cities and civilizations. At stake is how, and who chooses, memory of specific locations is maintained and documented, and to what end the process is undertaken. Digital archiving of historical sites, placed into a heritage frame, Mudie argues, risks erasing or othering the contemporary lived experiences of the population, and diminishing or occluding their suffering in favor of preservation

of cultural heritage. She urges reconsideration of the use of technology, and the aims to which it is utilized, in the construction of our collective cultural memory.

In “**Egypt in Western Popular Culture**”, **Aintzane Mentxaka** develops a similar theme through the lens of popular culture and media representation. Exploring the lens through which Egypt is seen, in particular during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Mentxaka uses a framework of ‘active witnessing’ to interrogate presentations of Egypt in Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of the Nile*, as well as in more contemporary interpretations ranging from novels to television documentaries. She does this with an aim to undermine historical renderings of postcolonial spaces, arguing that popular culture allows for reconsideration and rewriting of the representations of Egypt and other postcolonial spaces, via contemporary perspectives on otherness.

Using a contemporary lens to challenge misperceptions or characterizations of group of people in the past is also the project of **Helena Bacon**. In “*They’re Just People, That’s All*”, Bacon considers the representation of American carnival folk in Daniel Knauf’s *Carnivàle*. Using McGowan’s American version of the carnivalesque (as opposed to the Bakhtinian) she problematizes the representation of the Other, by positioning the space of the American carnival experience as both othering and redeeming, allowing the disabled and dispossessed a space to present, and re-present, their own identities outside of the normalizing framework beyond the walls of this public sphere. The use of seeing as a framework parallels other contributions to this issue, and helps develop the trend of representation, in its various forms, through its use of both representation as standing in for a marginalized group, as well as re-presentation signifying a positively framed new identity for the marginalized and displaced. The other, as she concludes, is not a simple as one might imagine.

Adele Hannon also argues for a reconsideration of those othered by contemporary society, though shifting from media representations of twentieth-

century America to literary representations in early Victorian England. In **“Othering the Outsider”**, Hannon argues that while interpretations of Emily Brontë’s iconic novel, *Wuthering Heights*, often present Heathcliff as monstrous, and settles him in a framework of alterity, her analysis challenges this notion by looking at the figure of the monster. She argues that the consideration of the monster, seen through a postmodern lens, is destabilized and undermined in its otherness, which challenges conventional readings of Heathcliff, who is then best read as an antihero as opposed to a prototypical Gothic villain. She argues that affiliations between the unknown and undefinable Heathcliff map more appropriately onto the reader’s own anxieties, and thus reconsideration of the representation of the cultural other needs to be taken.

Likewise, **Rachel Willis**, in **“A Man is Nothing without the Spice of the Devil in Him”**, urges looking at an iconic Victorian anti-hero in a new light. Here she uses considerations of Rochester’s masculinity in interpreting the elder Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Willis argues that associations of Rochester with an imperialist and colonialist frame is part of the literary representation, rather than references to contemporary historical representation, and that within the novel reading Jane and Rochester’s respective gendered presentations is key to understanding the structural message of the novel.

Rather than a close look at a specific text, **Hamza Karam Ally** focuses on a set of paired readings of the same event in **“The Stranger and the Other.”** Ally uses Kamel Doaud’s re-rendering of Camus’ classic novel, exposing a lack in Camus’s classic novel, the identity of the Arab victim. Doaud’s novel represents a writing back, in the postcolonial tradition, but such an enterprise, Karam Ally suggests, is not a simple affair of rewriting a context, and fixing an erasure, as the dynamic in place can never resolve, but only further, dialectically, the conversation of and about the identity of the characters, the reader, and the authors in question. Reading the two novels against each other, Karam Ally uses

phenomenological and ethical frames to interrogate the symbolism of this lack, and the impetus beyond the presentations, finding that each novel fails along ethical lines.

Rounding off the collection, **Sean Weaver** considers the complex framing of identity in Hasan Namir's 2015 novel, *God in Pink*. In "**Postcolonial Transformations**", Weaver analyzes Namir's novel and its presentation of national cultural norms which nonetheless exclude the lived experience of the protagonist. In questioning the established legal and cultural hegemony of sexual identity, Namir's novel questions the creation of national cultures that can establish patterns and, at the same time, other discourses of dissent. Weaver's analysis sees the novel as providing a voice to underrepresented aspects of Iraqi society, and the novel itself then becomes a site of representation, as well as the diegetic frame within the novel. Weaver concludes that queer narratives, such as Namir's, can decolonize national discourses, and make visible the various identity markers available. Literary representation, thus, can force larger cultural change, through the representation of otherness.

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Vulnerability and Trash

Divisions within the Stucky fandom

Alen Ríos and Diego Rivera¹

Introduction

Fandom studies initiated as a subsection of audience studies (Roque 2015), understanding fandom as a community of fanatics, an irrational and pathological mass with an illogical affection for some form of popular culture (Jenkins in Meyan & Tucker 2007). Or as Stanfill (2011) puts it, fans and nerds in general were framed as a form of failed white masculinity: they appeared as childish, feminized bodies unable to perform their expected role, needing to outgrow their hobbies to be able to do so. These notions were challenged in 1992 by Henry Jenkins, who proposed thinking about fandom not as a pathological activity, but as a communal activity that allowed the articulation of discourses outside of the hegemonic mainstream (Jenkins 2005). This was followed by studies done by academics researching the field as fans, mixing both their role of academic and fans, as “acafans”, increasing the complexity of their studies (Jenkins in Meyan & Tucker 2007). From there, fandom studies expanded from the conception of fandom as only an activity of resistance, exploring its heterogeneous nature and the ways it relates to hegemony, and they also changed with the gradual decline of

¹ The authors would like to eagerly thank Baird Campbell (bcc4@rice.edu), candidate to Ph.D. in Anthropology at Rice University, who generously proofread our manuscript, helping us to edit our article.

stigmatization of fandom and its growing role in the entertainment industry (Roque 2015). At the same time, the organization of fandom was reshaped with the widespread use of the Internet, taking the already virtual communities of fandom and settling in new sites that allowed larger communities and a new form of synchronicity (Jenkins 2006). This movement allowed new forms of organization. For example, in the South Korean fandom, it gave rise to new forms of cyber-activism organized by fans both in charitable drives and the moral policing of both stars and other fans (Sun 2012).

The term fandom is a neologism that combines the word *fan* and the suffix *dom* (Reid 2012; Roine 2013) and can be defined as a community of fans working with reciprocal sharing around a specific narrative work (Turk 2014), as a community who “understands” the fanworks related to a given product (Stanfill 2013), amongst other definitions. Production is one of its central dimensions (Fiske 1992). For Jenkins ([1992] 2005), fandom appears in relation to a text, filling the gaps that the author leaves with guesses, discussion, and fans’ own production. This production implies a constant give and take from both the fans and the fandom, forming a gift economy where the fans give their products, be they fanworks, discussion, infrastructure or others, and receive the products of other fans as part of the fandom (Turk 2014). This production, as we already mentioned, appears both as resistance towards hegemony and also as a part of the same (van de Goor 2015).

In our study it is important to note that we will work with the concepts of hegemony and resistance as components and results of power relationships. According to Ibañez (1983), they relate to a decentralized power, which no longer resides in one person or institution, but exist as a dissemination constituted, reproduced, and transformed by each everyday interaction. They might be viewed as total possibilities, but impossible to grasp as a relationship. These power relationships, or social relationships, work around norms and mechanisms of

verification, surrounding supposed knowledge and truths to compose the instances of the definition of hegemony and resistance, without certainty about the result of the interactions. Therefore, in our case, hegemony and resistance will be products of these relationships and be defined in their everyday presences, according to the discursive and non-discursive practices present in fandom.

As a consequence, when regarding fandom as a community, which would be a group formed either by practices (community of practices) or shared beliefs (imaginary community) (van de Goor 2015; Leverich 2015), it is important to note how, even in the most closed and minimal group of fans, there will be fissures and divisions due to discordances in practices or beliefs, turning a seemingly homogeneous community into a divided one. These possible divisions have often been dismissed by scholars, who instead suggest that there is one sole and all-encompassing fandom of certain products (Leverich 2015; van de Goor 2015). This is mostly due to the fact that practices are policed and agreed upon by members, as well as disregarded, disagreed or ignored; ships² can split fans into different 'factions' which do not necessarily cross paths, and crossover fandoms are liminal by definition in their activity, which can also set them apart from other fandoms (Leverich 2015). Thus, even while considering that fandom shares beliefs concerning what fan behavior is, what a community is and the sense of belonging therein, their practices contribute to othering and segmenting (van de Goor 2015), constituting communities when those sectors have "their own sets of boundaries, rules and hierarchical structures that may not necessarily conform to the wider fan community" (Chin 2010, p.119).

In particular, one subset of fanworks and the community that surrounds it has been used to illustrate the capacity to produce non-hegemonic discourses of fandom and the articulation that occurs therein. Slash is a branch of fanworks

² Romantic or sexual relationship between two or more fictional or non-fictional characters, canonical or not (definition from shipping wikia). It is usually coded as Character 1/Character 2 or Character1xCharacter2.

focusing on same-gender romantic/sexual relationships between characters. Sometimes the definition excludes lesbian relationships, making them part of a different sub-genre called femslash (Thurman 2015, Brennan 2013b). Slash traditionally has been conceptualized as a feminized space, for example to Jenkins ([1992] 2005) slash appeared as a primarily women activity that served to conceptualize romantic relationships outside of a heteropatriarchal regime. This was done by using the romantic relationship of two men as a way to blur the limitations of masculinity and its relationship with femininity; creating a relationship where both characters are equal. Such conceptualizations, which define slash as the creation of fictional spaces as a critique of a patriarchal society, have been adopted by many authors, who take slash as a strategy to blur the boundary between women and men subjects in a multiplicity of combinations (Willis 2016); or conceptualize it as a “place of female queer possibility”, arguing that the elements of their narratives and the community that forms around slash allow the articulation of queer identities (Lothian, Busse & Reid 2016). On the other hand, Brennan (2013b) discusses that scholars have focused too much on the critical side of slash and the women in it, shunning both the existence of men slashers and the conservative elements (Brennan 2013a) that exist inside slash communities, in particular how certain users attack producers of content if they cross certain boundaries, either of content or visibility. For Brennan (ibid), slash cannot be understood exclusively as a transgressive space as he finds that certain parts of it are rooted more in the fantasy of gay relationships than in the relationships themselves and so, when the content becomes more visible or touches on sensitive topics, the fantasy risks being broken.

Fandom and slash, as mentioned above, have been construed as spaces where otherwise marginalized individuals produce their own discourses, their own spaces, and communities and yet also reproduce some of the same hegemonic logic that excludes them. Thus, in this paper, we will examine how some

boundaries are constructed, what norms and mechanisms are used to uphold said boundaries, and what kinds of subjects are constructed through those boundaries.

Between the broad scope of slash communities, Stucky was selected because it was one of the more popular ships on 2016 on Tumblr. It originates from the characters and universe of Captain America, specifically Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes (Stucky being a portmanteau of the characters' names). Captain America, as a franchise, appears as part of bigger multimedia franchise and deals with themes such as patriotism, identity and culture within the USA (Steinmetz 2008; Stevens and Bells 2009; Mercille 2013), while being a product of marketing practices that involve fanification (Burks 2016).

The Stucky community moves across platforms and websites, as most fandoms do, using Tumblr, AO3, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and others to create, share and find content of interest. While moving on those platforms, fans learn to moderate their actions by acquiescing to others actors' actions, depending on their paths in fandom. Those dynamics help to construe guidelines or agreements about how to behave in different *sides* of their fandom.

Methodology

This research was done with a qualitative focus since the object of study was the practices of certain subjects and how they constitute themselves and their social reality (Piper 2007). This qualitative focus allowed us to work with the contradictions and breaking points of those socially constructed objects (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

The data was produced through virtual ethnography (Hine 2000), conducted between July 2016 and January 2017, via participant observation, documented with screenshots and field journals. Three ethnographic interviews were conducted with differently positioned participants in the fandom of Stucky: a

writer fan, a collector fan, and a lurker fan.³ Virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) is used as a way to produce ethnographic knowledge about online relationships, understanding it as a cultural artifact and therefore a product of the culture it is inserted in. As a consequence, the field of this approach appears not as a predefined space but as a place in constant fluctuation. Thus, the field expanded to other websites and areas insofar as they seemed relevant during the fieldwork.

For this research, the field was defined as a place where interactions in fandom were visible and traceable, which led us to the social network of Tumblr. Inside this platform, content is classified and observed according to the number of responses, quantity of users interacting, relevance of the contents and timing. This content was followed according to their use of tags and their interaction with the fandom of Stucky. Tumblr was selected because it works as a social network that connects to other platforms, allows posting and subscribing to content and interaction between their users. AO3⁴, another site for fandom, was sporadically visited when links to the site appeared in Tumblr.

To obtain data pertaining to perspectives from people who were already fans of Stucky, we conducted three ethnographic interviews with fans who undertake different activities within the fandom. Those interviews touched on topics regarding their ways of moving within the fandom, of interacting and building it, the history they knew about it, and their own involvement with it, along with their motivations, beliefs, and compromises with the fandom, as well as with other fans, plus their experience of being a fan. All of that data complemented our own experience around fandom, giving us a deeper understanding of other findings and allowing us to better navigate and map our

³ This data was produced for the researchers' thesis to obtain a professional degree in Psychology in Universidad de Chile, 2017.

⁴ AO3 is an "Archive of Our Own" for fanworks, created and maintained by the OTW, Organization of Transformative Works (alternative name for fanworks). In the site, fans can post and comment fanworks pertaining several fandoms. It has also compiled material from other websites, to preserve them.

fieldwork. Additionally, it added some insights about some similarities and differences within the groups inside the community that were too subtle for us to notice at first. An ethnographic interview approach was selected for these reasons; we, as immersed as we were in the field, needed to access fans' understanding of the field first, in order to subsequently focus on matters more specific and pertinent to our research.

To analyze the material produced, an ethnographic analysis was completed (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994), where the information collected was reorganized critically, emerging from the work in the field, giving as a result a narrative text with categories and perspectives to reformulate the information in relation to our analytical focus.

Analysis and discussion

In this analysis, we will explore the notion of othering that occurs within the Stucky fandom, by relating it to both discourse and practices, utilizing a frame of Foucauldian conceptual tools. This fandom can be explored from within its different spaces, within which many territorial distinctions occur, singling out groups either because of their different reactions to the content of fanworks, as happened with trigger warnings, or due to the production of content that was not welcomed or valued within the fandom community, as happened with Hydra Trash Party and *dark fics*⁵, which will be explained in more detail in the last segment of the text. Both aspects are framed in an apparent contradiction with the fandom's purpose of being an inclusive space, as well as its social condition of already being an othered space (Lothian, Busse & Reid 2016), which is contested by the emergence of performances that fetishize or invalidate homosexual

⁵ Dark fics are "fan fictions that deal with intentionally disturbing material, such as physical and emotional violence. The mood and atmosphere are characterized by a shift away from optimism, toward despair or hopelessness, or even a sort of gleeful exploration of the disturbing." (definition from whatisthehydratrashparty.tumblr)

narratives in the form of so called *trash*. In the discussion of HTP, “‘trash’ is slang for something nobody wants”. This more or less coincides with the one the library manager described as “something that's kinky or wrong”. However, “trash” is also used in the fandom to describe something as a guilty pleasure, as something that is enjoyed in spite of or even because of being problematic. These discourses and performances can be read from an ethicopolitical standpoint, both in the sense of constructing certain ‘acceptable’ forms of sexuality and the construction of inclusive spaces.

Triggering as rationality policing

To begin with, we will explain the tagging system in Tumblr. The tags in this social network function as identifiers that help viewers to select content within blogs tagged with certain words. For example, to display all of the posts tagged ‘Stucky’ in a blog, the tag must be typed in the search box, and all the posts that use it, either as a word or tag will appear, leaving out unrelated content (although this can change according to the platform’s tools). They also work as the search mechanism of Tumblr itself, or for Google results to pop out. It is due to this feature that tags can be used as a medium to split sections inside the fandom, since only similar content will appear, and all other possible content, as long as it is not tagged alongside the searched tag, will not be present in the results. This becomes relevant when browsing for Stucky-related posts or blogs, being the first step for our interviewees, and ourselves, when arriving at the fandom.

These tags are usually used to guide users both to content that they would prefer and to their associated community. Nevertheless, they are also used to warn potential readers about content that for any reason they may want to avoid. One subset of these tags is trigger warnings, which are used to warn and prevent other users from encountering concepts, ideas, feelings, or anything else that may be related to trauma or strong negative unavoidable reactions. Godderis and Root

(2016), referring to the use of trigger warnings in the classroom, argue that usually the call for trigger warnings does not come from those that should benefit from it, but from other people that consider that the content could cause suffering to someone else; in this sense, trigger warnings rest on the construction of a vulnerable Other and an attempt to police content that could harm them. But, for Lothian (2016), the use of trigger warnings in slash has a different connotation insofar as it has an added dimension as a pleasurable activity and therefore trigger warnings serve not only to help avoid unpleasant narratives but also as a tool to find them if one so wishes.

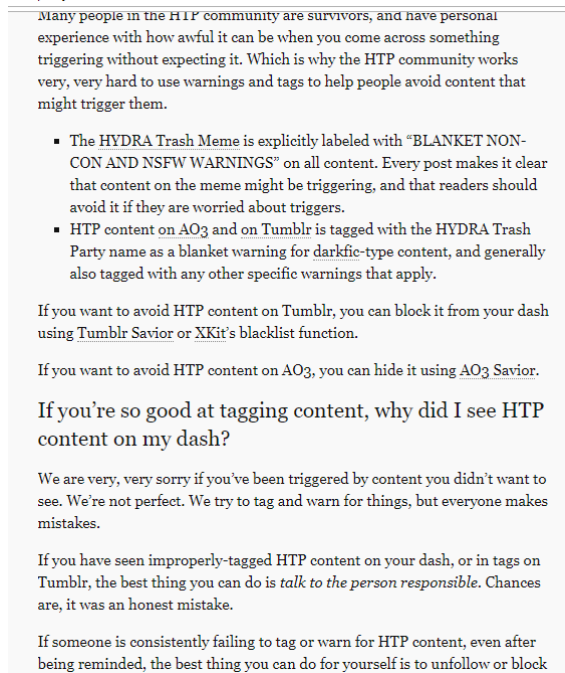
This framing of certain content as dangerous for some subjects marks a particular way of being and demonstrates how to relate to certain experiences. For Foucault (quoted in Tassin 2012) subjectivity consists of the way we make the experience of the self, appearing as a positive product of a matrix of power relationships in society and the economy of truth associated with it. This is part of a dynamic process of tension, transformation, and renewal that extends to both the macro political and micro political (Ares 2010). When considering the practice of offering trigger warnings, it is important to highlight the role that discourse plays in the constitution of knowledge, power, and relationships. It is due to the discursive practices of tagging that actual spaces emerge and disappear in fandom, within the possibilities of wording, taggable ideas, and the relevance of the contents to distinguish them from other matters (Foucault quoted in Domínguez and Tribalsky 2011).

Trigger warnings function as a discursive tool to other, since their use is heavily dependent on words, phrasings, and written codes, and ultimately speak of written content that may harm an Other. In this sense, this othering is rooted in discursive practices that are related to hegemonic or marginal discourses; after all, trigger warnings behold the intention of preventing and caring for an Other who is a peer.

In this manner, trigger warnings build a discursive Other that is rational, disabled, and similar to oneself, but with different experiences, translating to the fandom in a disaggregation of emotions, either uniting them in PTSD or positioning them in a lesser position to rationality. Additionally, they construct an Other that has acceptable and understandable problems, with which they can sympathize and try to amend their ways to include them without causing them more troubles. The fandom establishes this space where this Other can navigate safely. Since the warning was already given, the space to discuss the correctness or adequacy of the content is not expected to arise; rather, it is assumed that the content is at least tolerated, and that a debate will not occur unless there are other points of conflict surrounding it. They give fandom broader limits for its narratives, and help avoid unwanted responses. They also offer the benefit of being 'fair' to people who might get upset, and therefore give the impression of an understanding, empathic fandom while policing feedback and debates about Stucky and its fanworks.

An example of this is how the HTP *side* considers itself in regards to tags. As referenced below, this *side* appears to be unwilling to subject people to their presence, suggesting blacklisting⁶ to avoid seeing content one did not desire or does not like. Nonetheless, they also mention that people who submit, create or repost HTP contents are not always efficient in their tagging, which would mean that people can still encounter the products they do not want to see. In those instances, it is recommended to mention the slips to the original poster (OP), assuming they will correct their mistakes when pointed out.

⁶ A function of Tumblr to block undesired content from your own dashboard and searches via blocking their tags.



In the screenshot above, the advice and position one of the HTP blogs is made clear as a strict categorization of the content, so it can be blocked by users. As well as the specification that, in the event that calling out the person in question does not work, they can block or unfollow the blog producing the HTP fanworks.

These delimited spaces and subjects, are part of a broader “cultural common sense”, that is to say, statements that are shared continuously and reiteratively (Stanfill, 2011), as was argued in the literature surrounding trigger warnings (Gooderis and Root 2016; Lothian 2016). The ‘discursive environment’ that is built forms the objects of which we speak (Foucault quoted in Stanfill 2011). For Foucault, discourse is understood as that which is socially said of something, that constitutes it, a part of knowledge, which is created and transformed in the practices imbued with discourse or those that are done in a frame of possible discourses. In either case, discourse and practices are affected

⁷ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

by one another, in a dynamic that coincides with how society utilizes and performs them as truth or reality. Practices can be related to knowledge, ethics or power, in a specific historical context (Foucault, quoted in Domínguez & Tribalsky, 2011). For Butler, discourse is maintained and created in its performance, linked to the use and management of public and private spaces, and the ways of human relationships, where a continuous and reiterative performance will sustain a discursive category, such as gender (Butler 2011).

The discourse that reifies an Other is mostly based on the practices that delimit this Other, and its qualification as such in relation to a social group. These practices are what can transform and change these categories, from either the position of either the othered or the hegemonic discourse. No practice can be undertaken outside of its particular historical possibilities and the possible performances that come with it. Trigger warnings, in this sense, encompass, facilitate, and produce an Other within the Stucky fandom that other fans seek to protect, warn, and inform, due to the content in question, and because of a more comprehensive idea of the diversity of fans that inhabit Stucky. In this othering, the purpose is to be mindful of inclusiveness, although this practice inevitably forms a segregation of these others.

Trashiness in fandom as a relegated place of ethicopolitics

As we alluded before, Hydra Trash Party (HTP) refers to a sub-genre in Captain America fanworks relating to the abuse that both Steve and Bucky could have received at the hands of Hydra: in particular, rape, brainwashing and both physical and mental torture. At the time of our fieldwork, this subgenre's existence was a point of contention inside the fandom, because it was interpreted as a fetishization of abuse, an exaltation of rape culture, and a topic that could trigger or offend victims of abuse. Regardless of the merits of such criticism, it creates a framework of what is acceptable and palatable in the fandom and what can be

enjoyed within it, limiting these narratives despite being a possible interpretation of canon. This can be read as part of an ethicopolitical framework (Rose, 1999). For the author, ethicopolitics represent a development of advanced liberal democracies in which the focus of government moves to an ethical and moral framework, relating to the obligations the subject has to itself and to others, and the techniques it should use on itself to manage them. These techniques are a subset of technologies of the self, a molecularization of power that guides the ways of being of the subject at a micropolitical and quotidian level.

In this case, the issue is presented as a moral and ethical one: HTP content should not be enjoyed or produced as it appears as inherently problematic. Fans should avoid that particular vein, since it can be related to the normalization of violence and abuse, as both anti and pro HTP blogs recognize, as showcased in these two posts below:

like i love how people are like "2/3 of women have fantasies about rape! [rape] and [torture] are totally valid kinks! it's a thing!!"

could you step aside for like, five minutes and consider the fact that just because our rape culture has helped shape psychological desires (as all things related to culture do???) doesn't mean for that those desires are "healthy" or "normal" or "okay" or that we should be content to "indulge them" without doing the work to deconstruct our learned cultural biases. there is a lot of fatphobia out there, and hey! there happens to be a shit ton of pornography about denigrating fat women! and oh wow, look at all of that racism in america! and look at all of the pornography that is produced that fetishizes black bodies! wowwwwww

(also, radical thought: have you ever considered that by producing content that glorifies and sexualizes rape, you too are participating in our rape culture???? DUN DUN DUN)

personal responsibility is a thing yo

8

Yes, the HYDRA Trash Meme has an explicit, aggressively-enforced rule forbidding any kind of romanticization of rape or other violence. Any prompt or post that makes non-con, dub-con, or any other kind of problematic behavior seem unproblematic is either challenged for clarification or frozen outright. The HTP community is about bad people doing bad things, and the community is committed to being brutally honest about how bad those things are.

In fact, one of the reasons many of us prefer to explore darkfic in the HYDRA Trash Meme is *because* of this clear distinction that keeps HTP content free from romanticization of rape or abuse.

You will *never* see people victim-blaming, justifying the actions of abusers, or minimizing the effects of trauma in the HTP community.

But people get off on this stuff! How is that not romanticizing rape?

Remember: romanticization means making something seem better than it really is. There's a difference between sexualizing something and romanticizing it. Saying "This gets me off" is not at all the same thing as saying "I want this to happen in real life."

That's great for YOU, but what if OTHER people get the wrong idea?

The truth is, this is always a possibility. Violence in media is a risk factor for violence in real life. See "Isn't this normalizing violence?" for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

9

While other users encourage taking other routes all together in order to approach topics such as rape and abusive romantic relationships, dismissing HTP content when it is "sexually appealing to the reader". In this manner, HTP cannot exist for

⁸ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://annakomnene.tumblr.com/post/146555279526/like-i-love-how-people-are-like-23-of-women-have>

⁹ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

the writers as anything but a mechanism to work through their own troubles, consciously and without enjoyment, rather exclusively as health/emotional work, as appears in the post below:

What I am against: fetishising and/or romanticising abusive pairings and fiction, writing about rape in a way that is sexually appealing to the reader

What I am NOT against: writing about unhealthy themes whilst ACTIVELY recognising they are unhealthy, appreciating the complexity of a villain, using fiction to work through your troubles

10

Central to this moral dimension is a discussion about victims of abuse who, in spite of the content being properly tagged as such, could come into contact with it anyway, and for whom neither casual encounter or active consumption may not be appropriate, as it would not help in their ‘recovery’. In this manner, it also creates both an ethical requirement for ‘recovery’ and a demand that it may be done so only through certain content. On the other hand, HTP also constructs itself as a way to help with ‘recovery’ by exploring this content and arguing that many of its members are abuse victims for whom creating this content validates their experience and helps them cope with it. In this way this ethical requirement is not called into question, but rather only which content should be accepted within the fandom. The answers are divided somewhat between HTP fans and HTP “anti fans” (*antis*), in part due to the connection with Captain Hydra, who was very badly received, as the author and lurker fans pointed out:

“ILA: I mean (..) you just have to look at the >Hydra< Cap fiasco

E1: why do you think it was a fiasco?

¹⁰ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/153834654977/what-i-am-against-fetishising-andor>

ILA: Look at how angry people were, because Captain America is a modern day myth, a story that belongs to everyone, that means so much to so many people (...)

ILA: (There's not much you can do when it comes to them completely disrespecting the fundamental foundation of a character, like the HYDRA Cap thing)" (ILA, 31, 33)¹¹

"IAB: There were a lot of angry and hurt people. Not to mention the whole hydra cap mess which was disrespectful to the character and the creators who first invented the idea of captain America/Steve rogers" (IAB, 62)¹²

This particular antecedent is relevant in how the fandom treats HTP because the people who oppose it, associate Hydra with Nazism, as shown in the screenshots below:

¹¹ Interview with fan writer. November 25. 2016.

¹² Interview with fan lurker, December 2, 2016.



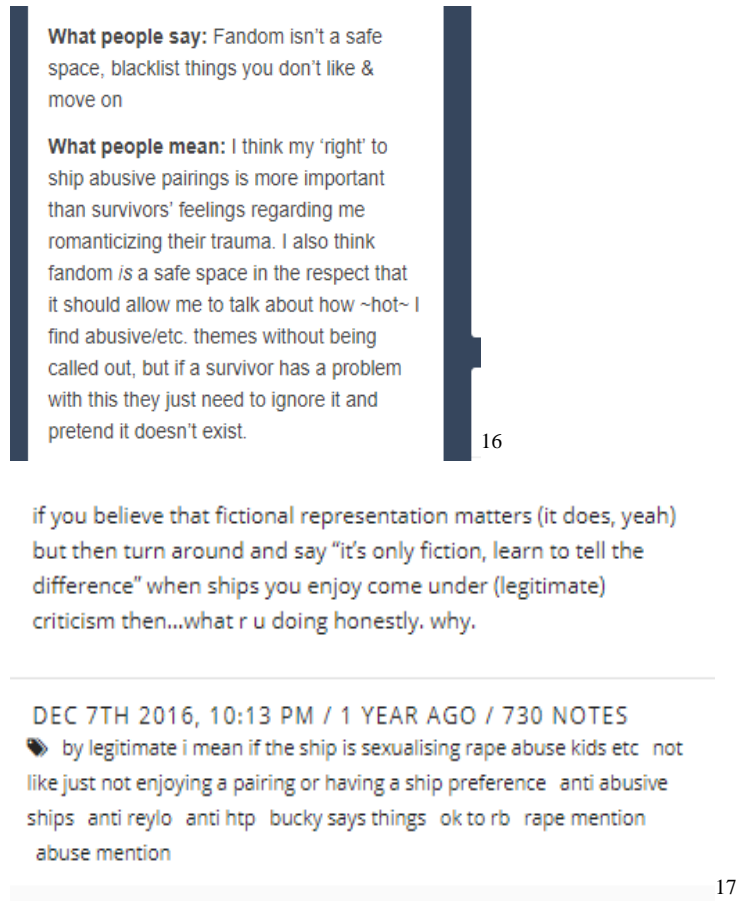
Therefore, any affiliation or joy involving HTP would automatically mean that the reader or writer is a Nazi sympathizer or apologist. The content that constitutes HTP would from the very beginning be wrong for personal pleasure or as coping mechanisms, since it would be read as antisemitism, and an affront to anyone affected by such oppression. Secondly, the status regarding abuse as a sexual need for readers or writers, when survivors of abuse are also present, and in a position

¹³ Credits to Nathaniel Orion, for allowing us to use this screenshot. Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://jewishcap.tumblr.com/post/163575585926/me-a-jew-hey-htp-is-disgusting-because-it>

¹⁴ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

¹⁵ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <https://transboyurameshi.tumblr.com/post/151071050987/marvel-has-stated-numerous-times-hydra-arent>

where fiction affects reality, is also a reason for gatekeeping HTP from the main fandom; such reasons are showcased in the following posts:



In these posts, rape/abuse survivors' feelings are used as a moral justification to avoid producing within the HTP fandom. The legitimacy of a ship itself seems to be pending on the topic of "sexualizing rape, abuse or kids", as well as the talk about fics depicting such themes, which should never deviate to 'how hot' it is for the fan. Overall, these posts highlight the role of fandom/fanworks in regards of

¹⁶ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/153310546552/what-people-say-fandom-isnt-a-safe-space>

¹⁷ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/154177641552/if-you-believe-that-fictional-representation>

these topics, pointing out the voices of survivors as points to not delve into them; as well as the illegitimacy of sexualizing topics that concern abuse, rape and trauma for one's own enjoyment.

HTP identifies itself through tags, marking a difference from some other similar content that may handle the topics in a different way. It creates its own space of differentiation where content that is not approved of in other places resides. We can draft a parallel to Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1984) -a heterotopia is a place that relates to all other places, in which utopia, an idealization of society or a corruption of the same, appears as an impossible place. Heterotopia appears as a superposition of many places, either real or imaginary, becoming a superposition of those other places that are not 'here', exposing that which is not 'here' by way of contrasting or exposing and exaggerating some characteristic of the 'here'. Heterotopias for Foucault had two primary uses, first as 'crisis' heterotopias, places—where changes that had to occur 'elsewhere' happened—and second as places of 'deviancy', where those outside the required norms dwelled. Foucault (1984) considered that heterotopias needed a clear boundary to mark them as different from the places of everyday transit, to mark them as delineated places, with distinct times and rules. On Tumblr, this boundary is less concrete insofar as the site's navigation lacks concrete barriers between blogs and content, but tagging works in a similar way: it marks them as a particular space of navigation where the proscribed content resides, and at the same time allows us to imagine HTP as a mixture of all the content that could be inappropriate (and, therefore, its exposure would be prevented via the presence of those tags). In that sense, HTP appears not as a place of crisis, but as a place of deviation, where those products that we do not approve of and its readers reside. And as we mentioned, this helps characterize the rest of the fandom as a place that does not deal with or approve of that sort of content and the moral quandaries that come with them. Yet, unlike the tagged content, HTP surfaces as a more defined

replacement, a community of people that thrive on that unacceptable content and therefore, a better place for the constitution of an Other and the discursive practices that come with it. Where trigger warnings produce a potential spectator that needs to be protected, HTP creates an already present and ‘*problematic*’ spectator and provides one particular identity and place to be identified with. Instead of a disparate group of topics, HTP works as a combination of them, and allows for a superposition with their spectators. Nevertheless, it is important to note that fandom moves fast and the way HTP was framed by the rest of the fandom was already changing by the time we were leaving the field, with the boundaries and the acceptability of content being negotiated between fans.

Slash, as we discussed previously, has been understood as an othered space, a place where women can produce narratives that exist outside of a heteropatriarchal framework, a place where identities can be articulated (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007) and otherwise impossible relationships produced (Jenkins 2006). It is in this sense that Rambukkana (2007) argues that slash can be constituted as an alternative medium as it creates a heterotopia that stands as an othered place of possibility to the mainstream. Although, as we pointed out, the Stucky fandom is not a homogenous place; inside of it there are other divisions, other fragmented heterotopias that mark the places that readers should avoid seeing. And yet they do.

The idea that slash constitutes a space of articulation of queer identities, a place for the elaboration of topics that cannot be mentioned elsewhere, implies the constitution of that elsewhere. Foucault’s (1984) heterotopias of contrast make a statement about the rest of the space, stamping it as a *not*. But, as we have argued, it is not a place without its own cartography, without its own fractures and in this sense, the construction of slash as a particular space involves sharing it with others that may be using it in other ways. Brennan (2013) noted that at least to some slashers the use of slash as a place of fantasy was not only due to those

topics being forbidden elsewhere but precisely because of that prohibition. Slash served as an impossibility that allowed for the maintenance of a separation between a fantasy-like gay sexuality and an actual gay sexuality. In other words, they construct slash as a heterotopia exactly because it is an othered place and therefore would lose its function if it stopped being so.

Following the thread of othered spaces in fandom, HTP involves wider phenomena, since *trash* is a term that has been used broadly in fandom, and it appeared also while we were exploring Stucky fandom, as well as in the interviews with fans. *Trash* refers, in the context of Stucky fandom, to content that focuses mostly on fetishizing homosexual relationships in stereotypical ways, being considered *problematic* since it borders on homophobia. This definition, although, is specific to what we observed since *trashiness* in fandom is related to several practices, interests, and identities. Nevertheless, when involved with HTP and supposedly communal values, its most akin concept would be related to how the fanwork produced or shared is a kind of *sin*. This involves how the characters are part of a homosexual relationship, and for that reason alone, how it is *smutty*, *sinful*, *shameful* and *dirty* as a product. How it is intended to exist as part of established and static tropes, portraying gay sex in predetermined settings. The practices associated with the characters are also related to this fantasized gay sexuality, as Brennan enunciates it (2013a), such as being abusive or controlling, delicate or naive, etcetera, giving a set of actions that they could perform according to this prefixed sexual positioning, that permeates all of their other contexts.

At the same time, the line that separates this ‘trashy’ content from the appropriate content also responds to certain ethical norms about how sexualities should be depicted. Going back to Rose’s (1999) ethicopolitics, the practices around which this content is framed involve a policing of that imagery, ways in which they should be thought and desired. While the notion of ‘*trashiness*’

involves practices that construct this depiction as marginal and to some extent shameful, they are not the only ethical construction involved in their marginalization. The construction of this brand of content as ‘fetishist’ and potentially homophobic also invites a certain brand of politicization, where instead of proscribing the content, it is asked to change the ways it represents the characters, the focus, and the roles of the characters. It involves a particular construction of sexuality where certain practices appear as inherently harmful or dangerous, and therefore they must be hidden and approached with care, even in fiction. In general, the discursive practices that were present when policing delved into territories of fantasizing sexual practices that involve non-hegemonic practices, such as homosexual ones, or their roles, and adjusting them to narratives to please the producer and reader, but not really connecting or alluding to a real homosexual community, utilizing these identities and practices as tools for pleasure. These kinds of practices are conceived as *trash* by part of the fandom because they use other people’s experiences, particularly marginal and minority subjects, to transform them into narratives that are considered unrealistic and selfish.

Considering how the discursive practices of tagging work into othering, *trash* is not part of a discourse of classifying and clarifying other people’s paths and experiences, neither there is an intended purpose of framing them into a unique discourse of homophobia, or the results of the practices do not show this. Instead, it is in the practices of participation on fandom themselves that the discourse appears, that sides are formed, and that homophobia, or rejection thereof, is present and visible for fans.

Conclusion

This paper explored the ways in which the Other is constituted inside the Stucky fandom, focusing on how the practices and discourse surrounding the ship

produce an Other, in particular, the practices around trigger warnings and the management of ‘appropriate’ content and *trash*. Through both our ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, what the fans do, be it either their fanworks, their posts within ‘discourse’ or arguments, or their chats and interactions, construe spaces and mark what is expected to exist in them. This construction relies on the existence of Others who do not follow these rules, either by not classifying the content properly or by enjoying content that should not be enjoyed or, if approached and liked, should be revealed in carefully, both within and outside the fandom. While the ‘outside’ has been studied thoroughly, by casting slash as a space for particular groups of fans (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007; Rambukkana 2007) or as a response to patriarchal norms (Jenkins [1992] 2005), the inside divisions of slash have not been studied in detail (Brennan 2013a, 2013b), nor has the mechanism that produces and sustains those divisions.

In our research, this inside othering rested on the delimitation of spaces and the control of visibility, through warnings and tags, allowing the management content and the limiting of the people who associate with it to *other* spaces, relegated from the general fandom to one particular place or subset of places. By means of trigger warnings, a particular Other that should be prevented from viewing the content is constituted while regarding the rest of the fandom as a ‘suitable’ place for them. This construction of the Other by warnings also helps to delimit certain subjects that enjoy this ‘*problematic*’ content and differentiates them from the rest of the fandom. This distinction facilitates the constitution of Stucky as a space with particular norms and sensibilities about content. In this manner, the fandom creates ethical norms about how the fans should approach certain topics and attempts to constitute slash as a queer space (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007), and yet, these Others dispute those notions insofar as that *problematic* content can be read as part of the ‘imaginary homosexuality’ that Brennan (2013b) proposed and so the arrangement of Stucky and slash in general

appears in constant conflict and negotiation. Moreover, these ethical norms can be read in a hegemonic frame of values, around censoring and invisibilization of deviant sexualities or subjects, reinforcing notions about common discourses and truths, as well as promoting a sense of shaming or shading of practices or experiences that are not considered valuable or presentable, and hence are hidden in those particular othered spaces. Although not all the discursive practices encourage or accept this segregation, it does indeed occur, and it is often mentioned as a respectful manner of behaving rather than a complicated side of fandom.

The Stucky fandom encompasses all kinds of fans, and acts as a vast space for fans to find their preferred content. Their movements are not always meant to cross, as it is intended to happen this way with their own constructions and uses of the platforms. This is often presented as related to communal hegemonic frames of value that are present in the fandom, that self-replicate or transform according to the presence and activities of fans. These practices are in a constant state of change and negotiation, whether due to the tools a site offers or changes in how some content is perceived. In this manner, the divisions of fandom must not be understood as static but as a contingent product of the power relations both inside and outside the fandom.

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The Other Woman

Re-Authoring and Re-Othering Gendered Narratives

Lucy I Baker

Introduction

The prevalence and popularity of fanworks in Western media has steadily increased over the past decade, with the use of technology assisting fans to communicate with each other and form a counterpublic, and commercial interests leveraging that communication for monetary gain. The methods used by fans (including professional authors within fandom, or those who create commercial fanworks) to adapt the works have also steadily changed, becoming more creative with format, form and content in order to adapt around the perceived bones of the original, and the more ‘mainstream’ forms of adaptation that populate the counterpublic. This essay will look at the ways gender is reworked and remade within regendered fanwork, professionally and within fandom; this regendering may take place simply by changing male characters to female ones, or more rarely female characters to male ones, or explore transgendered narratives. It also takes place across the spectrum of sexuality, and interacts with gender at a social level and in the media landscape. The regendered works, and the explicitly stated inspiration and drive behind them, reveal a literary and sociological form which it creates within the gendered structure of media but shifts it in order to reflect back something the creators see as more real, more emotionally resonant, than the

original. The drive of the creators moves beyond Jenkins' hypothesis of dissatisfaction to a kind of feminist praxis, centred on media and creativity.

Primarily functioning as a theoretical exploration of how otherness is refigured in fanworks that change the gender of one or more characters, this essay uses professional adaptations (primarily *Elementary* but also other mainstream media products such as *Ghostbusters*) alongside fanworks, and data gathered from fans in a survey and a series of interviews. Fans who participated in the data gathering came from a variety of backgrounds, with a wide range of creative practices, attitudes and thoughts about regendered fanwork. The specific fictional pieces I refer to and analyse are all available on *Archive Of Our Own* and permission was given to include those works in my research. Some authors also consented to interviews or have written extensive authorial notes on their work. By using Grounded Methodology, I was embedded within the community and identified myself on my tumblr and in person as a researcher, and participants engaged with me with that knowledge. I primarily followed Charmaz' methods for iteratively processing both analysis and collection, and creating inductive abstract categories for analysis (Charmaz 2014, 15).

This analysis revealed numerous elements for deeper research, however this paper focuses on the experience of regendering as one linked with feelings and states of 'otherness' – in communities or in media – that then function as a creative praxis. While experiences of non-conforming gendered people – transgender, genderqueer, non-binary people in particular – were evident in much of this data, as a high proportion of my respondents were outside the gender binary, much higher than either a national or even worldwide survey would predict due to using non-standard surveying techniques for respondents to communicate their gender to me, their experiences when elaborated on were often folded into the category of 'woman' or 'not male' as much as this was also a source of tension in their answers. In a symposium piece 'The Surface Of

Women' for *Transformative Works and Cultures* I explain not only what this means for fan studies methodologies (as it supports the findings of several other studies, academic and otherwise, that suggest fandom has a higher proportion of non-binary gendered and trans individuals) but also how it intersects with the conflicts between quantitative and qualitative research. In light of that work, when the word 'woman' or 'feminine' is used within this paper it is referring to that 'surface' of women – women as a class of 'not-men' rather than a biological or psychological state of being, that incorporates trans women, those assigned as female at birth, those read as female, and those whose social experience is coded by others as 'female', among others.

Crucial to this research is reflecting the rejection of the male default as an abstract category found in my analysis of my data; this is a form of feminist praxis within the creative function of fannish labour that regenders existing work that does embrace and reinscribe that male default. In particular this is relevant to the exclusion of slash, and male-male works that do not engage with regendering, and much of the research around gender and fandom that replicates this default focus on male narratives, even when using a feminist lens. Secondary to this is the focus on Western media. While this does replicate the white default of mainstream media, it is due to several issues; one being my own monolingual background, but also the highly culturally specific representations of gender that are explicable only through embodied and grounded critical examinations. Elements of race do need to be contended with, particularly in the instances of *Elementary* and *Ghostbusters* (2016) where intersections of race *and* gender are relevant to audience reception and fannish behaviour, but my position as a white Australian woman does not allow me the embeddedness required to legitimately explore fandoms from non-Western cultures such as regendered Japanese fanworks.

Reconfiguring Gender

Regendering is the creative process of adapting a work to change the gender of one or more characters. This can take place in commercial adaptations for television such as the remake of *Battlestar Galactica* where the hard-drinking, cigar-chomping Starbuck is regendered as Kara Thrace (still hard-drinking, cigar-chomping, ace pilot with the callsign ‘Starbuck’) or the Sherlock Holmes adaptation *Elementary* where Dr John Watson, the bastion of Victorian English masculinity, becomes Dr Joan Watson a Chinese-American surgeon. Both of these examples provoked backlash from viewers, critics, people involved with the original, and fans prior to release. A high profile example in recent film is Paul Feig’s *Ghostbusters* (2016) which reimagines the male originals as women in a contemporary New York, and garnered significant opprobrium by fans of the original series and film, with Feig saying that “I didn’t realize it was like religion for a generation of boys that came after me. It turned out it was the ultimate boys’ movie” and that the backlash “...it threw me off for a couple of years”, and that his decision to engage with those critiques was a mistake, as “...I took on one of the trolls, and they can fire at you for a year. You dare say one thing back at them, and it’s all over. You’re a victim and you’re a monster...” (Douglas 2017).

This seeming antipathy towards regendering is not repeated in fandom however. Within that context – such as cosplay, fan art or fanfic – the amount of fanwork hours, the audience, the effort, gives it a depth and provides a broader pool of methods and means for the regendering compared to the more hierarchical work in professional environments. Examinations of the methods and materials of these works provides not only an oblique reconstruction of how gender is formed in the original works, but also how gender is reformed by the audience of fan-creators, including those fans with studio and Hollywood backing to realise their adaptational works. Their drive to ‘honour’ the original through their own professional lens is often akin to those of fans, it simply happens to also include

large budgets and a significant amount of social capital (VanDerWuff 2013). These works often interact with wider political concerns about representation, creative and economic opportunities, and the psychological effects of misrepresentation (Sandvoss 2005, 78–79; Busse et al. 2009, 105). Within fan environments this ‘cause’ is viewed with some approval, or neutrality, due to the metanarratives of transformation integral to fanwork, but Feig in particular notes that the negative reaction to the regendered *Ghostbusters* was because “... for some of our audience, they were like, ‘What the fuck? We don’t wanna go to a cause. We just wanna watch a fuckin’ movie’” (Ferber 2017).

The illusion of fanwork creators as amateurs ignores the sheer amount of work they do – reading particularly – and the shifting barriers between fanwork creators and the professionals who use fanwork as a part of their commercial work. Many professional authors write fanfic, many fan artists are professionals in their own right, and the explosion of actual fanfics being published (with ‘the serial numbers filed off’ – invoking the theft analogies beloved of anti-fanwork activists) reveal the permeable nature of the borders between fanwork and the more acceptable pastiches, reboots, remakes, and adaptations. Australian author Tansy Rayner Roberts has created several projects regendering classic narratives, including the “a crowd-funded web serial” reboot of *The Three Musketeers* that I interviewed her about in 2014, which she calls “genderswapped musketeers in space”. Roberts goes on to note that her position as a professional author affected the reception of this fannish work;

Because I know in fanfic communities the commenting culture is really big, but I think actually because this is being presented as original fiction on a published author’s blog, I suspect that people don’t want to interrupt the flow of, like they feel awkward commenting on the fiction which isn’t finished? I don’t know? Normally my friends are normally more outspoken than this.

Fanworks which ask how a change in gender or race affects a narrative or character often suggest that the stories would become more interesting, not less,

and that any discomfort is due to our own internalising of stereotypes about race and gender (Scodari 2012, 337). Roberts, in her interview, found this conflict affected *how* she chose to regender the original *Three Musketeers*

I kind of wanted to change up the canon relationships, so that if I genderswapped everybody they would also all be straight, you'd still have all these male-female relationships and I wanted to explore different relationships. I also, because at its heart the *Three Musketeers* is a story about four men and their professional friendship, and I actually didn't want to change it into a story of four women and their professional friendship because for a start, ... because I was very interested in male-female platonic friendships. And so I deliberately kept one of the musketeers male, changed all the others to women, I kept another small canon character female, which allowed my heroine D'Artagnan to be bisexual. And because my version of Aramis is a lesbian, therefore any character Aramis slept with in the three musketeers got to stay female.

The original characters, often a site of identification or at least comfortable recognition for the audience, are displaced by the new version, although a common complaint is that this is often overlaid with what can seem like a political drive to 'correct' a narrative without paying due respect to that original.

The overstated fear of political correctness creating bland narratives, a character's depth 'lost in castration' as put by Dirk Benedict in his scathing review of the remade *Battlestar Galactica*, or much of the negative responses to the regendered characters of *Ghostbusters* (2017), is one that fandom proves to be unfounded within fanworks and the multitude of responses fanworks garner from their own counterpublic (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 193). Fandom unfolds with almost infinite plots, characters and characterisations, and while the canonical media imbalances are often replicated, the field is broad enough that transgressive works have an adoring audience and a constantly changing pool of creators (Reid 2009, 466). Fanwork has the capacity to include a multitude of universes, versions, and contains works that consciously and unconsciously recreate the mainstream, or elements of it, even as they may transgress other political ideals.

Adapted and fanworks provide a unique insight into both creative and social practices. There has been a noted tendency in mainstream media to create adaptive works; sequels, remakes, reboots, transmedia adaptations, and so on (Allen 2012). There are a number of imputed reasons behind this change over the past 10 to 15 years, ranging from the purely commercial (that the audience wants familiarity over everything) to creative bankruptcy (that all stories have been told/modern creators are devoid of originality) but the tendency remains and media producers are finding new ways to investigate and invigorate source material in an over-saturated environment (Sciretta 2009; Allen 2012). Genre media tends to engage fans with high levels of creative and obsessive behaviours which leads to higher levels of engagement and identification with the media itself; however the question of what creates a fandom like Trekkies, or X-Philes, is hardly a settled argument (Duffett 2014). So, while fannish engagement with the canonical materials seems to invite audiences to consume the remake it can also lead to a level of identification which actively impedes their ability to engage with the adaptation. To be the audience requires a distance, as Doane states, one that is thoroughly disrupted by closing the distance and becoming the character or becoming the (re)creator;

Glasses worn by a woman in the cinema do not generally signify a deficiency in seeing but an active looking, or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully moved to the other side of the specular. (Doane 1982, 78).

In fandom, Irigaray's curved mirror "...with its impossible reappropriation 'on the inside' of the mind, of thought, of subjectivity" or Doane's 'girl with glasses' find themselves reasserting the gaze of the assumed female (or at least, not normatively male) creator and audience, while undoing the distance between themselves and the works they consume (Irigaray 1985, 155).

In the non-commercial adaptations, or fanworks, a more creative approach can be taken where fan producers transgress that fannish identification and engagement and receive criticism for their sins (Bacon-Smith 1992, 234). Due to the romantic and sexual metanarratives of fanwork where the most popular (relation)ships are those between male leads rather than the women they are paired with in the media, regendering characters often leaves fans and creators with two choices: heterosexualising a queer bond, or queering a heterosexual one; when discussing *Elementary*, Roberts noted that “I’m all for the slashiness but I feel like that’s the more transgressive choice to make (to make the male-female relationship platonic)”. These bonds may or may not be sexual in the canonical media form – in fact they are often not – but the metanarratives of fandom are heavily invested in representations of male homosexuality via slash (porluciernagas 2013). Regendering within this metanarrative context has negative associations regardless of intent – either the queering of a heterosexual bond/relationship is susceptible to the fetishisation that lurks as a palimpsest in criticisms of fanwork and slash, or the heterosexualising of it then plays into the wider media ‘heterowashing’ and erasure of queer identity.

There are several methods fans use to regender characters and the next section will examine several of them as methods of transgression and othering. The rare regendered female character provides an examination of masculinity within a cultural insistence that it is default and immutable. The regendering of the slash metanarrative via regendered characters manifests as femmeslash, which addresses the absence of the explicitly lesbian woman in both mainstream narratives and fanworks but also replicates the wider focus on male narratives by focusing the emotional labour of the (female) fan on those (male) narratives and performances. The presence and problem of heterosexuality and heterosexism is a common critique of regendered work but is an avenue for investigating the myriad constructions of other and varied ways of transgressing the socio-cultural

boundaries of gender (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 189; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007, 103). While regendering is not the most popular adaptive technique, nor the most prevalent, it is one which offers a qualitative engagement with media depictions and perceptions of women from the creator, the created and the audience.

Gender, sex and sexuality within fanworks, along with gender presentation and performance, are differently explored axes for characterization and identity. Maleness is not masculinity; equally, femininity is not an indicator of sexual identity, rather they are both a manifestation of some internal quality that the universe attempts to assign meaning to. Many regendered fanworks interrogate this axis in some way; *Elementary* engages with the race-bending of Watson through Joan – now Chinese-American and played by Lucy Liu – objecting to assumptions she ‘knows martial arts’, while also illustrating a familiarity with Chinese herbal medicine. In the fanwork *In Arduis Felis* by mad_maudlin, the regendered Watson says, in an aside on her own masculinity compared with the canonically lesbian Harry, her sister;

(Harry had never been interested in the guns, or the hunting, or anything else that Jane liked, really; she was always more about makeup and dolls, never the one with the stain on her dress. No wonder people were usually surprised at which of them was the lesbian.) (Mad_Maudlin 2010). (*parentheses original*)

The effect of codified sexual preference performances of gender, in terms of Femme and Butch or the feminisation of ‘bottoms’ (gay men who are penetrated), has been to delineate a kind of gender performance as sexual identity – one that manifests not only in sexual behaviours but in characterisation and representation of one’s self in dress, speech, and non-sexual behaviours (Halberstam 2012, 336).

The canonical characterisation may or may not correlate with the acceptable performance of sexual identity in fanworks and similarly may or may not be static in those representations; the novel-length fanfic *How The Mouth*

Changes Its Shape by Having Been Breathed Out very deliberately engages with (mostly) historical tropes around Femme and Butch, and how that manifests sexually when performance does not match desire within a highly codified cultural context (breathedout 2013). The characters find themselves transgressing not only the historical gender policing social codes, but also subcultural codes of behaviour about the receptive Femme and penetrative/aggressive Butch behaviours that still find traction in media and culture; Sanger and Lynch reveal the ways in which those cultural figurations of female masculinity and ‘butchness’ impact both domestic violence and sexual behaviour within lesbian relationships in South African communities, and Rossiter examines the perceived problematic nature of trans women who may ‘destabilise’ the lesbian community with their masculinity, particularly if they also perform Butchness (2017; 2016). The flexibility of the sexual and gender identity is a feature of fanwork, as is the flexibility of performing those behaviours associated with identity in the works (and more generally as fans, as people).

In order to capture some of this flexibility the complex connections between sex and gender performance need to be understood through the construction of the female-feminine and the male-masculine, and the female-masculine and male-feminine in fanworks. Sexual identity is similarly fluid and exists as a continuum between text and subtext in the canon to the metanarratives of homosexuality and homosociality in fandom. What is subtext in the original is made text in fandom, with homosociality particularly becoming a sexualised motif within analyses and critiques of the original, often only in terms of the presumed straight but fannishly queer man, with masculinity no longer the delineator of heterosexual male identity. The female-feminine can be read as ‘Femme’ or ‘straight’ but it is still portrayed as a collection of external identifiers of gender (cis or trans), and culturally mandated and enforced behaviours, which may or may not be an actual manifestation of preference and desire. The conscious

performance of femininity as a form of protective colouration is featured in numerous fanworks as a way characters negotiate a world – canonical or fannish or real – that still punishes gender transgressions.

What Does She Look Like?

The perception of a character changes according to their presented gender – not necessarily their actual gender but the *perceived* or *presented* gender. In *Pitch Black* for example, a character passes as male for much of the movie until she is revealed as female due to her menstrual fluid, her blood, attracting aliens – the body as truth and women’s bodies particularly as dangerous, for the hidden places and inexplicable wounding we carry within us (Rosewarne 2012, 85; Twohy 2000). This perception is boundarised by concepts of performance and the binarised other. Fanworks that regender one or more characters interact with these complex sites of gender performance and embodiment, and the role of the gender binary in othering.

The audience perception of female characters is reliant on their media consumption practices and on their community. The female character, and the female role, is often seen as a foil to the male.

The real problem, though, is that the people involved in the series think they are doing something good for women by castrating detective fiction's greatest sidekick. ...But the first thing they're saying is that it's appropriate to have a woman in the junior role: the follower, the admirer, the helpmeet. Which is where women have been on screen for years already. (Coren 2012)

Criticisms of the regendered Watson in *Elementary* often focused on what impact her femininity would have upon the stories – that by virtue of her gender she must nag Sherlock, mother him, romance him – and thus turning them into women’s stories (Coren 2012; Stagg 2012). Ignoring the high number of female Sherlock fans and the long history of female fans of the Conan Doyle canon, these perceptions are that a woman character makes a woman’s story and thus unfit for ‘normal’ audiences unless she is appropriately dimensionalised as subservient to

the masculine narrative as in the canonically female characters. Or in the case of Sherlock, the canonically feminised Watson who indeed nags and mothers Sherlock and according to some critics and readings of the subtext, romances him as well. (Neko's Muse 2012; Stout 1941).

The arguments supporting the existing over-representation of men in media as supposed sites of neutral identification or as more innately interesting, or even just due to the ability of women to identify with men with 'ease' (Doane 1982, 81), are not a reflection of a statistical over-representation in the audience or an objective understanding. Instead they correlate with an over-representation of men in positions of power (Spender 1985, 30–35). The 'other' of women is constructed from a foundation of personal fulfilment and fandom responds with its own personal agenda; homosociality becomes outright homosexuality, and male narratives are flipped, the female gaze is prioritised and catered to. This act, this feminised and female agenda that is aggressively *not male*, acts to other the presumed male audience despite it changing very little. Instead it fills in the absences and rectifies the imbalance, simply by existing. The othering comes in the specific modalities and methods used in regendered narratives and works. The next section covers the way gendered expectations interact with those textual elements of fanwork to create a version of the other within the subculture of fandom.

Boy?Version

Fans rarely regender the canonically female character. When they are regendered it can be mired in unexamined sexism or fetishisation of the queer male; it can also be a valuable reconstruction of gender. This rarity works to reinforce the way regendering others the male; that experience of male-masculinity is so rarely given the attention demanded by the female-feminine or female-masculine that it is effectively erased and becomes, not invisible, but unimportant. While it seems

superficially to function as the opposite to the male character regendering, it occupies the other and the absence more fully by revealing the limitations of the original canonical female character within the narrative. The act of erasure not only replicates and makes obvious that erasure – unlike the unexamined and unconscious erasure of the wider media – it reconfigures masculinity within the erasure, the myriad female masculinities becoming dominant. Instead of the female other being essentially unknowable in the construction of the male, masculinity and maleness become dependent on the female other and the feminine creative process¹. Similarly the reworking of a cis – normatively gendered – narrative into a trans narrative is one that makes obvious the construction of the male-masculine default as a birth heritage within mainstream media.

The regendering of the canonical female character in either fanwork or commercial adaptations transgresses the metanarratives and polite fictions of fandom by making the absences and othering of the canon explicit and reformulating that absence to investigate the default male-masculine. This regendering can be queered as well, to create from the heterosexual narrative a gay male representation at the expense of the representation of women. This tension between the representation of women and representation of (male defaulted) queerness is only possible within the cultures of fandom; the transgressions can be cultural and subcultural, can be read from a multitude of perspectives. The tension between the progressive depictions of queer sexuality and the queer subtexts where fandom often situates itself is underwritten by regendering which forces the audience to confront the fetishizing/objectifying nature of their gaze and attention, and to consider the imbalances inherent in the

¹ Note: the gendering of fanwork as feminine and female is a simplistic one and part of a wider characterisation of fandom-as-female compared to fans-as-male – the difference between *Twilight* fans and *Manchester* fans is slight, but the creative works are explained as a manifestation of the feminine while the riots and gambling are exhibitions of masculinity (Busse et al. 2009).

prevalence of queer male narratives over the depictions of women, who may or may not be queer.

Regendering, however, does still prioritise a female experience and characterisation and creates a tension with the canonical media that does not. It still replicates a societal focus on the male character, the male narrative, but it does this through a female lens. There are fanworks which regender canonically female characters but these remain rare and are often pointed commentary on visual representations of women where a male character is positioned and clothed to mimic a female character, and the impossible anatomical contortions and improbable attire is highlighted as in [*The Hawkeye Initiative*](#) (Stevenson 2014), or they serve to provide an avenue for queering characters and relationships. The act of regendering is often well-received in geek and feminist communities (particularly cosplay and other visual mediums) but remains something which can provoke outbursts of aggressive critique in wider forums, such as the backlash against *Ghostbusters* (2017), or those critical and fannish complaints about *Elementary*. This can be seen in the reactions that provoke spectres of Solanas-esque feminist dictatorships removing men from the media, in the way those creative reworkings are refigured as personalised acts of violence and harm against the men in the audience, or the actors themselves –

The war against masculinity has been won... The male characters, from Adama on down, are confused, weak, and wracked with indecision...(the removal of a male Starbuck) was accomplished quicker than you can say orchiectomy (Benedict 2006).

The impact of regendering, in terms of perception and audience reaction, relies on it being read as an oddity, as unique. The transgression of the acts relies on the relative silence and invisibility of women in media, and the audience expectations of performance, behaviour and representation. However, this transgressiveness can fail, reinforcing gender role constructs, such as the recreation of sexualised violence and abuse in ‘Mary Sue’ narratives that simultaneously function as a

‘deflection’ of the author’s anxieties about society and media, or the ‘heteronormative monogamy’ of some slash fanfic, even as it prioritises gay relationships (Frey 2009, 67–69; Hellekson and Busse 2014, 75–81). Or as a survey respondent explained “...genderswaps often reinforce binary genders and gender roles” (AT35). It is this tension that drives much of the reaction of creators to regendering, while the subversion itself still arouses ire from some sectors of the audience.

The construction of the male-masculine Other, as opposed to the male-feminine, or as opposed to the female Other, is reliant on the gendered constructs of fandom and fans, and of the media forms themselves. The occupation of the Otherness inherent in binarised gender – as described by Irigaray – is the base from which those gendered constructs are identified and critiqued (Irigaray 1991; Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 89). Then the methods by which regendered fanworks construct both maleness and masculinity from regendering can be explored, and the reconstruction of the Other within the male-masculine character and the female narrative can be examined. This intersection, between the fandom perception and representation of gender, sex, and sexuality, and the media that they use within their creative works, is explored in the next section.

Make it so

Fanworks which cast the male default as the other – prioritising the ‘female gaze’, examining the female experience, challenging the male default as the norm – transgress deeply held social mores. This transgression relies not only on the male dominance in media existing but on fannish reaction to that and their push back, through their fan praxis, against it. This avenue of thought has been well-examined by Henry Jenkins and other fan studies researchers however the manifestations of this transgression within the sub-forms of fannish work provide different perspectives on how this is practiced and developed within creative

works. Construction of a male reader, male viewer, as the outsider while using the very media defined as ‘men’s domain’ (such as *Sherlock*, *Marvel*, media fandom in general outside the creative enclaves of fanwork) to enact it, transgresses the assumed audience and the assumed nature of the female audience member as the Other. The distance of the audience is abruptly terminated, and the female spectator becomes not only creator, but reimagines the space she creates in order to disrupt the male gaze itself. Doane’s two options, masochism of over-identification or narcissism in becoming one’s own object of desire (Doane 1982, 89), are subverted to create a masochistic, narcissistic masculinity illuminated in the creation of a female gaze that fetishizes both the men and, as Lackner and others suggest, the women writing them (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 2000).

This re-othering can only occur because the female is already structured as the Other. The fan, presumed female, and fanwork which has been gendered as female, occupies their own otherness and writes from within it to refit the structure and make it habitable. It is from this place of power as the dominant force within fandom and as the rising dominant force within adaptive work, as the majority of the audience, that fans force maleness and masculinity to understand their own otherness. This can be seen very clearly in fan art and collectives which regender existing artistic pieces or caption them. The now defunct political humour site *the toast* maintained a series of ‘conversations’ between women in Western art and the viewer or within the art itself that punctures and reworks the dominant focus of the male experience to instead give voice to the female art object, unendingly harassed and objectified by the men intra and extra-diegetically; A voice that is weary, sarcastic, cutting and *knowing*. The rejection of art practice and theory to give a voice to the commonly held women’s experience of male entitlement renders only in its criticism (Ortberg 2014). Similarly, Kon-yu and van Loon’s analysis of the *Art as Therapy* exhibition punctures the masculine nature of both the philosophical commentary

accompanying the curated pieces but also the expectation of the presumed male audience reading those;

But the commentaries on those selections were sometimes odd: oddly simplistic or just plain wrong. These issues niggled at us until we were faced with a set of commentaries on two adjoining works that lead to us abandoning our visit all together.

...

De Botton and Armstrong provide commentary on both paintings on small placards beside the information provided by the NGV. The figure of the gentleman is described as “proud” and “having a really interesting look on his face” According to the commentary, “he has a clear sense of what he is about”. The passage about the portrait of Susannah, on the other hand, focuses on her vulnerable body, on what she might be about “underneath” her “finery”.

We found ourselves doubly-distanced by this commentary through a combination of objectification and the sense of anger that accompanies the observation of that objectification when we know the people at fault ought to know better.

...

In their commentary, de Botton and Armstrong draw our attention to the fact that the woman “looks a bit of a snob”. We are told she is “very impressed by her own grandeur and probably in the habit of putting other people down”.

There is no mention of mortality; the skull beneath her foot is obviously a mere symbol of her priggishness.(Kon-Yu and van Loon 2014).

The rejection of the male-constructed female gaze and instead constructing their own regenders not just the object but the subject, the criticism, and the body of work entirely. An example of this is ‘[False Equivalence](#)’ by David Willis (2011), from the series *Shortpacked*, which takes the male constructed object of female desire identified as Batman, and refigures it to reject the male artist and the mainstream construction of ‘attractive’ masculinity. It not only reveals the ‘false equivalence’ of Batman as a female fantasy figure, but illustrates the way in which these constructed ideals register as discomfort to the objectified illusion.

The construction of masculinity with femininity but *not* women, or female-ness, is rejected and reconstructed by the explicit female gaze of fanwork (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006). This is not restricted to fanwork – female creative practitioners within myriad forms and genres have been engaging in this for centuries – but it is a feature of fanwork which simultaneously accords it

popularity and critical derision. From this position of popularity but powerlessness at a critical level, fandom and fanwork are aligned with other feminised art forms like romance writing, craft, domestic arts. Within the new attention economy this powerlessness is being rapidly reversed and those fields are reconfiguring their social effects (Duffett 2014). The importance of the female gaze is being co-opted into the commercial aims of mainstream creative works such as *Hannibal* and *Arrow*; which explicitly and knowingly court the female audience and their gaze at the male heroes. At a creative level the explicit female construction of the female gaze is transgressing the constructed male dominance of their own perception of ‘what women want’; instead of presenting the imagined female fantasy of ‘Batman’ these shows provide masculine fantasy figures that align with the ‘real’ female fantasies (as per ‘False Equivalence’) (Jenkins 2012). Instead of the masculine power fantasy, which a male default ‘neutral’ is imagined wanting to be, and the female ‘other’ imagined to desire, the female gaze oriented creations prioritise the female narratives and do not demand cross-gender identification from the still majority female counterpublic of fandom.

The construction of the ‘everyman’ as a neutral character is reliant on the erasure of female narratives and commonalities, and the ‘habit’ of ‘transvestite’ identification (Doane 1982, 85); a manifestation of the male neutral Gatens identifies as a result of *gender* neutralising processes (Gatens 1996, 52). The male body, the male experience, is the default and any diversion or diversity transgresses this by forcing the audience to control the absences in that characterisation. Fans engage with this in a variety of ways ranging from slash fiction to regendering to increasingly intricate shared universes such as the ‘transindividualism’ and complicated interplay of identities in Tumblr roleplaying (Howard 2017). Their frustrations are also aired in a variety of ways from popular fancasting gifsets to lengthy ‘meta’ posts critiquing media, which several survey participants linked in their responses;

The one that comes to mind is an AU gifset that genderbent the two leads of the CW show *Supernatural*, suggesting the same premise but featuring two girls. I absolutely fell in love with the concept and the potential it carried (AS246).

I've written four genderswap stories and lots of meta. Here is the DVD commentary for my longest story, which includes much ruminating on genderswap and why I wrote it (link redacted) (AS 38).

While the dissatisfactions may be dismissed as those self-same fans recreate and reinforce that gendered (non)neutrality of character by the currency of their attention, the quality of that reinforcement cannot be ignored. While regendering and slash in particular often uncritically reproduce the focus of the wider media focus on male characters and male stories (even with 'female' narratives) they also actively disrupt the way that focus constructs maleness and masculinity. As we shall see in the next section, this disruption reaches something of a peak when lesbian representation combines with regendering.

We Can Build Her and They Will Come

The narrative techniques used by fans to construct the male-masculine other are not subtle, nor are they strictly a genderflip of the narrative techniques used in wider media to construct and reinscribe women as Other. Regendered narratives cannot rely on an almost universal body of work supporting their othering and instead they must shore it up internally in the text and within the microcosm of fannish conventions and norms that rarely regender female characters. The textual othering, like all aspects of fanwork, relies heavily on previous experience with media and literature, but also on social progressiveness and feminist theory.

Textual othering is accomplished often through point of view and characterisation and narrator voice. The familiar 'bumbling unemotional man' is revealed by close point of view, and narration, to not only be achingly and obviously ignorant but also to be either damaged or wilfully ignorant to his own self when recontextualised by a female narrator speaking to a presumed female

audience; “She's not sure if Sherlock's noticed that he's attracted to her, though, because dating isn't his area, which means that in some ways he is very stupid indeed.” (Douglas 2017). While this trope is common in mainstream media – Homer Simpson, Ray Romano, any number of sitcoms – it is restructured in regendered narratives to be viewed from the perspective of the bumbled upon. This flip of the narrative focus is not enough to other the man, that is, to other male-masculinity; to accomplish this, the narrative attention the universe is also restructured. The specifically female and feminine experience is foregrounded, and it is the male character whose ignorance renders him the blank slate on which her narrative is imprinted. This can be as overt as narratives which assume a female reader, which then assume the audience will understand elements of a ‘communal’ female experience and overtly reference that knowledge:

Joanna knows that Sherlock is attracted to her, because in a world where appealing to a man's sexuality can lead to marriage or to murder, every woman over the age of thirteen is a master of observation and deduction (branwyn 2011).

This example functions as a callout and callback to contemporary discussion about the sexualisation of young women and also as a rejection of masculine attention as a positive state and as an external confirmation of adulthood by linking that attention with the twin dangers of marriage and murder. These examples predate the explosion of #metoo into the public perception, but not the conversations and the activism that linked the psychological othering of women to sexual violence. The implied reader not only understands this but empathises, and the male originator of those desires is left outside the narrative scope. It can also assume a narrative absence, male characters relegated to the background, to two-dimensional caricatures. This re-authoring of the other relies on the transgressiveness of the act and relies on that existence of the male canon. In regendered fanworks based on the Sherlock Holmes mythos this re-authoring is seen in works that regender one of the canonical pair and works that regender

both. The single-sided regendering allows for a direct conflict between the two characters, often around desire and safety within the existing framework of the retired army veteran and the detective. The female army veteran offers a different view of the service to the male, the female detective is observed differently to the male. These regendered characters form their canonical counterpart as the other, but also their non-regendered partner as the other; through the narration and through characterisation.

The ‘how’ is where the transgressions and othering actually takes place. The mere creation of a female Sherlock Holmes with wings is the stuff from which fandom is founded, but the particular manifestation is where fans rework the relationship with canon and with the wider media. Fans often speak of how fanwork introduced them to media they otherwise had no exposure to, or to tropes and kinks they were unaware they enjoyed, or to narrative styles they had never experienced, as both the consumer and the creator (Leng 2013, 90; Fiesler 2007, 735). From this boundary expansion fans also act politically; organised political campaigns and fundraising, but also social justice movements and discourses (Brough and Shresthova 2012). One survey participant linked to the Woman & Genderqueers First: A Podfic Exchange - WAGFAPE (AS148), and Volume 10 of *Transformative Works and Cultures* focuses specifically on the “power and potential of fan activism” (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012). The simple inclusion of women in male narratives challenges not only the accepted tropes around female characters but also provokes questions about wider narratives.

Conclusion: Works Re-othered and Re-authored

The reconstruction of male-masculinity re-authors the works and the Other; it also transgresses the now regendered relationships between the audience and the work. The works themselves exist within a theoretical matrix that genders the audience, the spectator, as receptive and passive – thus feminine – while engaging in

aggressively creative practices; then within those works the expected audience is legitimised and their female gaze, their feminine experience, prioritised. While regendered narratives accept the framework of the male narrative as default and neutral as the foundation, the construction of gender from there transgresses not only the common delineations between creator and audience but also the internal metanarratives of fandom.

This instigation of action, even simply thought, transgresses the boundaries of the audience and the creator. Comments, associated fanworks, spin offs, all reimagine the space of the audience and the creator. The gendering of the audience itself as female, as feminine, gives this transgression into action a regendered aspect as it transitions the creative praxis from the male creator to the female audience. This, obviously, is not a genuine reflection of the genders of the audience and the creators themselves but is a facet of the binary model which applies from gender outwards.

The gender neutral that becomes another facet of masculine dominance is a common underlying structure within reading and media consumption via the prevalence of male characters and the assumed ability of women's 'transvestite identification' (Doane 1982, 85). This gender 'neutral' state where the male is the 'human', or 'he' being appropriate in referring to humanity, is explicitly rejected by regendered fanworks. While the majority of fanworks are complicit in that cross-gender identification between the female audience and the male narrative, regendered fanworks highlight the incongruities between the states, the disembodied notions of gender which conform to male states and elide the female body in all its variances.

The polite fictions of gender, essentialist or otherwise, are interrupted by regendered works. Gender is neither static, nor easily defined, nor inherent to a character. Instead aspects of performative gender are blended with essentialist statements and implicit understandings about behaviour, subscribing to no one

single theory of gender or feminism. The comfort of the original work and the sideways comfort of the fanwork are disrupted by gender and the conflict between lived reality and the distorted mirror of mainstream media. The formation of the female experience as the default, for both reader, writers, consumer and character, refigures the male and the masculine as the other which reflects the reality of gender within the works and fandom itself. Simultaneously, outside of the parasocial fandom sphere the refocusing effects of regendered work serves to reflect the distortions of essentialist binarised male-female expectations.

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Everyday, Bro?

Authenticity and Performance Intersections in the Vlogs of Jake Paul

Pernille Rosenlund and Susanne Lisberg Jørgensen

As new media evolves, so must the celebrities who inhabit it. New tools become available and those most capable of utilizing them help shape the media landscape and its rules. The increasing popularity of social media has created a new type of celebrity who embraces the new platforms as sites of performance, on which they can make a living simply from showing off their lifestyle to whoever may be watching. The ‘vloggers’ of YouTube have an especially tight grip on their audiences with some gaining the attention of millions of people with every upload. The distance between these content creators and their fans appears much shorter than that of traditional mass media celebrities and their fans, as the creators share images from their own personal lives and thus create a sense of intimacy between themselves and their viewers. This relationship challenges the general understanding of celebrity personas and presents a new one, in which the celebrity and their fans are both same and other by virtue of their simultaneous perceived closeness and their roles as idol and fan.

One such creator who has made a career out of his lifestyle, and built his lifestyle from his career, is YouTube vlog star Jake Paul. Originally a video

creator on the Vine app, Paul moved on to vlogging in 2016 and saw a meteoric rise to stardom. Over the course of a year and a half, he gained almost 15 million subscribers and his videos were watched over 4 billion times (Paul n.d.). Along with the attention came a dedicated fanbase and a number of controversies, and Paul has had to navigate the relationship between his veridical I and Me. During his controversies, he has distanced himself from his exaggerated persona, an act of self-othering that allows him to join the chorus of criticism while still performing authenticity as a friend of the audience. Jake Paul's friends are his fans, and his fans are his friends, therefore his viewers and co-stars belong to a single group – all one and the same.

Social media entertainment in general and YouTube vlogging in particular is a form of entertainment which 'put[s] the highest value on authenticity and community' (Cunningham & Craig 2017, 72). As such, YouTubers are meant to be relatable (through emphasizing how similar they are to the viewer), yet at the same time being a celebrity means being apart from the masses (being something other than the rest). In this paper, using rising YouTube star Jake Paul as a case study, we will argue that in order to perform celebrity online, vloggers on YouTube need to shift between authentic and staged intimacy on the same medium; they have to straddle the line between the familiar and the other. By doing this, vloggers not only transgress audience expectations for authenticity and an intimate connection but blur the lines between reality and fiction resulting in a form of performance art.

YouTube has changed drastically since its early days, and so has the content placed on it. When YouTube was created in 2005, the intent was for it to be a site where users could upload their own home video content (Cloud 2006, 5). Soon, however, users began creating videos made exclusively for the purpose of being put on YouTube and not just to be shown to family members and friends. One of

the things that came from this was a genre of videos called vlogs (i.e. video blogs), a genre popularized on the YouTube platform, in which the YouTuber in question sits down in front of the camera and tells the audience about themselves (from this point on called ‘sit-down vlogs’) While vlogging is not necessarily a form of content exclusive to YouTube, it is emblematic of the platform and its user participation, and vlogs of various kinds make up a large portion of the content uploaded to the site (Burgess & Green 2008, 7). Of course, YouTube has grown exponentially since the first vlog was posted.

These days YouTube is filled with every kind of video and video creator: companies seeking to market their products, music videos, memes, comedy videos, home videos, and people who make a living out of posting videos on the site. Today, sit-down vlogs still exist and are still created, but the new trend for vlogs is for the YouTuber to bring the camera (and thus the audience) with them throughout their daily activities, filming their life instead of retelling it. This type of vlog varies widely in terms of range. Some YouTubers vlog only sometimes and upload weekly or even monthly vlogs, some exclusively vlog special occasions such as travels or events, and some vlog almost every day, calling themselves ‘daily vloggers’.

What has remained constant through the evolution of the vlog genre of videos is the appearance of authenticity:

Many viewers on YouTube are concerned with what is real and authentic online. Individuals who go online are often skeptical about what they see, to be sure. **Online, however, especially with private and personal distribution sites like blogs, webcams or liveblogs, and vlogs, there is an expectation of truth, a hope for something “real.”** Even those who produce the content often presume an almost revolutionary kind of “honesty” (Jean Christian 2009, conclusion, emphasis ours).

Vlogs appear to be a genre concerned with self-expression and an intimate connection between the vlogger and the audience. But as has been noted multiple times by both academics (Jean Christian 2009), YouTubers (Folding Ideas 2017),

and YouTube viewers, the format does not seem to be this simple. A user on Folding Ideas' video *Vlogs and the Hyperreal* commented:

One trend I've started seeing in many "vlogs" is the blending of an authentic portrayal of day-to-day life with improv and sketch-style storytelling. David Dobrik, Steven Suptic and to an extent Anthony Padilla create vlogs that are less like young people with a webcam recording their life and more like self-aware reality shows. Unlike "The Real World" in which it tries to pass itself off as authentic, these vlogs' "authenticity" is merely a thin dressing over an apparent creative process. Many of these vlogs start out showing actual events like David Dobrik getting breakfast and then he proceeds to have conversations with his friends many of whom are skilled in improv and intentionally say jokes with the intent of building on top of them as the vlog progresses and finally the vlog crescendos into fiction with David's friends doing cocaine with Spongebob or Carmelita the Prostitute journeying around L.A. It's as if within these vlogs, they're moving down the spectrum from realism to formalism. Their personal lives are still there, but they are merely a foundation for a hyperreality (Liam Shanley, July 2017).

Vlogs are not as authentic as often they appear, rather they are performances made by amateur or professional entertainers. While this comment specifically has been taken from a YouTube video that discusses the nature of vlogs and how vlogging creates a hyperreality (showing a prior interest from the user in investigating vlogging as a genre), it would be naive to believe that fans of vlogs are completely unaware that what they are watching is not the full truth. Many YouTubers stress that they only show parts of their day, implying that what is presented in the vlogs are highlights of a particular day or week and not necessarily a full or accurate representation of the creator's everyday life. Some prospective vloggers have revealed concerns that they do not 'do enough' in their daily life to make interesting vlogs (Butler 2017; Dominique 2016) and that they might be tempted to plan their day in terms of what would be good content. This shows an awareness on the creator's part of the vlog as a performance; a hyperreal version of their life.

The birth of photography raised questions about authenticity and artificiality, many of which seem to be just as relevant for the genre of vlogging

and its questions of authenticity. Is it real life or just staged fantasy? Erving Goffman has made the point that photographs are indexical glimpses of ‘real life’: ‘however posed or “artificial” a picture is, it is likely to contain elements that record instances of real things’ (1979, 21). This seems to hold true for vlogging as well. The events shown in the vlogs clearly *do* take place in real life, but many of them seem to be staged for the purpose of entertainment, placing the vlog in a peculiar space between authentic and artificial.

The *Lonelygirl15* controversy in 2006 became a noteworthy turning point for the expectations surrounding YouTube creators when it was revealed that the vlogger Bree Avery (Jessica Rose) was an entirely fictional character and that her vlog channel and social media accounts were actually set up and run by the media company EQAL. Jean Christian (2009) noted in relation to the controversy that

more viewers were upset at the prospect of corporate marketing than about authenticity or fakeness. That the actual creators of the show were young, independent, aspiring producers interested in building a show based on “community” seemed to ease concerns (Jean Christian 2009, conclusion).

That holds true today as well, and the importance of a YouTube community seems more important than ever with scandals and drama content becoming increasingly popular. It has become clear that the YouTube community frames YouTubers and YouTube viewers as part of the same group, whereas their critics (notably mass media news sources) are the outgroup; the other which they unite against; even when the two groups overlap.

YouTube has grown, and with it has the stakes for those who put videos up on the platform. Being a YouTuber is now a job which can bring in an unspecified (creators never reveal the specifics of their income) but large amount of money, which is revealed when creators use their content to show off what they can afford in terms of material possessions. The audience is aware of this because YouTubers explicitly state it. It is not uncommon for a YouTuber to thank their audience for ‘making this possible’, referring to the lifestyle they can now afford.

With this comes the understanding that YouTubers are paid entertainers. On the one hand, by showing the wealth that can never be shared with the audience, YouTubers frame themselves as Other than their audience. On the other hand, by connecting the wealth to the audience watching the videos and buying the merchandise, YouTubers allow their audience to be part of the success; the YouTuber and the audience are on a team whose mission is to further the YouTuber. The YouTuber is thereby allowed to other themselves from their audience (by showcasing wealth) while emphasizing their sameness (by making it a team effort).

Social Media Presence as Performance Art

The new 'trend' in interaction is all about performance (Nitshe 2013, 93). On social media, users' daily lives are shared through a stream of self-curated content, and whether posts portray fancy dinners or a fun night with friends, the point is to appear interesting and perhaps enviable to one's followers. In the social media landscape, any user who creates content is essentially a casual amateur performer, yet as in any medium, some fare better than others. Some creators manage to make a living through what is essentially still amateur work, capturing audiences to match even the most popular television shows. Groening (2016) describes 'amateur influence', stressing the word's etymological origin:

This sense of amateurism (as "a lover of") might help us to think more clearly about online videos, which are marked by a significant number of users who are so "in love" with the form they themselves feel compelled to practice it. The amateur is therefore an experimenter, someone aware of, but not bound by, professional conventions and protocols; this freedom to ignore conventions results in formal and technical experimentation as well as the production of new genres and types that other amateurs emulate (Groening 2016, 3).

As such, although vloggers, like Jake Paul experiment with filming techniques and different visual styles, their content remains at an amateur-level – they are the same as their audience. As stated earlier in this paper, a vlog is at its very essence a reproduction of the creator's life, expected to be authentic. To achieve this

authenticity, it is filmed by the creators themselves and accompanied by their own commentary. Vlogs must be small-scale productions in order to be accepted as genuine and acceptable examples of the genre. It is important that they give the impression of sameness; that the only thing separating the vlogger from the viewer is the camera; that audience and creator are *at their core* the same.

In a similar vein, Paul Kristeller describes a ‘rise of an amateur public’, arguing that modern aesthetics originate from amateur criticism, which is focused on the experiences of the *spectator* rather than those of the producer (1952, 44). This places the amateur creator in a peculiar space of authority in which they function both as producer and critic with the power to influence their preferred medium. As a creator, Jake Paul has himself expressed this sentiment. During his appearance on the *H3 Podcast*, Paul noted that he always tries to ‘innovate the game and ... push it forward and forward ...’ (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:07:40-00:07:44). Here he reveals his intent as a creator to be experimental in terms of challenging the expectations and boundaries of the vlogging genre, which he in turn critiques with his suggestion that it is in need of innovation in the first place. He further describes his own evaluation of his content, stating: ‘Sometimes I’m watching myself and I’m like, “bro, you’re being boring right now”, like, “this vlog sucks”, and I’m like, “okay, I’ll remember that, I can get better”’ (00:14:42-00:14:50). Jake Paul is part of his own viewership, a part of his own amateur public. As he plays the role of both producer and viewer, he gets to play with the line between sameness and otherness.

In these instances, Jake Paul describes efforts to break new ground in content as well as editing styles, striving to include memes and both visual and sound effects to create excitement within his videos in a new way. Paul’s editing style emulates ‘MTV style’, which rebels against traditional stylistic conventions and is ‘characterized by jump cuts, camera jiggle, swish pans, tilted framing, eccentric cropping, and the like’ (Messaris 1998, 71). The style is dynamic and

fast-paced, giving the impression that there is simply no time to re-shoot or worry about conventional cinematic aesthetics.

While this style arguably does seem to indicate authenticity in this way, the constant cuts also bring about the knowledge that an unknown quantity of potential content has been cut from the final product. As a result, the vlogs portray a better, perhaps more aesthetically pleasing version of Paul's real life (Benford and Giannachi 2012, 38), blending the real and virtual world into a hyperreality. The final video product is thus a recorded, carefully constructed performance of the life of Jake Paul and his friends. The highlights of his days are shown in a variety of angles and with elaborate drone shots, leaving out the thinking pauses and stumbling over words that undoubtedly occur in the part of his life that is not shown on camera. The drone shots give the vlogs a cinematic style, directly in contrast to the more intimate hand-held style of filming. Jake Paul uses both to varying degrees; the handheld shot can be used both for a confessional segment about something deeply personal (Paul 2017d, 00:00-00:07), but it can also be used as an ironic introduction of something which would never happen to anyone other than Jake Paul (Paul 2017e, 00:10-00:40). Drone shots are used in the same way; sometimes they are used earnestly to create the impression of the idealized life (Paul 2017c, 06:45-06:58), at other times they are used to underscore how ridiculous Jake Paul's life can be to his viewers (Paul 2017e, 01:45-02:10). Thereby the different shots are used both to underscore Jake's otherness ('see how my life is better than yours') and his sameness ('I go through tough times too').

Mass Media Celebrity, SoMe Celebrity, and the I/Me Divide

There is a big difference between traditional mass-media celebrities and social media celebrities. Rojek, in his influential book *Celebrity* from 2001, tied the rise of celebrities to mass-media culture, writing that as mass-media has spread, the importance of the public face has too. He defines celebrity as a '... crude

equation: celebrity = impact on public consciousness', maintaining that celebrities are 'glamorous or notorious' (Rojek 2001, 10). Connecting celebrity with the importance of a public face led Rojek to conclude that '... celebrity status always implies a split between a private self and a public self' (2001, 11). Using the division of the veridical I (the public face) and the Me (as we see ourselves) from G.H. Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Chris Rojek continues: 'For the celebrity, the split between the I and the Me is often disturbing' (2001, 11). Writing further on the subject of the celebrity self, he states:

With respect to the relation of the celebrity to the fan, celebrities usually develop what Goffman called "involvement shields", which hide the veridical self from the public face. These "shields" can be raised when celebrities attend conventions... ... Notwithstanding this, the general attitude celebrities cultivate in relation to their fans is that of negotiating with an abstract other (Rojek 2001, 46).

This 'involvement shield' is part of the veridical self, part of the public face that celebrities use, often to their own detriment (Rojek 2001, 11). For traditional celebrities their public I was to be separate and other from the masses, they were meant to rise above. The private Me, on the other hand, was to be the same as any other person; thereby confessionals of how celebrities are just like anybody else.

Rojek ties celebrity to mass-media culture, however, as mass-media has been replaced with social media, celebrity has not disappeared but instead evolved to fit the times. Social media has changed what it means to be a celebrity. The division of the I and Me is no longer as strict, the 'involvement shields' are no longer as thick, and the ability for celebrities to relate to their fans as if they are an abstract Other has been diminished. Celebrities have to become closer to their fans. Even when treating them as a coherent mass, they still have to connect with each and every one of them in some way.

This is true for social media celebrities. Mass-media still exists, and so the old celebrities still exist as well. But social media is growing and the number of

celebrities utilizing these platforms is growing. Social media celebrities have been named many different things, Jerslev (2016) wrote a short collection of terms:

“micro-celebrities” (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013a; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008, 2013;), “microfame” (Sorgatz, 2008), “Youtube stars” (Burgess & Green, 2009a, 2009b Snickars & Vonderau, 2009), “YouTube celebrities” (Gamson, 2011; Lange, 2007; Marwick, 2013a), “Internet celebrity” (Gamson, 2011), “Web stars” (Senft, 2008) and “Internet famous” (Tanz, 2008).
[Jerslev 2016, 5235]

Cunningham & Craig (2017) tried to put into words what makes social media, and by extension social media celebrities, different from mass-media: ‘These formats differ sharply from established film and television, and are constituted from intrinsically interactive audience-centricity and appeals to authenticity and community in a commercialising space – “social media entertainment”’ (72). They argue that social media has created new rules for celebrities, in particular: ‘... that SME is governed by quite strict norms that put the highest value on authenticity and community, and these governing “rules of the game” have developed rapidly to shape and discipline creators and the commercial environment in which SME creators work’ (ibid. 72).

Jerslev also noted the sameness between social media celebrities and their fans: ‘online celebrity practices unfold in accordance with a particular temporal and spatial logic characterized by what Marshall (2006) has called a “narrowing of the gap” between celebrities and their fans or followers’ (Jerslev 2016, 5235). Due to the nature of social media ‘microcelebrity strategies are especially connected with the display of accessibility, presence, and intimacy online; moreover, the broadening of processes of celebrification beyond YouTube may put pressure on microcelebrities’ claim to authenticity’ (Jerslev 2016, 5233). Traditional media celebrities had to keep their public I as other than the masses, while their private Me should be the same as the masses. However, social media celebrities cannot have the same stark separation of I and Me and can therefore not divide the roles of ‘same’ and ‘other’ to each. Instead, social media celebrities

are expected to find a new balance between sameness and otherness from their audience; a balance which is constantly renegotiated.

Jake Paul tries to straddle the line between mass-media celebrity and social media celebrity, having confessed that he seeks to be a celebrity both online and in traditional media (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:31:04-00:31:17). He began his career on the now-defunct app Vine, where users uploaded 6-second video clips. Once he had gained a massive following and popularity on the app, he signed a contract with Disney to be a lead character on their show *Bizaardvark*. When Vine shut down, Jake Paul moved over to YouTube where he quickly began his daily vlog routine and grew his fan base. After his neighbors sued him in July 2017, Disney announced that the company and Jake Paul had decided to part ways (Bromwich 2017). Now Jake Paul maintains a presence on YouTube and other related social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, but his only exposure in mass-media is in the news through the coverage of his scandals. In trying to embody both the mass media celebrity and the social media celebrity, Jake Paul has had to create an entirely new balance between similarity and otherness; between relating to his audience and being better than them. However, the recent loss of his Disney contract and the lawsuits filed against him show that he might just have struck the wrong balance.

Jake Paul uses the separation between his 'I' and 'Me' to distance himself from his scandals, while still taking responsibility for them. Rather than a hindrance, his I/Me divide becomes a tool he can use to navigate his transgressions. For a celebrity that spends so much time connecting with fans, Paul spends a lot of time distancing himself from his online persona, suggesting that he uses his 'involvement shield' when interacting with his own image, but not when interacting with his fans.

Jake Paul has thus far had two major scandals surrounding, respectively, his song *It's Everyday Bro* and the feud with his neighbors. The music video for *It's*

Everyday Bro (Paul 2017b) was published on Paul's channel on May 30th, 2017 and is his most viewed video by a significant margin (Social Blade 2017). The song drew attention from Paul's regular viewers and a wider audience, resulting in almost 200 million views, one million likes, and two million dislikes. The song sounds and the music video looks exactly like what they are: made in a day by people with enough money to buy the templates of a 'real' song and music video. Paul himself has expressed this, revealing to the *H3 Podcast* that '[they] present it as real music, but like we made that song in three hours' (00:06:47-00:06:52). He further adds that the video was produced so quickly, with '18 hours from making the song to it being online' (00:08:59-00:09:06), that he had no chance to even view it before it was posted. The song caused offense because Jake Paul bragged in the song and in his social media promotion about how he is the best and most popular YouTuber (in terms of skill and growth in subscribers). This sparked an interest in watching the music video, which featured meme-worthy lines - meaning that they were short, easy to remember, fun and cringe-worthy lines.

The shared language of Jake Paul's fan base was on display to the out-group and was relentlessly mocked. What most pointed to as the actual problem with the music video was Jake Paul's arrogance. Jake did not apologize, instead choosing to continue as usual. But now Paul had the attention of YouTube influencers like Philip DeFranco¹ and H3H3 Productions², and when his neighbors sued him only a few months later, claiming that he was a menace, the YouTube community was ready to continue the criticism and mockery. The critique reached a tipping point when a news station came to interview Paul and he climbed up on the news van, prompting accusations that he was arrogant and reckless (Tharp 2017; Bromwich

¹ DeFranco is a YouTuber most famous for The Philip DeFranco Show, a channel which follows a news show formula, presenting stories relating primarily to American politics, the internet, and pop culture.

² h3h3Productions is a comedy channel run by married couple Ethan and Hila Klein. The channel largely consists of reaction videos and responses to "YouTube drama", while the two also host more serious discussions about the platform on the H3 Podcast.

2017; Bradley 2017) and finally culminated in a 2018 lawsuit by Paul's former landlords (Hills 2018).

The scandals grew to a point where Jake Paul felt the need to respond to the criticism. In his responses, specifically his appearance on the *H3 Podcast* (Klein & Klein 2017) and his song *F**K JAKE PAUL* (Paul 2017a), a recurrent theme is how he distances himself from 'on-camera Jake'.

In the *H3 Podcast*, Paul speaks at length about how the Jake Paul in his vlogs is an exaggerated version, a fake version, of the real person Jake Paul. Indeed, his whole demeanor on the podcast seems subdued and quiet in comparison to the loud always-yelling Jake Paul of his vlogs. He says:

Jake Paul on camera is like... 'okay, like, we're doing this for entertainment', like, a ton of people are gonna be watching this. Um, it's telling a story. It's like a heightened version of, of who I am...
...And then off camera, it's like, I'm that same person but it's like, I'm more chill. I kinda just hang out, you know, doing my thing, and like, me and my friends joke around, but it's not like, loud and in your face (2017, 00:12:24-00:00:13:11)

More than separating himself from his Me, he is almost speaking as if he has created a personality outside of himself. Later in the podcast, when Ethan asks if the news report episode was On- or Off-Camera Jake, Paul replies that it's 'way too On-Camera Jake' (00:13:32), describing how he's playing a character, even putting on a silly voice. 'On-Camera Jake' is an exaggeration of 'Off-camera Jake', but he is also an 'extra Jake', another identity that Jake Paul can use.

*F**K JAKE PAUL* further explores this theme of self-othering. In the music video, two Jake Pauls appear side by side. One represents the critics and 'haters', the other represents the creator himself. This is not a new trope, but Jake Paul uses it in a new way. Rather than having the Jake representing himself defend himself, he instead agrees and continues the critique, blurring the line between the critics and himself. The song opens up with the "hater" critiquing his authenticity and the quality of his work. This never gets a response in the song; however, outside of the song Jake Paul is not shy about the fact that he believes he could do better

on the quality of his vlogs and even that his vlogs are somewhat staged. He told Ethan and Hila Klein on the *H3 Podcast* that: ‘You never know what the audience is gonna, like, eat up. It’s always, every day it’s different. It’s like, ‘what can I do here? Like, do I talk about this? Do I... you know, do I do this prank?’ (2017, 00:16:14-00:16:23), showing a conscious process of choosing his vlog content.

When the ‘real’ Jake Paul starts rapping, he seems surprised at the critiques before agreeing with them and even expanding on them:

Hold up, hold up, yo, let me stop you real quick
It's Jake Paul, why you're saying all this shit?
‘Oh hey Jake, you're a fucking bitch’
Ok, yo, yeah I understand that shit
And I know everything you can say about my clique
And I'm not saying I don't disagree with it
But let me tell you my point of view of it
Man I know all of my flaws, man here it is
(00:01:21-00:01:41)

This is a departure from how these songs typically go. The part where Jake Paul is supposed to defend himself is instead replaced with further ‘hate’. And the song continues like that; Paul never refutes the critique. He softens it up, saying for example that the problems he had with his brother are not an issue, that they are brothers and therefore will always be close. He ends the song:

And my neighbors wanna move, shit I would too
O.J. out of jail put him next to me
That's a punishment worse than the penalty
But I do fuck up, and sometimes I wanna quit it all
Sometimes I wish I wasn't involved
Sometimes I wish I could hate Jake Paul
I really wanna see that motherfucker fall
From the bottom of my heart, man fuck Jake Paul
(00:02:43-00:03:06)

This ending seems to suggest that Paul is suffering from a separation between his veridical I and his Me, but right after the song ends, the video cuts to Jake sitting in his car saying: ‘I don’t even know what to make of that. But the bottom line is you’re right when you hate on me. I’m agreeing with you guys. You suck Jake’

(00:03:10-00:03:23). After this, he turns the conversation back to his fans with a message of support for them, that it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Paul then proposes an opportunity for interaction, the option for viewers to make a ‘diss track’ (hate song) about him and they might win a trip to meet and record a music video with him. Thus, Jake Paul uses the separation between his I and Me to make the scandal less painful *and* as a way of connecting with his fans; simultaneously distancing Jake Paul from himself (self-othering) and emphasizing his sameness in relation to his fans. By separating himself from his scandals, he can join his fans in creating diss tracks aimed at himself. Ultimately, Jake Paul does not suffer from a loss of identity. The separation between the I and Me provides him not with a fractured self, but a multiplied self, supplying him with identities he can shift between in order to deal with celebrity life.

Jake Paul and the Performance of Authenticity

We are first going to analyze how Jake Paul performs authenticity in his vlogs, with a focus on how he uses authenticity as a way of connecting and being intimate with his fans. Then we are going to discuss how he uses mass-media and social media celebrity tools to distinguish himself from his fans - he is both the celebrity that is better than his fans, as well as a fan of himself blending in with the other fans. Unlike other celebrities that try to connect with their fans by engaging directly and turning the focus on the fans, Jake Paul instead connects to fans by being as enamored with himself as they are.

The purpose of Jake Paul’s authenticity is to create and maintain an intimate relationship with his fans. He does this through editing, merchandise, and from creating and referring to a community (known as ‘Jake Paulers’³).

³ It is unclear who coined this term, however, as Jake Paul performs the part of Jake Paul fan as often as the part of Jake Paul the Celebrity, it might not matter if it originated with him or the fan base.

Jake Paul has made some experimental choices in his editing, which he does himself (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:07:15-00:07:23). The four most obvious examples are using Instagram tagging effects on his friends, adding dolphin sounds to cover up swear words, telling the audience what clip he is putting into the video before doing so, and showing memes (here meaning audio and/or visual internet jokes).

Instagram tagging is used at the beginning of the videos. Whenever a new person appears a small picture of their Instagram username will appear, using the same icon that is seen on the Instagram app. This has multiple effects, including feeding into the gift economy of YouTube celebrity (Turk 2014), but for our purposes, it places Jake Paul and his friends firmly within the same world as his viewers. While not all of his viewers will have an Instagram account, it is available to all of them. YouTube is also available to all, but it takes more work (and technical equipment) to make a video than to take a photo and post it. Seeing Jake Paul tag his friends, as his viewers do their own, creates a digital connection. It puts them closer and emphasizes the possibility that the viewer might connect with Jake Paul online.

The dolphin sounds are perhaps born out of necessity. Jake Paul's audience and fans appear to be quite young (the fans that show up in his videos are often in their early teens), and to reach them he would have to censor all swear words. It also has the double effect of creating a shared language (which will be expanded upon later) and clearly signaling to kids and their parents that this content is for them. Rather than choosing to not use swear words at all, this calls to attention that he does use them and chooses to censor them through editing rather than censoring himself on the spot. This way he markets himself to a particular group of young boys who want to swear but are not allowed to. By censoring the words, rather than omitting them, he lets his fans fill in the blanks with whatever swear words they like.

Jake Paul occasionally tells the viewer what kind of editing he is going to do before he does it. An example is when he tells the viewer that he did something the night before, which did not make it into that vlog, but that he is now going to 'roll the clip'. This gives the impression that he shares everything - even when he does not get everything into the first vlog, he will show it later. It also creates the illusion of exclusivity. If you do not watch *all* of his vlogs, you might miss something.

Finally, he incorporates internet memes into his videos. Whenever he or his friends use a meme to make a joke, or whenever he believes using a meme in a post will be funny, he will cut away from the vlog to show the meme. That serves to create another node of digital connection between Jake Paul and his viewers, showing that he also sees and enjoys the same jokes as everyone else.

All of these types of editing, beyond the effects written above, ultimately serves Jake Paul's authenticity by calling attention to the fact that he knows that the viewers know that vlogs are edited and not the whole truth. By making it clear that he is editing (and where), he is admitting to inauthenticity, which makes him more trustworthy and therefore more authentic.

Merchandise (from here on called 'merch') is mentioned in every single vlog. Not only in the outro, where he replays the same clip of him urging fans to buy his merch, but also within the actual vlog, where he himself advertises his merch. Not only does his merch serve the usual purposes (as a way of making money, using fans for word of mouth marketing); it is also an important part of both Paul's connection to his fans and of his brand. For Jake Paul selling merch in this way has become part of his brand and wearing merch is both a way for him to be closer to his fans and an inside joke. Merch is part of Jake Paul's shared language with his fans and a way for him to sell that language back to fans.

Jake Paul sells his merch in a way which is unusual for most celebrities, even social media celebrities. Most celebrities either do not mention merch or

they sell it as something fans have asked for and they have worked to provide. Jake Paul, on the other hand, directly tells his fans to buy his merch: 'Jake Paulers, what's popping. Check out this new *merch*... click the link', he says in the outro in his vlogs. 'Link in the bio' is also a phrase he uses often, guiding his fans to his merchandise. Jake Paul's way of selling merch has become part of his brand and was even put into one of his songs *It's Everyday Bro*. Here Paul infamously sings: 'And I just dropped some new merch and it's selling like a god, church' (00:00:47-00:00:51) - a phrase which has itself become something fans can buy on a T-shirt. Interestingly, Jake Paul does not use financial reasons for fans to buy merch. They should buy it because 'it's the hottest' and to be part of the 'Jake Pauler squad'. To incentivize fans to buy the merch, Paul and his friends wear the merch themselves in the vlogs. This makes the merch serve two purposes for fans: they can emulate the celebrity, and they can showcase to insiders and outsiders, where they belong. For Jake Paul, this also serves as a way to find new things to sell. An example is his yellow sunglasses. He wore them in his vlogs, they stood out enough for him and his fans to name them 'yellars', and now fans can buy their own pair of 'yellars - link in bio'.

Most important for Jake Paul's authenticity is the community he has created with his fans. Unlike other celebrities who do not get directly involved with their fandom, Jake Paul is not only part of his own fandom, he is himself a fan, the leader of his fandom and uses the position to create a community with his fans. Unlike other celebrities who engage with their fans, Jake Paul does it not by taking an interest in his fans, but by being a fan of himself. He has fans in his videos, references things he has done/recurring events in his vlogs, and he creates and uses a shared language with his fans, which relies on inside jokes referencing his videos.

Fans in his videos appear in different ways. There are fans that stand around in groups whenever he appears, fans he randomly meets, and fans who lend out

their houses, boats, or other possessions to the creator. Having the fans in his videos creates an intimate experience for fans. They can imagine themselves being the ones to meet him in the future, and it shows Jake Paul as part of the group. Jake Paul engages with his fans as if he were a part of the fandom, specifically a ringleader of the fandom. He asks them to share collective signs (asking fans to dab⁴, which, while not exclusively part of Jake Paul fan culture, is an important part of it) and shows a lot of excitement when they do. He interacts with his fans as he interacts with his friends as if his friends are his fans and his fans are his friends, reinforcing the notion that they are all part of the same group.

He references things he has done in his videos and has things he does again and again, which provides consistency for his vlogs. Examples include his intro and outro, his merch gun, running around shirtless, and his kick of excitement. All of these actions are actions that fans can repeat, either to imitate or to partake in Jake Paul's lifestyle. He uses them to reinforce the community; these are things that *we* do.

Lastly, he has created an ever-expanding shared language. From inside jokes and phrases, to songs and actions. Almost everything Jake Paul does is meant to be passed on to fans. The songs, in particular, are interesting. Music videos make up seven of his top ten most viewed videos, including *It's Everyday Bro* and excluding his newest song *Jake Paulers*. These two songs are important for Jake Paul and his fans for different reasons. *It's Everyday Bro* was the song which propelled Jake Paul into public consciousness on YouTube and opened him up to external critique. Countless videos now exist of other YouTubers reacting to (and mocking) the music video. Thus, the Jake Paul fandom was provided with an 'enemy' to unite against. *Jake Paulers* serves the opposite effect, being a song about how his fans are the best (interestingly, he phrases the song as if he himself

⁴ A dab is a popular dance move, which consists of the dancer dropping their head into the crook of their elbow.

is a Jake Pauler), thus giving a song for the fandom to unite around akin to a national anthem. These are brilliant strategies, but in general, the songs serve to spread the Jake Paul brand around on different media than YouTube.

The shared language is not limited to songs. From popular internet slang, which has fallen out of fashion elsewhere ('savage', 'dab', and 'maverick') to unique phrases ('dab on the haters' and 'what's Gucci'), some of which come from his songs ('god church' and the phrase 'England is my city') or gets featured in his songs ('everyday bro'), the language of Jake Paulers is ever-expanding. New phrases appear at a rate that is higher than the rate at which they disappear. What is clear about the authenticity that Jake Paul performs is that it places him among his fans, not above them. Every strategy he uses emphasizes intimacy and connection, his editing makes it clear where he exaggerates, his merch gives a shared uniform, which he wears himself, and the shared language connects and unites the group around shared values and against critics. Jake Paul is both the object of fandom and a fan himself.

So how does he distinguish himself from his fans? He makes use of mass-media celebrity tools as well as social media celebrity tools. Mass-media celebrities are either glamorous or notorious (Rojek 2001, 10). Jake Paul embodies glamour and shows his life as glamorous. He surrounds himself with expensive material possessions, with other celebrities, lives an expensive and enviable life, and everything he creates is heavily produced and made to look expensive. All of these things frame his life as enviable. Internet celebrities often embody the American Dream in a way that is meant to be inspirational; if they can do it, so can you (Sternheimer 2011). However, Jake Paul instead frames his wealth as something unique to him. Instead of emphasizing his sameness with his viewers while showcasing his wealth, he instead uses it to distinguish himself.

He makes use of social media celebrity tools of distinction to soften the distance between himself and his fans, but also to place himself in an unusual position for a celebrity. Jake Paul might have nice things and know influential people, but that is not the point of his vlogs (rather, perhaps, his music videos). The point of his vlogs is presenting Jake Paul as the celebrification of everyday life. Through his personality, he manages to come close to his fans, share their fan practices, and to emerge as a fan leader. He makes sure to frame himself as a role model, for example helping after Hurricane Harvey and using his scandals to grow as a person. He participates in the fandom, for example speaking of himself as a Jake Pauler, and he shares fan parodies and creates them himself. He never lets anyone forget that it is all about him: the jokes, the songs, the parodies all build on who he *is*, rather than what he *makes*. He uses his excitement and extroversion to center every interaction in his vlogs around him, and when he meets fans he continues the same way.

Jake Paul is not wholly different from his fans; he shares enough qualities with them to be familiar and intimate. He is, however, *more* than his fans. He has more money, he is more sociable, he is more energetic, and he is more recognizable. He is what they try to be, but can never reach, because just when they reach his level, he has already moved on: ‘I always wanna beat myself, and my whole thing is, like, becoming better every day, bro’ (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:15:30-00:15:34).

YouTube is a social media, which paved the way for a new type of celebrity and a new type of authenticity, evident especially in the vlog-format. Vlogs allow an intimate connection between viewer and creator as the vlogger shares their daily life with the audience. The creator brings a camera with them throughout their day, filming and narrating as they go, and the viewer is along for the entire ride. With this genre comes the expectations from the audience that what they are shown is *real*, and when YouTubers sometimes transgress on this expectation, it

results in scandal. Even more so than an authentic *reality*, viewers expect an authentic intimate *connection* with the YouTuber they choose to watch. The YouTuber has to be approachable and emotionally honest with their audience for this connection to be experienced. Emotions are at stake, and, as a result, transgressions against this expectation are penalized to a higher degree by the YouTube community than seemingly any other form of transgression.

Along with shifts in the expectations of authenticity and intimacy, the difference between traditional mass-media celebrities and social media celebrities has also resulted in different 'I/Me relations' and the 'involvement shield' being used differently. Jake Paul is a popular vlogger, here used as a case study of this new celebrity reality. He continually and openly transgresses on his viewers' expectations for authenticity, making them effectively void. However, he still keeps the fan connection exceptionally strong, positioning himself amongst the members of his fandom, not above them. He uses his I/Me divide and his involvement shield to distance himself from his scandals and himself, not from his fans, who participates (are in fact invited to participate) in the othering of the scandalous Jake Paul.

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“We Must Learn to Speak to Each Other So That We Can Embrace from Afar”: **Dodie Bellamy *reading* Kathy Acker, an account in words and clothes**

Andrea Aramburú Villavisencio

Open your lips; don't open them simply. I don't open them simply. We - you/I- are neither open nor closed. We never separate simply: a single word cannot be pronounced, uttered by our mouths.

Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly,
back and forth.

Luce Irigaray, *When Our Lips Speak Together*

“It belongs to Suzy,” Sarah snarled. “Who cares who it belongs to, it's a nice blouse. These Americans!” Her anger was incomprehensible to me. Even then I sensed that an appropriated blouse is not just any blouse, it leaves traces of its original owner. It's like watching 3-D without your 3-D glasses, those wobbly lines of energy bleeding from objects. I wonder how things would have gone down if it had been Kathy who was wearing Suzy's blouse. Would she have attributed it or not? Would it even matter? Kathy had such élan, everything she touched was somehow made grander.

Dodie Bellamy, *Digging Through Kathy Acker's Stuff*

Lynne Huffer, in her work *Are the lips a grave?* (2013), situates the problem of alterity at the heart of a rethinking of an *ethics of the other*. Drawing on Luce Irigaray's *ethics of alterity*, as developed in her 1980 essay “When Our Lips Speak Together”, she revisits the “performative/narrative opposition in the context of the queer/feminist split” (ibid., 14). Huffer proposes that an oft-feminist associated “narrative coherence”, with its investment in a stable ‘I’, can be read alongside a queer “performative disruption”, which posits the inclusion of others in the narrative (ibid., 16). Her claims are premised by the idea that an

ethical approach to the *other* should always take into account an encounter with alterity, “an uncertain, embodied, disruptive encounter of subjects with others” (ibid., 16). What she thus calls “narrative performance” is the enactment of a narrative ‘I’ which, while holding a stable identity, remains open to a critical evaluation of its subjectivity. And, for the latter to happen, the ‘I’ needs the inclusion of the other in all its *difference*; it needs to be aware of its fissures and cracks within an intersubjective context, that is, it must interrogate his/her identity, in a “self-transformative, self-undoing labour” (ibid., 16) in relation and against others.

It seems to me that one crucial space where this *narrative performance* can be enacted is within women’s autobiographical texts. It is precisely here, “in the mutable, capacious space and time of the written (that is the public, published) text”, as Jeanne Perrault notes, wherein women’s voices “and ethics recombine under, or through the sign of the ‘I’” (1998, 191). As Donna Haraway (2016) also asserts, it is in this composed space that an *extended kin relationship* can be constructed in the materialist practice of thinking with other thinkers. Indeed, the various kinds of intellectual and affective *affinities* explored by women in the last half-century¹ can shed light on the multiplying lines of flight which a “thinking-feeling ethics of the other”, as Huffer calls it, can enable (2013, 22).

These reflections represent some of the concerns haunting the lines that follow, where I offer a reading of Dodie Bellamy’s genre-binding essay on Kathy Acker, “Digging Through Kathy Acker’s Stuff” (2015). My aim is to unpack an intertextual affinity as performed in the autobiographical. Dodie Bellamy², on the

¹ For a further development of affiliations in theory see Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and Avital Ronell (2012) in conversation about the notions of affinity and disruptive kinships, *The New School*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k91WwJlh8>.

² Bellamy’s recent publications include the buddhist (Publication Studio, 2011), Cunt Norton (Les Figues, 2013), The TV Sutras (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014), When the Sick Rule the World (Semiotext(e), 2015). Together with her partner, Kevin Killian, she has also coedited the anthology *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative Writing, 1977–1997* (Nightboat Books, 2017).

one hand, is one of the most notable postmodern writers of the *New Narrative*, a San Francisco based movement which came into prominence during the 1970s, and which blended together experimental writing, fragmentary narratives and critical theory. Kathy Acker, on the other, the star of Bellamy's piece, was the *avant-garde* and *punk* writer “known as ‘America's most beloved transgressive novelist’” (Kraus 2014), who died from breast cancer in 1997. While both Bellamy and Acker are recognized as part of a “counter-tradition” which “is often called the ‘literature of transgression’” (Breu 2012, 266), one could say that it is Acker who took this transgression to its limits, engaging in what critics of her work have identified as a *punk poetics*. Acker, as Margaret Henderson writes, was celebrated as “a punk feminist: a writer associated with the punk scene of the 1970s, who sutured a punk stylistics and ethos with a feminist politics” (Henderson 2017, 202). Her “punk textuality” (Ibid., 277), indeed, was twofold: it came to surface in her writings, where she constructed an assemblage of “syntactic cut-ups” and experimental forms of “textual appropriation” (Henderson 2015, 292), but it also underpinned her transgressive persona, where, just like in her work, fragmentation took place “via a montage of registers, voices, words, and narratives, brought into discordant proximity” (ibid). This punk textuality is likewise one of the hues which marks Bellamy's intertextual affinity to Kathy Acker; an intertextual affinity which, in the essay that concerns us, unfolds mainly through “an emotional engagement with materiality” (Bellamy 2006, 82).

Perhaps this is why Bellamy's piece starts with the narration of her first encounter with Acker's clothes and accessories in Matias Viegner's – Acker's executor – house, wherein “all [she] wanted was a piece of her jewelry” (Bellamy 2015, 124). From here, she constructs a meditation upon “relics, ghosts, compulsive shopping, archives, make-up, our drive to mythologize the dead [...]”, amongst other subjects, and about the connection she shared with Acker, which she herself felt compelled to put into words, even if they did not have such an

intimate friendship (Bellamy 2007). This shared connection, embodied in Bellamy's prose, is one possible answer to the question Chris Kraus posits in her literary biography on Acker: "Where to inter the remains of those who live in a state of perpetual transience?" (Kraus 2017, 21). It is also that which sediments a friendship between Bellamy and Acker.

For if we think about *friendship* precisely as that affinity grounded in a material and communal practice of writing and reading together, wherein, as Irigaray claims, "several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth" (1999, 85), then one might say that Bellamy and Acker were (and still are) *friends*: they hold an intertextual friendship which cracks the limits between life and death. In what follows, I wish to explore this affiliation, which gestures towards the preservation of alterity in-between the words uttered by *our lips - yours and mine-*, and which Bellamy performs in the intersubjective space of the *autographical* essay. I thus aim to call attention to the *constellative* ways in which she deliberately stages, in her narrative performance, her friendship to Acker, a friendship wherein the forces of the other are continually undoing and questioning the stability of the narrative 'I'.

So, what's the *difference*?

"Everything Kathy did was grand, was instantly transformed to myth" (Bellamy 2015, 140). So claims Bellamy when writing about Kathy Acker. But it was not only her transgressive and contradictory persona that which turned Acker into a maker of myths. It was also her own desire to build, as Amy Nolan writes, "a new myth to live by" (2012, 203). Nolan refers to Acker's willingness to tell stories in an innovative manner, crafting a different sort of relationality, one that would inaugurate a radically distinctive community, unlike the "predominantly masculine model that is based largely on storytelling derived from the myth of Oedipus" (ibid., 203). However, after her death, the new myth that Acker intended

to live by seems to have been dissuaded. As Bellamy writes, her fans came back “with a vengeance, plotting conferences, group readings, exhibitions, anthologies” (2015, 129) about her. Everyone wanted to write about Kathy; everyone wanted to become her. This proliferation of writings echoes Acker’s own prophetic words; as Kraus (2014) reminds us, “by 1995, she had become less than enchanted with her own persona”:

As she wrote to media theorist McKenzie Wark, who she’d met on tour in Australia that summer: ‘... the KATHY ACKER that YOU WANT is another MICKEY MOUSE, you probably know her better than I do. It’s media, Ken. It’s not me. Like almost all the people I know ... I’m part of a culture that doesn’t want me. ... Our only survival card is FAME’ (ibid.)

In fact, as Henderson notes, by then, “regardless of Acker’s critique of cultural commodification and romantic ideologies of creativity, “Kathy Acker” functions as both brand and signature” (2014, 542).

So, given “certain people’s attempts to control and police her image”, of trying to own her (Bellamy 2015, 130), my question immediately arises: what would set apart Bellamy’s account of Acker from those which continue to reproduce “the discursive violence of repetition” (Huffer 2013, 45) which takes place, as Irigaray would have it, on the plane of the *Same*? One appealing response to such question is that Bellamy, in her essay, embarks on the quest of hearing Acker in her alterity. Or, to put in Huffer’s terms, she stages a relationship with her through a *thinking-feeling ethics of the other*. Bellamy, in so doing, pays tribute to Acker’s refusal to let the “structures of a society [she] didn’t pick to be born into determine how [she] relate[s] to people” (Kraus 2017, 99). She opts, in turn, for writing about Acker rather by opening a space for her otherness. And this space for alterity is a particularly interesting one: as Bellamy inhabits it, she challenges the established meaning behind the act of *writing on someone*; “for to ask ‘what’s the difference?’”, Huffer rightly notes, “is to reopen the question of reading” (ibid., 44) within the task of writing itself.

The materialist practice of thinking/writing/reading together undergirds Bellamy's urge for possessing something that belonged to Acker; in her text, the verb "to possess" plays with the multiple configurations and contours it can acquire in its several *becomings*, where *becoming* must be understood "as the eternal, productive return of difference" (Staggol 2010, 26). This *becoming-other* starts to take place as Dodie's stuff suddenly goes missing – her "travel mug, the front of [her] car's CD player, [her] reading glasses, [her] fountain pen, [her] kitten Sylvia's toy", etc. (Bellamy 2015, 135) – while Kathy's possessions she takes from Matias' house – a pharaoh ring and a black Gaultier dress – begin to take over her life. Rather than *possessing* Kathy's stuff, Dodie begins *being possessed* by Acker's belongings – "As I reach into my bag Kathy's pharaoh's ring slips into my pinkie" (141) – by that strange "energy that clings to things" (136). By trying to possess and yet, at once, letting herself *to be possessed* by them, she constructs a conceptual plane wherein differentiated virtual forces and voices can emerge. If Bellamy, then, asserts that "possession" is indeed "nine tenths" of Acker's wardrobe (129), perhaps, the remaining one tenth belongs to those movements of *becoming* being mobilized as Bellamy writes about/through/with her.

On Clothes

'Acker: To live was to stay alive and not be reduced to materiality' (147)

The movements of becoming which suffuse "Digging Through Kathy Acker's Stuff" are especially related to the intimate relationship that Bellamy forges between herself and Acker's clothes. It is from between the *folds* of these clothes from where Bellamy writes about Acker as distinctive.

Gilles Deleuze defines the "fold" as "an instance" where "forces of the outside" fold "the inside" (O'Sullivan 2010, 107), which "is divided into folds,

which are tucked inside and which spill onto the outside” (Deleuze 1993, 35). For him, anything can fold *ad infinitum* and into each other: matter, selves, animals and worlds. In fashion, this particular practice of folding becomes relevant as it offers “new ways of producing connections and assemblages between bodies and materials” (Seely 2012, 164). As the body folds into clothes, clothes fold into the body; they both *become-other* in a space of indeterminacy or, as Anneke Smelik writes, the fold creates “a double movement of liberation”: it “is freed from the body, just as the body is freed from the restrictions of material clothing” (2014, 44). As the boundary between body and matter cracks, a gap is opened, which, in turn, renders possible a practice of becoming in that who wears the garments.

An *affective* approach to fashion, as described above, fits perfectly with the plane of connections Bellamy traces between herself, Acker and Acker’s clothes. As she writes, “Kathy managed to create exactly the effect she intended” (Bellamy 2015, 132) when she wore clothes by “Gaultier, Vivienne Westwood” or “Comme des Garçons” (131), yet, “as she moved through space”, a gap “between [her] intentions and the effects” (132) she created always opened up. This gap hints at the multiple spectrums of *becoming* which affective clothes enable as they “configure bodies otherwise”, “even if the new forms of embodiment” they engender “are not permanent” (Seely 2012, 139). Kathy’s garments, as described by Bellamy, seem to possess the characteristics of *becoming* Deleuze claims belong to the fold. As Bellamy writes, Acker’s clothes spark imaginations. It is hard “to figure out how you’re supposed to wear them”; one looks “like a gas mask”, and is hard to determine if another one looks like “an amorphous black blob” or a “ballet slipper” (Bellamy 2015, 139).

But Bellamy is not the only one infatuated by these clothes. Kaucyila Brooke, a Los Angeles based artist, in 1999, “photographed over 150 of Kathy’s outfits” (Bellamy 2015, 139). She did a “photographic study of her clothes”, featuring most of her extravagant fashions. Looking to bring out Acker’s spirit

from her “little-girl white dresses, sailor suits, sophisticated black dresses” or “biker costumes” (Brooke 2013, 105), Brooke formed geometric and organic shapes with the clothes to photograph them. In an utterly chilling manner, she hanged each piece with “an aluminum hanger from invisible thread” (ibid., 105), making them “awkward and misshapen” (Bellamy 2015, 139). Her intention was indeed to transfer, “through form and fabric”, Kathy’s movement of *becoming* and “the performance” of her “different personas” to otherwise inanimate garments (Brooke 2013, 105). Echoing this fascination for Acker’s clothes, in 2006, Bellamy curated an exhibition of several of these outfits; she named it “Kathy’s Forests” (Bellamy 2007).

As with the twirling (Bellamy 2015, 139) spirit of these exhibitions, in Bellamy’s description of Acker’s clothes, there seems to be a subtle invitation to the reader to submit to these garments’ terms, to get drawn towards them and get caught between their folds. If one of “Kathy’s tiny stretchy dresses”, Bellamy writes, would have “pulled tightly across” her body, the latter would slough its skin, “oozing perspiration” (135). By way of intensities, Bellamy draws an otherworldly connection between attire and body, suggesting that Kathy’s body would indeed *become-other* in merging with the dress. In this particular relation she outlines, garment and body eerily converge in “a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility” where “things [...] and persons [...] endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 173). In her words, body and cloth seem to fold into each other, spilling into “new modes of bodily being and becoming” (Seely 2012, 264).

Because the body which folds into the clothes exerts on them “an intensity of spiritual force” (Deleuze 1993, 122), without *her* body, “stuffed haphazardly in packing boxes”, “Kathy’s clothes feel devoid of will, abandoned, subverting sentimentality by their strangeness, their creepiness” (Bellamy 2015, 132). In order to *become* more, to develop their affective qualities, they need another

body; in Bellamy’s essay, this body is Dodie’s. And yet, when you wear something that is not yours, Bellamy writes, “wobbly lines of energy bleed” from the garment, an energy not entirely yours yet not completely foreign; it is, in fact, like “watching 3D without your 3D glasses” (128). This energy *in-between* folds could also be read as “the gap between the subject and the other” (Huffer 2013, 59), a gap whose acknowledgement becomes an honoring of the other’s singular alterity. So, when Bellamy asks if Kathy’s energy will change her, if it will “work some spell on [her] life” (Bellamy 2015, 135), she is also putting forward the possibility of an intertextuality -literally through the clothes’ folds- which “speaks to that binding ethical openness” (Huffer 2013, 60).

This means that the fold is also, in a forceful sense, a critique of a fixed and transcendental subjectivity, one which would account for “a simple interiority and exteriority” (O’Sullivan 2010, 107). Hence, the fold can also be read as the processes of becoming taking place amongst the extended kin relationships forged in writing and reading. Mirroring how Acker’s language spends “words anarchically, allowing them to play and to be unconstrained” (Henderson 2017, 206), Bellamy writes about Kathy’s clothes as they “shift and twist”, as they keep uttering the words “*listen to me listen to me*” (Bellamy 2015, 147). Perhaps this comes down to saying that, in Bellamy’s account, clothes open, as Huffer would put it, “the ethical, narrative, and performative space of alterity that is repetition with a difference” (2013, 56). In their *folds* and *becomings*, they open for the subject a gap wherein to hear and read the singularity of the other.

On Language

Writ[h]e: v. ‘To change or fashion *into* [...] some form [...] by wreathing or twisting’ (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2017).

There are many ways of inhabiting the space for difference opened up by Acker’s eccentric garments. Bellamy’s embodied use of language is one way of

doing so. Just like Acker's clothes open up a plane of relations as they *fold*, Bellamy's language aesthetics apprehends how, either overtly or covertly, words bring together the elusive performance of two alterities coming nearer, of one relentlessly folding onto the other.

One gets the sense, in Bellamy, that language is above all a matter of the body. Indeed, evocations of the body recur throughout her work, often in unanticipated ways. As Christopher Breu observes, she "presents [...] body and language as interpenetrating and partially mutually determining, yet also as crucially distinct and discontinuous" (2012, 272). Such a coexistence persists all along her essay on Acker. As Bellamy tries to write about "Kathy's unwashed Gaultier dress" which "sits on [her] dresser" (Bellamy 2015, 143), she articulates her relationship to Acker not as a "site or a space" but as "an energy" (Perrault 1998, 194). She writes the movement of her body. In so doing, she makes the reader aware of her bodily situation in relation to Acker's dress: "I write: Kathy's Gaultier dress sits on my dresser, me on my bed writhing and grunting" (Bellamy 2015, 143). Here, *writing* folds into *writhing*; the twists these words make bring us into the intersubjective "present tense" (46) of Bellamy's piece, wherein language is embodied, just as dresses are worn. Yet, Bellamy's body in movement is not the only one reenacted with her words; for instance, as she writes "Memory: Kathy holding court in a femmy short plaid dress, empire style, tight around her bust then flaring out" (132), she also recreates Acker's bodily presence. Bellamy's emphasis on this image being in fact a sudden memory which interrupts her narrative linearity lets the reader experience this presence in all its alterity, just like those moments on TV when "the image" would "suddenly pixilate, disrupting the predictable flow" (143).

But it is in Bellamy's text quoting Acker directly where she incorporates not only her body, but also her voice: "Acker: I was wild because I was protected—I could do anything—who was going to touch me—really touch me

like those others, like those poor people in the world—are touched?” (132). In so doing, she creates a space, within her narrative, where Acker can speak; she opens, through the self-othering power of language, the possibility of the other folding into her own self. Therein, Acker’s voice can ask “*who was going to touch me—really touch me (...)?*” (132), while Bellamy can perform figuratively this *touching* action. In *keeping in touch* with Acker’s words, Bellamy gives way to a language structured through a whirling configuration, where what matters is not “meaning”, but rather “accident, pattern, connection” (148).

“Burroughs said that cut-ups predict the future. But it’s not just cut-ups. Intense writing creates a vortex and the world opens to be read” (148); so writes Bellamy talking about Acker’s way of merging words and worlds. This attempt to write the porousness of the borderlines where two singularities encounter is perhaps that which best captures the concept of the “barf”, which Bellamy inaugurates “as a literary form” in her piece “Barf Manifesto”, published together with this text. For her, “The Barf is feminist, unruly, cheerfully, monstrous”; “[it] is expansive as the Blob, swallowing and recontextualizing, spreading out and engorging. Its logic is associative, it proceeds by chords rather than single, discrete notes” (2015, 63-64). Her essays are *barfs*. In her essay on Acker, as “in the great toilet bowl of memoir” (49), Bellamy’s words collide with Acker’s.

The passage where she alternates fragments from a series of Acker’s texts with an experimental reflection on talismans clearly illustrates this idea. It becomes the perfect example of a language featuring “deconstructed ‘80s and ‘90s glitz” (132). It follows the episode where Dodie unearths “some kind of mojo bottle” which belonged to Kathy at Matias’ house, which she describes as “a rectangular bottle filled with brightly colored liquid”, “floating herbs” and “other unrecognizable stringy things” (137). Grounding her words on yet another object belonging to Acker and paralleling the oft-cited cut-up technique, Bellamy juxtaposes a series of definitions of various mojos - “Mojo for the return of an

estranged lover”, “Mojo to remove a jinx”, “Mojo for a wish to come true”- with a spell of her own: “I got my black cat bone, all pure and dry / I got a four-leaf clover, all hangin’ high./ Got my hoodoo ashes all around your bed / Got my black snake roots underneath your hair” (138). And, amidst these words, as if invoked by Bellamy’s chant, we once again hear Kathy speaking: “Acker: My body has gone crazy. Shit lies over everything, the counterspace, the windowsill. Dripping down” (138). Here, by way of incorporating a “collage-rendered narrative” (Nolan 2012, 204), different chords of being are harmonized, possible worlds are brought together into new frames and the voice of the other is recontextualized with every iteration.

Yet, as Avital Ronnel puts it, citations are also linked to an evocative memory of the other in its difference, because “when we cite and recite, when we quote the other, we are calling to the irreplaceable one for whom there is no substitute” (2008, 229).

Acker: Inside my house, I started to scream. I couldn’t stop. Mucus poured out of my nose and mouth. I had been coughing convulsively for days. My body is a scream. I got a gypsy woman givin’ me advice/ I got some red hot tips I got to keep on ice./ I got a rabbit foot, I know it’s workin’ right/ I got a strand of hair I’m keepin’ day and night. Acker: Our father who beginneth all things I will not collude with you I will not die (Bellamy 2015, 138).

As the passage cited above shows, Bellamy is not claiming possession over Acker’s words; she is rather letting them exist on their own. One might situate this “folding -or doubling- “of Bellamy’s “own thought into the thought of another” (O’Sullivan 2010, 107) in what Huffer recognizes as “language’s performative force” (2013, 41), a force which “is not under [our] control, though sometimes it seems that way” (ibid., 41). This is because, in language, the presence of the other is always putting the self and its supposed knowledge into question: it becomes a force of unknowing.

At the same time, this adheres to the question brought up by Breu when pondering on Bellamy’s bodily aesthetics: “How are we to understand this

paradoxical injunction to both write the body and recognize the impossibility of doing so?” (2012, 271). Or, put yet another way, Bellamy recognises that writing the body, that is, framing alterity within language, constitutes a practice which challenges a totalizing system of representation; it is, echoing Nolan’s notes on Acker’s narrative, a “constant interruption of the conventional drive toward unity and meaning” (2012, 205). This is made clearer when Dodie writes about herself in the third-person, parsing her own body in two within a recipe for voodoo:

On the internet I find that to inflict pain on Dodie, all you need is:
2 black candles
A voodoo doll
Nail clippings on hair follicles or any item belonging to Dodie
Pins or another sharp object (Bellamy 2015, 136-137)

Gesturing towards Huffer’s words, one might say that, alongside its capacity for revealing an ongoing negotiation “between identification and disidentification”, the voodoo metaphor embodies a concept of alterity which both grounds and challenges “the narrative dimension of subjectivity and belonging” (Huffer 2013, 58). In many ways, Bellamy renders visible the radical impossibility underpinning the logics of alterity, a disruptive force which throws both the narrative and the I out of balance.

And it is precisely this disruptive force that comes to mind when we think about Bellamy’s emphasis on Matias’ house having a *labyrinth* structure, on being “a world of basements within basements within sub-basements like Dario Argento’s film *Inferno*” (Bellamy 2015, 130). Indeed, her depiction of Matias’ house bursts with phrases hoarding the narrative. One might say that her choice of words is longitudinal; it is “overflowing with books, discarded electronics, boxes” (125). Bellamy’s narrative *creates* space, making the reader aware of the “**sharply angled** ceiling” (125), the “concrete patio **scattered** with photo lamps” or “the dressing room’s still **crammed** with men’s clothing” (125). And her use of language echoes what Nolan points out about Acker, how, with her words, she seems to “evoke multilayered labyrinths, wherein pieces of the structure are

missing, in ruins, and paths are overgrown with reiterative, weed-like language.” (2012, 201).

Indeed, Bellamy’s words flow in multiple directions. She deploys a language structure which mirrors Acker’s own “architectural” forms. By which I refer, following Henderson, to the primacy of a narrative which spaces out geographically rather than in a “temporal or logical” layout (2017, 210). She succeeds in putting together an “angled” narrative, where “amidst its gothic angles and secret rooms”, the reader must “slip [herself] into a state of mystery and suspicion” (Bellamy 2015, 126); she must “navigate her way through the text, as if stepping over the ruins of a lost city” (Nolan 2012, 205).

For Deleuze, architecture – like clothes – is also related to folds; yet, when in relation to buildings and their correspondent levels folding into one another, the Deleuzian fold takes a new turn: it now “involves an opening up of the closed chamber of the upper floor and the concomitant affirmation of difference, contact and communication” (O’Sullivan 2010, 108). So, if we think of Bellamy’s language alongside Matias’ house, where “shooting off of every room is another room, as if the house were continuously spouting new limbs” (Bellamy 2015, 125), one might note how her words also *sprout new limbs* – disruptive, unpredictable limbs – as they open up their *closed upper chamber* and fold into Acker’s. Here, the self is no longer written as fixed, rather as open to transformation, a transformation which “is the site of the mutable self-engaging with language” (Perrault 1998, 194). A language, in turn, which is “full of trapdoors” (Bellamy 2015, 129).

On Friendship

But what does Kathy’s affective clothes or Bellamy’s performative language have to do with Bellamy and Acker’s virtual relationship, or, for that matter, with their *friendship*?

For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the friendship exercised in philosophical thought is always “traversed by a fissure” (1994, 206) as it consists of processes of becoming which bring “two thinkers together as singular subjects in thought” (Schonner 2010). Alterity, in this understanding of friendship, is spoken, rather than kept silent. In her essay, Bellamy reckons with Acker’s alterity, as she sees herself in relation to her, without erasing either of them. This act of seeing is grounded on a politics of disidentification (Huffer 2013, 57). Bellamy writes: “[w]e both knew that if we came too close it would have been *Godzilla meets Mothra*, screeches and roars, scales and feathers flying” (2015, 133). This disassociation becomes crucial, as it underpins the critical practice of self-undoing, which Huffer claims being central to an *ethics of the other*.

Reading Avital Ronell’s essay on her *friendship* to Kathy Acker, which the title of this section partially “mimes and recites” (Ronell 2008, 228), gave me a deeper grasp of Bellamy’s connection to Acker. Ronell puts forward the clear disjunction between a friendship grounded on “narcissism, where I claim the friend is a part of me”, and one which recognizes alterity, where one does not aim to “operate a reduction of the friend to the same or to the friend as other” (ibid., 234). Remembering Kathy’s way of creating bonds with others “wherever she went” (ibid., 231), Ronell outlines an understanding of friendship rooted in community, but a community which does not rely “on transcendence—a community without communion, without fascistic bonding rituals or strangulating close ties” (ibid., 231).

Yet, how does one construct a *friendly* narrative where the self is included and, all at the same time, the duties to a friendship with the other are paid? You let your friends be your ghosts, Bellamy would say, and “if you care for your ghosts, you leave them offerings of food” (Bellamy 2015, 145). Feeding your ghosts, for her, is writing about them, or rather writing together with them. It is letting them live and think inside of you, without attempting to contain their otherness:

“Acker: *I want to live, I really really want to live*” (145). “This essay is food for Kathy”, Bellamy writes, and later on, “[t]he dead are uncontainable, all we can do is greet them, allow them their otherness. Hello, Kathy, I humble myself before your otherness, an otherness I will never comprehend. I promise I won’t even try” (145). It is as if Bellamy was also inhabiting Irigaray’s words in *When Our Lips Speak Together*, where Irigaray speaks to a ‘you’ in order to assure her she is part of her skin, that she is one who avows for her existence, yet she is not her duplicate, her counterpart nor her copy (1999, 89).

Bellamy’s affinity with Acker reenacts an understanding of friendship which gestures towards Irigaray’s ideas, as it involves divergences and rifts which, in their difference, are all the same powerful. In her narrative performance, she reconstructs her friendship to Acker in a textual space, visualizing how when we write and think together with others, friendship also becomes an *act of thought*. Yet, this *act of thought*, in its staging, goes beyond a friendship constituted by two. As the concept of friendship is rewritten, it becomes “the readable site of an inscriptional relation to an *other*” (Huffer 2013, 46). Put yet in a different way, in consonance with an extended conception of kinship relations, Bellamy is going beyond a mere inclusion of Acker’s voice; she is moving horizontally towards other voices, in order to transform her ‘I’, her point of enunciation, into a “third person” pronoun (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 65). For instance, in the passage below, her voice folds into Acker’s and Acker’s voice folds into Pamela Lee’s, another writer mentioned by Bellamy:

The students complain they can’t read their assignment, so I find a white piece of chalk. It’s still difficult to write, but I finally manage to scratch out: “Write about a box—or build a box—that represents the otherness of death.” Acker: *Let one of art criticism’s languages be silence so that we can hear the sounds of the body: winds and voices from far-off shores, the sounds of the unknown*. Pamela Lee: *The subject loses its borders—its figure—in succumbing to “the lure of space.”* Acker: *Over and over again, in our false acts of absolute judgment and criticism, we deny the realm of death* (Bellamy 2015, 133).

The performative force of language, while following a narrative, nods towards the ethical dimensions of intersubjectivity. It embodies a “responsiveness to others—a heightened form of relationality” (Poletti 2018) which is both material and affective. Their friendship plays a scene where Bellamy is able to think with Acker, but also with other writers cited in her essay such as Kevin Killian (Bellamy 2015, 129) or Thurston Moore (132), and, by affinity, with thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Lynne Huffer, amongst others. She is able to feel their alterity, to touch and be touched by their words.

* * *

I have tried, in these brief meditations, through an exploration of Acker’s affective garments and Bellamy’s performative language, to interrogate the ways in which Dodie Bellamy stages her friendship to Kathy Acker. This friendship, as I have shown, seems to be rooted, recalling Huffer’s words, in a narrative performance which enacts a *thinking-feeling ethics of the other*. The broader significance of Bellamy’s piece, thus, lies in that it demonstrates how writing becomes itself an aesthetic act when it enables us to see a greater complexity in the relations we have with ourselves (it enables a self-undoing, an act of unknowing) and with others (it recognizes alterity). Following Henderson, one might say that in “Digging Through Kathy Acker’s Stuff”, “the writing remain[s] punk” and Acker’s “persona remain[s] abrasively punk, to the end and beyond” (Henderson 2014, 548). By which I mean that Bellamy shows how the concept of *friendship* can reach expansion and be kept alive, shaped and reshaped, in the contours of the essay, as an event, with its comingling points of enunciation and possible worlds in flux.

It remains to be restated, lastly, that Bellamy’s essay interrogates and rethinks the structures of language and telling, as she makes us reconsider how can stories which perform this kind of friendship can be political (Huffer 2013,

23). Here, I understand *politics* in Jacques Rancière's terms, as the act of always effecting a redistribution, a reconfiguration of what is understood as static in the structures of the common world. It is precisely in this way that Bellamy's piece can be understood as political, inasmuch as in her writing she reenacts the gap between "identification and disidentification' [...], subject and other, narrator and narratee, text and world" (ibid., 57) where an ethical relation of friendship starts to take place. It is only in this sense that, for Bellamy, wearing Kathy's words and clothes, in all its "tantalizing intimacy", becomes "a tribute to her" (Bellamy 2015, 128).

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Defining the Mexican Other

Insights from Interwar America and Postwar Canada

Naomi Alisa Calnitsky

Introduction

How have tropes, stereotypes or views towards Mexican workers played out in different historical contexts on the North American continent? How have the diverse factors of time period, location, and working landscapes impacted the ways in which employers, communities, and other hosts or directors over labour imagined their workers? How have certain continuities or threads across time and space, connected with depictions of the Mexican other, been transposed or transformed from one time and place to another, and how were such consistencies disrupted as new national, legal and social contexts emerged to reshape local contexts involving the mobility of Mexican bodies across borders? In what instances has otherness been transformed into acceptance, and to what extent has otherness in the sphere of cross-cultural labour relations and employment in North American history served as a tool for labour's agency?

The article explores three periods in American and Canadian history with a view towards the ways in which Mexican employment in both host countries was uniquely shaped by employer preferences, desires, needs and prejudices and by the parameters of national, officially-oriented programs of transnational labour management. It begins with a window into the Great Depression (ca. 1929-39), then moves into a discussion of the Bracero Program (1942-64) and concludes

with a review of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (1974-Present).

The Depression era is discussed by exploring findings from an archive of field data generated by the influential and pathbreaking political economist Paul Schuster Taylor, described by Linda Gordon as a "humanist-economist" (Gordon 2009, 151), whose early scholarly research into the question of Mexican labour reveals substantial evidence of the opinions and observations of employers and labour directors over Mexican agricultural, industrial and railroad workers in interwar America. Mexican labour's reception and management in the context of the American Great Depression offers a foundation, I suggest, for exploring the ways in which Mexicans and Mexican workers in particular have been 'othered' in American history more broadly, especially since this period played out as a dramatic bridge between the events of the Mexican Revolution on the one hand, which saw the influx of an estimated one million Mexicans into the United States, and the Second World War on the other, which witnessed the initiation of a large-scale program designed to arrange the importation of agricultural contract workers from areas deep within Mexico, rather than merely from the border region, as part of a bilaterally-organized, legalized labour scheme.

The management of labour emerges as a key theme of my inquiry, as it has intersected with the mobilities of workers. Labour contractors in 1920s United States functioned as early managers of labour prior to the arrival of state-led initiatives to invite in Mexican farm labour on a more massive, organized scale in 1942, and in postwar Canada, the managed movement of farm workers from the Caribbean and Mexico allowed for a circumscribed, circular migration program to bring seasonal farm workers into contact with Canadian host communities and employers, with labour contracts coordinated specifically according to the rhythms of seasonal employment.

What this essay will do is explore these three selected time periods together, with a view towards the ways in which Mexican workforces were maintained, managed, viewed, appreciated or derided, as far as is discernable through the archive, a reading of secondary literature, and a selection of media studies. Beginning with a discussion of labour relations between the wars in the Southern United States, I mobilize the Taylor field archive to offer insight into patterns or examples of racism and discrimination that were documented in this archive, as they played out along the border, in small town settings, in the field, or in employer correspondences. After briefly surveying the period of labour management which followed (1942-64), I examine the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and its employment of migrant Mexican labour to the advantage of Canadian agriculturalists from the mid-1970s on. The Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) began recruitment from Mexico for farm labour contracts in four Canadian provinces in 1974: Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Manitoba. It has since expanded to include other provinces, including British Columbia in 2004.

Not the first study of Mexican labour to adopt a chronologically wide approach to the topic to distill an informed historical interpretation, I mirror the approach taken in Mize and Swords' *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*, which adopts a broad timeline (1942–2009) to locate transitions in the consumption of Mexican labour power on the North American continent beyond Mexico (2011). In Mexican agricultural labour history, each period or development that preceded the next always proved transformative or foundational. Just as one cannot properly understand the era of accelerated undocumented migration (early 1970s to the present) without considering the Bracero era that preceded it, one might find it difficult to understand the historical weight and import of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in isolation. I begin with the Great Depression period, yet the

period prior to it, defined by the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17, was formative in creating the conditions for labour relations of the late 1920s throughout the American South, Southwest, and even Midwest. Of equal significance were developments in U.S.-Mexico relations that took place a century earlier, which will remain beyond the scope of this discussion. These, and even earlier events linked to Spanish colonialism and Amerindian collaboration and resistance are equally informative when considering the evolution of Mexican American identity and historical experience broadly defined. The *tejano* or Texan-Mexican community occupies a particularly instrumental place in the story of post-Bellum American labour relations and would become critical in shaping the textures of internal labour migration involving the Midwest and Pacific Northwest regions.¹ "Erased" histories, such as those linked to the lynching of Mexican Americans in the American West alongside the targeting of African Americans, can also be viewed as a key, if unrecognized component of the post-Bellum cross-cultural relations of the American South (Gonzales-Day 2006). As David William Foster writes, "the fact that we no longer hang men of color or acquiesce in their lynchings should not obscure the fact that police violence against people of color outstrips the violence directed toward white people..." (2017, 151).

***La Frontera* and the Borders of Social History: Nineteenth Century Bases of Chicano Identity Formation and Labour History**

Tejano culture, as Andrés Tijerina suggests, was born out of conflict and upheaval.² The *tejanos* were essentially colonizers of the northern reaches of New Spain who had developed a "distinctive" culture that sprang from their positioning

¹ Mario Jimenez Sifuentez' work also points to the broader emergence of a Tejano diaspora in the Pacific Northwest, and more specifically the emergence of a Mexican-Texan or Tejano community in Oregon (2016, 2, 36-58). There also emerged a complementary, cross-cultural collaboration between Mexican Texans and Nisei (second-generation Japanese) farming communities in Eastern Oregon, among whom, Mexican farmworkers found a "strong ally" (Sifuentez, 3, 36-8).

² On the Tejano past see Poyo 1996.

on the *frontera* and, for a short period of time in the early decades of the nineteenth century, along the fringes of the young independent or post-colonial Mexican state (Tijerina 1996, 33). As political maneuverings for the transfer of lands took hold during the era of the Texas Republic, *tejanos* were increasingly compelled to sacrifice land through “bogus lawsuits, fraudulent sheriff’s auctions, and other forced transfers of title” (Lack 1996, 95). Despite losses, they retained an “allegiance” to their religion and culture in the face of Anglo-American penetration (Poyo 1996, xv).

As Cosme Zaragoza suggests, contemporary Chicano identities have origins in uniquely nineteenth-century developments, which offer important interpretive windows into the political and cultural struggles faced by the Chicano community in the twentieth century and present time. He cites Juan Gómez-Quíñones (1975, 25), who writes that the Chicano past can be understood as constituting the

sum of the experiences by the communities of Mexican origin (indigenous, mestizo and mulatto) in the United States" and asserts that "there is a past prior to the US-Mexico War that should be taken into account in order to explain the existing diversity of the community, its geographic location, and its cultural references with regard to American as well as Mexican societies (Zaragoza 1989, 138).

Using Gómez-Quíñones assertion as an entry point for exploring this multilayered past, I underscore the deeply layered history that constitutes Chicano identity formation, inclusive of a history cross-cultural labour relations that sprang from the reordering of land with the Anglo-led Republic of Texas, an event that would radically disrupt patterns of sovereignty and land-based cohesiveness for the *tejano* community.

Paul Taylor’s first monograph, published in 1930, documents how a Mexican workforce in Texas served the onion harvest, with Texan agriculture dependent on a “reservoir” of Mexican labour located south of San Antonio

(Taylor 1930, 295).³ The deeper roots of Mexican agricultural labour in the state however have much earlier origins, as Omar Valerio-Jiménez writes: in the years leading to the American Civil War, *tejanos* laboured alongside slaves on plantations (2013, 251). In the twentieth century, Mexican migrants were desired in Texas primarily as onion cutters, spinach harvesters, and in cotton, but also in other forms of farm work and food processing, a trend carefully in Paul S. Taylor's monograph series. The documentary film work of Anne Lewis on the Hispanic female experience of labour militancy and repression in the 1930s pecan processing industry in San Antonio provides an additional window into the story of food processing labour in the state, the hands that worked this industry, and the labour conflicts that arose as a result of its poverty-level wages (Lewis 2018). As Paul Taylor's field archive shows, shrewd thinking often played into the economic calculations of farmers in the South, yet they would often still express how their harvests could not be completed without the aid of the Mexican labouring class. As the nature of cross-border migrations shifted over time, sparked often most prominently by more dramatic historical events and conflicts, but also remaining consistent as a leitmotif of the history of the relationship between the two countries, the history of labour's availability for farmers often went hand in hand with the history of cross-border mobility and agency.

Many Texan counties had long traditions of employing Mexican rural labour that dated to the nineteenth century; from 1860s through the 1880s, the Mexican states of Coahuila, Matamoros, Cerralvo, and Nuevo León provided labour for Dimmit County, Texas, where African American and Mexican "cowboys" earned food and 10 dollars per month, while Americans earned better pay and bore ostensibly higher responsibilities (Taylor 1930, 300; 320-1). The Anglo-Texan cotton industry offered the earliest opportunities for *tejano* wage

³ For detailed account of Taylor's social and professional roles during the Great Depression alongside his wife Dorothea Lange see Goggans 2010.

earning on plantation-estate settings, yet the social composition of this emergent industry would never prove uniform. The industry was defined by a diverse rural proletariat, which, in addition to its formative dependence on African American labour, was shaped by a Mexican Texan share-cropping and farm hand class. As Neil Foley writes, Texan cotton culture was shaped by "multiple and heterogeneous borders where different languages, experiences, histories, and voices intermingled." (Foley 1997, 7). Cotton was a colonial introduction, displacing cattle in south-central Texas, and as Foley emphasizes, the introduction of American white settlement to Texas with the establishment of the Austin colony in 1821 created the conditions for the Mexican community to be regarded as "alien culturally, linguistically, religiously, and racially" even though they had resided there for generations prior to its establishment (Foley 1997, 630). Divisions between "newcomer immigrants" from Mexico in the 1910s and 20s and the existing Mexican Texan community were shaped by questions of relative belonging and Americanness, and with the onset of increased migration during this period, which sparked a hardening of racist opinions towards the Mexican other in the state, white cotton farmers also found that their need for labour conflicted the prospect of Mexicans settling within the boundaries of their communities (ibid., 61-2).

"Seasons" of Labour: Paul S. Taylor and the *Mexican Labour in the United States Monograph Series*

The Paul Schuster Taylor field archive and multi-volume monograph series, *Mexican Labour in the United States* help record the character of interwar labour formations among migrant communities of workers, and this era was noticeably shaped by an absence of labour management practices taking place at the national level. Taylor, an Anglo-American economist, effectively crossed the color line in his own time to reorient the sociological gaze toward a non-white class of labour

that served enterprising American industrialism. This diverse community would form the lever around which his multi-volume study was rooted. Taylor's monograph series on Mexican labour has "lasting value and quality" as Abraham Hoffman has suggested, and Taylor for his part, "in the absence of hard data on the internal migration of Mexican workers, devised his own methods of obtaining needed information" (Hoffman 1976, 258). Taylor commenced research in the Napa grape fields in 1927 only to find he had arrived during the wrong season. He then turned to a study of Mexican labour on the Southern Pacific Railroad, and pursued his first agricultural field study in the Imperial Valley (Ibid., 261-2). His resulting studies help confirm the interwar era as a significant time when Mexican wage labour contributed instrumentally to the workings of the American economy, even as it underwent dramatic flux and change.

Born in 1895 in Sioux City, Iowa, Taylor would become one of the most eminent social scientists in California's history. After completing a PhD at the University of California in 1922, he filled the role of chief investigator in a research project on Mexican labour in the United States funded by the Social Science Research Council in 1927-1929, received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1931 to study in Mexico, and in 1935 served as Field Director for Rural Rehabilitation for the California Emergency Relief Administration (CERA) (Stephens and Jordan 1998). He later became editor of the journal *Rural Sociology*, and in 1951-2 he was a consultant to the President's Migratory Labour Committee, then serving as chair of Berkeley's Department of Economics between 1952 and 1956 (Ibid.). He served in an array of academic, political and union-affiliated positions and posts until his passing in Berkeley in 1984 (Ibid.).

Early on, Taylor found he could most easily interview farmworkers in the places where they gathered for social purposes: in cafes, bars, pool halls, and barbershops, rather than the fields (Gordon 2009, 143). Paul Gates wrote of Taylor that he "set an example for scholars to have the courage of their

convictions...” (ibid., 261-2). His interviews often “ranged in size from one sentence to lengthy conversations” (Hoffman 1976, 263-4). In addition to direct interviews and note taking in the fields, he collected extensive data sets linked to the movements of workers from the “labour agencies used by railroads, steel companies, packing plants, beet-sugar companies, and other users of Mexican labour,” as well as from correspondence with company employers who often proved “very cooperative in providing information” and “quite candid in their interviews” (ibid., 265). Taylor’s field study helped construct a narration of the social and economic lives of Mexican workers, with attention to specific regions, and the ways in which industrial labour relations operated across ethnic divides. While his work pre-dates the Bracero era, it illuminates themes and continuities that in some cases carried into this period.

Labour mobility in the interwar period tended to flow toward locations where workers were most dramatically needed. During these years, the Mexican presence was most prominent in agricultural zones, including in cotton fields in Texas and Arizona, in sugar beet fields, in lettuce and citrus, in railroad construction, and at mining sites. As a consequence of dislocations of the revolutionary period and newly emerging patterns of labour sourcing and recruitment at the border, the Mexican migrant would become a primary contributor to commercial agriculture prior to the onset of the Great Depression yet he was by no means the only contributing source.⁴ As Filipino-American oral historian Dawn Mabalon aptly charts, the Filipino agricultural worker community based in Stockton, California, experienced dramatic labour repression in the 1930s and 40s yet retained their resiliency through ethnically-based union building and organizing efforts (2013).

As the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution generated a campaign in the United States to promote order and repress labour, efforts to implement

⁴ For an account of multiculturalism in California farm labour history see Street 2004.

revolutionary approaches to better the working conditions across the border surfaced in Southern California, as Ricardo Flores Magón's *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) expanded into the city of Los Angeles (Bardacke 2011, 98). By the 1920s, able Mexican workers were not only engaging in cross-border mobility but they were already increasingly adopting a migratory nature within United States, often moving further north to the Great Lakes region to work in sugar beets, steel and automobiles. As Taylor's first monograph records,

Each annual wave has left its residue of Mexicans...who do not recede with the tide, but...winter on the farms or in the towns of the beet country, or in the cities of the North, to await there...the reopening of beet work in the spring; or who pass out of agriculture into the basic industries of the North (Taylor 1930, 97).

Full family units, as well as single migrants were drawn into seasonal labour regimes of Arizona, where agriculture, mining and railroads functioned as magnets (Hoffman 1974, 116-117, 122). Depression-era California would see the Mexican harvest worker enter into competition with hundreds of thousands of displaced white workers forced to pack up their lives and travel west in search of rural employment at a time when California was already home to some 200,000 Mexican field workers. The Mexican removal campaigns, which took place between 1929 and 1939, revealed how economic depression and Dust Bowl dislocations impacted the resident Mexican population of the South and Southwest as cross-cultural antagonisms came to a head.

During this period, at least in its early phase (1929-30), narratives of Mexican workers' durability and efficiency still often prevailed, as did popular understandings of Mexicans' industriousness, as is discernable from an examination of evidence from the Taylor field note archive. Thus, the conditions of the Depression did not necessarily deter employers of certain industries from hiring a Mexican workforce, although the competition between white and non-white labour would indeed grow in the agricultural sector and in California in particular. Discourses of low-cost labour would similarly shape the economic

paradigms that defined this era. In the South Platte Valley, Colorado, Mexicans often took inferior wages, occasionally did not receive any housing, and were often not aware of the “going rate,” rarely insisting on equal pay with fellow workers (Taylor 1930, 144). In Taylor’s first monograph, one farmer describes Mexican workers as being closer to nature: “The white men won’t do the work on their hands and knees next to Mother Earth” (Taylor 1930, 339). An Arizona Cotton Growers’ Association official in 1928 similarly admitted to Taylor that

Those who have *just come from Mexico* are the best. They are fine. *They don’t know anything.* After they have been here two or three years they get Americanized, want better houses, etc. and leave. The Mexicans are good, hard working pickers...they stay. *The white pickers won’t stay. They work a day or two and then go on* (“Field Notes Series A Set I” 6-7). (Italics mine)

The relative freshness of the labour force, in terms of when they had departed Mexico and the length of time they had spent in the United States, here helped determine their willingness to perform certain tasks, with this willingness often diminishing with time as increased acculturation took place.

Culturally-based tensions abounded in inter-war California as well, as recorded in another local account:

Orange pickers are practically all whites. The Mexicans are not careful enough...The Filipinos are more of a problem than the Mexicans. They are natty dressers and they attract the white girls. I have never heard of a Mexican who overstepped himself with a white woman (“Field Notes Series A Set I” 8).

Mabalon’s study similarly attests to Filipino men crossing racial lines to attain social advancement. Since such activities were often derided by the white community, some were forced to leave California in order render their cross-racial marriages or unions legitimate.

When it came to matters of accommodation, differential standards based upon perceived differences were also applied. One Kleberg County Agricultural Agent in 1928 observed to Taylor:

Yes, farmers *don’t have to put up such good houses* for the Mexicans.
Often a farmer puts up a shack for the Mexican who clears the land and then

tells the tenant since it was good enough for the former it should be good enough for him (Ibid., 25). (Italics mine)

Another account described the utility of a labourer as a function of the length of time he had spent at a particular farm: “We should send a Mexican back to Mexico after three or four years. *We should send back all the Mexicans unless they can prove that they are industrious and desirable*” (Ibid., 39) (Italics mine). Logistical calculations often dictated perceptions about the Mexican worker: “Granted that the Mexicans are socially undesirable and don’t assimilate...we have got to have some one to do this class of labour” (Ibid., 40).

The inspector in Charge at Santa Fe Bridge, El Paso, believed that “whipping is the only effective deterrent to the Mexicans – the fear of punishment” while his men, along with the border patrol, busied themselves with catching Mexican prostitutes who often sold their services to white Americans (Ibid., 16). Another account described the how horse-whipping was used as a method of discipline, a shocking continuity from the era of plantation slavery:

The Mexicans have replaced Negroes in Central and eastern Texas and even now in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Not ten percent of the mistreated Mexicans complain to the consul...Some farmers have given me the names of other farmers who horse-whip their Mexicans. The Mexicans sometimes are afraid to tell me about it even then (Ibid., 60-61).

Similarly, the verbal abuse and intimidation of workers has been documented in Canada in association with the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, a circular labour scheme that will be considered at the end of this paper.

The Mexican worker offered staying power and a measure of vulnerability. At one silver and lead mine near Santa Rita, New Mexico, the Mexican work force did not perform “so much work” yet were “there when needed” (Ibid., 11; 45). In an interview with A.J. Milliken, the Inspector in Charge U.S.I.S. at Santa Fe Bridge, El Paso, competition between industry and agriculture for able-bodied workers also apparent: “The railroads knowingly lose Mexicans to the Arizona Cotton growers, beet growers, etc.” (Ibid., 15-16). This dynamic

would foreshadow the more orchestrated management of railroad workers during the Second World War, when the Railroad Bracero Program which employed 6000 workers from Mexico in its inaugural year in 1943, paving the way for more than 100,000 more arrivals between 1943-5 to the Midwest, Southwest and East Coast regions (Fernández 2012, 31).⁵

The push of poverty was also critical, as E.J. Walker of El Paso observed: “We get the most poverty-stricken Mexicans. Nobody but the most poverty-stricken will pick cotton” (“Field Notes Series A Set I”, 95). Still, in the cotton industry workers were diverse. Employment agent J.R. Silva noted that this workforce in 1928 included American, American-born Mexican and Mexican-born workers. Employment agents like Silva functioned as middlemen who arranged for labour to be transferred to where it was needed; for example he furnished labour “for construction. I furnished the Rock Island with two thousand Mexicans in 1926” (Ibid., 105). In the 1920s we witness the transfer of workers from the border towards contracts where non-American labour was desired.

In the decades leading up to this period, the railroad industry contributed greatly to Mexican migrant mobilities: “The Santa Fe shipped Mexicans in 1902, and in 1916 the Southern Pacific shipped north of Bakersfield. The Rock Island shipped Mexicans from about 1907.” (Ibid., 108) While Taylor’s record gave evidence that American railroads were in the habit of employing Mexican contract labour as early as 1896, Jeffrey Garcilaso’s 1995 dissertation, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930*, pointed to an even earlier presence of Mexican workers in this industry. As Pablo Garcia Loaeza has noted, Mexican *traqueros* (or track layers) served as an inexpensive and docile labour force in the Southwest, Central Plains and Midwest between 1880 and 1930, and the railroad officials who employed them often viewed the Mexican as an “inferior species.” (Loaeza 233). Foremen in this industry also often exercised

⁵ For a focused chronology of the Railroad Bracero scheme see also Driscoll 1999.

violence against their workforce, particular in the state of Texas, as was the case in other sectors like agriculture (ibid.).

Intersecting with the railroads as an early employer of Mexican labour, the steel mills of Chicago would begin hiring on Mexican workers during the early interwar period, beginning in 1919. As Michael Innis-Jiménez writes, South Chicago “stood for economic opportunity and hope. Mexicanos came through the encouragement of friends, after being recruited in Mexico or along the border, or after years of working in other parts of the Midwest and West,” and “much like new immigrant populations in the United States today, Mexicans in South Chicago dealt with economic hardship, ethnic prejudice, nativism, and intra-ethnic divisions,” factors that “reinforced their sense of differences and their propensity to see themselves as sojourners desiring eventually to return to Mexico” (Innis-Jimenez 2017, 72). This new urban environment equally generated internal and external understandings of belonging that were new to *Mexicanos* in the United States, but certain continuities from this era, including the steel industry's reliance upon *enganchistas* or employment agents who acted as key figures in the management of Mexican labour during this early phase, would instrumentally tie this industry in with developments taking place elsewhere.

As Omar Valerio-Jiménez has observed, in the nineteenth century the U.S.-Mexico border served as a “weapon of the weak;” it functioned as a both an obstacle as well as an opportunity and was often crossed in order to escape unfavorable circumstances (2013, 182). While the reasons for mobility shifted as the twentieth century created new conditions for mobility (most especially, the warfare associated with the Mexican Revolution), migrant workers in the first three decades of the twentieth century continued to face labouring opportunities that were often substantially different from those made available to American workers, and these opportunities were often defined by difficult, dangerous work that was often of a seasonal or contract nature. Moreover, in agriculture, where a

diversity of groups were still employed, rural immorality and cold economic calculations on the part of farmers often merged potently with conniving labour practices towards Mexicans, as William Pullian in Crystal City confessed to Taylor: “The less you pay them the more work they will do” (“Field Notes Series A Set I” 143).

Many American employers in the 1920s continued to adhere to a strictly white workforce, and this dynamic would also be reflected in the context of postwar Canada discussed further on, where many growers have still opted *not* to hire offshore. In Taylor's record, some lumber companies he corresponded with, such as McKay and Co., revealed that they were not in the habit of employing Mexican workers, while other companies underwent a transition to a white work force after a period of employing a Mexican workforce. This was the case for the Los Angeles United Concrete Pipe and Construction Co., which initially employed forty workers from Mexico in cement handling and quarry labour then transitioned toward a solely American workforce: “As soon as white American labour became available we discontinued the Mexicans. At present we have but one Mexican employed in gang of eighty men” (Paul Taylor Papers n.d. n.p.). For employers like United Concrete, the Mexican worker viewed as practical yet imperfect solution to their labour needs. In other cases, questions linked to efficiency ruled employer attitudes. Pacific Lumber of Scotia, California employed Mexican workers in 1927 but reported to Taylor that they were a “rather undesirable and inefficient class of labour” (ibid.) Dolbeer and Carson, another lumber company, described having hired a single worker from Mexico for ten years, who was paid at a rate of 40 cents per hour, and his performance at work considered very satisfactory.

In addition to the Taylor archive, newspaper depictions of social conflict, nativism and indignation towards the Mexican other as the Depression years are evident in Melita Garza's study, *They Came to Toil*, which illuminates how

patterns of othering took shape at the local level and were recorded in local news media. In April 1930, the *San Antonio Light* followed a parade of jobless Mexican men marching through downtown San Antonio, documenting the disparaging comments of the parade's onlookers: "much comment could be heard concerning the nationality of the marchers," with non-Mexican onlookers highlighting the foreign constitution of its participants (Garza 2018, 64-5). Indeed, the longer any given workforce stayed in the United States, the more likely they were to begin claiming rights. Moreover, for the Mexican labourer of the interwar period, time spent outside of Mexico also enabled many to pursue occupations beyond original ones obtained, as social mobility through internal migration or the securing of new forms of employment could also signify advancement and acculturation and create initial pathways toward permanent settlement despite the economic pressures of the time. Despite policy changes at the border, which early on saw migration levels from Mexico fall from 87,000 in 1924 to 32,000 in 1925 after head taxes and visa fees were introduced, these fees were often waived for agricultural workers crossing the border when this class of labour was needed, giving them a sort of preference for transnational mobility, foreshadowing the period of managed migration that would become the norm as the Second World War arrived (Texas-El Paso; Hoffman 1973, 206)

The Bracero Program (1942-64): Securing a Backbone for the Harvest in Wartime

When the Bracero Program began in 1942 it took Mexican farm labourers from areas deep within Mexico into contact with American farmers. While it introduced non-citizen agricultural workers from Mexico via a legal scheme, the program would pave the way for many of direct Mexican origin to eventually attain green cards and remain permanently in the United States. In the Midwest, the impact of the program was profound, as the Railroad Bracero Program generated a lasting

transformation in helping to define Chicago as a site of substantial Mexican community formation and settlement. The Bracero Program marked a departure from earlier decades in terms of the nature (and scale) of the recruitment process as well as the scale of international mobility that took place. It was accompanied by a precondition that the scheme should not affect the American labour market adversely, in the form of Public Law 78 whose terms included the condition that *braceros* should not be recruited if sufficient domestic labour could be secured (Bardacke 2011, 91). A similar condition evolved in concert with the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, which typically requires employers applying to participate to first demonstrate that they are unable to procure sufficient workers initially from within Canada.

Indeed, despite its controversial status, given the fact that *bracero* workers did enter into competition with already existing farm workers, generating new conditions for wage competition vis-a-vis pre-existing communities like the Filipino-American farm working community of central California, which had been engaging in labour agitation from the 1930s onwards, the *bracero* years would nonetheless transform the face of the U.S.-Mexico labour relationship with lasting consequences. The scale of Bracero migrations were indeed unprecedented. The onset of the program coincided with the U.S. entry into the war, and approximately 4.6 million bracero contracts took place between 1942 and 1964, with some estimates recording 5 million contracts.

A diversity of experiences further took place within the boundaries of the scheme. Indigenous braceros often exercised agency upon return to Mexico where community networks were mobilized to recruit needed *braceros* for certain industries, allowing recruitment to effectively take place from the ground up. The inclusion of indigenous workers within the boundaries of the program also saw the introduction workers speaking new language beyond Spanish; in some cases, Náhuatl-speaking braceros used their native language as way to covertly

coordinate strikes for fair wages, the language allowing workers to communicate horizontally in a native language (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004, 2).

Bracero competition with local labour in the end created mounting opposition to the scheme. Increasingly in the early 1960s lettuce worker strikes, staged by *braceros*, signaled the beginning of the end of the program (Bardacke 2011b). Braceros were also viewed by Mexican American labour leadership as problematic, and they were treated differently, set apart from the inclusion association with the labour agitation linked to the early manifestations of Chicano nationalism and the United Farm Worker movement, which emerged as a fundamentally Mexican-American, rather than Mexican-in-America movement. Braceros as a result faced the brunt of pace and workload-related exploitation: Pacific Northwest farmers were often convinced that braceros' performance would improve if they were threatened (Gamboa, 1990, 59), and the long workdays typical for the *bracero* still typify modern-day farm work in many places in Canada and the United States: in 2007 seasonal workers in Canada reportedly worked 12-15 hour days (Montpetit 2007, n.p.). In Milton-Freewater, Oregon, *braceros* worked back-to-back day and night shifts: after a night shift they would often consume breakfast then "wander out where growers...would take them to pick cherries"; they also braved environmental hazards of extreme cold, lead poisoning, and pesticide exposure, not dissimilar to the chemical exposure faced by SAWP workers (Gamboa 1990, 67, 70). Toward its demise, the Bracero Program fomented debates at the national level over its utility, practicality and logic. It had functioned as a "labour loan" as *braceros*' flexibility imbued their bodies with a value that might be reaped *only* through migration (Camacho 2008, 62-3).

Migrant Work in Postwar Canada: “Not Good Enough to Stay”

Not dissimilar to the Bracero Program in structure and scope, the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program of SAWP is a postwar agricultural bilateral labour management scheme that was introduced in 1974 between Mexico and Canada. It had origins in an earlier program arranged in 1966 between Canada and Commonwealth Caribbean countries that was dubbed the Offshore Program.⁶ Despite its successes, the SAWP has offered fodder for debate. Sometimes depicted as a model program, offering a legal framework for migration, the program has yet to enable its worker participants from Mexico to circulate freely on the Canadian labour market. As a result they have suffered exclusions from certain definable human rights, including in some cases rights to engage in collective bargaining (depending on the province, with this problem proving acute in Ontario), and other interrelated rights linked to housing, sanitation and personal mobility.

Legal cases intersecting with the SAWP that have proven most controversial have also been telling regarding discrepancies between the scheme as it *should* operate under ideal terms and the inconsistencies have perforated its operation. Such cases have included those linked to labour bargaining rights, migrant deaths and accidents, employer intimidation and the rerouting of workers to new employers in consecutive seasons, and some instances of direct sexual abuse (Montpetit 2007; O’Toole 2013; Bajer 2013; Veneza 2013a, 2013b; Russo 2012, 2011). At its worst, seasonal workers were treated as less than human; in Windsor, Ontario, SAWP migrants were found to be working and living in dismal conditions at a farm where some 300 harvest workers were “referred to by numbers, and banned from speaking any language but English” (Makin 2001, 2). With the more recent increased participation of women in the program, the potential for worker mistreatment has included the double risk of race-based and

⁶ For a chronology of this program and its beginnings see Satzewich 1991.

gender-based discrimination. The Canadian Labour Congress documented the case of Teresa from Mexico who, while working on an Ontario apple orchard, “fell off a tractor, which then ran over her legs;” she underwent surgery twice, faced reprimands from a Mexican Consular official who “blamed her for being clumsy” and “demanded...she sign a document confirming his version of the accident, and said she would be returned to her family in Mexico” while the farm owner “paced the hallway... angry and anxious to have Teresa sign the document” (Flecker2001, 1-2). In this case, the female migrant’s vulnerability was clear yet the employer was concerned for his own wellbeing. Two police officers later found her belongings “carelessly stuffed into a plastic bag and tossed near the ditch” (ibid.) Mexican women who took SAWP contracts also risked their own wellbeing by travelling to Canada, operating as breadwinners for themselves and loves ones. In the workplace they were often “stigmatized as sexually available by their own countrymen,” and in one shocking case, differential treatment of women occurred when one farmer “forbade his female workers to leave the farm, while the men were free to come and go” (ibid.)

Scholarship on the SAWP has focused on housing conditions, health and workplace dangers, the prevalence of racism on farms, legal conflicts and the potential for worker exploitation. While fewer studies have emphasized positive experiences, my own research suggests the utility of oral history to offer a complex picture of migrant experiences as a means to potentially contest official narratives, media reports, and critical academic accounts. In addition to field harvesting and greenhouse labour, the SAWP has also encompassed the tobacco sector, a sector that has for a long period of time relied upon transient workers to serve its labour needs. Its current seasonal workforce is still very much relegated to the shadows (Dunsworth 2017).⁷ Filmmaker Min Sook Lee observed how the rise in temporary foreign workers and their willingness to fill less than desirable

⁷ On the tobacco sector see also Pietropaolo 2009.

jobs has created a “two-tiered” labour system in Canada where the rights of guest workers sit upon a lower rung in the Canadian legal system (Dharssi 2016 n.p.). On account of their perceived incompatibility as citizens, migrant workers are often deemed “non-citizenship material – not good enough to stay, good enough to work but not good enough to stay” (ibid.)

What insights can be drawn, then, in comparing the Depression era, postwar and present-day contexts? If citizenship was not of primary importance in Taylor's America but rather, questions connected with labour opportunity and conversely, employer perceptions of labour's efficiency in less desirable working sectors, some fruitful comparisons may yet be drawn. In Taylor's America, social divisions in small town settings often defined cross-cultural relationships, just as this occurred in postwar Canada, where social relationships in small town settings were at times defined by a lack of cohesiveness between local residents and the migrant worker community. The management of labour is another consistent theme, and one that evolved according to the necessities of time and place. Today, it is worth reconsidering the history of Mexican labour migration and its nativist responses as a window into the entangled and often inconsistent relationship between capital and labour, and as a broader indication of a deeply rooted labour history worth exploring.

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Palmyra and the Radical Other

On the Politics of Monument Destruction in Syria

Ella Mudie

Palmyra was indeed a city, a civilized and even cultured place, but it was dangerously close to nomadic noncivilization and a civilization of “the other,” that of Persia or of an even more remote place.
- Paul Veyne, *Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*.

Prior to its placement on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger in 2013 (along with five other Syrian sites¹), the desert city of Palmyra was venerated as one of the great remnants of the ancient world. “An elusive and highly romanticised goal of European travellers over the centuries,” enthuses historian Ross Burns (1995, 156) in his historical guide to the city. Today, the destruction of the monuments of Palmyra unfolds at the nexus of a bloody civil conflict and war on terror that has produced one of the most significant humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century. While the death toll in Syria is estimated at around 470,000 lives lost during nearly eight years of combat, the classical ruins of Palmyra still occupy a powerful mythical status in the cultural imaginary of the West. It is a fascination evident in the global online circulation of before-and-after photographs documenting the deliberate destruction by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) of the city’s renowned monuments of antiquity, the sharp

¹ The six Syrian locations listed as UNESCO World Heritage in Danger are the Ancient City of Damascus; Palmyra; Ancient City of Bosra; Ancient City of Aleppo; Crac des Chevaliers and Qal’at Salah El-Din; and the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria.

dissonance between then-and-now provoking horror and disbelief at the hyperviolent targeting of ruins that form part of what is increasingly (although not unproblematically) perceived as the common heritage of not only the people of Syria but of the world-at-large.

In keeping with recent developments in international humanitarian law aimed at protecting cultural property during armed conflict,² significant concerted efforts are underway to protect, and draw global attention to, the endangered monuments of Palmyra. And yet in light of the devastating impact of the war on Syria's civilian population, the international call-to-arms to protect the nation's monuments raises thorny questions about the discord that exists between the universalist tendencies underlying World Heritage discourse and the particular causes that fuel the targeting of culturally valuable sites and artefacts in the first place. With its pronounced links to Roman classical antiquity the targeting of Palmyra throws into sharp relief the civilization versus barbarism polarity that all too often frames responses by the West to the attack on cultural heritage by radical extremists. Indeed, the very concept of World Heritage has always had Othering tendencies in the dialectical tension it generates between inclusion and exclusion and, furthermore, the way in which it "amplifies an idea originating in the West and tends to require an attitude toward material culture that is also distinctly Western in origin" (Gamboni 2017, 167).

Following the observation of Christian Moraru that "culture does not end where terror begins (and vice versa)" (2012, 41), this essay considers how the privileged elevation of exceptional monuments in the name of Western values and civilization can in fact serve to perpetuate, rather than inhibit, the cycles of violence and destruction committed against architecture by the so-called "radical

² Notable developments include the passing of Resolution 2347 by the UN Security Council in March 2017, the first specifically condemning the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage. This follows a landmark case at the ICC in 2016 where Islamist rebel, Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, was convicted for the war crime of intentional attacks against religious buildings and monuments in Timbuktu, Mali.

Other.” In their treatise on the ascent of a new world order grounded in global imperialism, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasize in *Empire* the *differential* racism (as expounded by Étienne Balibar) of the contemporary era according to which “biological differences have been replaced by sociological and cultural signifiers as the key representation of racial hatred and fear” (2001, 191). As World Heritage protection efforts are increasingly focused upon coordinating projects to safeguard cultural property during armed conflict, the targeted destruction of monuments has become a principal cultural signifier of Otherness and barbarism in a manner that risks reinforcing the differential racism of which Hardt and Negri speak. In what follows, I address the case study of Palmyra in order to explore how the discourse of monument protection might be turned around to take greater account of the local context and lived experience of monuments as one potential means to mitigate the division and opposition that arises from framing the defence of cultural heritage in abstract universal value terms.

Culture under attack

In assuming a critical heritage approach to the politics of ruin destruction and preservation, this essay builds upon a rich body of work already undertaken on the relationship between memory, identity and the built environment, as well as the subset of literature within it concerned more directly with the targeted destruction of architecture, cultural monuments and archaeology in modern warfare. The numerous case-studies outlined in Robert Bevan’s *The Destruction of Memory*, in particular, have done much to establish that the breadth and depth of damage inflicted upon the built environment during the major conflicts of the twentieth-century extends well beyond collateral or incidental damage. Furthermore, this scrutiny of the deliberate targeting of buildings as containers of memory, tangible markers of history, and as expressions of power relations is warranted, Bevan

effectively argues, not as a means of privileging the safeguarding of architectural fabric above or before human life but to the extent that its destruction is all too often a precursor to the imminent physical attack upon civilian populations. Others have drawn attention to the growing mobilization of archaeology, specifically, as not only a target but also as a *weapon* of war, a discipline all too readily instrumentalized to serve wartime aims in a propagandist sense and used militarily as a form of structural violence aimed at economic and cultural forms of dominance (Pollock 2016; Harmanşah 2015; Plets 2017).

As an archaeological site located in the Middle East yet claimed by the West as an example of universal heritage, and standing at the crossroads of both the global war on terror and an intensely localized civil conflict, the current situation at Palmyra in many ways continues its long history as a complex multi-ethnic site. Located in the central Syrian desert to the north-east of capital city Damascus, the remains of this oasis city with a rich cosmopolitan past date back to at least the second millennium BC. Owing to its strategic location on the cross-desert caravan trading routes, Palmyra prospered during the second centuries CE as an outpost of the Roman Empire. Indeed, it was under Roman rule that an impressive, if ad-hoc, assemblage of civic imperial structures were built in a fusion of ancient Syrian and Roman architectural styles. Fragments of the main colonnaded street and its associated public buildings survive today alongside religious temples and remnants of the sandstone chambers of the Valley of the Tombs where the Palmyrene upper classes buried their dead. Throughout the Byzantine and Islamic periods that followed Palmyra remained an important trading centre and was occupied continuously at varying levels of density over the ensuing centuries. It was only in the early twentieth-century in 1932 that the local population living amid the ruins of Palmyra were finally displaced from their mud-brick villages to the nearby modern town of Tadmor under the direction of the French administration.

Ultimately, this contemporary image of Palmyra as a priceless and irreplaceable archaeological treasure, an eternal site frozen in time, belies the waxing and waning fortunes of a constantly evolving desert city where over the course of millennia the western influences of the Greco-Roman world intersected with the eastern cultures of the Levant. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the city slipped largely from the consciousness of Europe until it was “rediscovered” in the seventeenth century by a group of merchants working for the British Levant Company at Aleppo who set off in search of the fabled desert city. This early modern fascination with Palmyra’s monuments, sculptures and inscriptions intensified in the latter part of the nineteenth-century with the formal establishment of the discipline of European archaeology.³ During the late Ottoman rule (1876-1922), and the subsequent French Mandate (1923-1946), thousands of Palmyrene antiquities were removed from the site and dispersed to museums around the world. After the First World War, large-scale archaeological excavation commenced under the governance of the French. In recent decades and prior to the beginning of the civil war which commenced in 2011, the ruins of Palmyra as open-air museum had become a major tourist attraction and, as such, a significant contributor to the Syrian economy.

Given this complex history of Western interactions, it is “impossible to write a history of archaeology in Syria without addressing European colonialist interests” (al-Manzali 2016). In the specific case of Palmyra, the ascendancy of the site’s archaeological ruins in the Western imagination as a mythical fragment of classical antiquity and exemplary World Heritage site has come at great cost to its quotidian, or everyday, significance. The displacing of the local population from the site to make way for its archaeological excavation most notably marks an

³ Indeed, the cult of ruins (and by extension, archaeology) is itself a product of modernity and as such the hunger for authenticity that ruins symbolize only intensified “the more it was threatened by alienation, inauthenticity and reproducibility during the course of modernization” (Huyssen 2006, 9).

upheaval that speaks to a broader “disdain for present-day cultures in the Near East over its ‘glorious past’ [...] just as present today as it was in the 19th-20th centuries” (al-Manzali 2016). Historian Ingrid D. Rowland similarly notes the contemporary reification of Palmyra by archaeology and tourism in so far as prior to the recent vandalism inflicted by ISIS the site had earlier “suffered destruction in the lofty name of knowledge: it was twentieth-century archaeologists, not Islamic fanatics, who obliterated old Tadmor Village, and many structures, like fortification walls, that dated from post-classical times” (Rowland 2016). Today, neither the vernacular architecture of old Palmyra nor its Islamic relics elicit the same attention as its classical ruins. Still, “these places and these structures had their own tales to tell; in them, sometimes for centuries, people lived out their lives, built their families, gathered their memories” (ibid).

Notwithstanding the frequency with which Western accounts gloss the site’s myriad colonial and Orientalist associations, the arrival of ISIS at Palmyra in 2015 nonetheless marked the beginning of an extremely dark chapter in its recent history. In fact, the implication of Palmyra in the Syrian conflict predates ISIS as regime forces began installing military units in strategic areas within the modern town and the old city as early as 2012, resulting in substantial structural damage to the archaeological site and its surroundings.⁴ As the civil conflict escalated Palmyra was drawn into a tug-of-war between Syrian government forces and ISIS extremists challenging for control of the location. In addition to the military infrastructure at the site, the nearby modern town housed the notorious Tadmor prison where for decades political dissidents were jailed and tortured by the Syrian regime. When ISIS seized control of Palmyra in mid-2015 one of its first targets for demolition was the prison which it detonated with explosives. The destruction of ancient temples and tombs followed alongside vandalism of

⁴ For a detailed inventory of the damage caused to the archaeological site between February 2012 and June 2015 refer to the Special Report from the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology prepared by Cheikhmous Ali, “Palmyra: Heritage Adrift” (2015).

antiquities at the Palmyra Archaeological Museum. The brutal beheading of archaeologist and Palmyrene antiquities expert, 82-year-old Khaled al-Asaad, attracted global headlines as did the execution of Syrian soldiers in the Roman amphitheatre. A year later, Syrian and Russian forces reclaimed the city only to lose it again in a counter-offensive until the Syrian army finally recaptured Palmyra in early 2017. Since then, the area has remained under close military guard preventing further ISIS occupation.

While the archaeological site at Palmyra has been implicated in the Syrian civil conflict since 2012, it was the circulation of images on social media purporting to show the spectacular detonation by ISIS of the 2000-year-old pagan Temple of Baalshamin in 2015 that sparked worldwide debate over the motivation behind such targeted attacks. As an act of negation, the “moment of explosion is, from the point of view of spectacle, undoubtedly the most significant in the whole biography of the monument,” notes Mikhail Iampolksi (2017, 180). In this sense, the targeting of Palmyra’s heritage serves powerful propagandist purposes for the group. The initial focus by ISIS on the vandalism of religious monuments associated with polytheism and idolatry also invites explanation, to some extent, at the level of iconoclasm; which names the deliberate destruction of icons and other images or monuments for distinctly religious or political reasons. While iconoclasm is nothing new in either the West nor East, the deliberate destruction of millennial old ruins of antiquity has nonetheless transgressed a boundary, provoking a level of outrage that belies an amnesia on the part of the West with regards its own legacies of perpetual destruction. This legacy is at odds with the ease with which Western commentators declare the total incommensurability of the terrorist as barbarian vandal. At the same time, that fact that iconoclasm as a construct has evolved from naming the destruction of symbols of religious rivals to a more positive modern meaning of revolutionary destruction from the French Revolution onwards (Gamboni 1997) also renders it a problematic label for the

targeting of cultural heritage by terrorists lest it offer an apologist reading. Thus, the motivation behind the destruction of monuments by ISIS is often construed at the level of a more general “attack on culture,” as is evidenced, for instance, in the exegesis of French scholar and historian, Professor Paul Veyne, in which he asks:

But why, in August 2015, did ISIS need to blow up and destroy the temple of Baalshamin? Because it was a temple where pagans before Islam came to adore mendacious idols? No, it was because that monument was venerated by contemporary Westerners, whose culture includes an educated love for ‘historical monuments’ and a great curiosity for the beliefs of other people and other times...They blew up that temple in Palmyra and have pillaged several archaeological sites in the Near East to show that they are different from us and that they don’t respect what Western culture admires. (2017, 70)

No matter how impassioned, the rationale offered by Veyne for the destruction of the Temple of Baalshamin at Palmyra throws into sharp relief the inherently contradictory nature of the veneration and defence of the cultural heritage of the Middle-East by Western scholars. In qualifying the interest of the West in the heritage of Syria in terms of “a great curiosity for the beliefs of other people and other times,” Veyne’s comments reveal an Orientalist approach to the Middle-East that Edward Said has already deconstructed at length as an entire topic of learning, discovery and practice (1995). At the same time, the universalization of the value of the historic monument cannot help but, paradoxically, involve the “definition of a *residual place of exclusion*” (Balibar 2017, 936). The notion that the culture of the West includes “an educated love” for historical monuments interpolates as radical Other those who fail to enunciate the same educated love or respect for what the West admires as inherently uncivilized, barbarous, retrograde. This points, then, to the way in which the racism of the contemporary era is increasingly a *differential* one “whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences” (Balibar 1991, 21). Just as the Orientalist scholar’s erudite investment in the classical past of the East is mutually imbricated with colonial interventions into its present reality, the modern

tendency to frame the act of terrorism in terms of a general attack on universal Western values is implicitly tied to the emergence of the “notion of right” that Hardt and Negri identify as a key feature of global imperialism “affirmed in the construction of a new order that envelops the entire space of what it considers civilization, a boundless universal space” (2000, 11).

At a theoretical level it is tempting to cast the contradictory nature of defending at-risk cultural heritage sites like Palmyra as an inherently aporetic problem. Considering these attacks from the local perspective, however, serves to concretize the crisis in a more immediate fashion. In contrast to the more theologically-oriented motivation of iconoclasm, a number of commentators emphasize the place-based nature of the violence arguing that it is principally the domestic impact upon local populations for whom the ruins of Palmyra embody layers of memory that constitute the target of these attacks. For Elly Harrowell, Palmyra is an exemplary “urban palimpsest” (Huyssen 2003) such that its demolition by ISIS signifies a direct assault on the vernacular memories attached to the site and an attempt to erase the physical evidence of the region’s multicultural history (2016). Nour Munawar cites several factors motivating the destruction but is also concerned to emphasize the desire of ISIS to rewrite history by “erasing the extraordinary collective identity and memory of Palmyra in a way that would facilitate creating a new identity” (2017, 39). These readings place a positive emphasis on the archaeological site of Palmyra not for its universal heritage value but distinctly in terms of its significance for local communities as a repository of collective multicultural memories and identity at odds with the monocultural ideology of ISIS, which in turn acts as provocation for their attacks. It is an interpretation to some extent supported by the custodianship the local population have demonstrated towards Palmyra and in the active role Syrians have played in protecting heritage during the conflict, often at great risk to their own safety.

And yet in considering the place-based or domestic motivations for the targeting of cultural heritage by ISIS, one must also pay heed to the nationalist agendas that archaeological monuments are made to serve and the extent to which the strategic use of archaeology by oppressive regimes arguably produces a more profoundly ambivalent relationship between local populations and ancient sites. Not only are the remains of the past increasingly commodified or made ‘saleable’ due to tourism and the booming international antiquities trade (Pollock 2016), such sites are expediently deployed in the logic of state-building. In assessing the political history of archaeology in Syria, others are more emphatic in stressing the “**modern political reasons**” behind the attacks by ISIS on ruins as “sites of governmental power” (al Manzali 2016, bold in original). In Syria, archaeology has in many ways become “an instrument in the service of the Syrian regime, as part of the imposition of an official national memory and identity” (ibid). It is arguably this misuse of monuments for nationalistic purposes that provides a principal motivating factor for their targeting by terrorist groups. At the same time, it complicates the relationship of cultural heritage to civilian populations all too aware that the recapture of sites such as Palmyra are strategically exploited by the Syrian regime and its allies seeking to cast themselves in a positive light as the civilized guardians of Syria’s cultural heritage. While presently safeguarded from ISIS, recent developments at Palmyra nonetheless represent just one further step in a long history of cultural heritage and archaeology in the Middle East as “indelibly marked by its interplay with colonialism and nationalism” (De Cesari 2015, 24).

The race for virtual preservation

While monuments have long been targeted for multi-dimensional geopolitical purposes, the ease with which images of their destruction are now circulated in the age of social media and the online twenty-four-hour news cycle heightens the

sense of urgency to intervene when under threat. In recent years, the pivotal role played by technology, in particular, in the monument destruction debate has expanded as the international push to increase the legal mandate to protect cultural heritage coincides with the rise of the fledging field of virtual heritage. Representing “an amalgam of archaeology and VR imaging technologies,” virtual heritage is “primarily focussed on generating digital reconstructions of historical or archaeological artifacts and sites with enough fidelity to be truly accurate representations of their real-world counterparts” (Roussou 2008, 228). With the rapid proliferation of preservation projects utilising 3D models, digital printing, artificial intelligence, robotics and virtual reality to document and recreate at-risk archaeological and architectural sites, further questions arise around the relationship between heritage protection, globalization and the colonizing forces of capitalism. No matter how neutral technology may appear, the fact remains that “designating something as heritage is a critical act, leaving no object untransformed” (Gamboni 2017, 167) holds just as true in the virtual realm.

At the forefront of this race for virtual preservation is the Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA), a multi-lateral research institute that has engaged extensively with the threatened ruins at Palmyra through its multi-year Preserving Syrian Heritage project. In April 2016, the IDA attracted international publicity for its role in creating a 3D printed marble replica of the ISIS destroyed Arch of Triumph.⁵ Publicly unveiled in a media spectacle at London’s Trafalgar Square prior to its international tour,⁶ then-mayor of London, Boris Johnson, delivered a bombastic speech praising the near six-metre tall recreated monument, which is roughly two thirds in scale, as an embodiment of “London values.” For Johnson, the replica was erected in a spirit of “defiance of the barbarians who destroyed the

⁵ The 3D printed replica of the Arch of Triumph was a collaboration between the Dubai Future Foundation, UNESCO, the British Institute for Digital Archaeology, and the universities of Oxford and Harvard.

⁶ To date, the replica arch has also been installed in New York’s City Hall Park, at the World Government Summit in Dubai, at Florence during the G7 Summit and in Arona, Italy.

original of this arch as they have destroyed so many other monuments and relics in Syria and the Middle East, and in Palmyra.”⁷ Considering that Britain was at that time accepting the lowest number of Syrian applications for asylum in Europe, the comments were striking as not only culturally imperialist but as deeply hypocritical, too. Whatever the intrinsic worth of virtual heritage tools such as 3D scans and printing in terms of preserving collective knowledge about past civilizations and their potential capacity to assist in post-conflict restoration, the installation of a replica with such high symbolic value at a site so embedded in the history of British imperial power during an active war at the very least called for a more measured presentation.

At the same time, just in case one is willing to excuse the pronounced civilization versus barbarism theatrics of the London unveiling as an isolated offense by a particularly insensitive Western politician, the staging of a concert at the Roman amphitheatre at Palmyra by the Russian government just weeks later points to the more endemic complicity of so-called “civilized” cultural posturing in the conflict. Here, a “carefully choreographed spectacle” (Plets 2017, 18) unfolded on 5 May 2016 when an audience of Syrian and Russian soldiers, government ministers and international journalists were gathered amid the ruins to watch the renowned Russian Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra perform a classical concert titled “A Prayer for Palmyra.” Given the strategic domestic and diplomatic ends that sponsoring the reconstruction of Palmyra clearly serves for Russia, a number of commentators have rightly questioned the legitimacy of the Kremlin’s interest in protecting cultural minorities and their heritage (Plets 2017; Eakin 2016). At a moral level, it is deeply troubling that while the amphitheatre resounded with the soaring notes of the orchestra, fatal bombings continued across Syria. In this sense, it has been suggested the pageantry represented little more

⁷ Filmed footage of Johnson’s speech at the unveiling can be viewed online. This quote is transcribed from “UK: Boris Johnson gives IS two fingers during Palmyra arch replica unveiling,” Ruptly, video file, posted April 19, 2016 <https://ruptly.tv/vod/20160419-055>

than an “act of cultural propaganda that seemed explicitly aimed at contrasting the jihadists’ brutality with the victors’ enlightenment” (Eakin 2016). Not only did the uncritical staging of this Eurocentric high-brow performance further encode Palmyra as a target for destruction by ISIS (Plets 2017), it also acted as a potent reminder of “how detached from reality the international campaign to save Syria’s endangered cultural heritage has been” (Eakin 2016).

As the custodians and beneficiaries of cultural heritage including large swathes of classical antiquities sourced and governed according to “a finders-keepers, buyers-owners system” (Scheid 2016, 2), it is perhaps unsurprising that Western museums are also taking an active interest in the destruction of monuments. Such an interest cannot be otherwise than ideologically loaded if one considers that where “Archaeology as a modern practice is an invention of the West; so is the museum” (Wharton 2016, 2). In this sphere, too, new technologies are being harnessed to combat their disappearance from memory. In late 2016, the Grand Palais in Paris presented “Eternal Sites: From Bamiyan to Palmyra,” an exhibition that combined artefacts from the Louvre and other French collections with immersive virtual reconstructions of major archaeological sites, including Palmyra, to draw public attention to the issue of cultural heritage in danger.⁸ At the Los Angeles Getty Research Institute (GRI) in 2017, the museum presented its first ever online-only exhibition titled “The Legacy of Ancient Palmyra,” making freely available online a digital archive of more than one hundred historical photographs and illustrations of the site dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Promoted as a tribute to Palmyra, the exhibition drew from two bodies of work held in the GRI’s special collections: a suite of etchings made by the French artist and architect Louis-François Cassas (1756-1827) as part of a

⁸ For a critique of the methods of “institutionalized dispossession” that underpins the collection of antiquities in many Western museums, including the looting of Rome by Napoléon Bonaparte that bolstered the collection of the Louvre, see Kirsten Scheid’s article, “Artfare: Aesthetic Profiling from Napoléon to Neoliberalism” (2016).

diplomatic mission to the Ottoman Court, and photographs of Palmyra taken in 1864 by sea-captain Louis Vignes (1780-1862) during a scientific expedition to the Middle East.

Praised for its attractive user-friendly visual layout and provision of open-access to significant collection materials, the title of the GRI exhibition, “The Legacy of Ancient Palmyra,” nonetheless points to a cultural bias underpinning the curatorial approach. The reduction of Palmyra’s rich multi-ethnic history, for instance, to a singular “legacy” serves to perpetuate the grand narratives of colonialism and signals a missed opportunity to embrace the more pluralist legacies that viewing Palmyra through a postcolonial lens might have encouraged. Similarly, the emphasis on Palmyra’s *ancient* history again speaks to the ongoing tendency of Western media and historians to elevate the site’s links to classical antiquity whilst disregarding its relationship to the present-day cultures of the Middle East. In this way, the GRI exhibition falls into Orientalist traps, argues one reviewer who finds fifteen hundred years of “post-classical history [...] reduced to a brief parade of conquerors as we progress quickly from Palmyra’s glorious ancient past to its heroic Western rediscovery” (Press 2017). Rather than taking a critical look at Orientalist photography, the exhibition instead presents “a Syrian city reimagined as the heritage of its European visitors” (ibid).

To some extent, the shortcomings of the GRI’s exhibition could be addressed with greater remedial attention paid to “more of Palmyra’s varied legacies, alternately rich and heartbreaking” (ibid). Still, the narrow view of history that the exhibition somewhat unwittingly presents calls into question the taken for granted neutrality of technology in the mediation of politically contested historical narratives. Far from a non-partisan platform, capitalist and nationalist interests coincide on the net in ways that reterritorialize the lines-of-flight set in motion by potentially disruptive interventions. The institution of the museum, for instance, is inherently tied to colonizing systems of classification, organization

and categorization. When the museum enters into the boundless space of the virtual it too mirrors and reinforces the ways in which in “this smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power – it is both everywhere and nowhere,” as Hardt and Negri expound. “Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*” (2000, 190). This intertwined relationship between digital technologies, the internet and imperial power structures that the Palmyra exhibition brings into play has further reaching implications when one considers the role played by technology in the Syrian conflict more broadly. Initially harnessed by civilians as a tool of revolutionary uprising during the Arab Spring, the internet all too quickly became the target of a clamp down by the regime and in the present conflict is predominantly utilized for the purposes of surveillance, control and oppression.

As a distinct contrast to the institutional approach of the GRI exhibition, I want to consider by way of conclusion an independent grass-roots virtual preservation initiative with its origins in the self-organized culture of online hacktivism. The New Palmyra Project, or #NewPalmyra, is a digital archaeology project concerned with creating a reconstruction of Palmyra in virtual space, freely sharing its 3D models and data in the public domain. It builds on the legacy of the late Palestinian-Syrian free internet activist, Bassel Khartabil, an early pioneer in bringing the online collaboration and open-source philosophy of the Creative Commons to Syria. Khartabil’s efforts during the Arab Spring to broadcast live footage of the protests to international media captured the attention of the Syrian Military Intelligence, leading to his arrest by the regime in 2012. After three years of unlawful detainment Khartabil was executed in 2015. The New Palmyra project was founded by friends and colleagues in his honour with the aim of continuing Khartabil’s interest in building a virtual reconstruction of the ruins of Palmyra as part of a broader vision to utilize the web as a force for positive change, facilitating cultural exchange and empowering individuals through open networks and the free circulation of knowledge and information.

In February 2018, a file created by the New Palmyra project became the first 3D model to be officially uploaded to Wikimedia Commons under a new feature allowing users to share and view 3D models with enhanced interactivity on the site. The virtual model depicts the two thousand-year-old statue of the Lion of al-Lat, an iconic artefact intentionally damaged by ISIS during its looting and destruction of monuments at Palmyra in 2015. The rationale for specifically selecting the Lion of al-Lat is outlined on The New Palmyra website:

This lion who watched over the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra for over 2000 years was the first thing ISIS militants destroyed. Now it lives on as the first 3D model uploaded to Wikicommons, freed for everyone.

Running parallel to this techno-utopian tale of virtual rescue, the Lion of al-Lat was also one of the first destroyed artefacts of Palmyra to be physically restored by the Syrian government. When the Syrian army cleared Palmyra after the departure of ISIS, the statue's fragments were transferred to the National Museum in the capital Damascus where it was restored by Polish conservators in coordination with local experts. In March 2017, the statue was presented to the public and media at Damascus, "ready to welcome visitors as a sign of reconstruction and the beginning of victory," the Director of Antiquities and Museums, Mahmoud Hammoud, commented to the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) at the time (qtd in O'Connor 2017). Thus the reconstruction of cultural heritage is equally taken up by the state as means to project a politically expedient picture of civic stability, progress and social harmony. Seen from an international perspective, this race to coordinate heritage restoration efforts in collaboration with agencies such as UNESCO also serves to provide an otherwise isolated Syrian regime, and its Russian allies, with "a global platform and a seat at the table at future international conferences" (Plets 2016, 22). And still, the civil war in Syria rages on with brutal intensity. At the time of writing, airstrikes over the rebel-held suburb of Eastern Ghouta located near Damascus were so severe as

to lead United Nations officials to describe the situation on the ground as a “hell on earth.”

The intentional destruction of cultural heritage by terrorist groups is an alarming development that warrants some degree of international coordination aimed at implementing preventative measures and legal consequences for the perpetrators. At the same time, as the strategic motivations underpinning the apparent good news story that the Syrian government’s restoration of the Lion of al-Lat attests, there is an urgent need to reflect more critically on the symbolic meaning of the reconstruction efforts – both virtual and actual – already underway. The ease with which such restoration projects are co-opted and made complicit in the structural violence of war supports the view that such efforts should not be carried out when a war is still ongoing, nor controlled by one party such as the victorious side (Munawar 2017). In addition to reserving post-war restoration projects until such a time when they can be used to serve the aims of genuine reconciliation, it is also necessary to question the universalist rhetoric that all too frequently underpins the exhortation by Western leaders and agencies to rush to the defence of “culture under attack.” For as Hardt and Negri argue (following Balibar), today it is cultural signifiers and the apparent incommensurability of cultures that are responsible for so much racial hatred, division and fear. Even the most well-intentioned global efforts to safeguard cultural heritage sites like Palmyra risk escalating further violence and conflict if the discourse utilized is too simplistic and merely reinforces the polarity of a civilized West in opposition to the assent of a barbarous radical Other.

In addition to recognizing the deeply political nature and potential Othering tendencies of urban reconstruction (Harrowell 2016), it is also important to consider the longer-term risks that hasty rebuilding projects pose to authentic and culturally sensitive restoration work. As the authors of one report point out, “the greatest threat to Palmyra is mismanagement stemming from prioritizing

immediate and highly visible results, ultimately grounded in larger political objectives, and not guided by conservation best practices, community-based heritage management, and sustainability” (Cuneo et al, 2016). Not only does the race for speedy reconstruction pave the way for substandard repairs, kitsch replica projects and amnesiac interpretations of the past, in a very practical sense it redirects resources from the more immediately urgent task of rebuilding essential infrastructure such as roads, schools, hospitals and housing that should take precedence in the aftermath of war.

Lastly, for the people of Palmyra “the ancient site will be remembered as a place where their neighbors and family members were executed and buried. The restoration of ancient and modern Palmyra [therefore] presents an opportunity to heal the local community, and so current and future managers are challenged to consider how to address Palmyra’s difficult and modern associations” (ibid). The international campaign to prevent monument destruction in Syria and in armed conflicts around the world is no doubt poised to accelerate with the rapid advancement of digital and virtual technologies. The situation in Syria, however, gives pause for thought, provoking reflection on both the complex geo-political realities and the imperialist nature of the civilization versus barbarism rhetoric that place sites such as Palmyra at such great risk of destruction. However universally admired, it is only when the relics of Palmyra are acknowledged as belonging first and foremost to the present-day culture and everyday life of the region that local stakeholders may be afforded their proper role in determining the nature of the site’s eventual restoration. The lessons of history suggest it is by no means a given this will occur, but one hopes that with sufficient dialogue the remains of Palmyra might just be prevented from again becoming merely expedient to the project of legitimating state-power and nation building when the war is over.

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Egypt in Western Popular Culture

From Bram Stoker to *The Jewel of the Nile*

Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka

Introduction: Seeing as Owning

In April 2011, Western eyes were fixed on Egypt. Many were astounded when Hosni Mubarak, who had presented himself as the anti-colonial hero who nationalized the Suez Canal, was ousted by a popular uprising after thirty years of authoritarian rule. The subsequent waves of political protests sweeping over the Arab world put in evidence the complexities of the historical background, and brought attention to the long shadows of a not-so-distant violent past. For Europe and North America, there was something else about Egypt. Culturally, the West had absorbed Egypt onto its collective memory as the gate to the Near East since the nineteenth century. Casablanca and Hong Kong had been *pied a terres*, but Cairo, in a way that not even Byzantium had ever managed, was *home*. Egypt has been embedded in Western consciousness for the last two centuries, and its ancient, pharaonic past has reinvigorated the store of myth of Europe and North America to an immeasurable extent. The present essay is about the discreet but powerful interventions of Western popular culture in translating Egypt for Western consumption, both building and resisting stereotypes. I start by considering Bram Stoker's novel of 1903, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, which

solidified many of those stereotypes, and go on to discuss three popular renderings of Egypt produced around a hundred years later, which rewrite those stereotypes from within: the film *The Jewel of the Nile* (1985), the novel *The Map of Love* (1999), and the documentary *The Hidden History of Egypt* (2002). All four works are particularly interested in looking as a form of knowing, and I investigate how they articulate what we may call an ‘active witnessing’..

The Western gaze upon Egypt is often eroticized. An emphasis on “sensuality” was identified by Edward Said in 1978 as part of the Orientalist mindset (2011, 4), agent and manifestation of a Western sense of superiority over the Near East. In this binary construction, “[t]he Oriental is [presented as] irrational, depraved . . . , childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’”, and this structuring fiction of the Orient, “because created out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient” (Said 2011, 40). Said acknowledged the influence of Michel Foucault’s work from the 1970s. Foucault’s elucidation of how normative and queer sexual behaviours become associated with interlocked ‘identities’ through discourse was a crucial step in the development of queer theory in the 1980s, and the role of non-normative sexualities and affects in Western texts about Egypt will also be part of my discussion. While regularly unacknowledged by later critics, the foundational poststructuralist work of Simone de Beauvoir in the 1949 treatise *The Second Sex* established the existence of an even more historically embedded hierarchical binary, that of man and woman. De Beauvoir summarises it thus: “He is the subject; he is the absolute. She is the Other” (2011, 6). Misogynist and feminist attitudes are articulated alongside, and through, references to colonialism and sexuality. A text such as *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, committed to the aesthetics of the gothic mode, exploits the genre’s constitutive ambiguity to make all kinds of provocative suggestions.

An emphasis on the visual apprehension of the wonders of a distant world was transferred from orientalist literature into film (Lant 1977, 85). As a medium, cinema is chained to reality, in that you *must* believe what you see. This has resulted in much mischief, and much outright harm. The origins of cinema seem inextricably linked to the archaeological discoveries in Egypt, to the extent that Antonia Lant has claimed that “Egypt played midwife to film’s birth” (1977, 81). The country’s ancient past provided the new medium with keen Western audiences, an influential visual grammar, and jaw-dropping story lines. In addition, in the early days of cinema the exhibition of Egyptian artifacts, and of films set in Egypt, sometimes shared the same building, and “there was an association between the blackened enclosure of silent cinema and that of the Egyptian tomb, both in theoretical texts and in the use of Egyptianate architectural style for auditoriums” (ibid., 71). In the process, the colonial framework was strengthened, because cinema “inherited and disseminated colonial discourse” (Shohat 1977, 19). It is particularly interesting, therefore, to see how Western popular fiction and documentary films have processed this legacy at the turn of the twenty first century.

The Jewel of Seven Stars

Popular culture is a way of deploying dominant ideology, but it is also a site of resistance to it. This essay is concerned with that “double movement” (Hall 1981, 228). Normative ideas on religion, politics, sexuality, class, and gender are not only reflected, but often articulated in a coherent, interlinked manner through popular texts. Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, of 1903, is among the most important of the early cultural products on ancient Egypt. Gerardine Meaney sees the novel as a foundational text for most mainstream Western films on the subject, from the 1932 *The Mummy* onwards (Meaney, January 2002). The novel is the first to bring together tropes of western popular fictions on Egypt such as

the powerful artifact, the mummy's returning to life, the curse, the harmless young woman who becomes a murder suspect, the hero as a lonely mature gentleman, local events that have consequences for the world at large, non-normative sexuality, or a story within a story set in ancient Egypt. The inadequacy of technology and science is another concern of the novel. Finding proof of the immortality of the soul is the climax towards which the novel moves – and the male protagonist eventually *witnesses* the resurrection of an ancient Egyptian, queen Tera, an event which is referred to as “the Great Experiment” (Stoker 1999, 243). The investment on the senses in the text amounts to an obsession, as the body is taken over by, given over to, the physical experience of coming in contact with ancient Egypt. The emphasis of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* on the act of seeing is remarkable for a work predating the development of film. The novel even reproduces hieroglyphs and an actual drawing in the printed text, as a scientific essay may have done (ibid., 146, 196). Connections between characters are normally established through glancing and gazing (Bryson 1983, 121, 209), and watching is what the characters *do* for most of the novel. What the hero and the reader want is to *see* – to see the attacker, to see the attack, the queen, her transformation... The text is constructed around the compulsion to witness: meaningful looks, mistrustful looks, looks that betray how one feels, looks that search for clues. The text is also much concerned with feelings that distort vision, as when we are told that “[l]ove is, after all, a selfish thing; and it throws a black shadow on anything between which and the light it stands” (Stoker 1999, 248). Magnifying glasses are alluded to, bifocals are adjusted, telescopes employed, but they all prove useless, because the mystery at hand can not be apprehended by an uninvolved onlooker – only by a participant. The wholehearted investment of the narrative on witnessing is beyond question, as the following fragments show:

I watched her face as she began to read; but seeing at once that Sergeant Daw kept his keen eyes on her face, unflinchingly watching every flitting expression, I kept my eyes hence forth fixed on his. (21)

At last she raised her eyes and looked at me for a moment; after that I would not have exchanged places with a king. For a while she busied herself round the extemporized bedside of her father. Then, asking me to be sure not to take my eyes off him till she returned, she hurried out. (24)

He stopped, struck by the strange pallor of her face. Then his eyes, following her look and mine, lit on the cluster of lamps in the drawer. . . . I looked at [the detective], and as he caught my glance he turned his eyes on Miss Trelawney whose back was towards me. There was in them the same look of suspicion which had been there when he had spoken to me... (106)

These are not isolated occurrences. If first looks are recorded, together with the instinctive feelings they inspire (*ibid.*, 69, 115, 26), characters remain locked in a mesmeric trance or keep ‘watching watchers’ throughout as if caught up in a hypnotic chain. Unsurprisingly, we learn in the story that Hypnotism is “another art or science of Old Nile” (*ibid.*, 191). This frantic gazing is the common thread in all subsequent factual and fictional accounts of ancient Egypt in the west. It is not surprising either to learn that “cedar oil, which was much used in the preparation and ceremonials of the Egyptian dead, has a certain refractive power which we do not find in other oils. For instance, we use it on the lenses of our microscopes to give additional clearness of vision” (*ibid.*, 207). Even the Egyptian climate has a similar effect: “In that wonderful atmosphere of theirs, where sunlight fierce and clear is perpetually coexistent with day, where the dryness of earth and air gives perfect refraction, why may they not have learned secrets of light hidden from us in the density of our northern mists?” (*ibid.*, 213). Another character exclaims: “The clue is intended for seeing eyes!” (252). Wonders are meant for the discerning, and seeing is a by-word for knowing, for taking possession. Much of the western archaeological activity in Egypt at the time the novel was published, shared the impetus of the colonial project which financed it: to see/know/possess for the first time with human (i.e. Western) eyes. In the words of Antonia Lant, “clearly the burgeoning of images of Egypt is part of the colonialist project that

involved mapping and photographing, claiming both territory and subjects by reproducing them in visual form...”(1977, 76). Said identified the Orient as one of the West’s “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (2011, 1), but the otherness of Egypt stares back in defiance in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, and from unexpected quarters — passive femininity turns into a troublesome, proud, unpredictable force, and the young English Victorian lady Miss Margaret Trelawney metamorphoses into the Ancient Egyptian queen Tera. Margaret’s name had held a clue to her “dual existence”, an inverted second half. (Stoker 1999, 248; 236, 246). This is an almost literal imaging of Said’s suggestion that “European culture . . . se[t] itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (2011, 3). Consider the very first impression of the young woman on the protagonist, Malcolm Ross, when he sees himself in her “black mirror” eyes:

She had marvelous eyes; great, wide-open, and as black and soft as velvet, with a mysterious depth. To look in them was like gazing at a black mirror such as Doctor Dee used in his wizard rites. I heard an old gentleman at the picnic, a great oriental traveler, describe the effect of her eyes ‘as looking at night at the great distant lamps of a mosque through the open door.’ The eyebrows were typical. Finely arched and rich in long curling hair, they seemed like the proper architectural environment of the deep, splendid eyes. (Stoker 1999, 26-27)

Compare this to Malcolm’s comment near the end of the narrative: “There was something in her voice so strange to me that I looked quickly into her eyes. They were bright as ever, but veiled to my seeing the inward thought behind them as are the eyes of a caged lion” (ibid., 246). Woman as ‘black mirror’, as Islam, as night that complements masculine daylight; and then, an inviting exoticism which is revealed as threat, a fascination which turns to dread. Said proposed that “European culture gained its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (2011, 3). Poststructuralist feminism has contended that the construction of the western *male* is interdependent on the creation of western women as a perpetual other. We can

see the Western colonial gaze as simply a manifestation of the normative proprietary male gaze, which would explain why western stereotypes of the feminine are often transferred to eastern culture. In her feminist treatise of 1938 *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf shocked many by asserting that the subjection of women was on a continuum with fascism and imperialism, and by declaring that “the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; . . . the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (2000, 270). In Ella Shohat’s words, “[t]he western imagery [has] metaphorically rendered the colonized land as a female to be saved from her environ/mental disorder...” (1977, 39). The connection is exemplified by a scene in one of the numerous films inspired by Stoker’s text, the 1999 *The Mummy*, set in Egypt, where at one point the heroine, an Egyptian-English Egyptologist, gets tipsy and tells the American hero: “I know. You’re wondering what is a place like me doing in a girl like this. . . . Egypt is in my blood” (Sommers, 1999). But imperial, patriarchal discourse relies on ambivalence to legitimize itself. Fear is never incontrovertibly grounded, desire is never fully satisfied, so permanent suspicion and unquenchable need sustain a binary system that promises stability, in exchange from permanent control and permanent vigilance. As we see in Stoker’s novel, opposites are embedded in the narrator’s authoritative assessment:

We learn of great things by little experiences. . . . For the eye of infinite wisdom [the Eye of Horus] there is no need of shading. All things, all thoughts, all emotions, all experiences, all doubts and hopes and fears, all intentions, all wishes seen down to the lower strata of their concrete and multitudinous element, are finally resolved into direct opposites. (1999, 233)

Thus, in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* the all-seeing eye of infinite wisdom corroborates how the world is perceived by the upper class English gentleman: the gendered, colonial, classed gaze. But the ‘resolution’ of the world into ‘direct opposites’ shape-shifts in the un-mappable sands of Egypt, when those opposites

are transported to “our little oasis” in suburban London (*ibid.*, 120). The readers witness strange reversals: a strong man can become a passive tool in the hands of a powerful woman, Egyptian royalty can enslave the representatives of the British crown, women can make history while men become victims or observe from the sidelines, religion can take over science... The binary system is still intact, but the hierarchy has been inverted.

Like a magician’s trick, the internal contradictions of the system are suddenly revealed, but only to vanish again, seemingly without a trace, in a text that keeps offering glimpses of the suppressed within dominant culture. In this context, it is interesting that, as Shohat points out, “seeing himself as explorer and discoverer of new worlds, Freud in *Studies on Hysteria* compared the role of the psychoanalyst to that of the archaeologist [...], [which he saw as] analogous ‘with the technique of excavating a buried city’” (1977, 33). One example of the suppressed, in the novel, is the muddled familial links repeatedly suggesting incestuous feelings, in keeping with the custom of the ruling classes in Ancient Egypt. Margaret Trelawney seems to turn at various points into her father, her mother, and into the sister of her suitor Malcolm Ross (Stoker 1999, 49). Each of these possibilities marks a breach of established roles, which is not only relevant in the context of Ms Trelawney’s ambiguous personality, but crucial to the novel in that the ambiguities are embodied in a female character.

Bram Stoker was writing in the heyday of the ‘new woman’. The term originated in Irish novelist Sarah Grand’s feminist essay of 1894 “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”, where she discussed the dawn of a “new woman . . . [who] has solved the problem [of her dissatisfaction]” and has “prescribed the remedy”: sociopolitical engagement (1894, 271). The ‘new women’ were an emergent group of self-consciously feminist, financially self-sufficient, artistically inclined, and somewhat more sexually autonomous women. Contemporary allusions to “the Sphinxness of modern woman”, Antonia Lant points out, were

“surely a defense, a way of figuring her desires as a series of riddles, illegible for modern culture...” (1977, 91). Hence the anxieties of a male narrator, in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, over the undecidability of what the woman *knows*, a knowledge that is linked to sexuality:

“Leave her [queen Tera] alone with me [Margaret said]. There are still many hours to pass, and I do not like to leave her lying there, all stark in the glare of light. This may be the Bridal she prepared for — the Bridal of Death; and at least she shall wear her pretty robes” (Stoker 1999, 272)

The ceremony turns out to be the bridal union of two women, Margaret and Tera, climaxing in an orgasmic explosion that joins them in death and resurrection. The final scene thus becomes a lifting of eyelids over two “black suns” (ibid., 276), which refuse to share with the reader the secret of their new –sexual– knowledge. *The Jewel of Seven Stars* can be interpreted as one man’s attempt to *read* the orientalist mystery of the feminine, and his failure to do anything but witness his own irrelevance in the light of a transhistorical bond between women. In this way, the jewel itself can be seen as a metonymy of undecipherable, inapprehensible female sexuality. In the same way, it is possible to read the jewel-like artifact at the centre of the Orientalist Western action film from 2001 *Tomb Raider* as a clitoris. Jewels and pearls have a long tradition of encoding in lesbian literature (Faderman 1995, 441-6), and Stoker’s novel also suggests another symbol of non-normative sexuality, in the cat that keeps reappearing in suspicious circumstances. A number of literary critics have remarked on the use of pets to encode homoerotic desire (Vanita 1996, 215-41).

Lesbian eroticism and homoeroticism are not uncommon in Orientalised Egyptian fiction, but homophobia is not far away. An interesting example is Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story “Lot No. 249”, published in 1894, about an Oxford university student who keeps an Egyptian mummy in his room. He has the power to revive the mummy at will, and uses the creature as a surrogate to stalk

and assault young men. While the mummy's intent is not explicitly sexual, the awkward title's link to Lot's Sodom serves as the Rossetta stone for this disturbing tale. Ailise Bulfin sees this short story, as well as *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and a cluster of Western fiction from the period, as an example of 'paranoid Imperial gothic' related to the Urabi revolt of 1879-82, and explains that "the iconic figure of the vengeful mummy ultimately came to act as a signifier for Egypt" (2011, 438). In this case, it is also a queer signifier for how "the path of nature has been overstepped in open day" at a rarified English institution (Doyle 1892, 525).

The conclusion of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* marks the shattering of a system that relies on the opposites of male-female, aristocrat-plebeian, eastern-western, and even life-death, since it describes how two women of different class, religion, and race, become one and eternal. Malcolm Ross, who had seen himself as consort to Margaret and "guardian of the light" (Stoker 1999, 278), is reduced to a mere scribe, entrusted with the frustrating task of recording Queen Tera's reclaiming her favoured companion, together with an assorted court of brilliant minds, into her realm of darkness. If "Divine Wisdom" is synonymous with "Divine Power" (ibid., 253), the only thing Malcolm has confirmed by witnessing this miracle is his inability to understand – and consequently, his own powerlessness.

The Jewel of the Nile

Many of the tropes advanced in works like *The Jewel of Seven Stars* quickly became stereotypes in a succession of movies. These movies reproduce the same story-line: tomb execration, followed by curse, followed by innocent western girl under a spell, followed by western man attempting to rescue her. Rescue fantasies, according to Shohat, "serve to define the 'West'", and the "homecoming of this desert odyssey is the disciplinary punishment of female desire for liberation and

renewed spectorial appreciation for the existing sexual, racial, and national order” (1977, 57). Films like the 1932 *The Mummy* normativised Stoker’s tale by eliminating the philosophic-religious debates, by having the female protagonist fall for an eastern man instead of a woman, and by stressing the colonial significance of the story through setting it in Egypt. Bram Stoker himself wrote an alternative version of the last chapter of his novel in 1912, offering a happy ending (for the male protagonist), and most popular films also ended with a restoration of order. The bleak *al-Mumia*, an Egyptian production of 1969, steered away from stereotypical film fare. Interestingly, its director Chadi Abdel Salam had been the set designer for the film that marked the apotheosis of Hollywood Egyptomania six years earlier, Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *Cleopatra*. Meanwhile, some western movies were resisting from within. This is the case with *The Egyptian*, based on a popular 1945 Finish novel by Mika Waltari, whose protagonist is an existentialist anti-hero, the Egyptian Sinue.

There are other interesting examples, such as the more recent *The Jewel of the Nile*, an unpretentious and relatively small budgeted comedy-romance-adventure produced in Hollywood in 1985, which was enormously popular, and which subtly undermines stereotypes in a number of ways. Marketed as a romance action film, *The Jewel of the Nile* is also an effective comedy. It often resorts to humorous exaggeration —the sign of a camp sensibility—, for example in the repeated statement that the Arab villain “is a *very* bad man”. The film constantly undermines its own plausibility, as we see, for example, in the co-protagonist Joan’s response to the news that her ex-boyfriend is dead: “Don’t be ridiculous. Jack would never die without telling me” (Teague 1985). Self-deprecatingly, the film alludes to Western indifference to the rest of the world when a westerner meets a major Egyptian politician and wonders: “I’ve seen your face in *The Times*?” (ibid.. 1985). Newspaper reports also make a brief appearance in the 1932 film *The Mummy*. The popular medium of the press is another important site

of resistance to, as well as articulation and perpetuation of, colonial priorities. Rather shockingly, in a 2002 issue of the London and Manchester newspaper *The Guardian*, a paper not known for patriotic excess, the discovery of a new pyramid tomb in Egypt was reported in the 'National News' section, on account of the leaders of the archaeological team being British (Radford 2002, 11).

In *The Jewel of the Nile* it is not just the one-liners which ironically revisit stereotypes, as befits to a primarily visual medium. The numerous slapstick gags, for example, support the vaudevillian attitude displayed by the movie. There are also visual links to other films, like the parodic scene showing one of the protagonists, a fat and short white man, emerging from a rubbish container as if from a mummy's sarcophagus. Some scenes seem attempts to visually familiarize, de-orientalise, the eastern other. For example, after a westerner successfully walks over hot coals in the tribe which has adopted him, a staple of the colonial visual imagery of 'generic tribal rituals', he ambiguously exclaims: "I did it! I am one of us!" (Teague 1985). In the same way, the film may be alluding to its own contradictory position when it shows two westerners enjoying a tribal rave party in an oasis. Given that they dance to the tune of "There isn't a sheep safe tonight" (ibid.. 1985), the scene is also used to mock orientalist perceptions of non-normative sexuality. The epitome of the power of a visual spectacle in contemporary western popular youth culture, the rock concert, is also satirically incorporated into the film by showing a rock producer 'imported' from the West, who designs the propaganda rally of an Arab warlord.

The characterisation in *The Jewel of the Nile* also undermines gender expectations, by showing the female protagonist as a physically active and fearless heroine. She is the bread-winner, and the politically committed, enterprising half of a heterosexual couple; her male partner is an idle hero without intellectual curiosity or any discernible assets whose sole motivation is his love for a woman. The movie itself opens with a related visual joke: in what appears to

be the real film we are watching, the female protagonist is presented in a stereotypical swashbuckling adventure, with a male hero attempting to rescue her from a group of pirates. The scene turns out to be a chapter in the novel that the actual protagonist of *The Jewel of the Nile* is writing, as she lays on her boyfriend's yacht. She turns away in frustration from her writing, exclaiming: "I wanna do something serious. How much romance can one woman take?" (Teague 1985). She is about to become the heroine of an action film. However, romance is not ejected from the story. While the American protagonists observe a ceremony, a local explains: "This is the marriage dance. In this tribe, the women –they choose the man, and then, according to the custom, they will be together for the rest of their life" (ibid., 1985). In this way, Egypt has managed to remind westerners that their social arrangements are not universally endorsed, while simultaneously helping westerners to renew their Hollywoodian ideal of everlasting heterosexual union.

The Jewel of the Nile is a mainstream film, and inevitably, to borrow from Christine Gledhill, it is caught in the "continuous (re-)negotiation" of ideology in "[t]he culture industries of bourgeois democracy" (1999, 170). Subverting expectations is nevertheless a central aim of this movie. To give another example, greed is a recurrent theme in orientalist Egyptian films, and perhaps the accursed western archaeologist is a modern archetype in a cautionary tale about punished greed. In fact, 'mummy films' can be seen as a manifestation of capitalism's unease about its own ability to endure as a system. In *The Jewel of the Nile*, the title itself becomes a critical statement, because the 'Jewel' turns out to be the name of a holy man – a fragile looking, childishly cheerful, peace loving Arab intellectual who is considered to be their real wealth by his oppressed people. But perhaps the most powerful attack of *The Jewel of the Nile* on orientalist stereotypes resides in its refusal to incorporate the iconic staple of western representations of Egypt: not a single shot of a pyramid is included in the film. In

this way, *The Jewel of the Nile* not only articulates resistance through *re-vision*, but also by default – in its refusal to *see* what normativity requires that it should see.

The Map of Love

So many non-fiction books on Egypt are regularly published in English, that it is not uncommon to find bookshops which have sections on the topic. Neither archaeology nor travel, the ‘Egypt section’ may include a mismatch of pharaohs’ biographies, introductions to ancient Egyptian art, and mummification manuals. In the section, one may also find speculative treatises on an alien connection to the pyramids, and it is remarkable that a creation myth developed in the twentieth century, that of an alien civilization landing on the planet and triggering human development, should be often recalled to provide ‘answers’ for what are perceived as ‘mysteries’ of ancient Egypt. The common traits of this wide range of books is their reliance on *visual* material. Fiction is far less common, although novels with Egyptian settings and subjects by western authors have appeared regularly, at times from somewhat surprising quarters, such as Norman Mailer’s monumental *Ancient Evenings* saga, of 1983.

In 1999, a novel about Egypt became a bestseller in Europe. Billed as a romance, Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love* is structured through two parallel interracial love stories beginning in 1897 London and 1997 Cairo. Soueif was born in a British colony, like Bram Stoker, who began his professional career working as a clerk in the administrative centre of the British empire in Ireland, Dublin Castle. Like Stoker’s writing career, Soueif’s took off in London, and like him, she recreated colonial tensions and cultural hybridity imaginatively into her Egyptian story. A novel such as *The Jewel of Seven Stars* was directly affected by “the political riddle posed by Egypt . . . whose independence was forever hovering just over the horizon” in the period of unofficial British occupation, 1882-1914,

which saw the publication of Stoker's book (Deane 2008, 385). In order to understand present-day Egypt, Soueif contrives a double narrative that revisits that same period. If *The Jewel of the Nile* had articulated its rebellious streak through comedy, *The Map of Love* is an activist novel structured as a romance. Both share some concerns, like the inadequacies of the press, and the predictability of western attitudes. These are brought together in the novel, when Amal agrees to speak to an American journalist: "[Amal] braced herself: the fundamentalists, the veil, the cold peace, polygamy, women's status in Islam, female genital mutilation – which would it be?" (Soueif 2000, 6). Western media has regularly demonstrated an inability to think outside its own regulatory terms. A 2009 essay by a Muslim feminist activist protested yet again that "the only place for Muslim women in global media coverage is that of the victim" (Karaca 2009, 37), and, as Meyda Yeğenoğlu has pointed out, the "liberal desire to . . . re-value the weak and the subjugated is the very gesture by which the sovereign Western subject constructs himself/herself as considerate and benevolent" (1998, 121).

Written in English by an Egyptian woman, *The Map of Love* stands out for its denunciation of the imperialist grip of Europe, the USA, and Israel, which breeds Muslim fundamentalism in the region, doubly curtailing its development. In order to convey this message, the novel not only avails of the conventions of romantic fiction but, even more surprisingly, it adopts some orientalist stereotypes. Orientalism assumes an imperial *male* gaze, but as Reina Lewis has shown, Western feminist women have also reworked orientalist stereotypes to denounce imperial and patriarchal priorities (1996, 35-43, 158-61). Crossdressing for example, a typical manifestation of orientalist sexual ambiguity, plays an important part in *The Map of Love*. One of its protagonists, Anna, dresses up as a man in order to get to know the real Egypt, and it is in this guise that she meets her future husband, an Arab nationalist. In the words of Marjorie Garber,

Orientalism reflects “the constructed role of the Middle East itself as an ‘intermediate’ zone, a place where pederasty, homosexuality, and transexualism are all perceived (by Western observers) as viable options” (1991, 242). Incestuous feelings are another non-normative trait that may be added to the list, and one which plays a part in this novel, since the lovers Isabel and Omar are related; in a pronouncedly allegorical narrative, this is however likely to symbolize membership of ‘the human family’.

In *The Map of Love*, empathy between women seems at times to collapse into homoerotic appreciation of each others’ beauty, as when Hanim meets the crossdressing Anna:

I opened my eyes and found her looking at me. A beautiful European woman, her hair flowing to her shoulders in free golden waves, the bandages it had been tied up in last night fallen in an untidy heap to the floor”, and later, “[s]he spoke simply and with sincerity and when she turned to the window, her eyes, which seemed oddly dark with all that golden hair, took your breath away with their deep violet light. (Soueif 2000, 135, 137)

The text simultaneously suggests and undermines the possibility of same-sex erotic attraction, for example when Anna imagines that she may have been kidnapped by a princess, so that when her true sex is revealed “they would fall laughing into each other’s arms and become sworn sisters from then on” (ibid., 134-5). In a novel so tuned to the language of film, this episode exemplifies the complexity inherent in Laura Mulvey’s ‘famous claim that “in the classical narrative cinema, to see is to desire” (83).

In addition to the lengthy and detailed political discussions that take up much of the novel, some of its most effective political criticism is realized through subtle visual links that in fact mimic the language of cinema, zooming in on significant details like a camera would. For example, in a scene set in 1901 in a picnic at the foot of the Great Pyramid, a British official talks “fervently” about the virtues of Lord Cromer’s administration, as it ensures that trains run on time and so on. The man works as the ‘Oriental Secretary at the Agency.’

But I [Anna] was distracted by the thought that his clothes seemed to get more and more crumpled – *by their own agency*, as it were, though he was engaged in nothing more strenuous than eating his lunch. (Soueif 2001, 99, emphasis added)

Shortly after this, another British man “held that it would take generations before the Natives were fit to rule themselves” (ibid., 99), But Anna’s eyes wander again to “Mr Y, holding a strip of smoked ham to the nose of Toti [a dog], who showed not the slightest interest in it” (100). The crumpled clothes and the uninterested dog symbolize colonizer and colonized. They are visual statements ushered into the reader’s perception by verbal links.

The desire to *see* is in fact what triggers the narrative, as Anna becomes interested in the fascinating yet somewhat unsatisfying paintings of Egyptian landscapes at a London museum. When she finally arrives in Cairo, Anna realizes that something is still missing in what she sees, but she nevertheless persists in surveying every bit of the new land and culture in the hope that what she seeks will be revealed somehow. Her servant Sabir had been instructed to “look after her like your eyes” (111), but despite the vigilance Anna is kidnapped by rebels and imprisoned in a store room . Even then, her curiosity is still intact.

Oh, how I wish I knew where I was, and how I wish it were light! For this is a room of noble proportions. I have travelled around it with my little lamp and found high windows and recessed divans, rich hangings and a tiled floor leading with dainty steps to a shallow pool, and I feel, rather than see, the presence of colour and pattern.(108)

Despite of her genuine desire to absorb all the wonders around her, Anna has always suspected that looking is never enough. We learned this in an earlier scene.

I sit here in my room at Shepherd’s Hotel possessed by the strangest feeling that still I am not in Egypt. I have sat on the Pyramid plateau and my eyes have wandered from the lucid blue of the sky through the blanched yellow of the desert to the dark, promising green of the fields. . . . I have visited the Bazaar and the Churches and the Mosques . . . , but there is something at the heart of it all which eludes me... (102)

At the time, she did not realize that it was precisely *the heart* which was missing. She had wondered “whether it is possible for a conquering ruler to truly see into the character of the people whom he rules” (99), and she learns that the answer is *no*. Only an emotional bond will allow the English visitor to become one with the host culture. Unselfishness erases all difference, and finding a friend, or a lover—that is, finding an equal—is the key to the mystery of Egypt.

The story is less about Anna’s journey towards the real Egypt, and more about her progressive shift away from an imperialist gaze. It is as if this ambiguously-gendered Victorian-Edwardian English woman (assertive, independent, cross-dressing) becomes feminized by her contact with Egypt. This sounds like a ‘corrective’, normative, misogynist adjustment, but the novel in fact promotes an open-ended, vulnerable, non-assertive, tender feminine gaze as the correct one for all men and women wishing to transcend colonial directives. Seeing is useless without feeling, and knowing is impossible without loving, which is the reason why, the book suggests, the only true map is the map of love. What was missing in the Victorian Egyptian landscapes hanging in the South Kensington Museum, as well as in every stereotypical depiction of Egypt in Western popular culture, is in fact nothing other than the Egyptian people, who have become invisible to the surveyor’s cold gaze (121).

The Hidden History of Egypt

It is unsurprising that, given the overwhelming emphasis of popular western culture on the *visual* apprehension of Egypt, documentary films offering a virtual journey through the country have been regularly produced for television in the USA, Canada, and the UK. Most of them implicitly acknowledge the primacy of their visual content by placing the writers in secondary positions on the credits, generally after producer, director, art director, and editor, and occasionally even after the composer of the soundtrack. The definitional assumption that

documentaries are a document of reality makes the genre particularly pliable to political manipulation. In addition, documentaries made for television are often intended to introduce historical periods to people who may have little knowledge of history, making a biased account more difficult to identify without that specialized knowledge. Many anglophone documentary films on Egypt made in the same period as *The Jewel of the Nile* and *The Map of Love* have been driven by orientalist priorities. A brief survey should prove the point.

To begin with, pro-colonial attitudes are signaled by a fascination with the colonial past at the height of archaeological activity. These attitudes are so persistent that the narrator in the 2002 documentary *Journey Through the Valley of the Kings* affirms, while discussing the modern discovery of the tomb of Seti I, that: “Nothing like this had been seen. No European had been in a tomb in which such vivid detail was still preserved on the walls” (Lav 2002). Only what the West sees counts as history. In fact, we also find an imperialist mindset in the underlying —and sometimes explicit— assumption that the entire history of Egypt has been somehow assimilated into the collective memory of the West. As a guest from the USA put it in the 2001 documentary *Egypt’s Golden Empire: The Warrior Pharaohs*: “We are only now beginning to reclaim [the history of the ‘New Kingdom’]” (Hawes 2001). This may explain why we need to *disclaim* charges of cruelty, as in the following remark, by , discussing the Ancient Egyptian custom of cutting off the hand of enemies: “I suppose it’s not quite as horrid as cutting their heads off” (Ibid).

Westerners may be eager to cannibalize Egyptian history, but only history up to the last pharaoh, because the centuries that follow are variously unworthy of interest or pitiable in their ‘degradation’, as shown by the 1999 documentary *Napoleon’s Obsession: The Quest for Egypt*. According to the narrator, Bob Brier, the Egypt of two hundred years ago “had lost touch with its glorious past, its vast temples and monuments shrouded in mystery; its ancient writings,

indecipherable. The Egypt of Napoleon's day was an Islamic country. The skyline of its capital, Cairo, filled with the mosques and minarets of the faithful" (Spry-Leverton 2000). According to Bob Brier, speaking in the same documentary, the rarified atmosphere of the time explains why three thousand people were murdered by the French army at Jaffa: "This massacre could never have happened in Europe. But Napoleon wasn't in Europe, and he was behaving like a Middle Eastern despot. You know? It took three days to kill all of those Turkish prisoners" (Ibid).

The visible 'reconstruction' of the Egyptian past works as a metaphor of colonial desire. Documentaries produced in the West often include short fictional scenes of past events filmed in black and white, with archaeological discoveries being a favorite subject. It is not by chance that the names of western archaeologists and the precise dates —sometimes the precise hour— of their discoveries, are seamlessly, organically, incorporated into the lists of pharaonic dynasties, as if they were part of the same lineage. Thus, in the USA-produced documentary *Egypt's Golden Empire: The Warrior Pharaohs*, a scholar, John Ray, says that the woman pharaoh Hatsepsut "can be seen as the Queen Elisabeth the First of Ancient Egypt" (Hawes 2001). In the same film, the narrator's voiceefers to the "stroke of genius" of kidnapping "the children of . . . defeated princes, to indoctrinate them in the ways of Egypt", a strategy, Gray adds, similar to "what the British did in India" (Ibid 2001). According to Stephen Harvey, North American Egyptologistspeaking speaking in the same documentary, this "superpower" who was threatened north and south reminds us "perhaps of the United States" (Ibid 2001). He goes on to discuss "the nation" (not the Kingdom) being threatened by Hiksos and Nubia: "It would really be as if Canada and Mexico were pressing against the U.S. and actually managing, or talking about, invading" (Ibid 2001). History certainly comes to life by making links to lived experience, but this kind of cultural blurriness, like the 'black

mirror' of *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, displays the anxieties and aspirations of an imperialist mindset.

There is a strong class-related component here. The insistence on showing the riches of ancient Egyptian rulers in most western documentaries presupposes non-affluent yet greedy television viewers, indulging in transoceanic, transhistorical voyeurism. Unperturbed, the voice-over in *Egypt's Golden Empire: The Warrior Pharaohs* states: "But behind these treasures, lays an epic tale of real people. People like Rameses the Great, the boy-king, and one of the most beautiful and powerful women of the ancient world, Queen Nefertiti" (Hawes 2001). In the majority of these 'epic tales of real people', monarchy is more than the visual anchor; it is also their ideological core, as they persistently naturalize the ruler-ruled binary. We learn from the narrator of the 1998 documentary *Egypt: Chaos and Kings* that autocracy is the cure to all ills, as the ancients knew so well: "To overcome the ever-present threat of danger, they put their faith in one man, and the power of the gods. To protect themselves from disaster, the Egyptians vested their king with absolute power, and worshiped him, as a god" (Morgan 1998). Nothing can be more natural, we are reminded in *Egypt's Golden Empire: The Warrior Pharaohs*: "The reunification of Egypt is crucial. It means a new beginning. It means that Egypt is back to where it should be. As a unified land under the rule of one king, one pharaoh" (Hawes 2001).

This pervasive conservative impetus displays, unsurprisingly, patriarchal and heteronormative agendas. Women are objectified, sexualized, with such frantic tenacity, that the only purpose of some documentaries seems to be the articulation of an idea of women not merely as *other*, but as irresistible yet cursed *artifact*. A void of information is forcibly filled with misogynistic statements and representations. So for example, in the 1999 documentary *Cleopatra's Palace: In search of a Legend*, an amateur archaeologist is introduced thus: "A former financial adviser, he abandoned a successful career to pursue Cleopatra full time"

(Armstrong 1998). This man is attempting to locate the pharaoh's palace in the bay at Alexandria, and we are told that: "Somewhere in these waters lie the palaces where she seduced the most powerful men on Earth" (Ibid.). Apparently, this is the main reason to study her, and it is therefore unsurprising that archaeology becomes a sensual, even erotic, quest, so that "[a]fter two thousand years, Frank Goddio [the amateur archeologist] has touched her world" (Ibid,). This erotization of male archaeological excavation is ubiquitous in documentaries and films.

Accounts of female pharaohs focus on beauty and seduction, just as those of male rulers concentrate on wealth and warfare. The tone of the documentary from 2000 *Women Pharaohs* is typical: "Startling new discoveries are unraveling the secret of their seductive charms and political might", the narrator explains. We are told that with their "skills of divine seduction", these "master manipulators" could "beguile their enemies" (Glassman 2000). We are also told that Nefertiti "was more than just a pretty face", which apparently was the reason why she became "one of history's most recognizable women" (Ibid). As for Nefertari, "[h]er very name evokes beauty, splendor, and sensuality" (Ibid). In a similar vein, the documentary *Egypt's Golden Empire: The Warrior Pharaohs* devotes a sizable amount of airtime to the pharaoh Hatshepsut's -possible affair with a courtier, although the episode seems irrelevant to her rule. The narrator also explains that Hatshepsut "personally embraced her sexuality, reveling in descriptions of her own beauty" (Hawes 2001). So, it would appear that the search for imperial Egypt in Western documentaries is on the one hand a search for normatively gendered "beauty, splendor, and sensuality" (Glassman 2000), and on the other a search for a historical justification for might and expansion.

As we have seen, even if conservative ideology and oppressive stereotypes are regularly promoted in Western texts about Egypt, some texts are fighting back from within. *The Hidden History of Egypt*, produced in 2001, is a rare example of

a documentary intended for mass consumption which sets itself the task of undermining every western stereotype on the subject. Co-written and presented by Terry Jones, one of the founders of the Monty Python comic troupe, the documentary sets out to investigate how ordinary women and men lived in Ancient Egypt. Its subversive intent is made clear from the very opening sequence. We see a wide shot of an ancient Egyptian temple and hear a generic epic soundtrack for a few seconds, but this ends abruptly with a 'scratched record' sound effect, and the camera zooms in on the figure of Terry Jones, who tells the viewer:

Look. Quite honestly, this stuff isn't what interests me. I mean. This is just the funeral arrangements for some crazed megalomaniac who lived three thousand years before they thought of cryogenic freezers. Turn the camera over there <points>. Look <camera turns to a landscape of palm trees> over there <people walking down the street>. Instead of looking at how the rich and powerful died, <ordinary people in the streets of contemporary Cairo> lets look at how the ordinary people lived three thousand years ago. (Grabsky 2002)

Opening with the colloquial "Look" functions as an introduction to the informal, hands-on approach of the documentary, and also as a direct appeal to review our assumptions. One is reminded of bell hooks' reclamation of black women's active and oppositional gaze: "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (1999, 308). In *The Hidden History of Egypt* the will to re-write stereotypes is openly acknowledged in the script itself. It is remarkable that a sequence which abruptly terminates a normative narrative also opens *The Jewel of the Nile*, while *The Map of Love* is structured through two intercut stories which alternatively question and validate each other.

The new focus of *The Hidden History of Egypt* is set up against the necrophiliac obsession of western films and documentaries on Egypt, which is explicitly dismissed early on:

You sometimes get the impression that the ancient Egyptians were obsessed by death, but it's actually just because of a quirk of fate. You see, only five per cent

of the land of Egypt is fertile, and they didn't want to waste that in the old days on graveyards, so they got in the habit of burying their dead out here in the dessert. And it was the sand and the heat that preserved these tombs, almost as long as any other human artifact. But the ancient Egyptians weren't obsessed by death. If anything, they were obsessed by life. (Grabsky 2001).

The documentary certainly endorses it, with the camera roaming through the streets of Cairo, showing the buzzing urban life invariably neglected by western films. The focus of the documentary on ordinary activities, like praying and harvesting, is also a statement in itself. The stereotypical emphasis on an Ancient Egyptian class structure appealing to a western imperial capitalist mentality, is visually undermined and explicitly condemned. In fact, scenes from Euro-American films are used to illustrate the point. Jones explains:

[A number of archaeologists] are convinced that the men who built the pyramids were not slaves, but free men working in some sort of cooperative effort. So it may be that the image of ancient Egypt conjured up by Hollywood is based on a profound misunderstanding of how the ancient world worked. (Grabsky 2001).

This comment is followed by images of a black and white Hollywood film set in Ancient Egypt, showing slaves at work. To prove that this is a misconception, we are later told that workers building a tomb in the Valley of the Kings went on strike in 1170 BCE. The reason for the strike was the insufficient supplies of both food and 'make up'. This prompts the presenter to subvert another persistent orientalist stereotype: the supposedly sensual interest of Ancient Egyptians in adornment, exemplified by the black paint applied under their eyes. Jones explains that the practice was not cosmetic, but that its function was to reduce the glare of the sun. The archaeologist Joan Fletcher further demystifies the issue by declaring: "It's kind of like Ancient Egyptian sunglasses really" (Ibid.). Fletcher, the engaged and informed travel companion of Terry Jones throughout Cairo and environs, which they explore on foot, herself represents a break with tradition in more ways than one. Most guest appearances in documentaries on Ancient Egypt are usually men filmed in offices and archaeological sites, with the names of

‘experts’ superimposed on the screen, followed by either their professional title, or the University or Association to which they belong. In many cases, the contributions of ‘experts’ are shockingly irrelevant, and their presence is simply an attempt to legitimize the film.

Given the stereotypical focus on the looks of aristocratic women at the time of the pharaohs, it is not surprising that Patriarchal orientalist assumptions on gender are another target of *The Hidden History of Egypt*: Terry Jones reverses the familiar imperial logic: I was surprised to learn that in ancient Egypt women were legally on an equal footing with men. What’s more, they could marry and they could get divorced, they could buy and sell property, and they were entitled to receive the same wages as men, something even the modern world is still struggling to achieve. [...] In Ancient Egypt, the balance between the sexes was all part of the balance of life in general. (Ibid.)

The documentary also ridicules the aura of mystery associated with Egypt, exemplified by the western fascination with hieroglyphs, offering a translation of a representative sample.

So, here we are, listening to the language of the pharaohs [that is, the derivation of ancient Egyptian used by the Coptic Church], and able to read their scripts. What words of wisdom, what secrets and mysteries are they handing down to us through the millennia? <Voice off continues> ‘On this day, the following clothes were given to the laundry man: ten quilts, eight loincloths, and five sanitary towels.’ (Ibid.)

Throughout the film, the images confirm the stated intention to move away from the ‘crazed megalomaniacs’ of the past and to look instead at the ordinary Egyptians in the shops and holy places, in the coffee shops and the countryside. Perhaps the most radical gesture in *The Hidden History of Egypt* is the visual transformation that the presenter undergoes at one point. The film documents how Terry Jones ‘becomes’ an Ancient Egyptian: we see him choosing the material for his clothing, we see a tailor making it, Jones buying perfumed oil and ‘make up’ powder and having it applied to his body, shaving his head at the barber’s, ordering a wig, and proceeding to wander through the streets of modern Cairo in this guise to the amusement of the locals.

Fittingly, *The Hidden History of Egypt* closes in defiant mode:

When [the Ancient Egyptians] thought about the afterworld they saw it... very much like this one, for, you see, for the Ancient Egyptians, heaven *was* Egypt, and hell was to be anywhere else. I wonder how many people living in Los Angeles or London could say the same. (Ibid.)

And so, it is our own inadequacies that make us project our desires (including our desire of normalcy and validation) onto the foreign. *The Hidden History of Egypt* is nothing short of extraordinary, as it manages to overturn every stereotype persistently endorsed by other documentaries produced in the west.

Conclusion

The hero of the 1932 *The Mummy* tells the heroine that he fell in love with a mummified woman after unwrapping her face, and she asks: “Do you have to open graves to find girls to fall in love with?” (*Mummy* 1932). Perhaps the common trait of all the stereotypical accounts of ancient Egypt is their determination to avoid any constructive engagement with the present, with a real world full of living people. What gives their force to the resisting counter-narratives considered in this essay is their enthusiastic embracing of the now. Terry Jones at the Cairo market, the protagonist of *The Map of Love* arguing with Western journalists, the oasis rave party in *The Jewel of the Crown*, all have their feet on the ground. It has been claimed that all art has a “mummy complex” (Andre Bazin, quoted in Lant 1977, 69), but the impetus of the artist, rather than preservation, is surely movement, development, generation. The merit of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* rests on its imaginative qualities. Works such as Bram Stoker’s novel have facilitated the construction of oppressive stereotypical representations of gender, class, sexuality, and race which filter western perceptions of Egypt. Other popular works such as *The Jewel of the Nile*, *The Map of Love*, and *The Hidden History of Egypt* have attempted to undermine those stereotypes. There are a handful of other examples, but still they are not enough.

In the words of Ali Behdad: “That Orientalism as a Western discourse on the Other continues to operate so powerfully only makes the need for counter-representational practices more urgent” (1994, viii). The Eye of Horus, the ‘all seeing eye’ of the falcon-headed god from Ancient Egypt, is an icon of power. The very ubiquity of this image in the West is symbolic of the *Western* predatory gaze on a former European colony which continues to be culturally pillaged. Fantasies of feminized, acquiescent, erotized, luxurious bodies, ready for consumption, continue to be regularly produced by Western film, literature, and visual culture. Ancient Egypt, as reinvented by Western eyes, is an accessible ‘body’ of sensual experience, in a narrative that legitimizes autocracy, class divisions, state violence, slavery, and a view of women as non-rational, unpredictable, untrustworthy, and ultimately unworthy. This is also on a continuum with sexual allure as an orientalist trope, where the promise of transgressive experiences (the lesbian, the cross-dresser, the assertive heterosexual woman, the feminized passive male, the incestuous bond) is the ‘holiday’ of hard-working Western heteronormative self-regulation. Representations of Egypt in Western postcolonial popular culture thus demonstrate a continuum between the nineteenth century colonial imagination and the late twentieth century imaginary of global-minded market capitalism.

If the Eye of Horus is impossible to escape, we do have a means of deflecting its glare. The Hamsa, the blessing hand of the Goddess, is the Arab sign of a hand lifted against the evil eye. Also used in Jewish culture, and called the Hamesh hand, this symbol, a palm with an eye at its centre, is traditionally hung on doors to protect the household. Each Western stereotype of Egypt is a bird of prey scouting for an easy meal while policing Western knowledges, but the simplest of gestures can drive it away. Mainstream interventions ignored by historians and critics, such as the *The Jewel of the Nile*, *The Map of Love*, or *The Hidden History of Egypt*, are Hamsa hands on the doors of culture. Popular

culture has an ability to create and sustain tropes, and to resist, arrest, and reinvent them. Popular culture has a staggering power, which does not reside in the military, the media, or the market. It is as simple as raising a hand with an eye in it.

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They're Just People, That's All

American Carnival, the Freakish Body and the Ecological Self in Daniel Knauf's *Carnivàle*

Helena Bacon

“We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice” (Berger 1972, 8). The principal hypothesis of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* still bears weight in multiple contexts. To observe, examine or to even glance at another is rarely a neutral or objective act; ‘looking’ is both the culmination and catalyst of a number of social and cultural subcurrents that, created through individual, small-scale interactions, echo repeatedly into wider consciousness. This effect is only intensified in image rich, visual cultures like that of the United States. In *American Carnival*, Phillip McGowan proposes a version of carnivalesque that developed in symbiosis with American culture specifically: instead of Bakhtin’s European carnival of laughter, a temporary inversion of normal hierarchical structures, McGowan suggests that States-based carnival, manifested tangibly in American World Fairs, midway shows and freak shows, was a means of consolidating identity, race and social position specifically through the act of ‘seeing.’ Commercial, public events like these reassured the dominant, white population of its normality and status through

the act of looking at the freakish, abnormal, and exotic or racially ‘Othered’ attractions such events had to offer.

McGowan scaffolds his reading with the framework of European carnival, using this paradigm to delineate what he suggests is America’s innately contrastive practice; he states that these American shows were not yearly festivals, events or rituals, or isolated incidents of ‘Othering’, but that this method of seeing and controlling those that deviated from the norm permeated American life, becoming ever-present and pernicious. Through these visual relations a binary racial code was created. The ‘Other’ was set apart both for and from the white viewer, becoming an object of visual consumption, and through that consumption, the viewer’s whiteness and value were both confirmed and affirmed:

The spaces and moments of American Carnival serve a dual function: to displace and simultaneously display Otherness, to place non-American, un-American identities beyond regular social interactions and social viewing and exhibit them within extra social arenas that operate in the establishment of a politics or an economy of seeing, a visual economy of observing Otherness, blackness, ‘subversiveness’ (McGowan 2001, ix).

Within the structures of this American carnivalesque, boundaries are formed and fused instead of liberated. ‘Normal’ and ‘Other’ identities are constructed in symbiotic opposition, normal co-dependent on ‘Other’. American carnival is one of repression, rather than expression, and its mode a political and economic exploitation of minority groups, a monetary exchange that ensured that the white viewer purchased reassurance of their normalcy at the expense of the economically exploited individuals on show. As Berger states, “[a]s a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach – though not necessarily within arm’s reach,” (1972, 8). Through the act of purchase and the gaze itself, power and subsequently value were instilled in being able to ‘look’ at this ‘Other’ from a safe distance, laying the foundations for a sense of confidence and entitlement that went beyond the show environment. Though certain critics like Carl Lindahl argue that Bakhtin’s depiction of carnival is inherently conservative, a controlled

and self-limited 'venting' that allows only for a return to normality once the carnival experience is complete (Lindahl 1996, 57), in America, McGowan would have it, there is no inversion, however temporary, only enforced submission from those that appear to be different within such a "visual economy" (McGowan 2001, ix).

The theoretical concept McGowan proposes in *American Carnival* in particular seems little utilised in the broad and divergent sphere of reading American socio-cultural history, given that visual and commercial culture appear to be so inextricably engrained in the United States' past and present; indeed, these cultural phenomena have become the primary driving forces of the 'carnival impulse' that is responsible for the inherent prejudice against and marginalization of what is not white, normal, expected. I intend to rectify this previous critical neglect, testing McGowan's ideas alongside other intersecting critics and concepts that reflect upon American culture, the visual and the organisation of social hierarchies. As a suitable conduit for this examination, I will focus on a particular programme that lends itself readily to this reading: Daniel Knauf's *Carnivàle* (2003 – 2005).

Set between 1934 and 1935, *Carnivàle* provides an interior view of the carnival experience, following Ben Hawkins, a Dust Bowl farmer with inexplicable healing powers, after he is picked up by a travelling carnival while attempting to bury his mother in the dust that killed her. *Carnivàle* occupies a strange position in televisual terms. Sincere and cerebral, neither outright horror nor fantasy nor history show but somehow presenting elements of each, and nowhere near as forthright – some would say exploitative though recent criticism has been more favourable – in its depiction of mental or bodily abnormality as Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), *Carnivàle* still makes for disquieting viewing. Knauf himself has said of his show, "[like] a beautiful child born with its heart on the outside, it had no business surviving delivery, much less two seasons on

television,” (Aloi, Johnston 2015, 1). *Carnivàle*, as Knauf’s baby metaphor suggests, works in ectopia cordis, from the inside out, a feature that is key to interpreting its representation of the very American cultural phenomenon it depicts.

The emerging critical focus on *Carnivàle* has homed in on the show’s dense, inaccessible mythology, its tightly packed references, its HBO-standard montage title sequence and its spatio-temporal idiosyncrasies. While these new readings are necessary forays into an as yet underexplored show, the particulars of American visual culture embedded in its narrative and production have not yet been sufficiently investigated given their patent importance in a series that follows a freak show as it crosses some of the central and western states of America. Frida Beckman states that “[s]et in the 1930s Dustbowl and in California, *Carnivàle* offers a distinctly American historical context with powerful links to a specifically American identity” (2011, 6). The key projection of this identity in Knauf’s show are the ‘carnies’ and ‘freaks’ of the Carnivàle, the travelling fair and freak show led by Samson the Dwarf. The show’s depictions of this itinerant group, how they interact with and stray from dominant American social structures and cultures within the show, reveal just how *Carnivàle* offers an insight into the lives of the ‘Other’ in Depression-era small town America and how the ‘Othering’ it presents is not as clear-cut as it may first appear. The image of Knauf’s ‘baby’ is perhaps more appropriate than even he may have realised.

Constructing the Freak

In discussing ‘cult’ exploitation cinema, David Church argues that “non-normative bodies are framed in medium shots or close ups that abruptly break classical continuity, with a film’s typically slipshod construction resulting in awkward cuts to the inserted spectacle” (2011, 3). Although, Knauf’s creation is not as explicit as Browning or as heavy handed, in its first episodes *Carnivàle*

does appear to borrow from this cult tradition. As Ben reluctantly becomes part of the carnival troupe, we are given lingering shots of abnormalities or behaviours that emphasize difference: a shot of Gecko's lizard-like tail as it pokes through a hole cut in his underpants; Caledonia and Alexandria, the Siamese twins, playing cat's cradle, a game that requires two people, only here the two people are joined at the hip; Lila, the bearded lady tending her goatee; the catatonic gypsy psychic Apollonia, motionless in bed. We glimpse these moments of difference for perhaps longer than we should, the camera furtively resting on these characters only a second or two, but long enough to place the viewer firmly on the outside looking in, to separate the cast of the freak show from a 'normal' physicality and location.

This aligns with Church's notion that perceptions of disability or bodily difference as abnormal or 'Other' reinforce the deviancy of cult films and other cultural products that depict such difference. In the pilot episode, 'Milfay', the creeping of the camera literally suggests something odd or illicit is occurring, that Ben is in a suspicious environment, something he voices when he yells, "I don't appreciate being shanghaied by a pack of freaks" (Knauf 2005), piling piratical, unscrupulous and animalistic connotations onto the already unusual crowd he now reluctantly belongs to. Upon first viewing we appear to have a modern example of American carnival impulse at work effected through the show's presentation of its characters. In watching a show centred around freaks, one that lingers on their oddity, we've bought a ticket to look upon them from a distance, the camera's gaze fulfilling our commercially legitimated curiosity. McGowan states that, regarding this need to reject yet gaze upon the different, "it's most tangible manifestations are those of the freak show, or of American side-show culture" (2001, 1). A television show that in turn depicts a freak show is simply the latest incarnation in a long line of freak-based entertainment.

A generally unanimous critical understanding of the development of the freak show and its multiple incarnations (if not about whether freak shows themselves are commercially or morally acceptable forms of entertainment or ways of life) allows us to see that, in most instances, *Carnivàle* appears to be a faithful recreation of the actuality of travelling carnivals and freak shows in the 1930s. Robert Bogdan's seminal text, *Freak Show*, tracks the development of such arenas of entertainment from their growth in museums in the nineteenth century through to their place in expositions and world fairs – designated sites of 'edutainment' – and their connection to the growth of fad sciences such as teratology, the study of people with bodies that deviate from a broad norm, all catalysed by P. T. Barnum's takeover of the American Museum in 1840, the establishment that pushed the freak show to the fore of American amusement.

Those with congenital abnormalities had, of course, been exhibited before this period, often touring individually with personal managers. It was the designation of a particular arena for the public to learn and be entertained, combined with the notion that to go to see a freak show was a legitimate activity, that became key to its popularity, its longevity, and its resonance in the American cultural imagination. Bogdan states that "[s]ignificantly, once human exhibits became attached to organizations, distinct patterns of constructing and presenting freaks could be institutionalized, conventions that endure to this day" (1988, 11). A growing preoccupation with the classification of different races, a taxonomic hierarchy and a growing divide between creationists and those who subscribed to evolutionary theories all created a climate in the nineteenth century in which the organized display of human oddities was a profitable proposition and a much sought out attraction. An unusual star was born.

This development gave rise to dime museums that sprang up, most frequently, in urban areas. They offered a similar, if often more tawdry experience at a cheaper price than their parent institution, the American Museum. Freak

shows then found their way into circuses as side shows, providing entertainment for waiting crowds and an extra source of income for the circus outfit before the big top shows got started. They also became a part of World Fairs such the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, and the later Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, significantly where Buffalo Bill was blurring the lines of history and showmanship with his Wild-West Extravaganza:

It was at this exposition of 1893, in the area around Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, that the idea of a collective amusement company was first discussed and the carnival as we know it was born. Alongside the daily appearances by Sitting Bull and the display of people from other countries as exotic primitives, a blueprint was formed for the organized touring of the abnormal body for the benefit of paying customers throughout America, not solely those in metropolitan areas (Bogdan 1988, 59).

Less concerned with the educational pretensions of its forebears, the travelling carnival took the show previously found at these larger urban meccas of edutainment on the road, giving small-town America a chance to see what it had been missing.

The early twentieth century saw the mood shift regarding freak shows and their various guises. A growing interest in eugenics, and in keeping those with 'bad genes' from passing them on, alongside a moral discomfort attached to the exhibition of those with differences for profit saw a 'medicalization' of so-called freaks develop, many ending up in hospitals and other institutions, shut away to be studied by doctors, not laymen. A resurgent interest in pseudo-medicines like phrenology and physiognomy followed Cesare Lombroso's theory that criminality and degeneracy were hereditary and could be identified through congenital defects and distinct physical characteristics; this developing concern with eugenics and genetic determinism as a means of classifying the 'quality' of certain races or social groups meant that, as Ardis Cameron suggests, a "domestic 'Dark Continent' emerged" to trouble the social and genealogical integrity of the normative classes (2005, 33). The popular appeal of freak shows suffered, as

Bogdan notes: “The eugenics movement promulgated the idea that physically and mentally inferior people were far from being benign and interesting; rather, they were a danger” (1988, 63).

Carnivàle, set in the dilapidated mid-thirties, captures this industry on the down turn; Samson’s outfit offers a seedy, shabby show that moves around the small towns of the West and South-West in order to make enough money to survive. The outfit, with its freaks, its cooch dancers, and its rickety rides, encapsulates the last death throes of the side show, far removed from the grand, municipal structures and strictures of nineteenth century exploration and scientific endeavour; the *Carnivàle* offers up acts typical of the 30s and 40s, when, as Thomas Fahy states, “no intellectual pretext could be given for staring” (2006, 10). A ticket purchases a right to ogle and partake in other fairground distractions; the small-town visitors to the show never imply that there is any inherent educational value to their experience, barring an implicit reassurance of their own normality and even fortune, compared with the precarious and ‘Otherly’ lives of *Carnivàle*’s freaks and roustabouts. Visitors are there to be shocked, titillated and to ride the Ferris wheel, and look over the small, isolated society they have purchased a chance to stare at from up high – a literal though temporary elevation in their social status within the confines of the fair.

Fahy, aligning with McGowan’s interpretation of these carnival spaces, continues:

The freak represented what the audience was not – the Other, someone excluded from mainstream society for being different. In this way, the freakish body revealed surprisingly insecure power structures and suggested underlying anxieties about the ways individuals defined and related to each other in modern America (2006, 2).

Knauf’s creations are pressed to sell visual access to their freakish body or ability, or failing that, an exotic or titillating experience like the cooch show, so that they may eat and drink and buy enough fuel to get them to the next small town waiting

for much needed affirmation of the freaks' multifaceted subordination. The roustabouts, though physically normal except for their leader, Jonesy – a crippled former star baseball player – help to create this spectacle for the same ends.

The freak was rarely allowed to simply be themselves, to present their reality, and instead had to create an act, or have one created for them, that presented their deformity or ability in a stylized manner (the exception being the 10 in 1 show – literally ten exhibits on show in one tent – where quantity and explicit clarity were placed above idiosyncratic presentation). Bogdan states:

Showman fabricated 'freak's backgrounds, the nature of their conditions, the circumstances of their current lives, and other personal characteristics. The actual life and circumstances of those being exhibited were replaced by purposeful distortions designed to market the exhibit, to produce a more appealing freak (1988, 95).

Though the Carnivale's acts are more low-rent than any Barnum production, they all have their own 'shtick', a persona or set of quips and props that they utilise at show time.

Identity is flexible where profit is concerned, the self is set aside and the body hyper-individuated, though ironically this exaggeration subsumes the act into a generalised 'carny' identity. Critical discourse regarding freak shows again concurs regarding the types of freaks on show and the ways in which freaks were presented. Bogdan suggests that there were two modes of presentation, the 'exotic' and the 'aggrandized' styles, and that performers generally sat along a spectrum of authenticity, either 'born freaks' (those with congenital deformities or other irregularities – dwarfs, tall men, bearded ladies, those with no arms, or legs, or any limbs at all), 'self-made freaks' (circassion beauties, the heavily tattooed or pierced, sword swallowers) or 'gaffs' (fakes). The exotic 'cast the exhibit as a strange creature from a little-known part of the world', and normally applied to non-white races; sometimes these performers did come from Africa, or from little known tribes unfamiliar with western culture, but equally prevalent was the

dressing up of black men and women to falsely cast them as ‘savages’ despite them having no physical abnormality and often being born and raised in the United States (Bogdan 1988, 97). The aggrandized mode was used for people with distinct bodies; these acts were often presented in uniforms or fine clothing and were given status titles, like that of General Tom Thumb, a hypopituitary dwarf and Barnum’s star act in the American Museum.

Carnivàle again faithfully reproduces these different varieties of showmanship. Walter, a member of the Daley Brothers troupe that the Carnivàle finds on the road, is clearly a physically normal, healthy black American. His colour is used to render him exotic and turn him into a ‘wild man’ dressed in skins, with bones in his purposefully unkempt hair. His act is a complete gaff, and exaggerates his racial ‘Otherness’, his colour is not ‘freakish’ in and of itself but is a marker of difference strong enough to build a freak identity upon. Characters such as Lila, and Lodz, her blind mentalist lover (he displays unusual psychic abilities including mind control and fortune telling), are aggrandized, dressed sumptuously, with fine clothes and jewellery. Lila curls her beard as another woman might her hair, and fans herself constantly, partly due to the heat of the region and partly a ladylike mannerism cultured to imply genteel respectability, a slippage between her act and herself. Samson and Gecko are almost always wearing a suit. Sabine, the scorpion girl, is also well-turned out in draped fabrics and furs with a heavily made up face. The Siamese twins are presented as pretty, young show girls who sing and do gymnastics, reflecting the fashionable look of the thirties, and a mimic of the real-life Hilton twins, stars of *Freaks* (1932) who were “packaged in the twentieth-century wrappings of stage and screen idols” (Bogdan 1988, 166). Even Ben, physically normal but supernaturally freakish, is turned out in a tailcoat and starched collar when he plays Benjamin St. John, a faith healer. In reality, these props, manners and distractions merely provided a build up to the ‘big reveal’, the culminating show moment and plenary lesson that

viewers absorbed and carried with them out of the gate. If, as William Miller suggests, “[d]isgust shocks, entertains by shocking, and sears itself into memory” (1997, 42), that memory is not dispassionate or without consequence; it produces both immediate and cumulative, reverberating sensations.

Constructing the Spectator

The show’s accurate recreation of historical freak show practice and presentation speaks to the conventions Bogdan outlines and the well-rehearsed homogeneity of freak show operations; whether they moved in the nineteenth century, the 1930s or on modern television, they follow a template of presentation that inherently fulfils McGowan’s conceptualisation of the American carnival impulse. This is not the Bakhtinian carnival of inclusion and inversion; Knauf’s *Carnivàle* is instead the antithesis to Bakhtin’s notion that “[c]arnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (Bakhtin 1984, 7). The *Carnivàle* is a spectacle, a sight to see and a set of bodies to collect that encode for the audience a way to see them; that is its primary function, though it subsequently becomes a place to live for those that must carnivalize themselves to fulfil that function. The American gaze that gave rise to *Carnivàle*’s real-life counterparts did not form immersive moments of inversion, but sites of instruction that might have utilised all types of people but certainly did not embrace them or their variety.

Such lessons, learned among the gaudy banners and ‘step right up’ atmosphere of the side show, were applied long after the show had moved on. The ‘Other’ was both displayed and displaced simultaneously in these specific arenas of entertainment and the pattern of social exclusion that informed their creation emerged from them also, carried out of these spaces into wider American culture. At carnival sites, this construction is literal; the displacement is birthed from the rejection of those with bodily differences from normal society, the display

revealing an implicit need to still see this Other on stage, to know that you are not freakish, that you belong on one side of the ticket booth and they on the other. Again, speaking to the literal fashion in which carnivals and their acts exaggerated their own difference, and the routine and repeated ways in which this exaggeration was achieved, McGowan suggests that “[t]heir performance of otherness is scripted and costumed by the requirements of the white proprietor and viewer and by the stereotyped perceptions of difference abroad in the wider society” (2001, 2). Freaks must manipulate their own bodies or present them in a heavily stylized manner that obfuscates their real identity, to create a crowd-pleasing act.

Glenn C. Davis calls the freak show “a world where everything is the biggest or greatest” (Stone 2004, 64). This language, used so routinely that its claims became ridiculous and particularly ironic given that these shabby twentieth century shows were far removed from their Barnum heritage, was specifically an advertising ploy to get visitors through the gate, when conversely it was the bodies and lives of those on the inside that were amplified to produce a feeling of superiority – culturally, bodily, and racially – in the viewer. Cynthia Burkhead states that “[a]s a business, the carnival operators, sideshow freaks included, do not participate in the revelry they sell” (2015, 142). The freaks themselves are, in a sense, hidden, trapped inside the confines of the carnival. To reveal their abnormalities by simply going shopping or to get gas, those with bodily abnormalities would lose their source of income by giving up the goods too easily, as Samson says to Lila in the episode ‘Los Moscos’ when she stands outside without a veil on as visitors wander by, “you’re giving it away for free” (Knauf 2005). Deformity becomes something that must be withheld until point of sale, a commodity in McGowan’s ‘economy of seeing’, or it becomes immediately devalued, or worse, a tool in the hands of those who might cause harm.

The only examples we see of the troupe attempting to enjoy themselves and replicate normal social behaviours – and it certainly isn't when they're performing – is in 'The Road to Damascus' when the Carnivàle and The Daley Brothers outfit merge temporarily and hold a carny-only party in the big top tent (Knauf 2005), and in 'Babylon' when the group venture into Babylon, Texas; finding the town empty save one bartender, they have to create their own amusement (Knauf 2005). Babylon turns out to be full of the ghosts of miners who have died there, and the carnies' visit does not go unnoticed; as the troupe dance in an otherwise empty bar, the camera pans away from the bar window into the darkness outside as if the group are being watched. The implication is that they might be trespassing, breaking an unspoken rule by drinking and dancing. The carnival may travel but their mobility does not permit them to transgress delineated social spaces or identities. This notion of being in the wrong place, of crossing impermeable boundaries seems particularly pertinent to travelling spectacles of Otherness, as McGowan states: "The static inertia of such a carnival image is at times, ironically, part of a travelling economy" (2001, 18)

Carnivàle never lets the audience forget that this is a show on the move. Episodes are named for the geographical locations of the carnival at that stage in the narrative – Milfay, Babylon, Damascus – and we see repeated shots of the caravan of cars and wagons carrying tents and rides to the next location, dust circling around them. The carnies must, as Samson says, 'shake some dust', a loaded phrase that implies they must move on to make a living but also shake off their previous show, the looks of their previous visitors, the 'dust' of their performed or perceived identities – the status that the ticket buying public assigns them and the association with the Dust Bowl and its destructive effects. They must also outrun any retribution that might be sought after visitors work out some of their insalubrious business practices.

When the troupe does stop, we are shown eye-level and birds-eye shots of the carnival sat in the middle of nowhere. This, combined with these geographical episode titles, heighten this peripheral existence. The troupe is not really in ‘Los Moscos’ or ‘Tipton’, they are in a field or patch of dirt outside these towns, waiting for an audience to come to them, the giant star of the Ferris wheel lit up on the skyline like a beacon that announces their strangeness. Each location looks like the last; dirt and hills surround the camp, highlighting its insignificance and its vulnerability – tents do not provide adequate protection from violent townspeople, revealed by the murder of cooch dancer Dora Mae Dreifuss and the later kidnapping and mutilation of Jonesy in ‘Lincoln Highway’ (Knauf 2005).

Like the wheel, the freak show banners hint at what lies behind them, a precursor to the act of looking, as Davies states: “These images are designed to present information in a non-verbal manner, to communicate with visual dialogue” (2015, 66) The entrance functions in this way also – a white picket fence a few feet long on either side of a gate with a lit banner above it that reads ‘CARNIVÀLE’; it is a strange construction that references the conventional ideal American home but fuses it with a sense of transgression, a distortion of normality. The fence abruptly ends on either side of the gate, giving only an illusion of something concrete. The entrance way lends a sense of incompleteness to the carnies’ home, a half-structure that can be packed away at a moment’s notice. We’re shown one particular view repeatedly – so similar it could even be the same footage – a long shot of the carnival preparing to open, rousties setting up rides in the distance, the gate in the middle and the shows and stalls sitting quietly behind it. The carny home and identity are literally constructed and deconstructed before our eyes.

If, as David Sibley states, “the determination of a border between the inside and the outside [...] translates into several different corporeal or social images which signal imperfection or a low ranking in a hierarchy of being” (1995,

14) then transience, already a demarcation of difference or a cause for expulsion, again amplifies the strangeness of the Carnivale's freaks and carnies, and places them firmly if not at the bottom of the social hierarchy then outside it, as the group is not in one place long enough to be incorporated into any one social system. The carnies are negatively 'unbounded' in the sense that their homes – tents, caravans, the space underneath a truck even – do not sufficiently delineate them from the outside world, as a standard dwelling would. This is a continuation of what Sibley calls the "ecological account of the self", of non-human items or animals, in this case empty space, Dust Bowl destruction and the trappings of itinerancy being used to frame the carny experience. Their rejection is two-fold; firstly, because they have some form of deformity, have been 'Othered' or have 'Othered' themselves in some way or that they work with or for those that do; secondly because that Otherness requires them to move around so that they may be seen and rejected, over and over again, by each new visitor in each new town.

The fake barrier of the ticket gate, incomplete mimic of the normal American house and its borders and the point at which entrance into the carnival proper is purchased, hints that the carnival is an in-between place, a source of attraction and repulsion for townspeople. If, as Kristeva states, the problem with the abject is that "[i]t lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (1982, 1), then the spatial positioning of freak shows just outside these towns, and their drawing on the curiosity of the residents who want to look at but not engage with what they're being shown, becomes a source of tension between normal and abject groups and between the urges and fears of the normal individual. The show aesthetic is also uncanny in this respect: the barrier is a simulacrum of a home, or at least part of one, but it is also a space of entertainment; it is both private and public, disgusting and alluring, familiar and hidden – both *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*. Freud suggests that "an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the

reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary” (2003, 150). The fantastical presentations that form the freak show’s oeuvre are, therefore, a fantasy that emphasises the very reality of their abnormal bodies, and indeed their success and life despite these bodies, for this is the human form but not as we know it.

The travelling nature of the freak show solves one of the problems it creates. In *Carnivàle*, as in its real-life counterparts, any residual anxiety towners might feel about the troupe is eliminated by the show removing itself from their proximity – the freaks simply move on, their presence immortalised only in memory, souvenirs and ticket stubs. The temporary entrance of an able-bodied, predominantly white viewer into the carnival world might bring with it the excitement of contravening certain boundaries, of lowering oneself by crossing the ticket gate and giving those with bodies displayed as entirely different to yours your money so that you might recognise your own as normal, but this excitement is not counter-balanced with the fear that they may enter the normal world in return, because the carnies simply disappear in the night. The tension within the individual that the abject and the uncanny create, however, in both recognition and the need to look yet also look away, to display and displace, is less easily abated.

Miller suggests that “[s]omething pre-social seems to link in to a strong sense of disgust and horror at the prospect of a body that doesn’t quite look like one, either grotesquely deformed by accident or disorganized by mayhem” (1997, 82). This mayhem implies an energy or illicit life, an excessive quality that jars with the non-generative, dried out world of *Carnivàle*. Miller further suggests that “[o]ur bodies and our souls are the prime generators of the disgusting. What the animals remind us of, the ones that disgust us – insects, slugs, worms, rats, bats, newts, centipedes – is life, oozy, slimy, viscous, teeming, messy, uncanny life” (1997, 50). The very life of a freak is then, as mentioned, part of the shock a

visitor experiences – that they have one, that they exist, and seek to thrive, albeit in limited parameters. If “the generator of disgust is generation itself, surfeit, excess of ripeness,” (Miller 1997, 50) then an excessive, or misshapen, or compacted body suggests a biological process or being that was once out of control and one that could be again, if not for the confines of the stage, the tent and the fence. We have the uncanny manifest on a cellular level, the natural process of growth repeated with abnormal results, in manifold abnormal forms that threaten to overwhelm the normal.

The precariousness of this confinement, however, is not the primary driver of disgust; Miller states that, “[i]t is not that we fear intimacy with them or their intimacies with others; it is that we know how we see them and could not bear to be thus seen. The horror then is not being intimate with them (although that too), but in being them” (1997, 42). The recognition that not much separates the viewer and the viewed, beyond a set, some props and circumstance, produces a rupture in the American carnival impulse that *Carnivàle* depicts, and takes the show beyond an uncomplicated framing of these visual cues. It creates moments of recognition that blur attempts to render the carnies homogenous in their individuality.

Dawn Prestwich, a writer and executive producer on the show, states that “our belief, you know, thematically, in this whole series, is that the freaks are the normal people and it’s the normal people, you know, who are kind of bizarre” (Prestwich 2003). *Carnivàle*, then, is specular; it holds a mirror up to the audiences that come to gaze upon alterity. Regarding these social binaries Sibley states that “[o]ccasionally, these social cleavages are marked by inversions – those who are usually on the outside occupy the centre and the dominant majority are cast in the role of spectators” (1995, 43). In *Carnivàle*, the dominant majority are spectators – this position is not altered, it is this spectatorship that elevates them to dominance – but an inversion takes place in that the show is primarily filmed from inside the carnival, and particularly when the acts are ‘off-duty’, eating, talking, at

leisure. While we are never given one clear shot out of the gate, an explicit outward gaze – we still get a sense of being firmly within the camp. Indeed, the suggestion is that many of those inside the carnival do not need or wish to look outward, as what they see when they do holds no appeal. The viewer sees the social and bodily norm through different eyes and finds that outward gaze is unforgiving. Rachel Adams points out an uncomfortable truth about the nature of paying to look at another person: “spectators may be disconcerted to find their gazes returned, often laden with resentment or hostility” (2001, 7).

If what Homi Bhabha calls the scopic drive, “the drive that represents the pleasure in ‘seeing’, [...] and locates the surveyed object within the ‘imaginary’ relation” sees audiences combining vision and liberty by paying to see acts of the ‘imaginary’ (2004, 109) – freaks or acts constructed specifically to confirm their worst nightmares or prejudices or to titillate their worst impulses, all a by-product of implicit identity consolidation, then a returned gaze operates in a similar manner to the uncanny, and contests or dismantles that imaginary or at least confirms its unreality. Bhabha states that “the recognition and disavowal of ‘difference’ is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction” (2004, 109); the displeased gaze of the act intercepts the scope of their audience in a way that illuminates the act as presentation, one tailor-made to extort the most profit possible from those that want to see it. Freaks can look back at their audience and reassert their agency and disquieting humanity through their own outward stare. A ticket only purchases a certain amount of passivity.

Indeed, *Carnivàle* engages in its own way with the creation of a ‘generalized other’ in its depiction of Babylon (Knauf 2005). The ghostly miners visit to the carnival explicitly creates a carnivalized and reductive version of the normal ticket buying public. The miners appear as if out of nowhere, all wearing dirty blue jeans, their faces indistinct; they shuffle through the gate in silence, lifelessly alike. Their pharisaic murder of Dora Mae (they brand her a harlot yet

keep her ghost as a sex-slave) acts as distillation of all that is ugly about the American carnival impulse and the way it is operationally always in conflict - reject and look, displace and display, condemn and possess. Except here the miners are the worst features of normal society (in *Carnivàle's* context at least) presented as a homogenous, blurred mass. Their brutality, predation, and deathliness appear in contrast to the life, dignity and compassion of the *Carnivàle's* troupe, something only further emphasised by the loving funeral service and orderly retributive ritual the troupe hold after her death. The miners are trapped, vicious and dull shades who kill seemingly because they cannot cope with the tension that exists between their disgust and lust, a sentiment Miller succinctly encapsulates: "Men desire access to the vagina, but also fear it" (1997, 102). The miners want the body of Dora Mae, even in spectral form, but loathe what that body represents. The show bestows upon them a non-identity and bounds them in a limited location – the town they all died in – an other-worldly punishment that consolidates their lack of individuation. Though dangerous within this confine, they're rendered pathetic and aberrant ghosts of the past, literal nobodies, who cannot escape the limits and limitations of their own death, and in their portrayal, *Carnivàle* casts one half of the visual binary, the spectator this time, as ignominiously pathological.

Disrupting Boundaries

These binaries – normal/abnormal, townspeople/carnies – depicted in the show first episodes, begin to disintegrate as the narrative moves onward. When Ben goes freak hunting in the episode 'Lonnigan, Texas', he encounters an auto-attendant with an intellectual disability as well as a skin condition and a speech impediment. We might be tempted to frame him within the same realm of identity as those in the carnival. He, however, reacts to those around him in a manner that surprises Ben and disrupts our expectations; he shouts abuse at a family of Okies

who need to get their car tyre fixed, refusing to serve them, and when he sees Lobster Girl, he says to Ben that she's "[a] real freak, that one," (Knauf 2005). By verbally and violently asserting his own superiority, keeping the family at a physical and associational distance from himself, he denies or simply does not recognise any connection to those we assume he might identify with. He resists classification while happily denigrating and stereotyping others, rendering the family stuck in both automotive and social terms. His physical characteristics and the context in which he is presented might render him freakish to an external viewer – they certainly generate distaste in Ben – but freak is not a term or an identity he associates with himself.

Bogdan suggests that "'Freak' is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is something that we created: a perspective, a set of practices – a social construction" (1997, ix). In the show it is a term employed by various characters, including the 'freaks' themselves. Though the auto-attendant might have a set of characteristics that could easily facilitate him becoming a 'freak' in certain circumstances, those characteristics alone are not enough to make him one. He works a normal job and adopts the standard prejudices of those around him. He is neither 'normal' townspeople, nor a carny with the trappings that create a second, externalized identity. In *Carnivàle's* world, he occupies a middle ground that sits in between the two possible states shown, itinerant/freakish and stationary/normal.

He is not alone. Jonesy also occupies a liminal position within the show's world. Klaus Rieser states that "images are overwhelmingly present in American life," (Rieser 2013, 3) and that "[a]mong this flood of visual representations, a limited number of images gain greater prominence and remain in the public consciousness for an extended period of time, thereby becoming icons" (ibid). Jonesy, with a leg so damaged he must wear a brace which alters his gait significantly, is an example of what happens when a person situated in one arena

of national iconography – in his case a promising career in national American baseball – ends up in another, a Dust Bowl freak show.

Michael Fuchs and Michael Phillips state that in America, sports are read as “a metaphor for life,” and that “[a]mong sports fans, the common view is that the essential struggle for success is ritually enacted on the playing fields/courts of America” (Fuchs and Phillips 2013, 86). Flashbacks reveal Jonesy’s knee was broken because he refused to throw a game. The price he pays for honesty is an injury that puts paid to his sporting career and finds him assembling a Ferris wheel for a living. He goes from Clayton Jones to Jonesy, Samson’s right-hand man. However, despite his job and his injury, Jonesy is not a freak. Physically unusual, with his over-extended stride and imposing stature, Jonesy again occupies an unusual place within *Carnivàle* which both challenges and underpins the notion, broadly accepted and argued in critical understanding of freakery, that freaks are made and not born. What is Jonesy if not ‘freakish’ or normal? He is not a performer – his injury is not a congenital defect but is a physical reminder of a former identity now lost to him. It represents what he was, not what he is now, and also, like the migrants symbolising the failure of American agricultural commerce, signifies the corruption at work on the supposedly meritocratic American sports field.

Babe Ruth, arguably the most famous baseball player ever, iconic in the early decades of the twentieth-century and still celebrated today, acts as the original figure to Jonesy’s distorted mirror image, what Clayton Jones might have become had he remained undamaged. Shots of Ruth feature in the show’s expository title sequence, alongside other clips of 1930s footage (aid queues, The KKK, blimps, dust storms, Nazis, Jesse Owens, FDR) intercut with images of Tarot cards and biblical scenes that reference the more mythological narrative elements of the show. Ruth’s play altered the way baseball was played, ‘home runs’ becoming the aim of the game thanks to his powerful hit. His physicality

altered the American consciousness and became a part of American iconography, taking sports with it. Jonesy is Ruth knocked off this trajectory, strength diminished, his imperfect body necessitating a marginal existence.

In an industry hungry for new attractions there lies an implicit possibility that Jonesy could have been packaged as a freak, an act that passed off his injury as congenital or else displayed him overcoming this damage in some way, his failed baseball career ample material for a freak narrative that would blend one national preoccupation with another. Spectators who once watched him on the ball field might be drawn to see his antithetical new existence in a freak show. As it is, in *Carnivàle*, Jonesy stays off the stage; there is no mention of him becoming an act. Nor does the *Carnivàle* make advances towards Maddy, the little girl Jonesy takes kindly on in the first episode; she cannot walk and must be pulled everywhere in a trolley. Jonesy lets her ride the Ferris wheel for free, an activity she can take part in without difficulty. She too could be trained as a performer – she is adept at moving herself when not in her trolley – but no approach is made to this end.

Instead, Ben heals them both, fixing the girl's legs and saving Jonesy's life when he is tarred and feathered after a woman falls from the Ferris wheel on his watch (a strange echo of the creation of the Chicken Woman in *Freaks* and another means of physically 'Othering' someone as a punishment, like taking a bat to someone's knee). In saving him, Ben also heals Jonesy's injury – when he wakes he finds he is fully mobile once again and, crucially, can pitch a ball. Maddy and Clayton Jones/Jonesy represent the precariousness of the body, the different bodies a person might have in their life – physiology and identity can move from normal to abnormal and back again; the space between these variations can shorten or disappear entirely. Jonesy morphs from famous sports star to cripple to near-dead to healthy. Migrants move from respectable old-stock Americans to unwanted Okies before reclaiming a sense of belonging in Justin's

camp. Transience is not only geographical, but corporeal. Itinerancy is not, here, a moral failing, but a state that materialises in life, body and vocation.

American visual culture and carnival impulses respond and adapt to this precariousness, creating structures and locations through which to gaze upon and make judgement upon marginalised people according to a shared understanding of social hierarchy. However, this codification isn't always easy to do, and generates anxiety because economic circumstances severely reduce the distance between normal and abnormal and render events such as freak shows uncomfortable and uncanny spaces of identification rather than straightforward opportunities to gawk at something reassuringly unfamiliar. Fahy states that in the Depression, "the physical cost of employment, illness and hunger could often be seen on the body, the sideshow performer was often an unwanted reminder of everyday hardships and physical vulnerability" (2005, 80). While after each show *Carnivàle's* freaks and rousties move on, removing any physical or spatial issue related to their difference, the realisation that the viewer is only one bad harvest, or one bad accident away from the same existence and the same social status as those in the camp or the show, and the contrast between the strange yet successful (in biological and often economic terms) life in the *Carnivàle* – the excess, or excessive life – and the degenerated geology and economy of the Depression, starkly undermines the benefits of paying to look at abnormality.

However, while Ben's ability to heal those around him facilitates the show's depiction of the instability of both body and identity, it also raises further questions surrounding just who is a 'freak' and who isn't that are left unanswered. Just as there is an implicit possibility that Jonesy could have become an act instead of a roustabout, Ben's presence amongst a group of people who have physical or mental abnormalities infers that these abnormalities might be 'fixable.' Ben saves the lives of Jonesy and of Ruthie when she is snake-bit. He can cure physical ailments from the minor to the terminal through taking the life

from one thing or person and channelling it to another. He can even cure or soothe grief; in the first episode he calms a migrant woman who can't seem to let go of her dead baby (Knauf 2005), and he fixes Maddy's legs though she had been born without the use of them. He can also heal scarred and burned flesh, as he does with his father, who has mutilated himself to avoid detection by Ben. He can do all this, yet not one of the 'freaks' in *Carnivàle* enquires about the application of his power to congenital deformity or other conditions, such as Apollonia's paralysis, after they either intuit what he is or find out when Jonesy tells them.

The silence in the narrative regarding these possibilities is difficult to interpret. Considering the history of freak shows and the committal of the disabled into hospitals after the appeal of such entertainments waned, Ben is perhaps Knauf resisting the 'medicalisation' of his characters; they don't ask to be healed because their bodies aren't 'problems' or ailments to fix. They function, not as the 'Other' to a normal, white body, but as dynamic, flawed individuals, each with their own idiosyncrasies. This is what Ben says to Maddy in 'Milfay', when she tells him that her "Grammie says y'all are marked"; his reply, "Nah. They ain't marked. They're just people, that's all," (Knauf 2005) suggests that, like the spectrum of authenticity within the carnival structure, bodies in *Carnivàle* exist on a shared plane underpinned by a flawed humanity common to all, including Ben and Justin.

Alternatively, the freaks' lack of interest in Ben's ability within the narrative could imply the converse to this argument; only those with 'whole', normal looking configurations are healed by Ben, implying, particularly within a narrative heavily reliant on themes of fate and the individual's destiny within a grand narrative, that there are those that are freaks and those that aren't. Jonesy shouldn't have had his leg broken; Maddy, apart from her legs, is an otherwise 'complete' and normal looking child. Other characters within the narrative wouldn't have become sick if it weren't for the poor conditions the 1930s inflicted

upon them. These things are fixed in the narrative, a sense of order restored. These restorations seem to delineate the abnormal from the temporarily or wrongfully broken, giving their condition if not a physiognomic character than certainly a fatalistic one. Their role has been assigned, their difference predestined and unchangeable. They simply cannot ever be normal, as Rosemarie Garland Thomson suggests: "Never simply itself, the exceptional body betokens something else, becomes revelatory, sustains narrative, exists socially in a realm of hyper representation" (1993, 3). Freakishness, unlike injury, grief, culture and creed, cannot be hidden, or healed, only exposed.

While *Carnivàle*, with its freak show setting, its Depression-era story arc and direction and editing that makes explicit an individual's abnormalities, might appear to depict the display and the displacement of its freaks and Okies, and to reflect the binary this treatment constructs – 'Otherness' as opposed to normality, freakish as opposed to appropriate or expected, spectacle as opposed to respectable – it also works to display this binary as constructed on shaky foundations. The show raises more questions than it answers, from its indeterminate position between cult show and mainstream fare, to the ambiguous potentials that lie in its open-ended depiction of both migrants and freaks within its world. It faithfully recreates historical freak show practice, then subverts this convention by involving its characters in a biblical parable of good and evil, the forces of which are so alike and intertwined they are often indistinguishable.

Ultimately, it elicits neither sympathy for the freaks nor disdain or disgust. Sometimes the viewer is placed on the outside of the freak show looking in, but more often than not we are inside it, looking out. It is left to us to form our own understanding about who or what is freakish or 'Other' from the show's unusual population, whether the 'freak' is a social construction or something more concrete. What it does illustrate clearly, however, is that there is another side to the American carnival impulse: that the act of looking at a freak, a carny, an Okie,

is not a one-sided transaction. The normal gaze does not render the Other blind – your eyes might be met; your body, your culture, your way of life might be judged, and none too kindly; the cost of your ticket might be your dignity, self-perception and social identity, or all three. The tie between normal and ‘Other’ is inseparable, unlike a person and the money in their pocket, but an individual’s position between them is always up for negotiation.

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Othering the Outsider

Monsterring Abject Bodies in *Wuthering Heights*

Adele Hannon

'from the very beginning, he had bred bad feeling in the house' (Brontë, 1847)

Introduction

Where scholarly discourse has depicted the character Heathcliff as the racialised Other in Emily Brontë's illustration of 19th Century England, his function in *Wuthering Heights* transcends evoking just a 'bad feeling' in the reader. His very presence challenges how we define human nature, where social categories become insignificant in an evolving climate. Heathcliff being presented as monster illustrates a symbolic expression of cultural unease that pervades a society, and a fear that shapes the collective behaviour of the ruling class. It is the indeterminate nature of his being that designates him a disruptive force in the text, where outside the parameters of society his fate as 'monster' and 'Other' is sealed. He is set up as "a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being" (Brontë 1847, 179). Heathcliff functions as the 'outsider' or 'monster' due to his representation as the unidentified intruder within the familiar domestic space. Embodying both human and inhuman qualities at the same time, he becomes a manifestation of our fear of hybrid identities that refuse participation in the natural order. He is the half-civilised Other that illustrates debates concerning fear of the unknown racial

Other and serves as a complicated image of ethnic otherness, the incarnation of 'foreignness' in the eyes of the native British.

The Gothic as part of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen to be the "internalisation of that which is supposed to be foreign to thought" (Cottom 2003, 1067). Reflecting the menace of alien identities that threaten the dominant social order, Brontë's novel subverts preconditioned understandings of cultural difference and challenges rigid categorisations of the racial 'Other'. Attributing Heathcliff with foreign features, the novel marks him as the ethnic outcast, disallowed entry into the homogeneous space of British tradition. Heathcliff as the Gothic figure fits into recent studies on monsters that present them as telling products of their time and "embodying the anxieties and exhilarations of the moment in which they are born, they are ciphers for the culture, misshapen blank slates who tell us everything about their world while revealing next to nothing about themselves" (O'Connor 2000, 212). Due to the exclusory politics performed against him, Heathcliff is refused an identity and firmly positioned on the fringe of society, where he must exist as the foreign monster. He is essentially the deviant Other, a body whose radical aberrations work to reveal the limits of what is considered as acceptably human. From his decentralised position in society, Heathcliff can draw other characters, as well as the reader, away from a homogenous way of thinking. He is constantly on the border of structures and categories, diluting and blurring the lines of power. His place in the narrative serves as a representation of the disorderly aspects of human nature and the potential for a 'wuthering' taking place within the Self. The twofold nature of good and evil is diluted by Heathcliff's position as tortured villain, damaged by a childhood of discrimination and familial neglect. His position as victim of racial othering both subverts and undermines the notions of innocence, redefining locations of moral legibility.

The Absence of Heathcliff

Human nature continually seeks methods to solve problems in the semiotic field, such as optical and linguistic complexities present in the unknown 'Other'. The predisposition to categorise and define is what results in the Other being shrouded in darkness, lacking in both understanding and identity, because representation has been imposed on the subject. As Punday suggests "the monster is an entity created precisely by suppressing agency" (Punday 2002, 817). Forced to the margins and denied a narrative voice, Heathcliff becomes the deprecated subaltern whose identity is constructed solely by his superiors. Fulfilling any classification assigned to Heathcliff, such as 'demon' or 'monster', he acts as such for the rest of the novel so as to acquire some form of agency within *Wuthering Heights*. As a result of stereotypical characterisations in the novel, the reader's movements and thoughts become robotic because they are conditioned to act and think the way of the universal body. Daniel Punday delineates that "all human beings are "cyborgs" existing within and constructed by many different information circuits" (Punday 2002, 803). We are informed by these 'different information circuits' to become inordinately subservient to traditional tropes, continually relying upon these familiar recognitions. Heathcliff exists outside these circuits, and can no longer be recognised as human for living peripherally to the norm. Hence, the aversion to Heathcliff and the need to marginalise his being is consequent of "a general impulse to ignore someone disagreeable by averting one's eyes" (Sonstroem 1971, 52).

The familiar modes of representation, such as origin and name, that are absent in Heathcliff reduce him to an unknown alien presence. He becomes the personification of a 'tabula rasa', the blank slate on to which insecurities surrounding unfamiliar identities are imprinted. Heathcliff is designed as the faceless Other who encompasses uncertain origin and disconnection with the

domestic space. In an attempt to construct an identity for Heathcliff, Nelly can only imagine foreign correlations to describe his birth:

‘Who knows’, says Nelly to Heathcliff, ‘but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? ... Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppression of a little farmer!’ (Brontë 1847, 67)

We are never authorised entry into his mind and must rely upon the prejudiced perspectives of other characters. David Sonstroem states that none of the doors to understanding “opens wide enough to let the whole Heathcliff through” (Sonstroem 1971, 56). Knowledge of his motivations and ambitions are never allowed to fully surface. The refusal to accept Heathcliff’s abject thoughts and the desire to remain ignorant of his transgressive attitudes are exemplified by Isabella Linton’s marriage to Heathcliff. She separates entirely from her husband and prohibits both the physical door and the metaphorical door to understanding Heathcliff from remaining open stating “let the door remain shut and be quiet” (Brontë 1847, 208). It is in this action of forcibly excluding Heathcliff from the domestic space, there is emphasis placed on humanity’s tendency to overlook any sympathetic consideration of the cultural Other. An accurate reading of the Other is therefore sacrificed so as to ensure the door to alterity will ‘remain shut’. As a result, the reader is disallowed from seeing any personal growth in Heathcliff’s character. Barbara Munsen Goff outlines that Heathcliff is “not very complicated psychologically and does not ‘develop’ at all” (Goff 1984, 483). He becomes the ‘unnameable monster’ where endeavours to penetrate beyond his otherness proves futile. Due to monocular vision, Heathcliff’s form has been inadequately represented to the point that he becomes unrecognisable, and is projected far outside the reaches of the normative self.

The general failure to understand Heathcliff, as well as other characters in the text, is referred to by Sonstroem as the ‘nowt’-device in the perceptual field.

In *Wuthering Heights* the belligerent Joseph calls everyone a ‘nowt’, a nothing, denying everyone a place in society, as well as an identity (Sonstroem 1971, 51). Heathcliff’s inaccessible identity refuses categorisation, making him a corrosive force that parallels the decaying house. The broken down walls of Heathcliff’s dwelling are suggestive of the unstable boundaries and binaries within the text. Brontë emphasises this decay through the descriptions of the home “when beneath its walls, I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months – many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates jutt[ed] off” (Brontë 1847, 394). Consequent of the malfunction in identifying Heathcliff, he is dehumanised to the point that he, in turn, cannot distinguish any humanity existing within the self. Representing an invasion of both ambiguity and the uncanny, Heathcliff is essentially an ‘out-and-outer’ where Lockwood even mentions how he “did not feel as if [he] were in the company of a creature of [his] own species” (Brontë 1847, 191). Brontë constructs her infamous antagonist upon the foundations of misplaced information and vacant perspectives. The incongruity of his character can be placed at the heart of our fear of the unfamiliar and unknown Other. However, where his rebellion against definition may be interpreted as monstrous, his ability to transgress reductive categorisation allows conservative perspectives to be challenged. In similar ways to the literary monster, Heathcliff manifests “confusion about what might constitute the boundaries of human society and the limits of acceptable human being” (Wright 2013, 15). More than being seen as inhuman, Heathcliff is also uncontainable and attacks all endeavours to name and categorise him. He effectively complicates our fixated efforts to reduce the Other to a non-identity and to ignore its profound alterity. By infiltrating the domestic space, Heathcliff problematises society’s attempt to disregard the foreign Other and all that he/she represents. His lack of second, or family name, is an ongoing index of the inability of society to domesticate and categorise him. He essentially

embodies the forces of Gothic fiction that disrupt civilised society, the symbolic monster that threatens the fabric of patriarchal society that has excluded him.

The Connection Between Monster and Other

Heathcliff's bodily transformation in the text is made to serve a political rhetoric designed by Brontë, an indication of the political problems to be remedied. In doing so, his character reveals the limitations of our ways of ordering the world and the insufficiency of traditional categories in attempting to define subjects of alterity. Daniel Punday reveals that interest in monstrous or othered identities and their associated curiosities "reflect an attempt to come to terms with epistemological questions" (Punday 2002, 806). The fundamental debate challenged by *Wuthering Heights* is why we choose to monster the unknown and exclude the cultural Other. Heathcliff as the cultural Other addresses the socio-limitations of cultural difference. Paul Goetsch states that the monster "dwells at the gates of difference" and polices the border between inside and outside, known and unknown (Goetsch 2002, 17-18). Therefore, monstrous bodies, such as Heathcliff, symbolise the strangeness of the Other, and help to structure the self and the group the self belongs to. Accordingly, they draw boundaries between us and them, between 'I' and 'not I'. Heathcliff is confined to monocular vision attributed to race where his introduction to the reader as being "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and in manners" (Brontë 1847, 6). The gaps in Brontë's explanation of Heathcliff are filled by prejudiced perspectives concerning the abject, focusing the viewer's attention on him as the outsider. He exists always at the threshold, as an in-between identity, remaining forever an ambiguous construct that proves difficult to understand. This positions him as manifestly different from all other characters in the text where "not a soul knew to whom it [Heathcliff] belonged" (Brontë 1847, 43). Heathcliff serves as a cautionary sign that informs the reader of a change in the architecture of class and status. The

significance of the Gothic within the Victorian era was how it became a platform for resistance, and a stage to perform subversive narratives. Chris Baldick explains the purpose of the abject identities, in this case Heathcliff, was to reveal “the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning ... to erring humanity” (Baldick 1991, 256). Heathcliff’s indistinguishable origin and race makes him an unquestionable source of ambiguity and danger. With Heathcliff being defined as an aporia, as a definitively unknowable being, Brontë contests established assumptions concerning the complexities of human nature.

The narrative of Heathcliff’s identity can be taken apart to expose the aspects of humanity we attempt to suppress. The narrator Nelly Dean is the first to label Heathcliff as ‘Monster!’ and wishes that “he could be blotted out of creation and out of memory” (Brontë 1847, 204). There is an obscure void surrounding forbidden perspectives where society chooses to remain in the dark, ignoring the repressed desires of the unconscious. Within *Wuthering Heights* this metaphorical darkness is accentuated by the darkness that pervades the text where there:

was no moon, and every thing beneath lay in misty darkness; not a light gleamed from any of the house, far or near; all had been extinguished long ago; and those at Wuthering Heights were never visible. (Brontë 1847, 148)

With the fear of delving too deep into the unconscious, there is a predilection to ignore the darker elements of life. This extinguished thought therefore denies authentic identities to be realised and results in Brontë’s characters never being fully ‘visible’ in the text. As Heathcliff acknowledges “You’ll neither see nor hear anything to frighten you, if you refrain from prying” (Brontë, 1847, p. 384). Therefore, we determine not to interfere into the unknown or unfamiliar, preventing self-recognition in the process of protecting our minds from the oppressed psyche. Maria Beville determines that personalities who have been attached to the semiotics of monstrosity, are confined to such, because they are “frequently acknowledged as indefinable, remain[ing] indefinitely within the cultural spheres of the ‘repressed’” (Beville 2014, 1). Heathcliff shatters the

divide between the conscious and unconscious self, externalising abject thought and illicit behaviour. Heathcliff serves as an admonition of the darker aspects of the human mind, representing all that is forcibly inhibited. He becomes an emblem of untamed otherness, representing internally and externally all that is subjugated by the dominant class.

The Contagious Nature of the Abject

Upon the margins of traditional behaviour, Heathcliff transports others to the outskirts of the norm, manipulating his relationships to destabilise class definitions. In the case of Catherine, it is after she falls in love with Heathcliff's untamed quality that she abandons "the elegancies, and comforts, and friends of her former home, to fix contentedly, in such a wilderness as this" (Brontë 1847, 177). It is Heathcliff's presence at Wuthering Heights that allows others to challenge their given role. His arrival at the Heights is to divide Catherine from her father's governance, reconstituting her as 'a wild, wick slip' who transgresses Earnshaw's will and repudiates her own role as the quiescent daughter of patriarchy. According to Steven Vine, Heathcliff "metaphorises Catherine's otherness to the patriarchal world of the Heights-and Catherine 'is' Heathcliff insofar as he images her own eccentricity to that world" (Vine 1994, 345). Catherine as the unusual feminine is an othering presence due to her challenging stature towards patriarchal structures. In their different trajectories, both Heathcliff and Catherine move from a position of deviant subordination to socially dominant positions, thus interfering with the prevalent stable hierarchy. Catherine's statement that Heathcliff is 'more myself than I am' can be seen as a collapse in the barrier between Self and Other, as well as another example of how the monster is not just an external force but in fact lives within us. Catherine and Heathcliff encompass a love that denies difference and the binaries that force them apart. They share an intrinsic bond that stretches as far as Catherine

admitting she is Heathcliff. She does not say ‘I love Heathcliff’, but “I am Heathcliff” (Brontë 1847, 96). Catherine’s intricate connection to Heathcliff stems from her own feeling of isolation within the household unit of Thrushcross Grange and her marriage to Edgar. She reflects on her difference to Edgar saying “whatever our souls are made of, Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightening, or frost from fire” (Brontë 1847). Catherine sees herself only in a position of alterity stating “My God! Does he know how I’m altered” (Brontë 1847, 142). Her estrangement from the social structures that constrain her does not propel her toward insurrection but toward illness. In her disorientated state, she becomes incapable of recognising her own face in the mirror. In contradiction to Lacan’s ‘Mirror Phase’, Catherine’s recognition of herself in the mirror fragments her being rather than finding unity in the moment of seeing one’s reflection. Only when alongside Heathcliff can Catherine surpass the regulatory ideal, including the rules that clearly define and separate man and woman. However, as soon as Catherine inhabits Thrushcross Grange, she loses her source of transgressive power in Heathcliff and falls from female autonomy into conformist femininity.

Transgressing Normalcy

Much of the recently analytical attention to Heathcliff dwells on his oppositional stance and moral dissidence, figuring him as “a form of protest against the bourgeois capitalist forces of Thrushcross Grange” (Vine, 1994, p. 342). Even though Heathcliff achieves the same social standing as his fellow counterparts, he never succumbs to the behaviourism or mannerisms of the elitist class. His disposition remains a rebellious one throughout the narrative where his role as outsider never dwindles. It is noted that “though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged” (Brontë 1847, 118). It is his ability to threaten established ideals that casts a dark shadow over *Wuthering Heights*. From the

outset, his mere presence and physical exterior cause discomfort where Lockwood comments on how he “beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under the brows” (Brontë 1847, 3). The use of the word ‘withdraw’ sets the premise of Heathcliff’s position throughout the text, taking the place as outsider and withdrawing from the inflexible frameworks through which society operates. On the margins, he haunts the landscape and serves as an unwanted mirror that reflects back the uglier elements of all other characters. Like the “undefined shadows [that] lurk in the corners of the numerous projecting portions of the building” (Brontë 1847, 108), Heathcliff stalks the novel, a shadow of the unconscious self.

Peter K. Garrett determines that the aim of the Gothic is “to disturb its readers, and the disturbance it produces can be cognitive or ideological as well as affective, but is always accompanied by a strong concern for control” (Garrett 2003, 2). His untamed animalistic character is further emphasised by the feral dogs that reside at Wuthering Heights. Rena-Dozier digresses that “dogs represent all who would resist or despoil the perfection of domestic cleanliness and purity: they are opposed to the forces of domestic authority and must be punished and tamed” (Rena-Dozier 2010, 772). In turn, Heathcliff is seen as an intrusion that despoils the perfection of domestic cleanliness and purity. He is the undomesticated animal that changes the sacredness of the family unit and refuses all attempts to be trained in the customs of Victorian etiquette. Even in Heathcliff’s final moments, he remains a force of resistance. In the moment where Nelly tries to shut his eyes “they would not shut – they seemed to sneer at [her] attempts” (Brontë 1847, 392). This opposition even in death is symbolic of Heathcliff’s refusal to shut his eyes to the injustices and prejudices of the world. He ‘sneers’ at those who grasp onto linear perspectives and inflexible traditions, forever avoiding the stereotypical gaze. Even upon his death, he forces the reader

to keep their eyes open to accepting cultural difference, and not allow others shut off that perspective to them.

Heathcliff demonstrates the prospect of a change in vision in his ability to transgress socio-limitations. According to Peter K. Garrett, one of the main appeals to Gothic was how it came from “such resistance, from its promise of release from the limitations of cold reason and the commonplace” (*Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2003, p. 1). Thus, the presence of the abject other in any text is used to reimagine the power relations that mediate, and all too often determine, the limits of human possibility. Its contribution to literature is how it disputes binary oppositions and represents the extremes of identity. The resistant Other, especially in the case of Heathcliff “describes the simultaneous violation of physical and metaphysical boundaries” (O'Connor, 2000, p. 210). A psychoanalytic observation of the Other determines it as an articulation of the edges of humanness; the embodiment of something deviating from the norm. Due to Heathcliff's name being “the name of a son who died in childhood” (Brontë 1847, 43), his very title signifies something unfavourable and is reflective of the pervasive darkness that haunts the Heights. His ability to disobey conventional definition is seen as an infection that weakens and convolutes standards of upper-class decency. Edgar comments on how his “presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous” (Brontë 1847, 134). Solidifying the link between monster and Heathcliff, James Twitchell compares his parasitic nature to that of a vampire. He contends that he evidently is not a vampire but “his relationships with other people can be explained metaphorically and that the metaphor Emily Brontë developed was one of parasite and host, oppressor and victim, vampire and vampirised” (Twitchell 2004, 81). The plague that Heathcliff carries infects and weakens the systematic routine of Victorian convention and tradition. Heathcliff falls under the category of ‘monster’ or Other because he infringes upon cultural limits and escapes the

semiotic field, rendering established boundaries unstable. Due to the discomfort he causes to other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff becomes “the scourge, the infector carrying the plague to all he meets” (Twitchell 2004, 87). He scourges aristocratic customs in how he climbs the social ladder and obtains ownership over two estates, enabling a transgression of class prejudices. Reducing difference to a negative, Heathcliff is confined to be nothing more than a strange outsider who is disallowed entry into the status of the upper class. From an early age, he is a victim of exclusory tactics where his position within Wuthering Heights teeters on his ability to follow the rules. Catherine gives an account of his tainted childhood where her brother Hindley would not “let him sit with us, nor eat with us anymore . . . and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders” (Brontë 1847, 26). It is on the margins of the status quo that Heathcliff goes beyond the limits of what is acceptably human, providing a tangible site for the inscription of disobedience and transgression. He disrupts this social paradigm in a Machiavellian way where “so much had circumstances altered their positions, that he would certainly have struck a stranger born and bred gentlemen” (Brontë 1847, 173). The irrational terror that he provokes emerges from his attempt at violating boundaries and forcing others to abandon naturalised beliefs. David Sonstroem comments on how, during the reader’s encounter with Heathcliff, he/she experiences “vacillating allegiances, his sense of being afloat on a troubled conceptual and ethical sea” (Sonstroem 1971, 51). This ‘troubled conceptual and ethical sea’ reflects the semiotic field with which we are habitually familiar, yet Heathcliff’s character creates ripples that both unsettles and confuses the reader. His narrative function is to open up fixed meanings and identities to otherness, to invade the seemingly natural and turn it on its head. To Fred Botting “the effects of such novels are that they warn of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form” (Botting 1996, 7). Therefore, this calls into question is the Other merely perceived as such

because they do not follow the existing social order and escapes the dialectics of the general economy. It is Heathcliff who seems most insistent to shake the fixed structures of the novel's world. As Vine contends:

An unquiet and contradictory presence, Heathcliff can be seen as a trope of radical displacement: lacking a knowable origin... Heathcliff comes from outside, from the other, introducing an instability into the world that precariously incorporates him, and he is never stably lodged in any of the social places he assumes. (Vine 1994, 341)

Throughout the novel Heathcliff's unquiet presence articulates and exacerbates the internal instabilities of the world he invades.

The transcendent nature of both Heathcliff can be connected to the sublime effect, that which is seen as without boundaries and beyond the imaginable. With the 'sublime' being a fundamental element of the Romantic period, Heathcliff cannot be examined without reference to its rationalisation of elevated thought and untamed emotion. The sublime allows us to perceive an imposing object or figure in a different light, so that it may "be ultimately transformed into self-enlarging, quasi-spiritual transcendence" (Barney, 2010, p. 2). It looks at digression from the norm not as a deviant encounter, but as a transformative experience. Therefore, a re-imagining of the character of Heathcliff will look into how he shares a common purpose with the sublime in his transgression of cultural limits. Heathcliff exploits a number of contemporary insecurities, among which is the fear of being outside the ordinary. The 'splenetic sublime' coined by Richard E. Barney assists an understanding of our concern for the unknown while also uncovering the need of the unidentifiable subject for the functioning of all society. Linking mystery and the sublime to the human spleen, Barney reflects on how it "provides a dislocated, ungraspable centre around which is palpable" (Barney 2010, 4). Heathcliff can be put forward as embodying the 'splenetic sublime' in how he constitutes an unknown and incomprehensible presence who is able to transcend his 'ungraspable' identity as Other and utilise his abjectness to offer new meaning and challenge

the dominant modes of thinking. Barney sees the sublime as “having emerged from the contentious function of stretching, distending, and pushing to extreme limits the historically dominant modes of representation or perception” (Barney 2010, 8). Heathcliff therefore embodies the threatening sublime by stretching Victorian thinking and testing prevailing representative classifications.

Heathcliff becomes a catalyst for the personal suffering of other characters in the narrative, inducing both a sombre and sublime experience. He is the embodiment of the sublime that emerges from both uncertain and inexplicable mannerisms. He is positioned as “an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (Brontë 1847, 120). Even though his association with monstrosity is linked to his tentative behaviour, he still serves as a universal explanation for humanity’s tendency to monster the outsider and to equate uncanniness with evil. It is his combination of both the sublime and the uncanny that inflicts a metaphorical ‘wuthering’ upon narrative development.

Heathcliff as a Wuthering Force

Ambiguity not only surrounds his character but also permeates the framing devices of the text. *Wuthering Heights* is skewed by extremity: it is an architectural torsion wuthering between stability and instability. In Brontë’s own words she states “‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, [is] descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which [the house’s] station is exposed in stormy weather” (Brontë 1847, 4). The narrative is full of interruptions, with the perplexing transfer from past to present disallowing a fluidity and progress in both plot and character development. David Sonstroem states that “far from wholeheartedly endorsing an order, Emily Brontë depicts conceptual wuthering” (Sonstroem 1971, 51). The term ‘wuthering’ simultaneously describes both nature and human nature, and when used to describe Heathcliff, it in many ways acts as a

metonym for the place which he eventually comes to own. It is consequent of confusing identities and the inability to categorise abnormal elements in the text that demonstrates a failure in storytelling. The narrative is full of interruptions, with the perplexing transfer from past to present disallowing a fluidity and progress in both plot and character development. Lockwood even highlights how “time stagnates here” (Brontë 1847, 32). Knowledge of the Other, in this case Heathcliff, is denied to us through narratorial failure and narrative inadequacy. According to Scheider “fragmentation seems to refuse to tell the story from one reliable point of view, mirroring the confusion of what to believe and the possibility of erring fatally” (Scheider 2015, 10). Heathcliff represents an outside force that enters into the internal world of the prohibited gentry, attacking and convoluting it. The chaotic weather can be paralleled with the anarchy that follows Heathcliff, demonstrating an instability of both internal and external, where “a high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy” (Brontë 1847, 49). He mirrors the corrosive storm in how he too can invade the home as an exterior force, disrupting every corner of the family household. In a similar way to the tumultuous weather, he threatens *Wuthering Heights* with his unpredictable and uncontrolled strength. Vine suggests that the ‘wuthering’ embodied by Heathcliff “becomes a movement of othering: a passing of boundaries that takes the outside in and the inside out, where the familiar is made strange” (Vine 1994, 340).

It is Heathcliff’s ability to ‘wuther’ narrow definitions of identity, which allows for him to participate in a multi-faceted identification process. Brontë’s novel adopts the multi-narrative voice which opens a forum for multiple perspectives and demonstrates through this narrative device the possibility of alternative interpretations of Heathcliff’s character. If the reader were to rely on the perspective of Lockwood or Nelly alone, then Heathcliff would only be seen in a negative light. In *Wuthering Heights* Brontë outlines man’s refusal to

overlook his prejudices is what augments his inability to discern what lies beyond his limitations. Nelly and Lockwood present the limited eye, whereby the reader must actively reshape their interpretation of Heathcliff through an alternative lens.

The Villainous Victim

To a contemporary audience, the distorted form of Heathcliff can therefore be transmuted into a recognisable image. Heathcliff underscores that presented monstrous or othered identities are not intuitively immoral and are pushed by external influences toward malevolence. Lockwood admits how fear and anger can turn someone into, what Stephen T. Asma described as, an ‘accidental monster’ (Asma 2011, 13), whereby external forces that are out of our control dictate to us how to behave. In his words “terror made [him] cruel” (Brontë 1847, 29). It is consequent of society’s prejudiced stance and perspective that disallows the outsider to enter the realm of cultural norms. From the very beginning of the novel, Heathcliff is cast in the role as the hostile foreigner, and is demonised only for being his position outside the norm. From the moment of birth, external forces condition Heathcliff to see himself as unworthy and monstrous. Even before Lockwood is allowed access to this outcast’s full history, he is aware that a series of unfortunate events have shaped his aversive character. When speaking to Nelly he acknowledges Heathcliff “must have had some ups and downs in life to make him such a churl” (Brontë 1847, 40). Rather than just being ‘evil’, when looked at from an alternative view he can be seen to be a product of his upbringing. It is only his passion and emotion that shows us Heathcliff is not the presented ‘unfeeling child’ and validates to the reader the victim existing beneath bestowed villainous facade. Nicholas Mosley introduces the idea of the ‘hopeful monster’ that is not inherently evil but is simply born too early to be accepted by a conventional society. Mosley notes however that there is hope that the Gothic villain will be received by modern audiences where progressiveness is translated

through contemporary perspectives. It is from this observation that monsters “are things born perhaps slightly before their time; when it’s not known if the environment is quite ready for them” (Mosley 1993, 71).

For Heathcliff to be transformed, his position as tortured victim must be considered in any debates concerning his role as the antagonist. He represents everything that is peripheral to the ‘norms’ of self and society. Even though his intentions are injected with revenge and immorality, his position as a gothic villain remains an ambiguous factor. Brontë’s novel does not invite us to identify with Heathcliff—it only invites us to identify with those around him and interpret his character through their eyes. Clover comments on the stereotyped roles of victim and villain whose “roles no less prefabricated and predictable for their being performed by many or one” (Clover 2015, 12). It is these superficial categories, set up by the both the gothic and horror genre, that confines identities to one role and disallows alternative modes of representation from being formed. From these postmodern viewpoints, Heathcliff can be shown to no longer be someone that is inherently evil or a manifestation of otherness, but instead is a falsified persona shaped by a misconception of deviance and difference.

Current criticisms now see Heathcliff as victim as opposed to the negative illustrations of him in previous analytic literature. According to James Twitchell “the second generation of critics sees Heathcliff in shades of gray” (Twitchell 2004, 80). Essentially Heathcliff cannot be labelled as a monster because his ferocity spawns from him being a victim of his own misery. It is only Nelly who recognises Heathcliff is a victim of his own dismal situation. She notes “you have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery” (Brontë 1847, 337). Contemporary literature and thinking thus argue that people are not born cruel but become transformed into these vindictive beings as a result their own persecution. Readers therefore see Heathcliff from a different angle, from an

anamorphic perspective, through which he can be seen “as a mortal, as a fallible man who does his best in a scurvy world” (Twitchell 2004, 80). Nelly also accedes to how it was the maltreatment of Heathcliff caused by the strict regime of eighteenth-century English life that turned him into the monster he became. Heathcliff even ponders his existence and inner monstrosity, asking whether his situation would be as dark “had [he] been born where laws are less strict, and tastes less dainty” (Brontë 1847, 317). Nelly notes that the upbringing of Heathcliff, as well as Catherine, encouraged the deviant and darker self to be released from within. She notes that “the master’s bad ways and bad companions formed a pretty example for Catherine and Heathcliff. His treatment of the latter was enough to make a fiend of a saint” (Brontë 1847, 76). It is through language and the semiotic field that the categories of Self and Other are solidified. Through demonisation of Heathcliff, he metamorphoses into what people expect of him, conforming to the category assigned to him. This verbal conditioning of the monster is passed down onto Hareton where he confesses:

papa talks enough of my defects, and shows enough scorn of me, to make natural I should doubt myself- I doubt whether I am not altogether as worthlessness as he calls me. (Brontë 1847, 298)

The internal chaos Heathcliff possesses is that of a tormented man, and not of what we might traditionally term a monster. He is more human than most of the characters because he expresses his mortal passions and only instinctively acts on the emotions he holds. He is dominated by ardour, and his decisions are wrought with animal instinct and primal urge. *Wuthering Heights*, then, becomes a psychological study of an elemental man whose soul is torn between love and hate.

Conclusion

Misguided readings of Heathcliff’s character have driven audiences away from his representation as victim. However, a re-reading of the novel both subverts and

undermines the relationship between normalcy and the abject, redefining his role as the antihero. Heathcliff essentially incites a debate on the contributing agents to aberrant behaviour and challenges whether it is a socially constructed attitude or born from the deeper scopes of the mind. Through the postmodern lens, one can thus re-evaluate why we are uncomfortable with representations of otherness and how any form of difference will continue to be demonised by prejudiced eyes. In the context of monster studies, manifestations of the cultural Other as ‘monster’ or ‘demon’ places emphasis on the ongoing debates in the humanities and social sciences regarding cultural difference. Placing a magnified lens on the acts of monsterring the Other and the dislikeable aspects of humanity will show how observations of the cultural Other are rendered incomplete, as any true understanding of the Other will locate them outside the realm of unknowable and unfamiliar, making the subject harder to dehumanise and marginalise. Even though Heathcliff is without a narrative voice or any distinct identity, his actions speak to many transgressive ideas concerning gender, otherness and understandings of the abject. Where he lacks in definition, his obscure identity allows Brontë’s audience to displace their own trauma onto this tragic gothic villain. Thus, the once unfamiliar Other is exposed to share a familiar face to the differing insecurities of the reader.

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“A Man is Nothing without the Spice of the Devil in Him” Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester Navigate an Imperially- Inscribed Masculinity

Rachel Willis

Victorian literature is the site of imperially-inscribed discourses of gendered relations. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, in particular, layers Orientalist language over the descriptions and interactions of the novel’s main characters. This strategy allows Brontë to portray the interdependence of the sexes in colonial terms, replete with conquests, oppression, and marginalization. Jane Eyre narrates the novel, negotiating heavily-classed expectations of her sex while navigating Edward Rochester’s masculinity, using Orientalist language to justify her choices. We can adopt a similar strategy to analyze the novel’s gendered relations in terms of postcolonial theory, linking Western patriarchal masculinity to the colonizing figure and Western marginal femininity to the colonized. Thus, a further exploration of the way Jane traverses Rochester’s imperially-inscribed gender identity offers insight into the novel’s negotiation of power and oppression.

Scholars have read Brontë’s text in a variety of ways—Terry Eagleton has analyzed the novel in terms of Jane’s ambiguous social position as a governess (2005), feminist critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have traced Jane Eyre’s rise to prominence as a landmark feminist text in terms of gender relations (1979), scholars like Marianne Thormählen have fixated on the novel’s religious

aspects and on Jane's Christian faith (1999), and postcolonial theorists like Spivak have considered the novel alongside the postcolonial revisionist text *Wide Sargasso Sea*, noting that the novel tends to ignore the plight of colonial woman Bertha Mason (1985). Recent readings of the novel have taken up these subjects of class, race, gender, imperialism, religion, and more, since the novel lends itself so well to analysis of power and desire (Diederich 2010; Hanley 2009; Hope 2012; Dingley 2012). To these readings, I argue that a focus on Rochester's masculinity, inscribed as it is in terms of Western Protestant imperialist patriarchy, intersects the various emphases that others have placed on class, gender, religious, and colonial themes within *Jane Eyre*.

Since Brontë's use of colonial themes in the novel is so well-documented elsewhere (Meyer 1996; Zonana 1993; Michie 1992) it is beyond the scope of my argument to detail how extensively Orientalist language is used in the novel to characterize both Jane and Rochester in addition to characters like Bertha and Richard Mason, Lady and Blanche Ingram, and the Reeds. Instead, I align my paradigm with scholars like Ralph Austen, who argues that the novel does not have a "suppressed imperialist dimension," but that its over-representation of colonial concerns serves to teach us more about the novel rather than anything very directly about the British empire and its colonial subjects (2009, 113). Austen's approach correctly seeks to position the colonial references in the novel within the novel itself. Agreeing with this type of approach, Joyce Zonana posits that what she calls feminist orientalism¹ allows Brontë to critique patriarchal oppression in the West by displacing it onto Eastern or colonial locations. Zonana argues that this displacement enables "British readers to contemplate local problems without questioning their own self-definition as Westerners and

¹ Zonana argues that feminist orientalism "is a special case of the literary strategy of using the Orient as a means for what one writer has called Western 'self-redemption' . . . a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority" (1993, 72).

Christians" (1993, 71). I agree with Zonana's point and argue that the displacement she references allows Jane to critique her surroundings from a culturally-acceptable standpoint. As an example of this, Susan Meyer points out that the novel associates the "marginality and disempowerment Jane experiences due to her class and gender" with colonial others, the "dark races" (1996, 74). "By making these sly, intermittent allusions to nonwhite races when describing the British aristocracy," Meyer argues, "Brontë gives the 'dark races' the metaphorical role of representing the presence of oppression in the novel" (ibid., 80). Thus, what these scholars' collective arguments suggest is that Brontë characterizes Jane and others in relation to imperialist ideology as a way of locating and critiquing sites of power and oppression. And because of the hegemonic nature of the Victorian patriarchy—a site of power and oppression—an analysis of Rochester's masculinity and Jane's responses to it using postcolonial theories gives greater insight into the novel's interplay of power and desire.

According to David Armitage's *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, the spread of English Protestantism was one of the main catalysts for Great Britain's imperialist expansions. Armitage claims that "the ideological origins of English nationalism, British nationhood and, in turn, British imperialism have all been traced back to the Protestant Reformations in England and Scotland" (2000, 61). Gayatri Spivak notes this as well in her argument that Christian philosopher Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative—that man is an end in itself—became a justification of the imperialist project that proposed to "make the heathen into a human so that he can be treated as an end in himself" (248). As part of this ideology, the formation of the British colonies included missionary work that served part of a civilizing mission to the perceived colonial "savages." Spivak calls this program one of subject-making, another register of sexual reproduction (ibid., 247). Additionally, if the imperialism of the West

views its colonies as human subjects it has literally reproduced, then it necessarily inscribes this process in terms of gender as Jenni Ramone, author of *Postcolonial Theories*, argues: “Colonial acquisition is often described in these erotic terms, where the colonizer plays a dominant masculine role and the colonized land is figured as feminine, as virgin territory to be conquered” (2000, 30). Imperialism and colonialism, then, are figured as masculine penetrations and conquests of feminine spaces, which demonstrates how the patriarchal hegemony of the West is reproduced in and represented by its colonial subjects.

It is not only Western religion or patriarchy that is thrust upon the colonies, however. Homi Bhabha argues that Britain’s desire to reproduce itself in its colonies creates copies that are “almost the same, but not quite” (1984, 127), and that this “not quite” aspect represents a menace to the colonizer:

Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers. (ibid., 126)

In other words, mimicry indicates a complex and threatening relationship between the colonial powers and their colonies. Ania Loomba sums up Bhabha’s ideas well: “Resistance is a condition produced by the dominant discourse itself. Bhabha’s writings are indeed useful in insisting that neither colonizer nor colonized is independent of the other” (2005, 149). Essentially, what Bhabha and Loomba mean is that the project of imperialism has transformed the landscape to one of interdependence; the colonizers depend on the colonized, and simultaneously the colonized depend also on their colonizers. Similarly, in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë’s imperially-inscribed language portrays the interdependence of the sexes, making room for the marginalized Jane to resist her oppressors.

The Victorian patriarchal society Jane lives has marginalized her in several ways. As an orphan girl, Jane has both suffered at the hands of extreme Christian

patriarchy, embodied in the person of Mr. Brocklehurst, and been converted to a Christianity that denies Jane's ability to resist/rebel against her oppressor (Brontë 2003).² To reproduce this oppression using postcolonial terms, we might say that the patriarchy views Jane, a woman, as something to be colonized. The success of this colonization appears in Jane's acceptance of Christianity, through the moderator of Helen Burns, and in Jane's attempts to repress her restless spirit, which would rebel against the patriarchy if allowed. Her conversion to Christianity and repression of her wild nature is not a complete buy-in to the Western patriarchal terms of her colonizers, however.³ It is, in the words of Bhabha, "almost the same, but not quite," a form of mimesis that nonetheless is dependent on Western patriarchy for her ability to thrive and later resist. Postcolonial theory demonstrates that once the colonizers imbue the colonized with their Christianity—a civilizing mission—the colonizers also imbue the colonized with the means of resistance. Thus, the opportunity afforded Jane to attend the oppressively patriarchal Brocklehurst's school provides her with the religion she will later use to resist Rochester's patriarchal attempts to colonize her completely. In fact, the state of Rochester's masculine identity itself contributes to Jane's resistance in its over-extension of patriarchal ideals.

Edward Rochester's place in *Jane Eyre* is central to Jane's progress and elevation. Rochester is, as Robert Kendrick argues, "crucial" to the narrative of gender relations since he "rearticulates and redefines his position as a masculine subject, as he reexamines the ethical implications of the masculine prerogatives that he has enjoyed and abused" (1994, 237). In other words, Rochester can alter

² Mr. Brocklehurst says that because of her penchant to resist, Jane is "not a member of the true flock" (Brontë 2003, 100), but Helen Burns explains Christianity's non-resistance to Jane in a way that enables Jane to accept the doctrine of contentment despite deprivation and mistreatment (ibid., 89-90, 104-105)

³ Jane notes how Miss Temple helped to repress Jane's restless and rebellious spirit: "I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple—or rather that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity—and that now I was left in my lateral element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions" (ibid., 126).

his masculine identity as he is confronted with the ways that identity has afforded him certain privileges. As a result, Rochester's fluid masculine identity intersects the conventional Western Protestant imperialist patriarchy in a variety of ways. First, within the English landed gentry, Rochester's masculinity is tenuous. His initial position as second son requires him to make his own way in the world, for as Kendrick notes, "without money and holdings of his own he does not fit his class's narrative of a mature male subject" (ibid., 236). This is important because it initially locates Rochester in a subordinated position of power. Since masculinities theorists like Michael Kimmel (1994, 125) assert that masculinity is a constructed identity seeking to navigate a definition of ideal masculinity as powerful and hegemonic, Rochester turns to what Kimmel calls Marketplace Man to assert his dominance. In Kimmel's view, the "Marketplace Man derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman. Restless, agitated, and anxious, Marketplace Man was an absentee landlord at home and an absent father with his children" (ibid., 123). In other words, a man establishing his masculinity using marketplace strategies would derive his identity from an accumulation of wealth. This would offer a path to masculine power, which would always be tenuous and require continued maintenance, for if his wealth was ever lost, the Marketplace Man would need to find a new way to assert his masculine identity. As Marketplace Man, Rochester literally derives his masculinity from the colonies, making explicit his connection to colonization as oppressor: he accumulates wealth through his mercenary marriage to the West Indian Bertha Mason. The maintenance of his newly acquired colonial business holdings allow him to take up his place in England, though still on the margins of the British gentility. His brother's death allows him to assume the place of firstborn; however, his utilization of a marketplace masculinity simultaneously prevents him from attaining full status. For though Rochester is now part of the landed gentry,

his method of accumulating wealth through marrying the mad, non-British person of Bertha Mason, whom Victorian society others, prevents him from being completely on par with his British landed peers. Although his link with the colonial other might prevent him from fully attaining the British Victorian masculine ideal, Rochester's masculinity is still inscribed by imperialism, as are the hegemonic identities of his British peers. This combination of Rochester's marginalization and his possession of masculine power allows for Jane's references to him as both colonizer and colonized—his masculinity is associated with the colonizer, but his marginalization is associated with the colonized.

A closer look at the language Brontë uses to describe Rochester reveals this positioning as both colonizer and colonized. For example, while Jane notes Rochester's marginal identity as an English gentleman through references to his dark features that mark his otherness (Brontë 2003, 167), which Elsie Michie argues "suggests that he fits into the simianized images of the Irish that were beginning to be produced" when Brontë was writing (1994, 130), she also ascribes characteristics to him that are a distinctly Victorian ideal of British masculinity. We learn, for example, that Rochester has a strong and athletic body with a broad chest (Brontë 2003, 167), that in personality he is "all energy, decision, will" (ibid., 252), and that "there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious" (ibid., 194). Her description of Rochester's embodied manhood is especially telling, for Rochester's indifference to his appearance and pride in his demonstrated qualities of virility fits with a hegemonic standard of masculinity for that time. Masculinities historian Christopher Forth traces a reaction of men across Europe around 1800 against what the British thought of as a distinctly French focus on appearance and good looks (2008, 47). The focus turned from the "effeminate man's" concern over dress to a "real man's" demonstration of

unyielding virility and strength (ibid., 42). From this, we can infer that Rochester's valorization of his own active masculinity while being simultaneously unconcerned with his looks is a rejection of effeminacy. Thus, Jane's response to her master's masculinity is to highlight these exteriorized aspects of it and compare it to other, inferior examples set by Rochester's peers.⁴

Rochester's hegemonic masculinity is built on British colonialism, and his link to imperialism also makes him an object of Jane's desire. Social historian Joane Nagel (1998) explains that scholars equate the development of a hegemonic British nationalist masculinity with the expansion of the British Empire, inscribing the national standards of masculinity as imperialist. Thus the same standards of masculinity that Jane prioritizes and admires in Rochester are also the same standards of masculinity that encouraged colonization and reproduction of British societies elsewhere.⁵ Her admiration of Rochester's hegemonic masculinity, in accordance with Victorian gendered ideals, makes it difficult for Jane to resist his colonization of her. Complicating this is also the fact that Rochester's marginalized manhood also allows Jane to identify with him. Daniela Garofalo, in *Manly Leaders in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, resolves the problem of Jane's desire for Rochester by explaining that "[f]or Jane, the oppression of women and the lower classes consists first and foremost in a refusal to offer them the pleasures of adventure . . . Rochester brings the pleasures of the master home to Jane so that she can put aside the boredom of domestic life and create a new kind of home" (2008, 143). In fact, it is not just Jane who feels this way. Rochester's troubled negotiation of the ideal British masculinity leaves him

⁴ Jane "compared [Rochester] to his guests. What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram—even the military distinction of Colonel Dent, contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power" (Brontë 2003, 252)?

⁵ Rochester's masculinity is even inscribed by imperialism in his relationship to the French girl Adele, who he derides for being shallow and obsessed with appearance. Jane notes once sadly that "if [Adele] could but have been proved to resemble him, he would have thought more of her" (ibid., 212). In other words, if Rochester could have reproduced in Adele a copy of his own British nationalism that derided her concern for dress, he would have loved her more.

seeking a relationship with Jane where power that is not based on the accumulation of wealth circulates more equally between them; he, too, is looking for a new kind of home than the one he has had.

Jane's partial colonization, or rather her mimicry of Western, Protestant, imperial, patriarchal ideals prior to her arrival at Rochester's house, has already primed her for the entrance of Rochester's compromised masculinity and the creation of an interdependent relationship between master and servant. Rochester notes how her mimicry is both appropriately submissive yet inappropriately powerful: "Jane, you please me, and you master me—you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart . . . I am influenced—conquered" (Brontë 2003, 372). But if Rochester feels that she has conquered him, Jane herself is ready to be conquered more completely—lending not just her social status and general behavior to the patriarchy's power, but her feelings as well: "[His features] were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his" (ibid., 252). We see here that her attraction to Rochester is coded in terms of power where Jane positions herself as subordinate to him. However, though Jane wishes to yield to her conqueror, upon learning that he has over-extended the power of his position beyond what a Christian, imperially-inscribed masculinity permitted, her mimicry becomes subversive. This is significant to their relationship and the ways imperialism is inscribed in the novel. For while Rochester desires Jane's mimicry initially, when the "menace" that Bhabha notes is inherent in mimicry threatens Rochester's attempts to over-extend his patriarchy, as Kendrick claims he does by attempting bigamy (250), Rochester's response is a violent one. In colonial terms, he desires to suppress Jane's rebellion through force. Garofalo notes that the couple's "doom would be to reduce their relationship simply to one of brute oppression and to establish an explicit hierarchy," (146) which is what Rochester's instinctual response is to do. In attempting to dominate Jane, he

replicates the patriarchy's hegemonic oppression of women, but that hegemony has also given Jane the tools to resist Rochester's claims of dominance and to undermine his attempted use of violence against her because her master's claims of authority in this instance clash with Christianity's law.

Although Rochester's masculinity is marginalized in some ways, his attempts to navigate the ideals of proper British manhood have led him to depart from the dominant Victorian moral code, which Kendrick notes is within the masculine privilege of his class. By keeping mistresses and fathering an illegitimate child, Rochester, according to Kendrick, is able to return to some form of patriarchal power despite his closeted wife (251). We see his power in the way Rochester dominates the relationships and activities of his house-party.⁶ On the other hand, his indulgence of passion also violates the law of God according to the Protestant religion, and Rochester laments how this diminishes his masculine identity, saying first to Jane, "Nature meant me to be, on the whole, a good man," and then confessing to her, "I am a trite commonplace sinner, hackneyed in all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life" (Brontë 2003, 198). Christopher Forth, in his work on masculinity in the modern West, calls this tension the "'paradox' of the Protestant ethic [that] is at heart the paradox of a consumer society that encourages both self-discipline and self-indulgence (52). Thus, Rochester's status as manly gentleman is undermined by his indulgence in the things that simultaneously reinforce his class's privilege and power. To demonstrate this simultaneous identification with patriarchal power and that power's undermining, Jane nearly always associates Rochester with the "oriental" whenever they discuss his penchant for breaking the laws of God. He is positioned, in short, as a "savage" and a "heathen"—a man who is powerful but still in need of the civilizing (and emasculating) Protestant religion. In the

⁶ Jane notes that if Rochester "was absent from the room an hour, a perceptible dullness seemed to steal over the spirits of his guests; and his re-entrance was sure to give a fresh impulse to the vivacity of conversation" (272).

instance, for example, where Rochester is first deciding his plans of wooing Jane, he invokes the unalterability of the laws of the Medes and Persians in a reference to the East as well as an acknowledgement that his plan goes against Western Protestant Christianity. In terms of Rochester's masculinity, however, this misbehavior does not necessarily diminish his British manhood in the eyes of society, indicated by Blanche Ingram's assertion that "a man is nothing without the spice of the devil in him" (Brontë 2003, 258). Jane herself delights in calling Rochester her "master" (ibid., 359) when he displays his power. However, Elsie Michie notes that "when Rochester is characterized as most powerful relative to Jane, he is most explicitly associated with the "oriental," (1992, 136) and Zonana points out that because Jane sees Rochester in this way she "later is able to free herself from a degrading relationship with a man who has bought women, is willing to become a bigamist, and acts like a despot" (1993, 74), rebelling against his heathen ideas even when he is at his most powerful. Maria Lamonaca notes in an article on Christianity and feminism in *Jane Eyre* that "[b]y discerning for herself what she perceives to be God's will, Jane effectively resists Rochester's . . . attempts to possess her spirit as well as her body" (1992, 246). In other words, Jane denies his supposed right as a man and her almost-husband to command her when that right infringes on the law of God.

Jane's resistance to Rochester, despite his masculine power and his almost-total success at colonizing her, is anchored in the religious principles that her colonization has imbued her with. Her resistance, in effect, threatens to emasculate Rochester, who pleads with her, asking, "What shall I do, Jane? Where turn for a companion and for some hope?" (Brontë 2003, 450). Jane's response is to instruct him to "trust in God and yourself" (ibid.) Rochester's next question is again inscribed by Western Protestant imperialist patriarchy: "Then you will not yield?" (ibid.). That word "yield" is associated with the Biblical call to wives to submit to their husbands (Col. 3:18 and Eph. 5:22), the Victorian

understanding of the domestic realm, and with the imperial demands placed on colonial subjects. Jane's refusal to yield to Rochester's colonization of her renders him without power to control her, as he complains: "Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage—with a stern triumph . . . Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place" (Brontë 2003, 452). In this complaint, Rochester notes that his attempt to completely colonize both the land and its inhabitants—Jane's body and her spirit—is a failure.

Jane's flight from Rochester's colonization ends in his physical emasculation despite a moral remasculinization. We learn that when Bertha sets the house on fire, Rochester saves her, and this can be read as a Christian submission to God appropriate of Western British men who were supposed to be the protectors of women, as Victorian author John Ruskin (2002) claims. Ruskin writes of men: "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender" (77). Kendrick even argues that if Rochester had not tried to save his wife, it would have represented a final alignment with Oriental heathenism that abrogates the laws of God, recalling the earlier conversation between Rochester and Jane when Rochester desires to pass a law as unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians (252). Rochester's attempt to save Bertha, however, fails and destroys both his hand, which is tied to his strength, and his vision, which is tied to his patriarchal power of the male gaze. The emasculating nature of his injuries is clear to him, as he notes to Jane at the novel's end, "You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness?" (Brontë, 632). Yet, Jane, as Garofalo points out, recognizes the inherent power located within her master despite his physical limitations: "At the moment that Rochester's masculinity seems most imperiled, it ceases to become a matter of the

physical body and becomes, instead, a sublime object that seduces Jane. This strength, not of the body, offers a new virility seemingly unrelated to social power" (150). This new masculine strength is directly related to a clearer allegiance and submission to the Protestant God that Jane believes in, as we see when Rochester prays that God would grant him strength to live a purer life with Jane than he had once led (635). As Garofalo puts it, "This is a mastery that emerges, as it were, out of the ashes of a purifying fire that burns off the social superfluities of caste and gender leaving the essential nature" (150). Postcolonially, we can see that in *Jane Eyre*, as Edward Said in a discussion of decolonization notes, "[I]nstead of liberation after decolonization one simply gets the old colonial structures replicated in new national terms" (74). But these terms are more equal, for now *both* Rochester and Jane are submitted to an authority higher than that inscribed by imperial masculinity. Thus, when Rochester's literal reproduction, his son, is placed in his arms by his wife Jane, Rochester thanks God, with whom true authority for subject-making lies.

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The Stranger and the Other

Radical Alterity in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*

Hamza Karam Ally

In the introduction to his book, *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon*, John Thieme considers a key question regarding the agency and predicament of postcolonial societies and authors. Namely, is the act of responding or 'writing back'—by postcolonial authors to Orientalist or other canonical texts in the European tradition—by definition a reactionary reinforcement of the latter's very indispensability? Thieme argues the contrary case, i.e. that the meta-effect of postcolonial reimaginings of the canon ('con-texts'), whether intended or otherwise, is in fact not the confirmation of an oppositional binary but rather a problematization of it. As postcolonial authors set about the task of refuting European canonical authority in the latter half of the twentieth century, Thieme observes that "[it became] increasingly apparent that the official 'record' to which they were writing back was far from unitary" (2001, 2). Instead of 'correcting the record', or otherwise undermining the ostensibly monolithic stability of the canon, the net result of writing back was to reveal hidden instabilities therein, showing the canon itself to be comprised of "unstable objects...being constructed anew by each postcolonial writer's gaze in a kind of parodic reversal of the process by which postcolonial subjects had been constructed as 'other' during the heyday of imperialism" (ibid.).

The conversation between the canonical and the postcolonial, between text and ‘con-text’, Thieme suggests, delves into an interstice whose coordinates are defined by a crosspollination of contradictions, what he calls a “discursive dialectic operating along a continuum” (ibid.). Recalling Jacques Lacan’s insights on the hidden psychological fissures and dimensions of language, the perhaps surprising discovery of the broader project of proverbially returning serve (particularly in the case of texts specifically about colonial societies) was to discover a hidden territory of conjugation and contradiction, both with and *within* the ‘official record’ itself. Thieme concludes: “[w]hether or not they set out to be combative, the postcolonial con-texts invariably seemed to induce a reconsideration of the supposedly hegemonic status of their canonical departure points, opening up fissures in their supposedly solid foundations” (ibid.).

Kamel Daoud’s 2013 debut novel *The Meursault Investigation* is a particularly explicit instance of ‘writing back’, a contemporary reinvention of Albert Camus’ seminal *L’Étranger* (*The Stranger*) (1942). Daoud’s book is a mirror image, inverted lengthwise, written from the point of view of the brother of the nameless murdered Algerian “Arab” in *The Stranger*. *Meursault* attempts to recover and mourn the victim—who functions mostly as sort of a prop in the existential, late colonial drama of Camus’ novel—by belatedly giving him not only a name but an identity, a past. This simple act of naming begins to humanize the Arab, lifting him out of his provincial otherness, his obscurity. It also, of course, re-centers the act and power of authorship, in the quite literal sense of conferring narrative (and canonical) authority upon the postcolonial subject, a counter-discourse that seeks to ‘set things straight’.

Yet although Daoud sets out ostensibly to refute *The Stranger*, his narrator Harun Uld el-Assas finds himself instead repeatedly walking along the same path as his counterpart, Meursault, if in the opposite direction. Harun explains his intent, as he understands it, to his nameless interviewer: to rescue the voice of his

murdered brother Musa and to reverse the current of Camus' story, perhaps arriving eventually at convergence: "It's simple: The story we're talking about should be rewritten, in the same language, but from right to left. That is, starting when the Arab's body was still alive, going down the narrow streets that led to his demise, giving him a name, right up until the bullet hit him" (Daoud 2015, 7). Multiple levels of directionality come into question in this phrase: the figurative, i.e. the perspective from which the story is narrated and the literal, the right to left direction of Arabic script, a vectorial 'opposition' to Latin/ English or, as Daoud writes, "a story that begins at the end and goes back to the beginning. Yes, like a school of salmon swimming upstream" (ibid., 2). Both these senses share a counterpoise relationship to Camus' original; Daoud's project is not mere rebuttal but to en flesh a subjectivity is missing in *The Stranger*, one that fills in its predecessor's silences and shapes the interaction between the texts in a dialectical rather than autocratic form. In this sense, a third meaning of the reversal of direction of the text is the historical, i.e. not just the story of Meursault and the Arab told chronologically backwards but also the story of French colonization told from an Algerian perspective.

The two texts thus take up adversarial positions in a pitched battle, a collision of subjectivities. The novel begins with a rebuke of Camus' nonchalant "Maman died today" (Camus 1954, 3); "Mama's still alive today" Harun declares (Daoud 2015, 1). Daoud's novel follows this path throughout, opposing Camus while also echoing him. Harun seems, in spite of himself, to discover more and more aspects of Meursault within himself, each turned on its axis. Where Meursault's mother is a distant apparition who, as critics like Jean Gassin and Patrick McCarthy have observed, is evoked by natural symbols (as I discuss shortly), Harun's relationship with his mother is its opposite number. Harun is oppressed by his mother's overbearance, her "sensual closeness" (2015, 16), and the survivor's guilt that fractures their relationship after his brother's death ("She

seemed to resent me for a death I basically refused to undergo, and so she punished me”) (2015, 36).

Daoud’s novel is not actually written from right to left, as it would be in Arabic. It was originally published in his native Algeria in French, under the more illuminating title *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Meursault, counter-investigation). Though opposed and opposing, the two novels thus also share a repository of meaning, nuance and signification embedded in their common vernacular, and so their postures nonetheless each bear a colonial imprint. Daoud acknowledges the imperialism of language from the outset, noting the dull echo of Camus’ voice in his own prose (2015, 3), but he does so by imagining the project of the postcolonial novel in European languages more broadly as a repurposing of the language, in much the same way as postcolonial societies must assimilate the ruined artifacts of colonialist art and architecture within their own continuing history. Harun self-consciously presents his story as a symbolic syncretisation that parallels that of his native Algeria after French colonization: “I’m going to do what was done in this country after Independence: I’m going to take the stones from the old houses the colonists left behind, remove them one by one, and build my own house, my own language” (ibid.). As he explains to the graduate student to whom the narrative is addressed, language is the last evidence on the crime scene of his brother’s murder, and so also the means by which he can draw himself closer to Meursault.

As Homi Bhabha has argued, this ‘hybridity’ (incarnated by the figure of the postcolonial person whose identity exists ‘in between’ the colonizing and colonized cultures), though often understood as evidence of the dominance of the colonizing culture’s narrative, actually disrupts the colonialist project by confounding the latter’s authoritative expectations. Bhabha explains, “[s]omething opens up as an effect of this dialectic...that will not be contained within it, that cannot be returned to the two oppositional principles” (1995, 82). By

appropriating the colonizer's language, Harun leaves Meursault nowhere to hide, drawing him ever closer to a metatextual confrontation: "You look surprised by my language" Harun later tells the interviewer, "I devoured thousands of books! It seemed to me I was approaching the places where the murderer had lived, I was holding him by the jacket while he was embarking for nothingness, I was forcing him to turn around, look at me, recognize me, speak to me, respond to me, take me seriously" (Daoud 2015, 89-90). Even the structure of Daoud's novel—a confession to a stranger in a bar in Oran (as reviewers like *The Guardian's* Nick Fraser (2015) have noted) is a refrain of a later Camus work, *La Chute* (The Fall) (1956), in which Camus' narrator relates his story to an unnamed second-person audience in a series of monologues in a bar in Amsterdam. Though they are narratively and ritually counterpoised, Daoud seems to seek with Camus' a synergy, an eclipse, where the common meaning of things becomes plain—or alternatively, where Camus, like Meursault, can be called to account for his colonialist indifference. This imbricative synthesis between the two texts penetrates to the imagistic and symbolic levels, and open the novels to a provocatively Hegelian reading, i.e. a higher resolution of two opposing truths. And, as I will argue, it constitutes a textual version of what the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas described as the moment of first ethics, when the self and the other are afforded the opportunity to act justly toward each other on a more spontaneous level.

In addition to Harun's assertive use of colonialist vernacular, *Meursault* deliberately revisits and repurposes several of *The Stranger's* events, symbols and metaphors. Like Meursault, Harun is deeply alienated from God, but experiences his alienation as abandonment. Both characters respond to God as an agent of the father from whom each has been estranged. "Friday?" Harun scornfully remarks, "It's not a day when God rested, it's a day when he decided to run away and never come back" (Daoud 2015, 69), echoing the magistrate who tells a skeptical

Meursault “all men believe in God, even those who turn their backs on Him” (Camus 1989, 69). For Harun, the indifference is at least mutual, again reminding us that there are two halves to a whole, even when one is in absentia. “When the sun’s not there to blind you,” Harun explains to the interviewer, “what you’re looking at is God’s back” (Daoud 2015, 39).

Daoud’s appropriation of the Algerian sun as a symbol of Meursault’s existential panic, in the first, functions as an explicit refutation of Oriental myths of the mysterious, secret-laden darkness of the former colonies. Harun, like his brother, is not the other that is the bearer of secrets or greater truths who Meursault must kill to silence—he suffers under the *same* oppressive sun as his counterpart. Daoud describes the movement of the sun on Friday, the primary day of communal prayer, as indicative of the same divine indifference, the effect of which is to reclaim the subjectivity of the colonized, to undermine the Orientalist belief that spiritual crisis is the sole purview (and marker) of the enlightened colonizer:

It’s the Friday prayer hour I detest the most...there’s the sun, which runs its course uselessly on that eternal day, and the almost physical sensation of the idleness of the whole cosmos...As for death, I got close to it years ago, and it never brought me closer to God...there’s nothing on the other side but an empty beach in the sun (68-70).

As with *Meursault*’s counterposition with *The Stranger* and its mimetic structure with *La Chute*, the borrowing of Camus’ symbolic currency allows Daoud’s text to enter the discursive space opened by Camus while challenging, again, the latter’s canonical privilege.

The provincial sun plays various potential roles in Camus’ text; it alternatively excites Meursault to his existential crisis (McCarthy 1988, 49-52), stands in for his absent father or chastises him for his indifference to his mother’s death (Gassin 1981, 226). It has also been interpreted as Camus indirectly addressing the race question, perhaps depoliticizing it. The sun and sea

periodically incite Meursault to fits of Pied-Noir (French Algerian) anxiety without directly referring to it, since, as McCarthy argues, to invoke it directly would itself be a transgression. "The conflict between colonizer and colonized cannot be treated directly," McCarthy observes, "if the legitimacy of the colonizer is not to be undermined" (1988, 49).

Camus' numerous references to the sun are persistently ambiguous; it watches over nearly all of Meursault's movements, but it does so as both witness and chastiser, standing in for the absent parent. The first reference to the sun in *The Stranger*, as Meursault stands by his mother's coffin, is affirmational: "The room was filled with beautiful late-afternoon sunlight" (1989, 7). But as he rises the next day, the sun quickly ascends to its appointed position as superego overseer: "When I went outside, the sun was up... [it] was now a little higher in the sky: it was starting to warm my feet" (ibid., 12). Soon after, Meursault describes a growing feeling of discomfort and exposure: "The sun was beginning to bear down on the earth and it was getting hotter by the minute...I was surprised at how fast the sun was climbing in the sky" (ibid., 15-16).

Meursault's relationship with Marie, his romantic partner, is repeatedly reproached by the sun acting as a powerful representation of maternal superego (with Marie as id): "the day, already bright with the sun, hit me like a slap in the face. Marie was jumping with joy and kept on saying what a beautiful day it was" (ibid., 47). Marie is positioned as a potential replacement for Meursault's mother (McCarthy 1988, 50), and his coolness to Marie's suggestion of marriage followed by his nihilistic murder of the Arab suggest a dual alienation from both women. The sun is thus also a sign of Meursault's emotional estrangement; as McCarthy notes "Meursault is fleeing both the indifferent mother and the tender Marie. He is still unable to free himself from the former by caring for the latter" (1988, 53).

Like these other important scenes, the moment Meursault shoots the

anonymous Arab (Harun's brother Musa in Daoud's novel) on the beach is accompanied by overwhelming flashes of sunlight and heat, exciting in him a sort of violence that seems less like bloodlust and more a kind of lapse or vertigo ("[t]hat's when everything began to reel" (1989, 59)), a losing of his grip on himself. Just before the murder, Meursault feels a sort of overspilling or *exceeding* of himself, again accompanied by maternal alienation. Stuart Gilbert's original 1946 translation (the British edition originally titled *The Outsider*) is more instructive on this point:

The heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks; beads of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows. It was just the same sort of heat as at my mother's funeral, and I had the same disagreeable sensations — especially in my forehead, where all the veins seemed to be bursting through the skin. I couldn't stand it any longer... (1954, 75)

There is a notable nuance in Gilbert's translation here, one that augments the feeling of a swelling over, a torrent of hot blood. Later editions, like Ward's, have replaced Gilbert's "bursting through" (Fr. *battaient*, 'to beat against') with "throbbing under". The former, I feel, is far more revealing, and heightens the sense of something uncontrollable *inside* which, roused to a frenzy by the sun, Meursault is no longer able to restrain. In the Algerian afternoon, Meursault's subjectivity seems to be not melting exactly but rather becoming untethered from him, spilling out of his own person. Washed out by the sun, his ironic posture—represented especially during his trial as a detached self-restraint—disappears into an act of emotionally enflamed violence against the colonial subject. Instead of a personal or abject death caused by imperialist indifference, Camus writes the murder as a moment of fiery Judgement or Phlegethontic condemnation (In Ward's translation, "The sea carried up a thick, fiery breath. It seemed to me as if the sky split open from one end to the other to rain down fire" (1989, 59)).

And yet, as the sun makes Meursault a stranger to himself, it transforms "the stranger" from "Arab" (i.e. the faceless colonial subject, who is transparent under the imperial gaze) to the other who is unknown and unknowable, the wrathful

bearer of terrible truths. Meursault describes a shaft of sunlight that reflects off the Arab's knife that seems to join him to Meursault even as it threatens him, a physical sign of their metaphysical encounter, in Gilbert's version, a "long, thin blade [which] transfixed [his] forehead" (1954, 75). The result of this assault is that Meursault is temporarily blinded, awestruck, and so commits the murder in a condition of rapture. But, I argue, this is a blindness that has in fact the opposite symbolic purpose; blotting out the physical features—and politics—of the colonizer and colonized, it reveals instead the chthonic level of the other in *himself*. The scene becomes not about the Frenchman and the Arab but the self and the other laid bare, strangers met on a beach. The symbolic function of the sun in *The Stranger* is to both draw out and make imminent the other's alterity (or in Lacanian terms, the *object a* or the *remainder*) and thereby reveal the strangeness of the self alienated from itself. Simultaneous with its other imagistic functions, the sun exposes the frailty inherent within identity; rather than heighten Meursault's fear of the other's impending Arabness, he is literally blinded to it. In the final accounting, the precise nature of the Arab's foreignness, his identity, seem to fall away for Meursault in the same way as does his own grip on himself, and his violence is instead directed at the other's *metaphysical* aspect and proximity. While the sun blinds Meursault to his action, everything else is left harshly exposed—in its essential nakedness, in what Levinas called "face to face" relation.

Conversely, in the moments immediately preceding the murder, Camus twice describes the Arab's face as shrouded in the shadow of a rock, ostensibly the only shade available on the sunlit beach, though "the rest of his body [was] in the sun" (1954, 58). So obscured, Meursault strains to read or understand the Arab's features and intentions, and the inability to read the other's face immediately engenders a crisis within Meursault of his own subjectivity: "Maybe it was the shadows on his face, but it looked like he was laughing. I waited. The

sun was starting to burn my cheeks, and I could feel drops of sweat gathering in my eyebrows” (ibid.). The inscrutability of the other’s face dooms the encounter to catastrophe.

Levinas’ ethics begin at the moment of the face to face encounter, which is the source of his ethical first philosophy. This initial encounter occurs before cognition or self-consciousness, i.e. in a moment that precedes individuation. In this moment of anonymity, the first imperative of the face of the other is: do not kill me; Levinas explains, “[t]he first word of the face is the ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is an order” (1985, 89). The nature of this request is both literal and symbolic, an imperative to resist the will to murder but also to dominate, to subsume the other within my own consciousness. The other, for Levinas, possesses a “radical alterity” quite apart from the world of objects, the latter of which can be understood through contemplation. Radical alterity presents therefore for me an ethical dilemma (whose potential resolutions include both murder and ontological violence). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas’ describes the other “as interlocutor, as him over whom I cannot have power, whom I cannot kill” (1961, 84). The first demand of the face of the other is therefore toward ethics, not understanding. ‘Doing justice’ to the other is to respect his alterity without trying to counter or destroy it. The ethics of this encounter, significantly, are decoupled in Levinas from rational morality, which requires not only reflection and deliberation but also individuation and the desublimation of the primordial, preconscious encounter into bodies (and then identities etc.). “[A]s critique precedes dogmatism,” Levinas declares, “metaphysics precedes ontology” (ibid., 43). What Levinas deems the “epiphany” of the face is that it opens up this space for a radical ethics of radical that is both pre-rational and pre-ontological; it does not impel upon me to uphold a set of moral obligations, each of which are naturally predicated on a legal or sociocultural, not metaphysical relation, and in which “[we] would remain within the idealism of a consciousness of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other”

(1961, 199).

What is especially unusual about this philosophy is that it is not based on empathy, and in fact is theoretically opposed to empathy as a construct. It does not proceed from a recognition of the other's likeness to me or on the other confirming to me my own transcendental ego. Levinas' ethics are explicitly spontaneous. The justice that the other's face demands begins with humility, an acknowledgement of the other's phenomenological "infinity" and the "strangeness of the other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions" (1961, 43). This insistence clearly distinguishes Levinas' approach from one based on, in common parlance, putting oneself in another's shoes.

The other Levinas imagines here is explicitly not a reflection of myself, but rather beyond my imagination altogether. And it is this other that Meursault encounters on the beach. Meursault's relation and his ethical failure is not in the strictest sense with an "Arab", whose name he does not know and whose face he cannot see, but with otherness itself; his undoing in this moment is his inability, in Levinas' terms, to recognize the other as a subject who possesses an absolute (and independent) alterity. In his feverish delirium, Meursault's most primal anxiety is his inability to practice Levinas' ethics and responsibility for the other as first philosophy. As he continues to fire, the face of the stranger becomes only an "inert body" (1954, 58) and the encounter with the other comes to ruin.

Daoud too affirms the symbolic centrality and omnipresence of the sun, which seems to compel him toward the same madness as his predecessor. The sun recurs more discretely in Daoud's novel as a vision both of the colonizer's moment of moral trepidation and ultimate self-absolution. Harun is at first contemptuous of Meursault's identity crisis on the beach, and of Camus' implied sympathy for Meursault over his anonymous victim:

So the Frenchman plays the dead man and goes on and on about how he lost his mother, and then about how he lost his body in the sun, and then about how he lost a girlfriend's body, and then about how he went to church and discovered that his

God had deserted the human body...Good God, how can you kill someone and then take even his own death away from him? (Daoud 2015, 3)

But Harun seems elsewhere wary of the sun himself, cognisant somehow of it as a threat, its potency to totally immolate subjectivity. Notwithstanding his derision of Meursault's purported defense, Harun muses about something similarly mysterious, something clearly Icarian that happens under the sun. "Musa didn't do anything that day but get too close to the sun, in a way" (Daoud 2015, 62) he reflects, seemingly speaking more to himself than to his interviewer. He appears not to know exactly what he means by this; the observation seems to catch him unawares. But the revelation that follows, his "family secret" (Daoud 2015, 80)—that he, too, had murdered a man during the Algerian war of Independence (in his case, a Frenchman)—blurs the lines between him and Meursault, the former following in the latter's wake. Days before the murder, Harun sees the Frenchman, Joseph (whom he takes care to name) for the first time, and their eventual violent meeting is heavily foreshadowed. This first encounter, on a crowded street in the afternoon, is immediately assailed by the sun, reprising its role from *The Stranger* as the panoptic overseer under which the relation with otherness plays out. "That afternoon there was a big, heavy, blinding sun in the sky," Harun recalls, "and the unbearable heat scrambled my mind" (Daoud 2015, 82). So blinded, Harun enters the same state of ignorance about the other's political and racial identity as Meursault, an underworld in which the other, stripped of his physical features, is at his/her most alien and threatening.

Yet, again, it precisely *in* this ignorance there that there arises the possibility for ethical relations. Blindness under the sun depoliticizes the encounter with the Frenchman, but the other who one meets in this 'blindness' is a metaphysical subject, unknown and unknowable, irradiated by the sun yet hidden in shadow—in Levinas terms, the other "metaphysically desired" (1961, 33). The ethical stakes of Harun's encounter with the Frenchman are so raised even higher; the

other he confronts is not the Frenchman Joseph or (intertextually) Meursault, but the radically other. For his part Harun, unlike Meursault, seems to recognize (if only in retrospect) these consequences. “The Other is a unit of measurement you lose when you kill” (Daoud 2015, 90) he tells the interviewer, “I’d chilled all human bodies by killing only one...the only verse in the Koran that resonates with me is this: ‘if you kill a single person, it is as if you have killed the whole of mankind’” (Daoud 2015, 91).

The killing itself happens not in the sun but at night, in a revealing tableau of light and shadow. Joseph emerges as if out of a primeval darkness, slowly taking on a human shape as Harun peers into the night: “The black shadow suddenly had eyes...the beginnings of a face” (Daoud 2015, 83). Daoud’s language here evokes another of Levinas’ phenomenological insights, the precarious fluctuation between form and non-form he called the *il y a*, the depersonalized and primordial void made imminent through the encounter with the other. Literally translated as the “there is”, Levinas describes the *il y a* as both formless and the very state of formlessness, a kind of indistinct or perhaps Tao-like fabric of everything and nothing, wherein “anything can count for anything else...[and where] the I is itself submerged by the night” (1978, 58-59).¹

The Frenchman seems to hover in this “there is”, in an in-between, taking and then losing shape. His face emerges out of and then dissolves back into darkness, and the encounter, the ethical moment, teeters on the verge of failure as he does so. Significantly, Harun waits until the moment when the face is no longer recognizable *as a face* before firing. Again, as Levinas tells us, it is the face of the other which first “orders and ordains” (1985, 97) us towards ethics, that first puts forth the imperative “Thou shalt not kill” (1985, 89). So it is not incidentally that,

¹ Though it is by its very nature impossible to describe in language, it may be useful to imagine the *il y a* as a coming into contact with the purest anonymity, a seeping back of everything into an original, chaotic state which is always at the threshold of the world of form. The *il y a* is always both imminent and *immanent*—again imprecisely, like a kind of universal white noise or omnipresent background radiation.

just like Meursault on the beach, looking upon the Arab whose face is in shadow, Harun is momentarily able to absolve himself of his responsibility for the other only when Joseph's face fades back into the night: "the Frenchman moved...and retreated into the shadows...the darkness devoured what remained of his humanity" (Daoud 2015, 85). Harun reels at the danger of the moment; objects seem to verge on disappearance into the *il y a* ("every angle and curve stood out so confusedly"), and the encounter becomes ossified entirely outside of the flow of time, "as if our lives since Musa's death had been nothing but playacting" (Daoud 2015, 84).

Like he does with Camus' sun symbolism, Daoud here both appropriates Meursault's action and repurposes it, and by so doing lays out one of his main challenges to Camus. The right to violence, Harun seems to declare, i.e. to deny Levinas' invocation against the murder of other, does not exclusively belong to the colonizer. By subsuming Meursault's violence within himself, Harun also stakes claim to the choice and consequences of violence as an expression of postcolonial subjectivity. His murder of the Frenchman inverts the direction of the violence so that it is no longer the exclusive right of the imperial power but can be directed back at it. By taking Meursault's murder from him, as it were, and showing that to kill is not a colonial invention, Harun affirms his earlier vow, that is, to "take the stones from the old houses the colonists left behind...build [his] own house" (Daoud 2015, 2).

And yet, to his great frustration, the murder of the Joseph becomes itself a mere mimicry. As a sort of burlesque of Meursault's famous trial, Harun is afterwards accosted by authorities not for the murder in and of itself, but rather—absurdly—that he did not do it in service of the Algerian Revolution (Daoud 2015, 109) but for personal reasons and that his real crime was therefore not being adequately patriotic. The other, Joseph, so disappears from the scene of the encounter in the same manner as Musa from the beach. And, rather than being

validated as a murderer, Harun is robbed of his revenge against Meursault and—synergistically— left as alienated from his crime as Meursault from his. “The Frenchman,” he ruefully observes, “had been erased with the same meticulousness applied to the Arab on the beach twenty years earlier” (Daoud 2015, 97). In the postcolonial role of writing back, Harun finds himself instead re-enacting something beyond his control. The murder ultimately leads him to a terrible discovery that becomes, in my reading, the novel’s key insight: that the same story, when told “from right to left”, must therefore meet its opposite number in the middle.

The two indifferent murders thus comprise a kind of overlay of the two novels, joining them across time and space. Harun tellingly echoes Meursault when recalling the moment of Musa’s death twenty years earlier: “I can’t clearly make out Musa’s face” (Daoud 2015, 73). I contend therefore that the two murders are not, symbolically, opposing actions, one avenging the other, but rather the *same* action seen from opposing sides. As Thieme suggests about the canon and its con-texts, the murders of Musa and Joseph create an interstice, in Bhabha’s terms, an adjoining third space opened by the ‘collision’ of the two texts themselves. Harun specifically references a meeting of the two ‘stories’, left and right, as he describes finding the doomed Frenchman at first trapped between two levels or *stories* of his house, the word here taking on a profound double meaning: “The man was there, wedged between two stories and some walls, and his only way out was my story, which left him no chance” (Daoud 2015, 83-84). The way “out” represents, in my reading, a synthesis, a liminal passage to and from both books. Daoud has himself spoken to this point, stating in an interview with *The New Yorker* in 2015: “I’m not responding to Camus—I’m finding my own path *through* Camus” [*italics mine*] (Treisman 2015).

Daoud’s novel is thus neither a homage to nor rebuke of *The Stranger*, but what I consider an overwriting of a story on top of another which has the effect of

subverting the original's authority. Daoud's work fills in the gaps, twisting through and around Camus, and the resulting shape of the new "hybrid" text is dynamic, a mutation only partially resembling its progenitors. *Meursault* begins and ends with patterns of this eclipse, as if the fabric of his story is drawn taut over Camus' and so must traverse the same distance along the same contours. In addition to metamorphosing "Maman died today", Daoud coopts Camus' culminating statement of Meursault's defiance on the eve of his execution: "that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of [his] execution and that they greet [him] with cries of hate" (1989, 123). Harun finds at last his wish granted, to meet his counterpart face to face, live inside the other's skin: "I too would wish them to be legion, my spectators, and savage in their hate" (2015, 143).

Daoud's truth is double-edged, simultaneous with its own refutation. It exists on the membrane between two worlds, two societies, between the self and the other. *The Meursault Investigation*, purportedly a 'response novel' to *The Stranger*, thus actually establishes a dialectic, the resolution to which is a truth whose epistemology is uncertain. It asks, as its key refrain, an intimidating question: what happens to the epistemology of the self when it collides with or even collapses into the other?

As a final challenge to the reader, Harun ponders the possibility of two opposites being true at the same time and the shape of such a dialectical world. Daoud presents this as a choice to the reader, as if the answer might open up a path forward, a transcendence built on contradiction, a shared reality between self and other:

Do you find my story suitable? It's all I can offer you. It's my word...It's like the biography of God...no one knows if his story is true or not. The Arab's the Arab, God's God. No name, no initials. Blue overalls and blue sky. Two unknown persons on an endless beach. Which is truer? An intimate question. It's up to you to decide. (2015, 143)

What is Daoud asking us to "decide" here, and what are the consequences of this

decision? What effect does reading these ostensibly oppositional works as ‘dialectical’ instead have on their comment on alterity? And how does the concept of two texts in ‘eclipse’ inform or parallel the self and the other in the act of recognition? Considering Camus’ and Daoud’s intertextual conversation as itself a dialectical encounter, informed by GWF Hegel’s insights into otherness and the “double movement” of self-consciousness offers us potential ways to think through these questions. It is especially revealing to engage these questions in the context of Hegel’s description of self-consciousness.

In the fourth chapter of *The Phenomenology of Mind*² (1807), Hegel’s famous treatise on dialectics (and other related subjects), he describes “the process of Recognition” (2003, 105) as the starting point or catalyst for self-consciousness, i.e. for one’s fundamental awareness of one’s own distinct subjectivity—and thus for all aspects of what we might upon subsequent reflection call identity. Like Levinas, Hegel argues that encountering otherness is profoundly consequential for one’s understanding of one’s place and relationship to the world. Unlike Levinas, however, for Hegel the self and the other are perpetually exchanged in a struggle for mutual recognition, one which does not prioritize, as Levinas does, ethics above all else, but rather makes recognition (and then mastery) its focus. Hegel’s encounter traces the first emergence of the “I”, of self-consciousness itself, through its dialectical relationship with the other. The self, and for the other himself, is negatively determined through reciprocity—I begin where the other ends and he where I end. As Bernardo Ferro summarizes in his essay on Hegel and otherness, “self-consciousness is never equal to itself. It is what it is through the simultaneous positing of what it is not, i.e., through the positing of an otherness it continuously discards... the self-conscious self is never simply this or that. Its identity stems from the very act of negating” (2013, 3).

² Alternatively translated as *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, a significant difficulty produced by the German word *Geist* which carries both (and other) meanings.

Hegel refers to this movement of mutual recognition as a “double movement” that takes primacy over all other relations³.

Levinas’ ethics seem, at least ostensibly, to approach the problem from the opposite direction. By prioritizing responsibility for the other over reciprocity, Levinas’ idea about the relationship to the other appears asymmetrical; i.e. it does *not*, as a condition for ethics, demand ethics from the other—I am responsible for the other irrespective of the other’s behavior towards me. Thus asymmetry is at the core of the disagreement between Hegel and Levinas, one that ensues from the rules under which the dialectic occurs: “[T]he rupture [between Hegel and Levinas]” Robert Bernasconi writes in trying to resolve the two views, occurs “precisely at the point where Hegelian dialectics attempts to contain the ethical within the bounds of the ontological” (2005, 50).

Yet this purported opposition, between Hegel’s dialectic as “symmetrical” and Levinas’ ethics as “asymmetric”, seems nonetheless to converge and find a higher resolution in what Jacques Derrida calls a “transcendental” truth, an underlying symmetry (1978, 157). Derrida argues that the other, in order to *be* an other (for whom I am responsible) must be in the same predicament as myself, i.e. confronted by *my* otherness. In his essay on Levinas, *Violence and Metaphysics*, Derrida describes the recognition of the other as a subject, as one for whom I must therefore be responsible, as indispensable in Levinas as in Hegel. Derrida’s point is quite straightforward: in order for there to be an other to whom I am responsible, I must first assume that the other is independent from me and is faced

³ Ferro further clarifies the “double movement” of Hegelian dialectics as a persistent reciprocity, an “infinite coming and going, [in which] *self and other* are both moments of self-consciousness and are both completely dependent upon each other: on the one hand, as if facing a mirror, consciousness can only acknowledge itself as self-consciousness by putting an *other* in front of itself... Self-consciousness is a purely negative entity, which must be conquered anew with each new moment. In light of its self-moving nature, the tautology *I am I* does not really amount to a positive affirmation, but rather to the negative acknowledgment that *I am not another*. This *I* of which identity is predicated is nothing more than *what is left* when all otherness was gotten rid of...[yet] by stating that *I am not another*, that same *I* is forever tied to the otherness it seeks to eliminate” (2013, 4).

with the same ethical dilemma when he encounters me. “The movement of transcendence toward the other,” Derrida observes, “would have no meaning if it did not bear within it...[that] I know myself to be other for the other” (157). Without this “transcendental symmetry”, were I not to proceed from the belief that the other is “my fellow man as foreigner” (157-159), both self-consciousness (through negation) and the opportunity for ethical relations cannot arise. In a sense then, Hegel’s constellation can be interpreted both an opponent of Levinas’ (the dialectical encounter is possible only with *another of myself*, i.e. otherness that is not truly radical or infinite) *and* as a necessity for Levinas’ ethical relationship, in that the other confirms to me my own subjectivity and therefore my responsibility for him.

The stakes, therefore, in the encounter with the other are not simply recognizing or not recognizing the other as subject *or even* the self becoming conscious of itself (i.e. Hegel calls the tautology of *I am I*); if to encounter otherness is a requisite for self-consciousness, the self is therefore in itself a site of trauma, and the very ordering of reality, the coordinates and conditions under which I can posit the existence and viability of subject vs object are in question—a question I can answer only through the other. And ultimately, the consequences of a ‘failure’, an encounter that ends without symmetry or reciprocity (i.e. a recognition of the other’s radical alterity), are to lose *both* the ethical and the ontological, both the moment for ‘doing justice’ to the other and *I am I*.

The space for a transcendental ethics, for a relationship with the other that is not a totalization, is opened by the act of mutual recognition. And it is this test that Camus and Daoud put to their protagonists, one that each eventually fails. Meursault’s encounter with the Arab on the beach and Harun’s reciprocation of sorts with the Frenchman are each an instance of a disrupted dialectical relationship with the other. Shrouded in darkness (and in the case of the Arab on the beach, deprived of a name), the other cannot achieve the transcendental

symmetry of mutual recognition. Across time, culture and politics, Meursault and Harun, like Camus and Daoud themselves, grapple with the possibility of the other as “my fellow man as foreigner” (Derrida 1978, 157-159)—*another of myself*—but are left with only suspicion and shadows. And thus both journeys to find in the other redemption for the self end in utter failure.

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Postcolonial Transformations

Queering the Narrative in Hasan Namir's *God in Pink*

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Forgive me. I don't know your name. After all, I have only seen you once. I hope you are able to help me since I have no one else to reach out to. I know you must be wondering why, of all people I chose you. I don't have the answer myself. But I can tell you this...*When I looked into your eyes, I thought you were somewhat different.*

Now I begin *my story*. (Namir, 2015, 7, *Emphasis added*)

The passage here opens Hasan Namir's text *God in Pink* (2015), the first novel written by a gay Iraqi man that deals explicitly with homosexuality and Islam in the Middle East. However, setting the author and his background aside for a moment and focusing on the text itself, at first glance, this passage reads seemingly illegibly. Firstly, the narrator refuses to divulge the reason for writing to the specific person reading the passage. Clearly, the narrator articulates their isolation as an outsider in need of help with "no one to turn to." Silence is encrypted in this passage by what is withheld—gender, sex, orientation, nationality, names, places, and individuals. The nameless narrator invites the reader in only to isolate them. Stylistically, the narrator seems to be addressing the reader, "Forgive me, I don't know your name. I have only seen you once." The narrator creates an inversion between the text and the reader. First, the narrator subjects the reader to a singular perception, a perception that cannot be returned.

Then, the focus is shifted from the narrator to the reader. Finally, the reader must reevaluate their position in comparison to the story about to unfold.

The opening passage, then, becomes disorienting, disruptive, confining, and resistive. Considerably, illegible. The opening passage is signifyingly *queer*. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) Lee Edelman, points to the disruptive and namelessness nature of queerness that this passage personifies. Edelman, pushing against reproductive futurism, explains that queerness “must [always] insist on disturbing...on queering ourselves...” and that queerness can never fully be named nor can it ever truly “define an identity” (17). Instead, Edelman claims that queerness can “only disturb” identities (17). Additionally, Edelman explains that queerness can only ever disturb an identity by “shift[ing] the figural burden of queerness onto someone else” (27). The opening passage becomes more legible by coding queerness as the process by which an identity is only ever disturbed, never named, and shifting queerness onto someone else. Moreover, Edelman’s coding of queerness points to the nature of queer narratives and their ability to disrupt dominant narratives and discourses. Therefore, in order for the unnamed narrator to begin what seems like an affirmation of queerness they must first “shift the burden of queerness” onto another individual: *I can tell you this...when I looked you in the eyes I could tell you were different* (Namir, 2015, 7). Once the burden of queerness is shifted, the narrative moves forward with the only affirming line in the entire introduction: Now I will begin *my story*. In this case, the reader becomes the one marked by difference—the outsider. Thus, the narrator’s story can only begin once the burden of queerness is passed to someone else. The narrator above is the main protagonist of Namir’s novel, a young man by the name of Ramy. As Ramy’s narrative unfolds the reader learns that he is a self-identified homosexual. Given that the novel takes place in Iraq, where homosexuality is condemned by religious institutions, Ramy occupies a

place of otherness—he begins his letter with a declaration of helplessness— “I have no one else” (Namir, 2015, 7).

Reading the introduction to *God in Pink* as a moment of disorienting and disruptive queerness points to the ways queer narratives possess the ability to disrupt dominant forms of narrative discourses. One dominant discourse Queer narratives disrupt are narratives of colonization (Abu Assab 2017). Furthermore, in the essay that follows, Namir’s novel, *God in Pink*, will be contextualized as a narrative that posits queerness as a means of overcoming the essentialist binaries created by colonization that dictate who and what is othered through the use of queer bodies that transform normative religious and heteronormative national identities. First, the essay will analyze the ways heteronormative national identities are queered/disturbed by calling attention to the fallacies inherent in singular national dichotomies. Secondly, the essay will address the ways in which queerness is able to transform singular national identities. In doing so, this essay will argue that queer narratives, as represented by *God in Pink*, in colonized spaces offer the means to understand how the future of such places offer the key to decolonizing and transforming singular national futures.

I. Imagined Queer(ie)s: Shifting the Narrative of Queerness

To truly understand the ways in which queerness can transform national identities, it must be understood in terms of the way queerness is constructed in the Middle East. The Middle East embodies one place where colonial history and recent interventions by the US and other world powers formed competing discourses of power each with different factions with their own national identities (Abu Assab and Nasser Eddin 2018, 49). While laws that criminalize same-sex relations are non-existent (with the exception of Penal Law Number 19 and the Decree Number 9 that prohibit homosexuality in the military), religious sects, in the form of nation-states with their own justice systems act outside the jurisdiction of national

laws as well as international human rights laws (CTDC 2017; Abu-Assab and Nasser-Eddin 2018, 49). However, contextualizing Arab sexualities is more complicated¹—gender roles, familial relations, and cultural norms overlap and differ from one country to another (Jones and Tell 2018).

Therefore, Iraqi nationality is influenced by multiple cultural discourses each influenced by national narratives—in this case Islam and Western patriarchy reinforce narratives of heterosexuality and family. While the West might interpret sexual relationships as explicitly homosexual, this is not always the case for some Arab men (or women) who engage in same-sex relationships (Haddad 2016). With this in mind, the dominant narrative at work in Iraq is greatly influenced by Western norms and carried out by a narrow interpretation of Islam, resulting in “heteronormative nationalisms on both sides of the postcolonial divide [collaborating] with each other” (Dhawan 2013, 195).

One major aspect of Iraqi national narratives is the connection between the nation and the family. Like other postcolonial regions and nations, in the Middle East the nation and the family are deeply connected to colonial liberation—the family represents a national narrative of unity and futurity (Chatterjee 1993, 232). For example, the family serves as a symbol of the nation and marriage functions as the means to produce more national subjects (Abu Assab and Nasser Eddin 2018, 54). While in Western cultures such as Europe and the United States gender roles and gender deviance are used as the main factor of surveilling non-normative bodies, in Iraqi culture same-sex relationships that do not end in marriage are considered taboo and illegal and often faced with violence and erasure when perceived a threat (ibid. 55).

With that said, how might queer narratives and bodies exists in Middle Eastern spaces when they face of such adversity and othering? While Edelman

¹By bringing attention to the complications of Arab sexualities, certain theorists might categorize homosexuality as a product of Western intervention. For further clarification on this argument see Joseph Massad’s theoretical work *Desiring Arabs* (2007).

claims queerness can only ever disturb identities, queerness in the context of Arab literatures have the potential to stand on their own. In her essay “Queering narratives and narrating Queer: Colonial queer subjects in the Arab World” Nour Abu Assab (2017) points to the ways an analysis of queer Arab narratives might be used to decolonize the nation as well as the body while explaining how Queer Arab narratives deal with oppositional discourses. She explains that in order to translate queer narratives, one must consider the narrative and how it was, and is still used, to further colonial agendas. Therefore, she explains how the narrative can be used to decolonize the effects of colonialism and the types of surveillance described above. Abu Assab writes “Narratives are crucial to understanding colonial relations...Narratives of queerness have become associated with sexual minorities, and are used to police identity categories for LGBT individuals...A queering of translation narratives involves looking at [these] dominant narratives and their queer opposites in contextualized terms” (2017, 28). Here, Abu-Assab explains that to truly overcome colonial narratives, queerness must be read alongside dominant narratives—and contextualized. However, she points to a key component of the ways in which queerness might overwrite colonial narratives—queerness functions as *oppositional*. However, it is not enough to simply posit that queerness is oppositional. Similar to Edelman’s definition of queerness, this notion assumes that queerness can only exist in *juxtaposition* to straightness.

Furthermore, if the reader is to understand Ramy’s story—a story that only begins once queerness works as a form of othering—it is important to contextualize his position as somewhere outside/but within a patriarchal nation. Therefore, in order to understand how queer Arab narratives overcome dominant narratives by disturbing and transforming them, Iraqi citizenship must be contextualized. Referring to the text for an example, Ramy reveals how justice in the form of religion and family is used to control and exclude queer Arabs from the nation resulting in the negation of his individuality and citizenship. In the

second half of the first letter Ramy writes to Sheikh Ammar, Ramy describes how Iraqis are all the same, as well as locating the fallacies in such dominant narrative discourses:

Do you really know our city, Baghdad, sir? Most people would try to find eloquent words to describe it. For me Baghdad is a city that has evaporated into tiny particles of filth. *We* often think our lives are ordinary. *We* often look down on the streets, crowded with our fathers going to work, our children going to school, and our mothers praying for our souls and taking care of our homes. Some say that Baghdad has changed since the war, but *I believe* that things are the same. *We* are the *same*. Everyone sees “justice” differently. (Namir 2015, 7, *Emphasis added*)

While Ramy claims that Baghdad hasn’t changed since the Iraq War, he is unaware of his exclusion from the nation even if his language says otherwise. The US passed on its own practices of regulating the body in continuation of the nation via “reproduction and bodily control” (Abu-Assab & Nasser-Eddin 2018, 53). However, in this passage, Ramy also recognizes the limits/negation of his own national citizenship through oppositions as well as nationalism. Furthermore, he establishes his position within the nation. This passage contrasts with the first passage where Ramy is unwilling to divulge names or locations without first establishing a difference. Moreover, Ramy shifts the burden of queerness once more; he queers Baghdad. Again, Ramy shifts queerness away from himself and positions the nation as a queer construct.

Therefore, Ramy’s life is dictated by oppositions established within the social norms of Iraqi culture. The cultural oppositions are not singular in nature, however, but pluralistic. Ramy establishes the singular “Iraqi” through the signifying pluralistic pronoun “We.” The collective “we” is made up of fathers, children, and mothers—each of which make up the normative nuclear family. In the illustration that Ramy provides, a family consists of a father, a child(ren), and a mother. All the aspects of the family are irrevocably connected to Baghdad, as are the roles they play in representing the nation. If the family symbolizes the national norm it is explicitly tied to the nation represented by the capital city of

Baghdad. Moreover, the negativity Ramy personifies through this description of Iraq is due mostly to the responsibilities that Ramy must shoulder when it comes to his own family. Ramy explains to Sheikh Ammar continuing his letter “Their [his brother Mohammed and his wife Noor] love was strong...marrying after their return to Iraq. My brother and his wife cannot conceive a child” (Namir 2015, 8). The inability of Ramy’s brother to have children, shifts the future of his family onto Ramy—a future Mohammed is deeply invested in as he explains to Ramy “I [Mohammed] want to make Mama and Baba happy in their graves” (ibid., 17).

Ramy remains caught between two dichotomies: the future of his family and the future of his queerness. Because his queerness faces uncertainty, Ramy uses his narrative to shift queerness once again—questioning the validity of the family. Dispersed throughout this passage is a language of negativity, a language subtle, yet provocative, in who/what it categorizes. Moreover, attached to the norm is a negated language. Ramy sees Baghdad as a mixture of “Tiny particles of filth” and “ordinary lives.” Such language reveals the nature of living on the outside, but still encompassed by the collective, a space that Ramy occupies. In the final lines of the passage, Ramy also establishes a caveat in which difference/opposition can be located within the norm. He states that “Everyone,” not “We,” “sees justice differently.” Ramy uses the pronoun “Everyone” instead of “We” to imply that citizens can break the norms that seem to attain their power from normative national ways of being. This marks the first place where Ramy begins to disrupt the national, using “We” as the singular metaphor for Iraq. Moreover, Ramy is working through moving beyond the essentialism of binaries established by Western narratives of control responsible for normative narratives.

Therefore, Ramy attempts to locate a position outside but within the nation through a narrative of his own design—he doesn’t exactly oppose the nation, but he doesn’t exactly see it as a positive addition to his own life. Queerness, once again, in Ramy’s eyes represents the failure of the heteronormative individual to

imagine alternative means of existence—he engages in a narrative of queer failure. Jack Halberstam, previously Judith Halberstam, in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), works on defining the spaces where queer bodies, or individuals, create counter discourses to the heterosexual/homosexual binary (87). He states—in regards to queer narratives—that “I tell it [the narrative of failure] also as a narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, an art of unbecoming...The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (Halberstam 2011, 88). Here, Halberstam shows that failure is not just losing, instead failure functions as a means to search and look for other ways of living beyond the margins. In other words, Halberstam explains in this passage that there is power in imagining new alternatives of existence and embracing the negative connotations associated with excluded identities—finding power in the failure of living on the outside.

Therefore, a queer aesthetic is one that plays with failure and turns it into something else. It (the queer aesthetic of failure) “confuses” and in doing so questions the “systems” that designate certain queer bodies as examples of failure. Halberstam takes this a step further stating, “We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed, failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities” (ibid, 88). By questioning failure as indifference, Halberstam believes that failure can be used to reveal the fallacies embedded in ideologies that dominate discourses.

Therefore, Ramy’s negation of the nation, and the heteronormativity he finds holding him prisoner due to the “close-minded repressive” people in Iraq, is the beginning of his own queer narrative that recognizes alternative futures beyond the family (Namir 2015, 8). It is markedly a representation of queer

failure to imagine alternative means of existence. Ramy's queer imagination can be further clarified when he meets his second boyfriend, Sammy. Ramy first meets Sammy at school as Sammy is practicing the violin. During this scene, Sammy plays the song "My Heart Will Go On" by Céline Dion. While listening to Sammy play, Ramy "[imagines he] is Rose and Sammy is Jack...[*Titanic*] convinced me that I would rather die in the arms of a lover than die alone in a world that imprisons me in silence" (ibid., 65). Ramy transforms a popular heterosexual couple, Rose and Jack from *Titanic*, by transposing homosexuality onto heterosexuality through depicting himself and Sammy as Rose and Jack. Even though Rose and Jack are a non-normative couple who break class-based norms by being together, they are ultimately a doomed couple. However, Ramy believes fiction can provide visibility to social transgressions and creates possible alternatives to norms that may not exist in real life. Through his imagination, Ramy is able to subvert social norms inherent in his society—as well as Western cultural influences. Although it is a fundamentally flawed reimagination, he offers an alternative way outside of his imprisonment because he counters the normativity of heterosexuality. Again, Ramy's queer narrative shifts the perspective, subverting the norm.

While he might seem silenced, Ramy challenges his imprisonment within the heteronational when he discusses homosexuality and Islam with Ammar: "Sir, this is my final question to you: why can't I be a devout Muslim and be true to myself at the same time?" (Namir 2015, 104). By asking this question, Ramy disrupts the singular view that non-normative identities are not able to be religious—he forgoes the singular "We" and instead invokes the personal "I." Secondly, by voicing an unspoken taboo—one cannot be Muslim and homosexual—Ramy imagines a new narrative different than the one that delegitimizes his existence; his narrative isn't exactly *oppositional* as it is an alternative. He questions the belief that Iraqi-Islamic citizenship relies on

heteronormativity, supported by a single interpretation of Islam and opens a space for homosexuals through a language of possibilities. Instead, he no longer accepts that he must be Muslim and heterosexual in order to be considered Iraqi. Instead, he provides an alternative, a possibility; he can be Muslim and *homosexual* even if Iraq denies his homosexuality.

Through language and imagination, Ramy queers the national narrative of Iraq, but Ramy never fully establishes a collective outside of the nation. While his language reveals that there are possibilities and alternatives, he is never ever truly able to break outside the norms, only disrupt/push at them. In doing so, Ramy makes it possible for other homosexual Iraqi Muslims to create a collectivity through the visibility of his faith and homosexuality. For example, when Ramy's brother Mohammed approaches Ramy in order to arrange his marriage, he is unable to articulate to his brother that he will be unhappy in a heterosexual relationship. Mohammed shows Ramy a picture of Yasmine, a potential wife, and asks "What do you think?" to which Ramy responds in his head "I am thinking of another life, a different future, with someone else," but states out loud "She's nice" (Namir 2015, 37).

Once again, Ramy is caught within two oppositions: the heteronational and his desire to be queer—the latter of which is only a different future, a possibility, an utterance. Ramy's inability to make the imagined physical happens once again when Mohammed drives him home from the mosque where the Sheikh has delivered a sermon on homosexuality. During the drive home, Mohammed asks Ramy if he is '*lotee*' (gay): "He turns and grabs my shirt collar. 'I need to know the truth. Are you...? God, I can't even say the word.... Are you *lotee*?' (Namir 2015, 52). Ramy states that he is not, but directly after he imagines an alternate conversation, "Mohammad is driving, and I feel uncomfortable as I sit beside him. He says, 'I want to know the truth.'... 'What truth?' I finally ask. Are you *lotee*? He asks. 'Yes'... 'I've always known.' A moment of silence follows.

He smiles, leans over, and kisses my cheek” (ibid., 52-53). These two passages show that he can only imagine a narrative future where homosexuality is known and visible for what it is; in imagining his brother articulate his homosexuality, Ramy lays the groundwork for change. Once again, Ramy connects his homosexuality to his faith through this reimagination of the situation in which his brother questions him. Ramy sees no harm in being both homosexual and Muslim. When Ramy reflects on alternative moments in his life that involve both his homosexuality and his faith, he is showing the possibilities for queer Arab spaces outside the nation.

II. Transformative Narratives: Queering the National Body

Although Ramy is unable to wholly establish his own place as a queer Iraqi, he still has agency to influence others through how he records and shifts his own queer narrative. Part of Ramy’s inability to fully realize his own queer narrative is that he occupies a space between queerness and heterosexuality—he doesn’t exist within the space of Islam. Therefore, in order for a Queer body to Transform the national story—it must do so from within a space of Islam and heterosexuality. Returning once again to the beginning of the text, Ramy shifts queerness onto a significant character—the Sheikh Ammar. Sheikh Ammar represents the norm because he is married, has a son, and leads the mosque Ramy and his brother Mohammed visit in Iraq—he is the father in the allegory that Ramy establishes in the beginning of the novel. Sheikh Ammar upholds the normativity that Ramy subverts and is eventually influenced by Ramy’s queer imaginations. Through disturbing the Sheikh’s narrative, Ramy influences Ammar’s religious and social beliefs, and in turn, Ammar undergoes both a spiritual and sexual transformation—establishing a narrative of success over failure of the heterosexual body. Where Ramy is unable to fully subvert the normative belief that it is not possible to be both homosexual and Muslim, Ammar succeeds

because he embodies the secular as well as the non-secular attributes of Iraqi society.

Therefore, the opening letter that Ramy shares with Ammar is significant because it begins the work of transforming the nation. In the first passage above, the structure of the novel is actually brought forth. The introduction is actually the first part in a series of letters that permeate the entirety of the novel. Additionally, Ramy exchanges these letters with Sheikh Ammar. Sheikh Ammar leads worship at the mosque Ramy attends with his brother Mohammed. However, while the letters Ramy writes function as a means of correspondence, the letters also function as a means of confession. Ramy's story is told alongside the letters he shares with Sheikh Ammar. Therefore, Ramy shifts the burden of queerness alongside his own narrative to a significant individual within the text as well as Arab culture; a leader of Islam. As stated before, Ramy uses a letter to confess his homosexuality and to correspond with Sheikh Ammar. José Quiroga in *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* explains how letters of correspondence erase the division between the public/private and the subjective/objective "Letters talk about the private life...[wherein] privacy is a spectacle...It [the letter] is the place where an individual becomes a subject and a subject becomes an 'author.' Correspondence, like homosexuality, beckons a play with liminal or marginal status, a play where readers rescue pleasure given in the form of absence" (2000, 38). Therefore, the letter Ramy writes in the beginning of the novel creates a space to articulate that which prevents him from living a queer life—his exclusion from the religious half of his national identity.

For example, Ramy's letter drastically changes and influences Sheikh Ammar—a process that begins with one little queer word. Towards the end of his first letter, Ramy asks Ammar for help by asking him to create a sermon that accepts homosexuality, a sermon in which he must use the singular word "werdy (pink)" (Namir 2015, 23). This is the culminating moment that begins the work

inherent in disrupting the singular narrative of Iraqi life because “pink” in Arab culture carries a positive connotation (Al-Adaileh 2012, 4). Given the word pink and the form of Ramy’s queer narrative (a letter of correspondence), Ramy shows that queer narratives are deeply invested in evoking what’s left unsaid. Therefore, language is deeply connected to queer narrativity and queer futurity. Ammar’s language, before he is influenced by Ramy, can be divided into two parts, the latter of which is an evolution/disruption of the former. At first, Sheikh Ammar is a devout follower of Islam and interprets it through linguistic norms based in heterosexuality and the formation of the nation. Like Ramy, he uses oppositions to lay out the frameworks of the single nation. After receiving Ramy’s letter, Ammar delivers his first sermon on homosexuality: “I clear my throat yet again. ‘Homosexuality is unlawful in Islam, my brothers and sisters. It is neither accepted by the state nor by Islamic society. The Qur’an clearly states that it is unjust, it is unnatural, a transgression and a crime. It’s *haram*. *Haram!*’” (Namir 2015, 48). Ammar clearly articulates that the Islamic national allegory excludes homosexuality— “It is neither accepted by the *state* nor by *Islamic* society.” By pointing to both the state and Islamic nation, Ammar reveals their conflation and how they both exclude homosexuality. If Ammar believes that homosexuality is a “transgression” and a “crime,” he also believes that it is a crime against the state (nation) and society (religion). But, homosexuality is a specific crime: “*Haram*.” Translated, *Haram* means “forbidden.”

Although this lecture is the first place in which Ammar points to how homosexuality is a transgression against the nation, he uses national languages that uphold the norm when he describes his son Jaffar and the role he will fulfil when he becomes a man. After the angel Gabriel’s visitation, and before he discusses homosexuality with Ramy, Ammar reinforces the singular nation when he describes his son:

Jaffar is ten years old. I’ve followed in the family’s footsteps and rejected institutionalized education for him. Like my father, I believe that the best

education is through experience and the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. Jaffar now a young *imam*, accompanies me to the mosque...and listens to my lecture...One day I hope that he will become a sheikh like me. I see in him a younger version of myself, wearing the white dishdashi and cap on his head. Of course. Jaffar doesn't have facial hair, but he will. *Masha'Allah*...I like to call my son "man" because I want him to think he is one...When I look at him, I see the grown man he will become. (Namir 2015, 33)

Here, Ammar uses language that resonates with the nation that Ramy has established is the norm: family and masculinity. He explains that he has decided to forgo "institutionalized" education for Jaffar because his father had done the same for him. Ammar reproduces the vision Ramy has of Iraq, family and its connection to the nation. Amar chooses to follow in his father's footsteps, therefore, reproducing the heteronational. He also reveals that Jaffar is a "younger version" of himself, implying that he will grow up and be a "sheikh like [him]." Ammar expects Jaffar to be a father with a wife of his own—reinforcing Ramy's previous observations of Baghdad and Iraqi citizenship.

But, Ammar's understanding of citizenship is not simply reduced to the heteronational. He proves that Islam factors into the citizen-based equation. Ammar equates being a man with "facial hair"—something Jaffar does not yet have. Following his wish that Jaffar will have facial hair, the epitome of masculinity, Ammar uses a religious euphemism declaring "*Masha'Allah*." The Arabic "*Masha'Allah*" translates to the English equivalent of "God willing." Inherent in this euphemism is the belief that God has a hand in everything. In this instance, Ammar believes that God will play a role in shaping Jaffar's masculinity, and subsequently, his place within the nation. Once again, this euphemism comes after Ammar's desire for Jaffar to be a man as God wills it. But following this line of thinking, Ammar believes that God plays a role in shaping Jaffar's manhood; God shapes every man's masculinity, not just his son's. Ammar explains that by calling his son Jaffar a "man," he will think he is one. Clearly, Ammar operates within heteronormative understandings of nationality that are

directly reinforced by his interpretations of Islam. One cannot be understood without the other, but instead each works together to determine an Iraqi nationality based in both the secular (the belief that Arab traditions define hair as the epitome of masculinity) and non-secular (the belief that God wills all that takes place in a man's life.)

Undoubtedly, Ammar understands that language is the tool in which to reproduce normative frameworks—i.e. his use of the term “man” when he addresses his son Jaffar. Once again, in another passage, Ammar reveals the connections between Iraq and Islam as it is used to reinforce the heteronational. While Ammar only believes in oppositions, his position on Islam and homosexuality begins to resist the self he finds inherent in his faith and its connection to the nation. When he finally sits down to talk with Ramy, Ammar discovers that Ramy is a homosexual and that Ramy has written the letter asking him to deliver a sermon on homosexuality. After, Ammar and Ramy are soon embroiled in a debate about whether Islam acknowledges homosexuality and if there is a place for homosexuality within the Iraq-Islamic nation state. When Ramy declares that he was born homosexual and blames Ammar on behalf of the nation, Ammar responds, “When a majority of people believes in similar ideology, it might have some truth to it” (Namir 2015, 103). Here, Ammar seems unsure of the singular nation bound up in his interpretation of Islamic ideology. He doesn't directly declare that it is true, but that it “might” be true. The truth presented here marks the partial evolution of Ammar's limited view of religion and its role in creating the nation.

Ammar's narrative begins to take shape as a queer narrative in the second half of the novel. In fact, he begins to break away from the norm through private and public performances. Jose Muñoz, in his work *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* explains that queer performances in such places are significant political rejections of the norm. Muñoz describes

“disidentification” as the process in which one refuses to identify “or connect” with certain “cultural codes” (1999, 12). He states: “To disidentify is to read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to “connect with the disidentifying subject...” (ibid.). What Muñoz means here is that “disidentification” is the process of “rejecting” the “norm” and creating a new identity through performance that recodes the individual. It means turning such positions into positions of power and harnessing the “energies” created by such “contradictions.” In order to harness these energies, Muñoz proposes that those who do not fit these “narrow and rigid” existences, must embrace “Counter public performances [that] let us imagine models of social relations” (1999, 33).

When Amar begins to shift his cultural politics, he begins the work of disidentifying with the social and religious norms he has originally upheld. The first area he begins the work of writing his own queer narrative is through rewriting the codes of religious norms. Whereas Ramy was caught between two forces—queerness and straightness—Ammar is caught between differing spiritual forces—good and evil. In Biblical and Qur’anic theology, angels often intervene in the lives of men, allowing God to influence man, but not directly. After Ammar reads the word “pink” in Ramy’s letter two angels begin to visit him: the Angel Gabriel and the Angel Abaddon. Each angel is invested in a different outcome when it comes to Ammar’s acceptance or rejection of homosexuality. While the Qur’an characterizes Gabriel as good and Abaddon as the angel of death—in the circumstance of the novel Abaddon works as the force that upholds the Qur’an as it is interpreted by society showing the contradictions inherent in his faith. While society, and in turn Abaddon, condemns homosexuality by interpreting it as “haram” and “sinful”, Gabriel embraces it. While Ammar is deciding whether or not to give a sermon on homosexuality, Gabriel explains “to be a Sheik isn’t just to lecture and pray and read the Qur’an. You have to help those who are in need”

(Namir 2015, 25). Therefore, the codes of religion are switched. Gabriel shows that narrow interpretations of the Qur'an are sinful, not homosexuality itself. Furthermore, Ammar is changed by Gabriel's influence. This is best illustrated in a passage where he argues with the angels Gabriel and Abaddon. Gabriel asks Ammar if he is "going to let Abaddon control [him]" to which he responds "Of course not, I make my own decisions." (ibid., 108) This is a stark comparison to the beginning of the novel, where Ammar evokes *Masha'Allah*, what God wills, as a way to explain that God controls/intervenes in human life. If Ammar asserts that he makes his own decisions, he no longer follows what God wills, but instead what he himself wills. Once again, he begins to break away from the norms he vehemently upholds—showing that narrow interpretations of religion by society is fundamentally flawed.

Yet, despite his declaration, Gabriel is responsible for the dream that begins the process of Ammar's reconciliation of homosexuality and Islam. For example, Gabriel transports Ammar to a dream world of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he is subjected to a homosexual awakening:

Suddenly, I am transported to a room I've never seen before, in the presence of a beautiful young man. His hands are tied to the bedposts, and he is naked. I try to back away but something pushes me toward him...The man says something in Hebrew...I realize he is one of the men of Lot...I look down; I am naked now too. I try to cover my genitals but my hands won't move. My penis is stirring; I try to calm it. Suddenly, I'm pressing against the young man and entering him; he whimpers. After a few thrusts, I feel the need to cum. I have never felt this before in my life, not even with Shams. I close my eyes, trying to steady my breathing. When I open them, I am back home with Gabriel hovering nearby. "Did you enjoy it?" he asks. "No!" Gabriel chuckles. "I know you did," he says. (2015, 109)

While this dream can be interpreted as a metaphor for rape, it should instead be read as a metaphor for the violent sexual awakening of Ammar's repressed homosexual self. Ammar's dream functions as a sexual awakening because he cannot reconcile homosexuality and Islam, nor can he reconcile homosexuality and Iraqi citizenship as denoted by the previous passages in which he only

believes in the norms dictated by religious and national fundamentalisms. Therefore, Ammar can be read as the young man tied to the bed post; the rope is a metaphor for the limitations placed on his latent homosexuality. Subsequently, the young man is his repressed homosexuality confined, limited by nation-based citizenship. The rope is therefore the norms that bind Ammar's sexuality and imprison it within the Iraqi nation.

Moreover, Ammar reveals that he is finally in control of the sexuality that he has kept hidden, especially if the reader is to believe his declaration that he "makes his own decisions." Even though Ammar claims "he can't move," his body responds in a way that reads he is enjoying the sexual act of penetrating another male, even though he is anxious: "I try to calm it [his penis]" but "I feel the need to cum." (ibid. 109) Attached to this physical pleasure is an awakening, a stirring he cannot control. When he finally gives in to his own homosexuality and enters the young man, the young man's whimper is his homosexuality finally voicing what has been contained—reinforced by the fact that he does not understand the man when he speaks Hebrew. He is finally able to understand homosexuality and explains that he has "never felt this way, even with Shams [his wife]" (ibid., 109) Therefore, Ammar is able to experience pleasure as well as the fear and shame attached to his repressed homosexuality.

Moreover, in this dream, he is also reimagining a single interpretation of Sodom and Gomorrah that he previously uses to condemn homosexuality. In a previous passage, Gabriel questions whether Ammar knows the truth about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to which Ammar responds "I know the truth. It's in the Qur'an," and Gabriel replies, "The truth is in the Qur'an, but it is ambiguous...I will show you the truth" (2015, 57). Gabriel reveals the truth of what happened and Ammar is transported to Sodom and Gomorrah where he witnesses the brutal rape of a boy by the men of Lot. After Ammar witnesses the violent rape of the boy that leaves "blood spilling from his backside," Gabriel tells

Ammar that “God punished the people of Lot because of this incident. Don’t ever forget it” leaving Ammar “confused and overwhelmed” (2015, 58-59). Ammar doesn’t forget, and this experience crosses over into his own sexual awakening where he recognizes the man he is penetrating as a “man of Lot.” Therefore, the second dream Ammar experiences becomes a disruption of the first dream, a rupture with the truth he is unable to acknowledge. There is no clear connection between his interpretation of Islam and homosexuality; there are only ambiguities.

Ammar’s sexual awakening takes place in the form of an ambiguity, an imagined sexual awakening that changes his limited view of the nation—that one must be heterosexual and Muslim in order to be considered Iraqi. After this dream, Ammar’s imagined homosexuality crosses the threshold of the imaginary and into the physical realm of his daily life. Ammar begins the work of establishing an imagined collectivity that becomes a physical manifestation as his homosexuality becomes a part of his everyday life. He begins the work of deconstructing the normativity that guides his daily life, and the first place in the novel where this begins to happen is when his wife Sham visits his bedroom:

She is sitting at her dressing table... “I thought I’d surprise you,” Sham says with a smile...She nudges me towards bed...gets on top of me, her long red hair falling over my face as she kisses me again. I am sweating, my heart is racing, I feel inexplicably frightened, trapped. Shams moves my hand downward. I am not enjoying this. *I suddenly flash on the handsome young man and, before I know it, cum before entering her.* She climbs off me, looking disappointed. I know she wants me to give her pleasure. But I can’t. I am a *failure* as a husband. (Namiir 2015, 115-116, *Emphasis added*)

This passage takes place directly after Ammar’s sexual awakening in Gabriel’s rendition of the Sodom and Gomorrah dream. Moreover, the passage shows the ways in which Ammar begins to pull away from the heteronational norms that he vehemently stands by. Instead of upholding the heteronormative, he feels “frightened” and “trapped” by it. Sham, Ammar’s wife, has come to his bedroom in order to have sex with him and during the process of foreplay Ammar realizes that he is “Not enjoying [it].” Directly after he voices his displeasure, Ammar

imagines the “handsome young man” from his dream and “cums” before he is able to engage in sexual intercourse with his wife. Ammar unable to perform husbandly duties in order to give his wife “pleasure,” declares that he is a “failure” as a husband. Therefore, his homosexuality overrides the success of his body as a heterosexual man. The normative binary is imploded, and he reverses the sexual discourses that define his life—he is *able* to cum when thinking about the young man, but *unable* to cum when he has sex with his wife. Failure is shifted to the narrative of heterosexuality. Once again, he turns to his religion to reaffirm his homosexuality because he returns to the previous dream in order to overcome the fear and dissatisfaction attached to the heterosexual intercourse Sham tries to initiate.

While in this passage Ammar considers himself a “failure” as a husband, this passage technically reads as an alternative narrative of success. For one, Ammar finally begins to understand the differences he upholds when condemning homosexuals. He begins to imagine his homosexuality through his heterosexuality and begins to recognize the possibilities of a different collectivity. For instance, directly after his failed attempt to have sex with his wife, Ammar decides to visit Ramy where he apologizes for his previous behavior:

Ramy closes the living room door, then sits down across from me. “So, what do you want?” [Ramy asks]. “Ramy, I first want to apologize to you for my behavior the last time we met”... “I really wanted to help you, yet I couldn’t,” he [Ammar] tells me [Ramy]...” What is it, Sheikh Ammar? You came to talk to me, so go ahead.” “I felt bad because I *dismissed* you so hastily. I didn’t even take the time to consider a *possible solution* to your problem...” “Did I tell you I’m engaged now?” he [Ramy] says with a smirk. “You looking forward to your marriage?” “No, I’m only doing it to make Mohammed and Noor happy.” “What would make you happy?”... “Going to America...I’d love to see the Statue of Liberty in person.” “A statue is a statue. How can it give you freedom if it’s just an object? You shouldn’t depend on an object for freedom. You have to find freedom *within yourself*...” (2015, 126-127)

Here, Ammar finally recognizes the queer narrative Ramy uses in the beginning of the text. Ammar apologizes for not helping Ramy the first time, even going as

far to say that he didn't consider a "possible solution" to his problem (reconciling his homosexuality and Islam). Secondly, Ammar shows his concern for Ramy's happiness. When he asks Ramy if marriage will make him happy, Ramy states that he is only trying to make Mohammed and Noor happy—Ramy would be happier visiting the Statue of Liberty in America. Even though Ramy believes happiness resides in the Western acceptance of homosexuality, Ammar pushes back stating that Ramy cannot place faith in objects. Instead, he tells Ramy he must find freedom within himself. Here, Ammar refers to freedom in a very specific way. While he is not openly telling Ramy to be gay, he is telling Ramy to establish a space in Iraq, a space which he can be homosexual *and* Muslim.

Thus, he pushes against heterosexuality and its reinforcement of the nation. In doing, he deconstructs the secular and non-secular allegories that control his life to establish a place in Iraq where homosexual Muslims are possibilities. Ammar takes this even farther by initiating a homoerotic experience with Ramy before he leaves, "I stand up to shake hands with Sheikh Ammar; he suddenly kisses me on the cheek, mere millimeters from my lips. What just happened? 'I'm sorry,' he says and leaves the house quickly" (Namir 2015, 128). This passage highlights how Ammar begins to use the failure of homosexuality as a means to imagine other alternatives to heterosexuality and contrasts with the previous passage where he is unable to have sex with his wife. Yet, he is still unable to fully realize a homosexual Muslim collectivity. For instance, after he leaves, Ammar feels shame for erotically kissing Ramy and thinks to himself, "What have I done? Shame, shame on you.... I am a sheikh, a holy man, yet I am worse than a criminal. What is happening to me?" (Namir 2015, 129).

Once again, Ammar returns to the ambiguities between homosexuality and his role as a Muslim. He is a sheikh and the problem is exacerbated further. Therefore, when he returns home he is bedridden until another Sheikh comes to visit. During the visit, Ammar breaks away from his religious routes because he

thinks he cannot be gay and Muslim: “‘Brother Ammar, is something wrong?’ His [Sheikh Jassem] voice is filled with concern... ‘Why haven’t you been attending the mosque?’ ‘Because...I [Ammar] am retiring,’ I blurt out” (Namir 2015, 134). Directly after this, Sham questions Ammar and asks how their family is going to live and he reflects, “that hasn’t even crossed my mind. How is my family going to live?” (ibid., 135). In these two moments, Ammar breaks away from both the secular (his family/heterosexuality) and the non-secular (his role as a Sheikh) allegories that have defined his life, allegories which he feels he is no longer a part of. Instead, his homosexuality finally takes over because he reflects that he doesn’t even give his family a thought when he decides to retire. Even though the moment of his retirement seems bleak, and that Ammar has fully pulled away from his Islamic faith as well as the heteronational norms of Iraqi citizenship, eventually he comes fully into his homosexuality and religion. In the final dream sequence of the novel, Gabriel once again visits Ammar:

While Shams is cooking dinner in the kitchen, I am back in my bedroom...I am staring at myself in the mirror when Gabriel appears again, fluttering near the ceiling. “What have you done to anger Abbadon?” he asks me. “I took your advice.” “Oh and what was that?” “To be true to myself. Now come down here.” I reach my arm out to him. Gabriel alights on it, and I hold him tight. Kissing him gently on the lips. When I open my eyes, he has transformed into the same handsome young man who visited me before. I turn around, and he kisses my back as he enters me. I feel as if I’m being born. He gives me everything that I need, and I feel complete. (Namir 2015, 141)

Here, Ammar fully realizes the imagination of life outside the nation; Ramy has helped create this space in pushing the boundaries between homosexuality and Islam. Where Ammar was the young man in the previous dream, Gabriel becomes the young man and reverses roles, sexually penetrating Ammar. Ammar makes love with his religion, and for the first time in the novel he finally feels “complete” because his religion allows him to experience a faith-based homosexual fulfillment. Ammar fully disidentifies with the nation and joins “in a

moment, object, or subject” that he once rejected, bringing his transformation full circle.

Although this passage reconciles the discrepancies between his homosexuality and religion, it does not fully imagine the other half of his collectivity—his place in Iraq. Before Ramy visits Ammar for the final time, Ammar fully transforms into the imagined collectivity he previously tells Ramy to find. After fully shaving his face and applying lipstick and rouge, Ammar looks at himself in the mirror and states “I am *malikat jamal* Iraq” (Namir 2015, 149). Translated from Arabic, this statement means “I am the beauty queen of Iraq.” Ammar is fully transformed by queerness showing that his homosexuality and his citizenship are able to engage in a greater dialectic with his religion. Ultimately, Ammar reveals that it is possible to locate happiness within one’s self, the lesson he tries to teach Ramy. Moreover, he embraces “a celebration of pleasures and of the intensification of bodily experiences” over the “ideal out self” [often categorized as] the road to freedom” (Dhawan 2013, 194)

While it might seem that queerness can never exist except through its opposition to heterosexuality and familial futures, this essay has attempted to ascertain the ways queer narratives might offer the possible means to decolonizing singular national identities. Furthermore, this essay has attempted to show the ways Namir’s novel functions as both a queer narrative as well as a narrative that defines queer Arab identities by giving both voice and recognition to the problems that arise when queer narratives explore the intersections of sexuality, religion, and nation. Therefore, Namir successfully gives voice to a narrative that is often overshadowed by the complexities of nations, social norms, and the traditions of families, by demonstrating that it is the differences that unite others, even if those differences are only seen as disruptive, oppositional. Queerness, as Halberstam, Muñoz, and others have posited, becomes the process of imagining a body beyond such singular dichotomies.

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ABSTRACTS

Vulnerability and Trash: Divisions within the Stucky fandom

Alen Ríos and Diego Rivera

In this article we focus on the construction of the Other within the Stucky fandom. Contemporary fandoms are spaces that have been conceived as homogenous, or communities in which differences are not seen. Moreover, they are an articulation of subjectivities that encompass and allow several mechanisms of governmentality; they can be capitalized upon and exploited, but also produce their own logics of resistance. This paper analyzes how certain fanworks and fan practices on the social network Tumblr constitute an Other in relation to the general fandom of Stucky. The methodology used was a virtual ethnographic approach using participant observation and ethnographic interviews. According to our results, the Stucky fandom utilizes trigger warnings as a political rationality to construe a vulnerable Other in order to prevent and warn about activities, topics, or experiences that may heavily upset them, as well as converging in the creation of a segregation of those experiences via tags. This phenomenon also occurs in the parts (*sides* ad verbatim) of fandom that do not move or uphold the same values or hegemonic perspectives within the fandom, generating an Other that should be moderated. We suggest framing and understanding these practices as power relationships that are constantly changing, due to the platforms, the fans and the discourses that surround them. Therefore, divisions and othering in fandom should be understood as a contingent product of relationships both inside and outside the fandom.

Keywords: Otherness, fandom, slash, ethicopolitics, trigger warnings.

The Other Woman: Re-Authoring and Re-Othering Gendered Narratives

Lucy I Baker

Abstract

Fans are increasingly publicising their adaptive works, and Hollywood is turning to reworking and remaking existing media properties as a method of franchising. Regendering – rewriting a character as another gender – is becoming a more popular choice in these adaptations. This occurs in both mainstream works (recently: *Hannibal*, *Elementary* and *Doctor Who*) and fannish/non-commercial works. By examining the methods some fans and creators use in their regendered

works, the construction of a male-masculine other can be identified, as well as the ways in which celebrity (mainstream or sub-cultural) is traded on for legitimacy in that construction. This examination also provides examples of the 'frustrated fan' identified by Jenkins as at the heart of fandom – examples that are not necessarily bound to the canon but to media in general. The frustration evidenced by fans centres around the way the 'everyman' necessarily others the 'everywoman'. Fans who engage in regendered adaptations work around embodied notions of gender to occupy the absence of women in original works, the absence of women's agency in wider media, and form the male-masculine narrative as the Other. The re-authoring of the narrative not only highlights the gendered pseudo-neutrality of the original, but also the necessity of that construction as othering the audience of women. The reaction of some fans in re-authoring and re-othering the male narrative while retaining the masculinity of the original transgresses both the boundary of the creator-audience but also the boundary of male-female and the polite fictions of cross-gender identification.

Keywords

Gender, fan studies, masculinity, regendering, adaptation, media studies

Everyday, Bro?: Authenticity and Performance Intersections in the Vlogs of Jake Paul

Abstract

With the rise of social media, a new type of celebrity has emerged: one who takes on a different type of celebrity which performs intimacy, community, and authenticity to their audience in a new way. One such person is YouTube star Jake Paul, a vlogger who connects to his fans through any means available to him. In a mass-media culture, celebrities distinguish themselves from the masses through glamour or notoriety, but in a social media culture, celebrities must be approachable and intimate with their fans. Jake Paul positions himself as part of his own fandom, utilizing the separation of I and Me to inhabit the role of fan and celebrity at once, creating a role of fan-leader. When faced with scandals Jake Paul was put in a difficult situation; to wholly denounce his behaviour would be to denounce his fans who share in that behaviour, but to endorse it would taint his reputation. He chose to use his 'involvement shield', a distancing technique used by mass-media celebrities to deal with fans, on himself, joining his fans in 'dissing' him, while admitting to his fault. Thus, Jake Paul performs a new version of himself, which is better than the old.

Keywords

YouTube, celebrity, authenticity, intimacy, performance

“We Must Learn to Speak to Each Other So That We Can Embrace from Afar”: Dodie Bellamy *reading* Kathy Acker, an account in words and clothes
Andrea Aramburú Villavisencio

Abstract

Writing on Kathy Acker, the avant-garde punk writer who is well-known for her transgressive persona, is becoming increasingly commonplace nowadays. The fandom that has developed around her figure has taken multiple shapes, yet few of these representations have been capable of grasping Acker in her difference and her otherness. Amongst those writers who did do justice to her transgressive persona is Dodie Bellamy, one of Acker’s contemporaries. Bellamy, in her autobiographical narrative, is capable of staging a performance wherein the forces of the other –in their alterity- are continually undoing and questioning the stability of the narrative ‘I’. This essay considers the intertextual friendship amongst Bellamy and Acker, as it is staged by the former in her 2015 genre-binding piece “Digging Through Kathy Acker’s Stuff”. Drawing on Lynne Huffer’s thinking-feelings ethics of alterity and her concept of narrative performance, as well as by taking a Deleuzean orientation towards fashion, I attend to the relationship amongst affective fashion, performative language and the act of constructing extended kin within the practice of writing, reading and thinking amongst thinkers. I situate Bellamy’s and Acker’s bond first in dialogue with the affective relationship between Acker and her wardrobe, and the equally intriguing relationship Bellamy forges between herself and Acker’s clothes. Secondly, I juxtapose this affective approach to fashion with the performative force of Bellamy’s mechanisms of textual construction, which allow Acker’s voice and body to emerge within the text. Finally, I provide an overview of how both clothes and language are overtly linked to the construction of an intertextual friendship undergirded by a thinking-feelings ethics of alterity.

Keywords

Dodie Bellamy, Kathy Acker, alterity, friendship, affective fashion

ABSTRACTS

Defining the Mexican Other: Insights from Interwar America and Postwar Canada

Naomi Alisa Calnitsky

Abstract

This article considers two periods in American history and one in Canadian history to discern the ways in which Mexican farm labour experiences were uniquely shaped by employer preferences and desires, as well as needs and prejudices. More specifically it considers how definitions of the other were constructed around national idealizations that sought out a reshaping of labour migration or labour's repatriation in accordance with officially-oriented programs of transnational labour management. It begins with the Great Depression (ca. 1929-39), then considers the Bracero Program (1942-64) and concludes with a review of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (1974-Present). It explores the three selected time periods together with a view towards the ways in which Mexican workforces were maintained, managed, viewed, appreciated and/or derided, as far as is discernable through the archive, a reading of secondary literature, and a selection of media studies.

Keywords

Mexican Transnational Migration; Great Depression; Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program; Bracero Program; Repatriation; Citizenship Studies.

Palmyra and the radical Other: on the politics of monument destruction in Syria

Ella Mudie

Abstract

Since its ancient ruins were targeted for destruction by ISIS in 2015, the World Heritage listed site of Palmyra has become the focus of a global campaign to unite for cultural heritage protection. However well-intentioned, the unfolding of this international call-to-arms to safeguard the nation's monuments against the backdrop of an active civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria points to the discord that has emerged between the universalist tendencies underpinning the rhetoric of World Heritage protection and the more complex geopolitical causes

which fuel the targeting of such sites in the first place. Concerned specifically with those responses by the West that construct the safeguarding of cultural heritage along a civilization versus barbarism binary, this article interrogates the Othering tendencies of the notion of “culture under attack.” Today, the international push to increase the legal mandate to protect cultural heritage coincides with the rise of the field of virtual heritage. Critical attention is paid therefore to the role played by technology in preserving at-risk archaeological and architectural sites and the extent to which digital reconstructions risk reifying a classical past at the expense of engaging with the present-day cultures of the Middle-East.

Keywords

Palmyra, monument destruction, virtual heritage, universalism, Étienne Balibar, Hardt and Negri

Egypt in Western Popular Culture: From Bram Stoker to *The Jewel of the Nile*

Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka

Abstract

In April 2011, Western eyes were fixed on Egypt. Many were astounded when Hosni Mubarak, who had presented himself as the anti-colonial hero who nationalized the Suez Canal, was ousted by a popular uprising after thirty years of authoritarian rule. The subsequent waves of political protests sweeping over the Arab world put in evidence the complexities of the historical background, and brought attention to the long shadows of a not-so-distant violent past. For Europe and North America, there was something else about Egypt. Culturally, the West had absorbed Egypt onto its collective memory as the gate to the Near East since the nineteenth century. Casablanca and Hong Kong had been *pied a terres*, but Cairo, in a way that not even Byzantium had ever managed, was *home*. Egypt has been embedded in Western consciousness for the last two centuries, and its ancient, pharaonic past has reinvigorated the store of myth of Europe and North America to an immeasurable extent. The present essay is concerned with the discreet but powerful interventions of Western popular culture in translating Egypt for Western consumption, both building and resisting stereotypes. The essay considers Bram Stoker’s novel of 1903, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, which solidified many of those stereotypes, and goes on to discuss three popular renderings of Egypt produced around a hundred years later, which rewrite those stereotypes from within: the film *The Jewel of the Nile* (1985), the novel *The Map of Love* (1999), and the documentary *The Hidden History of Egypt* (2002). All

four works are particularly interested in ‘looking’ as a form of ‘knowing’, and the essay investigates how they all articulate what we may call an ‘active witnessing’.

Keywords

Egypt, popular culture, postcolonialism, orientalism, popular film, popular literature, gendered gaze, Bram Stoker, Ahdaf Soueif, Terry Jones

They’re Just People, That’s All: American Carnival, the Freakish Body and the Ecological Self in Daniel Knauf’s *Carnivàle*

Helena Bacon

Abstract

In *American Carnival*, Phillip McGowan proposes a version of carnivalesque that developed in symbiosis with American culture specifically: instead of Bakhtin’s European carnival of laughter, a temporary inversion of normal hierarchical structures, McGowan suggests that States-based carnival, manifested tangibly in American World Fairs, midway shows and freak shows, was a means of consolidating identity, race and social position specifically through the act of ‘seeing.’ Commercial, public events like these reassured the dominant, white population of its normality and status through the act of looking at the freakish, abnormal, and exotic or racially ‘Othered’ attractions such events had to offer.

In this paper I intend to apply McGowan’s theory, along with those of other intersecting critics and concepts that reflect upon American culture, the visual and the organisation of social hierarchies, to a particular programme that lends itself naturally to this reading: Daniel Knauf’s *Carnivàle* (2003 – 2005). Set between 1934 and 1935, *Carnivàle* provides an interior view of the carnival experience, following Ben Hawkins, a Dust Bowl farmer with inexplicable healing powers, after he is picked up by a travelling carnival. The show’s depiction of this itinerant group, how they interact with and stray from dominant American social structures and cultures within the show, reveal just how *Carnivàle* offers an insight into the lives of the ‘Other’ in Depression-era small town America and how the ‘Othering’ it presents is not as clear-cut as it may first appear.

Keywords

Freak, America, Visual, Carnival.

Othering the Outsider: Monstering Abject Bodies in *Wuthering Heights*

Adele Hannon

Abstract

The gothic villain functions as a reminder of social groups that exist on the margins of society, whom, to many observers, are viewed as the ‘graphic smear’ or the ‘Other’, a distortion that interrupts the normative progression of the homogenous space. Its position as the literary antihero instructs its audience on how societal and cultural norms force a deprecated identity, whether it be the ethnic, gendered or foreign Other, to be seen only as an ambiguous disturbance to the status quo. A universal preoccupation with labelling the Other as monster has engendered a plethora of inconsistent meanings of the term. The monster can be seen to act as a metaphor for those who transcend the limits of acceptable behaviour, and subsequently become identified as ‘abnormal’, victimised by inflexible expectations and intolerant stereotypes. Essentially, this essay will contribute to existing studies of Heathcliff as the *Unheimlich* monster, but it will also investigate his role as the human monster, and probe what that meant for the development of the Gothic genre. Building on an analysis of Brontë’s well-established Gothic villain, this analysis will also deconstruct traditional monstrous identities, and reconstruct new interpretations of what we consider evil or ‘Other’. Through use of the anamorphic lens, or as Lyle Massey calls it ‘distorted perspective’, Heathcliff is no longer excluded to the margins but is transformed within the contemporary literary sphere. Anamorphosis reveals the need for dual perspectives, highlighting previously ignored insights concerning distorted identities. Its value stems from its ability to deconstruct the error of the first depicted image, and shows the need for multi-perspectival approaches as the Gothic genre develops. For Heathcliff, this allows him to be reborn and to balance on the binary of villain and victim.

Keywords

Uncanny, the Abject, *Wuthering Heights*, the Dichotomy of Self and Other, Anamorphosis

“A Man is Nothing without the Spice of the Devil in Him”: Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester Navigate an Imperially-Inscribed Masculinity

Rachel Willis

Abstract

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Edward Rochester's imperially-inscribed masculinity, anchored in Victorian patriarchal ideals, requires Jane to negotiate and eventually resist his attempts to dominate her. Recent readings of the novel by scholars like Joyce Zonana and Ralph Austen acknowledge its heavy reliance on colonial discourse, arguing that this discourse allows Brontë to critique the Western patriarchal values that Jane grapples with by displacing them onto the colonial “other.” The Victorian patriarchal society Jane lives in marginalizes her in several ways, and the novel uses colonial themes to portray this marginalization. However, these themes also offer her ways of resistance, especially in relation to Rochester. Rochester's masculinity, which is both marginalized according to British class standards and hegemonic according to his social position and wealth, is also figured both in colonial terms as Jane's colonizer and in terms that mark his otherness. For example, Jane associates Rochester with the “oriental” whenever he tries to dominate her in ways that go against her Christian faith, positioning him as a “savage” and a “heathen”—a man who is powerful but still in need of the civilizing (and emasculating) Protestant religion. Thus, examining Jane's navigation of Rochester's imperially-inscribed masculinity offers insight into the novel's negotiation of power and oppression.

Keywords

Jane Eyre, masculinity, gender, postcolonial, imperialism, Christianity

The Stranger and the Other: Radical Alterity in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*

Hamza Karam Ally

Abstract

The central plot point of Albert Camus' novel *L'Étranger* (1942), the murder of an Algerian Arab by the pied-noir protagonist Meursault, crucially omits from the narrative of Meursault's trials one essential detail: the Arab's identity. The other of Meursault's Orientalist imagination begins and ends in anonymity, so that Camus' novel as a work about ‘otherness’ is fundamentally (perhaps intentionally) imbalanced. The Arab, and thereby Arabness, is constructed as a limit to colonial agency and understanding, a kind of personification of the provincial gloom of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In phenomenological terms, Meursault's encounter with alterity is asymmetrical, in that the other as a radical subject never appears to make a dialectical relationship

possible. Kamel Daoud's 2013 novel *The Meursault Investigation* recognizes and responds to this very omission in Camus, re-telling the earlier story but from the perspective of the brother of the (now named) Arab. By doing so, Daoud both inverts the direction of the Meursault story and inserts the second participant into the dialectic, raising important considerations about otherness, ethics and postcolonial authorship. This essay investigates the two novels in conversation, their shared symbols and imagery, and the central episode of the Arab's murder as both a phenomenological and colonial encounter. I invoke the work of Emmanuel Levinas, GWF Hegel, Homi Bhabha and others to explore each novel's ultimately unsuccessful search for an other who is not merely an object of desire, but rather a being possessing radical subjectivity.

Keywords

Phenomenology, Postcolonialism, Otherness, Camus, Daoud

Postcolonial Transformations: Queering the Narrative in Hasan Namir's *God in Pink*

Sean Weaver

Abstract

Certain complications arise when it comes to national and sexual based formulas of citizenship, especially when bodies are often found in between and on the margins of nations, states, and cultures, a sign of the modern world. As such, it is important to establish new frameworks in order to understand newly emerging bodies as others. In the essay that follows, Hasan Namir's novel, *God in Pink* (2015), will be contextualized as a narrative that posits queerness as a means of overcoming the essentialist binaries created by colonization that dictate who and what is othered through the use of queer bodies that transform normative religious and heteronormative national identities. First, the essay will analyze the ways heteronormative national identities are queered/disturbed by calling attention to the fallacies inherent in singular national dichotomies. Secondly, the essay will address the ways in which queerness is able to transform singular national identities. In doing so, this essay will argue that queer narratives, as represented by *God in Pink*, in colonized spaces offer meant for transforming singular national futures.

Keywords

Gender, Sex, Nation, Culture, Queer Failure, Other, Queer Narrativity, Queer Futurity, Islam