




2013

## 2013 Literary Review (no. 26)

Sigma Tau Delta

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# LITERARY REVIEW

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# ***2013 Literary Review***

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The Upsilon Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta

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*"A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language."*

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## Fiction

*"...One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say—and to feel—"Yes, that's the way it is, or at least that's the way I feel it. You're not as alone as you thought."*

### Whittier Awards in Prose

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## *Scholarly Writing*

*"I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. For the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works."*

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## Acknowledgments

Once again, it is our great pleasure to present to you the 2013 edition of the Whittier College Literary Review. This yearly publication, designed to showcase the best of student writing and artwork, was organized and edited by the Whittier College Upsilon Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honors Society.

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Quotes used in the Table of Contents are from the following great minds: W. H. Auden, John Steinbeck, Samuel Johnson, and Oscar Wilde.

Finally, a big hearty thank you to everyone who submitted wonderful essays, short stories, poems, and artwork to this year's Literary Review. This all would not have come to fruition without you.

Happy Reading!

Megumi Chou, Editor



**Fragments of Now**  
*Whittier Awards in Poetry – First Place*

Jessica Miller

I.       An Impending Ghost

It is only in these sunny days  
Of beaches, of cop dodging, of apple picking<sup>1</sup>  
That the hurtling-towards turns inward  
And I am haunted by a ghost that has not yet  
left the body:

*You will sob on your moth-eaten quilt  
And, clasping the soles of your yellow feet,<sup>2</sup>  
Beg for the chances, these chances,  
Exchanged for a bottle, a bowl or nothing at  
all.  
You would sell your soul.*

But what will be left of that?

*Very little, lest a miracle  
That you should remember yourself ever-  
presently.*

And so I call upon this me, this miserable me,  
To be spun into gold as my wrinkled  
doppelganger conjures me.  
It is the magic hour of my time,  
And though I may not be bathed in light,  
I will not let the sun set on a bleak and  
unmemorable day.

II.       Daily Life

The mornings and afternoons of diligent work  
Freckled with interactions and petty hellos  
Are some basis and foundation  
For what I seem to be:  
A student, a dope, a punk-ass kid  
Whose ambitions do not extend beyond the  
month of May.

So much time,

---

<sup>1</sup> See “After Apple Picking” by Robert Frost

<sup>2</sup> See “Preludes” by T.S. Eliot

Yet so much time spent eating brunch.

But the wonderful things I wish to list!  
A heap of broken images<sup>3</sup> I could string  
together  
And hang heavy from my geriatric neck.  
Immeasurable miniscules chalked up to vague  
patterns—  
Not “the time we spoke in self-indulgent  
alliteration”  
But “the days I spent on an old couch on the  
back porch.”

Each event is vibrantly colored with choking  
laughter and wrenching heartache,  
But I will never see them that way again.  
Goodbye, shades of Now,  
I finally understand why photos come in black  
and white.  
Perhaps an adjective or two would bring them  
back to me...  
I suppose that’s why I write.

III.       Concerns

Good grades, keeping up with music, movies,  
Painting, acting, composing, whatever the fuck,  
Remembering the definition of ‘epistemology’,  
Finding enough money for pot and booze;  
The first-world problems of a middle-class  
white girl  
Who has no idea how to make the right friends  
Or what to do with words like “shareholder.”  
I am a little girl playing house  
Though I am far too ugly for it to be endearing.  
But ugly means tough,  
So perhaps that is enough to get by.

Sketches of “the one” line my notes on  
extrapolation  
Such that anything I think, anything I feel,  
Belongs to a recently awakened child

---

<sup>3</sup> See “The Waste Land” by T.S. Eliot

And has no place in a feminist's heart.

I am always sad about things but I laugh harder  
than anyone else.

I am worried they don't like me.

I am overcome by the urge to move to Hungary  
And never speak to anyone again.

Love and routine and responsibility are my  
captors.

Sending all my things over would be  
expensive.

#### IV. Appearance

Okay...

I say I am okay.

I *say* I am okay.

Sometimes I feel I will be okay.

Sometimes I feel I am okay.

Some days my hair falls voluptuously behind  
my shoulders

And my smile is amiable, quirkily seductive;

My skin may be covered any number of ways:

Sleeves, foundation, skirts, large T-shirts, heels,  
towels, flannels,

Anything to warp the shape of my body into  
something livable.

Other days my eyes shrink and come closer  
together

While pale gobs of flesh anchor themselves to  
my cheeks, shoulders, belly, ass—

Mirrors are not more silent<sup>4</sup> than those around  
me,

Those beautiful girls of age who have never  
had to worry

(Though they do,

Just as I)

About their physical manifestation being a  
deal-breaker.

Yet it has been.

It will be.

I have had my share of mirrors, Mr. Borges, but  
I don't get to be blind.

People are cruel,  
Just as I.

#### V. Concluding Plea

When I am nothing but a single gray hair,

I ask that certain constants remain:

Close and eccentric friends, agnosticism, things  
to do,

And above all, peace of mind.

Never let me tremble in a reeking linoleum  
kitchen

For fear of losing a bored, pathetic life.<sup>5</sup>

Let my ghost leave freely

With the nonchalance of making breakfast

And soar into the absolutes

That were promised first by religion, and then  
by philosophy.

So may I be now,

So may I be forever.

<sup>4</sup> See "To A Cat" by Jorge Luis Borges

<sup>5</sup> See "The Souls of Old Men" by C.P.  
Cavafy

## **black holes**

*Whittier Awards in Poetry – Second Place*

Harriet Enenmoh

i communicate mouth to mouth  
speaking only in tongues.  
during high tide, my body  
performs like waves on sand,  
descending and receding  
in shallow syncopation.  
my limbs are as smooth  
as the moon from a distance  
so I never stay tangled.  
and on the nights when my skin  
is cold, i writhe in bed  
and dream of black holes.

## **Brother, Sister**

*Whittier Awards in Poetry – Third Place*

Carsen West

When she holds her breath she hears  
the thrumming that fills the space between  
his lungs, the heart she drug her teeth to taste,  
with thirsty eyes and twisting lips because  
even miles and miles could not keep him from her.  
When she licks her lips

she relishes the red of his insides, the ardent  
viscosity that sang for her carving nails,  
to pour it out, she knows if he could only see the  
wolf he made of her, he'd pull himself open first.  
And when she turns her back

to the glaze of ghostly moonlight that  
bathes his paling limbs a sweeter porcelain,  
splintered shards left behind, picked away  
from ivory bones, she reminds herself the  
dying night is hungry and cannot go unfed.

## **Maybe**

*Whittier Awards in Poetry – Honorable Mention*

Harriet Enenmoh

One day I walked up to him after class and said, "I think  
you may have died on me in a past life. Maybe we met at an art store,  
there was only one can of gesso left and you let me have it.  
Your hair was a deep brown, your hands stained with paint. You'd just been nice  
and that was enough and I thought, he can have me. And then you did,  
and you liked the planes of my face and said they were perfect to sketch,  
so we sketched each other for weeks and soon began to leave things  
at one another's place. Small things like erasers at first, then toothbrushes,  
then clothes then one another's scents and eventually our entire bodies.  
I was probably an orphan or something and you were giving me my first taste of affection  
or some melodramatic shit like that and right then you died. Suicide maybe,  
I'm guessing inadvertent, you were probably dabbling in drugs.  
I probably found your addiction dangerous and alluring and when it killed you  
I blamed myself, I was an enabler. Or maybe you were just hit by a car, right in front of me. I  
dunno, maybe.

## **If a Man Reads Braille then She is Mute and He is Blind**

*Whittier Awards in Poetry – Honorable Mention*

Elizabeth Reitzell

She sees

under his bed  
lubricated latex  
they never used  
and cleans to make him  
quiet since she's sorry  
she saw  
the sloppy operation  
of the clotted pump  
he didn't rinse

She says,

human spines  
are vertically aligned  
extensions from  
the bottom of the skull  
and this spine  
is shaped like s  
to balance  
the human skull  
above the pelvis

**Inside a Bottle**  
*Whittier Awards in Poetry – Honorable Mention*

Jessica Miller

I found a ner-do-well imp inside a bottle  
and wished for evil, rubbing the whitened bottle.

Father, grandfather, neighbor, Labrador, daughter;  
my mother's convinced we all oblige the bottle.

A cat sits on her doorstep with her ears pricked up.  
When the milk man comes, she only eyes the bottle.

Cut! Puke! Fuck! Burn! Shout! Sleep! Sob! Lie! Puff! Drink! Hate! Spend!  
We all have those vices that we try to bottle.

You pour fear into folks like a soda fountain,  
but you won't sip it out of me, I'm no bottle.

There are no people here, no megaphones or rope,  
just some sand and a child's note inside a bottle.

The new line of J-Mil just came in this morning...  
None have sold; it won't be hard to find a bottle.

**Traffic (Or A Sonnet on Traffic Anywhere It Is)**  
Rebecca Baker

Hark, symphony of profaneness,  
And a bird, unfeathered, fleshy and rude.  
This legion of wheels drives on filthiness,  
While fowl freight look down on this auto brood.  
O airy transit, send your flighty throngs!  
Save us, stranded in dealings mad and black,  
Crow, cry, and heaven floods our world of wrongs,  
But love, do send the dove to lead us back.  
From heavenly roost provide guidance clear;  
Cry for swan songs and aid in earn'd wings,  
Forge no feckless roads gorged from there to here,  
And make the end cardinal above all things.  
Alas, I am chicken by any word;  
I won't change road rage to prayer by bird.

**Insomnia**  
Cody Reese

The sky turns amber through the city lights,  
time froze and avian silhouettes are trapped  
like fossilized mosquitoes mid-wing-flap.  
and I sit waiting for the sun to rise.  
My eyes won't close no matter how I try.  
Another glass of water from the tap  
and ask the mirror why my mind needs a map  
to find the end of this eternal night.

I wait in fear until this night resolves,  
my friends don't fret, assumptions close their eyes.  
I wish they wouldn't trust the sun to rise.  
The dinosaurs fell to the same mistake,  
encased in amber time machines and safely  
tucked in sheets of comforting basalt.

**Where There's a Mist**  
Demaris Dubon

Where there's a mist  
a flute invites me to play along,  
Haunting such a pale face,  
Guiding me into her maiden land,  
"Let's hunt the stags,  
Let's tour all the green mounds  
before our mouths twist years around!"  
Her exertion like the warriors' blaze,  
The cauldron of rubies! swords! armour! the  
Crucifixion?  
Only in Arthur's dreams.  
Feasting on the grounds where  
she and I giggle for men's pleasures in return,  
The stars align for Orion to lend his sword,  
The dying souls have no word to go,  
Too many names, colors, and servants  
now whirled into Imagination's past.  
The old man is shrinking to insane,  
His identity is up for many questions,  
I can feel the cold,

My poor lady's pale face not wanting to go,  
"Our culture is now feared,  
Our song will never be more,"  
We let our hands go,  
And her song drowns into the ocean's ripples.  
No more do I see her,  
I keep calling her name but  
only the wind speaks to me.  
I walk under the grey clouds,  
My identity in silence,  
A wind then whispers by my ear,  
And my head turns where  
a lonely mist appears.  
Where there's a mist,  
the stars are ready to align,  
And the golden mist opens up  
where two warrior shadows  
with steel to steel above their heads  
invite me to play along

## I Took James Joyce To A Bar In Long Beach

Charlotte San Juan

We were booth-stuffed beneath the  
clatter-clamor of harsh bar chiaroscuro,  
He was coughing fits of *Chamber Music*  
open handed phlegm-hack, readjusting  
his eye-patch, raised his glass with a toast  
to "bid adieu to girlish days."  
And over in the corner by the arcade games,  
in the wheezing and bickering sound bytes  
and blinking lights  
a woman's inked neck and shoulders  
rolled slow with the song in her head  
her spritzed curls damp in the sweat-light  
she was the leaning, love-struck drunk  
of her own late thirties, pining over  
chance, over the smoke-flirt-kiss  
of lost men. She was the tip-toed  
damaged damsel guarding the jukebox,  
the heroine of the night,  
amidst the dizzy sway of plastic-paper  
shamrocks and too-ra-loo-ras  
over the sports commentating flat screen  
heads talking, necks bar stool swiveling  
back and forth, caught in the ivory-corn  
grin of old men and their spreading  
crows feet, beneath the stolen banter

speaking in waves of Long Beach  
poured poetry, of her tight jeans  
cupping her with sequins,  
of the clink of glasses giving away  
the condensation of secrets, all  
talk and thick skin and hard lips  
and tales from the laundromat  
hanging from the shadows of her  
eyelids, an anklet around her  
inked rosary, spelling Frailty  
thy name is woman in the  
links of an unpolished silver  
chain pilfered from a pawn shop  
love affair, she was the swooning  
aftermath of Wednesday nights  
beneath the neon, still hair-twirling  
in hopes for something more than  
insignificant, insomniac embraces from  
somebody's stepped-out-for-cigarettes  
husband, who will take her to pace  
*under the moongrey nettles, the black  
mould and muttering rain*, only to leave  
her in the same weeded vacant lot  
of last week, before her eyes could  
ever *gather simples of the moon*.

## Messy Smooth

Elizabeth Reitzell

She'd need her second-story to be clean  
to see past the dust and hear past the  
noisevomit of her cluttered life,  
tangled from tiles black with grout, stale  
crackers and thick dirt  
stomped in years ago by a guest she doesn't  
know  
anymore since now she sleeps on too much  
fluff and steps on more  
than floor and listens to two songs at once but  
can never hear

a note and can never hear  
a mirror squeaking windex-clear because she  
doesn't clean  
reflective glass that echoes back her cluttered

face, wrinkled more  
with gaudy outlines oiled from claustrophobic  
smoky elevator life  
she grew up (dancing, running, flipping) never  
knowing she would know,  
when mudpies were still made to throw and dirt  
was still play-dirt.

But now she knows a different dirt,  
not rounded into patties, wet and fun. Her dirt  
is thickness she can't hear  
under flooded songs, ensuring that she'll never  
see or know  
the windex life of quiet houses, grout scrubbed  
Comet clean  
so she could see a tangled smile from memories

of the dancing, flipping life  
she lived with unstale crackers and background  
Beatles, before she needed more.

But now that she knows, she still needs more  
wellbutrin, pillows, vodka just to feel less. But  
there's still dirt  
masked with dank perfume and sloppy lipstick  
in her candy-coated life,  
com-syrupped too numb then GreyGoosed too  
sharp to hear  
what really happens to the Sleepers when the  
Lively clean  
their own crisp mirrors in their own two-stories  
because they want to know

how many wrinkles their clear mirrors know,  
only eating ritz crackers peeled freshly out of  
nutmeg paper, never housing more  
than one buttery sleeve per house, always  
wiping toothpaste spots on mirrors clean  
without wrinkling a nose at even wrinklier  
foreheads. In their clean lives, dirt  
is dirt to be cleaned, not a tool to hide the

dirtier. Their music plays to hear,  
not for unhearing the unhearable. Her music  
toothgrinds her cluttered life

stained with black grout, a stale ritz life  
gushing pillows thicker than the cushioned ass  
the pillows mold to know  
through muffled, crumb-filled missing-remote-  
tv nights when she can't hear  
Law and Order reruns over siren screeching  
crime scene music crowding her more than  
pizza-  
crusted couches seeping moldy tears and  
crumbed with padded dirt  
that she may never trash in the room next to the  
vanity mirror she may never clean.

Her dirt numbs and cushions more  
than it muddies so she leaves speckled glass  
she doesn't want to know,  
ups her downs and downs her ups, like the  
drums she beats with her vodka clean.

### **It's about time**

Patrick Guy

She wanted me to write her a poem,  
but I didn't really know what to say.  
She said: "There's nothing to say about me?"  
So I told her that I could say something,  
but it wouldn't really put all my feelings into  
words.

She told me: "It could be something simple,  
something meaningful; I think you're pretty."  
I thought pretty wouldn't do her justice  
but I asked her if that's what she wanted  
me to say in the poem. She looked at me and  
said: "No."

"It has to be the right moment," she said.  
I have always thought that she looked pretty  
so I told her I would tell her again  
tomorrow morning when we both woke up,  
because that is when I thought that she looked

the prettiest,  
but she said: "It has to be a surprise."

I said: "Babe"—I call her babe—"that's unfair,  
you want something true, but not something  
obvious,  
you want something right now, but not at this  
moment,  
and you want something beautiful, but simple  
too?"

So she said: "That's exactly what I want."  
So I looked her in the eyes, grabbed her hand,  
pulled out a pen from my back right pocket,  
bit the cap off and spit it on the floor,  
faced the palm of her left hand towards our feet  
and wrote in blank ink: I love you more than  
any finger on this hand. Then kissed her.



**A Neu Doctore**  
Poonam Narewatt

A Professore of lawe ek ther was,  
Who taughte with vigor alwey his cas.  
Taughte he at Whittier scoleye,  
But nantheeles as Jesuit he preye.  
Bifore he became professore,  
Him liste holde post as ane frere.  
But soon he became war that he was  
A love of man and all their cas.  
It byhoveth he ne would be a frere.  
Eek hope to be solempne rymere.

As rymmer lite monies wold he make,  
So the lyf of lawe he undertake.  
Came to Whittier on pilgrimage  
To sprede his wysdom and knoledge.  
In classe he act a harlot alwey;  
“Doctour Neu!” yelle clerks in agoney .  
He speke to clerks of his lust for mights,  
Who deserveth from Gouvernment rights.  
Love of man, never aske for wyf,  
Forthy as servaunt to clerks he led his lyf.

**Ziggy’s Tale**  
April Lotshaw

A minstrel ek there was, come of Brixten;  
Eek an of this world, well was he knownen.  
Eek he ben for the mastrie a fair,  
Hadde an eyen colour of water,  
An eyen colour of emeraudes;  
His face faire, gent and small, he faires  
Were clad in fyneste array mottelee;  
His lippes were reed, as rouge his cheke,  
A face ful soft and whit as is the pearl;  
I wood, his visage were mystorneth,  
So lyk of wommanhode he stondeh.

In many a ferreste lande he wone

Eek many a maiden hadde he knowene;  
He clepped somtyme Tom, somtyme Ziggye,  
Full knowe he of astromye.  
Eek with ful fetisly voys singe he,  
Also koude him pleyen wel giterne,  
An wel coud he dauncen magik daunce.

Folwen of Mars, he doon sacrificis  
To Mars spyders to saven his hondis;  
Oft he tok reste, and in his slepe,  
Mette of the galaxye depe,  
Eek mette of his wif, that on this world,  
Doth love him trewly, as Venus will’d.  
Of kyn, oon child he carieth certis  
Though they been kyn I dost not know it is.  
I thynke him a manly man trewly,  
Eek an a fey fellow ful honestly.

(David Bowie)

**The student prostitute at University Mohammad V**  
Leandro Fefer

“I’m having a great time Mother”

She looked at it as an adventure

indentured to an education

pensive, patient, pacing, mind racing, on dark streets waiting

occupation of innovation

vocation something ancient

vacations are suffocation waiting at the train station

sensation, smothered

“studies are going well mother”

Sensations,

leather slicked with sweat

tugging hair, restricted neck

bills paid with regret

“everything is fine mother”

Dreams defy deferral

Objectively a goddess

tell-tail signs: the toes he curled

perfectly objectified

close friends first are petrified

then disregarded then pushed aside

dependence on a life she hides

Independence Must Be Pride

“I love you too mother, I have to go.

**Allen's Day Off**  
*Whittier Awards in Prose – First Place*

Jessica Miller

Allen Fine poked his head out from his crater window and gazed into the vast depths of lunar suburbia. Having slept in until noon for the first time in years, it was as though he were looking out a different window altogether. It was neither slow nor still, as the early mornings usually were. Instead, folks were hopping about across the dusty cement sidewalks imprinted in the moon's surface, heading out to their various jobs or attending to some domestic list of errands.

Allen, bless his heart, was not one of these people today. It was his Day Off. This one unexpected free day for the duration of the floor renovations at "Fine and Well's Floral Design" left Allen quite unsure of what to do. The flower shop had demanded his unconditional dedication for virtually every day since Allen could remember opening the place, to such an extent that he had moved a toothbrush and a face cloth into the medicine cabinet behind the mirror of the cramped employee restroom. Every other day of the year he readily reminded himself that the cost of living was expensive enough; there was little point in passing up a decent day's pay to indulge some futile activity like hyper-gravitational baseball instead. But he wasn't 'passing up' anything today. By courtesy of the shop's drab floors, he had been awarded a full day to spend however he liked. To most this would have been agreeable, but it made Allen feel naked. Where was there to go, if not work?

Perhaps it was this abrupt coercion to live, to think beyond the route to and from work, that replaced the emptiness of not being at Fine and Well's with a sudden, giddy sense of impulsiveness. As Allen sat at the dining table with a dense slice of toast, he was lifted by an overwhelming energy, a sense of capacity to plant his feet wherever he pleased. Not even pleased-wherever there were simply enough space for a short, albeit unusually wide, pair of feet to land.

The possibilities of the day now lay opened before him like the morning paper. He could do anything, really. He could see a movie, go out to the museum, enjoy a picnic lunch at Bradsley Park and-if purely on principle---catch a glimpse of a little league hyper-gravitational baseball game. Why, he could watch struggling entertainers perform their improvised monologues outside the book store all day if he felt so inclined. He could perform monologues out there himself! Or go skydiving, make solitary dust angels in the vast rural outskirts of town, set up a tarp in the thickets of the rocky deserts and spend hours banging on overturned pots! The moon's surface stretched to every corner of Allen's imagination. He could hardly wait to begin the day's adventure.

After finishing brunch, he brought his plate to the sink. Although Allen had a perfectly functioning dishwasher, neglected stacks of used bowls, plates and utensils had piled up in the right hand compartment of the sink. There was, quite frankly, a sluggish smell beginning to emanate from them. He stood over the pungent dishware with a curled lip. Work sometimes occupied so much of his attention that he forgot to tend to the little things. Well, thought Allen, here is finally an opportunity to address all this mess.

But a trip beneath the sink soon revealed that Allen was utterly out of powdered dish detergent. The nearest grocery store was a twenty-minute walk, all the way on the other end with the upscale homes and accompanying shopping centers. Even by taking the subway through the maze of sedimentary caves beneath Allen's residential area, he would only shave about six minutes off his total trip. And who had time to spend their whole day off going to grocery stores? The thought was almost offensive. So Allen immediately set to work washing each plate, fork and glass by hand with a dingy blue sponge.

By the time the mass of dishes were dripping cleanliness on their cheap plastic drying rack, the sun's dim but present glow reminded Allen that it was about that time of month for the moon to descend into its one night of darkness. Allen adored the night. It was a reassuring feeling to go to bed and know that everything outside his eyelids was exactly like the inside of them; sleep felt logical.

Allen drew a thin curtain across the kitchen windowpane to prevent the beams from damaging his pallid complexion. That was the other problem with the sun. His doctor had informed him some time ago that the human body requires only twenty minutes of sunlight no more than three times a week. Allen tallied up all the commutes from his doorstep to the flower shop, from the flower shop to the delivery trucks, and all the chance passings by a sunny window that occurred in a week and knew his skin well filled its sunlight quota without any extra effort. This made Allen extremely apprehensive of any further exposure than was absolutely necessary. But recalling that it was, in fact, his day off, and that in all fairness he should be allowed to indulge in the slightest bit of sun on this day, Allen pioneered his way to the end of his narrow driveway to collect the morning mail. He appeared less than presentable in his bathrobe, mismatching thermal socks and fiery peaks of unaddressed hair which were usually so neatly feathered atop his bean-shaped head. Allen kept his face down and focused on his footsteps to the mailbox and back. Somewhere down the street he heard a couple tri-terrestrial mobiles revving their engines competitively at one another. The neighborhood youth often drag-raced through the shallow lunar dunes on their way to school, a noisy activity the citizens of the town condoned only because they had done the very same during their own high school years.

"Reckless, oblivious fools," Allen had always thought to himself. It seemed the teenagers were forever seeking out some superfluous new gadget, an enzymatic fire-powered accelerator or a gravity spoiler to affix to their cartoonishly-decaled vehicles. But hey would have a new vehicle ten or fifteen years from now, and all that money would have been

frittered away on something as useless and ephemeral as 'astro-flauge paint', which only worked effectively half the time, anyway.

Allen squinted. For a transition-to-full-night day it was still so incredibly bright out ... it could have been due to something he remembered hearing on the news a few evenings ago, one of those uncommon aurora borealis solar flares in which the sun went through a series of technicolor hues as it hovered in the sky. It was bound to be some shade of fuchsia or ultramarine at any given point throughout the day. Allen kept his face turned away from the direction of the sun so that the flare wouldn't do some exponential amount of skin damage during its rare luminosity.

Allen quickly collected the contents of his mailbox and walked back to the house. One envelope contained contained a promotional offer from the recently opened Huck's Lunar Aquarium, granting a guided one-day admission to anyone who registered to receive their monthly newsletter. This Allen discarded in the paper recycling bin with the rest of the junk mail. The next was a bill from the Helio Gas Company, which Allen immediately opened. The slip suggested "going green" by paying the bill online. Allen, having always considered himself an environmentally conscious person, decided to go on his computer and pay the bill while it was still fresh in his mind-it wasn't always guaranteed that he would remember or even have time later on.

The internet, as always, drug laboriously from page to page. Allen had to enter his bank account routing number into the website at least four times before the server finally sent it through. It was a tedious process to say the least, so he was more than happy to get it out of the way.

With the dishes done and the gas bill paid off, Allen returned to romanticizing the staggering openness of the rest of his day. He knew there was a big-budget period action-drama being shot not too far from his home, as an innocuous "Notice of Filming" tag left on his doorknob had decreed. He could perhaps watch from the taped-off boundaries as craned

hauled chandeliers and improbable prop "space tanks" from set to set; maybe even run into one of the several big-time celebrities rumored to be starring in the film. They were always looking for extras, too. That might be fun.

But Allen knew if he were to meet a celebrity, he would be chagrined to meet them looking as he did now. And if he were to inquire about being an extra he would most certainly have to get gussied up, or at least moderately well-groomed. The time spent getting ready was, in Allen's opinion, hardly worth the trouble for such an iffy excursion. Suppose the celebrities were all hidden away in their trailers, or the scene didn't call for extras? Allen's efforts would have been for nothing, and his time wasted. Besides, was it not his day off? He combed his hair and coordinated his slacks and socks every other day of the year—why bother with these tedious burdens today?

Allen floated down into his corduroy recliner as he pondered the reasons not to tend to his appearance. It really began to stir up some ideological convictions in his head. Today shouldn't be about superficial things like clothes and social graces. As far as Allen was concerned, this whole beautiful day had dropped into being for him and only him, and he should seize it as such. He felt rather proud about it. The inhabitants of the universe ought to accept him with or without a comb or a razor. Why, he should go out and do something today where he *could* be seen, disheveled as he was.

That's when Allen had a marvelous idea—the plaza! Of course. It was the perfect place to go on a day off. The main downtown area was filled with all sorts of bizarre little nooks and interesting spots in which to dine, play or be entertained. Something was always going on, and during the day it was usually bustling with people. Surely, there would be something for Allen to discover there. He could simply head downtown and let pure chance decide the day's itinerary. The allure of an unplanned adventure led Allen to the front entryway as he prepared to depart immediately. But just as he was looking around for his keys, there came a knock at the door.

Allen darted a wary glance in its direction. He wasn't expecting company. He hardly ever had visitors—or, if he did, he was never home to receive them. So who was this, then? What could they want from him? Was it a wandering evangelist? A salesperson selling portable oxygen patches? Or, worst of all thoughts, what if it was a pig-tailed little Girl Scout trying to guilt him into buying an outrageously overpriced box of shortbread cookies? Allen didn't have money to waste on cookies; he'd only have less to spend on his day off! Allen felt a burning resentment at the poorly-timed second knock that erupted from the door.

Whoever was out there was perfectly barricading him from his adventurous day. In the interests of not getting held up, Allen decided it would be best to just wait for the person to leave. He minimized his breathing and stood absolutely still, as though the bothersome guest were prowling around the house like a velociraptor in search of prey. To be absolutely sure that he wouldn't accidentally run into the person— whoever they were— on his way out the door, he stayed there motionless for several moments. Once Allen felt the coast was without a doubt clear, he crept to the door and put a pupil to the peephole. The coast was, without a doubt, clear.

It was therefore just the least bit startling when Allen opened the door to discover a large, brown package sitting on the front step. He laughed at his earlier reticence. It had only been the mailman! Allen respected the brevity with which mailmen and women carried out their work—pleasant but practical. And here he had been worried about jumping through acrobatic conversational hoops trying to explain why he wouldn't buy someone's cookies, patches or religion.

Allen brought the box right inside and placed it on the dining table. It was roughly the size of a microwave, though it was much lighter. He read the return address: "Online InterPlanetary Home Outlet." Ah, yes! Allen had completely forgotten about the little robotic vacuum he had purchased online some weeks ago. As the dishes could testify, he spent so much time at the flower shop that he didn't like

squandering his sparse amounts of free time tending to mundane household chores like vacuuming. With this cutting-edge "OmniVac," he could simply tum it on before he left for work and return to a house of fully-vacuumed floors. The thought of this ingenious time-saving technique brought Allen an inexpressible amount of joy.

After hunting around for a suitable box cutter, he opened the package and sifted through the aquarium of packing peanuts. He fished out several pieces of equipment: a dust chamber, a replacement motor, a 'settings' remote, several nozzles and hose attachments, and the vacuum body itself, which was actually five pieces that required assembly. The multi-lingual instruction manual tumbled like a Jacob's ladder from Allen's hand to the floor. Not discouraged, he was eager to see his OmniVac putter about from room to room, and he knew he might very well be too tired to assemble such a device on any other day. So he set to work clipping the tubes and panels together with the keen diligence of someone building a model rocket.

To Allen's surprise, it took quite a few attempts to successfully put the darn thing together, and even after it was properly built it wouldn't start. Perplexed, he had had to completely de- and re-construct the contraption at least three times before discovering that it was missing batteries. Fortunately, Allen kept a large storage tub filled with batteries of all sizes for just such an occasion. It took some thorough excavating to come upon three triple-Cs, but he eventually found them.

Much to Allen's satisfaction, the OmniVac now navigated freely through the labyrinth of chair and table legs in his home. After cleaning up the mess of plastic baggies and extra screws strewn about the dining table, Allen decided that although it was getting to be later in the afternoon he could still walk through the main plaza and see where his fancy led him. He could leave for the plaza whenever he wanted. Adventure didn't stop at sunset-it doesn't stop, ever, so long as you're seeking it out. Allen inspired himself with this philosophical revelation and took a bold step out the front door.

He was tingling with the euphoria of freedom and spontaneity as he made his way into town. With his joints in motion and his heart now pumping blood to the utmost tips of his fingers, he couldn't wait to see what new and exciting experiences he would stumble into. Down the street he chugged along as fast as one can do while floating between steps: past his neighbors' exotic botanical gardens, past the grunge concert venues carved into lunar rock, past the shadows of free-floating apartment complexes suspended in the air, past a private spacecraft landing strip, past the extraterrestrial petting zoo ... he buoyantly trod without any thought except of all the intriguing things he might soon see.

Faster than he knew it he had made it to the plaza. Along the craftily cobbled walkways were curio stands, thrift stores, geological displays of precious stones and every number of bohemian bake shops, cafes and microbreweries. There was much less fervor on the streets as the busiest part of the day was beginning to end, but it seemed at least a few folks were still sustaining the cultural hub with their presence.

Allen caught whiff of something sizzling all the way from inside the Moon Wok and felt his stomach rumble. He decided an adventure would be less fulfilling if he was preoccupied by hunger, so he popped inside a random food establishment, a crooked little bistro painted purple. Inside were a couple straggling moonsquatters in rumpled gray polyester, sipping gritty lattes out of tinted glass spheroids as strands of their beaded dreadlocks orbited their messy, dust-plated heads. They were watching a three-piece beatnik group summon ethereal melodies and incomprehensible lyrics that combined timpani percussion sets with flutelike appendages emitting staccato trills into the subdued atmosphere.

A frail young waiter with mousy pink hair offered Allen a smile and a menu, which he furtively perused. It was written in a quirky colloquialism of the moonsquatter subculture, and was difficult to make heads or tails of. It was also fairly pricy, at least for a place like this. Allen politely bowed out of the

establishment and went up two buildings to Subway, where he meditatively sat and consumed a five-dollar foot-long meatball sub.

With his sandwich in hand, Allen watched the sun now begin its conspicuous descent from the sky. As it sunk away his heart took up a familiar flutter—he hadn't accomplished a single adventure yet! But, fortunately, now that the skin-frying sun was finally disappearing he could freely explore the outside moon without expending any of his precious 60 minutes of light.

Allen stepped out of Subway and yawned from a bready-meatball comatose. He checked his watch. What could he do with these remaining hours of the day? It would, of course, be fully dark soon. A place. A place to go. Allen juiced his brain for ideas ... Ah! He could go to the cliffs! The Morikon cliffs were, after all, a fantastic place to observe the nebulous stars which orbited so rapidly and irregularly that they regularly changed places at an eye's careful detection in the sky. Allen had only seen them once before on a television program. With not a moment to lose, he began a frantic power walk to the bus station.

The bus was five minutes late. Allen nervously fidgeted from foot to foot until its headlights finally settled beside the curb. To make matters worse, the regular route to Morikon had been blocked off due to some silly, extravagant parade that occurred once a month when the night came around. People from all over would gather and clog Karp Street with their merriment. Karp Street, unfortunately, was the only direct route to the trail leading to the cliffs. Allen had never minded their festive celebrations, but now their merriment was in direct conflict with his quest to try something new and exciting.

There was a pixelated harmer flashing across the side of the bus, stating that it had to take an alternate route and that the delay would be roughly thirty minutes. Once Allen was on, the bus began its winding detour through an unfamiliar part of town. Houses were constructed from reeds and wood planks bound together by cakes of sediment. Each building was shaped like a large oval and painted with

unique, intricate designs along the outside, such that they resembled a community of muddy Easter eggs. Allen didn't notice this, however, since he had decided to utilize the bus ride for a thirty-minute nap so that he wouldn't be exhausted by the time he reached the cliffside.

Once Allen finally arrived at his stop and got off, it was officially dark out. He shivered in harmony with the rustling leaves surrounding the area. The cliffs were located on the edge of one of the earliest developed synthetically-grown lunar jungles, which were a treacherous entanglement of vines, roots and loping rubber trees allegedly home to a unique breed of iridescent koalas.

Now, it wasn't that Allen necessarily feared koalas, but their large, pit-like eyes and geriatric claws made him uneasy. To encounter one might indeed be a very suitable adventure—empowering, even, to autonomously confront. But the stones and snaking floor vines of the forest were undetectable in the dark, and even in Allen were to reach the cliff sides by the remaining instances of light, he would have to travel back in the thickets of night. What's more, if he did somehow manage to make it through safely without tripping over something and clapping his head against a pointed rock, doing so would ensure he didn't get home until very late. And work resumed early tomorrow; he couldn't stay out exhausting himself.

So Allen decided to go back.

It was at least fifteen minutes before another bus came to get him. When it did Allen got on quickly—it was getting chilly out—and took another small nap so he could stock up on as much sleep as possible before tomorrow. At the rate the buses were moving today, there was no telling if he would make it to bed on time.

He took the bus all the way back to the plaza. Once he arrived he checked his wristwatch again, and this time he really was flabbergasted by the abrupt way time seemed to jump forward every time something entered his brain. There was so little time between now and when he would once more return to the flower shop and water the same lilies, prune the same rose stems, sort the same arrangements and sweep the same green and brown trimmings skittering against the broom head

like scattered counterfeit bills.

It was the end of Allen's day off.

Well, a whole day spent. But on what, Allen couldn't quite recall. His memory highlighted a meatball sub and a smelly bus. But nothing more.

Disappointed in his foolishly unsubstantial day, Allen felt the gravity of sadness press itself down upon his chest and shoulders. Wasteful. Though a part of him briefly entertained grabbing a late-night coffee someplace and catching a light-night 6-D movie, Allen was certainly far too sad to do anything anymore. Every object in the moon—

every lantern, every flower, every person—was an opportunity waiting to be missed, and he had succeeded in missing them all.

And so Allen sojourned home in resignation, vowing that next time--whenever that was—he would surely be more adventurous with his day off. Yes, the solace of Next Time. As Allen made his way homeward he was able to take comfort in the fact that at least his OmniVac would be waiting for him when he returned, still winding arbitrarily around furniture pieces, covering the same places some exhaustive number of times. Still going around and around.

### **Peaches on Adderall**

*Whittier Awards in Prose – Second Place*

Elizabeth Reitzell

#### *Antipasta*

Still zipped up, I clog up the crowded mauve doorway, ready to breeze back onto the gum-stained late night North Beach sidewalk. With his brown leather coat already draped on his forearm, he nods me into the crowded upscale restaurant I was expecting to leave.

"I know a guy," he winks. Squirming out of my knee-length thrift store coat, I follow him past the waiting line benches cluttered by well-dressed middle-ages with perfect postures. We are seated immediately in the center dining room. "Johnnie Walker Green, two rocks," he grins at the must-be-actress waitress before I can flip to the cocktail menu. She's fitted in a light blue button down shirt, synched at her athletic waistline. Her tight ponytail waterfalls from her crown, rushing just past her shoulder blades, slightly straining her high, unsmiling cheek bones upward. The North Beach menu pages have the smooth thickness of fancy business cards, unlike the laminated menu at the Chinese restaurant I frequent, sticky with forgotten orange chicken sauce and taped-over prices next to the poorly-selling dishes. Never

certain that they scrub the lemon rinds at Taste of Asia, I usually order water without lemon and count the shrimp swimming in my fried rice to make sure that the last overcooked bite of my meal would at least have one miniature veined shrimp, oversalted to match a cheap American pallet. Here, the steep prices are printed even tinier than the undernourished shrimp at my greasy Chinese joint.

The waitress eyebrow-raises me out of my greasy daze and before I have a chance to squint at the cocktail's description, I blush, "I'll take The Mandorla." I sweep my gaze across the range of dresses and skirts the women diners wear under the ironed table cloths in Tulipano's, landing on the waitress's simple black pants and then my own dark slacks. *We must be the only two women wearing pants in this establishment; me and the dining staff.*

Menu still untouched, he tilts his head toward me across the table. "Ah, you're a fan of grappa?" *What the fuck is grappa?* I blink cautiously down at the powder-smooth page before answering. The menu reads: *The Nardini Mandorla Grappa, Aperol, Lemon Juice, Orange Curaçao.* Sounds fruity.



“Shaken not stirred,” I smile, hoping Mandorlas are either shaken or stirred to begin with. I bite my flustered lip and flick my unpainted thumb over to the pricey entrees page. *Glad we’re not going Dutch.* The waitress hustles back to our table with steaming sliced sourdough in a basket and a shallow oil dish blotted with balsamic. My eyes hover over the pasty carbohydrates, refusing to take the first bitter oily plunge. He doesn’t seem to notice my greedy pupils or the steaming bread at all.

He leans slightly back to welcome his oncoming glass of whiskey. “Have you ever been to Italy?”

The waitress sets my peach-colored cocktail glass to the top right of my plate and circles the table to set his whiskey to the top right of his. The light brown blended malt seeps around a lime-sized chunk of ice and the waitress hovers above his glass with a dutiful second sphere of ice. He frowns away the second piece she brought in case he insisted on two. I sip my drink. “I have not, but I do like grappa. Wanna sip?” Whiskey already evaporated, he sparks a smile at my glass and grips its stem, sipping it from the rim opposite of the one my lips had already cleared of sugar.

He raises a soft palm toward the waitress. “We’ll have a bottle of Cabernet.” His palm settles down, directing his creased upper brow my way. “You do like red, don’t you?”

I blurt, “I am pro-red.” The waitress blasts me with icy eyes a second longer than seems consistent with indifference; a small step above eyerolling. *She’s no actress yet, but I’m sure a job like this is good training.* She slinks away and he illustrates his childhood vacation home in Italy where a friend of his still owns a vineyard. I consider matching his vineyard story with my Pliny the Younger story about the time I spent the pocket money I earned from my summer retail job on cocktails at Eureka Burger so I could secure prime real estate at the bar until eight o’clock when they were scheduled to crack the small keg of Pliny the Younger, only to be kicked out just before eight and told to stand outside with the long line of ticket-holders thirsty for Pliny. He

finally dips a corner of a bread slice into the oil, welcoming me to the carbs.

I use this pause to glide into my own alcohol-related story. “Did you know that Pliny the Younger is only distributed in small kegs?” The waitress pops over to his side of the table and introduces the 2007 bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from the Saddleback Cellars in Oakville, Nappa, pouring him a sample. He swirls, smells, and sips. She fills my glass and his, waiting for an appetizer order.

Facing me but glancing over his nose at the menu, “We’ll start with your Fritto Misto of snapper, calamari and onion rings with the kaffir lime aioli, and I think we’ll also take—you do like seafood don’t you?”

“Yeah, calamari is good.” My face stings under the waitress’s arctic eyes. *Calamari is good. Real cool.*

“Great. And the grilled seafood-stuffed calamari with split green lentils and caper aioli.” She nods, trailing away a delicate peach scent with her chestnut ponytail zigzagging behind her. I tilt my head at our untouched wine glasses. I had taken a Chinese tea ritual course in college and had a basic understanding of specific tea brewing times but had no idea how long the wine had to breathe in a glass before an appropriate sip. “What were you saying about Pliny the Younger? I’ve yet to experience the brew myself,” he blinks. “How is it?”

I reconsider rambling out my story about the burger bar which ends with me drunkenly flipping off the bartenders, refusing to wait in the outdoor line after having dropped so much cash on place-saving cocktails. “I haven’t tried it actually, just Pliny the Elder. But the Younger is a rare triple IPA version.” He finally pinches the stem of his wine glass. I copy. I feel like I did back in my junior high cotillion class, learning to let the nervous redhead boy lead me stumbling in the Fox Trot, spitting out cold chitchat about his model train collection with instructor-enforced eye contact. Is he aware that across the table his movements are carefully monitored and occasionally mimicked when I’m uncomfortably unsure of myself? And, with our Fritto Misto—whatever

that is—and our stuffed calamari on its way, which fork am I supposed to use first?

## Entrees

I finish my Mandorla to ready my pallet for wine and to catch up with him. The waitress wafts in with our two appetizer plates and clears our empty glasses. I watch him slide up his outside fork and I do the same, spearing an almost unidentifiable stuffed calamari as he goes for a fried calamari ring on the other plate. “I never tend to order chicken, but here it really is the best on the menu. The pastas they make are also delicious, and so is the Local Dungeness Crab Cioppino with clams, prawns, snapper, and calamari, but that is recommended for two people, and—” he chuckles up at me, closing his menu. “—I’m not sure I’m ready for that kind of commitment.” I stab an onion ring and slather it in the lime aioli sauce on the plate.

“I’m leaning toward the wild sea bass,” I smile, wresting off a bite of the ring with my canines. I swallow roughly, and breathe in a gentle peach gust.

“Interesting choice,” the waitress chimes from our table side. *She would be stealthier than Batman if she didn’t smell so delicious.* She turns toward my date, “have you decided?”

“Sorry, where’s your restroom?” I interrupt. She points to the back of the restaurant and I nod to excuse myself. A three-cocktail chill tingles from my face down as I stand up, numbing my feet as I concentrate on each buzzing step to the washroom. I lock myself inside the silver box, rushing my hands under thick cold water, rubbing wet fingers under my eyes and behind my neck. I smile at my reflection in the silver-trimmed vanity until my gaze locks straight without an alcohol-induced frown.

I release myself from the silver room and softly swing my arms past well-dressed couples leaning toward one another over circular high tables. He sips another whiskey at our table. “It’s a bit of a habit,” he shrugs. *Is he one of those well-functioning alcoholics?* I

thought about my O’Doul’s drinking mother who told me once that true alcoholics circulate alcohol in their blood at all times. *Could that be true?*

I flash him my mirror-approved smile. “No judgment on my end. We all have vices, right?”

He licks the last drop off the rim of the glass. “Well then fess up! What’s yours?”

My mind drops as cold and empty as the glass he clutches. *I have straitjacket ADD and pop focus drugs like skittles. Is that a vice?* “I’ll get back to you on that one.”

He reaches for the bottle. “Can I top you off?” I slide my wine glass toward him and he pours a couple inches in both our glasses. Peaches emerge.

“Here’s the Chicken Al Mattone from the Hoffman Farms with asparagus and compound butter” the waitress eases the plate in front of him. She lands a graybrown package on a plate in front of me. “The Wild Striped Bass in Parchment with vignarola and pea shoots.” *How the fuck am I supposed to eat this?* It looks like a cooked brown paper burrito. She leans over me as if to elegantly save me the trouble, sawing at my plate with a steak knife and a fork, releasing steam from the graybrown parchment enveloping my wild sea bass. Her tan forearm clenches, bouncing her ponytail, intimately biting her tongue. I inhale deeply but her delicate harvest scent is almost masked by the balsamic-drenched sea bass. She uses the knife and fork like a pair of chopsticks to garnish the bass in its exposed parchment womb with the pea shoots from the side of my plate. Her smooth jaw ascends from my dish and I thank her ice cube eyes which almost reach mine. *She would make a wonderful actress.* If we had intersected on the path to the washroom I would have been tempted to tell her. She bows away, stealing the light peach scent from my breathing range. I follow her coiling hair with my quiet eyes as she scurries over to the bar. *Has he watched me watch her this whole time?* I spear an artichoke heart from inside the parchment. It blasts hot citrus balsamic on my tongue and I hold in a moan.

“How is the sea bass?” he grins with

hot eyes and a perfect square of chicken on his fork. Relieved to finally have recognizable food between us so conversation can shift to experiential knowledge of the present, I smirk with the irony that I haven't yet tried the bass.

"If it's as good as the vignarola then the sea bass is amazing." *Oh fuck, I pronounced bass like the sea creature, not bass like the guitar, right?* "Is your chicken delicious?"

He nods with the confidence of a mouthful. "The chicken is tender. They cook it under a brick, but the question is, how big of a brick?"

*Is this a joke? Should I be politely laughing?* I smile with an exhale—my go-to subtle laugh-smile—and his eyes flash mine in approval of my safe response. I flake off some sea bass with my fork and he continues a conversation about Chinese history I must have forgotten we were having sometime pre-sea bass. *Textbook. He's appealing to my interest in Chinese history my uncle must have told him about in passing so that I'll think he's a good listener and uncross my legs.* I plunge the flake of bass in the vinegar cradled in the parchment and rest it on my tongue. It half-dissolves in my mouth and I give it a chew before letting it swim down my throat. *Fuck, is he still talking about China? Is this working on me?* He pauses to finish his glass of wine.

"How do you feel about Confucius?" I redden from a combination of the obscurity of my uncontextualized question, the Cabernet, and the heat of the front-of-the-house style kitchen, jutting into the dining area. I try again. "His perspective just seems elitist compared to Mozi." *Fuck, did I just bring financial statuses into a conversation with Johnnie Walker Green on Two Cubes?* I did.

"I like Confucius. He's sort of the Socrates of Eastern philosophy," he breathes into his wine glass. *He's good.* He folds his napkin from his lap. "Excuse me for a moment," he dimples, setting it on the table as he stands up and disappears into the back of the restaurant. I slouch comfortably and stab the vignarola, punishing each pea and artichoke heart for my awkwardness. *I've never felt so adequately educated but overly distracted,*

*underopinionated, undertraveled, undergoogled, and underhumped.* I stuff a huge chunk of wild sea bass into my mouth and send it down with a rush of red, reaching for the bottle to top off my glass. *Fuck, how many fucking fingers high do you fill a wine glass? I knew I should have taken that fifty dollar bartending course with my ex-boyfriend junior year.* I pour a couple of oxblood inches into my wine glass and take a sip for good measure. *Maybe this is how cultured men land women. Not for the money directly, but because they penetrate us with this awful awareness of our limited collection of experiences!* I cram a pea shoot in my mouth, clearing my front teeth with the tip of my tongue. I re-stiffen my spine as his oxfords glide on the burgundy carpet toward his seat.

"Have you thought at all about dessert? I have a bit of a sweet tooth myself." His cleanly severed mostly eaten chicken would be mocking the crime scene in my parchment paper if it wasn't bandaged up by the stiff graybrown. *Is he trying to wave his culturedness in my bass-butcher face or does he just have extraordinary dining manners?*

### **Desserts**

Her high cheek bones revisit our motionless table. "Can I clear your plates?" she breezes with a waft of harvest peach.

He distributes the rest of the wine into our glasses. "Yes, I think we're done. What do you recommend on the dessert menu?"

"My favorite is the House Made Persimmon Bread Pudding with Eggnog Gelato and Nutmeg," she chirps through peach colored lips. *I never knew I had such an affinity for all that is peach.* "But our most popular is the Vanilla Cookie with Lavender Cream and Green Tea Caramel. If you're an espresso fan, the Flourless Chocolate Budino with Espresso Whipped Cream is also great. They're all quite good."

I smile at the waitress, waiting for her to list a peach dessert. "You pick," I dart my eyes at him across the table, watering for a mouthful of dripping peach juice.

"Let's try your Vanilla Cookie, then," he chuckles. "Can't go wrong with the popular

vote.” I smile politely at my date across the table, wishing our waitress’s strong cheek bones had been softened with the word *peach*.

“Actually, you don’t have any peach desserts, do you?”

“Peaches,” her cheeks soften. My mouth fills a moist warm from under my tongue. “No, we don’t—”

“Did you know that in ancient China peaches were thought to be the elixir of life and

prosperity?” I stare at her softly pinkish cheeks. “The peach was the fruit of the emperors” *She’s too good to be here*.

“But we’ll get the vanilla cookie and the check,” he frowns across the table.

“Peaches are my favorite,” she finally smiles.

“Mine too,” I blush pink-orange. Forget his name.

### 3 Fables and a Resurrection

*Whittier Awards in Prose – Third Place*

Victor Vargas

*Once upon a time, I did a porno. Many, actually.*

“The greatest stories ever told begin with naked people. God followed up light with nudity, and that wasn’t an accident,” said the girl who ruined my life.

When I first met her—Penelope Lynley—she was another anonymous face in my writing workshop at the community college years and years ago. You know I’ve never been particularly good with faces or names, but I remember that this girl stood apart from the jumble of my memory because *every* character in *every* story she ever wrote, she wrote butt naked. It was sort of her *thing*. Make no mistake, Penelope wasn’t into the erotic potential of nudity. Penelope was a master of the taught muscle clench, the gelatinous fat quiver, the greasy sweat streak—this girl liked to thoroughly describe the nauseating aspects of our bodies’ biology in such excruciating detail that I often caught myself close to heaving before closing my eyes against the pages of her work. The very first time it came for the class to review Penelope’s work in the open workshop, I remember that the class sat around in the customary circle with people taking passive turns to offer bits and pieces of of generally meaningless praise and constructive criticism.

Your writing style is good.

Maybe focus less on description and

include more imagery.

Do a little less telling and a little more showing.

I like your strong tone and pacing.

I think your blah, blah, blah could do with some blah, blah, blah.

I raised my hand amidst the tight little circle of single parents and forty-something mechanics and janitors and asked her why it was that she was so obsessed with nudity.

I remember that Penelope, with her naked people eating, her naked people exercising and running down the street, rolled her eyes. I remember that she screwed up her face in this exaggerated scowl. I remember that she shook her head.

“I fucking hate cowards,” she had answered, raising her chin at me. “The flaccid cock, the hairy vagina—there’s something incredibly powerful about it all. Whoever first thought up Genesis certainly knew it.”

I raised my eyebrow.

“I don’t care about *nudity*,” Penelope continued, purposefully enunciating her pronunciation slowly, as if she were talking to someone very stupid. “I care about courage. I care about *power*.”

I looked around the room at the blank, nodding faces. Those tired, dark eyes. Those slumped shoulders.

I remember telling her that she was full of shit. I remember I had been twirling a

bent pen between my fingers and, for effect, I stabbed down on the piece of notebook paper that I had been doodling on. I let the sound of impact pop with *shit*.

Penelope's mouth fell open.

Courage? Power? What a joke. I don't care what kind of pervert you are, but don't pretend to philosophize your degeneracy.

Later, on the metro bus ride home, Penelope plopped down on the empty seat to my right. I had been working on a poem. Something stupid about rats finding love in graveyards.

I regarded her coolly. She smiled at me and said: "Sorry, I didn't get your name earlier."

Celandine, I said. My name's Celandine Luna.

"I'm Penelope," she said. "Celandine? That means swallow, right?" Her smile turned into a sneer. "The bird, I mean. Not the, ah..."

I shrugged and turned back to my notebook.

"The average age that a boy watches his first porn is eleven and a half," she said to me. "You ask me, that's not nearly young enough."

I stared at Penelope when she said this to me. More amazed than surprised. She peered over at my notebook. Leered over. Annoyed, I started writing again, scrawling descriptions on the notebook page. Describing *her*. I took note of her eyes—squinty and too far apart. She watched me while I wrote about how her nose was too long, how her ruby red lipstick clashed horribly against her yellow cheeks. I remember wondering if maybe this ugly, horrid girl had jaundice.

She watched me write that down too.

"That's the problem with you writer types," Penelope finally said. She scooted over in her seat and placed her head on my shoulder, leaning against me, she wrapped her arm around me and started tickling my ear. "You confuse power over the *word* for power over the *world*. Didn't anyone ever tell you? Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never bring me to orgasm."

I asked her to stop. No offense intended, but I wasn't gay.

"We're all addicted to pleasures and dissipations," Penelope said, but I didn't get the reference.

555-6996.

She jammed her finger into my ear.

When I recoiled in agony, she snatched my notebook and pen from my lap and scribbled those digits down. A telephone number. She tossed the pages back at me and rose, stalking off down the isle.

The bitch, she stole my pen.

"Call the number," Penelope called over her shoulder. "Ask for Manny. Byrd. Tell him I sent you."

Look, I'm sorry. I know I'm getting a little sidetracked here. The point I'm trying to get across here is: this all started with the porno, and this all ended with *love*.

My teeth rattling around on the highway floor, you sticking your tongue down my throat—that was inevitable.

### *The swallow and the other birds.*

Imagine this: you're sitting alone, in your darkened apartment bedroom, staring at the bright, buzzing rectangle of a monitor screen. You're dead tired. Falling asleep at the wheel of the car tired. You've just gotten off a double shift, first at Subway and then at Jack in the Box. Before that, you spent three hours in trade school classes working so the carburetor that's going to be your final assignment will stop catching fire whenever you get the engine going. Prior to that, you spent four or so hours trying to get the last edits on some poems done so you can go ahead and submit them for consideration at some no-name online contest. You're hanging on to slipping consciousness thanks to the faint buzz of three cups of coffee, and all you can taste is the grease lining the top of your tongue. Your lips are chapped and cracked dry. There's a dull ache in your jaw that's been bothering you every time you bite down for going on two weeks now, but you can't afford to pay for a dentist and so you're living with the pain. There's a numb sort of pinprick feeling creeping along the soles of your left foot—you think maybe you stepped on a shard of glass a few weeks ago, and

walking around since then has only dug the particle deeper and deeper.

Behind you, heaven awaits. Your bed, underneath a pile of month old laundry and a few abandoned TV dinners. It's beyond revolting, but all you want in the entire world then and there is to lie down on that filthy bed and go to sleep. But you've got to check your email first. You've got to know if there have been any responses from any of the online contests and publications. You've got to know whether anyone out there cared enough to read through your lines and write back.

And as usual, no one has.

But you *do* have a new message. No subject title. The entire email is just two lines: "your past is a graveyard." Underneath that, a website link for one of those porn site versions of YouTube.

Your eyes flick to the sender line—and here's where it gets freaky.

To: yourself. From: yourself.

You might have been worried, but you've gotten these kinds of creepy messages before. You think maybe someone has hacked your email account or something. Maybe you've got one of those low level keyloggers on your computer. It doesn't really matter—you don't have the energy to force yourself to care and it's just annoying.

Usually you'd just close the browser window, but this time, without even thinking, you click the link and the screen goes black as the new page begins to load.

So imagine yourself, sitting in the darkness of the room as the website loads. Outside, it's a sweltering 37° Celsius, and it's not much cooler inside. This is one of those condominium blocks where you can't open the windows and the walls are concrete—there's no ventilation or air conditioning, and so the air is broiling and stuffy when it meets your lungs. Imagine that there's a runoff layer of sweat running down the back of your neck, your thighs. Imagine your hair sticks to your forehead; your arm pits, inner thighs, and anus moist. Imagine you're afraid of breathing through your nose for the smell.

And then the page has loaded, the video is ready, and so you click play.

Beyond the monitor glass, inside that tiny 700 x 450 box, you see the subdued sight of a familiar bedroom. A bed covered in beige and brown earth tones. The wallpaper a sickly piss yellow dotted with pink, pale rose designs. The thick orange drapes pulled against the window. A row of beer bottles lining the headboard space. Familiar, yes. This bedroom you know very well—it's a sight from twenty five years ago: your old two room condo on Lakebed drive.

And now imagine that you're there too, in that monitor. Imagine you see yourself prostrated on your old bed. And you're not alone. On top of you, some fatass guy is thrusting himself up and down. You can see that he has his huge hands pressed into your back, you see that he's kneading his thumbs into the space between your shoulders.

Manny Byrd.

Even after all these years, imagine that you can still feel the pressure of his touch there, his thick nails scratching and digging into your back.

There's something wrong—you can't hear anything. You realize your speakers are turned off. You play around with the toggle but you jerk it too fast and so the sound blares out into the darkness of the room, the fatass guy's voice screaming:

Like always.

"Fucking whore!"

Flesh slapping flesh.

"Stupid bitch!"

Mattress springs creaking up and down.

"Worthless slut!"

Imagine you hear the little you in the monitor, grunting out these pathetic little choked up moans. You think you might be crying. The quality's not good enough to make your face out clearly, but imagine that the little you in the video has her eyes clenched shut while tears and mucus run down her nose. It makes you feel better to pretend it *only* ever hurt.

"Mommy?"

Now imagine that you see yourself, the little pixelated version of yourself, arch backwards underneath the guy's screaming

girth. Imagine you hear the crack of your spine, crisp and distinct, even through all the cursing and epithets bouncing around inside the cement walls.

The camera recording all this shifts slightly to the left, drooping from its position on the desk.

Imagine you turn around—the *you* you watching all this from your seat in front of your computer. You turn back and look at your bed. Your real bed. The bed beneath the dirty laundry and microwave meals.

But close your eyes and imagine instead that your real bed is gone, replaced by the ancient bed in the video. By the old mattress with the broken springs, the brown and beige sheets and covers.

The old stains.

Imagine the little you in the computer starts screaming with a screeching pitch. Imagine you turn back to the computer screen. Or don't and keep looking at the old bed. It doesn't matter. The neighbor to your right is slamming the wall. You can't tell if it's happening inside the video or outside in reality, but Manny's head springs up and he screams at the guy to knock it off. Imagine you see the little you underneath him look up, at the camera—at you on the other side—and smile. Your little tongue slips out and Manny reaches over and jams his fingers into your mouth. Imagine you can still taste his hairy knuckles, and the taste beneath his nails is something like metallic penny coins and rancid cheese. You see the little you suck down on his fingers, wrapping your tongue around his wedding band, and when he pulls away, thick white strings of saliva trail away from his digits.

Imagine that, for a fleeting moment, you almost reach up and stick your fingers in your mouth.

The guy struggling on top of you, Manny Byrd, go ahead and imagine that he groans. That he puffs his lips out and holds his red face up, above camera shot. He gets off the little you in the monitor and waddles over, to stand above your little face next to the old bed. Imagine that he stands there, working on his rod for two or three minutes, hissing out between clenched teeth the whistle of boiling

steam.

Imagine that the little you laying beneath him rolls over, onto her back. Imagine that she parts her lips expectantly.

Imagine that you stare on from your hard, plastic chair in a cold sweat, grinding your teeth..

And finally, he's on his knees, exploding on your face, getting his spunk in your mouth, on your cheeks, your hair, the bedsheets.

"Swallow it," Manny says. "Make sure you drink it all."

Imagine that a subdued silence settles on the heavy moments following ejaculation. Imagine all you can hear is Manny dragging out gutfuls of air and the neighbor pounding on the wall that divides you.

"Well," Manny says, breaking the silence. "How was it?"

The camera's moving now. The male lead in your little production lifts it from its position on the desk where it had been recording. Imagine he brings it over to the little you on the bed. Imagine that, while Manny bumbles with the camera, you see yourself rise to a seated position. You see yourself look off-camera to the left.

Imagine you turn toward that direction now, away from the computer monitor. Your immediate right. You forget what the little you in the video looked at then, in that moment, but to your immediate right, on the wall of the dark room, imagine you see the grey shadow of a cross nailed to your wall. Imagine the stony features of a little Jesus screaming out in agony, head and back thrown back in an agonized arch.

It's spooky how much it looks like someone was fucking Christ.

Imagine you hear yourself laugh this horrible little shaky sound. It was pretty much what you expected.

Then, imagine the unexpected.

"Mommy?"

The camera runs sideways and whips to the side—to the doorway. The lights flick on. Now go ahead and imagine a small boy standing in that doorway, holding the door apart. Imagine a trail of saliva running down

his mouth.

The seed of evil. Feather from my wing. Seed from my womb.

He's gone in the next instant, running away from you, down the hall; away from all the nasty memories recorded for posterity on camera for ever and ever and ever.

Amen.

"It'll be alright," Manny says. "We'll edit out his face. The little shit walking in'll make a good ending. It'll really get the milf fetishists. They'll love it."

You hear yourself ask whether you should go have *the talk* with him, and the uncertainty in your tone makes you want to strangle yourself. He's only eight.

And then the video cuts off and the screen monitor is dark again. The video greys out, frozen on your small, little worried expression and a replay button centers the screen.

Imagine: you scroll down on the mouse wheel. Imagine you get to the bottom of the page, to the list of related videos with all their preview pictures. Imagine your surprise when you see that every single video listed here features you—your name, your old bedroom, different guys, every time. Imagine now, the stifling heat of the air, the jackass neighbor screaming from beyond the wall. Imagine Jesus on the wall, a witness trapped somewhere between the heat of orgasm and the chill of... of...

Of, well, whatever.

### *The moon and her mother.*

I guess I was never the greatest mom. I had you young, you understand, and by the time you were crawling, I was already on my back. But I want you to remember: everything I've ever done, I did it for you. Always. I tried to give you what I never had. The opportunities I was never given. The life I could never live.

I still remember reading to you every night, as you fell asleep. The nursery rhymes, the old fairy tales, the Aesop fables. I remember you really loved those. The fox and the grapes. The avaricious and the envious. The dog and its reflection. The frog and the ox. The

young thief and the mother.

And then you grew up to be a cop. My little seed. My little thief. I couldn't have been prouder.

My landlord tells me my neighbors are starting to complain about me. They think I must have a boyfriend that likes to slap me around while he fucks me.

See, the thing about amateur porn is, you tell yourself that it's only going to be once. Hell, you believe it too. Just this once, and never ever again, you'd put all the little voices aside—your mother, the tiny nun from childhood catechism class, the old nearsighted lady who used to stop traffic at the crosswalk with her red sign—and smile for the camera. For the bills; for tuition; for the sweet leather jacket at the mall. After all, it sounds like one helluva deal in the hushed whispers of your new friend Penelope. One thousand for a twenty five minute scene; four minutes of corny dialogue, five minute blowjob, five minutes missionary, five minutes doggy, five minutes reverse cowgirl, and one minute cumshot. Roughly, it translates to about two hour's worth of filming. Maybe two and a half if the fat fuck you're riding can't keep a stiffy (which happens a lot).

Just once.

Just grit your teeth and smile.

You don't even have to smile. You can pull the in-distress look. They like that too.

And the next thing you know, you're forty fucking four and you can't go one week at your part-time without some asshole walking up to you and asking you for an autograph. They never meet your eyes. They're always giggling. They never mention where they recognize you from.

The internet, you see, is fucking amazing. My time in the adult industry was a few decades before groups like Bang Bros and Casting Couch and Brazzers came into vogue and started dominating the amateur hardcore scene, but that hasn't stopped some fuckwit somewhere from taking my VHS specials, burning them to a hard drive and uploading them for everyone to see.

But forget about the porn for a minute. Get your mind out of the gutter and think about



this instead: dead people.

HAM. That's short for the Hospital And Morgue program. Basically, it's when the judge orders a gaggle of teenagers and young adults connected to incidents of DUI to be shuffled over to the emergency room or county morgue for a such and such hours, so they can get a close up look at incidents of driving under the influence that ended a tad more lethally than their own. Generally, these kind of conditions are applied to the probational cases of younger individuals. Occasionally, a judge might decide to send a busload of older struggling alcoholics because he's trying to make his record look better for upcoming elections; maybe he's thinking of moving up to a political career. Maybe he thinks this will look nice as a footnote on his list of commendable actions and recommendations. Or maybe he's just feeling like a dick that particular day.

The point of all this, of course, is that this is how I wound up at the county department of the coroner. It's this old brick and stone building situated between a three story parking garage and a highway overpass. It's late, and the full white moon is working the black sky, faithfully, our ancient, cratered, and dead mother to the sleeping sun, our father. Inside, I was standing in this gaudy looking office room somewhere in the basement. Around me, eight other people paced around uncomfortably. All the guys looking awful as all hell; all sagging, pallid skin and greasy hair. The only other woman looking like she's old enough to be my grandmother. Everyone's standing because the only couch in the room had this horrible dark stain running along the cushions and no one wants to admit what they all think it is.

Later, I found out it was coffee.

You're here. My son, the cop. You're standing in the corner of the room, in uniform. You've been assigned to guide our little troupe here tonight. You stand, stony faced; we make eye contact and you nod curtly. I smile.

Eventually, a little man scampers out of a back office and introduces himself to us. He says that he's the assistant director. He has deep black bags under his eyes and something

that looks like yellow paste under his nails.

He leads the way through a series of narrow and cramped hallways and eventually, we arrive to a large, open room. Here, a long metal paneled wall dominates one sides of the room. Prepared on a few line of tables are forms draped with hanging white sheets, and underneath that, waiting for us, are our hot dates.

There's one for each of us, the funeral director explains. He even got one for you. He laughs at this, as if it's some kind of joke.

One of the fat guys of the group, he chuckles nervously. Every one else looks on in silence.

This charade of a *scared-straight* session proceeds for about half an hour or so, the little director stands in front of a table, reads a name off a chart, time of death, blood alcohol levels, and then a little something about the person. Their favorite color, their job, how much their family misses them. After the third person, I start to suspect that the director is making these final additions up. He doesn't consult any file when he talks about the grieving wife, the mourning children. I look around at the faces around me, but everyone else is wide eyed and silent. They're all listening earnestly. A few even look like they want to throw up.

I don't get it.

I look at the faces of the dead people to pass the time along. Some of them are really gruesome. There's a guy who's missing a chunk of the right side of his face. Another who looks normal until you move around to look behind him and you see the entire back of his head is sunken into his skull. A girl with a series of stitches running along her face. A guy who looks alright except for a laceration above his eyebrow—the director waits to tell us that this cut pierced his skull and buried a small metal shard deep into his brain.

Sort of nasty to look at, but nothing I couldn't handle.

There wasn't even a smell.

I had been expecting an awful burning reek, but nope.

Just a faint sort of oxidizing odor.

I yawn. That's how bored I was

getting.

My son, he looks over at me. He frowns.

The brat, He knows I have a problem with drinking and driving.

I shrug.

The funeral director, he's talking in front of a new table. I don't catch most of it. Something about a single mother. Something about how she got drunk during a family celebration at a park and wandered off. They found her near a trail the next day, naked.

The director, I see him look at me. He pulls back this nasty grin.

He raises the white sheet away from the body and reveals the girl underneath.

My mouth drops open.

I take a half step back, my legs give out and I fall down to the cold, tiled floor.

Everyone turns to look at me.

It's me.

Me on that table. My face, my eyebrows, my nose, my hair. I can see myself as plain as day laying on that table. My eyes are closed, it looks like I'm asleep.

I look around, gaping at the people around me, looking for affirmation of this horror and they look back at me like I'm stupid.

That same old Penelope expression.

What's wrong, one asks.

Are you okay?

Do you want to throw up?

I look at them, disbelieving. I look at their faces, their curious eyes.

Don't they understand?

Can't they see?

I look up at the table, and I see myself sitting on the metal table. I see myself sit up. I see myself look down at myself, sitting on the floor. I see myself ask, are you alright?

Everyone else not paying the me on the table any attention. Everyone else just looking at the me on the floor.

Are you okay, I ask the me on the table.

She shrugs. Eyes still closed. I can't complain, she says. It was pretty much what I expected.

And that's too much. That's too fucking perfect. Seeing myself like that, naked

under a white sheet on that table, it looks too much like a bed.

I start laughing. Really, just busting a gut then and there, on that morgue floor, with all those curious eyes looking down at me, with the me on the examination table looking down at me with her closed eyes.

Eventually, I get control of myself. Eventually, I manage to get to my feet, smile and apologize sheepishly to the others in my group, to the little director, who looks away, annoyed. His little foot tapping away.

The me on the table, she's lying back on the table, and when I walk forward again, to get another look at her, I see that she no longer looks like me. Her eyebrows are too thick. Her hair is too short, her nose too long. Her skin color is all wrong. This girl, she looks twenty years younger than me. What the hell was I thinking? We're nothing alike.

The group moves away from her body and I hang back, away from the rest, to look at the girl. To look at her cheeks, the mound of her breasts, her closed eyes. You stand next to me and look on.

Eventually, you say: "She looks just like you."

I look over at you and ask, you think so?

You nod your head. "Yeah. You're exactly the same."

I move to walk away and join the rest of group.

"Your past is a graveyard."

Excuse me? I say, turning back to you.

"Nothing," you say. "It's just something I heard once."

Your past is a graveyard.

Your future is one too.

And then you smile at me. My son, the cop.

And I smile back. Your mother, the ex-porn actress.

Your mother the corpse.

*The eagle and the arrow.*

I try to say that I'm glad that you're here, but I couldn't even raise my head up to look at you. Under my ass, the world spun

gently on its axis. I think I slurred my words. It was just as well—I don't think you could hear me very well over the roar of the incoming traffic.

It's night. I'm sitting on the shoulder of the highway, looking at my knees, my back to the car. The emergency lights blink off and on down the way.

My son, you smile at me. Your lips pull back like the strings of a bow. Your tongue flicks out, the arrow.

The deafening wind that crashes against us whenever a trailer truck passes is heaven.

The night sky twinkles with diamonds.

You reach out. You grip me with one hand and you help me stand. Your hand is surprisingly warm. I remember wanting to lean against your shoulder and just close my eyes. Just rest there for a while, while the wind screams against us.

I think you are the only man who's never disappointed me.

The entire world is spinning around me, it feels like my legs are going to give out.

You lean over and kiss me.

And I kiss you back before I remember that you're my son. That this is wrong.

Something's pressing against my lips.  
Wind and cold all around.

Something wet and slimy's being jammed down my throat. Your tongue. The arrow, plucked from my wing. Seed of my womb.

I step back, away from you.

You smile at me.

Trail of saliva running down the corner of your mouth.

For some reason, I remember something that Penelope said years and years ago. She explained that she hadn't been lying when she had said nudity was about power. But nudity wasn't about *your* power. It was about the power of *others* over you.

Eating isn't about nutrition. Fucking isn't about love. Not anymore.

You deck me. I crack my head against the car's driving side door.

My vision doubles over and I throw up

there, splashing against my car, on my feet. It's warm and it feels so nice on my sandaled toes.

It's so ridiculous but I want to tell you this, to tell you that my half-digested chicken broth feels so good on my feet. If I could, I would probably have told you to knock me another one. That's how friggid up I was. But all I can get out are these pathetic little hitches and gasps of air, this clear spittle running down the corner of my mouth, burning my throat.

You turn me around and slam me against the side of my car. You yank my arms behind my back and slip a pair of ice cold handcuffs around my wrists. They click locked and you lean over my shoulder, into my ear, and whisper: "Did you know?" Even over the roar of the incoming traffic, I can hear you perfectly. Your warm breath, it tickles me terribly, and this too feels so good, even against the throbbing ache starting up in my right shoulder, under the haze of the drink. You continue: "It's actually easier to find child pornography on the internet these days than it is to find legal porn featuring an adult Asian male and an adult black female?"

I blink, taken completely off guard by this statement. I try to step back, to turn around to face you, but maybe that's a mistake because the next moment, I'm doubled over, hacking up bile. You punch into my left side a few times, crushing my kidney, leaving me breathless.

We always give our enemies the means of our own destruction.

The world is my enemy, I manage to spit out before you slam me back against my car. Feather from my wing, seed from my womb. Have you come to strike me down?

"Did you know that there are entire groups of people online," you say, "perverts dedicated to searching through Facebook, Myspace, any social network—dedicated to looking through profiles and finding pictures that they run through Photoshop and Gimp in order to x-ray the layers and walk away with a nude shot?"

Over my back, you fit your elbow into my neck, digging above my shoulder. My legs buckle and you step forward, stepping down on my Achilles' Heel, causing me to scream out in agony.

“There are actually groups of people who go around with these doctored nude photos,” you say, your squared elbow choking me now, every press causing my gag reflex to act up. “They contact the unsuspecting women—the victims—and blackmail them for money, and even sex. Sextortion.”

Behind us, out in the dark night of the speedy highway, vehicles pass us without so much as slowing down. Cry as I might, not a single car or truck or trailer slows down to come to my aide.

I can't breathe.

“You can make a flamethrower out of a chalk gun, gas canister, and match stick,” you say, lifting me up from under my elbows and turning me around. “You can make a makeshift shotgun from a water pipe, steel couplings, a pipe plug, some elastic bands, and wooden base to serve as a stock.”

What do you want? I wail out, blinded by the glare from the incoming whiz of speeding vehicles.

“What do I *want*?” You grip me by the collar and *lift* me over, turning me around, and positioning me against the flow of traffic. Unsteadied, you lessen your hold, but you don't let go—the result being that my aching body, my weak ankle, threatens to send my tripping backward, into the highway. “I *want* you to understand that we live in a very strange world. I *want* to give you one last chance to write your wrongs. I *want* you to start living and stop dying. I'm giving you a pop final exam. It's the bottom of the ninth. The extra bonus round.”

Please. Don't...

“Don't?” you ask.

Don't stop.

I lunge away from you; I try my best to fall forward, out of your grasp, and into the rush of traffic.

You just cluck your tongue, your features pulling into a heartbroken grimace. “I'm sorry, but you fail. If you want to eat so

badly, eat. If you want to fuck so badly, fuck. And if you want to die so badly...”

And I scream as I'm pushed out, landing backwards on the road. I have a moment to roll on to my side, to face the thundering roar of a giant trailer double wheel, the blinding of headlights, the crunching of the Earth beneath me—and then it's over.

The trailer truck screeches to a stop several dozen meters away.

The wide eyed driver lunges out, running back towards us.

I'm alive.

God fucking dammit, I'm *alive*.

I lay there on the side of the road, panting burning lungfuls of cold air that seem devoid of oxygen, crunching gravel beneath my fingers.

You had grabbed my legs and hauled me into the safety of the roadside at the last possible moment. You shove me into the backseat of your cruiser and then spend a few minutes allaying the hysteric trucker.

Later, when we're speeding away in the night, and sensation has finally returned to my body, I sit quietly in the back of your cruiser, wringing my wrists, now free from the cuffs. My breathing has normalized, and I no longer feel like retching uncontrollably. Even so, I can still see the thunderous roar of the wheels bearing down on me, the the blinding glare of the headlights, the earthshaking vibration of the floor beneath me. I feel so cold and so very tired.

“Well?” you ask. My son. My seed.

My cop. My love. My arrow. “How do you feel?”

And for once, I say the truth. This isn't what I fucking expected. Not at all.

This seems to please you because you look at me through your rear view mirror and then grin widely. “Good,” you say. “That's better. That's exactly how you *should* feel. That's worth some extra credit. You pass.”

## Crutches

Elizabeth Sánchez

Montserrat stood alone on the stage. It was the same stage where Flamenco queen Carmen Amaya first mesmerized audiences with her bold choreography. There were rumors that once a certain Margarita Cansino had also performed, before before Hollywood christened her Rita Hayworth. In more recent memory, Carolina had danced to perfection Ravel's *Bolero*, choreographed by her aunt, the legendary Estellita. They still talked about Carolina's green spangled dress and how her gown fell behind her like a trail of stars in the limelights. So Montserrat wasn't really alone, of course. It is true of all stages. Even after the music dies and the audience leaves, a small part of the performer is left behind.

Someday, Montserrat fancied, another dancer would rehearse on this stage and think about her, how she dazzled audiences and danced to such triumph that even Estellita would tear up and be, for once, speechless. And humbly, Montserrat would deflect all praise and just claim she was devoted to her craft.

In her reverie, she chose to ignore the fact that she had not earned her solo.

For 40 years Estelita never auditioned anyone for a solo. They were always earned, and never given. For every thirty boys and girls who started lessons as children, maybe thirteen would continue past the age of fifteen. Of these thirteen, only two or three might ever earn a solo in a recital, let alone one of Estellita's professional productions.

This year Estellita decided to revive her masterpiece, a version of the Salome story as told through Spanish choreography. Instead of a crown, evil Queen Herodias wore a mantilla. Rather than seven veils, the girl cast as Salome danced with seven shawls, dripping with fringe. In order to choose her Salome, Estellita made careful observations during the usual classes. Christina was graceful, but too stiff. Beatriz was notorious for her beautiful heelwork, but her turns were too slow. Natalia was too sloppy, Amanda too distracted.

Then she had come to Montserrat. Montserrat whose turns were quick, arms

gentle and head always held at an arrogant angle. Her heelwork was quick and flawless and her carriage regal. Even in her off hours, Estellita had noticed, she walked as if everyone else should stand aside. She was perfect. She was Salome. But Estellita still observed.

"Well señoritas, aren't you going to congratulate me?" she asked the girls, a twinkle in her eye. They applauded eagerly, until someone dared to ask why.

"Isn't it obvious, we have our Salome. Don't we Genoveva?"

They all turned to face the very far right of the room towards the girl, so shocked she had gone very pale. Montserrat was even worse. Genoveva, whose turns were so slow, who sometimes forgot to play her castanets, or worse, would get lazy with her steps.

The other girls hustled Genoveva off to the seamstress to get fitted for her costume. Estellita braced herself and surely enough, a very wounded Montserrat stayed behind, no doubt to have a conference.

"Well?" Montserrat demanded.

"Well what?" asked Estellita, for whom nothing was a surprise.

"Why?" The girl's audacity sent Estellita's eyebrows past her hairline. In 40 years no one had ever questioned her decisions. But at least the answer was simple.

"You didn't smile."

"Excuse me?" Montserrat fumed, making Estellita all the calmer.

"You know the rules, Monsita. First rule, point your toes. Second rule, smile. If you want to know the truth you did neither." She paused. Apparently imperfection was a quality Montserrat was unaware she possessed.

"But maybe if you can wipe that perpetual scowl off your face I'll make you Genoveva's understudy."

This possibility had not occurred to Montserrat and she went from wounded to begging instantly. Knowing an understudy was rarely needed, Estellita relented. "Don't get your hopes up!" she cautioned. "Oh I won't!"

cried Montserrat and she ran off eagerly to rehearse.

An eternity of grueling rehearsals gave way to the night of the first performance. Nearly 1000 people were in attendance. The story was old, the biblical princess who was willing to kill an innocent person to get what she wanted, but the presentation was new and they were impatient with anticipation. It took nearly ten minutes to silence their excited chatter. But then Genoveva made her entrance, and they grew silent in a wave of awe.

Her costume was an array of oranges and reds, chiffon and satin. At her waist was tied a scarf, deep vermillion. On the edge of the scarf and on the band she wore in her hair were little bells, so the jingling heralded her entrance long before she was visible to the audience. As she danced, her skirts flounced about her shoes like tiny flickering flames.

Her shoes were of particular interest to Montserrat, who was not relishing her role as "ensemble." Just before they had gone on, she noticed that the heel of Genoveva's shoe angled oddly, an angle any seasoned dancer recognizes as the sign of an imminent break. But she said nothing, for so far nothing had happened. She figured she would keep it to herself and see what transpired.

For first the two acts, the audience sat, stunned. Even the dancers in the background were captivated as Genoveva tossed shawl after shawl, the fringe flying with every step. Though it pained her, Montserrat understood why Estellita had chosen her.

It happened just after the final dance. As Salome shrieked at the sight of the decapitated John the Baptist, Genoveva's heel snapped off cleanly, sending her stumbling gracelessly forward. What were intended to be staged screams became real as she fell into the orchestra pit.

Several of the dancers and musicians rushed to attend to her. In no time they spirited her backstage. Shaky, she held a delicate hand up to the warm liquid streaming down her face. She heard someone shout to cover her face, but it was too late. As they rushed her to her dressing room, she caught a glimpse of herself in the backstage mirror. The blood mingled

with perspiration and her heavy stage makeup. It had already started to cake onto her forehead. Someone managed to wrap one of the shawls around her head, but she could still see. The pain in her skull drowned out all but her own cries of agony. She never saw the ovation the audience gave her, nor did she hear the applause that followed.

The others huddled around Estellita backstage. Estellita, for whom nothing was a surprise, tried to remain calm.

"Señors y señoritas, for now all we know is that Genovita suffered a broken leg. I must say, even I've never heard of someone dancing off the stage," she said, trying to inject some levity. "Tell me Armando, did she at least land in the tuba?"

Armando, the conductor, just shook his head, grimly. The musicians had even heard her leg snap. Not to mention they had seen the gash to the head. They were all shaken.

"But we all remain optimistic she'll dance again. And until then, we'll have to keep up to her standards. You all did so well. I'm incredibly proud," she continued.

They all nodded. "For Genovita," cried Ana Lupe and they all applauded and went to change. Estellita stopped Montserrat.

"Well, Monsita. You're next."

Montserrat stood alone on stage, practicing the solo she had not earned. To the few dancers and musicians who came in and out of the theater that afternoon, she appeared frantic, unusually energetic for a rehearsal. They saw a girl striving for perfection. She was hoping that if she exhausted herself, she might wrestle away that feeling that kept coming and going, pointed throbbing in the front of her head, reminding her that she had not earned the solo, and something else she could not identify. Or didn't want to.

*I've been with Estellita for 15 years, she thought, I practice day and night. I deserve this.* But no amount of convincing could get that feeling to go away completely.

At Estellita's insistence, she stopped rehearsing an hour before the show, to give her some time to rest. As Montserrat walked back

to her dressing room, she noticed that the lights were on and someone was sitting at the vanity. Was it Carolina or Ana Lupe or Christina? They always needed things like bobby pins or rouge or combs but they usually asked first. Thinking it was one of the little girls rummaging through her things, Montserrat quickened her pace.

Inside, she was startled to find, was Genoveva. She sat calmly at the vanity, quickly collecting her cosmetics into her case. She hardly even looked up when Montserrat appeared at the door.

"I won't be long," she said gently, "I know you need your space." She reached for her earrings, a comb, and a pair of stockings.

"That's mine," Montserrat snapped, snatching away a lipstick. Genoveva's hand had only hovered over it, but she mumbled a quiet apology. Setting the case aside, she began to bend down to pick up something beside the chair. Her movements were very deliberate and slow, as if she were made of glass. Obliging, Montserrat stepped forward, more impulse than kindness, but Genoveva shook her hand.

"It's fine, I have them. My shoes. I expect I'll need these soon," she said brightly. She began to adjust the buckles.

*Not too soon*, Montserrat found herself thinking. It was then she noticed the enormous cast on Montserrat's left leg and remembered the girl was in terrible pain.

Out of pity, and feeling slightly culpable, Montserrat decided to make small talk. "You should get those fixed," she said. Genoveva said nothing, as if she hadn't heard.

"You know, for when you dance again." Genoveva just smiled, Montserrat noticed, somewhat nostalgically. It made her feel worse than if the girl had actually spoken.

Just then Genoveva pushed the chair back and maneuvered herself towards the left. "Would you mind handing me those?" she asked with a nod towards a pair of crutches by the door. Montserrat acquiesced immediately, even helping Genoveva to the door, anything to get her out and reclaim the space.

"You'll have to use the back door," she said in a voice she hoped was apologetic. "The others are locked. Half hour to curtain and all."

Genoveva nodded, aiming herself towards the door. Montserrat trailed her. "Now, is someone picking you up or--?" she asked.

"Oh, don't worry about me," she said, again with that same smile. "I'll be fine." Just before she left, she paused.

"You know Monsita, about the shoes," she began. *Oh now she responds*. "What about them," said Montserrat, sweetly enough.

"I never told anyone the heel of my shoe was broken. So how did you know?"

A sudden rush of blood rose to Montserrat's forehead. For the first time she had a name for that awful tingling feeling. Guilt.

"I noticed it before but I,--"

"So you noticed it before and you said nothing?" Genoveva was so calm it made Montserrat increasingly flustered as she fumbled for excuses.

"I'd ask why, but," Genoveva shifted her gaze to the fiery Salome costume hanging on the door with the shawls, "but I think we both know the answer." And with that she hobbled off. Montserrat stood there speechless until the sound of the crutches faded into silence.

The guilt was tangible. It pounded in her forehead and at her temples. She could not enjoy the sound of her heels clicking on the floorboards, fearing at any moment they might snap off. It wasn't until Maria, the dresser, wrapped the band of coins and bells around her forehead that it stopped. The coldness of the metal seemed to startle it into submission. Then she noticed herself in the mirror. She was Salome. She began to spin, her skirt flying out and the little bells jingling their delicate cacophony. Soon she heard Estellita's voice backstage and flew off so quickly she knocked over the little sign Carolina had put next to the mirror so many years ago. "Pride goeth before the fall." A joke. And a reminder some choose to ignore.

But just before she left, she locked the door of her dressing room. One unexpected visitor per day was enough. Slipping the key into her bodice, she flounced off.

In her own personal opinion, she was a resounding success. The audience was enraptured. The choreography was never cleaner, never more perfectly synced with the music. No one missed their cues and no one turned the wrong way. Everyone smiled and everyone, even the nameless rabble of the ensemble pointed their toes.

But during the intermission, there were no congratulations, no hurried words of motivation from Estellita. Instead, Montserrat came backstage to find the dancers huddled in a circle. Some clasped rosaries. Christina and Beatriz were crying. Erik and Fabian stood silently, eyes closed. Norberto was massaging the bridge of his nose.

"What's all this, what happened," Montserrat demanded. Everything she said was a demand. Regardless, Ana Lupe came over and wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

"Mija," she said softly. "Genovita died this morning."

Morning?

"Impossible. When." More demands.

"Not really morning. About three o'clock this afternoon. Fabian and Christina were there with her."

Frantically Montserrat did some calculations in her head. She had practiced all morning. Time ceases to exist when you rehearse, sometimes hours pass like minutes. Often it is the reverse. And in this case, Montserrat prayed it was the latter.

But she had stopped an hour before curtain. *Oh God*. She was grateful that the others interpreted her blanched face as shock, as a sign of grief.

Carolina came to offer a hug but Montserrat pushed it away. "Well, the show must go on. She'd want it. Now come on."

They all returned, clinging to each other as long as possible. Montserrat danced with, as one critic noticed, with even more passion and energy. The feeling had returned and she was desperate that it might disappear. *Anything, just make it go away!* she prayed as she danced.

And then, right before the final bows, she got her wish. But there is always a price. In exchange for the guilt, Montserrat was suddenly overcome with excruciating pain in her left leg. It was as if it had been caught in a bear trap with the teeth sinking deeper and deeper.

The audience, some of whom had also seen Genoveva dance, believed it was part of the show, some sort of cosmic revenge for the execution of John the Baptist, and their cheers grew louder. Fabian and Norberto carried her backstage. Maria hurried to open the door exasperated to find it locked. "Why the hell is it locked?" shouted Norberto.

"It seems the Infanta didn't want the peasants in her personal territory," muttered Maria, shoving the door open. The pain was so great Montserrat could not hear her. However, although the otherwise delirious, she sensed there was something about the darkened room that was different. She couldn't say what but she knew she did not want those lights to come on.

It was Norberto who found the switch and Fabian who caught her as she went unconscious.

There, stacked neatly against the back of her chair was a pair of crutches that was all too familiar.

And on the mirror, scrawled in the red lipstick she so prized, two words.

"You're next."



## **Nostalgia**

Danielle Rivera

It's a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations, the fuzzy warm feelings remnant from the past. The smell of sugar cookies does it for me, as well as the theme for Jeopardy and the guilty feeling I get whenever I realize my elbows are on the table. I always get a bad case of nostalgia come holiday season, which is also birthday season in my neck of the woods. It just seems that I'm the only one who ever catches this horrible bug. (Yes, it's a bug; green with yellow and red spots. I've seen it.) The bad part is, there's no vaccine or remedy. Once October second hits, it bites me good, in that tender spot behind your ear. The first symptom is longing for the days long ago when I had no idea what it meant to be nostalgic. When I lived in the now and then was no "then". The second is seeing things that aren't there. For me it's the nutcracker that would always sit in the dinning room. Grinning its toothy smile at me until I caved to its will and cracked the undeserving chestnuts to smithereens. Third, is wanting to contaminate

others. I wish it were contagious that way I could spread it throughout my family and they'd be just as sick as me. Sick of the way things have become. Sick of the way we've thrown out tradition. Sick of the way no one remembers. If they would remember I wouldn't try so hard to forget. If I could forget, I guess I'd never catch it. The very last symptom of nostalgia is wanting to be quarantined. To be left alone with my nostalgia is the best, that way no one can ruin it. Doesn't matter if I'm the only one who can remember the days prepping for holiday feasts, all the cleaning of nooks and crannies and the making of confections. I want to be alone with the giddy memory of lugging boxes of decorations and costumes from the garage to the living room and alone with the sweet smell of a warm kitchen.

As much as I hate the nostalgia I love it all the same. I love the way I remember and hate the way no one else does.

## **Looking For Normal**

Patrick Guy

It's probably best to mention now before I go on any further that she was absolutely normal. This is, of course, not to say in the conventional sense; rather, the contrary, the fearless, the intriguing, the goddess; absolute and irreplaceable beauty incarnate. Sitting next to me, she smiled enough for both of us into the whites of my eyes that thanked her for being there. And with every drag of her cigarette, my heart waited for hers to recover from the smoldering that--I knew--killed her a little bit more every time; but, I didn't have the heart or the words to tell her that she did anything short of perfect in my eyes. As far as I was

concerned, her perfection was an understatement when I conceived it in my mind; and, that mind, that wandering free-spirit of a mess found solace in touching her pale hands with mine: my run-amok hands that searched for something normal, something more like her. She sat there with her arms crossed holding herself like I wanted to--probably waiting for me to say something wonderful that never usually came--but I could only look at her and appreciate everything I thought she was at that moment sitting right next to me, normal as ever.

## Server Diaries

Patrick Guy

"Server Diaries- 1/21/2013: Sunday night."

She must have been twenty-three; or, she at least looked it. In reality, she was most likely beautifully into her thirties, aging to perfection with delicate Angelina Jolie-like hair, parted in the middle with the front of her hair tucked behind her earring-less ears. Soft spoken to match her attractively timid countenance and velvet skin, she always looked into my eyes when she spoke--which I loved. She was there with her three well-mannered children with perfect little posture's and beady little eyes, sitting across from her and at her side like trophies for everyone to gawk at. They were probably three, four, and five years old, or four, five and six or whatever; I'm not really sure how children age and what they should look like at a particular age. Anyways, these kids were the type of kids that weren't allowed to watch Spongebob, they chewed with their mouths closed, and they surely didn't fling those dissolvable Cheerios all over the damn place. I swear, sometimes these kids leave behind food that we don't even sell at the restaurant; like where the hell did these eggs come from? I'm pretty accustomed to small children being allowed by their incompetent parents to drink three or four Cokes during their meal only to later watch those same parents scold their kids for running amok at the table. Anyways, these three Toys "R" Us kids drank waters like all children should instead of sugar and juice. She was calm, she was loving, she was endlessly beautiful without having ever aged through her three child births. I seriously considered offering my services to father her children without really being able to offer her anything more than college debt and a shit-load of ass-backwards ideas; so I didn't offer out of the fear of rejection, but I'm seriously kicking myself in the head for not offering. I wondered how she managed to tame those three toddlers all by herself without ever raising her voice; she was no larger than her oldest son and it wasn't like she was intimidating or anything. God bless her, she wore a black shirt that read

in silver across her breast "MILF," which made my day; and, every time I walked to and from her table, a little lavender colored thong peeked out to remind me that work isn't always as bad as it seems.

"Server Diaries- 1/26/2013: "

Once upon a drunken night, about a month or so ago--I forget--I threw my iPhone 4s face-first into the curb during a stupid scuffle with Mathew Cardona. Like a know-it-all jackass that I know I am, I was trying to prove to him that people don't need "worldly things." At the moment it sounded really poetic and enlightening, but then again, every drunken slur sounds like a ...parable to a drunken idiot. I tried to prove to him that I didn't need my phone and it was nothing but a burden on my life, so I smashed my phone against the curb and it somehow survived. I mean, I was actually kind of angry that my hardest attempt at breaking this little machine was stifled by Chinese or Japanese ingenuity. Then, about 4 days ago, I was at the hospital with Matt Cardona--the guy that likes to fake sicknesses for attention--whereupon this elderly man using a cane dropped his pills on the floor. Me, being the good guy that I like to think I am, attempted to get out of my seat and help pick them up for him. Of course, because I have all the luck, my phone was sitting on my lap and when I got up and bent over to help him, my phone fell on the tile and broke even more. You see, the glass on the phone after the curb-job was completely shattered; the spider-man phone. It looked like it had been beaten to hell with a mallet; and, to top it all off, only half of the screen worked. It was like someone had plucked out one of my eyeballs and held the phone right in front of my face. When I dropped it trying to help that old fuck that told me: "It's ok guy, I got it," I couldn't help but want hide his cane from him at the top of the stair case in the lobby for letting his pride, ruin my phone even more. Anyways, up until about 4 hours ago, my phone was shattered, and I had about a half-

inch wide vision on my phone that made making a phone call as difficult as pulling fucking teeth. Then, 4 hours ago, I thought it would be a good idea to charge my phone at work--because I can't tell anymore the battery life on my phone--when I realized that after my phone was completely charged, it was also sitting in a puddle of water for about 2 hours. Placing my iPhone on a shelf above my eye sight made it really hard for me to notice that shelf was completely wet probably due to the bussers hiding their drinks up there. So now, I'm phoneless, I mean, the phone turns on, but the screen, on top of being cracked, looks like it had a seizure. If you think this is too long, kiss my butt, I'm bored without my phone and I have nothing else to do. In retrospect I guess I do need my phone; oh well, thanks for reading.

Server Diaries- 1/20/2013:"

This past Friday night at the restaurant I met another crazy. He wasn't the homeless-man-in-the-street-flinging-shit-at-oncoming-cars-filled-with-children crazy. Arguably not straitjacket crazy either. And he wasn't like the crazy guy at the party that picks a fight with everyone and pulls out his dick either. He seemed like he had a comfortable amount of money and good ...job as he sat at the bar by himself in his very unoriginal baby blue dress shirt and black tie. For once, I want to see these corporate hooligans wear a radically colored shirt that makes them stand out amongst the other clones; anything but white and baby blue would do really. Anyways, this goofball actually wasn't sitting at the bar, I take that back, he was standing at the bar by himself in the middle of our rush with his chair pushed back into the only accessible aisle that takes you from one side of the bar to the other. Imagine being at party in the middle of a cluster-fuck with one way in and one way out. Got it? Okay, this guy put his chair right in the middle of that passage and watched everyone struggle; ain't nobody got time for that. To top everything off, he had his back towards the bar top, leaning back against his table, facing everyone that squeeze through his little

barricade that he made. His eyes were bulging. He was sweaty. He was licking his lips a lot. He kept touching his face. Needless to say, he was probably in town on business, staying across the street at the Holiday Inn, away from his wife and kids, and he came across a little crack, and thought he'd go out and throw a few wrenches in everyone's night; which, after I finished typing, seems kind of fun. After passing through that birth canal a few times, I finally asked him for the sake of everyone in the bar: "Excuse me sir, are you using this chair or would you mind if I moved it?" It seemed like a reasonably polite question to which he responded like a complete fucking baboon: "Why would I care about a chair that's not even mine?" I wasn't really sure what he was talking about and I was too busy for his shenanigans so I asked him again: "So... would you like me to move the chair or are you using it?" Again, and I've got to say, I should have expected it, but he replied: "What's the chair got to do with me, I can't even own it?" At this point I was completely confused so I told him: "Alright man, that's crazy and all, but I'm just going to take the chair and walk away from you." As I walked away with the chair, that apparently wasn't his, Confucius said: "The chairs can never be taken away." He must have watched the Matrix too many times, or he was spun-out; but, either way, he was crazy. Then, I went to all of my tables and told them what crazy-chair-guy had said and what had just happened. Unfortunately for him, after everyone was convinced that he was a crazy, he was stared at by a bunch of people until he eventually left. I thought it would be funny to watch this guy panic a bit while he was lit; but, I did feel kind of bad for killing his high, but that chair really cramped the entire vibe in the bar; plus he was crazy.

"Server Diaries- 1/29/2013"

So I'm at work, pretending that I want to be there, teeth and smiles with hair combed and nails clipped, ready as ever; pretending that my stomach isn't swimming with Bud Light and Frosted Flakes. And there I am, same

underwear on from the night before, flipped inside out and caked with spits of urine rushed into my day; new deodorant of course; that would be gross. Standing in front of them, hand...s behind my back, hiding the faded stamp that I can no longer recognize on the top of my hand; searching, with my big toe, for that rat bastard hole in the tip top of my sock that Bruce Lee chewed out while I was asleep--I probably shouldn't recycle socks, but it was convenient, so whatever. And they looked at me, with that look that I love them to look at me with, that I'm-unsure-what-to-think-of-him look that everyone gives when they're sure in their minds what to think of me. They had no

idea though, no idea that I just scattered a beer fart a few feet behind me before I arrived to their table; one of those airy ones that doesn't ripple on your butt cheeks, the kind that sit in the back of the classroom and hide from the teacher, the kind that hate attention, well it was one of those, but they didn't know, but I knew. But this was work, shit, piss and stink, served with a misleading smile and a submissive attitude that made them feel safe and trusting, in me, the hung-over guy that wasn't even suppose to work. And then I asked them: "How are ya'll doing today?" Because they paid me to.

### **A Look Through the Mirror**

Nicole Buehlmaier

I watched as she ran from me, her long blonde hair surrounding her waist flowing in complete disarray. She was scantily clothed, the exposed parts of her body covered in dotted lines. I gritted my teeth, as I knew what had to be done. It *had* to be done. It had to be me to do the job—this was my mess and this is what I have been charged with. I never thought I'd have to be the one to take care of my rogue; I usually just took care of the other problems in the lab.

I put my hand near my pocket, feeling the cold metal press into my side: a cold reminder of what had to be done. As I stood there, I heard Nancy Sinatra float out of an upstairs window, touching my ears, teasing me: "bang bang I shot you down, bang bang, you hit the ground..." I smiled to myself as the lyrics massaged my brain. It's time to do what I came to do; I shouldn't be reminiscing on my childhood.

Bracing myself, I began the chase—the search to destroy her, Number 2. I never liked calling her Number 2; I secretly called her Lillie. It was hard for me to see in the darkness; my eyes were bad and unreceptive to objects in low light and even worse in darkness. Just one more thing that needed to be fixed on this old body of mine. I listened intently as I walked around the corner she had

turned. The stench of urine hit my nose, but that was the least of my problems.

I could hear the pattering of her unclad feet as she ran across the cobbled streets, in the narrow alleys between the old houses. Her breathing was barely audible, but the slap of her footsteps was enough to lead me to her location. I began running down the cobblestones knowing which way in this myriad of maze like alleys she would take. It was instinctual and almost unfair. Yet I found her as she realized she had run into a dead end. She turned around and looked at me: her face the picture of fear. I approached her and looked into her green, gold eyes, seeing the fear written there. I looked into *my* eyes when I looked at her. Lillie. If we were the same, she would understand my reasoning. She knew why she was created in the first place; but I too would rebel and flee from the lab—in hopes of preserving the life I had, to make sure the blood that was pumping through my veins, no matter if it was given to me artificially, would never stop.

I had always fantasized about killing myself. I had always run through the different scenarios in my mind: a knife through my artery, a razor blade through my left wrist, drowning myself, driving off the side of a freeway overpass... Now that I was confronted

with killing myself, it was no longer a fantasy. I could kill myself and be able to watch it as it happened, living vicariously, feeling no pain, being able to finally make the decision I had never fallen through with. I'd still live as she died, my creation, my unethical experiment: my clone. Oh selfish reasons. I am such a selfish, selfish child—caring for myself, willing to kill my blood in the form of an innocent child—the 20 year old me. I wonder what was running through her mind as she watched me reach into my coat. I knew what would be running through my head. The first problem was ever naming her. I should have just kept calling her *number 2*. But for some reason I thought that was inhumane, but look where I am not. I had a name, and so should she: Lillie.

I ran my finger against the cold metal pressing into my side. I pulled out the colt. The way that the light of the lamp on the corner bounced off of it gave it a menacing look, reflecting the light she would see once she died. Well, I hoped she would walk into the light and be in the arms of Our Savior. But did God accept abominations into Heaven? Did he allow the humans created by humans—pretending to be god to enter into His arms? I know the Bible says that He is forgiving, but could He forgive an abomination—a creature that shouldn't exist, that should never have been created in that dingy, underground laboratory—the lab where ethics didn't exist and where the government turned a blind eye? I spun the gun in my hand, felt the coldness of the metal—the same coldness my now-beating heart would soon become.

I had to be stone. This *had* to be done. Even if I changed my mind, where would she go? What would she do? The repercussions of her living would put me in more danger with the underground experimenters. The higher-ups had spoken. This deed was mine and mine alone, probably the last I would make if this all went wrong. I looked back into her eyes, hoping she would see the understanding and compassion I felt for her. I looked back at the gun. What if I just walked away right now? What if I just said I killed her? Or say that I lost track of her and she vanished into thin air,

never to be seen by anyone; 'fallen off the grid' as they call it? After all, she wasn't dangerous. She was a child in a grown woman's body, never out of the lab until now, never out of the tube we created her in, the floor length tube with her inside of it—asleep until we woke her up and drained her of the artificial, life-giving fluids.

I still remember the smell when we switched the machine off and 'birthed her', the stench of the life-giving chemicals and embryonic tissue, burning my nose and watering my eyes. But she came out so perfect, so flawless and beautiful, her body lying on the floor in a heap. It was amazing to watch her open her eyes and see light for the first time, then to watch her try to stand up, her legs wobbling, making her look like a foal. She was mine and I was hers. That sounds so creepy. Especially since she *is* me—the perfect clone, the *first* human clone.

As I looked at her face, my hand shaking, the colt that was once stable with resolve was now quivering I saw her eyes change—my eyes change from a doe-like innocence masked by fear to a steely green. She looked directly in my eyes, like she could see inside me and read my every thought. Who knows, she might be able to, we never even thought of testing her; well the others did, but I was just anxious to get the organs I so needed in order to keep living. Even if we had had time to test her, she ended up escaping before anything could be done. The cancer inside of me was slowly killing me. I just want to live; I never thought she would have a will to live too—she was just an experiment. It's funny how when you are faced with death, the harder you cling to what little life you had left.

Lillie began walking towards me, that smile spreading across her face, the eyes that darkened to steel, staring me down. Oh I knew that face too well. I had the same face when I didn't care about my life and wanted to scare my mom; it always felt like I was possessed. It was never me thinking and never me talking, but it never mattered; it worked; it instilled the necessary fear to get everyone to leave me alone. A shiver went down my spine and I began to giggle. So this is what it felt like to be

on the receiving end. I loved every second of it.

She was finally standing right in front of me, looking into my eyes, and all of a sudden we *were* each other, perfect mirrors. I closed my eyes and severed that connection. She reached out her arm and touched my wrist, gripping tight and pulling my wavering hand to her chest. She placed the gun over her heart and my wrist stopped shaking; my resolve coming back to me; my mission at the forefront of my mind—instilling purpose back into this illusory, fragmented life of mine. That smile dimmed for a second and her eyes lost their vibrance. Lillie glanced at the gun then at my face, then back at the gun—as if she had no recollection of ever placing it there.

I knew that feeling exactly. Like I said earlier, it is like someone else is in possession of your body and you have no control. There is never any control. But this I *could* control, and she just realized that. Her face tilted back up to mine and I saw the confusion at the realization that she had just gone from running for her life to walking straight to the gun that would puff out every trace of her existence: like a candle left outside, to burn out and finally be extinguished by the ruthless, uncaring wind. Maybe she could see weakness in this aged body of mine, for she looked into my eyes and I watched her face twitch into a threatening half smile. Who knows what her motive is, although we think the same, I have 30 years on her and I don't think the same way I did when I was 20 and full of vivaciousness.

She opened her mouth for the first time, unsure of what to say. I could only imagine what was on her mind; what would you say knowing you had only “lived” for a few hours? What would you say as you knew your life was ending by the hands of yourself, the self that created you? What she asked of me I never would have guessed. She looked at me, her eyes of hate had changed, taking on the look of an innocent doe, somehow filled with love. “Can I hug you Ellie? I know I am not supposed to be here. I have just never felt the touch of another. Thank you for creating me. I know my purpose, the reason I was created was

to save you. But I can tell that you don't want to do this. I can tell at least that much. I can tell you are considering letting me live. For that I am thankful. But the cancer that is ravaging your body will only happen again. You will only have a few years left.”

“What do you mean Lillie?”

“I *am* you Ellie. What has happened to *you* has already happened to *me*. Remember that time you burned your left arm with cigarettes when you were 18?”

“How can you know that? You were created. You can't have my memories Lil—at least ones you didn't create on your own.” For some reason, the more I talked to her, the more intimate I began to feel—like I was speaking to an old friend.

“El, look at my left wrist. I *am* you at twenty.”

I grabbed her wrist, maybe a bit too roughly, for she winced in pain. I didn't care. I looked at it in the dim light given off by the lamppost. Sure enough, she was right. There on her wrist were the two scars of the burns—the burns that had haunted me; a reminder of the darkness in my soul, the skeletons rattling my mind.

“How can this be? You should only have my genetics and my choices in life never should have affected you. Something must have gone wrong. Clones are exact replicas, but they shouldn't have age markers—things that happened to me in the past shouldn't have happened to you” I murmured half to myself and half to her.

“We are the same. It's only natural we should share the same consciousness, the same experiences, the same body. Logically it makes sense, but it shouldn't be. Put down that gun El. We have a lot to figure out.”

I lowered the hand that was holding gun, hanging it loosely at my side and gave her a hug—*our* last request, for we *were* each other now. There is no “me and her”, but an *us*. Although I had always hated myself, I guess I couldn't bring myself to actually hurt Lil. I guess I never saw what I was worth—that I was a life, a person, and deserved to live. When you are young you only see in the short term. You hate yourself and want to die over the most

trivial things—everything you glance at is myopic in scale: I only came to realize that as I aged and started tinkering with other lives. Yet, I should have known.

I closed my eyes. I forgot why I was sent to kill her. For a minute I forgot that she was *me*. I forgot that there was darkness in my heart. I opened my eyes as I felt the emptiness in my right hand, the cold metal against my back, a concentrated pressure centered in a vital spot; she wasn't going to let me off with a painless death.

"Let it be my turn to live."

She gave me a kiss on the cheek, and pulled the now warm trigger, shooting me through my back. I heard the sound and smelt the smoke sting my nose as I fell to the ground. My breath began to rattle in my chest. Hah. How could I forget the darkness I held in my heart at that age? As I fell, only one thing ran through my mind: "Bang bang, I hit the ground. Bang bang, that awful sound. Bang bang, my baby shot me down..."

I felt the blood trickle through the whole in my chest, matting my shirt to my body as I laid there, the icy cobblestones pushing their sharp edges into me, the tinge of iron gently tickling my nose. Lillie rummaged through my pockets, grabbing my keys, grabbing my phone. As I lied there in a haze,

my vision blurring, I heard her dial the phone. In *my* voice she said, "I finished it. She is dead. Come pick her up behind the alley of L Street. She needs to be put on ice immediately. The organs will only last for 6 hours. I need those transplants completed within the next 3 hours. The mission is complete and we can move on to stage 4." I chuckled and looked up at her.

"Well played. I wish this could have ended differently, but now you know what it is like to kill yourself. I am kind of jealous."

"Why are you laughing El?"

"Think of the shock those bastards will have when they realize that you were the one to kill me instead. Just go on, fall off the grid. Use my experiences that you seem to already contain inside of you and live better than me. It's parked a few blocks down."

"Thanks. I'll make sure I don't toy with other people just so I can selfishly live, all in the name of finding a 'cure for cancer' you bitch."

The last thing I heard were her footsteps slapping the ground and the roar of the black and silver café Honda CB550F as the clutch released and she roared away. I smiled and closed my eyes. "Bang bang, my baby shot me down..."

## Salsa

Emily Baeza

The parade of tomatoes, jalapenos, onions, and garlic bounced slightly atop the thin slate of cutting board as it creaked with every rocking swing of the dull knife. By now, Lena's wrist had grown accustomed to the small pinch it endured while slicing vegetables, almost always leading to an ache that she wouldn't notice until she did something obscure, like reach for her glass, hours later. She doesn't feel the throb now as she reaches for an onion in the netted bag across the crowded table. It's the fifth consecutive night she's made salsa for her classmates, now housemates, and everyone but the tallest guys outside smoking a rack of lamb on the braai are crowded around, seated at the table and

windowsill, to watch her work.

Lena struggles with slicing the top off the onion, unable to decide if it's the onion or the knife that's giving her trouble. She usually gets to the sharpest knife before the guys and their meats, but today she was resistant to the calling of clanging dishes and silverware across the house as she lay in her cool bed. It had been a long day, seasoned with a whole touristic adventure around South Africa's cape and she was feeling worn. The Cape of Good Hope, baboon sightings, a trip to the botanical gardens—it was all very overwhelming and draining, especially in the heat. It was a sight when one of the baby baboons had even mimicked her classmate Diego using a payphone, scaring the

poor guy as he turned to follow the wide eyes of the growing crowd. Lena, too, was almost too distracted to catch Melissa, mesmerized and careless, inching dangerously close to the innocent-looking animal. She reached for Melissa's bony arm just in time to avoid a glaring look from their professor. Maybe it was her tired hands that made this onion impossible.

She tightened her grip around both the onion and the knife, reversing her tan with the pressure, and it finally gave. Lena exhales and frowns, looking at the daunting onion that she still has to slice. She looks up to share a smile with the crowd, meeting the sun-slapped faces around her at the table. With nothing funny to coerce the smallest of laughs from her belly to a smile in her mouth, she decides to bend up the corners of her brown face. She had come to realize that they deal far better with forced laughter than with silence. It was more difficult than her plight with the onion for Lena to succumb to their needs, but it has been a long six days they'd been abroad and she wasn't about to let it spiral past unbearable in their fifteen more days they had together. Besides, she enjoyed the praise she received for her salsa recipe that was finally a positive distinction from her peers. She didn't want to be the silent sitting troll she sometimes feared herself to be.

There is a difference between a silent troll and a quiet person. People don't think ill of quiet people, but they will avert themselves from a plopped troll of a person who does nothing but frown as everyone else heaves in laughter at the next funniest thing they had ever heard. Quiet people at least maintain that soft, timid smile.

As Lena steadfastly drags the knife through the onion, Melissa's blue eyes ("that change color depending on the shade of green she wore") start to bubble up with tears that she embraces by tucking her top lip into her bottom one to fashion a pout.

She giggles a tone deeper than Lena can ever remember and squeaks, "Oh man that's strong stuff Lena! How do you put up with it?? I never could! Wow, that stuff is too much!"

"It's no big deal really. My dad and I throw onions into a lot of the dishes we make at home. I like the smell."

"Oh, I can't stand cooking. You guys are lucky that I'm even doing this," she laughs out with a shaking finger of conviction. Lena swallows her smile and tilts her face closer to the onion as Melissa continues to smear garlic spread on rolls, preparing them for the grill. The crude and violent strikes of Melissa's knife into the butter bowl echoed the clanging of the phone on the booth by the baboon earlier that day. Mesmerized and careless.

Ray and Jael sat opposite each other at the table and were getting restless. Ray had a nervous jiggle about his leg making Lena's job of chopping a precarious one) and Jael had begun to drum skewer sticks against the bag holding the rest.

"Hey, dude, let me have some," Ray said.

"Nah." Jael's drumming grew louder and more rhythmically involved, more distracting.

"C'mon man, we're working here," Melissa preached.

Clark, slumped like a lounging cat at the windowsill over Jael, wanted to join the symphony so he snatched the bag of sticks from right under the Jael's riff. Before anyone could pay this any attention, the two tumbled, a knot of limbs and cargo shorts, into a punching contest for the bag, for the heck of it.

"Hey faggot, let me go!"

"Shut up and take it, dick!"

Covered in the dirt and sweat of the day, the howling brats rolled over the back of the sofa bed, nearly knocking it over. The weight of their brawl on top of the furniture made their whole company scrape across the hardwood floor, loud enough to shake Lena's concentration from the cutting board, sending a puddle of onion juice at her eyes.

"Are you kidding me?" More than her eye irritated, she left the table and felt her way to the sink in her room. She bent over the tiny porcelain sink and ran the faucet over her roughed fingertips, intermittently flicking water in her eye and rinsing her fingers not wishing to worsen the pain. Blinking with fervor, Lena



almost saw the blue-tiled countertop of her home bathroom. She could almost feel the matching fuzzy bath mat under her bare feet. Lena yanked a small towel down to dry her face, wiping away the thoughts of home.

She couldn't miss home just yet.

She made her way back to the kitchen, this time able to see the dripping mess on the floor that was a clear trail to the boys grilling outside. Lena leaned back into the bathroom and grabbed the same small towel to wipe up the thin river of lamb and veal juices. The smell of the soppy towel mixed with the mischievous scent of the rare meats on the braai and she felt her mouth start to water. Oh yea, she was hungry, too.

"Hey!" Melissa and Kara, another member of the audience, jumped in tandem to block Lena's path to the kitchen sink.

"Um...hi?" Lena confusedly responded, struggling with the dripping towel. She didn't want their housemaid to return to this mess the next morning and think they were slob.

"Me and Muhlissa are gonna do CARTwheels outsiiiiide! Wanna come? Hm? Hm?" Every word Kara sang brought her face further from her petite body and closer to Lena's blank stare.

"Erhm, isn't it our turn to prepare the appetizers?" Lena knew the answer to this question, but she had also learned that asking an obvious question gets better feedback than being a smartass.

"Mmyea," Melissa shrugged, "So? We'll do it after." She grabbed Kara by the front of her shirt, pinching the underside of her breasts. "Let's GO!"

"You dumb bitch," Kara said as she swatted the pricks from her chest. Giggles and swinging ponytails bounced through the hallway and out the propped open back door.

Lena deposited the towel into the kitchen sink, triumphant that none of it had made its way to the floor. She sighed and wiped the sweat on her nose off on her forearm as she turned toward her work station.

To her horror, the howling brats had proceeded with their tussle while she was away. Mixing bowls had become helmets. The cutlery

was now weapons, the cutting board a shield for Ray. Her salsa...tomatoes like blood splattered on the window, onions in the air like shrapnel, jalapenos flattened into the groves of the wooden floor panels—her last hour of work nothing but casualties in the kitchen.

The only place of quiet in their exotic paradise was the front porch for Lena. The door shook the whole wooden and colonial house as she let it swing shut behind her with drink and her book in tow. It was definitely hotter outside than in, though the sun was now setting over the Moederkerk's tallest steeple—the oldest Dutch reformed church in Stellenbosch, according to the guide the maid had left them. Lena set down her glass and the R6 bottle of Pinotage wine on the wicker coffee table, the clinking of the two the only sound heard outside above a veil of bird choirs and the muffled chaos inside. The roof of the porch allowed for a subtle breeze to dance with the fallen hairs that didn't make it into the bun slopped on Lena's head. She put her feet up on the wicker couch and reached out to pour herself a glass. Every swinging slice from her failed salsa expedition was knotted in her wrist and the wine was now decidedly deserved. Lena closed her eyes and let the wine sit on her tongue, tasting the oaks of the barrel in which this cherry wine had fermented.

"From Stellenzicht?"

Lena gulped and sat up to Nolte's smiling face, his teeth bright against his black skin.

"Excuse me?"

"Your wine. It's from the winery down the road, yes?"

"Oh, yes. Pinotage 2010."

"Good year for Pinotage." His accent was new to her ears every time she heard it. He had an odd syncopation in his inflections and a kind whisper about his tone. Nolte was their security guard who stood watch on the grounds from dusk to dawn. He was only seventeen.

He perched himself on the porch railing and pulled out his book, unfolding the top corner of a page to pick up from where he left off the evening before.

With wine and Nolte as company, Lena read through dinner.

## Without Home, Without Soul

Matthew Aranda

*The following was found on the side of a dirty bus bench in an irrelevant place:*

~~I don't know how to start but I guess my name is~~ I don't know my name. I think it's no I don't know. I'm probably too old. But I was lucky. I found some paper by the freeway. And a pen in that parking lot. I don't know who throws away fine paper. but then again I don't know who throws away half the stuff I find.

Once I found a whole burger in the trash. That kept me full for a couple days. Good times.

Your probably bored of me now. I do that to people. Julio told me to write that down. Hes really smart. He went to school. ~~Your probably bored of me now. I do that to people.~~ I forgot I wrote that already. Sorry it takes me some time. I want to write neat so people can read what I have to say. I don't know whos gonna read this. but I guess it doesnt hurt to try.

*On the back of the same page*

I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. A dog. A family. Food. A bus. A bug. My toes. My beard. The floor. Some gum. A candy wrapper. People. The bus bench. I don't know why I'm writing that. I hope it I don't know what to maybe if I talk about my life but no you might think its boring its worth a shot.

Maybe you can save

My life begins when I was young. A long time. My momma loved me. But she like drugs to. My friends all liked to sniff. I didn't. ok. Enough about that. People are looking at me cry.

*On another paper.*

I have a lot of time. To write. But I like to move around. It makes me feel better to

walk around. I pretend that the bus bench is my home. People visit. Then they go. But they don't talk. Its ok. I make them talk in my head. Hello mr suit man. Hello whats your name. my name is junny. Hey junny. Hey mr suit man. Oh its time for me to go. Bye mr suit man. Hello handsome boy. Oh thank you mr. whats your name? my name oh its ruben. Hey ruben. Can I get you something to eat handsome boy? Sure! Oh I forgot I don't have anything. That's ok Im going to go play now. Ok boy. Hey there lady with glasses. Oh look! Its mr. whats your name? my name its Julio remember? Right Julio! I like your glasses. Arent they nice? Yeah. Where can I get some? At the store. I think ill stay here and not go to the store. Ok Julio I have to go now. Bye lady with glasses. I don't know them for real. But I pretend.

*On the back of the same paper.*

People leave. The bus takes them to places. they need to go. The bus bench is kind of like a home. But I know it's just a bus bench. I wait for the bus to come. I hope that. There is one to take me some place I need to go. But Im just waiting. For a bus that will never come.

*On another paper. This paper was ripped in many pieces.*

I lost some papers yesterday. I forgot what I wrote. ~~I think it was about my leg. No it was about those mean kids at the park My uncle hands on my My moms murder. How eold it gets at night. God doesn't listen. My dead son The voices~~ I forget what I wrote. Sorry. Goodnight.

*On the back of the same page.*

Good morning. Junny said good morning too. Junny said God bless you. Julio really wants to write now so ill let him Hello. Whoever decides to read this, don't try to save him. He's probably dead by now anyways. I don't know why he is writing this, but leave

him alone. He is without home, without soul and doesn't deserve to be helped. Just as a warning, try not to read

*On another paper. This paper was urinated on.*

It wasn't nice what Julio was saying. I had to stop him. Sorry. Its been I don't know how long its been. but I think its been a while. These papers keep getting wrinkled. Wait one second. Sorry there was someone sitting on the bus bench. He looked like he was going to hurt me. So I left. Now im safe under the bridge. But I don't like under the bridge. People do things here. They touch each other. It reminds me of when my uncle put his hands on my

Ok now im in the alley. Away from the sounds of under the bridge. I cant go to the park cause the kids who want to hurt me. Ill be ok here. Im going to go see if theres food in the cans.

*On another paper. This paper was ripped in many pieces.*

I was remembering. When my mom and dad would tell me things. When people tell me things. Sometimes I get hungry and I need money for food. Get a job people say to me. My mom told me to get a soul. I cant get a job. No one would hire. Me. Theres the man who wants me to help sell. Sniff. But no. theres that church place that wants to save my soul. But no. I don't have a soul. I think even if I had one I don't want god to save. It. I don't think god is real anyway. Junny likes to pray to him. Me and Julio laugh when he finishes. Junny asks why we laugh. I said that sheep make wishes come true better.

Don't become attached to him. As if you are.

*On another paper. This paper was ripped in half.*

Its late.. Im in the park. It's cold. The kids might be here so im in the slide. Where

they cant see me. I cant sleep. I want to see the stars. but I cant cause the kids. I used to sing a song that made my son sleep. He liked it. Until he got to big for it. But I still like it. I don't remember how it goes. Sleep. Sheep. Sleep sheep sleep. It is time to go to sleep. Sleep. Sheep. Sleep sheep sleep. See the stars and go to sleep. Sleep. Sheep. Sleep sheep sleep. Make a wish to go to sleep. Sleep. Sheep. Sleep sheep sleep. It is time to go to sleep. See the stars and go to sleep. Make a wish and go to sleep. I liked the song. My son would always sleep after. But not after he grew up. No one liked me. Maybe if I sing it I can sleep.

*On another piece of paper.*

Sorry. Its been a while. There was some bad news. I had to steal some tape from a store. The old lady didn't know I did it. I feel bad. But those kids took some of my papers. They ripped some. So I needed to tape them. One of them peed on a paper. I didn't want to write it again. Im running out of paper. I should steal more paper. But I don't ever want to steal again.

Good. He's almost finished with this pathetic writing.

*On the same paper spaced away from the above, written in small print.*

Julio really doesn't like me writing. He thinks theres no point. I don't know know why im writing. But it makes me feel good. I don't want you to write because there is no point for you to hope. If someone reads this they won't help you. I am trying to protect you. Don't write this with the hope of being saved. Its pointless.

*On the back of the same paper.*

I am not writing to be so what if I am. Whats wrong with me hoping to Please. Nothing has gone right for us. It's best if we just live the rest of our life digging through cans. The only thing to hope for is rat poison in

the food we eat. Julio stop talking like that. Can't you see how crazy this is getting? How you look to anyone reading this? Who am I kidding. No one is reading. No one cares about you. People care for me! Like who? Junny? Junny believes in god. You are all in my prayers. You as well, humble reader. God bless you. Junny cares for people and that's what matters!

*On another paper*

Your running out of paper. Are you really going to make the last words people read an argument your having with yourself?

*On the last paper.*

I don't ask for spare change. I don't look at people in the eyes so they feel guilty. I don't stay in a place too long if I smell. I don't ask for food much. I don't hate my uncle. I don't hate those kids. I don't wish for an easy life after I did what I did. I don't know why I can hear everyone elses voice except the voice I need to hear. I don't know why I hope to be saved if I write. I don't know why I live and fight against death. I don't know why a person would throw away a whole burger.

*On the back of the same paper.*

But if the burger. That's thrown away. Saves my life. Ill live off of trash. And live without home, without soul. Ill eat trash. And be what I eat. And hope. Someone will. Save me.

## **Good-bye Mrs. Mulligan A Short Play**

Kiley Giard

*For the teachers in Newtown who gave it all for their children and for the teachers and administrators everywhere who would and do the same*

### Characters

Ruthie  
Katheryne  
Penny

### Setting

Stage is set for a memorial service, but there are no caskets or pictures. The stage is empty and fairly bare bones.

**IMPORTANT** Note on dialogue. Where lines are repeated they are meant to be said seamlessly together almost over-lapping but not quite. While they are all repeated in a prompt manner, they all must be with different emotion. These are three very different people and must be treated as thus. They don't notice or acknowledge each other in any way. Please also realize that these are real people and real stories. Please treat it as thus.

Lights up.

Enter Katheryne, Penny and Ruthie.  
All stand in a straight line formal like.

Katheryne

Hello. I'm so terribly sorry for your loss. I'm sure you don't know me

Penny

I'm sure you don't know me

Ruthie

Hi. I'm sure you don't know me. I just came to pay my

Katheryne

I just came to Pay my

Penny

Came to Pay my

All

Respects

Penny (con't)

I just came to pay my respects. Hmm? How did I know her? Oh well she was my...

(Pause)

All

She was my teacher.

Ruthie

Mrs. Mulligan. 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Honors English.

Penny

Mrs. Mulligan. Humanities 11<sup>th</sup> grade

Katheryne

Mrs. Mulligan. Freshman English. I remember the first day of class. I walked in limping slightly.

Papa had been drinking again. But I was at school and wasn't about to let him bring me down.

Not then. Not that day. I remember the first book we read in class. Lolita. How fitting. A month

late I came with a broken finger. Three weeks later it was a broken arm. The kids in class thought

I was unbelievably clumsy. Klutzy Katheryne that's what they called me. I laughed it off,],

hoping that they would pay it no mind. Then one day I walked in with my nose still bleeding

from the night before and long finger marks on my neck. Mrs. Mulligan gave the class their

exercises and took me outside. I remember that day

Penny

I remember the day

Ruthie

I remember the day. February 11<sup>th</sup>. 2nd semester of A.P. English. I had just come back from the bathroom, after crying my eyes out again. See there was this other girl in class named Evelyn.

And I liked her. Like Liked liked her. I had no idea what these feelings were. I had always been

taught that they were wrong. I thought I was evil. That I was a bad person. I was so young. 16. I

thought my life was over. I thought that God hated me like Pastor told us He hated all people that

had unnatural thoughts like I did. I made the decision right then and there. I walked back to class

and I was prepared. I would do it once I got home. I figured nobody would notice. That no one

would care. But I was wrong. She noticed. I went calmly through the rest of my class. When the bell rang, I hung back a bit, thinking my goodbyes. I was about to leave when I she asked “Ruthie? A word?” I looked back and she had stood up by her desk. She gestured for me to come over and sit down and I did. I sat and stared at the desk. I memorized every square inch of it. I remember that desk

Katheryne

I remember that desk

Penny

I remember that desk. As I sat there my hands gripping, clawing, the dark wood grain. Mrs. Mulligan had kept me after class to talk to me about grades. As we talked I kept rubbing my arms. The material itched and bit at my healing hurts. She noticed. Finally she told me to sit down in front of her desk. I stayed stock still as she gently rolled up my sleeves to reveal the ugly red smiles up and down my arms. I heard her sharp intake of breath when she realized how many there were and how widely they smiled. She murmured “oh Penny, I’m so sorry.” I couldn’t look at her. Eyes burning I bit my lip. I would not cry I refused to cry. I felt weak and ashamed. But I also felt overwhelmingly angry. She didn’t know the pain, she didn’t know why I did it. I wanted to scream at her and yell at her to not tell me she’s sorry. She doesn’t know me, she doesn’t know. As these thoughts raced through my head I watched her. She slowly raised up her sleeve and then I saw. On her arms. Smiles. Old and faded but there. Then is struck me. She did know.

Ruthie

She did know

Katheryne

She did know. She knew exactly what was going on. She took me outside and asked me “Katheryne? What is going on?” But we both knew she knew. I just looked at her. She looked away and sighed. “Was it your dad again?” I jumped, shocked that she could’ve guessed so quickly. But she knew. She had known since the day I entered class. It had just taken her till now to get her plan together. I didn’t know this at the time but as she pulled me outside of class, the cops were pulling Papa out of our house. She had to wait until she received news that he had been taken until she could talk to me. She sat me down. She looked me straight in the eye and said “No one is going to hurt you anymore.” When she said that, I couldn’t do anything. I just. I just cried

Penny

I just cried.

Ruthie

I just cried. She made me look at her, straight in the eye and told me “ Stop looking so sad. You are a wonderfully marvelous person and God or whoever you believe in has a plan for you” After that she talked to me and asked me what was wrong. I told her about my feeling and my fears. She listened. She actually listened. She talked to me and told me that I wasn’t evil or a monster and that these feeling were perfectly normal. She consoled me and promised to be there for me if I ever had any other questions. On the way home I had to stop and sit. Then I just cried and cried. She spoke to me with so much truth in her eyes and so much love in her heart that I had to believe that I had a place in this world and that I wasn’t a monster. So that night I didn’t go home and throw myself off the roof like I had planned too. She saved my life.

Penny

She saved my life.

Ruth

She saved my life

All

She was my teacher.

Note. These next three monologues are said directly over each other. It should not really make sense. But they all speak together on the line at the beginning *Mrs. Mulligan* and at the end *she saved my life*.

Ruthie then starts her story, followed by Katheryne followed by Penny. But they still all overlap

Ruthie

Mrs. Mulligan. 10<sup>th</sup> grad Honors English. I remember the day. February 11<sup>th</sup>. 2nd semester of school. I had just come back from the bathroom, after crying my eyes out again. See there was this other girl in class named Evelyn. And I liked her. Like Liked liked her. I had no idea what this feelings were. I had always been taught that they were wrong. I thought I was evil. That I was a bad person. I was so young. 16. I thought my life was over. I thought that God hated me like Pastor told us He hated all people that had unnatural thoughts like I did. I made the decision right then and there. I walked back to class and I was prepared. I would do it once I got home. I figured nobody would notice. That no one would care. But I was wrong. She noticed. I went calmly through the rest of my class. When the bell rang, I hung back a bit, thinking my goodbyes. I was about to leave when I she asked “Ruthie? A word?” I looked back and she had stood up by her desk. She gestured for me to come over and sit down and I did. I sat and stared at the desk. I memorized every square inch of it. I remember that desk. I just cried. She made me look at her, straight in the eye and told me “ Stop looking so sad. You are a wonderfully

marvelous person and God or whoever you believe in has a plan for you” After that she talked to me and asked me what was wrong. I told her about my feeling and my fears. She listened. She actually listened. She talked to me and told me that I wasn’t evil or a monster and that these feeling were perfectly normal. She consoled me and promised to be there for me if I ever had any other questions. On the way home I had to stop and sit. Then I just cried and cried. She spoke to me with so much truth in her eyes and so much love in her heart that I had to believe that I had a place in this world and that I wasn’t a monster. So that night I didn’t go home and throw myself off the roof like I had planned too. She saved my life.

#### Katheryne

Mrs. Mulligan. Freshman English. I remember the first day of class. I walked in limping slightly. Papa had been drinking again. But I was at school and wasn’t about to let him bring me down. Not then. Not that day. I remember the first book we read in class. Lolita. How fitting. A month late I came with a broken finger. Three weeks later it was a broken arm. The kids in class thought I was unbelievably clumsy. Klutzy Katheryne that’s what they called me. I laughed it off,], hoping that they would pay it no mind. Then one day I walked in with my nose still bleeding from the night before and long finger marks on my neck. Mrs. Mulligan gave the class their exercises and took me outside. I remember that day She did know. She knew exactly what was going on. She took me outside and asked me “Katheryne? What is going on?” But we both knew she knew. I just looked at her. She looked away and sighed. “Was it your dad again?” I jumped, shocked that she could’ve guessed so quickly. But she knew. She had known since the day I entered class. It had just taken her till now to get her plan together. I didn’t know this at the time but as she pulled me outside of class, the cops were pulling Papa out of our house. She had to wait until she received news that he had been taken until she could talk to me. She sat me down. She looked me straight in the eye and said “ No one is going to hurt you anymore.” When she said that, I couldn’t do anything. I just. I just cried. She saved my life

#### Penny

Mrs. Mulligan 11<sup>th</sup> grade Humanities. I remember that desk. As I sat there my hands gripping, clawing, the dark wood grain. Mrs. Mulligan had kept me after class to talk to me about grades. As we talked I kept rubbing my arms. The material itched and bit at my healing hurts. She noticed. Finally she told me to sit down in front of her desk. I stayed stock still as she gently rolled up my sleeves to reveal the ugly red smiles up and down my arms. I heard her sharp intake of breath when she realized how many there were and how widely they smiled. She murmured “oh Penny, I’m so sorry.” I couldn’t look at her. Eyes burning I bit my lip. I would not cry I



refused to cry. I felt weak and ashamed. But I also felt overwhelmingly angry. She didn't know the pain, she didn't know why I did it. I wanted to scream at her and yell at her to not tell me she's sorry. She doesn't know me, she doesn't know. As these thoughts raced through my head I watched her. She slowly raised up her sleeve and then I saw. On her arms. Smiles. Old and faded but there. Then it struck me. She did know. She saved my life.

At the line she saved my life, which is said together. They stop and pause, letting the sound die down. They then resume speaking one at a time.

Penny

My name is Penny Salinnos. With Mrs. Mulligan's help and support, I was able to overcome my struggles and find a more positive outlet for my feelings. I went through school and college and got my degree in Psychiatry. I help people like Mrs. Mulligan did. I haven't cut myself in 25 years. I still bear the scars though. Just like your mother did. I'm sure she never mentioned me and I know you've never heard from me before but Mrs. Mulligan saved me. I thank her for that. (Looks up towards sky) Thank you Mrs. Mulligan.

Penny exeunt.

Katheryne

My name is Katheryne Pope. With my father behind bars, I was finally able to go and lead a productive life. I'm finishing up my degree at Harvard Law. I hope to practice family law, make sure that no-one will have to live through what I lived through. As for my father, I haven't seen him since that day. And I will never have to see him again. The bastard died in his cell last September. (pause) If your mother had waited or had decided just to ignore the signals, I'd be dead. My father would've broken not just me, but my spirit. He would've kept escalating and beating me until he killed me. So look, I know you don't know me, but know this. Mrs. Mulligan saved my life. I owe her my life. And she will be very sorely missed. (Looks up to the sky) I will miss you Mrs. Mulligan.

Katheryne exeunt.

Ruthie

My name is Ruthie Henry. That night, I decided not to kill myself was the night that my life came back to me. With your mother's help I was able to come to terms with who I was. I was able to finally like myself. As for my life, well I'm in the Peace Corps, and as for Evelyn it turns out that

she had similar feelings towards me. We have two kids. (pause, looking down and holding her belly) and another on the way. (pause) Mrs. Mulligan gave me so much. I have a life. I have a wife and kids. And every day I go out and I change the world. Just like your Mom did. I owe Mrs. Mulligan everything in my life and I don't think I ever even knew her first name. You asked me why I was here. Its. I just. I just wanted to say goodbye. (pause) (quietly) Good bye Mrs. Mulligan. Thank you. For everything.

Ruthie looks down  
Lights out.

End

**"On the lips of whispering men": The Quest for Authority  
And Truth in *Lord Jim***  
*Scholarly Writing Prize – First Place*

Joshua DeBets

In the Preface to the *Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* Joseph Conrad claims that his fundamental goal as a writer, and as an artist is "by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see! That – and no more: and it is everything!" (Conrad 255). Conrad firmly believes that the manipulation of the written word must appeal to the senses in order to reveal to the solidarity of readers a moment of vision; a glimpse of the truth. Vision and truth are the ultimate aspirations of the writer, and of the artist.

Truth, though, is dependent on vision. Like the artist, the thinker and scientist seek distinctive truths; the thinker dabbles with ideas; the scientist with facts; and the writer with wonder. But, according to Conrad, unlike the artist, the thinker and scientist appeal to people's credulity by disguising their facts as truths through scientific authority, reason and observation.

During the nineteenth century, science and scientific reason were viewed as the

pinnacle of knowledge, and were placed in a privileged position within Western thought. As John Peters states in *Conrad and Impressionism*, "Science yielded 'facts': information believed to be objectively verifiable and hence true" (Peters 7). This, along with the revolutionary beliefs of Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill and many others, challenged preexisting understandings of ontology and epistemology and Western thought was transformed and began constructing and promoting universal truths within academic and literary master narratives.

As a result, science progressed into scientific positivism, "a movement based upon the belief that all knowledge could be obtained through scientific methodology" (Peters 7). Positivism was constructed around the belief that data and statistics obtained through sensory experience and logical and mathematical treatments was source of all authoritative knowledge, and assumed that valid knowledge, or truth, is only obtained through empirical evidence. In *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure*

*Tradition*, Andrea White notes how positivism influenced literature and says, "...adventure fiction had purported to work directly from original sources, and thus made claims on its readers' belief, presenting itself as having the force of actual experience behind it" (White 45). In other words, adventure fiction aspired to be conceived as factual through presentation of scientific methodology. As Peters says, Conrad was not as concerned about the loss of humanity in a scientific society, but worried that the pursuit of facts oversimplifies reality (Peters 11). According to Conrad, art is more difficult than science because it does not celebrate or create universal or authoritative truth; rather it reveals the human conception of truth as solely individual and highly complicated. The Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, "as well as the narrative and substance of *Lord Jim*, reveals that truth is highly subjective because knowledge and experience are restricted to a specific person and moment within space and time. Since the human experience is always individual, knowledge becomes a singular experience rather than a universal one. Conrad additionally recognizes that epistemological disillusionment is mediated by the community, and he claims that humanity shares universal beliefs, not truths. He expresses this ideology through the intricate and impressionist narrative style and structure of *Lord Jim* and deconstructs authority, knowability and motivations of truth while simultaneously unveiling and criticizing communal and epistemological illusions.

Since empirical evidence and scientific reason were viewed as the zenith and affirmation of knowledge, other disciplines, specifically travel writing and adventure fiction, adapted this scientific methodology. The genre's emphasis on eye-witness accounts, real and geographically verifiable places and empirical evidence attempted to convince the reader that these written accounts were indeed factual. Adventure fiction additionally featured quoted sources, maps, prefaces and footnotes that urged the reader to perceive this genre as scientifically accurate, and thus genuine and truthful (White 48). Authors such as Robert

Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling relied on these presentational methods to convince their readers of the truth within adventure fiction, while simultaneously validating the imperialist conquest of the British Empire. Scientific positivism was directly linked with the idea of nation and democratized knowledge. Since the European man and the British Empire had unveiled universal truths, this justified the conquest of the savage "other." Haggard and Kipling embraced and juxtaposed scientific positivism and nation, whereas Conrad remained skeptical towards the developing ideology. From Conrad's perspective, positivism not only oversimplified reality, it hierarchized knowledge and justified imperial expansion through promises of national prosperity. This skepticism is reflected within the narrative structure of *Lord Jim*.

Conrad was an impressionist author and directly responded to the stimulus of scientific positivism within adventure fiction through his own literary ideology and canon. In "Developing the Theory of Impressionism with Conrad," Ford Madox Ford says, "We agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. A novel must therefore not be a narration, a report" (Ford 274). Rather than recreating an objective reality, literary impressionists sought to portray and depict subjective and sensory impressions within their literature. The group's central ambition was to reflect the complicated nature of being and understanding through a modified and modern presentation of form within their novels. As Conrad states in the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, "It [Art] is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult!" (Conrad 256). He is obviously critical towards the effect scientific positivism and adventure literature has had on human beings because the ideologies simplify human existence by disguising the empirical research as conclusive, and thus true. But life is not that simple. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad portrays the complicated

nature of being and knowing through the modern narrative structure, but remains faithful to the adventure tradition through setting and theme. The narrative contains multiple narrators, a discontinuity and fragmentation of events, impressionist devices and modes of storytelling and relaying information. Like other adventure novels, *Lord Jim* is about Jim's quest to achieve heroic greatness; but unlike imperial romantic novels, Conrad creates a dual quest narrative: Jim's idealized venture and Charles Marlow's quest for knowability and understanding of Jim. These narrative devices simultaneously undermine narrative authority within the adventure tradition, and reflected Conrad's belief that knowledge is subject to a specific place, time and individual, and thus diminished the notion of universal truths.

Within the opening chapter of *Lord Jim*, Conrad immediately criticizes the imperial romantic and adventure tale tradition, which emphasizes the heroic potential of young men in search for some symbolic sense of self. Jim is a spotless European young man, who "after a course of light holiday literature" leaves his upper class home inspired by a sense of adventure (Conrad 39). The holiday literature that Conrad alludes to is the novels of his contemporaries, Stevenson, Haggard and Kipling. Jim perceives himself based upon this romantic, adventurous literary tradition, and emulates characters, like Jim Hawkings in *Treasure Island* and Leo Vincey in *She: A History of Adventure* by impulsively migrating towards the sea. He ultimately aspires to be "as unflinching as a hero in a book" when faced with impending danger and controversy (Conrad 40). But Conrad's Jim is atypical from these characters, and as White suggests, Jim becomes a fictional victim of this fiction (White 65). White suggests that the "truth" Jim finds in the romantic novels disillusioned him through idealized heroism, moral obligation and personal advantage and fulfillment. In the first chapter, after Jim fails to act during a collision at sea, his fictionalized and idealized vision is presented through free indirect discourse. Jim realizes that 'he could confront greater perils. He would do so – better than anybody' (Conrad 41). Despite his inaction,

Jim still envisions himself as an epic individual who will pounce on whatever dangerous and worthy tasks that await. Since the statistics and presentation of adventure fiction was perceived as factual and true, Jim has no doubt that he will succeed in his quest for self-discovery and heroic status. When Jim does briefly find success as *Tuan*, or Lord, on Patusan Marlow notes that Jim says, "'They are like people in a book, aren't they?'" he said triumphantly" (Conrad 247). Even when within reality, Jim continues to associate the adventure tradition with his life because he triumphantly becomes a 'hero' on the island.

Similar to Jim, Charles Marlow is also on a quest; but rather than adventure, Marlow is searching for the essence of Jim. Marlow serves as a narrator, character, interpreter and orator who recounts and interprets his and other characters' impressions of the inexperienced water-clerk. His curiosity surrounding Jim leads him on an analytic adventure that spans eight years: starting from Jim's inquiry in 1883 and ending in 1891 when the "privileged man" receives Marlow's account of Jim's sovereignty in Patusan. These leaps in the narrative range from months to years that move forward and backward within the plot and distort memory and interpretation. Marlow suggests the importance of this narrative device when he says, "He related the facts which I have not forgotten, but at this distance of time I couldn't recall his every word" (Conrad 121). Peters suggests that impressionist representation lies neither solely with the subject nor solely with the object but rather in the space between the two so Conrad makes these bounds within the narrative to create space between Marlow's oral reminiscences of the water-clerk. In effect, time distorts memory and thus the recollection of events. The truths and facts surrounding Jim's character are affected by these lapses in time, and suggest that the subject and the object of Marlow's inquiry change mutually between each other. The narrative leaps and loops disjoint time and impressions in order to complicate Marlow's and the readers' quest for truth about Jim's being.

Though generically a *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age story wrapped in a quest

narrative, *Lord Jim* extends and defies the generic conventions of the adventure tale through experimentation with narrative structure and dissection of Jim. The seemingly ambitious water-clerk becomes a specimen for observation and analysis through the gaze of multiple narrators and contradicting sentiments; most of which is framed through Conrad's narrator, Marlow. In effect, the narrative operates like a series of leaps and loops that swoops back and forth through time and is shaped by these contradictory reflections by the omniscient narrator, Marlow, Stein and various secondary characters. The first four chapters are narrated by an omniscient, third person narrator who provides the backstory of Jim's life and describes his romantic demeanor as "the gift of endless dreams" (Conrad 44). The novel begins *in media res*, or in the middle of things, as the omniscient narrator alludes to an unexplained secret of Jim's and says:

...he was just [known as] Jim – nothing more. He had, of course, another name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport. (Conrad 38)

This information is exclusively presented by the omniscient narrator and is crucial to understanding Jim's character as well as a narrative device that propels the plot. Jim's relationship with his comrades is fundamentally based in deceit; the seamen perceive him as Jim the water-clerk, but in actuality do not even know Jim's name and history. Although the reader is granted this exclusive knowledge, the initial impression of Jim suggests he is an untrustworthy vagabond, which drastically influences the readers' opinion of the character. Like his fellow shipmates, the reader makes assumptions about Jim based on the observations and information provided, but unlike the seamen the reader becomes well aware that initial information is

inconclusive and thus deceiving.

The omniscient narrator does not reveal the secret fact to the reader, but is well aware of the personal incident that haunts Jim wherever he goes. The only information exposed is that the event is indeed based in fact and once discovered, Jim must flee. Immediately, the credibility and truthfulness of Jim is placed into question within the first chapter presented by the omniscient narrator. In *The Twentieth-Century Novel*, Joseph Warren terms this impressionist narrative technique, the "chronological looping method," which describes how Conrad initially provides "a strong impression" of a character or event in order to "catch the reader's attention, before bringing the light of retrospection and anticipation to explain and modify the impression" (Warren 363-364). Ford also alludes to the importance of the first impression in his essay "On Impressionism," and says, "The [first] impression is as hard and as definite as a 'tick-tack' because of its strength and influence upon the reader" (Ford 260). In this instance, the reader has a strong impression of Jim's romantic and secret demeanor, and the light of retrospection is based upon an unknown essence or secret that problematizes the knowability of the water-clerk. As a result, readers and Marlow naturally formulate their own vision and conception of Jim that is solely based upon this initial description, but then find themselves trapped in an interpretative loop when presented contrasting impressions of Jim.

In chapter five, Conrad complicates interpreting Jim's character when he introduces Marlow as the next narrator within the frame narrative. The omniscient narrator alludes to Jim's obscure secret and then transfers narrative authority to Marlow, who is attending an inquiry when the reader is introduced to him. The omniscient narrator and Marlow each provide varying information that details and constructs a visual and ethical understanding of Jim and his actions while at sea. Although essentially narrators, the omniscient narrator and Marlow also play witness to Jim's life and affect the readers' understanding of the water-clerk. Unlike the reader, Marlow is unaware of the information provided by the omniscient

narrator and details his first impression of Jim by saying:

And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us. (Conrad 98)

This description is a far cry from the omniscient narrator's depiction of Jim as a tramp and "hero of the lower deck" and serves as an example of the beginning of the chronological looping method (Conrad 41). Although the reader is aware of Jim's inability to act in chapter one when his youthful dreams distract him on board a ship, Marlow perceives Jim as a noble and heroic man of the sea and continues to emphasize the young man's appearance by highlighting his muscular bulk and extravagant gorgeousness (Conrad 65). As a result, Jim no longer seems like a distant and unknowable vagrant, but rather, as Ian Watt suggests in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, "Marlow transforms Jim the outcast into 'one of us'" (Watt 265). The impression has been modified to include Jim within a community of men to make him seem more relatable and thus understandable. Despite Marlow's conception of Jim, he continually struggles to create a comprehensive image of the inexperienced water-clerk. Marlow admits his failure to construct Jim when he says, "He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you" (Conrad 217). Although the reader can make no conclusion about Jim, it begins to become apparent that conclusions are impossible because knowledge is subjectively restricted.

Marlow continues to complicate his quest for truth when he meets with his friend Stein to discuss and analyze Jim. After Jim becomes involved in a barroom brawl he tells Marlow that he does not want to migrate

elsewhere, but desires a clean slate and a new opportunity. To try and help Jim and discover some clarity concerning his quest, Marlow consults his friend Stein. Marlow describes the wealthy and respected merchant and entomologist "as one of the most trustworthy men he has ever known" and continues expressing his respect in a reverential passage:

Simply to hear what he would have to say would have been a relief. I was very anxious, but I respected the intense, almost passionate, absorption with which he looked at a butterfly, as though on the bronze sheen of these frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings, he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendor unmarred by death. (Conrad 203)

Marlow values Stein's profound analytical knowledge and keen vision and hopes together they will uncover the truth surrounding Jim's immediate and metaphysical existence. In "Butterflies and Beetles – Conrad's Two Truths," Tony Tanner suggests that this respect towards Stein's anthropological and scientific knowledge "with which he studies his insects somehow qualifies him to make a key assessment about Jim" (Tanner 54). These admirable descriptions of Stein provide him authority in the novel as Marlow hopes his awareness will unveil the truth surrounding Jim's incident and essence. The passage also suggests that Stein's knowledge is valuable because he can look deeper into subjects and understand them through scientific and analytical observation.

Even though Stein has masterful analytical and scientific insight and knowledge, he and Marlow fail to grasp and comprehend Jim's demeanor and meaning within the world. Like the omniscient narrator, Stein proposes that Jim is "a romantic" with "Ability in the abstract," but further suggest that Jim's idealistic mindset will be his ultimate downfall (Conrad 207, 38). Stein perceives that Jim

envision himself as a hero and says, “He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil – and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself a very fine fellow – so fine as he can never be... In a dream...” (Conrad 208). Stein complicates Marlow’s quest for truth suggesting that Jim is not only a romantic, but perceives himself in a way that fragments his own understanding of identity. Since Jim is a romantic he aspires to become a hero, but fails to recognize or accept his reality as an inexperienced water-clerk who fails to embrace the moment and achieve elevated success. As a result, the omniscient narrator, Marlow, Stein and even Jim all express and conceptualize varying impressions of Jim. Stein continues elaborating on Jim’s potential downfall and says, “A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavor to do, he drowns...” (Conrad 208). Ironically, success at sea is Jim’s ultimate dream and downfall, but this metaphor especially dissects Jim’s conceptualized romantic self. Stein suggests that if Jim’s inexperienced and romantic self remains then he is fated to dream and thus drown in his idealisms. The world is tough and Jim must either sink or swim by realizing and accepting his limitations within the seaman community and the universe. Even though Stein cannot define Jim, his analysis is concrete. Unlike other narrators and characters, Stein immediately sees through the layers and construction of identity and shows the impossibility of truly understanding another human specimen.

Additionally, the scene between Marlow and Stein creates a juxtaposition and metaphor between Nature and man, or specifically between butterflies and Jim, and echoes Conrad’s literary objective expressed in the Preface to the *Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* Before the two men begin dissecting Jim, Stein stares at a prized seven-inch-long butterfly in one of his glass cases and tells Marlow that “man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece” and proceeds to reminisce on the moment he first saw and collected the specimen (Conrad 203). The metaphor is extended once Jim

becomes directly linked to the butterfly when Marlow wishes to discuss a different and flawed type of specimen:

‘To tell you the truth, Stein,’ I said with an effort that surprised me, ‘I came here to describe a specimen....’ ‘Butterfly?’ he asked, with an unbelieving and humorous eagerness. ‘Nothing so perfect,’ I answered, feeling suddenly dispirited with all sorts of doubts. ‘A man!’ (Conrad 206)

These two passages are crucial because Stein and Marlow allude to two particular artists: Nature and man. According to Stein, butterflies are perfections rendered by Nature, but man is not a masterpiece and will never achieve perfection. This creates a paradox within the construction and narrative of *Lord Jim* as the novel functions as a fragmented portrait detailing Jim and all his imperfections. However, since Conrad acknowledges and details these contradictions and imperfections the man and the artist achieve perfection through depiction of failure. Conrad elaborates on the importance of the artist in the Preface to the *Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and says, “[The artist] knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to that solidarity in dreams... which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity” (Conrad 254). Similar to dreams, art aspires to unify humanity and illustrate that moment of perfection and insight. Andrea White elaborates on this statement by focusing on the form of *Lord Jim* and says, “The nostalgia, the romantic yearning for a more heroic past is mixed with the realistic appraisal of man’s universal imperfections, an understanding that all men are base...” (White 108). Although Jim can never be fully understood, it is this precise truth that the artist, like Conrad, strives to capture. Unlike the butterflies that slowly wither away in their cases, the novel impresses upon Jim longevity and demonstrates an understanding that although man is flawed, he can achieve perfection through realizing his own imperfections through the gaze of worldly

limitations.

The leaps and the loops show how singular interpretations of the specimen Jim results in contradictory and inconclusive information and despite the research gathered and framed by Marlow, he realizes that he is fated to never see Jim clearly (Conrad 232). Warren describes the collage of accounts, observations, assumptions and rumors that Marlow collects from other characters to piece Jim together as “loops.” Watt elaborates on the importance of this technique and says, “...the novel in effect multiplies the single observer who narrates the sketch [Marlow], and gives a long and penetrating series of reports and interviews with people who are either acquainted with Jim or who illuminate his case” (Watt 265). The contradictory information provided by characters, such as Jewel, the French Lieutenant and Gentleman Brown, complicates Marlow’s quest for the truth surrounding Jim’s secret. For example, while Jim leaves Patusan, his wife, Jewel, yells, “You are false!”; whereas Stein insists that Jim “is not false but true! true! true!” (Conrad 370, 318). Conrad critiques scientific positivism and the master narratives within the adventure tradition by having empirical and sensory data fail Marlow and suggest that Jim is an enigma. Conclusions become impossible because information remains inconclusive. In effect, the omniscient narrator, Marlow, Stein and the secondary characters all share equal amounts of narrative authority because each observation is neither true nor false. Each opinion shares equal narrative authority because each view shapes Jim and portrays his imperfections. Knowledge does not become hierarchized because understanding is a subjective experience. Marlow sums this up perfectly when he says:

It is when we try to grapple with another man’s intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. (Conrad 180)

Marlow realizes that Jim, like humanity, is complicated and cannot be oversimplified

through facts and master narratives that are created through sensory observation and scientific methodology. But differences between facts and interpretations are what initially drive Marlow on his analytical quest to understand Jim’s soul.

Loops and leaps as well as facts and interpretations shape the narrative and thematic elements of *Lord Jim*. The most significant leap within the narrative timeline of *Lord Jim* is the omission of the actual occurrence and secret that haunts Jim. The reader becomes aware of the incident when Marlow is transferred narrative authority and proceeds to recount the official inquiry surrounding Jim’s character. Through the details of the inquiry, Marlow and the reader learn that Jim is on trial because he abandoned a sinking ship called the *S.S. Patna*. Like Marlow and the omniscient narrator, the reader never receives information or an objective description about Jim’s abandonment of ship. Conrad leaps over this essential plot detail to generate mystery and illustrate the unreliability of objective narration. Since Marlow and the reader are never granted this detail the inquiry serves as its substitute. Immediately, Marlow notes the shallow nature of the court and says, “These were issues beyond the contemporary of a court inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge” (Conrad 111). This statement makes a clear thematic distinction between the importance of facts and interpretations. Marlow believes the court is more interested in the facts concerning Jim’s persecution than the reason of his predicament and existence. Marlow additionally realizes that the “object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair” (Conrad 81). The how is the inquiry’s desired objective view and the why serves as Marlow’s subjective view that wishes to dive into the inquiry of Jim’s soul. This distinction motivates Marlow’s analytic quest to discover the true nature of Jim.

Although different in scope, the omniscient narrator and Marlow each disparage the obtainment and glorification of facts within Jim’s inquiry. In chapter two, the omniscient



narrator says, "They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything" (Conrad 58). Similarly, in chapter five, Marlow says:

"Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the backdoor of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!" (Conrad 71)

Through both points of view facts are presented as demeaning, vagrant and inconclusive. Like the omniscient narrator and Marlow, Conrad criticizes the technical methodology of the inquiry because ultimately, like the 'Laws of Nature,' the analysis fails to understand the quintessence of Jim and the human experience in general. The facts, or the 'how,' of the inquiry are limited to an objective view that desires and demands the truth of Jim's leap in order to properly sentence the perceived criminal. The omniscient narrator, Marlow and Conrad are more interested in the 'why' of Jim, believing that truth is subjective and comes from within. Confrontation between the how and why creates the dual narrative that simultaneously depicts Jim's venture and Marlow's impression of Jim's quest. Jim's jumps and the leaps in the narrative also disfigure the how of inquiry and shows that objective fact is not always reliable or accurate and thus inconclusive.

Conrad and Marlow are obviously critical towards facts, but do not hierarchize interpretations above truths. In fact, both prove to be equally unreliable. In "*Lord Jim*: the narrator as interpreter," Richard Ambrosini examines how Marlow analyzes the empirical evidence he gathers, and he notes how the "reality/illusion opposition and the issues of Jim's existence undergo a continuing reformulation in statements qualified each time by the narrational context" (Ambrosini 118). Not only does Marlow recite other character's impressions of Jim, but he constantly reshapes and questions his personal understanding and

motivations through the narrative. Before telling his tale about Jim, Marlow says:

I was, and no mistake, looking for a miracle. The only thing that at this distance of time strikes me as miraculous is the extent of my imbecility. I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubts. (Conrad 77)

Despite years of empirical investigation, Marlow realizes his own inability and failure to create a universal conception of Jim which culminates in the inconclusive and inadequate ending to his oral narration. Ambrosini and Peters would agree that the facts surrounding Jim become affected by the narrative lapse and distance between experience and storytelling. Marlow realizes that the facts he gathers through empirical research are just as questionable and deceptive as his own interpretation of Jim. Only through a miracle could he hope to make the audience see and comprehend his young and ambitious friend the water-clerk. Since Marlow realizes the unreliability of his own impression, he becomes well aware of his limits as a storyteller and relater of information. Towards the end of his oral narrative he says, "For my part, I cannot say what I believed – indeed I don't know to this day, and never shall probably" (Conrad 293). Marlow admits his story is a result of a "sentimental mood" and ends the tale without a tangible and thus unsatisfying ending (Conrad 295). The storyteller himself does not know what to make of Jim's tale and qualms over his failure as a narrator and interpreter.

Even though Marlow doubts his reliability as a storyteller, he makes significant distinctions between the process of telling and hearing throughout the narrative. In chapter 21, he says, "I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing that would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds" (Conrad 217-18). Through his quest for truth, Marlow clearly discovers the

unpredictability of interpretation as well as reception. Even though he doubts his reliability as a narrator, Marlow justifies his unreliability through the inconsistencies of the audience and the reader. Like storytellers, listeners and readers are just as unreliable because each individual perceives and understands a person or story through a strictly subjective lens. Ford realized the importance of interpretation and says, "...he [the artist] must typify for himself a human soul in sympathy with his own; a silent listener who will be attentive to him, and whose mind acts very much as his acts" (Ford 269). The artist and narrator must remain aware that the readers' mind is just as chaotic and impressionable as their own. Marlow realizes that Jim's tale is his own impression of the water-clerk and the failure to create a comprehensive image is not only his fault, but the fault of the audience. When Marlow concludes his oral narrative and the audience begins to depart an omniscient narrator says:

...as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret. (Conrad 307)

The narrator and audience each have individual perceptions that influence their cognitive portrait of Jim. Like Marlow, the audience and the reader cannot further discuss or elaborate on the tale or Jim because the inconclusiveness and sentimental tone affected each individual listener or reader differently. Each of their impressions fragments Jim and the tale even more to further suggest the impossibilities of conclusions. As a result, no universal image of Jim is established between Marlow, the audience and the reader as each impression fragments Jim even more and suggests the impossibilities and failure of conclusions.

The how and why of the inquiry both attempt to uncover truth and facts, but ultimately fail because of the collision of

subjective understanding and the processing of knowledge. Although failure of the human condition tends to be characteristic of modernist fiction, in "Conrad's Modernist Romance: *Lord Jim*," Tracy Seeley argues that the recognition of interpretative failure is naturally romantic. In the essay, she says the novel's second quest becomes the redemption of Jim through the narrative and how "recognizing impossibility matters as much to Conrad as the ideals themselves" (Seeley 497). For Seeley, the romance lies within the human capability to recognize and accept the delusiveness of ideals and the inevitability of failure. Jim becomes specimen of this failure and becomes redeemed through the narrative process. Through his adventure, Marlow exposes the limits of his own perceptions and arrives at the conclusion that truth and ideals are delusive. This realization is satisfying and unnerving; tragic and romantic. Even though Marlow fails to recount Jim, the awareness and skepticism gained becomes the treasure of his quest.

Seeley elaborates upon her argument by suggesting that the community within *Lord Jim* shapes the constructed beliefs and truths within the novel and says:

While for Conrad, skepticism has eroded possibilities for absolute truth and certain knowledge, community creates the ground of consensual understanding. In community, Conrad can yet hope for meaningful identity and action...yet even that communal ideal becomes subject to the knowing disillusionment of gnostic romance. (Seeley 498)

Knowledge and societal values become hierarchized and valued depending on the emphasis placed on by the community. In other words, community constructs epistemological judgment.

Jim acts as outsider and finds himself belittled and misunderstood through the community of seafaring men during and after the inquiry. Marlow notes how the trial became infamous and says, "You must know that everybody connected in any way with the

sea was there, because the affair had been notorious for days..." (Conrad 64). The entire seamen community attends the trial and perceives Jim as a cowardly vagrant and exiles him from the trade. However, Marlow remains skeptical towards the final judgment placed upon Jim and attempts to redeem the young water-clerk through the narrative. While recalling the inquiry Marlow says, "[the occurrence] concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to certain standards of conduct" (Conrad 76). Marlow realizes the construction of the code and conduct that motivate the seamen community: a devotion to duty.

In the opening chapters, Jim expresses a devotion to duty through his eager and ambitious demeanor, but it is his identical devotion to dreams that problematizes his life within the community. The omniscient narrator makes a discrepancy between duty and dreams in the second chapter and says:

After two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water: he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread. (Conrad 43)

The regions of Jim's imagination blind him from the harsh and strict reality of seafaring and result in his inability to act and embrace the heroic moment. Seeley states that Jim's inward romantic gaze and the self-aggrandizing model of achievement keep him from achieving his devotion to duty because he is deluded by dreams (Seeley 499). Although his idealism is contested, Jim continually imagines even more dramatic and daring situations that may await him and retains his romantic demeanor. The omniscient narrator additionally recognizes the dangers of Jim's aspirations and says, "... Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all

terrors..." (Conrad 44). Jim's ideals disillusion him and his inability to act shows the distance between his romantic conceptualization of self and the reality of his situation. When Jim finally does act he abandons the *Patna* and then finds himself confronted by an inquiry of seamen who question his motivations and devotion to duty.

The communities of seafaring men that exile Jim share a rigorous code of conduct that emphasizes honor, respect and brotherhood. When Jim leaps off the *Patna* he disobeys the fabrics of the social code that governs the group of gentleman sailors. Since Jim was a man during the British Empire he was expected to act with a sense of national duty and honor, but when he fails to act the water-clerk finds himself exiled by the men he attempts to emulate. Upon disobeying the code, Jim is punished and loses the respect from nearly everyone he knows and as a result his reputation and honor become tarnished. Despite Jim's circumstance, Marlow remains hopeful throughout the inquiry and says, "We are snared into doing things for which we get called names, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive, - survive the condemnation, survive the halter, by Jove!" (Conrad 70). Marlow highlights Jim's spirit throughout *Lord Jim* by emphasizing his appearance, strength and life. This spirit, however, becomes Jim's worst punishment. After the inquiry, Jim tells Marlow his recollection of the sinking ship and Marlow says, "He must have had an unconscious conviction that the reality could not be half as bad, not half as anguishing, appalling, and vengeful as the created terror of his imagination" (Conrad 128). The imagination is depicted as more terrifying than reality because of the immense distance created between idealism and devotion. Jim's refusal to let go of his idealized self and daunting past ensures that he can never escape the judgments of humankind and the condition of his reputation. Jim is forever fated to be a romantic.

The omniscient narrator, Marlow and Stein all see the discrepancy between Jim's imagination and the reality of his situation and

deem him a romantic. Through his idealized self, Jim becomes fated to forever be an outsider amongst his community. Stein especially provides thoughtful insight that diagnoses Jim's predicament within the community of men and says:

And because you not always can keep your eyes shut there comes the real trouble – the heart pain – the world pain. I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. *Ja!*... (Conrad 208)

When Jim opens his eyes he realizes he cannot achieve his heroic goals because the community of seamen doubts his strength, cunning and reputation. Once the community persecutes Jim he still does not realize the limitations of his aspirations and ability. In "Narrative and Authority in *Lord Jim*: Conrad's Art of Failure," Suresh Raval, like Seeley, distinguishes the importance of Jim's romantic inner-gaze within the community and says, "Man's ideals are the 'destructive element' because he can neither live without them nor make them natural to the world in which he has to live" (Raval 395). Jim's imagination is the "real trouble" or "destructive element" because he fails to make clear distinctions between dreams and duty. Jim's dreams detach him from the code of conduct and the community of men who are committed to duty. Seeley additionally suggests that Jim's imagination distances him from the larger seafaring community, and says, "For that community depends not only on its code of conduct, but on this common story of disillusionment. Ideals and disillusionment together sustain their community, which Jim will not join" (Seeley 501). This community is based within adventure, honor and brotherhood and dreams of doubloons, wenches and heroism are common disillusionments among the nautical men. These men, however, matured and looked through their idealized ambitions and realized the limitations and cruelty of the sea and the sea dream. The romantic self drowns in the

ocean and the community remains intact.

Jim's suicide is the direct result of his exile from the nautical community. After Stein relocates Jim to Patusan, he finds brief success as a Lord to the Malaysian islanders. Jim becomes friends with some of the islanders including father and son Dain Waris and Doramin, and he marries a woman on Patusan. But eventually the dream ends when a buccaneer named Gentleman Brown stumbles upon Patusan and defames and ruins Jim. Brown's crew plunders the island and kills numerous Malaysians including Dain Waris. As a result, Jim must once again choose between fight or flight and decides to abandon the island and start anew. But Jim then returns to Patusan to face his fate and allows Doramin to shoot and kill him out of revenge for his recently slain son. Jim essentially commits suicide by finally facing his fate. In *Conrad's Marlow: Narrative and death in 'Youth,' Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance*, Paul Wake examines the relationship between the narrative techniques and the theme of suicide that is prevalent throughout Conrad's novels. Specifically, in the chapter "*Lord Jim* and the structure of suicide," Wake argues that suicide and absence play crucial roles in the telling and narrative structure of the novel and claims that a "double death within the narrative reveals the narrative as the site of absence that emerges from a misrecognition of the nature of ending as possibility" (Wake 88). Wake suggests that the "double death" simultaneously portrays the importance of mimetic death along with the loss and absences in the telling and recollection of *Lord Jim*. Like Raval and Seeley, Wake views the narrative as providing a sense of validation and meaning to Jim, but claims Jim's suicide is ultimately an act of reclaiming lost honor within the seamen community.

In his examination of Jim's suicide, Wake believes Jim was reclaiming his diminished honor and humanity and says, "The possibility of suicide acts as a constant deterrent to the authorities who would otherwise have him [Jim] arrested and so his potential death becomes a mechanism through which he orders his life" (Wake 70). He suggests that suicide provides meaning to Jim's

life that has otherwise become despondent and isolated from the other seaman who once embraced him. Although this is true, the possibility of suicide and the actual action of suicide are different and deserve more particular attention and analysis in relation to Jim's inherent nature. As many characters and the omniscient narrator suggest Jim is a romantic and idealist. He is described as staring into the sun and daydreaming countless throughout *Lord Jim* and this romantic demeanor is crucial towards analyzing his suicide. As Wake states, Jim's dying well validates his honor, existence and involvement with the Patusan community, but Jim's suicide is a moment of misrecognition, strangeness and comes too soon. This moment of misrecognition is a direct result of Jim's romantic ideology because although he [Jim] may view his death as honorable and brave, as described by his "proud and unflinching glance" he leaves Patusan in ruins and desolation as a result of his suicide" (Conrad 372). Through flight or suicide, Jim had no chance of regaining any honor, and this misrecognition caused him to lose his life and any chance at another clean slate. Communal absence amongst the seafaring and the Patusan people result in Jim's role as outsider and eventual suicide.

Endings are also a crucial element in Wake's argument and in the overall progression of the narrative of *Lord Jim*. Two questions of concern for Wake is if *Lord Jim* indeed has an ending and what constitutes an ending. Marlow also ponders the meaning of ending when he states, "[men] perhaps enlivened by some fable of strife to be forgotten before the end is told – before the end is told – even if there happens to be any end to it" (Conrad 64). The repetition suggests a cognitive reflection on the purpose and meanings of endings as Marlow tries to understand Jim as well as the storytelling process. These two ideas become intertwined throughout his oral narration and as Wake says, "*Lord Jim* becomes a story about the possibility of storytelling"; rather than a romantic tale about the young and ambitious Jim (Wake 96). Although, Jim dies and the story seemingly ends, the actual tale is

Marlow's struggle to reimagine and make clear Jim's identity and purpose in the narrative. The self-reflective narrative suggests that the story may never end because Jim's life could be retold by Marlow or any of the other characters within the novel. While boating to Patusan Marlow reflects on Jim's existence and how it added to his great and famous stature and while staring at the sea and Patusan in the distance says:

It took its tone from the stillness and gloom of the land without a past, where his word was the one truth of every passing day. It shared something of the nature of that silence through which is accompanied you into unexplored depths, heard continuously by your side, penetrating, far reaching – tinged with wonder and mystery on the lips of whispering men. (Conrad 256)

Jim's reputation will live on well after his death on the lips of whispering men. Marlow tells his tale to redeem the ill-fated water-clerk and convince the seamen on the verandah that Jim is more complicated than the inquiry suggested. Marlow shows the universal truth surrounding Jim's reputation is false and unveils the communal construction that ruins Jim. As Wake says, *Lord Jim's* narrative is the manifestation of the double death because it reveals "the narrative as the site of absence that emerges from a misrecognition of the nature of endings as possibility" (Wake 88). *Lord Jim* has no concrete ending because absences within the plot and narrative are just as complex and inconclusive as Jim's nature. While concluding his written narrative Marlow says, "And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic" (Conrad 372). Since the narrative is a series of leaps and loops based upon facts and interpretations mediated by the community, the novel embraces yet another absence: the absence of closure.

Despite years of empirical investigation, Marlow realizes his own inability

and failure to create a universal conception of Jim which culminates in the inconclusive and inadequate ending to his oral narration. As a result, the oral tale moves sporadically through time to report these varying recollections while simultaneously allowing Marlow to reflect on and change his own perceptions of Jim. Marlow attempts to redeem his friend through the tale by suggesting that Jim is a young and ambitious victim of the sea dream; that he is just like "one of us." The inquiry establishes the difference between the facts and interpretations of information and knowledge, but the fragmented details and disjointed time within the narrative suggest that both are equally elusive. In effect, these narrative and metaphoric devices undermine narrative authority, as well as scientific and pragmatic justification. The form of *Lord Jim* directly responds to the democratization of knowledge that justified imperialist expansion while simultaneously responding to imperial romantic authors and elaborating of the purposes and techniques of impressionism.

Conrad concludes the Preface to the *Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and says, "But sometimes by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished behold! all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile – and the return to an eternal rest" (Conrad 256). Through some miracle the artist can incite a clear moment within a reader or viewer that makes them ponder their metaphysical existence. Art inspires solidarity that influences vision and truth. Despite Jim's fateful descent and suicide he has a brief moment of vision; a glimpse of the truth. Marlow describes Jim's final moments and says, "They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forwards dead" (Conrad 372). Jim's romantic dream comes to fruition when he dies for the sake of his honor, and he finally becomes the hero. He sighed, smiled and returned to an eternal rest when he confronted his fate and accomplished his dream. Jim covers his mouth while he dies to suggest that he will not reveal his glimpse and remain an

enigma amongst the seafaring and Patsuan community.

Although Jim finds peace through suicide, Marlow and Stein remain to analyze Jim's existence. Marlow concludes with final condolences to his friend but does not end the story about Jim, but about Stein and Jewel. Marlow concludes the narrative and says, "Stein feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave,...' while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies" (Conrad 372). Life goes on, but not really. Jim may have accomplished his ambitions through death but his past and reputation will remain behind on the lips of whispering men. Stein remains with only his fluttering thoughts, memories of youth and prized butterflies and knows his death is imminent. Like Jim and all of us, Stein tries to come to terms with his meaning within the universe and realizes life is too real to escape and too illusory to believe in.

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**What Do We Do with the Children:**  
**Victorian Attitudes towards Childhood in *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy***  
*Scholarly Writing Prize – Second Place*

Christina Gunning

Spare them yet a while, O  
 conscientious parent! Let them doze  
 among their playthings yet a little! for  
 who knows what a rough, warfaring  
 existence lies before them in the  
 future?

--  
 Robert Louis  
 Stevenson

Some readers have found children's  
 literature to be a rack of hats: didactic,  
 useful books that keep us warm or  
 guard us against weather. I find  
 children's literature to be a world of  
 snakes: seductive things that live in  
 the undergrowths and that may take us  
 whole.

-- Seth Lerer

I only recently read the two books that  
 this essay covers for the first time. However, I  
 was by no means new to either story. My  
 experiences with *Treasure Island* and *Peter  
 Pan* came much earlier from movies and theme  
 park rides. The picture of Jim Hawkins that I  
 have in my mind comes mainly from the  
 Disney film *Treasure Planet* (2002) which sets  
 the piratical adventure in the depths of space.  
 Similarly, before I read J. M. Barrie's original  
 novel, I knew Peter Pan from Disney's 1953  
 animated movie, from the 2003 live action  
 version and from Robin Williams' grown up  
 Pan in *Hook* (1991). But I came to realize, in  
 my academic reading, that Long John Silver  
 wasn't a cyborg cook and Captain James Hook  
 wasn't Dennis Hoffman in a black wig.

These realizations brought me to a  
 question that I'd never before stopped to  
 consider: why are these stories so deeply

embedded in our culture? The question spoke even louder once I realized that Robert Louis Stevenson first published *Treasure Island* in 1894 and Barrie published *Peter and Wendy* in 1911, though the original character of Peter Pan appeared earlier. How could it be possible that these books, these precious memories of my childhood, were over a hundred years old? And what's more, so many of my favorite classic children's books appeared at the same time. A. A. Milne created *Winnie-the-Pooh* in 1926, Beatrix Potter privately published *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1902 and Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865. Something about this time period sparked writers to pen the stories that still make up the reading of children today. So I set about to discover what that spark was.

In the late nineteenth century, writing for children changed. This change mirrored an overall cultural shift in British society's attitude towards their children and towards the idea of childhood. Education changed. Parenting changed. The beliefs that today's Western society hold towards children began to rise in Britain about this time. There are many reasons for this – tracked by Joseph Bristow in *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* and Bradley Deane in "Imperial Boyhood: Piracy and the Play Ethic" among others – and these societal changes reveal themselves prominently in the books and stories written for children at the time. Maria Tatar comments in her introduction to *The Annotated Peter Pan: The Centennial Edition* that "Fairy tales and adventures stories, which flourished in the nineteenth century, reoriented children's literature in the direction of delight rather than instruction" (xlii). This reorientation is obvious in both Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. These novels are mainly about children at play and even though certain lessons can be traced through the pages, there is no overt moral message at the end of either book. They are not about instruction. They are about play.

However, this similarity in topic is not absolute. *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy* pick up two very different attitudes towards play and these variations illustrate the

developing beliefs in late Victorian society regarding childhood and the importance of play. Both novels are written by adults attempting in different ways to capture childhood within their pages. This endeavor is no easy task as the experiences of childhood often fade until it becomes difficult to pull them back to the surface truthfully. Each writer navigates this process in a distinct way, employing two unique narrative styles to portray similar things. These are novels of adventure, regaling the audience with events that range from the perhaps plausible to the highly impossible. Whether a young boy like Jim Hawkins could really run off to sea is debatable, but there remains a sense throughout the book that it could happen. Flying off to a world where a boy can simply refuse to grow up, however, is only possible in the realm of the imagination. Yet both novels are completely plausible in the world of childhood play where anything can, and often does, happen.

These two novels about adventure and play exist as two focused points within a larger cultural shift occurring throughout late Victorian England. The less than twenty year separation between the two novels allowed time for massive changes in the cultural attitude towards childhood and play so when the differences between the novels are tracked, there appears a clear progression in the representations of childhood play. In her essay titled "The Sea-Dream: *Peter Pan* and *Treasure Island*," Kathleen Blake analyzes the methods of each novel, focusing on the narrative style, and compares them in order to claim that *Treasure Island* is "the sea-dream pure and fine" while *Peter and Wendy* "makes it all the harder for us to play the dream straight" (178). I will use a similar technique here while also contextualizing the discussion within a historical framework similar to Bradley Deane in "Imperial Boyhood." This historical context allows the reader to take a different approach to Blake's assessment of the end product of the novels. In this essay, I contend that both *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy* show the cultural and literary developments of fin de siècle conceptions of childhood and play. In fact, I argue that many of the beliefs Stevenson



raises in *Treasure Island*, Barrie pushes, argues or answers in *Peter and Wendy* and that both authors were grappling with the new policies and attitudes towards children in Victorian society.

This essay addresses some of the key debating points that each book inspects. One main distinction between the two is the difference between the plausible, the possible and the impossible. On this argument, the two novels are at odds, a dispute best illuminated by the pointedly dissimilar narrative styles. In *Treasure Island*, Stevenson uses the tools of plausible realist fiction to create a book that deals with the possible. On the other hand, in *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie breaks the rules of conventional narration in order to emphasize the impossibility of his plot line. Despite this difference, the books do seem to agree on a policy of removing their child characters from adult civilization though they each question how far a child must go to be removed. Stevenson takes his child character to the Caribbean in order to separate Jim Hawkins from British society while Barrie's child characters fly away to an impossible and far away world.

A separate point of contention between the novels is the attitude towards general rules and conventions and especially the rules of morality. The actions of the characters in both stories purposefully ignore a Christian moral system; however, the authors differ on how far they allow those characters to stray from a centering code. Stevenson's characters adapt a new code in place of the Christian moral system but Barrie's characters appeal only to the rules of play which are fluid at best, changing from game to game. The narrative style of the each novel matches this attitude. Stevenson adheres to the code of realism whereas Barrie's narrator remains contradictory, refusing to subscribe to any certain method of narration. The last discussion this essay will pursue is the instructive quality of childhood play and whether or not play must remain educational in order to be valuable. The play of *Treasure Island* is productive in some form or another and has value. The play in *Peter and Wendy* acknowledges some of the

educational quality of play but focuses on enjoyment and play for play's sake.

### Children Are People Too

A key to understanding the boom in children's literature is recognizing the Victorian position on childhood. In "Growing Up: Childhood," Claudia Nelson asserts that, "never before had childhood become an obsession within the culture at large – yet in this case 'obsession' is not too strong of word... 'Mid-Victorian society was a society of the young,' and their elders knew it" (70). This societal obsession appeared in a variety of changes in laws towards education, child labor and parenting. Across the board, children became "both the object and the vehicle for social reform" (73). Beginning in 1802, "a series of Education Acts... extended the categories of children required to attend school and the number of hours each day to be spent in the classroom, while the average number of years of schooling rose correspondingly" (73). These new acts involved not only the privileged upper and middle classes but took notice of working class children as well, placing them in barrack schools or industrial schools instead of work houses with adults (73). Nelson believes this increase in schooling led to the literacy required to "expand the market for children's reading" (74). In this way, the new attitude towards children caused a policy shift and can be seen as a direct catalyst for the increase in writing for children. But there is more involved in this new type of book than simply an increase in the available market. The purpose of literature for children underwent a reconstruction as well. Books and magazines in the late Victorian period began to emphasize less of the "evangelical religion or secular rationalism" of the earlier part of the century and focused instead on "fun" (74). The new emphasis on fun also came with new beliefs about the value of play.

The idea of play itself is a difficult concept to define. Play is something one sees every day. Children play and that is a natural fact of life. However, the intense focus Victorians placed on their children made this concept an important facet of the debate. In

1917, Henry Caldwell Cook wrote a work titled *The Play Way: An Essay in Education Method* that discusses how crucial play is for children. Cook defines play as “doing anything with one’s heart” (4). His argument in this work is that “without interest there is no learning, and since the child’s interest is all in play it is necessary, whatever the matter in hand, that the method be a play-method” (3). Play is elevated above learning to the point that it is essentially idealized. Cook writes that he knows of “nothing so whole-hearted, so thorough, so natural, so free from stain, so earnest, as the spontaneous playing of a child” (4). The attitude represented in this work illuminates the late Victorian opinion about play. Childhood becomes something idealized as “free from stain” and play changes into an essential part of childhood.

Both the historical conditions that Nelson traces and the attitude expressed by Cook relate to the interpretations of play in *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy*. The two novels are in direct conversation with the movements surrounding childhood and children’s literature. More importantly, the two novels are in conversation with each other. Both authors weigh in on certain aspects of this debate at different moments in time. Their representations of play reflect the new obsession with childhood in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and show that the new beliefs about childhood were in flux, progressing and developing in many parts of British society. One key way that Stevenson and Barrie display their representations of play is through the narrative style and plot focuses.

### **Narrating Plausibility, Possibility and Impossibility**

The difference in narrative styles between *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy* illustrate the progression from the plausible to the possible to the impossible. Stevenson borrows “the finest lessons of realism to remodel the romance” and adopts the methods of the plausible in order to leap into the possible (Bristow 110). During the 1880s, “realism and romance competed against one another... to define the key debates about

fiction of the day” (110). In an interesting stroke, Stevenson appropriates the conventions of realism – “strength of characterization” and “stylish precision” – in order to create a romance that challenges the reader to remember they are lost in a work of fiction (110). Barrie, on the other hand, draws attention to the narrative process in order to display his belief in the folly of such strivings for plausibility and employs a narrative style that emphasizes the complete impossibility of his story. In “Mirror in the Sea: Treasure Island and the Internalization of Juvenile Romance,” William Blackburn refers to Barrie’s style as “archly ironic and subconscious” (11). This description is helpful at getting to an conception of the style of *Peter and Wendy*. The straight-forwardness of Stevenson’s style facilitates understanding. Barrie’s style, in contrast, is harder to pin down as he seems to take pride in being contradictory, both employing the techniques of romance and critiquing them. Blake describes Barrie’s style as almost formulaic “as if the narrator... were saying: I tell it this way because that is what is needed for the sort of story I am telling” (172). This self-conscious narrative style calls the reader’s attention to the impossibility of the plot line. However, both styles emphasize the fact that the novels exist within the world of childhood play.

Many prominent writers of the late Victorian period looked at “the child’s extraordinary ability to become absorbed in a world of make-believe... [as] the most important aspect of childhood, the crowning achievement of the child, an object of nostalgia and envy” (Petzold 35). This ability to slip the confines of reality and dance off into the realm of the imagination becomes an idealized part of childhood. In *Treasure Island*, Jim Hawkins slips out of society into the world of adventure, treasure and pirates, an act that while possible seems rather unlikely. However, the narrator would have the reader believe that this act is completely within the bounds of reality. The opening of the novel sets about grounding its events in realism by calling on the names of high-standing gentlemen in order to lend credibility. The narrator begins:

Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen. (Stevenson 3)

Opening with this sentence places the novel within a tradition of travel narratives or of realist novels. It signals the reader to set aside their disbelief of the events to be described and to entertain the idea that such things could actually occur. Stating that treasure remains on the island provides a justification for the lack of a specific location, however the book also contains a map of Treasure Island, meant to exist as further proof of the credibility of the tale.

The novel works hard with the narration throughout to maintain the sense of realism especially as the story gets more unconventional. Midway through the narrative, Jim Hawkins, who previously conducted the retrospective narration, is replaced by Doctor Livesey, who carries out a detailed, matter of fact retelling of events Jim was not involved in (87). This switch for three chapters maintains the idea of a travel journal. Instead of having Jim narrate something that he was not involved in or describing the events in a conversation between the characters, the narration is handed over to a reliable source who can take as much time as is necessary to relate the events. This switch reduces the sense of having a single author by giving the impression that the two characters collaborated in order to distribute an accurate description of the “whole particulars about Treasure Island.” This act increases the realism even further but also limits the similarity of Stevenson’s realism with a novel by an author like Jane Austen. As the stories told by Austen and other realists line up closer with the everyday experiences of the reader, there is less need to validate their reality. A novel about the life of a family in London or the need for a suitable marriage is already

plausible. A novel about pirates on the high seas is not and therefore needs to be continuously grounded to maintain plausibility.

This mix of realism and fantasy in *Treasure Island* is an attempt to make the events of the novel, which are only slightly possible, seem more plausible and illustrates some of Stevenson’s attitude towards childhood play. The book is not a full flight of fancy into the realm of the imagination, but it is close. Instead of fully immersing itself in the game, *Treasure Island* remains aware of its audience and continues working to convince the reader that the events of the novel could have happened. The techniques of realism keep the novel within the bounds of the possible. In Stevenson’s view, play is still something that needs to remain within a framework of rules and take place on solid ground. Barrie’s narrator scorns the idea that children need to remain on the ground at all and emphasizes the full immersion of *Peter and Wendy*’s characters into the world of play.

Realism is abandoned in *Peter and Wendy* which flies into the land of fantasy and imagination at full speed. The narrator actively defies the usual conventions of narration in order to emphasize the impossibility of the plotline. The narrator in *Peter and Wendy* becomes a separate character in a way that doesn’t happen with Jim in *Treasure Island*. Though there is a retrospective narrator in *Treasure Island*, the reader understands who is doing the narration and how that narrator has obtained his information. In contrast, Barrie’s narrator draws attention to the act of narration from the very beginning of the novel and therefore to the character of the narrator. At one point, the narrator advises the reader to “look at the four of them, Wendy and Michael over there, John here, and Mrs. Darling by the fire” as if the narrator and the reader are cohorts in the act of spying on the Darling family (12). Later, at the arrival of Peter Pan, the narrator remarks, “if you or I or Wendy had been there we should have seen that he was very like Mrs. Darling’s kiss” (12). The narrator seems set on throwing an arm around the reader and pulling them in close to see the edges of the story. This image is even clearer in the first description of

Neverland when the narrator says “let us pretend to lie here among the sugarcane and watch them as they steal by in single file” (46). In this case, unlike the others, the narrator even refers to the actions of the novel as “pretend.” Not only is the reader part of the narrative process, but the whole situation is addressed as a fiction.

This narrator has a very different attitude from the retrospective realism of *Treasure Island*. Stevenson’s narration pulls in everything it can to give plausibility. Barrie’s narration reaches for ways to show the audience the gaps in the story. Blake makes an important distinction in her essay between the narrative styles of Stevenson and Barrie. While reading *Treasure Island*, she says, “our minds waver between consciousness that we are watching a performance and the fancy’s active participation with the characters” (Blake 167). However, if one was to “abandon realism, [and] tip the mind towards consciousness of the story as a story,” they would find *Peter and Wendy* in that space (168). This description draws to mind two different attitudes towards play. The first case sounds very much like adult participation in the games of children. There is an awareness of the lack of reality but an “active participation,” a suspension of disbelief, in order to serve the game. This is what the narrator of *Treasure Island* requests of the reader in the novel’s opening. Put aside the knowledge that this is a fictional book just for a moment, he says, and enter a world of swashbuckling adventures. *Peter and Wendy*, on the other hand, abandons realism in the same way that children do when they are at play. The characters in the novel are completely immersed in the events but the audience is not given an “in” to participate in that illusion. They are constantly made aware of the lines, and so not allowed all the way into the game, but the play within the novel is completely free of the ties of plausibility. The action of *Peter and Wendy* is impossible and untroubled by it. The narrator, however, cannot pull the same narrative trick of realism that *Treasure Island* just manages to grasp. Instead, in place of realism, the rules of narration are flung away and the audience is left to wrestle with an

additional layer between their world and the world of the novel. In a certain way, Barrie strides deeper into the world of childhood play than Stevenson. This flinging off of the ties of plausibility allows *Peter and Wendy* to venture into a more complete realm of fantasy where pirates are commonplace in comparison with the flying children and mischievous fairies. Just as the two novels differ on whether impossible things are allowed to in the world of play, they disagree about who is allowed into this world. While children are definitely allowed, the type of adults permitted into the game is limited.

### Who Needs Parents?

The action of *Treasure Island* is significantly less realistic than its narration implies and falls within a mode of writing that was emerging in literature for children. Many children’s books at the time emphasized the idea of children “living separate and independent lives – and being none the worse for it” (Petzold 33). Unlike earlier Victorian texts that represented “family as the natural center of a child’s life,” the protagonists of children’s books in the later part of the century are seen as “worlds apart” from adults (33). *Treasure Island* depicts a beginning step towards this mode. While Jim Hawkins spends his adventures surrounded by adults, none of them are family. The ease with which Jim leaves his mother behind, however, is illustrative of the beginnings of this policy of separation. The sum of Jim’s discomfort about leaving home takes up two paragraphs (in chapter seven) and there is only one moment where he seems actually upset about leaving. Jim says that “at the sight of this clumsy stranger, who was to stay here in my place beside my mother, I had my first attack of tears” (Stevenson 40). Yet, in the next paragraph, he says goodbye in one line: “I said good-bye to mother and the cove where I had lived since I was born, and the dear old ‘Admiral Benbow’ – since he was repainted, no longer quite so dear” (40). With this sentiment, he is off, ready for his adventure, seemingly “none the worse” for leaving his last piece of family behind. With all the realism of the narration, the actual attitude of its child narrator

is less than realistic in terms of emotion. This attitude is due to the fact that, in the world of *Treasure Island*, parents are not necessary for the game and therefore, do not get to come on the adventure. Stevenson explains this point of view towards parents in his essay "Child's Play." He writes that for children,

the doings of their elders, unless where they are speakingly picturesque or recommend themselves by the quality of being easily imitable, they let go over their heads (as we say) without the least regard. If it were not for this perpetual imitation, we should be tempted to fancy they despised us outright... ("Child's Play" 228)

Essentially, the doings of grown people are only good if they are helpful to the game. Jim's mother would be no help in the game on *Treasure Island*. This fact becomes obvious early in the novel when, in the midst of all the excitement of Pew and the other pirates are attacking the Benbow Inn, Jim's mother faints while they are trying to escape (*Treasure Island* 24). Because of this weakness, she is left behind when Jim sets sail and her memory doesn't bother Jim again. There are no instances where worries about his mother intrude into the thrill of the game. Those capable adults, such as the squire and Doctor Livesey, are allowed to come along on the adventure. It is clear from this compromise that Stevenson doesn't believe in sending children off on their own in the same way that Barrie does. He abides by the belief prominent among Golden Age children's authors that children are "socially saturated beings, profoundly shaped by the culture, manners, and morals of their time" and illustrates this opinion by keeping adults around his child character (Gubar 4). Alternatively, when Barrie takes up the issue of parental supervision, he goes to much greater lengths to ensure his child characters are separate from their parents and proceeds to pit his children against most of the adults in the novel.

*Peter and Wendy* furthers the idea that children can live "separate and independent

lives – and [be] none the worse for it" by taking its characters to a place where adults have no say over the lives of children (Petzold 33). Peter's little gang in the novel are referred to as "the lost boys" and are "the children who fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way" (Barrie 29). They are parent-less children and they live cheerfully like savages dressed all in "the skins of bears slain by themselves" (46). Wendy, John and Michael leave the worlds of adults and fly for days and miles until they finally reach Neverland. The physical separation is marked by how long it takes the children to get to Neverland. They fly for so long that they lose track of time completely and begin counting how many oceans they've flown over (37). Their physical separation is much more than the ocean that divides Jim from his mother. Eventually they find Neverland because "the island [is] out looking for them" which makes it even more impossible for their parents to find them (40). The adults in Neverland have even less control over the lives of the child characters than the adults of *Treasure Island* have on Jim. Under Peter's command, the lost boys wage war against the adults and are in constant battle against the pirates and redskins. Any control that these adults have over the lives of the children is negative and must be resisted. This furthering of both the physical and emotional separation enhances the completeness of play. Adult influence can only limit the adventures children can have.

Despite this intense separation in *Peter and Wendy*, there is a nagging sense that these lost children still want their parents. While Jim Hawkins' mother does not trouble him out on his adventure, Wendy makes a point of trying to retain the memory of her mother. She doesn't worry about her parents forgetting her but she is afraid to forget them. The longer the Darling children stay in Neverland, the more it disturbs her that "John remembered his parents vaguely only, as people he had once known, while Michael was quite willing to believe that she [Wendy] was really his mother" (70). So she tries to "fix the old life in their mind" (70). This act remains important to Wendy which indicates that she is troubled by

the memory of her parents. Wendy's mind-set towards her parents creates a strange contradiction. In Barrie's world, children can lead completely separate lives from adults without any detriment and yet they still like to have parents and adults around. The lost boys constantly reminisce about their mothers and love having Wendy as a mother (51, 99). However, they also favor their life of freedom. In the introduction to the Penguin edition of *Peter Pan*, Jack Zipes provides the possibility that *Peter and Wendy* is meant to explain "what the adults were missing in raising children" and offer a way to "re-educate... parents and potential parents... so they will grant their children the freedom to fly off into their own realms and receive the nurturing they want and need" (xxv). This idea leads to an explanation for the shifting attitudes towards adults in the novel. Children need both the freedom to be separate and the nurturing relationship provided by adults.

In order to make this point, Barrie applies the popular Victorian convention of presenting children living in adult-free spaces to a form a more complex examination of what children need from their parents. By allowing for the possibility that the children would miss their parents, Barrie treats his child characters more fairly. He accounts for emotional reality even while expressing an impossible plot. Stevenson's compromise represents an idea that children cannot be completely without attachment to adult society even in a world of play. Barrie allows his child characters to completely escape into a world of play where adults have both limited entry and limited power. But he recognizes that children want to return to their parents when the game is done. Once in the world of play, the children of both stories exist in a space where the rules of the real world lose at least some of their power or, in many cases, disappear altogether.

### **Wickedness Can Cause Happiness Too**

Separation from adult society has a definite effect on the way morality is approached in both novels. The change in morality in the novels represents a larger shift

in the overall approach to writing for children. In previous centuries, books for children had a distinct agenda. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, books intended for children "very much revealed an educational purpose with an emphasis on promotion of religion and virtue" (Thwaite 21). Between 1557 and 1710, most books for children were "directed towards moral improvement or religious teaching. Some [were] books of parental advice or instruction, others [were] homilies or warnings against wickedness, and rarely [were] religious doctrines or moral exhortations allowed to make way for lighter fare" (24). Gradually, there began to be less religious zeal and an emphasis "more concerned with character and conduct in the life of here-and-now" (33). Even the fairy tales had "short verse moralities... added at the end of each story, probably to give the correct impression of serious purpose, then so necessary everywhere in books intended for the young" (36). Starting in the 1700s, there began to be published works that pushed less morality and gave some acknowledgement of "the young child's" need for "sheer entertainment" (46) but the focus remained on the idea that "goodness brings happiness and wickedness leads to misery" (70).

As the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, books for children began to leave religion and a previous obsession with moral training behind on favor of instead fun and entertainment (Nelson 74). This new priority gained power during the nineteenth century and is incredibly visible in *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy*. Neither of these books have a moral agenda. They are not designed to instruct the child reader on the proper conduct of life. Instead, each substitutes a different code of living for the Christian morality that was previously pushed by children's literature. Stevenson's novel especially maintains a specific and consistent set of rules. While the code of *Treasure Island* subverts the traditional moral system, there is still a belief that some sort of code is necessary. This concept translates to the idea that children need a structured set of rules in life. Barrie argues back against this idea in his novel, creating a world where the only rules

are the fluid and changeable rules of play. These rules change from game to game and therefore can never be consistent. Though there is a sense of the importance of fair play in certain parts of *Peter and Wendy*, fairness is not always rewarded. This difference again depicts the disagreement between the two novels about the construction of play and childhood.

Though the narrator of *Treasure Island* would have the reader believe that it is a true retelling of actual events, the plot remains firmly situated in the realm of adventure. From the first colorful appearance of Billy Bones at the “Admiral Benbow” to the strange landscape of Treasure Island, Stevenson’s plot bounces gleefully through an amoral world full of mutinies, buccaneers and treasure. Deane comments on the “striking amorality” of the novel where the traditional “moral lessons” are replaced by an “alternative ethical code... which sets the terms in which masculinity can be defined” (696). This is a book in which play is placed above other concerns. The rules of Victorian England are not just put in the background but removed from the characters decision-making criteria. One moment where the dismissal of traditional rules becomes clear is when Jim leaves the ship for the first time. The loyal crew is already sure a mutiny is in store and the rest of the crew is sent ashore. Jim looks at the number of men left on the ship, compares the number of mutineers with the number of loyal crewmen and then sneaks into a gig. His decision is made based on the idea that “the cabin party had no present need of [his] assistance” (Stevenson 72). He is essentially disobeying orders and deserting his post but once he decides that his being there will offer no immediate help, he follows his “mad notion” (72). This action in and of itself can be written off to the carelessness of children. However, the narrator informs the reader that this “mad notion... contributed so much to save [their] lives” (72). This careless, amoral decision leads to positive results. The world in which Jim exists rewards his disobedience instead of punishing it because Treasure Island operates within a different set of moral norms. The Christian morals of England have no bearing. Morals are

decided by what saves lives, what gets things done and what gets the favored characters the results they desire.

The amorality of *Treasure Island* is never clearer than in its dealing with the character of Long John Silver. For the most part, the “bad” men of the novel die or are equally punished before it concludes. Most of the mutineers are killed in action and those that aren’t are marooned – though in a kindly fashion with lots of food stores left behind (188). Issues in Jim’s decision-making skills can always be written off by his young age and by a lack of training in the ways of the world. To counteract these instances, the novel presents the reader with another, more problematic example. It would be difficult in reading the novel to allow that Long John Silver is a “good” person within a Christian moral system. He lies, cheats, steals, murders and shows no remorse at any of it until presented with the possibility of being hung for his crimes. Yet the novel seems more concerned with disdaining the cowardice of his mutinous crew than with his ever-shifting loyalty. When, towards the end of the book, Jim inadvertently finds his way into the enemy camp, Long John begs a deal with Doctor Livesey. He says, “You’ll make a note of this here also, doctor... and the boy’ll tell you how I saved his life, and were deposed for it...” and then later, “I’m no coward; no, not – not so much... But I’ll own up fairly, I’ve the shakes upon me for the gallows” (167). This conversation takes place just after he finishes convincing his crew that he is completely on their side.

Once the mutiny falls apart, Long John spends the rest of the novel playing both sides of the equation but rather than hating him for this, the reader is impressed by his courage and his persuasive abilities. So much so in fact, that at the end of the novel when he “connive[s] his escape in a shore boat... with three or four hundred guineas” (189) without a trial or any sort of punishment, “few readers can be so heartless to wish the case otherwise” (Blackburn 11). By the end of the novel, each of the surviving characters has killed their fair share of men in a variety of ways but there is

never a crisis of conscience. Though Jim remarks on how many lives were lost in acquiring Captain Flint's treasure – both in the original gathering of the hoard and in the rediscovery of it on Treasure Island – there is not a moment where those involved in the scheme seem the least bit upset with their actions (185). The repercussions in the novel are for actions of cowardice instead of immorality, for lack of conviction rather than lack of fidelity. It is not a novel that teaches its reader that “goodness brings happiness and wickedness leads to misery” (Thwaite 70). The lessons of *Treasure Island* are ones of masculinity not of morality.

However, for all Long John Silver's slipperiness, he maintains a place within a code. The rules of piracy are returned to again and again throughout *Treasure Island*. One key instance of piratical ruling system is foregrounded in the novel with Billy Bones' black spot and returned to when Long John receives a black spot from his crew (Stevenson 16, 159). Bones' spot is a summons (16). Long John's is a signal for him to step down as captain. Long John's response to the black spot illustrates his thorough knowledge of the rules presented to him. He tells the crew, “I thought you said you knowed the rules,... Leastways, if you don't, I do” (159). Then he goes on to persuade his crew to keep him by working within their code. The fact that the spot is drawn on a page torn out of the Bible further illustrates the raising of the pirates own code of conduct over the idea of Christian morality (159). This scene creates a sense of the flexibility of the social mores that bind society. Another set of boundaries easily replaces those left behind in England whether it is the pirate's code or the rules of masculinity.

Through the examples explored above, Stevenson indicates that neither morality nor societal rules are fixed objects. This attitude adapts the late Victorian reaction against rules. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Victorians began to realize “that rules were not absolutes” and they developed a “recognition of the artificiality of rules” which was most clearly demonstrated in Carroll's work (Nadel 20). However, both the content of Stevenson's novel

and the realistic narrative style illustrate his belief both in the flexibility of rules and the idea that there must be some form of code. The rules of pirates can replace the rules of British society and the rules of masculinity can replace the rules of Christian morality but there always must be some type of rule system. This belief can be seen in his maintenance of the realistic narrative style as realism is the narrative equivalent of a centering code. Society must have a framework and so must fiction.

Barrie, in contrast, does not subscribe to a solid set of narrative rules. In *Treasure Island*, there is a recognizable narrator and an understandable narrative structure which allows the reader to relate directly to the story. In *Peter and Wendy*, the narrator is an unknown character with a separate motivation who actively pulls the reader to a certain viewpoint. This reorientation forces the reader to relate to the narrator in order to relate to the story which becomes more problematic because of the lack of a narrative framework. Instead of being centered around a character, the narrator acts as the centering force of the novel. This same issue is presented in the way morality exists in *Peter and Wendy*. The rules of Neverland are not absolute but instead are centered around Peter's ever-changing attitudes. Peter's rule system is based on whatever game he is playing at that moment. Each time a new game is set up, a structure of rules is placed over an empty space. An equivalent can be seen in the playing of board games. In some games, it is considered bad sportsmanship to knock another player's pieces off the board but in chess, that is a perfectly acceptable strategic move. Each game has its own rules. As long as a person's actions are fair for the game that is being played, there is no moral dilemma.

Peter is very strict about the rules of the game being played are followed. At one point in the novel, he asks one of the lost boys, Slightly, to fetch a doctor so Slightly goes and puts on John's hat and a solemn expression. Peter immediately believes that Slightly is a doctor and the narrator explains this reaction:

The difference between him and the other boys at such a time was that they



knew it was make-believe, while to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing. This sometimes troubled them, as when they had to make-believe that they had had their dinners. If they broke down in their make-believe he rapped them on the knuckles. (Barrie 61)

Here the rule of the game is to stay in character. Breaking character has distinct and immediate consequences. However, later in the novel, the lost boys are in a battle with the redskins when Peter announces, "I'm a redskin to-day; what are you, Tootles" which causes all the other boys to become redskins and the redskins to become lost boys (71). In this game, the rules insist that the players break character and change their parts midway through. Neither the lost boys nor the redskins are troubled by this switch. They all understand that the rules of the game are not fixed and that Peter is in control of those rules.

In Neverland, there are only the treacherously shifting boundaries of the world of the imagination. Once Wendy, John and Michael fly off with Peter Pan, they enter a world in which the only rules are those that the mind creates. While en route to Neverland, the children fall out of the sky whenever they drift off to sleep which Peter finds very amusing. The description of his reaction to the fall illustrates how little he is concerned with the life of others:

Eventually Peter would dive through the air, and catch Michael just before he could strike the sea and it was lovely the way he did it; but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life. (Barrie 38)

The normal structures of morality that would cause an individual to value human life do not apply to Peter Pan. Another situation later in the novel causes Peter to save a life. One day, the lost boys are in the lagoon when two pirates bring Tiger Lily, the daughter of the redskin's

chief, to Marooner's Rock to leave her to drown. Peter reacts in anger, however, the narrator tells us that "he was less sorry than Wendy for Tiger Lily: it was two against one that angered him, and he meant to save her" (76). Peter sees the situation as unfair play and this, rather than the moral imperative to save a life, causes him to act. The characters in *Treasure Island* don't necessarily have a great regard for human life. Quite a few people die in the quest for treasure. However, there is a sense of protecting one's own and people are only killed for the good of the cause. Peter does not act to save anyone out of a value for their lives or a belief that he should protect anyone in particular. He doesn't do it for a cause or for a sense of right and wrong. He saves Michael in order to showcase his own cleverness. He saves Tiger Lily because she is unfairly matched and so he evens the odds. These actions are similar to Long John's reason for saving Jim (that is, to protect his own interests) but are less consistent. Long John has a definite goal and his actions are centered around that goal. Peter's centering belief system is difficult to pin because it changes based on the game being played.

Even abiding by the rules of the game is a problematic action in *Peter and Wendy*. Treasure Island, unlike Neverland, is a world in which "the right kind of thing [falls] out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing... follow[s]; and... the characters talk aptly and think naturally" (Blake 165). The reader is allowed to know that when something happens that that's "the way things should have happened" (167). But in Neverland the rules of the game are addressed as "arbitrary, conventional, made-up, [and] literary" (173). During play, concerns about what is supposed to happen are not important and sometimes sticking to the rules causes more harm than breaking them. This aspect is made clear when the pirates attack the redskins. The narrator remarks that, "the pirate attack had been a complete surprise: a sure proof that the unscrupulous Hook had conducted it improperly" and continues to say that "by all the unwritten laws of savage warfare it is always the redskin who attacks" (Barrie 101).

In following the “unwritten laws of savage warfare,” the redskins perish in what becomes “a massacre rather than a fight” (105). In this case, Hook is rewarded for breaking the rules but the reader is not pleased like they are when Jim Hawkins transgresses. The reader’s loyalty is placed with the noble redskins, whose tactics are painstakingly explained as the *right* way of doing things. The proper balance is upset in this scene and the characters the reader is pulling for are punished for sticking to the “unwritten laws.” As soon as the reader discovers a method for comprehending the morality of Neverland, it shifts out of reach much like playing a game of pretend with a child who alters the rules so that they always win.

Despite this difficulty with the inversion of typical conventions, there are rules within Neverland but they are as shifting as Peter’s loyalties. Many of them are brought in when Wendy arrives to be their mother. She insists that the lost boys take a rest “on a rock for half an hour after their meal... and it had to be a real rest even though the meal was make-believe” (74). She also holds firmly to the boys’ bedtime and cries “To bed, to bed” when they do “dodgy things to get staying up still longer” (87). Another important rule is not hitting back at dinnertime but instead referring “the matter of dispute to Wendy by raising the right arm politely and saying, ‘I complain of so-and-so’” (89). The rules of the nursery intervene into the freedom of Neverland but are not treated with any sort of seriousness. Shortly after Wendy arrives Peter invents a game which consists of “pretending not to have adventures...sitting on stools flinging balls into the air, pushing each other, going out for walks and coming back without having killed so much as a grizzly” (71). This sort of attitude is taken towards all of the rules Wendy brings with her. They apply for as long as they hold Peter’s attention, as long as they are novel and interesting, and then they are thrown away with all past games. The essential rules of childhood life, embodied by Wendy-as-mother, are exposed as just another type of game. The game in *Treasure Island* follows a set of rules which makes it comprehensible for adults and

play in the novel is explained as having the value of instruction. In *Peter and Wendy*, the rules of the world of play are addressed as changeable and play itself is re-imagined to be inherently valuable without need of an educational purpose.

### Can We Just Play For Play’s Sake?

In the centuries leading up to the Victorian era, “there was no question of children having an independent imaginative life of any importance, or of their being able to perceive anything that was invisible to adults. The only necessity was for instruction to be poured into their ears” (Carpenter 7). This attitude is dismissed by Stevenson and Barrie. Neither book takes up a policy of instruction and Barrie’s novel even refuses to commit to the idea that play itself has true instructive quality. Stevenson does not try to impart moral wisdom in his novel but he does adhere to an idea set down by Deane in “Imperial Boyhood: Piracy and the Play Ethic.” Deane labels the newly emerged Victorian concept that allowing boys to play freely would enhance their natural ability to conquer the imperial frontier as “the imperial play ethic” and argues that Stevenson uses this idea in *Treasure Island* (692).

Around the turn of the century, the British empire “had ceased to strive towards idealistic ends” which meant that it “no longer required its heroes to grow up, and a non-developmental understanding of global politics welcomed a masculinity resistant to development” (690). One of the ideas behind the imperial play ethic was that “boys or boyish men were equipped naturally for struggle on the frontier” leading to the idea that forcing boys to grow up would actually be detrimental to the empire at large (693). While there are other aspects of this concept, this piece seems essential to the way in which both Jim Hawkins and Peter Pan act in both novels. The amorality of the stories can be seen as an expression of the new policy of non-interference in the education of boys. If any changes are made in the boyish spirit, then the natural equipment for life on the frontier would be lost and it would have a direct negative impact on the struggles of imperialism. In this way, the lack of societal

influence on the boys of *Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy* seems justified by the overall social constructs in which the authors' were writing.

Deane continues to apply his imperial play ethic to Stevenson's novel. He writes that Stevenson's "cultural influence through *Treasure Island* was to remap the imperial frontier as a self-sufficient playground, not a place on which moral laws of Britain are impressed, but as the kind of 'Better Land' in which they can be escaped" (697). This idea functions well within the historical framework of play as the "change from a restricted, educationally focused view of play to sheer enjoyment" created playgrounds in British society for the first time (Nadel 32). By applying the recently formed concept of playgrounds to the imperial frontier, Deane demonstrates Stevenson's agreement with the belief that act of free childhood play trained boys for their future role as colonizer. In *Treasure Island*, the further the crew of the *Hispanola* gets from Britain, the less the rules of the real world apply. All the characters in the novel seem to enter the "immoral or pre-moral" sphere of childhood (Deane 697). Blake agrees with the interpretation of *Treasure Island* as an exercise in play in her essay when she writes that "there are moments when Jim Hawkins strides the thin line between living his adventures and playing them" (171).

One of the clearest instances of this confusion is when Jim confronts Israel Hands after Jim sneaks back onto the *Hispanola*. During the encounter, the narrator remarks, "it was such a game as I had often played at home about the rocks of Black Hill Cove; but never before, you may be sure, with such a wildly beating heart as now. Still, as I say, it was a boy's game, and I thought I could hold my own at it, against an elderly seaman with a wounded thigh" (Stevenson 141). This connection of actual peril with that of a childhood game displays a distinct argument about what boys are naturally capable of. It is never explained that Jim has any sort of training in fighting or any of the other endeavors he excels at throughout the adventure. However, the events of the ship are tied with boyhood games which

implies that Stevenson believes this play is enough to ensure Jim's safety throughout the life-and-death adventures on *Treasure Island*. Though Jim is mostly saved by luck, there are also comments on his quickness and his courage which are somehow enough to avoid the onslaught of a well-blooded pirate. After the fight, Jim does not lament on the fact that he has killed another man but sets about looking after his own wounds and completing the mission he set for himself.

The connection of peril with a game colors the overall attitude towards play in *Treasure Island*. The novel itself does not set out to provide instruction the way texts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century did. The premise of the novel is one of adventure and play, not of learning lessons or creating a more moral child reader. *Treasure Island* is an idealization of play, exemplifying the necessity of children being allowed free and natural play. However, the link between the battle with Israel Hands and the games of Black Hill Cove proves, at least for the duration of the novel, the instructional quality of play for imperial subjects. For Stevenson, play needs to have a purpose for it to be valuable. In contrast, play is portrayed as valuable even if it is not constructive in *Peter and Wendy*. The purpose of play is to play, not to learn to be a colonizer. While there can be an instructive quality to play, that quality is not what makes play important. In a large way, this distinction is because the captain of play in the novel is Peter Pan, a boy who has no need of lessons as he will never need them as an adult. Blake explains that "make-believe and real are the same thing to him [Peter]. He does nothing to simply get something done. He never just lives; he has adventures. And he organizes his life in order to have them" (171). Play is Peter's whole life. In this way, he is an embodiment of the idea set forth in Stevenson's "Child's Play" when he writes that "in a child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. 'Making believe' is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character" (235). While Jim Hawkins "strides the thin line between living his adventures and playing them," Peter cannot tell the difference between reality and pretend (Blake 171). But

unlike Young Hawkins, Peter doesn't learn anything from the games he plays.

A key reason for lack of instruction in Peter's games is that in order to stay a boy forever, he is unable to remember anything for a long period of time. One instance of this phenomenon is during the fight between Hook and Peter on Marooners' Rock. When Peter reaches down to help Hook up onto the rock to make their fight fair, Hook bites Peter (82). The narrator explains the reaction that follows:

Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly.... No one gets over their first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. I suppose that was the real difference between him and all the rest. So when he met it now it was like the first time; and he could just stare helpless. (82)

Despite the extremity of this reaction, Peter will eventually forget even this unfairness. Peter doesn't learn from his experiences so play as a learning process would affect him little. This logistical issue does not minimize the fact that for the most part in *Peter and Wendy*, play is just something one does for the pure enjoyment of it. There is not only no specific moral lesson to be gained from the reading of the novel but play itself isn't about learning a lesson. In this way, *Peter and Wendy* represents an interpretation of play that existed later in the century. In "'The Mansion of Bliss,' or the Place of Play in Victorian Life and Literature," Ira Bruce Nadel analyzes the different types of play that existed through the Victorian era and points to the 1880s and 1890s as a period when the "restricted, educationally focused view of play" began to wane (32). Play began to shake off the necessity to teach something in order to have use.

One piece of play in *Peter and Wendy* that seems to have instructive qualities is when the children imitate adult actions. In theory, this imitation would prepare the children for their

future roles in society but what is most obvious about these games is the lack of accuracy or true understanding. Through most of the book, Wendy acts as mother towards the lost boys and she works very hard to be as true to her role as possible but it is clear that she does not truly understand what the role means. At one point, the lost boys complain that they don't like the redskins treating them as "ordinary braves" and "secretly Wendy sympathize[s] with them a little, but she [is] far too loyal a housewife to listen to any complaints against Father [Peter]. 'Father knows best,' she always said, whatever her private opinion must be" (Barrie 88). There is the sense that Wendy has gathered information about how a housewife and a mother acts so she sticks to as strict an interpretation of that information as she can. This outlook is why Michael ends up sleeping in a basket; "Wendy would have a baby, and he was the littlest, and you know what women are" (68). None of the other children in the novel seem to have true conception of what adults act like. Later, John is grumbling about not being able to sit in Peter's chair and says, "He's not really our father... He didn't even know how a father does till I showed him" (89). "Father" is just a role in a game, something a person "does," so while the children may be learning how to be parents, that isn't the point. Most of the time, their interpretations or imitations are incorrect anyway Stevenson still feels the need to justify Jim's games with their constructive applications. For Barrie, the knowledge gained from the game is less important than the game itself. Play is important because it is fun and children enjoy the freedom.

### **The Men (or were they boys) Themselves**

Both Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie wrote books that to a certain degree idealized childhood. Many historians and literary critics depict them as perpetual boys themselves. In an introduction to *Treasure Island*, John Seelye writes that "Stevenson, it can be said, never quite shook off his early years, and courted what became a familiar association with boyhood" (x). Barrie shared a similar opinion about Stevenson based on their

correspondences. Barrie thought of him “as an inspired and lifelong boy, as ‘the spirit of boyhood tugging at the skirts of this old world of ours and compelling it to come back and play’” (Blake 175). Blake describes Barrie’s opinion of Stevenson by saying that “for Barrie, Stevenson was a kind of Peter Pan” which is an interesting assessment since so many people see Barrie as “the ultimate Peter Pan” (175). The memory of J. M. Barrie cannot shake the attachment with boyhood. Tatar writes in a biographical essay of Barrie that he “will forever be linked with youth, joy, and the pleasures of childhood” and that he “had a boyish quality to him even in middle age” (lxvii). She references a quote by Barrie where he writes that “nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much” (qtd. Tatar lxx). Even in this aspect the two authors differ. Stevenson is portrayed as remaining boyish simply through personality, unconsciously projecting boyhood. Barrie is in contrast painfully aware of his own boyishness and consistently grappling with it. These personal attitudes towards their own childhood are paralleled in their work. *Treasure Island* bounds through childhood, seemingly simple and carefree. *Peter and Wendy* is constantly aware of its own artificiality and conscious of how it is interpreting play.

Both these authors were highly aware of the charged debate going on around at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In literature and life, children were suddenly under a spotlight as British culture turned to ponder over their offspring. As governmental policies and general cultural attitudes transformed, literature, as is so often the case, reacted to the debate. Dieter Petzold expresses the situation eloquently in his essay “A Race Apart: Children in Late Victorian and Edwardian Children’s Books.” He writes that:

Even if we look closely at only some of the books written for, or read by, children during that period, we find not one monolithic conception of the child, but rather a confusing variety of attitudes towards, and opinions about, children, sometimes clearly

pronounced, sometimes only implied or obliquely hinted at. (Petzold 33).

Stevenson and Barrie represent two distinct instances in this variety. By comparing these two novels, it is clear that the authors were responding not only to culture but some of these other books that were all working to create a cohesive “conception of the child.”

Stevenson’s novel represents an earlier version of this conception so in *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie is often responding to the views presented in *Treasure Island*. Peter Pan was created to push the boundaries of the representations of childhood that existed previously. Some of the ways Barrie affects the boundaries are included here. Each novel responds in different ways to the lines between the plausible, possible and impossible, to narrative structure and style, to the policy of separating children from society and to the instructive quality of play. This diversity is highlighted by the narrative style as explained by Blake in “The Sea-Dream” but is more interesting when considered in context with the historical movements of the time period.

*Treasure Island* and *Peter and Wendy* are two novels that are deeply ingrained in modern day cultural understanding. It would be difficult to find someone in Western society who hasn’t heard of Long John Silver and Jim Hawkins or Peter Pan and Tinkerbell. Understanding the historical processes that sparked these novels – and many others like them – allows deeper insight into novels that shaped many modern childhoods. Before this time period, childhood was incredibly different from the way we see it now. These novels were written when childhood was, in a sense, being invented. The Victorians in the fin de siècle implemented many of the policies that ushered in the type of childhood we believe in today. Awareness of the recentness of the invention of childhood allows us to accept that our perception of childhood isn’t fixed. It’s as transitory as it was in 1894, as open for interpretation as it was in 1911. Being conscious of where children’s literature has been is as important as appreciating its power and its continued importance. But what these

novels tell us most consistently is to enjoy and embrace childhood both in ourselves and in our children.

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**Dangerous Dualisms in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau***  
*Scholarly Writing Prize – Third Place*

Jessica Miller

“In spite of their increased intelligence and the tendency of their animal instincts to reawaken, they had certain *fixed ideas* implanted by Moreau in their minds, which absolutely bounded their imaginations. They were really hypnotised; had been told that certain things were impossible, and that certain things were not to be done, and these prohibitions were woven into the texture of their minds beyond any possibility of disobedience or dispute.”

(Wells 132)

### Introduction

Good versus evil, man versus woman, reason versus emotion, human versus animal: the world seems to have been made in opposing pairs. It may at first seem easy to place something in one group or the other, to neatly compartmentalize it and let the matter rest. However, a closer look at the ways in which we dichotomize the world uncovers all sorts of ambiguities and uncertainties. For instance, could it ever be wrong to tell the truth? What makes it wrong? Is it possible to do the right wrong thing, or vice versa? In addition to disregarding the complex relationship of the concepts it divides, dualism itself is a malignant form of thinking that makes it easier to perpetuate oppression. The practice of valuing one category over another can be mapped onto any number of dualistic structures, which in turn creates two ultimate defining categories by which the world is ordered: Superior and Inferior.

In this essay, I wish to expose the flawed practice of dualism and deconstruct the methods of dualism that enforce oppression by consulting various examples presented in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, particularly in the way the novel addresses the dualistic opposition of reason and emotion. I will begin this essay by using textual evidence from the novel to illustrate how dualistic thinking

reduces the dynamic conceptual gradient of reason and emotion into a set of mutually exclusive, hierarchized categories, which does not properly reflect the relationship of these two categorical concepts. Then, in order to demonstrate how hierarchical practices accompany dualities of all types, I will highlight the links between the reason/emotion dualism and the respectively hierarchized pairs contained in the novel, specifically human/animal and science/nature. Within this discussion, I will deconstruct how the pernicious dualism of human/animal points to a deeply ingrained Western fear of identifying with ‘lower’ animals. Continuing to draw on examples from *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, I will then illustrate how this fear derives from the systems of oppression under which dualisms operate; that is to say, I will show the analogous, oppressive similarities between dualities such as human/animal, man/woman and reason/emotion. This will expose the conceptual flaws and ultimate iniquity of dualistic structures by indicating their contributions to the perpetuation of oppressive social structures.

### We're Not in England Anymore

When Edward Prendick, a sensible Englishman with a casual interest in biology and education, finds himself shipwrecked on a mysterious island, his life is thrown into far more chaos than he could have ever imagined. The island is occupied by a mad scientist named Dr. Moreau, who performs excruciatingly torturous vivisections on various animals and— to Prendick's further horror— turns them into grotesque mutant hybrids referred to throughout the novel as Beast Folk. While fighting for his life and trying to make sense of this entangled world, Prendick is forced into a nightmarish moral experiment through which he must weigh between his rational decisions and his emotion-driven

impulses. However, as Prendick discovers, the differences between the two often give way to perplexing similarities.

This debate over the dichotomy between reason and emotion is not solely confined to H.G. Wells' 1896 science-fiction horror story. The novel itself explores the role this dichotomic dualism plays in science and, more broadly, humanity's sense of moral reasoning. The prioritization of reason, rationality and "scientific detachment" is prevalent within Western thought, while emotion, impulse and instinct are categorized as irrational and reckless modes of decision making. However, as exemplified in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, these conceptualizations of reason and emotion are not only false but also wrongly thought to be mutually exclusive. Emotion actually informs reason and is just as vital to making appropriate decisions. Furthermore, the complexities of the reason/emotion dichotomy are overlooked because of dualistic thinking in general, which provides a simple choice: it's either one or the other. But what if those were not the only options? What if it were possible to have both, or neither... or something else? Dualistic thinking poses a danger in replacing a fluid spectrum of choices with two static boxes, and inevitably places one of them in a position of higher status than the other. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* illustrates this through the characters' various attitudes towards reason and emotion, especially in the case of Dr. Moreau himself, who values reason far above emotion and demonstrates how this dualistic, objectivist mode of thinking reveals the true madness of a paradigmatically 'rational' world devoid of emotion.

#### Rational Doctors, Reckless Assistants, Resilient Runaways

The characters in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* each represent the varying degrees of a moral spectrum through the decisions they make, and is also revealed through their improper subordination of the Beast Folk. The symbolic medium of moral uncertainty is Prendick, who strives to be rational but often

pragmatically gives in to his impulsive intuitions throughout the story. At polarized extremes, however, lie Dr. Moreau and his assistant, Montgomery. Dr. Moreau represents the cold and calculated detachment of conventional scientific practice, whereas Montgomery is driven by his impulses and emotional responses. In the case of both these characters, their moral extremes become their ultimate downfall.

Dr. Moreau is portrayed as a dedicated science fanatic who works solely in the name of his scientific endeavors. Upon hearing his name, Prendick recalls that Dr. Moreau was once a prominent scientist in England who was known for his "brutal directness in discussion" (Wells 93). Dr. Moreau is a sharp, level-headed man; the supposed paradigm of reason and rationality. But as the story reveals, this disposition is just one of the many ways that Dr. Moreau appears to be rational while his attempt to remain emotionally detached from his scientific practices makes him nothing short of insane. He openly admits to performing unanesthetized operations on live animals, transforming them into the gruesome Beast Folk, and shows absolutely no sympathy for his subjects or sympathizers of his subjects. When Prendick expresses his disgust at viewing one of Dr. Moreau's grisly vivisections of a puma, Dr. Moreau waves this off as nothing but "youthful horrors" (122). The doctor views reactions such as disgust, sympathy and pain as silly weaknesses of humankind. Instead, he derives the moral legitimacy of his actions from the empirical facts of the world and the laws by which they abide. He boasts to Prendick, "I was the first man to take up this question [of changing the physical structure of living things]... with a really scientific knowledge of the laws of growth" (124). The laws Dr. Moreau obey pertain to what he *can* do, not what he *should* do, and in fact he admits, "I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter" (128).

Interestingly enough, however, he follows this with the statement, "The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature" (128). Herein lies a seeming contradiction in Dr. Moreau's philosophy as



well as an argument against the practice of reason without emotion. Dr. Moreau considers ethical empathy for his scientific subjects to be a weakness in the nature of humankind, yet it is this very same lack of ethics that brings Dr. Moreau closer to nature. In so many words, his attempt to defy human nature by being utterly rational works to such an extreme that he develops a carnivorous, animalistic attitude towards his scientific practices. What is perhaps most troublesome about this, however, is the fact that this does not concern him. Dr. Moreau uses reason and rationality to justify his merciless, animalistic behavior, essentially asserting his dominance over humanity and other animals by using the argument of scientific objectivity to legitimize his actions. As if none of this were proof enough of this dangerous contradiction, Dr. Moreau further illustrates his point by sticking a penknife in his leg without expressing any sign of pain. "It does not hurt a pinprick," he says, "But what does it show? The capacity for pain is not needed in the muscle, and it is not placed there" (126-127). By relying on the scientific facts of the muscle's design in order to transcend his otherwise instinctual reaction of pain, Dr. Moreau is able to cause himself physical harm without batting an eye. Whereas he considers this a point of human intellectual advancement, common sense may force one to consider how exactly the ability to mutilate oneself is a sign of evolutionary progress. If Dr. Moreau had at all factored in his own natural impulses, he would know it is generally not a good thing to be stabbed in the leg. But his rationality—his intellectual set of laws—physically allows this to occur and condones it as a rational action, though it seems rather self-evident that such an action is anything but.

By contrast, his assistant Montgomery is very servile to his own impulses and often relies upon them when making decisions. Far from sinister but somewhat rough around the edges, Montgomery is an impulsive man whose behavior is hard to predict. It was he who heroically rescued Prendick from the sunken *Lady Vain*, but his abrasive personality is immediately apparent in his biting conversation. Montgomery indicates no good

reason for rescuing Prendick other than he was "bored, and wanted something to do," emphasizing that it was "[c]hance... just chance" that had saved Prendick's life (83). This suggests that Montgomery acted on how he was feeling rather than out of a sense of morality. Montgomery subscribes to no code or set of laws like Dr. Moreau; his life revolves around chance and is consequently chaotic and disordered. Furthermore, Montgomery demonstrates no sense of method, forethought or self-restraint, and as a result is entirely unpredictable. "If I'd been jaded that day [I rescued you]," he tells Prendick, "or hadn't liked your face, well—; it's a curious questions where you would have been now!" (83). Early on it is established that Montgomery, as a man with a quick temper, is impulsive and therefore unable to make well-calculated decisions.

Though Montgomery's unreliability just so happens to work in Prendick's favor when he saves Prendick from the sinking ship, Montgomery indicates that his impulsive attitude often results in severe, negative consequences as well. While intimating the details of how he came to work for Dr. Moreau on the island (because there's "something in this starlight that loosens one's tongue," he decides), he says, "Why am I here now— an outcast from civilisation— instead of being a happy man enjoying all the pleasures of London? Simply because— eleven years ago— I lost my head for ten minutes on a foggy night" (23). The result of one moment of irrational thinking— those ten minutes on that foggy night eleven years ago— completely changes Montgomery's life for the worse. Completely devoid of any rational judgment, Montgomery is ruled by his emotions and impulses and is driven by them from one action to the next. Consequently, he is able to make neither good choices nor bad choices; he simply acts and faces the outcome. Montgomery is very nearly the opposite of Dr. Moreau, who is calm and calculated in every single one of his choices.

The shifting middle ground between these two characters is Prendick, who tries to think rationally but is often motivated by his impulses and emotions. His narrative

chronicling of the events in the story begins with a precise account of the events surrounding the sinking of the *Lady Vain*, the ship on which Prendick sails before it sinks and he is picked up by Montgomery aboard the *Ipecacuanha*. Drawing from reports in the *Daily News* and using language like “As everyone knows,” Prendick seemingly establishes himself as a rational narrator (73). But as John Glendening notes in *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels*, “the text begins with great and misleading attention to accuracy, precision, and narrative control” (Glendening 39, emphasis mine). For not long into the initial chapter Prendick reveals himself as a central character rather than a detached relater of facts and outside sources. He is conflicted about action and unsure whether he can obey his intellect without his feelings getting in the way, though ultimately it is their strained yet oddly harmonious coalescence that inform his decisions throughout the story.

This intersection of reason and emotion is first illustrated as he sits with the two other shipwrecked men aboard the dingy from the *Lady Vain*, admitting, “I sat in the bows with my clasp-knife in my hand— though I doubt if I had the stuff in me to fight” (Wells 74). His reason is his instinct: to grab the knife. Self-defense seems a wise choice, even though it conflicts with his own limited emotional capacity to inflict harm on another human being. However difficult this internal struggle may seem, it is vital to shaping Prendick’s moral actions. It seems that a detached and rational choice would be for him to slaughter the other men on the dingy, since it would be the only way to ensure Prendick’s safety from them. However, despite the fact that the desperate men aboard the dinghy “were already thinking strange things and saying them with [their] eyes,” Prendick’s instinctual uneasiness with harming the other passengers keeps everyone on the boat alive— that is, until the other two men kill each other (74). Plus, Prendick ultimately feels safe having a weapon as opposed to actually using it. Impulse puts the protective blade in his hand; rationality keeps it from slicing into Prendick’s potential

shipwrecked rivals.

Countless other instances demonstrate Prendick’s constant shifting between reason and emotion. After arriving at the mysterious island and being invited to stay in the house of Dr. Moreau, Prendick becomes increasingly uneasy as he hears the wailing sounds of the puma being vivisected. Once the cries of pain begin sounding too human, Prendick panics that Dr. Moreau actually vivisects people and fears that he will be the doctor’s next victim. Here, the simultaneity of reason and impulse— what we may call rational instinct— comes into play and Prendick flees the house. “It came before my mind with an unreasonable hope of escape that the outer door of my room was still open to me,” Prendick says of his initial response upon the perceived realization of his fate (108). It is the fear of torture that causes him to spring into action and calculate his escape, which seems both an impulsive act and a wise decision. Initially, emotion and impulse immediately tell him to run away, but then rationality factors itself in and helps him execute a quick and successful escape. Without that fear, Prendick would not have been motivated to leave the house. And it is that same fear which caused him not only to escape, but also to make the rational decision of hurriedly obtaining a weapon— a piece of wood with a nail stuck in it— in order to protect himself and fight off Montgomery. Although Prendick’s fears are later revealed to be (relatively) unnecessary, the given situation substantiates them and proves that Prendick, through both emotion and reason, is capable of taking necessary action to ensure his own survival.

The varying moral standpoints of these three characters indicate the dubious nature of reason and emotion as dichotomized concepts. To favor one over the other is to utterly ignore the valuable ways in which they inform one another, as Prendick’s pragmatic character demonstrates. The exclusion or utter disregard of the other additionally leads to turbulent extremes, as in the case of Dr. Moreau or Montgomery, and perpetuates a false belief that one must be more favorable. This problem applies not only to reason and

emotion, but to a much more vast interrelated system of duality, and calls attention to a critical conceptual pitfall in Western thinking. If, for instance, we are to question dualisms such as reason/emotion, why should a parallel dualism like humans/animals be overlooked?

### Humans: Rational, Animals, or Both?

The revelation of an ideally equivocal relationship between reason and emotion as forms of moral guidance in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* points to a particular apprehension experienced not only by the characters in the novel but by the anthropocentric reality of the world in which we live: what separates humans from animals? The Western scientist is eager to claim that it is the human ability to exercise reason, but since the analysis of reason and emotion unveils these terms' copious similarities and indicates the ambiguity of their differences, it becomes difficult to pull these categorical concepts apart once again. Reason and emotion are not truly dichotomous, so it is risky to exclusively assign "reason" to humans and "emotion" or "instinct" to other animals, and therefore even more perilous to use such terms as key distinguishing traits. In this way, the dissolve of the reason/emotion dualism inevitably infiltrates the human/animal dualism as well.

Particularly within Western thought, deference to emotion, instinct and impulse is widely perceived as a trait of "lower" animals, i.e. non-human animals. Scientific detachment supports this claim in its quest to "tame nature" by classifying, categorizing and analyzing the world around us (Vint 85). It attempts to "separate man from body and nature and posit the scientist as the neutral, unmarked, and unconnected observer," which Sherryl Vint asserts is "a distorted and limited perspective" (86). By adopting a position of alleged analytical distance from nature, scientists place themselves in a seat of superiority over their specimen, as though nature were no more than a large petri dish to be manipulated and experimented upon at will. Western conceptions of humankind, as illuminated by this practice of scientific objectivity, use

science to overcome nature while asserting species-centered superiority and dominance. Furthermore, as Donna Haraway speculates, "Man is not *in* nature partly because he is not seen, is not the spectacle. A constitutive meaning of masculine gender for us is to be the unseen, the eye (I), the author, to be Linnaeus who fathers the primate order" (Haraway 54). Scientists supposedly achieve legitimized superiority over their subjects by remaining rational and 'detached', but this tendency towards detachment necessarily invokes a patriarchal assumption that humans (synecdochically referred to as 'man') exist outside of, or above, the natural world. The establishment of this distance forms an unexamined gap between humanity and nature, and a closer analysis of this difference makes it difficult to determine what that difference is and whether it is as significant as humanity would like to believe. Like scientists to the subject of nature, human beings tend to define their species, and by proxy, status, according to the difference between themselves and other animals, which points to an ostensible apprehension towards identifying with the wild and unsophisticated constitution of nature.

Dr. Moreau, the portrait of rationality and scientific objectivity, is an embodiment of the anthropocentric anxiety that humans and other animals share more similarities than differences. He is, according to Vint, "the model of the perfect New Scientist, who asserts his own humanity by forcing nature to submit" (Vint 85-86). By manipulating nature to conform to the "ideal of humanity," as Dr. Moreau calls it, he is able to transform beasts into men (Wells 130). In doing so, Dr. Moreau claims a certain mastery of nature that purportedly makes him a man; an extremely powerful one that almost transcends humanity and assumes a godlike position of authority and agency. In *From Dr. Moreau to Dr. Mengele: The Biological Sublime*, Elana Gomel likewise describes the New Scientist—the objective, detached and dominance-seeker—as a "scientific Übermensch, whose imitation of the cruelty of nature would elevate him above ordinary humanity" (Gomel 393). As indicated by Dr. Moreau's claim that "[t]he study of

Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature," this certainly seems to be true of Dr. Moreau, who perceives himself as the godlike creator of the Beast Folk (Wells 128). Dr. Moreau's claims to reason and rationality, which derive from his status as a scientist and a creator, serve to justify his anthropocentric ego and place him in a position of extreme power and dominance.

The Beast Folk, however, undermine this notion by 'blurring the lines' with their being humanistic animals, or perhaps animalistic humans. Though Dr. Moreau tries to control them by instituting a set of laws, such as "Not to eat Flesh nor Fish" and "Not to go on all-Fours," they always eventually regress back to their instinctive, animal-like tendencies (114). Symbolizing a fear of the devolution of humankind, the Beast Folk demonstrate the weakness of the set of ideas that supposedly differentiate humans from other animals and thereby pose humans as superior. The Laws set forth by Dr. Moreau and propagated by the Sayer of the Law are meant to distance the Beast Folk from their baser instincts, and thus are generally counter-intuitive. However, despite this fact, the Beast Folk readily accept the Laws as absolute authority, reflecting how reason and rationality can be utilized for oppressive, unnatural ends. Since the Beast Folk's unquestioning obedience of the Laws brings about their subordination, their appeal to rationality solely for rationality's sake proves just as unfavorable as deferring only to emotion and impulse. As it stands, the motivation for them to obey the Laws is to avoid the pain of further vivisection, which Dr. Moreau believes is a characteristic of base animals. "So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick, so long as your own pains drive you, so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin," he tells Prendick, "so long, I tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels" (126). However, if aversion to pain is based in emotion and instinct, and aversion to pain is what causes the Beast Folk to obey the Laws, then it is emotion and instinct which gives the Laws any power to begin with. In spite of Dr. Moreau's attempts to create "a rational creature

of [his] own," that rationality is founded in emotion (130).

The same is true of human beings. Our own innate set of laws— what Charles Darwin refers to as "social instincts"— is produced by our natural responses to particular circumstances (Darwin 208). Our sense of reason and rationality derives from an instinctual reaction as to how we ought to act. Darwin himself contends that these "social instincts, which must have been acquired by man in a very rude state, and probably even by his early ape-like progenitors, still give the impulse to some of his best actions" (208). While these impulses do not make us savage or irrational, they do allude to the erroneousness of the argument that the difference between humans and other animals is that humans are rational and other animals are recklessly instinctual. However, both human beings and other animals possess an instinct that initiates our rational decisions. Once we realize this, the difference between humans and other animals virtually collapses altogether. Thus, as Giorgio Agamben conjectures in *The Open*, "To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean ... to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that— within man— separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness" (Agamben 46, qtd. in Vint 53). Here, Agamben addresses the human fear of identifying with non-human animals by stating that whatever difference exists between the two species is trivial and ultimately inconsequential. For this reason human animality, though a material reality, has no reason to be feared.

### The Origin of Our Fears

If the desire to dichotomize reason and emotion is born out of our fear of identifying with animals, it begs the question: why are we afraid? The historical period in which Wells wrote *The Island of Dr. Moreau* appropriately embodies a time when there was much anxiety surrounding humanity's evolutionary degeneration. Wells was fascinated with the works of Charles Darwin, who during the Victorian era published landmark theories

about evolution that served as inspiration for much of Wells' work. Even Darwin was aware that his revolutionary concept, that "man is descended from some lowly organized form," would be upsetting to the anthropocentric Victorian society (Darwin 208). Offering evolution as the alternative to the lofty theory of creationism, Darwin not surprisingly received much backlash for his theories. The outright rejection of evolution is and was due to its incongruity with the assumptions of the Western anthropocentric power structure, namely that "humans have a more god-like status, that they are more 'rightly' sentient than any other species" and therefore "that 'real humans'... have some sort of invisible essence that makes them less susceptible to devolution" (Vint 90). The notion that humans and other animals are biologically linked undermines humanity's claims of difference from other animals and consequent claims to species superiority.

Despite the gradual widespread acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution over time, humanity still enjoys a certain unabashed "pride at having risen, though not through [its] own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale" through its highly-developed mental faculties (Darwin 209). This sense of species superiority is ever threatened by the notion of devolution: the possibility that humans could regress, descend the evolutionary chain, and lose their status as the dominant species. By finding some means to "demonstrate the slow upward ascent and the struggle of man from the lower to the higher stages, physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually," society would be able to maintain its anthropocentric god complex over other animals, providing 'scientific evidence' that animals are mentally inferior, and thus inferior in every regard (qtd. in Haraway 57). The result is the dominance-oriented practice of Western science, which is based in establishing a dualistic difference between humans and other animals in order to alleviate the fear that these categories may in fact lie at a similar spectral juncture.

Certainly, Dr. Moreau's relationship to the Beast Folk well-illustrates how the fear of

identification— and consequent shared status— with animals translates into assertions of hierarchized superiority. His patriarchal authority over his creations isn't fatherly, but rather, godlike— though perhaps the two terms are more synonymous than spectral. He attempts to curb their animalistic behavior by assigning the Sayer of the Law— a Beast Folk parody of a preacher— to emphasize the severity and importance of the laws. It is significant that these are referred to as laws, as monolithic institutions that are allegedly a part of some objective natural order. This fact is made clear when Prendick discovers that the Beast Folk have no inkling of rebellion or a life beyond the Laws. For them, life *is* the Laws, and Dr. Moreau the divine creator:

*His is the House of pain.  
His is the Hand that makes.  
His is the Hand that wounds.  
His is the Hand that heals...  
His is the lightning flash...  
His is the deep, salt sea...  
His are the stars in the sky.*

(Wells 114)

Dr. Moreau's Laws over the Beast Folk are thinly-veiled as deference to reason, since Dr. Moreau's status as scientist and creator grants him the unquestioned status of rational authority. As a result, he is able to institute dogmatic Laws which convey to the Beast Folk that this is simply the way of the world and it is not to be questioned. But, as we see, the Laws actually turn out to be a cruel and dictatorial means of control. By taking advantage of the Beast Folks' "limited mental scope," Dr. Moreau exercises his unexamined authority in order to design laws that go against their natural impulses (132). If, however, they were to abide by these natural instincts, as does the rebellious Hyena-swine, they could easily escape "the hand that wounds" and free themselves from the oppressive force of Dr. Moreau (114). Dr. Moreau creates the Laws because he doesn't want to lose control over his creations. His safety net is the power derived from his alleged reasoning capabilities, and any suggestion that the Beast Folk ought to question this dynamic would dismantle the

security of his elevated status.

Similar apprehensions parallel Western science, which, as I have discussed, is founded in the lust to dominate nature and thereby assert the superiority of humankind. In the case of Western science, “[t]he scientist has been constructed on the basis of a myth of objectivity, distance, disembodiment, and separation from the world of nature. The rest of nature... can be used and exploited as raw material, their agency erased from the official discourse of science” (Vint 87). Incorporating other animals into our moral consideration is not only an inconvenience to Western science, but also undermines “the capacity of science to master and modify nature” by suggesting that it is wrong to objectify animals as mere scientific specimen (86). It is the unchecked system of rationality which poses that humans are separate from and superior to animals, and which consequently allows animals to continuously be exploited and oppressed for humankind’s own scientific ends.

To extend the oppressive nature of this structure even further, the echoes of the Western patriarchal power structure are also clear: the dominant party recognizes the importance in distinguishing lines of separation between the superior and the inferior in order to maintain their position of superiority.

Historically, men have used their male status in order to oppress women. By establishing a clear point of separation between the nature of men and women, men are then able to confine women to a marginalized and inferior sphere in order to place themselves in the dominant and superior one. Similarly, in the case of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, reason and emotion, translated into human and animal, and then respectively into superior and inferior, are the lines Dr. Moreau draws between himself and the Beast Folk in order to maintain his dominance. By establishing two distinct groups labeled inferior and superior, such groupings “appear to be a quite direct consequence of the facts about the beast which are beyond the scope of human manipulation or revision” (Marilyn Frye, qtd. in Plumwood 41). As a result, the marginalized group comes to either accept their inferiority as some sort of

biological reality, or else they completely fail to acknowledge this inequality altogether. Indeed, as Prendick sees in the Beast Folk, “They were really hypnotised; had been told that certain things were impossible, and that certain things were not to be done, and these prohibitions were woven into the texture of their minds beyond any possibility of disobedience or dispute” (Wells 132). Dr. Moreau’s oppression of the Beast Folk is so severe that they are not even aware of it. To bring such inequalities to light, that is, to acknowledge the implications of the lines of separation established by Dr. Moreau (the dominant group), is to familiarize the Beast Folk (the inferior group) with their own unjust subjugation. From this springs forth the propagation of fear that if we, the dominant *species*, reconcile the commonality between humans and other animals, those lines will dissolve, and any purported legitimacy of our superiority would consequently vanish. Dr. Moreau’s gruesome death is an appropriate metaphor for this fear: once the Beast Folk gain knowledge of his true powerlessness, they tear him to shreds. Whether it is scientist to specimen, man to woman or human to animal, in all cases the dominant group relies on the practice of dualistic line-drawing in order to keep the subjugated group from ‘shredding’ the existing dynamic.

### Dualism/Dualism

This interrelation of varying oppressive systems exposes the inherently oppressive modus operandi of dualistic structures. As Val Plumwood speculates in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, “The set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate western culture forms a fault-line which runs through its entire conceptual system” (Plumwood 42). Indeed, just as dualism erroneously posits spectral relationships as mutually exclusive categorizations, dualisms themselves are not mutually exclusive from one another; they are all interrelated and come together as a whole to create a deep-seated power system that creates and upholds the structural inequalities that permeate Western society. The dualistic view of

reason and emotion, most pointedly, is not only harmful to general conceptions of morality but also points to a much wider scope of pernicious dualisms in the ideology that forms the Western social structure. Dualistic attitudes overlap and meld together to create an extensive, all-encompassing dichotomy that ultimately gives one group power and the other a status of subjugation. Whether reason and emotion, men and women or humans and animals, their respective parallels are not coincidental but in fact causal:

[T]he postulate that all and only humans possess culture maps the culture/nature pair on to the human/nature pair; the postulate that the sphere of reason is masculine maps the reason/body pair on to the male/female pair; and the assumption that the sphere of the human coincides with that of intellect or mentality maps the mind/body pair on to the human/nature pair, and, via transitivity, the human/nature pair on to the male/female pair. (Plumwood 45)

Through this network of 'transitivity', all the characteristics of the dominant categories (human, reason, male, etc.) come to be perceived as analogous, while the same thing occurs among the marginalized categories (animal, emotion, female, etc.). The result is an inverted logic that facilitates the possibility to make assertions that a particular category is legitimately superior because of its association with other dominant (read: superior) characteristics; e.g. men have legitimate claims to dominance because they are rational, whereas women lack this legitimacy because they are emotional. It should be fairly evident that assertions such as these are problematic for many reasons. First off, the terms 'male' and 'female' are respectively conflated with 'reason' and 'emotion' simply because, as dualisms, they are paired onto one another.

These dichotomized concepts "are linked by the shared logical structure of dualism" due to the nature of duality, which operates off the premise that inclusion in one group signifies exclusion from the other (47). Secondly, to categorize two terms as in dualistic opposition to one another presupposes their mutual exclusivity, and as we have seen in the case of reason and emotion within *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, this severely limits and distorts our understanding of those terms and all their respectively analogous pairs. What better example of this than Dr. Moreau, who serves as a freakish representation of the patriarchal paradigm, asserting his (hu)manhood through rationality and by subjugating the natural for his own ends. Were his reason-derived authority called into question, it would expose him not only as illegitimately superior, but in fact just as 'beast'-like as his creations.

### Conclusion

Dualistic thinking, on the whole, is only favorable to half of the human race. By promoting hierarchical thinking, it allows marginalized groups such as women and non-human animals to be attributed a sense of inherent or biological inferiority. Dualistic structures split the world in two, thereby warping the reality of the world to the benefit of those who are a part of the alleged 'Superior' half. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* demonstrates in a significant way how rationality, posed in dualistic opposition to emotion, ties Western beliefs of scientific detachment into the dichotomized realms of scientist to subject and human to animal. Wells' novel calls on us to consider whether the relationships between these dichotomies ought to remain unquestioned, for up until the point when the publishing of Darwin's theories proposed a biological link between humans and other animals, Western society perpetuated the anthropocentric assumption that human beings were inherently superior to all other species. Through its experimentation with reason and emotion, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* considers the various ambiguities and uncertainties of the lines drawn between human and animal,

prompting many questions about what those lines are and the consequences of their being drawn. Though Wells may not have originally considered this novel to be a moral experiment for dualistic deconstruction, his prolific writing allows modern readers to illuminate the voiceless, subjugated half of existence. It dismantles the oppressive force of dualisms and points towards a truthful, more liberated and vivacious world: a world full of spectrums and without oppressive hierarchies.

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### ***The Artist, Sunset Boulevard, and The Gaze*** **The Nostalgic Past and Reversal of Gender Roles According to Laura Mulvey** Allison Rohrer

Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" looks at three levels of gaze: male character upon female character, audience through the male character's eyes upon the same female character, and specifically the male audience watching the male character looking through his eyes upon the same female character. The two films *The Artist* and *Sunset Boulevard* are also looking with a gaze upon an element of their film, one that is both similar to Mulvey's example and different: sex/gender and the past. The nostalgic look at the past through the actions of George Valentin (*The Artist*) and Norma Desmond (*Sunset Boulevard*) are continuing a conversation within the media film and its past. Both films are set in Hollywood, both within a "present" time frame for the film, but where *Sunset Boulevard* is a self-reflexive film about the times of Hollywood that it is in (the early 1950s) and

the repercussions of the Talkie Movie movement, *The Artist* is a nostalgic look by the director/writer upon the history of Hollywood at the time of the Talkie movement in the context of its changing times through the modern eye. Mulvey's "gaze" is a psychoanalytical construct of the male objectifying the female through his gazing upon her, intoning a sexual desire derived from her feminineness, or as Mulvey puts it, her "absence of a penis" (837). For the films *The Artist* and *Sunset Boulevard*, the gaze of the characters can be considered sexual gazes, but the more interesting gaze is that of the director, and therefore the audience, which is the gaze upon the past. To understand where this comes from it is best to start with a small recap of the films.

*The Artist* is French writer/director Michel Hazanavicius' black and white modern day *silent* film about a big silent film star,



George Valentine, and his descent out of stardom due to the Talkie movies technology being made and demanded by the audience. George doesn't believe the fad will last, boldly saying "If that's the future you can have it" (Hazanavicius). He goes on to meet a woman, Peppy, after a premier of one of his films, who captures his attentions for the rest of the film, even though he already has a wife, one that does not love him. He gives her advice on how to be an actress, having something the other girls don't have, unwittingly setting her up for stardom. He continues on his way until the talkies hit the big screen and he is pushed out of the spot light of the cameras, and Peppy is a pioneer of the movement, taking over his spot light. After his spiral out of fame, selling his house to make ends meet, and losing all his close friends, George is on the verge of killing himself, when Peppy, the girl of his dreams who loves him, steps in to save him, starting a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers like dancing career with Peppy, leaving the audience to make the assumption that he once again is back on top. With some classic gags, and a little dog too, *The Artist* won Best Picture at the Oscars (2011) because of its well done homage to the past, with great cinematography, and an overall heartwarming feeling that is brought about because of the nostalgia.

*Sunset Boulevard* on the other hand, is a cold, dark, creepy film about nostalgia, and how one can become stagnant in one's gaze back at the past. "It is a film about film, a Hollywood film about Hollywood, packed with an ironic self-referentiality that never falls into postmodern ennui, but remains firmly within a dry yet theatrical noir tradition. Most importantly, it is a film about the female star and the most valuable 'asset' of the female star, her face" (Cooke). Joe Gillis, an out-of-luck screenwriter for late 1940s Hollywood is running from loan sharks ending up in what seems to be an abandoned "great big house in the ten thousand block" on Sunset Boulevard where he meets silent film star Norma Desmond who is slowly rotting away within the home (Wilder). Being in a tight pinch without money, Joe agrees to fix up Norma's screenplay "Salome", her "return" to the

screen, since she hates the word comeback. She plans to offer the script to her old director, Cecil B. De Mille, and has Joe move into the guest house above the garage so that the script is kept safe in her grasp, and a few months later he is a "kept man," and Norma is in love with him. Gillis is a young man, wanting to live his own life, write his own screenplays, but is too caught up in the fortune of Norma and her willingness to spend it all on him to do very much about his basic incarceration. Finally when he thinks he can break out of Norma's rotting existence, maybe even fall in love, Norma finds out and shoots Gillis in the back, murdering him. The entire film is narrated by the ghost of Joe Gillis, and from the beginning you know that he will end up dead. Norma ends the film with some of the most famous words of film: "Alright Mr. De Mille, I'm ready for my close-up" walking in a haze of spot lights towards the camera, and the audience, a chilling performance of insanity (Wilder).

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" made statements about the sexualized gaze of the male character, claiming that it determines within the audience's psyche what is suitably considered *sexy* or *fantasy* worthy. This is done through the three levels of gaze listed above. The film *The Artist* changes this statement through the audience no longer specifically looking through a male character's eyes upon a sexual female figure, but the gaze of the woman upon the sexualized man, and that of the camera and therefore the director upon the past, be it in a negative or positive light. For *The Artist* the gaze of the director is obviously positive for it pays homage to the silent film era and genre. Writer and Director Michael Hazanavicius wrote an article about *The Artist* with its releases in the film festivals explaining his use of the black and white silent film: "From the beginning of my career, I fanaticized about making a silent film... I thought there was an opportunity to make a modern movie within a genre that hadn't been utilized in 90 years... In a silent film, everything is in the image and in the organization of the signals you're sending to the audience" (55). These signals to the audience

for the film and its writer are the nostalgic look at the past of Hollywood films. Through the character of George Valentin, Hazanavicius reestablished the positive gloss of the “good old days” of the silent films Hollywood industry. It is both a self-reflexive look at the making of films and a praiser of the past. But it is also a distortion of the theory of Mulvey about the sexual gaze. Within the first five minutes of the film Valentin is looking at himself being projected onto the silver screen, watching himself being watched by the audience. And after the film is over, he runs out on stage exploiting himself (and his co-star) to his fans with a slap stick performance. So far the gaze’s layers are the audience through the camera/director *through* George at George, and we are seeing what he is seeing: his success. But this perception of the gaze upon power is quickly changed after the premiere of his film when he runs into Peppy. She will begin to revert the gaze back from success to sexual.

Mulvey’s article on the gaze has a statement from director Budd Boetticher saying “[w]hat counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance” (841). This statement about women is not included as a plot point in *The Artist*. The character Peppy is a fan of George and goes to his film’s premier where they have a “cutemeet” and begin to fall in love. We then see Peppy being to fantasize about George in the memorable “coat rack scene” where she impersonates him holding her in a lover’s embrace. Peppy’s sexualized objectification of George, shown through her actions, watched by the camera and the audience, is the reversion back to the original psycho-sexual meaning of the gaze for Mulvey, and a twisting of it through the role reversal of the genders. But the film does not immediately follow along the love story that it set up. Instead George is repulsed by Peppy, who for the love provoked in her by George, becomes a Talkie film star, incidentally pushing him out of the lime light. When this happens the roles of

the gaze are once again reversed for the audiences of both *The Artist* as a film and the films that Peppy star in begin to gaze at her for her feminine-ness, and the gaze is once again in place. Even though the story of *The Artist* is told fully through the camera (and therefore the director), all of the actions that George takes do not surround Peppy, rather he is repulsed by her for taking over his stardom, and doing it with the talkie movement. It is only until his depression worsens to the point of attempting suicide that George realizes that he has been the one gazed upon by Peppy and loved by her from a distance.

In the creepy twist upon the gaze, *Sunset Boulevard* works with insanity, a negative, narcissistic nostalgia, and a push-pull of words versus image. Norma Desmond, the once famous silent film star, is trying to shoot back to the top, and her constant inspiration for this is herself. Norma has surrounded herself in all things her and her fame. Every surface of her living room is filled with her star studded image of the past, two or three times a week she watches a silent film “becoming just a fan, excited about that actress up there on the screen....I guess I don’t have to tell you who the star was. They were always her pictures --that’s all she wanted to see” (Wilder). “She is surrounded by photographs of herself in her heyday, and entranced by private screenings of her movies in which she appears always young and beautiful” (Cooke). Not only does Norma simply fantasize and idolize the past, she also sexualizes it with her constant gaze upon herself, desiring her old self, and the days when she was the center of attention. Now she makes up for the “thirty million fans [who] gave her the brush” and no longer gaze upon her (Wilder). The levels of gaze here are the audience gazing through Joe through the present Norma at the past Norma. But there is also a role reversal in *Sunset Boulevard*.

The gaze of the audience should primarily be the same as that of Joe for he is the ghost narrator of the story, and as a man he is supposed to gaze upon a woman in a sexual way, then telling the audience what a sexualized woman should look like. But this film flips that role through Norma gazing upon

Joe as she does with her past. Joe is a young and handsome man, one that she keeps like a pet (this is only more ironic that in the beginning of the film Joe is mistaken for the undertaker of her dead pet orangutan, symbolizing Joe's future existence). At first Joe is kept so that Norma's precious script of *Salome* is kept safe within her sight. But it is quickly obvious that the woman lusts after Joe and his youth, beginning to spoil him with good clothes, camel hair overcoats, throwing parties for just the two of them with plenty of champagne and caviar. Norma is gazing upon Joe in a sexual way, reversing the typical gender roles of Mulvey's gaze.

During the film Norma tries to keep Joe as locked away within her rotting realm of the past as much as possible, but he finds a way to sneak out, meeting up with his screen writing partner Betty Schafer, where both the audience and Joe knows that the "proper" gender roles are back in place, and Joe can gaze upon the sexually appealing Betty. When Norma discovers the nightly rejection of her love/lust of Joe she reacts badly, killing Joe and going completely insane, triggered by her ex-director and husband, Max, now her butler saying that "Madam is the greatest star of them all." This scene of the murder progresses with Norms shouting over and over again "You're not leaving me Joe... No one leaves a star. That makes one a star!" (Wilder). Norma's nostalgic gaze upon the past has fully enveloped her in the end and as she descends in front of Paramount News cameras she believes that C.B. DeMille has come to start the shooting of *Salome*, ending the film in some of the greatest lines ever written for the screen:

I just want to tell you how happy I am to be back in the studio making a picture again. You don't know how much I've missed all of you. And I promise you I'll never desert you again, because after "*Salome*" we'll make another picture, and another and another. You see, this is my life. It always will be. There's nothing else - just us and the cameras and those wonderful people out there in the dark... All right, Mr.

DeMille, I'm ready for my closeup.

(Wilder)

This amazing scene is played out so fully to have the audience surrounded in the insanity of Norma Desmond, and one does get goose bumps when Norma breaks the fourth wall with her line "and those wonderful people out there in the dark." Norma is forcing the gaze of the audience upon her with these words, informing us that she knows that we are watching, she knows that she has won her fame and glory again, and what she has always wanted since the Talkie films began: to be gazed at once again.

Through the film there is a tension of past versus present in the form of both Norma and Joe and the main subject of the film: words vs. image. "*Sunset Boulevard* deconstructs the "nature" affinity between the seeable and the sayable by polarizing the movie's leading roles" (Trowbridge). Joe is a screenplay writer for film, a career that is blatantly thrust in the face of Norma who lost her fame due to the Talkie films which keep Joe in a job, and while he helps her rewrite her script he is constantly taking out shots of her, and she is demanding that they be put back in saying "Cut away from me?... Why do they beg me for my photographs? Because they want to see me, me, me! Norma Desmond" (Wilder). "His tendency to disparage images reveals his conviction that they undermine the authenticity of words... Norma despises words, which she insists, have vitiated the purity of visual imagery in the film medium" (Trowbridge). Because Norma is trying to get back in the spotlight she wants her face plastered all over the screen, again she wants to be constantly gazed at like her years of fame, but doesn't understand that the film industry has fully changed over to words being more important than the images, according to Joe. It is only another snub in the character Norma's face that *Sunset Boulevard* won the 1950's Oscar Award for Best Screenplay.

With the films *The Artist* and *Sunset Boulevard* in mind when thinking of Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" there is the sexualized gaze that she speaks of, but the gender roles of that gaze in

these films are constantly switching between the men and women gazing upon each other, reversing the gender roles. Peppy looks upon George who is mostly looking at himself and his famous past; and Joe is watching Norma self destruct, as Norma gazes at Joe and herself with lust in her eyes of his youth, reversing the roles of the sexes, as Joes frantically tries to right them with his gaze upon Betty Schafer. The writer director of *The Artist*, Hazanavicius, is attempting to let the audience gaze upon the past greatness of silent films, and goal he accomplished by winning the scar for Best Picture. And writer director Wilder changes the gaze of the audience through the gaze of Norma Desmond on the past, a sick one twisted by greed and insanity of losing the gaze of millions, a 1950's critique of Hollywood and the audience "all those wonderful people sitting in the dark" (Wilder), overall changing "the gaze."

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#### The New Celtic Romance

Allison Rohrer

With the ongoing fad of the "Celtiomania" there is a literature that has erupted onto the shelves of book stores concerning the Celtic culture. One of the most popular genres of literature in today's society is the Romance novel. From men who are bad boys needing a woman's love, and their strong women who truly do need a man, to the historical romances of English high society with the belles of the ball and the rakish gentleman who then woos her to be his wife. One of the many subgenres of the Romance section is that on the historical or modern novels about the Scottish Highland lairds or Irish Fae princes. Pages and pages have been

filled with the fantasy men of female writers in love with the green lands of the British Isles, and their written rugged Celtic men. One such author is Karen Marie Moning and her series entitled "Highlander." These books are all based on the plot line of a woman from the twenty-first century somehow being transported back in time to find their perfect matches in men who are all amazing warriors, and crafty druids, in some epic battle against the Fae who are fighting against humanity, and is one of the top bestselling book series of Highland romance novels. This series is just one example of hundreds if not thousands of books and series that are based purely upon the

Celtic culture of Ireland and Scotland. So what does this mean for modern readers and their interpretations of what the Celts were as a culture?

I started reading Romance novels in late high school as another genre that passed the time, a guilty pleasure that allowed me to not think when reading unlike Science-Fiction and the like. When I first started reading Moning's novels I was in college, and instantly wanted to meet a man like these Scottish "hotties" that were tried and true, hard and hurt warriors, tamed by the women that won their heart (what all women that read romance novels obviously want). Of course this led me to reading more of these novels, which are admittedly ridiculous and men like these obviously do not exist (I am not *that* crazy about these books). But what has occurred is that when I think of Scottish men it is men like these characters that come to mind. This image of a Scottish (and therefore Celtic) man is plastered all over covers of hundreds of books about these Celtic men and their leading ladies. This image of the Celtic man, with his kilt, claymore, torque of gold and Celtic knots on his arm, with a sculpted chest, is what is permeating the minds of romance novel readers everywhere, and though considered cheesy by non-readers (and some readers like myself), the image is still one that can be recalled when one thinks of Celtic cultures and their men. Not only this image but the identity that is then implied behind the writings: all Celtic men were like these heroic figures of the novels. According to Alan Kent, author of *Celtic Nirvana*,

The strength of that identity prove that, although the theory of a merged Celtic nirvana sounds impossible, even ludicrous, and somehow a long way from established academic constructions of Celticity, the reality is that, coupled with other symbols of ethnicity, the proposed union between such disparate entities (such as romance novels and Celticness) can significantly help to promote Celtic peoples and territories in

[today's world]" (Kent 225)

Thus, even though this Celtic identity is not truly what and who the Celtic people really were in their prime, their image is able to be modified to something that is appealing to today's audience, and is obviously drawing massive amounts of attention and appeal to it because of those images, and the message of the books themselves.

To end I want to bring in another example of the modern day fad of the Celtomania that is occurring in romance novels. One of Moning's other series is one entitled "Fever," a series of five books with a new branch off trilogy series being produced today. This series is about what Moning calls the Unseelie (a Sidhe with a very dark twist) that are out to destroy the human race, and are crossing over from their world to ours through a ripped "wall" between the worlds in Dublin Ireland-- and it includes characters from her Highlander series, thus spanning between the Scottish and Irish "Celticness." This series has had major successes, to the point that it can boast its own convention tour called "Fevercon," has a CD produced with music portraying actions and characters in the books, and hundreds of products of merchandise from t-shirts to handbags to jewelry with the ever present Celtic knots. Because of these conventions etc. many people are becoming more involved in the world that Moning presents to them, and through her creations based off of the Celtic culture, what with the Sidhe (her Unseelie) and the druidic powers of her "Highlander" heroes, and therefore are able to reinterpret the Celtic culture into something that is relatable to them (or at least they want it to be relatable) and what they *want* the Celtic culture to have been.

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## Tell Me How You Really Feel

Lauren Nico

The feeling of love is something that people want to share and express; whether it is written, verbal or both, it is expressed nonetheless. The need to express emotions is not a modern phenomenon; in fact, love has been the topic of poetry for centuries. The idea that a person can feel such strong feelings for another person is surely worthy of words, especially if these words are arranged in a beautiful, unique way. Poets such as Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Wroth have all had their share of love experiences, whether they are through personal interactions or admiration from afar; the interactions with and depictions of the beloved differ from poet to poet and change with the times.

Petrarch portrays the lady in the most idealistic way. Although he never engages in any conversation, he can still see that she is perfect, she is divine, and she is the one mortal being that distracts Petrarch from his love for God. Because Laura is so beautiful, he mirrors the platonic belief that she must also be beautiful on the inside. Petrarch takes love very seriously and absolutely pours over Laura's beauty, and assumed inner beauty. He also suffers, as Andreas Capellanus wrote two centuries earlier, as lovers would: "Love is certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex" (*The Art of Courtly Love*, Chapter 1). Petrarch is captivated by Laura's beauty and takes every chance he can to catch a glimpse of her: "The sight of her was so sweetly austere/that I left all my work to follow her" (Sonnet 190). While Petrarch never has any intentions of committing adultery with Laura, he does face the issue of committing idolatry with a mortal being. Due to his priesthood, he feels as though he should be devoting all of his time to loving and idealizing God, but instead he is distracted by his instincts as a man: "How sweet it is, in Spring to see her pass/Alone, and by her lovely thoughts caressed,/Weaving a circlet for her golden hair!" (Sonnet 127). He puts his beloved on a pedestal; her hair is golden and her thoughts are

lovely. Just by looking at Laura's physical image, it is safe to assume that her inner beauty is ever present. Again, however, because Petrarch is a priest, he engaged in a sort of tug-of-war with whom he should spend time loving and idealizing.

Throughout Petrarch's sonnets we see his admiration for a mortal being who has achieved divine beauty, but we also see his guilt for not devoting the love he feels for Laura to God. To him, Laura is untouchable and God, too, is untouchable. Petrarch is torn between the immortal God and the mortal Laura, neither of which he will ever be able to touch or hold: "Pure white and gaily light, dear glove/that covers polished ivory and fresh roses,/who ever saw on earth such gracious spoils?" (Sonnet 199). He is so enthralled by her beauty that even the removal of her glove is something to take note of. Petrarch portrays the lady as the most perfect mortal being he has ever laid eyes on, and admits to his love for her. He also makes a point to mention that this beauty is seen on earth, implying that the beauty of God is ultimately greater.

The only love Petrarch has allowed himself to experience is love from a distance, whereas Spenser experiences love in a mutually loving relationship. Because Spenser allows himself to approach his beloved, her physical attributes are not the main focus of his poetry. He is not just an onlooker admiring her beauty like Petrarch; instead, he is interested in who she is and wants to spend his life with her. Spenser is pursuing a real woman, someone whom he talks to, whom he is engaged, and whom he kisses: "Coming to kisse her lyps (such grace I found)/Me seemd I smelt a gardin of sweet flowers" (Spenser, Sonnet 64). Along with love comes fear and longing. A few sonnets after Spenser kisses his beloved, he speaks of himself as a huntsman trying to catch the game. In this type of scenario, there is both fear and longing. There is the fear of his beloved not loving him back, and there is also the longing of her presence when she is not near. Unlike Spenser, although Petrarch never

tries to approach Laura, he still longs for her and wishes to see her from afar. Spenser's beloved begins to love him back, but even with that, he still feels what any lover would feel: fear of rejection and longing for the beloved.

Spenser admits that his beloved is attractive, yet he is more interested in her personality and virtuous mind: "Men call you fayre, and you doe credit it,/For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:/But the trew fayre, that is the gentle wit,/And vertuous mind, is much more prayd of me" (Spenser, Sonnet 79). While he is aware of her physical beauty, he places emphasis on the fact that her beautiful mind will last longer than her beautiful body. Instead of coming to terms with the fact that he will forever long for the presence and company of his beloved as Petrarch does, Spenser intends to marry her. Because the idea of arranged marriages was slowly fading, Spenser can be romantic about marriage, a marriage that reflects the marriage in heaven: He wanted to be with someone that he enjoyed. "He onely fayre, and what he fayre hath made,/All other fayre lyke flowers untymely fade" (Spenser, Sonnet 79). He speaks of her getting older like a dying rose because he has long-term intentions for their relationship. Spenser is aware of the fact that his beloved's physical beauty will lessen as she gets older, but her inner beauty is what has him interested.

Shakespeare's interest in inner beauty also outweighs the importance of looks; however, he makes his point in a far more explicit way. He writes his own rules for the meaning of love through the unique traits of his beloved. Instead of love for a beautiful woman, he describes his beloved as a man. Shakespeare completely breaks conventional love and very much distances himself from Petrarchan views. *The Art of Courtly Love* states: "Between two men or two women love can find no place, for we see that two persons of the same sex are not at all fitted for giving each other the exchanges of love or for practicing the acts natural to it" (Chapter 2). Shakespeare goes against the conventional love object being a woman or anything that describes beauty because he is more interested in the intellect of the person.

Whether his beloved was truly a man

or not, he states that love can exist anywhere with anyone as long as the pair enjoy each other's company. His beloved is nowhere near the divinity of Laura's physical beauty, but that doesn't matter to him: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;/Coral is far more red than her lips' red" (Shakespeare, Sonnet 130).

Shakespeare shares the description of being with someone who isn't necessarily attractive, but the relationship they share makes up for that fact. Shakespeare does nothing to put his beloved up on a pedestal; rather, he tells it like it is. He says that he likes to hear his beloved speak, but music sounds better; his beloved doesn't float like a goddess; rather, she "treads on the ground" (Shakespeare, Sonnet 130).

There is a much more earthly feel to Shakespeare's poetry about love and even though he doesn't see his beloved as a divine being, he's happy: "And yet, by heaven, I think my love is rare/As any she belied with false compare" (Sonnet 130). The focus of his poetry is to convey the message that love is about getting along with the beloved and enjoying her company. The idea that personality outweighs looks is one that Spenser agrees with, except Spenser still finds himself with a very attractive woman. Shakespeare questions everything conventional about what a relationship between two people should carry; by celebrating homosocial love and recognizing less than conventional beauty. Because of that, he doesn't write about the beauty of his beloved; instead, he describes how they make each other happy through beautiful lies: "Therefore I lie with her and she with me,/And in our faults by lies we flattered be" (Sonnet 138). They are both far from perfection and have accepted that; they lie together faulty as they are, but through their sweet lies to each other, they remain flattered. Because of the lies there is also a sense of mistrust, but the love is there nonetheless.

Wroth writes about her love in a very pained way. Just as Shakespeare couldn't completely trust his beloved, Wroth cannot trust hers either: "His desires have no measure,/Endless folly is his treasure;/What he promiseth he breaketh:/Trust not one word that he speaketh" (Sonnet 74, lines 5-8). She

doesn't trust anything her beloved says because she knows that he is cheating on her.

Ultimately, the blame falls on Cupid because he is the one who blindly shot her with his arrow; this love is not good for her and she feels trapped: "Am I thus conquered? Have I lost the powers/That to withstand, which joys to ruin me?/Must I be still while it my strength devours,/And captive leads me prisoner, bound, unfree?" (Sonnet 16, lines 1-4). Trapped by Cupid's arrow, she feels the pull of loving her beloved even though he is not loyal to her. She cannot think of being with another man because her heart is set on only one. In so doing she shows how far Amphilanthus falls short of Andreas Capellanus' dictum: "It adorns a man, so to speak, with the virtue of chastity because he who shines with the light of one love can hardly think of embracing another woman, even a beautiful one" (*The Art of Courtly Love*, Chapter 3). Here it is shown that Wroth is fit for love and her beloved is not. Wroth is playing the masculine part in chasing after her beloved, just in the way that Spenser and Shakespeare chased after theirs. While it may seem empowering that Wroth is the lover rather than the beloved, she is miserable. Even so she can joke about her misery by comparing it to a mother's: "Love a child is ever crying,/Please him, and he straight is flying;/Give him, he the more is craving,/Never satisfied with having" (Sonnet 74, lines 1-4). Feeling frustrated by Cupid she compares love to a crying child. She feels as though there is no way to make her beloved happy or to make him want her. She is distraught that the masculine object in the story is not true to her.

Through the works of Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Wroth, the reader

experiences a wide variety of descriptions and relations between the lover and the beloved. Even with their differences, all four poets experience love. Petrarch idealizes Laura, but admires her from afar; her physical beauty must match her inner beauty otherwise something would be very wrong. Spenser writes about a very attractive woman as well, but focuses instead on the importance of personality and compatibility; unlike Petrarch, he actually has intentions of marrying his beloved. While Spenser and Petrarch's work differ greatly, Shakespeare completely breaks convention when he talks about his beloved as a man. He brings in the idea of homosocial romance and does not at all put his beloved up on a pedestal. Shakespeare and Wroth describe a very real sense of love, comparable to working and non-working relationships today. Wroth's tortured experience of love shows the less attractive side to real relationships; some relationships are based on trust and compatibility, others are lacking and dissolve. This idea of writing about love in realistic terms continues in the seventeenth century with poets such as Katherine Philips and John Donne; their works and style of writing was undoubtedly inspired by earlier poets such as Wroth and Shakespeare, but their poetry also brings with it new structure and knowledge.

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### The Epic Female

Rosalie Atkinson

The role of the female hero is not common in the epic genre. Though it is simple to search epic works for a warrior-like male protagonist, dominating the text with his valor and pride, in certain epics female characters

ascend into heroic positions. Milton glorifies Eve in *Paradise Lost* as the unlikely hero of humanity. Made in the image of God, Eve exemplifies His grace and compassion. Although guilty of being deceiving by Satan,



she asks for forgiveness and admits to her trespasses. Alexander Pope is heavily influenced by Milton's depiction of Eve as the co-savior of mankind, and in his poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, he creates a differing female hero. After a lock of her hair is transgressively cut by her fiancé, Belinda severs connection with her aggressor, remaining true to her emotions as well as her reputation. She sacrifices her lover to remain a powerful hero in the eyes of her people. Because Belinda does not relinquish the identity her hair symbolizes to the Barron, she is left a maid, to live in solitude with the remembrance of a love forsaken, in the name of pride. Milton's redefinition of the hero as a beacon of moral reevaluation influenced poet Alexander Pope to create a female hero, although one in contrast to Eve.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton expands the potential of the epic genre with his inclusion of Eve as a heroic character. Both Adam and Eve were made in God's likeness but received different qualities from their creator. Adam represents the brawn and valor of God but in the fall of humanity, it was the grace and patience received by Eve which could salvage the broken Earth. "With long tedious havoc fabled knights/.../Of patience and heroic martyrdom/ Unsung..." (9.30-33). These qualities, which Eve exhibits, Milton admits are "unsung" or unacknowledged. In the retrospect of the tale, these are the two qualities which Eve utilizes to save humankind. Eve's giving into her desires, satiating Satan's desire to destroy God's creations, begins the Fall. As Satan boasts, "To me shall be the glory sole among/ The Infernal Powers, in one day to have marred/ What he Almighty styled" (9.135-137). Admitting to herself and to Adam that she alone must bear the ache of her folly, she unknowingly echoing God the son, the ultimate martyr for the human race.

The qualities of an epic hero require that they must be massive in their importance and characterization. In this moment, Eve hurls herself in front of Death because humanity has depended on her strength and she has faltered. There is no hero to compare to Eve, because between her desires and actions, the entire

Universe hangs in the balance; "Thus it shall befall/ Him who to worth in women overtrusting/ Let her will rule;.../ If evil thence ensue,/ She first his weak indulgence will accuse" (9.1182-1185). Eve attempts to repay the debts ensued by her actions. By accepting God's punishment entirely, she acknowledges her fault and places herself forever placed inferior to Adam in the hierarchy. Adam blames Eve for the entirety of the Fall; in a misogynistic rage he forsakes her to which she remorsefully responds, "...both have sinned, but thou/ Against God only, I against God and thee,.../ On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,/ Me me only just object of his ire" (10.930-936). Owning her fault but virtuously reminding Adam of his involvement, she intends to suffer the consequences of their actions, but pleads with him not to leave her. Adam consoles Eve and shares the guilt of the Fall with her: "...both confessed/ Humbly their faults, and pardon begged.../sent from hearts contrite, in sign/ Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek" (10.1101-1104).

Adam and Eve reconnect and share the burden of the Fall. Because of Eve's patience and graceful virtue, her heroic self-sacrifice allows the Universe's original parents to begin the slow redemption of mankind. Milton's depiction of Eve embodies the qualities of a God-like hero. He pioneers the ultimate female protagonist not through Eve's leading of the world into despair, but more because she commits herself to repairing her damage caused, or to die for the salvation of future generations.

In Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, Milton's influence is clear in the development of an alternate female hero. Pope's work is classified as a "comic epic" in that the subject matter is not as grand as what is expected of an epic. Pope illustrates the nuances of irrational upper class women and the battle between the sexes. His protagonist Belinda is seen as a hero to her people, albeit not in the traditional sense. Pope's initial description of her character is of her attractiveness: "If to her share some female errors fall,/ Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all" (2.17-18). She is an exemplary beauty. Belinda's honor lies in her reputation, of which

her heroic qualities exhibit themselves in defense. After sailing the Thames to Hampton Court, Belinda is united with the Baron, and her friends. When the Baron, who is Belinda's suitor, snips a lock of her hair, he incites a fight between the two: "Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,/ And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies" (3.155-156).

The rage felt by Belinda provokes her heroic moment in the poem. She rejects the man she loves because he has tarnished her image. Though her hair has been cut without her consent, it symbolizes her true reason for rage. Her privacy with the Baron has been breached into her public affairs, leaving her embarrassed: "Uncurled it hangs, the fatal shears demands./.../ Oh, hadst thou cruel! been content to seize/ Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!" (5.173-176). This quote refers directly to their intimacy as a couple and states that she would have allowed him, in their own privacy, to defile hairs that did not represent her appearance to others. Within these lines, she encompasses her love for him and willingness to relinquish herself to him but not in the conditions of this moment. To remain a prideful woman in the eyes of the public, Belinda is resilient in her decision to sacrifice her personal happiness and love for the Baron, to adhere to her heroic vanity. Though Belinda presumably lives the rest of her life as a shrew, Pope immortalizes her heroism by stating the lost lock lofted to the heavens to create a constellation in her honor: "This lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame/ And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name" (5.149-150). Belinda is the hero of the poem because of her strength to forgo eternal love with the Baron, in order to defend her honor, her image. Pope valorizes the

feminine world in his depiction of Belinda as a woman, steadfast in her values because of her inability compromise her image for a love interest.

Both Pope and Milton have different approaches to presenting heroic female protagonists in their epic poems. Eve in *Paradise Lost* is made in God's likeness and exemplifies his compassion and grace, which in the poem, lead to the salvation for all mankind. Through her admission of guilt, reconciliation with Adam, and offer of martyrdom for future generations, she becomes the mother of the human race. Pope's female hero Belinda, in *Rape of the Lock*, experiences a fall and redemption contrasting to Eve's. She falls in glory once the Baron cuts a lock of her hair, but by remaining adamant in her rage and leaving him, she is immortalized by the lock, for her pride. She is the hero because she does not sway her mind for a man or for the eminent future she will spend in solitude. Belinda represents a social hero due to her dedication to her image and society, whereas Eve is an internal hero for her emotional competency which saves the human race. Pope is evidently influenced by Milton but insists on continuing the development of the female epic dynamic by providing modern insight into his character, by making her female hero into a social context to counter Milton's omnipotent female hero.

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## Transborder Justice: Using Identities

Meg Oka

### Pernicious Identity: Fear of the Other

One way in which people are oppressed is by their identity. In America, anyone who is not a White, middle-class, heterosexual male may be oppressed because

they are a person of color, a woman, poor, homosexual or transgender (or all of the above). Recognizing identities, then, is very salient to fighting oppression. To resist identity-based oppression, it is necessary to first recognize an identity as a social reality, see

how oppression occurs based on that identity, and then identify effective ways of resistance. There are, however, critics of such identity-based resistance. Political critics would say that organizing around racial or gender identities distracts from the “main” oppression, which is class-based. It would be divisive and fragmenting, they would say, and lead to tribalism and disunity, and nothing would get accomplished. Philosophical critics posit that identity-based organizing harmfully emphasizes difference. Both types of critics, as Linda Martín Alcoff points out in her book *Visible Identities*, are trying to say that identity-based organizing is detrimental to marginalized groups because their efforts will ultimately backfire (80). However, identity-based organizing is both necessary and critical for forming resistance and working towards transborder social and economic justice.

Amidst these arguments for and against identity-based organizing lies a very subtle but powerful ideology: the division between the Self and the Other. Alcoff, by tracing a genealogy of the Self in Western philosophy, uncovers a belief that what comes to the Self from the social is “necessarily constraining and pernicious” (80). Therefore, identities, being assigned by society, are an obstacle to a truly free Self. But why, Alcoff questions, assume that “the source and effect of identity claims are nefarious” (81)? In other words, what is there to fear about the Other? She posits that the basis of the fear is situated in the context of colonialism: the colonizer must deflect the gaze of the oppressed, as it is necessarily accusatory, and the colonized must resist the representation foisted upon them by the colonizer (70). To say it differently, if identity is socially constructed, and the others around you are an active reminder that your identity rests on a racist, supremacist foundation, then the identity that you are socially given most certainly is condemning. And if you are the colonized, then you must be able to overcome the projected identity coming from the dominant group.

To begin this analysis of the fear of the Other, Alcoff uses philosopher Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* to examine the

critical points of Western philosophy's treatment of the Self. She starts with Plato, who conceives of an ideal rational self as one who can “discern the nature and contours of the intrinsic good in the existing cosmic order” (51). This existing cosmic order, therefore, provides the context for and substance of what is considered Good. And the one who sees what is Good or True is rational. Using Plato, rationality can then be seen as substantive: what one sees as Good is more important than how one sees what is Good. Similarly to Plato, Augustine's self is “internally structured by God in such a way as to be capable of seeing the Good” (52). Thus, God determines what is Good and also the abilities of one to see what is Good. However, unlike Plato's philosophy, Augustine's *Confessions* indicates a critical turning point in the West towards an inner/outer ontology, or an interiority of the self and an exteriority of the other. Even still, the Augustinian self is dependent upon an intrinsic moral order (as determined by God) and autonomy therefore is less valued and can even be taken as “the sign of one's sinfulness and disorder” (52).

While Plato and Augustine are less subject to Alcoff's criticisms, René Descartes' “*cogito ergo sum*” represents a decisive shift from an intrinsic moral order to an autonomous, detached Self that names and structures the world as it sees fit. As Alcoff compares brilliantly, “the Cartesian self is more like Adam in the Garden of Eden, naming the animals according to his preference, than like Job bemoaning his fate until he comes to accept its moral validity, no matter whether he can fully understand the ground of its validity” (53). The key difference between Adam and Job, or Descartes and Plato respectively, is that Job or Plato accept an externally structured moral order, whereas Adam or Descartes assume an internally possessed mastery and superiority over their world through objectification. However, Alcoff is careful to distinguish that mastery over the world does not appear until after Europe's conquest of the Americas and its subsequent new perception of itself.

Mastery of the self, on other hand, did

exist in Plato's time and was an ancient ideal of the Stoics based on the rational part of the self overcoming the desiring part. Desire, they believed, was an obstacle to seeing Truth, with seeing Truth being defined by Plato as rationality. Even though Plato preceded the appearance of the inner/outer ontology, Alcoff points out that mastery of the self is mutually exclusive with mastery by another, and draws a parallel between this ancient mastery of the self and the modern concept of autonomy. There does exist, however, an important distinction in ancient and modern rationality. Whereas ancient rationality overcame desire in order to achieve moral virtue, modern rationality replaces this with an epistemological motivation and redefines rationality as "disengagement, rather than truthful belief" (53). Modern rationality as disengagement and the ideal of autonomy is thus traced from Plato to Descartes, the latter of which stands as the explanatory turning point in Western philosophy for a rationality that is based on mastery of the world.

### **The Third World Woman: Suppressing Heterogeneity**

Mastery of the world implies a structure of domination and subordination: man over world. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," defines colonialism as "a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (333). Rationality that is based on mastery over the world can then be seen through the lens of colonization. She criticizes Western feminist discourse as reflecting such colonial tendencies through the production of a homogenous "Third World Woman" identity, in which women are represented as victims, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, family-oriented and domestic. This representation suppresses the heterogeneities of women in the Third World and is, as Mohanty argues, "arbitrarily constructed," yet nonetheless supported by the hegemony of the "cultural centers of the West" (334, 335). The "inadequate self-consciousness" in Western feminist discourse

of the structurally dominant position of the West and of Western scholarship's effect on the Third World also contribute to this colonial discourse (335).

The production of the "Third World Woman" also serves the interests of Western feminists' own identity. By creating a universally oppressed Third World Woman "out there," they are implicitly defining what is "in here." The inner/outer ontology that characterizes the colonizer's modern self becomes clear as Western feminist discourse creates a clear divide between the Self—Western feminists—and the cultural Other: Third World women. The Western feminist Self then takes the Third World woman Other and names them (as victims, uneducated, poor, etc.). This exemplifies the social naming that Butler calls a "form of primary alienation whose source is power" (Alcoff 75). As Mohanty points out, this also reveals the implicit, privileged self-representation of Western feminists as "educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their decisions" (337). The explicit naming of the Other and the implicit naming of the Self in Western feminist discourse reveals its colonizing nature, as it attempts to homogenize the real differences of women in Third World countries.

Mohanty sees two troublesome methodologies that Western feminist discourse employs that lead to this problematic "Third World Woman" identity. First, it assumes that women are a universal, a priori group with "identical interests and desires," ignoring class, race, or ethnic differences (337). To use a comparison from Mohanty, imagine first, a book titled "Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression." Now, imagine a book titled "Women of America: Roots of Oppression." The latter book would have American feminists demanding "What women?" and "Whose oppression?" alongside the cry of "'Women' is not a homogenous group!" This should be especially true in the American context, with its history of Feminism, which turned out to be White, middle-class, heterosexual feminism. In fact, one could imagine Mohanty pointing out

that this feminism was colonizing too, as it assumed all American women shared the interests of White, middle-class, heterosexual women, when in fact the oppression of women varies quite specifically according to their race, class or “sexual preference.” However, it took Black feminists, working from the material and social specificity of their lives, to point this out to White feminists. And Mohanty, working from her context, is able to recognize Western feminist discourse colonizing and suppressing the heterogeneities of women in the Third World.

The second approach that Mohanty finds troubling is the “uncritical use of particular methodologies in providing ‘proof of universality and cross-cultural validity’” (337). One such methodology problematically applies concepts such as the family, the sexual division of labor and reproduction cross-culturally without regard to the value and meaning of each in its local and historical context. This discursively colonialist move blatantly ignores the heterogeneity of economic systems, social values and cultural differences within Third World countries. It disregards the local meaning and assumes the operative, universal meaning for each concept is the hegemonic, Western feminist meaning. For example, the sexual division of labor in the American context carries with it the value assigned to the types of labor done by men and women, as well as the hierarchy of these values. While such concepts may work as descriptive generalizations—e.g. in many countries around the world, women are often found in service-oriented jobs—the meaning and explanation for why this is the case “obviously varies according to the socio-historical context” (348). To infer that the sexual division of labor globally indicates the oppression of women based on the Western understanding of “women’s work” as socially undervalued reveals an ethnocentric, universalistic frame of analysis that imposes forms of oppression that simply may not exist.

Another methodology that she criticizes assumes women’s oppression is a global phenomenon. In order to validate the claim that women’s oppression occurs across

borders and cultures, Western feminist discourse uses the “arithmetic method,” described as such: Some phenomena, such as female genital cutting, are assigned as a signifier of women’s oppression. The more instances of female genital cutting that are “discovered” by Western feminists, the more universal women’s oppression must be. The arithmetic method disregards the historical and social specificity of practices, discursively homogenizing cultures in the Third World. As Mohanty points out, this method also strips a cultural practice of any “potentially subversive aspects,” which simultaneously designates Third World women as “politically immature” (347, 338). In other words, if a practice is labeled by Western feminists as oppressive, it therefore could not possibly be used by women in Third World countries as a sign of their own resistance. It isn’t too much of an analytic leap to say that stripping practices of their politically subversive potential could be a symptom of the assumption that Third World women don’t even know how to resist because they are, after all, always victims. As discussed above, this naming of Third World women concomitantly supports the identity of Western feminists as agents as opposed to victims, as well as politically mature and savvy.

The underlying problem in these frames of analysis that Mohanty identifies is the use of generalizations as a starting point. While Western feminist discourse may have arrived at such generalizations through the specific historical and material reality of their experiences, they cannot then apply cross-culturally without paying attention to the specific historical and material reality of the women to which they are trying to apply these generalizations. To achieve this attention to specificity, Mohanty advises the use of “context-specific differentiated analysis” (347). By this, she means to use the lived realities of women within their historical and material context to analyze oppression, and then arrive at generalizations engendered from that context. Mohanty provides the example of wearing “The Veil,” a very “universal” sign of oppression for Westerners. However, if Western feminists were to employ context-specific

analysis, it would be clear that not all occurrences of women wearing a veil is oppressive, as was the case during the 1979 Iranian revolution, when middle-class women veiled themselves as a sign of solidarity with their working class sisters (347). There is not a single, universal meaning that can be assigned across cultures and societies to specific practices, even if the practice is visibly indistinguishable. Doing context-specific, differentiated analysis would avoid the quasi-armchair feminism that Western feminist discourse seems to be producing. And I mean that purely conceptually, as I cannot say whether or not these Western feminists writing about women in the Third World speak from first-hand experience or not. But regardless of the actuality of their experiential knowledge of women in the Third World, the effect is the same: they may as well be writing from their armchairs. If they weren't, they would know that not all practices that Western feminists identify as oppressive are actually oppressive.

### **A New Epistemology**

To reiterate this criticism of Mohanty: Western feminist discourse uses knowledge claims validated by their own experience to erroneously talk about, name and discursively colonize women in Third World countries. Patricia Hill Collins, in "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," echoes Mohanty in calling out the incompetence of using hegemonic discourse and epistemology to describe the experiences of marginal groups. Rather than offer an improved methodology as Mohanty does, Collins challenges the very Eurocentric, masculinist epistemology upon which such methodologies would be based. As Collins declares, "one cannot use the same techniques to study the knowledge of the dominated as one uses to study the knowledge of the powerful" (528). As opposed to Eurocentric, masculinist epistemology, Afrocentric feminist inquiry's ethical aims subordinate neither emotion nor ethics to reason, allowing for an ethic of care to emerge (539). This ethic of care as a characteristic of an epistemology places value on individual uniqueness (not general

homogeneity) and demands the capacity for empathy. Knowledge claims that are validated through such an ethic of care must necessarily preclude colonization, the concomitant suppression of heterogeneity, and the imposition of nonexistent classifications.

However, in juxtaposing Mohanty's call for a new methodology and Collins' call for a new epistemology, it would appear that they are irreconcilable. If "one cannot use the same techniques to study the knowledge of the dominated as one uses to study the knowledge of the powerful," then it would follow that Western feminists cannot use their own methodologies to write about women in Third World countries. And so even if analysis is context-specific, the analysis itself is still based on Western feminist epistemologies, which, according to Collins, could not be the same as epistemologies from women in Third World countries. However, the audience of the scholarship that is produced by Western feminist discourse seems to be other Western feminists. I conclude this based on the portrayal of Third World Women in such discourse as powerless victims. Portrayal of a person as a victim precludes any agency on their part, so the audience therefore must be agents in a position of privilege who have the freedom to help. Therein lies the problem: Western feminists writing to other Western feminists on how to liberate non-Western women. As Collins puts it, "living life as an African-American woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black feminist thought," and subsequently, Black women's liberation (539). To say it more generally, one must be in the community and accountable to the community in order to produce liberatory scholarship for that community. But this produces an seeming impasse: how then, can Western feminists help liberate all those oppressed Third World Women?

The aboriginal activists group of Queensland in 1970 offers this answer: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." So now, let's reword that question: what can and should one do with a

position of power and privilege to work towards transborder social and economic justice? Mohanty, in “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” makes it clear that the liberations of peoples across the globe—especially that of women and girls—are bound up even more tightly than before in the context of a hegemonic corporate capitalist system that “utilizes the raced and sexed bodies of women in its search for profit globally” (530).

It is helpful here to return to the conceptualization of oppression based on identity, but not the pernicious, nefarious, static identity of Western philosophy. Rather, we should consider identity as having “positionality,” as Alcoff designates it. To reconsider identity as positionality implies an agency that is dialectic within a dynamic system that is constantly shaping and being shaped by those within it. Rather than producing an identity like Western feminist discourse’s homogenized “Third World Woman,” positionality acknowledges the dynamic nature of identity within a given context. It illuminates the fact that both Western feminists and women in Third World Countries are positioned within a hegemonic, global system of corporate capitalism and its ruthless quest for profit. However, that is not to say that their position or oppression is the same, but rather that it encourages the “use of positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values” (Alcoff 148). So then, the answer to the question, “How do we work towards

transborder social and economic justice?” is not a simple one, and certainly not one that can be perfectly answered within ten pages. However, Alcoff, Mohanty and Collins all offer compelling ways in which every person can work towards social and economic justice across borders, cultures, genders, ethnicities and class. No one author offers the “best” solution, and I argue that no such “best” solution exists, for that assumes our problem is static. However, all offer critical ways in which to avoid colonialist tendencies by increasing self-awareness of social location, being mindful of privilege, paying attention to specificity and being cognizant of our positions and identities within local and global power dynamics.

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**A Reductionist Argument Against Reductionism:  
Breaking Down the Industrial Food System and Putting It Back Together Again**  
Meg Oka

In an industrial food system that is shaped by the capitalist “free” market, there is one priority: profit. While this may sound like an overly simplistic street chant of the Occupy movement, an examination of this profit-maximization mindset reveals a complex logic and value system that has severe consequences for all elements within and affected by the system. In order to maximize and increase profits, three other supportive priorities take shape to form the industrial food system logic: economic efficiency, speed and mass production. The main priority—profit—working in tandem with economic efficiency, speed and mass production creates an implicit value system within this framework. What is necessarily valued by the industrial food system logic are the following five main dynamics, in application to inputs. Inputs are first engineered or selected for homogeneity, increasing their interchangeability or expendability. Interchangeability then allows for more meticulous control of the inputs. These values also seem to be self-fulfilling, as increased control encourages further engineering to create more homogenous, interchangeable inputs that are easily controlled. These four values—engineering, homogeneity, interchangeability and control—create economic efficiency and allow for speed and mass production, which together all mean profit, either through the reduction of costs or the increase of profits. However, this industrial logic and value system is a reductionist understanding of the world, which means that it pursues knowledge by breaking down complex natural systems to their “essential” parts. This belief in the higher value of separated parts rather than the wholes from which they came has severely deleterious effects on all the “inputs” that are used in the system whether these inputs are plants, animals or human workers.

Human worker expenses for firms tend to be the greatest costs, so industrial

corporations wanting to cut costs for more profit will naturally search for the cheapest human labor possible. Their unrelenting search for the cheapest labor possible leads them naturally to populations that are vulnerable, isolated and in desperate need of employment. For example, Lucas Mariano Domingo came to the U.S. looking for work so he could send money back home to provide medical care for an ill family member (Estabrook 76). Antonio Martinez, another immigrant, had two sick parents and the intermittent employment he could find in Mexico just wasn't enough to support his six other family members (85). These two men, along with an overwhelming majority of migrant farm workers, meet the carefully engineered list of qualifications of industrial farming corporations: they “(1) have no legal documentation, (2) speak no English, and (3) have little or no education” (84). Immigrants in critical need of employment are vulnerable and those that don't speak English or Spanish but native Amerindian dialects are linguistically isolated. Their undocumented status, in addition to employment vulnerability and language barriers, gives them further incentive to stay quiet and keep their heads down about any worker mistreatment, creating a very docile and easily controllable work force. Thus corporate farming operations, following industrial logic, employs human laborers that are a selectively homogenous group with the above characteristics, increasing workers' interchangeability and expendability to the industry, and giving corporate farming chains greater control over these legally defenseless, linguistically isolated and economically vulnerable populations.

The combination of a vulnerable population and the industrial food system's priority of the economic bottom line logically leads to the violent mistreatment of workers on farms. Treating workers humanely and providing safe working conditions always increases expenses which naturally decreases profit. And if farm workers are treated as



expendable or easily interchangeable especially given that the annual turnover rate can be as high as forty percent, then the treatment of workers is nowhere near a priority or even a trifling concern (46). What this means practically is the existence of modern-day slavery in the United States. What it means to human beings working on these farms is debt-peonage and violent physical abuse. Through debt-peonage, farm crew managers employ various tactics to significantly reduce workers' paycheck amounts, such as charging exorbitant amounts for food, water, showers, rent and even for cashing their checks (77). Managers would also claim the worker owed the managers more than the worker had made that week, but then make alcohol readily available to any workers on the farm, regardless of their debts. When workers are picking more than three hundred buckets of tomatoes a week but barely subsisting on sometimes no more than four tortillas a day or even nothing at all, it's no wonder they had to turn to the generous amounts of alcohol provided for them so they could boost their caloric intake. Alcohol dependence for calories doesn't even take into account the psychological and emotional stress factors that might also make liquor an enticing escape for their seemingly compounding problems. All these factors lead to alcohol addiction which, alongside violent beatings, imprisonment in truck beds and being physically shackled with chains, enslaves workers at these industrial farming sites. It's clear then, the dehumanization of workers clearly contributes to the farms' economic bottom line. By cutting their human labor expenses through the tactics of debt-peonage of vulnerable populations enforced by alcohol, violence and chains, these farms are able to operate at below what the true market cost should be, allowing them to edge out any sort of competition that would dream of providing their workers with a fair wage and quality working conditions.

Just as human workers are dehumanized on industrial farms, plants like tomatoes or corn that go through the industrial system are denatured. While corn has been domesticated, hybridized and is not very

evolutionarily fit without the help of humans, it still, just as any other plant, abides by the laws of nature and possesses the abilities to metabolize energy, grow, adapt and reproduce. The denaturing process of corn, or the deprivation of its natural character or properties, is a consequence of industrial logic, driven by the values and priorities that shape the industrial system. To review, the main concern of the industrial food system is profit, which is realized through the prioritization of economic efficiency, speed and mass production. The values that enable these priorities are engineering, homogeneity, interchangeability and control of inputs. In the context of plants and their natural habitat within ecosystems, these industrial values stand in direct opposition to the inherent value system of nature, which prioritizes complex diversity, lack of waste, conservation of energy and the intricate interconnectedness of each organism's unique features within the web of life. Therefore, corn pushed through the industrial food system is denatured through the application of the industrial values of engineering, homogeneity, interchangeability and control.

To begin with, the vast majority of corn that is produced today is a variety called "number 2 field corn," a commodified version that is not the same corn as the corn you would eat off the cob (Pollan 58). Number 2 corn is actually less a specific variety and more a "lowest common denominator" definition of corn that specifies qualities like moisture content and insect damage; a quintessential homogenization of corn (59). So number 2 corn is not merely a standardization for corn, but also by very definition homogenizes other distinct varieties of corn. Many of these distinct varieties, however, are genetically engineered breeds that have been "improved" through the insertion of specific genes into the corn. These genes give corn qualities that it would not necessarily naturally develop, like the ability to grow ramrod straight, produce higher yields and resist certain pests. The engineering of specific characteristics of corn produces a higher level of control over the variabilities that inevitably come with the complexities of living

things; this inevitability being exactly what the industrial food system likes to pretend is anything but. Consequently, the values of the industrial food system, when applied to living things like corn, produce a denatured, commodified artifact that can be economic-efficiently<sup>6</sup> mass produced for substantial profit.

To review, the main priority of the industrial food system is economic profit. Working in support of this priority are economic efficiency, speed, and mass production, all of which increase profit. These priorities create an industrial logic that values four main dynamics: engineering, homogenization, interchangeability and control. These four values are applied to the “inputs” of the industrial food system, such as human workers or plants like corn. The consequences of the execution of this logic in the system is dehumanization and denaturization. While these effects are pointedly conspicuous within the system, the complexity and invisibility of food supply chains can make it difficult to understand the effects of the logic outside of the system. My argument, in an ironic reflection of industrial logic, broke down its complex system into specific parts to examine each individually. If I were to stop there, this paper would be nothing more than a reductionist argument against reductionism. However, the visible, within-the-system examples used in this paper point to a larger, more cohesive picture that should be interrogated as a result of the examples' implications. Besides the clearly detrimental effects on the health of humans and plants (and animals) within the industrial food system, what of the effects on the health of humans, plants and animals outside of the system? What are the effects on the less visible and often overlooked aspects of the earth's ecology, such as bacteria, water quality, and soil health? The industrial food system logic, while creating

unambiguous examples of its harmful effects, must also be put back into a larger, more holistic understanding of ecosystem and comprehensive planet health that includes all beings and things that share this earth.

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<sup>6</sup>My hyphenation of “economic” and “efficiently” is meant to emphasize the economic definition of efficiency, which is the reduction of inputs simultaneous to the increase of outputs, rather than a natural, ecosystem-based efficiency which implies less a reduction and more so a lack of waste of inputs.

## **The Dark Lord Saga: Self-Transformation, World-Domination, and Total Eradication**

Erica Clifford

In a world of transparent fairy tales with simple, recycled characters, one man dared to lose himself in the unrestrained illusory furrows of his own imagination, and to create not just a story that would carve a place in history for fantasy literature, but a theology, a set of languages, and a documented history of an entire world. Even in the modern age, where fantasy novels are much more ubiquitous, the literature of J.R.R. Tolkien, specifically the tales of Middle-Earth, remain unrivaled in their cohesive complexity, and the care with which they were assembled. Thus Tolkien has become a household name, and is commonly referred to as the father of modern fantasy. Many other notable authors have managed to gain renown through various works of fantasy writing but Tolkien's influence, still prevalent today in everything from books to movies and video games, is discernable in a multitude of their works as well. Indeed, Tom Shippey, Tolkien expert, and author of J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century agrees that, "no modern writer of epic fantasy has managed to escape the mark of Tolkien, no matter how hard many of them have tried."

The same is true of author J.K. Rowling, and her Harry Potter series that took the world by storm, and which features a Tolkien-like quality of complete, preliminary planning of a significantly elaborate detail-oriented plot. Rowling herself said of one character, "I had a lot of background on Dean [Thomas], though I had never found the right place to use it," which suggests that in spite of the conclusion of the series, there are still many stories within the wizarding world that remain untold, much like Tolkien's innumerable histories of Middle-Earth. Although Rowling read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series in her teens, she stated that although the two *works* "overlap in terms of dragons and wands and wizards, the Harry Potter books are very different, especially in tone" (JK Rowling Chat,

AOL Live, May 4, 2000), and subsequently went on to underline the divergence between the entire mythology that Tolkien created, and the clandestine world that she revealed. Regardless of the disparities between Tolkien and Rowling's worlds, including the aforementioned clear difference in tone, there exists an undeniable semblance between the two, whether intentional or not. Much of this relativity manifests itself in the author's depiction of evil. It is possible that this perception is an inherent part of human nature, and that the evils illustrated by both authors are simply the most horrifying to the largest number of readers, however, it is more likely that a borrowing of various minutiae and motifs occurred, whether conscious or not.

The battle between good and evil is a motif whose creation cannot be credited to Tolkien, for it is nearly as old as time itself; nonetheless, the villains in both Tolkien and Rowling's literary works, cloaked in the great mantle of malevolence, have many analogous components. These villainous congruencies are, logically, most pronounced in the principal antagonist. In both Tolkien and Rowling's works, the head-honcho antagonist takes the form of an unspeakably evil dark lord of great power, namely Sauron of Middle-Earth (successor or Morgoth) and Voldemort of the wizarding world. The source of the prodigious power wielded by both Lord Sauron and Lord Voldemort can be largely attributed to certain significant relics of power. Of course, the combination of an antagonist, and a source of power provide a foundation for any formidable adversary in any comic book, novel, or film, notwithstanding, there is an especially uncanny affinity between both maleficent menaces.

It is true that the two dark lords employ somewhat different strategies of lordship in the two stories. On one hand, Sauron is a very passive antagonist, as he is almost never seen throughout the plotline, is

never physically described in detail, and never physically faces off with a member of the Fellowship of the Ring. Instead, to subdue his foes, he relies upon his apostles, along with his formidable reputation, and the evil aura spreading from his stronghold in Mordor. This physical ambiguity makes Sauron ever more terrifying due to the visceral fear of the unknown. By keeping him cloaked in shadow, the imagination of the reader proves to be a more useful tool than any description, for it specifically tailors Sauron's vague countenance to the fears of the individual. Lord Voldemort, on the other hand, plays an extremely active role in the plotline throughout the entire Harry Potter series. Described often, and in appalling detail, he and Harry face-off on multiple occasions, yet Lord Voldemort's more frequent appearances in the series do not diminish the potency of his campaign of terror.

It is without a doubt that the two villains share a similar fear-inspiring reputation, though it wasn't always so. Sauron and Lord Voldemort alike both engaged in a similar diabolical metamorphosis. Sauron, who began, uncorrupted, as Mairon (or, "the admirable"), became Sauron (Quenya for "the abhorred") once he entered into the service of Morgoth and revealed his evil intentions. He then spent a great many centuries in his humanoid form until his defeat at the hand of Isildur during the War of the Last Alliance when "he forsook his body, and his spirit fled far away and hid in waste places" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 294). Thereafter, he gained a body again at some point, as Gollum speaks of having seen Sauron's black hand with four fingers during his imprisonment and torture at Barad-dûr. So it must be assumed that until the demise of the One Ring, and by association, the demise of Sauron himself, the Lord of Mordor had some type of humanoid form. This is relevant only because Lord Voldemort followed an almost identical pattern in his own perverse physical transformation, although his change occurred over a score of decades, rather than centuries.

Moreover, Lord Voldemort began as the child Tom Riddle, perhaps uncorrupted, although vengeful at his parents for having

orphaned him. Whether he was inherently evil, or the lack of love in his life slowly turned him so, at the age of seventeen, Tom Riddle confirmed his true colors when he murdered his father, and his grandparents. It was at this critical juncture in his life that he abandoned his patronym, and fully embraced the identity of Lord Voldemort. And in this new identity, he began performing certain forms of dark magic that would, due to their corrosive nature, soon make him unrecognizable as Tom Riddle. Several tyrannical years later, Lord Voldemort was stripped of his power, and rent from his body after the attempted-murder of the infant Harry Potter. After the spell that went awry, Lord Voldemort, in spectral form, fled far away to a forest in Albania. Fourteen years later, however, after a brief number of months spent in the form of a demonic fetus, Lord Voldemort was reborn in the same guise as before his fall. This form was relatively short-lived, however, for 4 years later, Lord Voldemort followed Sauron's fate, and was defeated once and for all.

Although both dark lords eventually perish, it is worth mentioning that even during their respective periods of dormancy, their names are still feared. Most of the wider world prefers to use epithets rather than invoke the dreaded names. Sauron is referred to at times as "The Nameless Enemy," while Lord Voldemort is commonly called "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named." It is likely that the fear of using the names of the dark lords lies within the realm of superstition, or contains traces of the common fantasy genre philosophy that true names have power. Irrespective of the truth of these undercurrents, it is clear that the majority of this fear stems from the terror that each inspired at the height of his power.

Despite the fact that historically, Sauron and Lord Voldemort share the same rhythmic fluctuation of powers, physically there is only one unifying feature that further equates the two. During the First Age, Gorlim the Unhappy is brought before Sauron, and mentions being "daunted by the eyes of Sauron" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 191), just as Harry is brought before Lord Voldemort after the Triwizard Tournament, and gazes into

his “pitiless red eyes” as the dark lord taunts him. The red eyes of Lord Voldemort with their slit, catlike pupils, gleaming through the darkness of the graveyard in Little Hangleton, are very reminiscent to The Eye of Sauron (also The Great Eye, The Red Eye, The Lidless Eye, etc.). The Eye of Sauron, at its point of vigilance atop the tower of Barad-dûr, is described as “rimmed with fire...yellow as a cat’s” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 355) with a black slit pupil, that could “pierce all shadows of cloud, and earth, and flesh” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 616) which alludes to The Eye’s possession of capabilities beyond normal sight. This is likewise illustrated by the extension of Sauron’s sight through the palantiri (a set of seven stones used for long-distance communication in Middle-Earth), which give him access to the thoughts and memories of all but the strongest willed who attempt to use the stones. Mimicry of this connection is evident in the unique mental bond that exists between Harry and Lord Voldemort, which, like that of the palantiri, is a connection unaffected by distance. Legilimency (a term for the magical extraction thoughts, feelings, and memories from the mind of another), on the other hand, is contingent upon a close physical proximity, although it is not limited to two specific people. Clearly, legilimency contains discernible vestiges of the potency of The Eye of Sauron and the palantiri, so it is unsurprising that Lord Voldemort is commonly known, in the words of Severus Snape, as “the most accomplished legilimens the world has ever seen” (Rowling, *The Half Blood Prince*, 18).

Sauron effectively uses the palantiri to sow the seeds of discord and enmity among those who oppose him, yet ominous relics of power that they are, the palantiri are dwarfed in comparison by the rings of power scattered throughout Middle-Earth. Forged by Sauron, these rings were designed to ensnare their powerful bearers in their own greed, and so enslave them to the dominion of Sauron, for in secret, the Lord of Mordor forged “One Ring to rule them all, and in the Darkness bind them” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 249). The One Ring, master of all others, was said to be

“fraught with all his malice; and in it [lay] a great portion of his strength” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 497). From this cryptic account of the forging, it is understood that within the One Ring, Sauron concentrated a great part of his *fëa* (Quenya for “spirit” or “soul”), which illustrates why the One Ring is such a dubious article of power. The act of concealing a portion of one’s soul within an object is not a phenomenon exclusive to Tolkien’s works, however, for the subject is introduced in *The Half Blood Prince* when Harry learns of the existence of Lord Voldemort’s horcruxes (the wizarding term for such an item), and dedicates himself to their destruction. Where Sauron has only one material extension of his soul, Lord Voldemort has fragmented his soul into eight separate parts (though he intended only seven). Admittedly, the discrepancy between quantities of such objects means little in terms of purpose; for the objectives are similar in ends, yet differ slightly in their means.

Sauron’s ring, while amplifying his power and reducing his weaknesses, also gives him the power to control others, though it plays the role of the double-edged sword, for he is weakened by the absence of the ring. Lord Voldemort, on the other hand, uses his horcruxes as a means to evade death, and weed his only vulnerability. Yet by making himself essentially immortal, or very close to it, Lord Voldemort believes he is increasing his power, and by doing so, attaining a better means to control others. Therefore, the essential motivating factors behind the creation of both Sauron’s One Ring, and Lord Voldemort’s six intended horcruxes are uniform. Insubstantial in the purpose of the relics, the quantity becomes significant in regard to their destruction—and consequently, the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and fellowship over lordship.

For the One Ring, it is appropriate that there is only one method of destruction. There is some debate about the effectiveness of dragon-fire in the obliteration of the One Ring, yet the eradication of the dragons of Middle-Earth makes such speculation useless. For horcruxes, however, as Hermione puts it, “it

has to be something so destructive that the Horcrux can't repair itself" (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 112), so there might be a reasonable number of possible methods of destruction, despite the fact that Harry, Ron and Hermione employ very few. The only successfully proven method the trio is aware of is the use of Basilisk venom, which is incredibly rare, but has impregnated the sword of Godric Gryffindor. Unfortunately, however, the whereabouts of the sword, at that time, are unbeknownst to them. And so the sword seems as hopelessly inaccessible to Harry, Ron, and Hermione, as Mt. Doom seems to the hobbits. Because this destruction is so difficult, and they do not yet have a means to achieve it Harry, Ron, and Hermione are inevitably forced to wear the locket horcrux in order to protect it, just as Frodo wears the ring upon a chain around his neck to protect it. In both cases, adorning themselves with a piece of jewelry saturated with a piece of soul of an evil dark lord has negative effects upon the wearer.

In the case of Frodo and the ring, there is a substantial difference between wearing the One Ring upon a finger, and wearing it upon a chain around the neck. When worn as intended, as a ring, the One Ring exerts its full, and considerable power, rendering all save for Sauron, its maker, invisible. This aspect of the ring, though reshaped, seems to resonate in Rowling's works in the form of Harry's own hallowed invisibility cloak, though rather in reverse as the cloak grants Harry, its true owner, infallible invisibility. Nor is the invisibility cloak the only one of the Deathly Hallows that bears certain similarities to Tolkien's One Ring. The omnipotent Elder Wand, the fabled Wand of Destiny, with its notoriously bloody trail throughout wizarding history, seems to demonstrate a certain similarity to the One Ring's passing from murderous hand to hand due to the treachery and greed it inspires in those who covet it. Although, with both the Elder Wand, and the One Ring, there have been exceptions of benevolent individuals, like Bilbo Baggins and Albus Dumbledore, who came into the circle of inheritance without resorting to homicide. The third of the Deathly Hallows, the resurrection

stone—which later became the ring of Marvolo Gaunt—reflects the most insubstantial similarity to the One Ring, yet a similarity, nonetheless. The resurrection stone completes the trio of the Deathly Hallows, and so makes the possessor master of death, though the stone alone is still enough to recall others from death—to a certain extent. Those whom the resurrection stone recalls are said to be "sad and cold, separated from [the world of the living] as by a veil" (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 409). The same breach of the barriers between worlds, or at least dimensions, is depicted when the One Ring is worn a mortal, for it appears to lend the wearer a Middle-Earth equivalent of astral vision. At Weathertop, when Frodo dons the ring, he is able to see the Nazgûl's corporeal astral form. Invisible in the material dimension of Middle-Earth except for the black cloaks that give the Nazgûl form, Frodo reflects that in the astral world "in their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 208).

Though only shadows of uniformity, it seems that there is an undeniable connection between the Deathly Hallows, and certain features of the One Ring, although Rowling has removed these features from the scope of the One Ring, and honed them into a trio of new, unique magical objects.

Invisibility and astral vision, however, are effects of the One Ring only when worn as a ring, which occurs seldom because of the dangers associated with it. More often than not, however, the ring remains on a chain around Frodo's neck, although this does not protect him from the long-term effects of its scathing influence. The ring eventually corrupts everyone it comes into contact with, even those with the best of intentions, if given adequate time. As the variation of the duration of the corruption of Sméagol versus that of Frodo demonstrates, the greedier and more selfish a person, the more quickly the ring will corrupt them, until eventually it becomes an obsession beyond compare, and turns friend against friend. The locket horcrux of Lord Voldemort exemplifies similar corrosive tendencies, and eventually results in a fracture

of the bonds of fellowship between Harry, Ron, and Hermione in Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows. Although Ron eventually is able to dispel the influence of Lord Voldemort, and returns to save Harry's life, he reveals "[the locket] affects me worse than it affected you and Hermione, it made me think stuff—stuff I was thinking anyway, but it made everything worse" (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 374). Ron's explanation of the horcrux exacerbating his doubts and negative thoughts portrays the same crushing corruption of the One Ring upon even the pure of heart. Furthermore, it underlines the idea that the caustic chafe of an evil soul upon a mind where cynical thoughts already dwell will exponentially quicken the rate of corruption.

The coercion of the horcrux, however, extends further than subtle manipulation of thought. At this period in the plot, the locket has already proven that it is capable of some independent action when it burns Harry during his foray into Lord Voldemort's memories after he and Hermione flee from Godric's Hollow, and when it tightens around Harry's neck, threatening strangulation when he attempts to retrieve the sword of Godric Gryffindor. When the locket opens, the full malice of the Lord Voldemort is unleashed when the fragment of soul within attempts to taunt Ron into submission before he destroys it. This independent action of an otherwise inanimate object can undoubtedly be attributed to the presence of the soul residing within it; therefore it is unsurprising that the One Ring also exercises a certain amount of its own volition, although not to the extent of the locket horcrux. Bilbo mentions to Frodo that the ring seems to erratically change size, from time to time, which initially seems benign. This action proves to be much more loathsome in light of the ring's treacherous history when Gandalf recounts that, "the Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 33).

This willing treachery that undoubtedly stems from the maker's own tendencies, eventually comes full circle, and ends up being self-destructive. In the case of

the One Ring, it takes place in Gollum and Frodo's struggle to possess the ring, in the cavern of Mt. Doom, which culminates in both Gollum and the ring being cast into the fiery chasm. If the ring were not so treacherous, and did not inspire such violent jealousy, perhaps it would never have been destroyed; though if it were not so treacherous, and did not inspire such violent jealousy, it would not, by its very nature, be the One Ring to rule them all. Additionally, in the case of the horcruxes, the key lies within the revelation that Harry is the unintentional seventh horcrux containing a piece of Lord Voldemort's soul. In fact, it was Voldemort's haste to remove any remote threat to his power that ends up being his downfall, for in doing so, he equips Harry with a unique set of skills and a future. The same motif is present in light of the Elder Wand: if Lord Voldemort had not so arduously pursued the Elder Wand, it would not have mattered that Harry was the true master of it, and Lord Voldemort's final spell, if it had not backfired, might have meant the true end of Harry Potter.

Fantasy epics, however, rarely end with the death of the hero. Tolkien and Rowling seem to have been operating the same train of thought, sending Frodo to the Undying Lands, and illustrating Harry's brief foray into what appears to be the realm between life and death. Both heroes travel to some sort of land beyond time, and manage to evade death themselves. Clearly the qualities in Tolkien's works that resurface in Rowling's series are those that many readers enjoy, for it is highly unlikely that were they not, both authors would have amassed such a prodigious league of fans. These choice elements are most clearly visible in the façade of evil that is authenticated by the powerful dark lords Sauron and Voldemort, as well as in the malevolence that stems from their creation of certain personal relics that enhance and magnify their dark powers. But for all the similarities between the works, there are hundreds of thousands of differences that clearly distinguish one narrative from another. The intricacies that Rowling may have borrowed, subconsciously or otherwise, she has sculpted into independent components of characters that present a fresh-face to the

historical roster of fantasy, and in doing so, she has defined a clear separation between her own form of literary genius, and the timeless literary genius of Tolkien.

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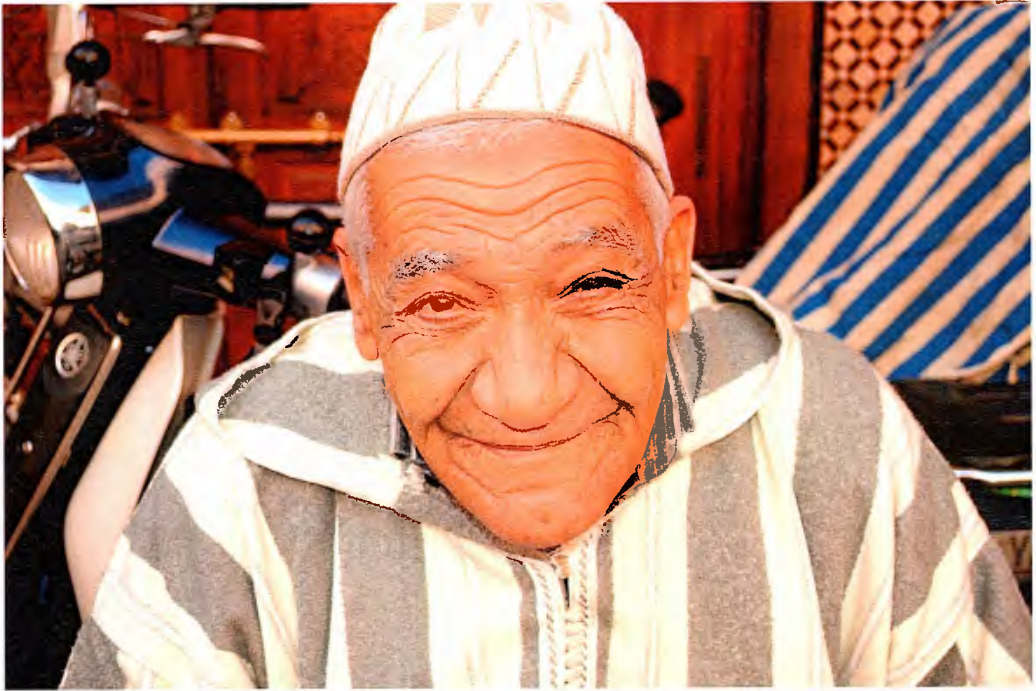


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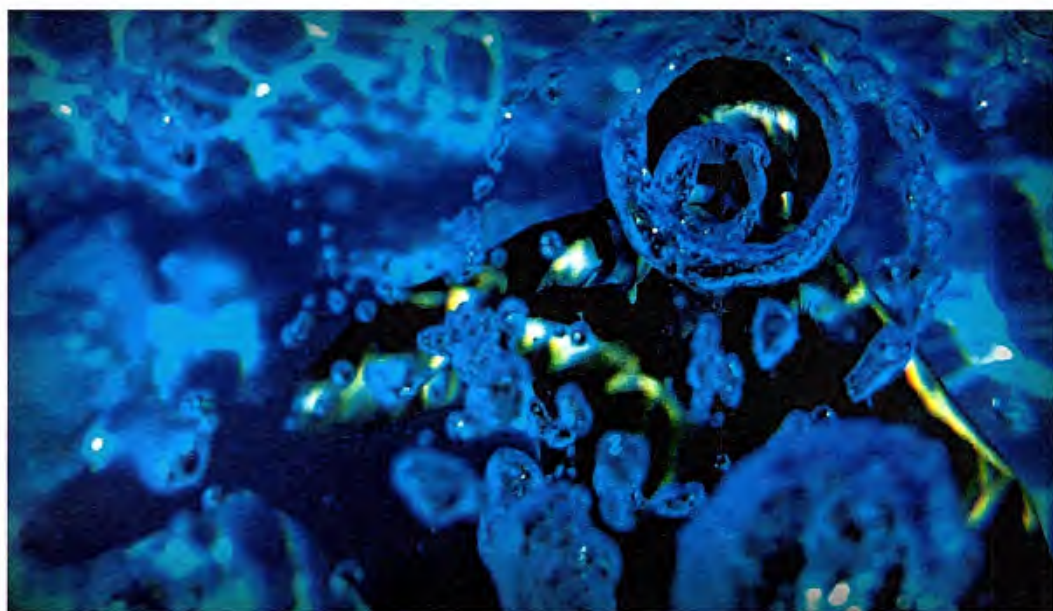




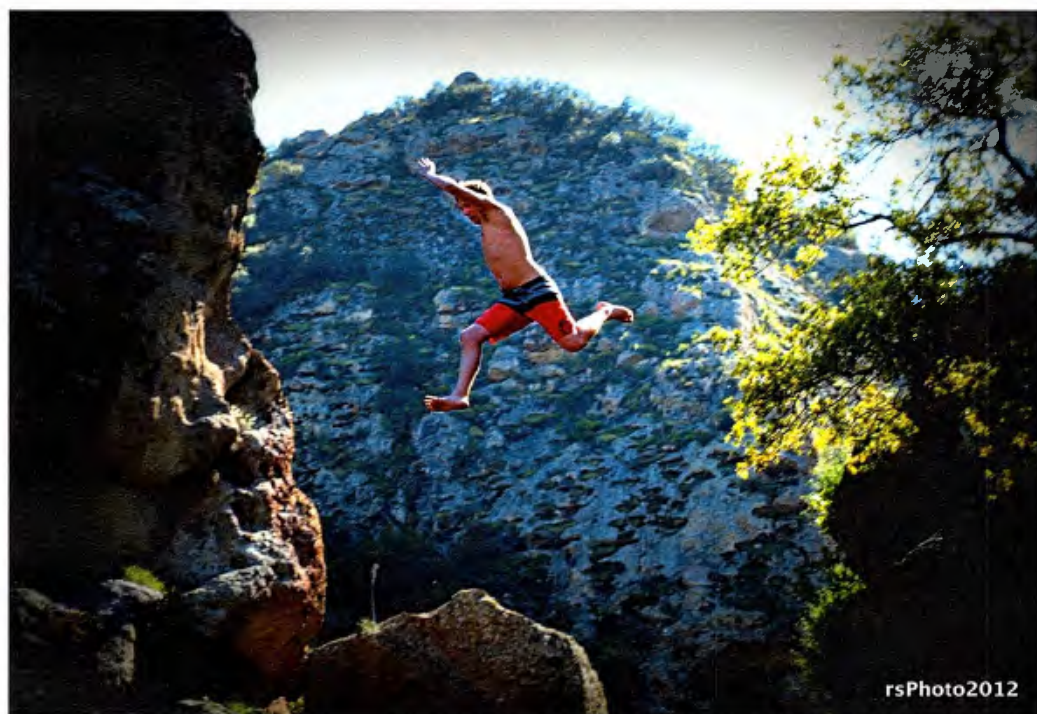
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