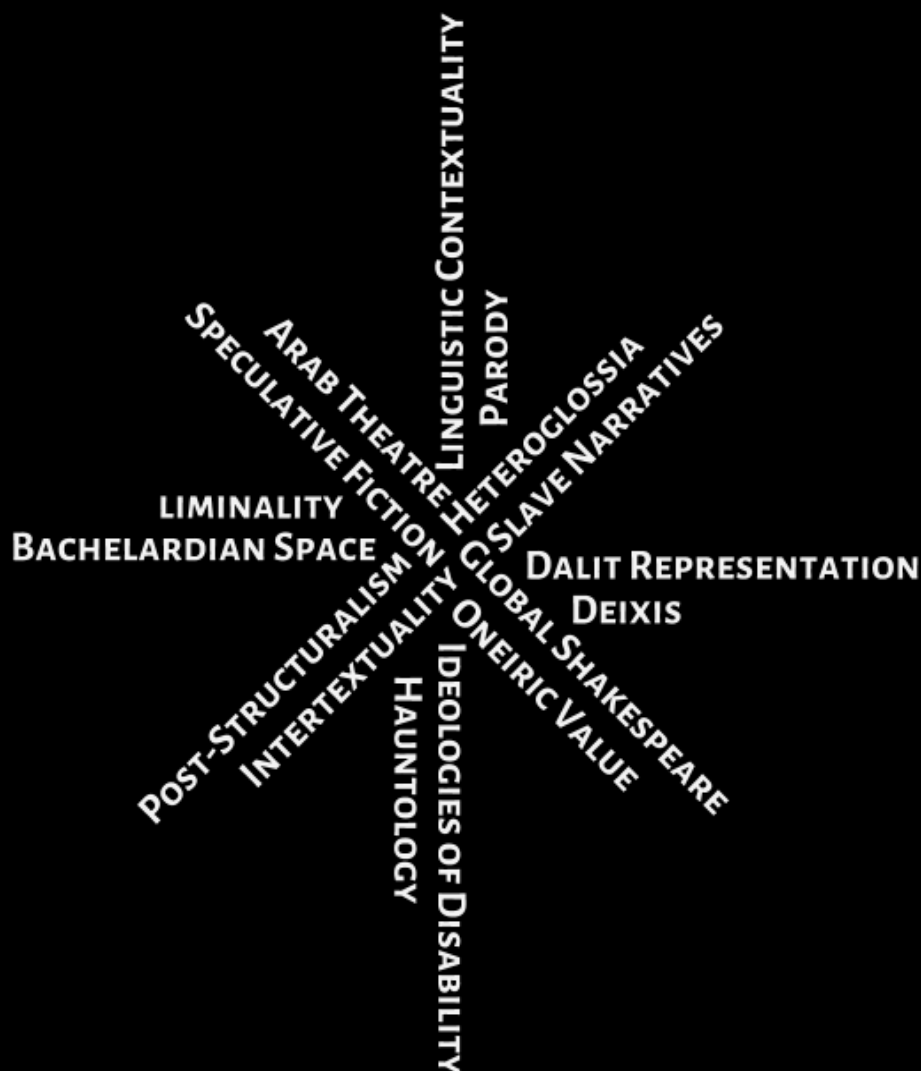


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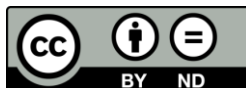
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EDITORIAL

Deeksha Suri

This Winter Issue has, for its purpose, an understanding of literary practices around theoretical ideas that expand the horizon of studying literary contexts with political and cultural significations. Around 1980s Cultural Materialism argues against the possibility of seeing a text in isolation from its cultural milieu that, in a sense, inspires the production of a text as well as the readers' role as its potential interpreters. The discursive conditions for meaning, generated by trans-individual forces, invoke a plurality of politico-cultural hybridity disseminating cultural and materialist value to social discourses and practices. Raymond Williams's view of Cultural Materialism as 'a theory of the specificities of material, cultural, and literary production within historical materialism' thus gravitates towards the markers of culture, history, and politics as contributors to the 'structures of feeling' contrary to the dominant ideology.

With this emergent attitude the earlier Marxist model is 'decentered' through determinants such as a particular period's beliefs, voices of dissent, and oppositional values for wider discussions on the issues like gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. Derrida's critique of Marx later in the century too finds the meaning, which has been tied to certain solutions within Marxism, disturbed as it is neither a part of the present nor has a definite founding in future but hangs as a ghost offering complex interpretative strategies. In his deconstructionist model Derrida, while commenting upon Marx's analysis of the eschatological construction of history, underlines the infinite possibilities within a text which remains 'open.'

Both Cultural Materialism and hauntology, as discursive strategies, contribute to the reception of a text by destabilizing our confidence in a single meaning and present a discourse that remains against established teleology. These varying epistemes, thus, while construing the position of the subject within the textual form, perceive the production of narrative itself as a register of inconclusive interpretations.

In the themed section, the papers present alternative interpretations of canonical texts such as *Hamlet* and *Gone with the Wind*. Power dynamics inherent in these texts are highlighted through a subversive reading that transgresses the historical lineage of meaning attached to them. General section of the journal reflects thematic variance in terms of the subjects of papers, examining contextual meaning and performa-

tivity of language, intersubjective existential grief as a space of poetic figuration, use of bodily humour as a critique of attitude towards disability, and the feminist possibilities in science fiction beyond linear and static conception of time. All the papers published in the issue successfully offer a disparate view of the respective literary texts and this occasions a heartfelt appreciation of our authors for their dedication towards their work.

While acknowledging the favourable response our journal has received from the scholars across the globe we would also like to thank our peer reviewers, editorial board members, readers, friends, and all the well-wishers for extending their help and support. We also owe gratitude to Aayush Gupta who developed the website from scratch and to Surya Pratap Singh Shekhawat for improving upon the website and smoothing over the user interface. A special note of thanks is also due to Ved Dutt Arya who has been working in the shadows since the very inception of LLIDS and has provided fortification during many staggering moments. As always, we are grateful to Md. Faizan Moqium for his encouraging presence and tireless efforts.

We hope our readers enjoy and appreciate this issue as much as the previous issues, and welcome their motivating comments and critical observations.

A very Happy New Year 2019 to everyone!

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“Blood Draws Flies”: Arab-Western Entanglement in Sulayman Al-Bassam’s Cross-Cultural *Hamlet*

Yvonne Stafford-Mills

As England’s East India Company expanded its global market to the East, cultural material, like the works of William Shakespeare, were transmitted along with tradable goods. The works of Shakespeare first reached the Arab world in the early 17th century. On the third voyage of the London East India Company in 1608, the crew of the *Red Dragon*, the company’s flagship, performed *Hamlet* on the island of Socotra, now part of the Arab Republic of Yemen.¹ This voyage, and its theatrical endeavors, were recorded in General William Keeling’s journal, in which he notes that *Hamlet* was staged twice and *Richard II* once during the outbound voyage (Barbour and Marlowe 255). By 1609, the *Red Dragon* had reached colonial Indonesia. Thus began Shakespeare’s journey through the Middle East and Asia very early in the history of British global trade and empire expansion.

Such cultural exchanges were considered “...an important tool in the cultural work of colonization” (Barbour and Marlowe 255). The performance of Shakespeare by the crew of the *Red Dragon* on this third expedition of the Company was particularly important in establishing diplomatic ties in Africa, where previous expeditions had resulted in pillaging and the capture of Africans for slavery. African dignitaries were invited onboard the ship to witness this demonstration of “English cultural achievement.” Similar cultural exchanges and diplomatic treatment of Arab officials in Socotra proved invaluable to the Company, as Keeling thereby obtained crucial navigational information from local mariners, facilitating the Company’s expansion into the Indian Ocean and surrounding ports of trade (256). These early performances by the crew of the *Red Dragon* created a precedent establishing *Hamlet* as a global political property. By performing the play as a means of gaining the trust of people who would eventually fall victim to British imperialism, the *Red Dragon* provided these areas with their first encounter with political Shakespeare—ironically through the staging of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* which embody the struggle over power that the near and far East would experience internally and with foreign powers over the next four hundred years.

¹See the Prologue to *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (Columbia UP, 2009) ed. Alexander C. Y. Huang and the Introduction to Sulayman Al-Bassam’s *The Al-Hamlet Summit* by Graham Holderness (U of Hertfordshire P, 2006).

Although Shakespeare first found his way into the Arab world propelled by the sails of British trade, the Middle East's "Shakespeare" was formed through a multiplicity of lenses reflecting Shakespeare's status as a global author. As Margaret Litvin asserts in her book, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost*, the Arab Shakespeare was formed through a "kaleidoscope" of influences including the British "original" as well as Italian, French, American, Soviet, and Eastern European Shakespearean adaptations and traditions (2). Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey, in their article "'Rudely Interrupted': Shakespeare and Terrorism," argue that Shakespeare remains a symbol of Western dominance, even if not solely Anglo-dominance. In their interpretation of the March 2005 suicide bomber attack on the Doha Player's Theatre in Qatar during a performance of *Twelfth Night*, Holderness and Loughrey contend that, to the Al-Qa'eda organizers and perpetrator of the attack, the production "must have represented...a flagrant display of Western cultural power" (114). "Shakespeare and jihad," they assert, "no longer appear such improbable bed fellows" (112). The production, according to Martin Walker, encapsulated

...the Shakespeare who stands for the Western invasion of Islam's holy peninsula. He is the symbol of the English language that he helped perfect, and thus he also symbolizes its steady advance into the mouths and sensibilities of a generation of educated Arabs. (qtd. in Holderness and Loughrey 114)

The attack, they assert, was not only an attack on a culturally diverse audience and theatre troupe (including many Western expats), but an attack on Shakespeare himself as an instrument of cultural imperialism and symbol of Western cultural and political dominance. Despite Shakespeare's hybridization through contact with other cultures, Holderness and Loughrey's analysis of the terrorist attack in Qatar claims that, in the eyes of the terrorists, Shakespeare serves as a dominant symbol of continued Western influence and oppression within the Arab world.

Litvin, however, argues that Shakespeare has outgrown his imperial roots precisely because of the kaleidoscope of influences that have created his Arab identity. This establishes him as "a global author rather than a British one" and prevents him from being "resisted or subverted" as an object of cultural imperialism or dominance (*Journey* 58). In fact, in the Arab world, as in China and other post-colonialities, Shakespeare was "globalized and naturalized" as an "ally in the fight

against British rule” (14, 75). The earliest translations of Shakespeare in the Arab world first appeared in the 1890s and, similar to China, saw a progressive evolution “toward ever more faithful and readable” versions (59). Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales From Shakespeare* served as an early source for Arabic translations of Shakespeare and the English version of the *Tales* was studied in Egyptian schools throughout the twentieth century (72). Thus, like other post-colonial nations, Shakespeare’s adaptation, appropriation, and performance became instrumental in the founding and growth of a modern Arab theatre tradition.

Arab theatre emerged from Middle East traditions of shadow plays, puppetry (*karagoz/karakoz*), the recitation of poetry, and public storytelling by the *hakawait* or storyteller (Zuhur 4). Nadia Ai-Bahar notes that the introduction of Shakespeare and Western theatrical traditions was instrumental in the formation of an Arab dramatic tradition, which previously did not include plays. In “Shakespeare in Early Arabic Adaptations,” Ai-Bahar explains, “The theatrical field being void of indigenous plays, the ground was open to the introduction of the adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays” (13). Much like other post-colonial regions, Arabs embraced theatre and Shakespeare in particular as cultural ambassadors to “...foster greater respect for Arab culture and greater self-respect among Arabs” (Litvin, *Journey* 48). Early engagement with Shakespearean performance in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt (the Arab world’s cultural center until its defeat by Israel in the June War of 1967), was part of an attempt to master “world classics” and to put Egypt, both literally and metaphorically, on the world stage (11).

Shakespeare became a “...battleground on which a native identity is asserted and an adult artistic personality begins to develop” (Litvin, *Journey* 55-56). While Shakespeare’s translation and production formed the foundation on which Arabs sought to modernize their theatrical traditions, “[t]he Shakespearean text” became “a means for discussing...diverse post-colonialities” (Loomba and Orkin 19), and, in many cases, it asserted Arab nationalism. Theatre took on a nationalistic impetus as “...encroachments of Western powers on parts of the Arab world gained momentum” (Al-Shetawi, “Conflict” 46). Influenced and inspired by the development of nationalism in West, Arabs turned to the development of “...a committed literature...to reflect the Arab national quest for independence and unity.” It was in plays that this committed literature first became apparent and the work of Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932) was its first example.

While writers like Shawqi forged a uniquely Arab voice for the stage, Shakespeare formed the litmus test of theatrical maturity for Egypt and many other Arab nations. As Litvin argues, “[U]se of Shakespeare mirrored that of many emerging states striving to prove their worthiness for international respect and political independence” (Litvin, *Journey* 50). The early formative Shakespearean productions in Egypt were both politically and commercially driven as Egypt strove to prove its cultural prowess and fill the seats of its newly formed theaters with Western immigrant businessmen (60). As Arab theatre developed and sought a position on the global stage, Shakespeare’s tragedies, and among them *Hamlet*, became the primary vehicle for the assertion of Arab theatrical prowess. However, these plays were often performed in classical Arabic to the point that even the most educated of audience members did not understand them. Such distancing effects as these kept the stark political undertones of plays like *Hamlet* safely tucked away and prevented allegorical readings of the play (50). Thus, early Arab-Shakespeare interaction was largely a teaching and cultural exercise, while the practitioners strove to maintain, at least overtly, an apolitical tone.

However, Arab theatre, and subsequently Shakespeare’s arabic renditions, have grown into vehicles for political engagement. As Sulayman Al-Bassam has noted, “Shakespeare’s world, with its mixture of autocracy and feud, conspiracies, adoration of rhetoric, and its feudal structures, has specific [political] resonances for the Arab world” (qtd. in Culshaw). Sherifa Zuhur similarly contends that Middle Eastern theatre and the arts “...have been highly responsive to political circumstances” (6). He further argues that theatre’s “vitality” is measured in the Arab world by its “...ability to continue to sharpen social consciousness or point out the abuses of political power.” Moreover, its political and social work was openly recognized by Egyptian dramatists who considered themselves as “mediators between the revolution and society” (Litvin, *Journey* 45). Egyptian theatre of the early 1960s, like China, served as “regime-directed allegorical drama,” and the government funded and promoted art “...that would ‘contribute to the objectives of a democratic socialist society’” (45, 93). Such government interest and investment in theatre, in Egypt and throughout the Arab world, indicates a general recognition of the power of performance to influence the masses.

However, public funding of theatre in the Arab world, like other emerging nations, has ensured that the overt messages played on stage further state agendas. The funding of theatre in the Middle East has generally followed the trend of moving from private to public fol-

lowing the various revolutions and uprisings each nation has encountered (Zuhur 7).² Due to state control and censorship of theatrical works, issues of “social realism or critique” were the main focus, and political theatre was, at least overtly, supportive of the ruling regime. State control and censorship of theatrical engagement emerged largely in response to controversial and often illegal uprisings or *coup d'états*. The ruling regimes thus recognized the stage's latent power for suggestion and strove to suppress theatre's political engagement to ensure that it may not undermine an already frail system.

An increased “intolerance of dissent” in 1960s Egypt led to “...playwrights and directors...cod[ing] their political suggestions in more subtle ways” (Litvin, *Journey* 48). By employing “historical, classical, foreign or fabulistic locales,” dramatists were able to convey political messages with greater safety. Therefore, Shakespeare, distanced from contemporary Arab politics by language, time, and location, emerged as a perfect vehicle for political commentary and engagement. Theatre practitioners could employ his works overtly as part of the ongoing mission to establish a rich and globally relevant cultural tradition within Arab nations; covertly, however, many productions began to take on political import.

Despite some instances of early drama censorship, until recent times, Shakespeare was assimilated with greater enthusiasm and less formal restriction within the Arab world than in China and other emerging Asian and African nations. *Hamlet*, in particular, was considered appropriate for Arab audiences and was continuously produced in various adaptations (suited to current social/political climates) in Egypt from the 19th century onwards. In fact, *Hamlet*, according to Margaret Litvin, is the most translated play (into Arabic) of the entire Shakespeare canon (Litvin, *Journey* 3). Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi argues that the reason for *Hamlet*'s popularity with early Arab audiences was three-fold: first, the supernatural elements of the play are reminiscent of those present in traditional Arab folklore; second, the theme of revenge expresses “a time-honored trait of the Arab social character” (“*Hamlet*” 44) and third, the melodrama of Hamlet's madness would appeal to an “ordinary audience.”

In the early years of its production, the play was often staged as an historical romance with Hamlet victorious against Claudius. These early adaptations also contained songs and musical interludes, as music was expected by the early Arab theatre audience. In productions

²See for instance the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 and “Syria after the rise of Asad” (Zuhur 7).

throughout Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia from the 1970s onward, Claudius was often characterized as "...the powerful Arab despot, while Hamlet was the 'Arab intellectual, a figure commonly portrayed as impotent when it came to positively responding to the miserable conditions of his country'" (Holderness 11-12). Hamlet's Arab evolution has spanned the gamut from Arab national hero to freedom fighter to homegrown terrorist. The play's progression mirrors the social and political climate of the producing nation, and thus maintains a contemporaneity often lost in Western productions.

The earliest recorded Arab production of *Hamlet* was performed in 1901 as a musical with a happy ending for the tragic prince (Litvin, "French" 133). This production's script was derived from mostly French sources and featured "heroic Hamlet in pursuit of justice" (Litvin, *Journey* 10). Tanyus Abdu's adaptation was performed "...in Egypt at least seventeen times during the years 1901 to 1910," proving that Shakespeare could be a great commercial success. In 1922, the first full direct English to Arabic *Hamlet* translation was published in Egypt by Sami al-Juraydini, and although his script was criticized in production as "too dry and stilted," the tradition of fidelity to the English original was, for many years, the standard of Shakespeare translation and production (71).

After 1955, Soviet models of adaptation and performance became prevalent as many Arab directors traveled to the Socialist bloc to study with its foremost theatre practitioners (Litvin, *Journey* 77). The Soviet influence on Shakespearean performance and interpretation resulted in an apolitical view of *Hamlet* until Grigori Kozintsev's film version, *Gamlet*, planted "the seed of a political Hamlet" when it was first screened in Cairo's Odeon Cinema in 1964 to commemorate Shakespeare's quadricentennial (85; 79). It was only after Egyptian directors tackled a handful of seemingly less challenging Shakespeare plays between 1962 and 1964 that "Egyptian theatre was deemed ready to tackle *Hamlet*, considered Shakespeare's most grueling play" (86). This piece was not, however, staged as a "political parable" (87) and critics of Sayyid Bidayr's production "call[ed] for more purposive, topical stagings" that would help "frame the pressing concerns of contemporary Arab society" (89).

Despite calls for a more politically engaging Shakespearean tradition, *Hamlet* was not used to examine political or social concerns in Egypt until the 1970s. However, in regards to the incorporation of *Hamlet* in "politically themed Arab drama," Litvin argues that it was not "...caused by any conscious agenda of postcolonial appropriation"

(*Journey* 90). Instead, Arab playwrights strove to portray emotionally complex and “politically topical characters,” which resulted in a “‘Hamletization’ of the Arab Muslim political hero.” Hamlet thus became synonymous in the audience’s minds with “the theme of earthly justice.” Litvin’s analysis portrays the modern Arab Muslim as a Hamlet figure, and she argues that it is because of the Muslim world’s familiarity with *Hamlet* that such allegory has found footing. Similarly, Al-Shetawi argues that *Hamlet*’s “...assimilation into the fabric of Arabic creative processes” is so thorough that its lineage and evolution is difficult to trace (“*Hamlet*” 60). *Hamlet* has become so culturally pervasive in the Arab world as to make reference to the play in creative or political discourse absorb a myriad of symbolic significance.

Litvin is not the only critic to recognize the figure of Hamlet as a metaphor for the modern Arab. Sadik J. Al-Azm in his *Boston Review* article, “Time Out of Joint: Western Dominance, Islamist Terror, and the Arab Imagination,” argues that the Muslim world’s simultaneous assimilation and rejection of “European modernity” has made the modern Arab into the

...Hamlet of our times, doomed to unrelieved tragedy, forever hesitating, procrastinating, and wavering between the old and the new, between *asala* and *mu’asara* (authenticity and contemporaneity), between *turath* and *tajdid* (heritage and renewal), between *huwiyya* and *hadatha* (identity and modernity), and between religion and secularity, while the conquering Fortinbras of the world inherit the new century.

Hamlet’s political struggles and vacillations between action and inaction became powerful metaphors for the modern Arab’s internal and global struggles. Bari Walsh, in her article about Margaret Litvin’s research, confirms the Hamlet-as-metaphor theory. She writes, “Hamlet’s problem mirrors a problem facing the Arab world: ‘to exist or dissolve, to awaken politically or to slumber while history passes by’.” Just as Jan Kott saw in Shakespeare a powerful metaphor for the Grand Mechanism of history, contemporary scholars of Arab politics analyze the political strife and struggle for identity in the Arab world in Shakespearean terms. Similarly, Litvin affirms that “...Arab cultural commentators see the character, and *Hamlet* itself, as a potent way to talk about ‘an existential threat to a valued collective identity’” (Walsh). Thus, *Hamlet*’s pervasiveness throughout Arab culture has provided not only fodder for theatre practitioners, but a powerful image and source of language with which to engage in political discourse.

It is the theme of political agency, according to Litvin, that has drawn Arab adaptors and directors to *Hamlet*. She argues that the direct link between “the contemporary Islamist” and Hamlet is “their politics” (Litvin, *Journey* 16). Litvin hinges the emergence of *Hamlet*’s political life in the Arab world on the humiliating 1967 defeat of Arab forces in the June Six-Day War with Israel and, particularly, Gamal Abdel Nasser’s death.³ Nasser’s death, she argues, was felt throughout the Arab world as representation of the death of hope for Arab unity. As this hope crumbled, early political adaptations of the play focused solely on internal Arab politics and removed the Fortinbras subplot (126). In contrast with previous archetypal Arab hero Hamlets, “The new Hamlet lacks power—most notably, *verbal* power” (146). Hamlet’s loss of language reflects the impotence felt within Arab societies after the June War and Nasser’s death. In Arab societies, “rhetorical virtuosity” or the use of “fluent and often artful language” was a sign of “competence, power, and manly virtue” (146), and without it, Hamlet is left powerless in a corrupt state.

Since the 1967 defeat, contemporary politicized adaptations often purposely separate themselves from Shakespeare’s text and instead rely on the audience’s familiarity with previous renditions and interpretations of *Hamlet* to highlight Hamlet’s new-found impotence. As Litvin writes, “The old play is allowed to haunt the new one” (Litvin, *Journey* 146). Arab Shakespeare adaptors create a dialogue between the new play and contemporary Arab politics with earlier, more faithful renditions of *Hamlet*, through the tension created by free adaptation. After the Six-Day War defeat, Arab theatre directors stopped attempting to address corrupt regimes through productions, but instead shifted their focus on Hamlet as metaphor for the now voiceless and impotent audience. Hamlet emerged as “...a revolutionary martyr for justice who dies confronting a repressive regime” (115). “Because his will was pure,” writes Litvin, “the outcome was fore-known: Hamlet’s conflict with the overwhelming corruption of his environment destined him for martyrdom.” Hamlet thus emerged as a political everyman doomed to fall under a corrupt and repressive regime. Like Zhaohua’s impotent Danish prince, his plight is effectively collectivized and he becomes a metaphor for the disenchanting and impotent modern Arab, battling fruitlessly against corruption of a magnitude that renders individual action ineffective.

³Ed note-See the Chapter 2 of Margaret Litvin’s *Hamlet’s Arab Journey: Shakespeare’s Prince and Nasser’s Ghost*. Princeton UP, 2011. Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein was the second President of Egypt whose policies and personality majorly influenced the Arab Hero Hamlet according to Margaret Litvin.

However, in more recent Arab history, the trend in *Hamlet* adaptation has seen a greater focus on the figure of Fortinbras as a foreign threat. Mahmoud Al-Shetawi argues that nationalistic literatures emerge in response to foreign influence and dominance in the Arab world and often portray "...the deteriorating political and social conditions of Arab societies because of foreign domination and point...to ways out of this decline" ("Conflict" 46). As Al-Azm asserts, Arabs, like Hamlet, feel their place on the world stage as makers of history that has been usurped

...by modern Europe *fi ghaflaten min al-tarikh*—while history took a nap, as we say in Arabic. I say usurped—and usurpation is at the heart of Hamlet's tribulations and trials—because this position belongs to us by right, by destiny, by fate, by election, by providence, or by what you have.

Hamlet has been woven into the very fabric of Arab political discourse and identity. His trial is so engrained in the Arab imagination that it is only fitting that productions of *Hamlet* have come to directly address Arab politics. Contemporary Arab politics has resulted in *Hamlet* adaptations which are highly attuned to both the internal and external struggles of Arab states that have erupted in the post 9/11 world. As Al-Azm and Litvin have asserted, the post 9/11 Muslim predicament resembles Hamlet's and has fueled free adaptations of Shakespeare's play that are timely and biting in their criticism of both the East and West.

The time is truly out of joint throughout the Arab world and as the ten year anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait during the Gulf War approached, Kuwaiti playwright and director, Sulayman Al-Bassam, envisioned *Hamlet* as the perfect raw material for a contemporary and politically relevant adaptation, *The Al-Hamlet Summit: A Political Arabesque*. Like his politically engaged Egyptian predecessors, Al-Bassam composed an adaptation that strips Hamlet of his language and sets the play up to dialogue with the "authoritative" renditions most familiar to both his English and Arabic-speaking audiences. The adaptation has been performed and published in both English and Arabic and has received both condemnation and accolades.⁴

Al-Bassam recognized the political nature of Shakespeare's original and relied upon his audience to recognize the struggle for rulership and the use of violence and revenge embedded in *Hamlet*. By locating his adaptation as a fictional meeting of Arab delegates, he un-

⁴Al-Bassam was accused on one occasion of funding the production through secret Israeli contributions as a pointedly anti-Arabic/anit-Islamic production (Al-Bassam 24).

derscores the political implications of Shakespeare's original, seamlessly aligning his work both with the original debate over succession and the possibility of modern Arab monarchical so-called "democracies." Although Shakespeare's original language was completely expunged from his adaptation, all of the major plot elements of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be correlated to scenes in Al-Bassam's adaptation, with Al-Bassam even attempting to mimic Shakespeare's original word-play in his characterization of Hamlet. The main cast of characters remains intact—Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, and Fortinbras—with one significant addition: the Arms Dealer. In the introductory list of characters, the players are designated as either "delegates" or "outsiders," the outsiders being Fortinbras and the Arms Dealer.

From the beginning, Al-Bassam situates his text as a commentary about foreign influence in Arab society and culture. By unfolding the plot in an unspecified location, the playwright establishes a universal commentary on the Arab world. This adaptation into the modern Arab world is a particularly apt reflection of the post-9/11 War on Terror and, in the light of the media's recent references to the political uprisings in the Middle East, the Arab Spring. Al-Bassam's play simultaneously focuses on Western societies' influence in the Arab world and the treacherous nature of Arab internal politics, where religious extremism and politics mix and conflict with deadly consequences. As per the play's conclusion, internal conflict between factions led by Hamlet, Claudius, and Laertes throw the country into civil war, and when all the major characters have died, the country is left for usurpation by an Israeli-esque force led by Fortinbras.

The Al-Hamlet Summit evolved out of two previous projects, *Hamlet in Kuwait* and *The Arab League Hamlet*, and was first performed for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2002, for which it won the Edinburgh Festival Fringe First 2002 for Excellence and Innovation in Writing and Directing. *Hamlet in Kuwait* featured a more recognizably Shakespearean text and traditional costumes, but it made use of site-specific cultural signifiers that linked the production directly with Kuwaiti history and politics. The cross-cultural aims of *The Summit* were in evidence even in this earlier version, as the production was also performed in front of 600 American troops in Doha. While *Hamlet in Kuwait* was more specifically attuned to a particularly Kuwaiti audience, featuring an exaggerated Claudius-Saddam Hussein link and video footage of Kuwait's burning oil fields during the Iraqi invasion, the adaptation's next rendition, *The Arab League Hamlet*, adapted the previous text into a composite of Arab nations to produce

a collective Arab lens and, while maintaining Shakespeare's text, situated the play in "a grotesquely pompous summit meeting" set in an unidentified Arab nation (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 86).

The play's political evolution was fueled by the penchant of Arab audiences "to extract political meaning" from theatrical works. "In fact," Al-Bassam argues, "...as a result of decades of censorship, they had grown to almost demand political significance" (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 86). By relocating *The Arab League Hamlet* into a summit setting, Al-Bassam was able to take further liberties with Shakespeare's text and introduce the character of the Arms Dealer, "...who is desperately courted by each of the delegates" (86-87). The Tunisian audience for which this adaptation was written "...immediately read the work as a piece of radical agitprop" (87).

While the production was readily recognized as political theatre by Arab audiences, when Al-Bassam's company played the adaptation in front of an invited London audience that included well-known theatre critics and other working professionals from the theatre world, it was viewed as "...little more than a 'clever' adaptation of Shakespeare" (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 87). Al-Bassam was dismayed by the reaction. He explained that he "...had wanted them to feel the same voyeuristic thrill that the Arab [viewer] had felt" in viewing and hearing the "forbidden act." Al-Bassam had wanted his English audience to "...experience the same sense of strangeness in familiarity" that his Arab audience had felt, but, most importantly, "the same degree of implication in the events presented to them on stage. (87)" This was not, however, the reaction that *The Arab League Hamlet* received.

Hamlet's familiarity to Western audiences prevented the complete inscription of contemporary and local import that Al-Bassam sought. To reach a cross-cultural audience, Al-Bassam realized that his *Hamlet* needed to lose its Shakespeare. To guide the adaptation that would become *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, Al-Bassam imagined a kaleidoscopic Arab audience constructing meaning of his English-language text and strove to maintain the "poetry, anger, irony and sorrow" of his Arab inspirations. "Part of the success of *The Al-Hamlet Summit*," Al-Bassam argues, "...was that it brought the English audience into a world so foreign that it was almost taboo" (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 88). *The Summit* gives Western audiences a sense of voyeurism in watching the dirty and frightening inner workings of Arab-West political engagement, and a sense of discomfort arises through the open revelation of Western political influence (and dominance) within the Arab world.

A component of SABAB⁵ Theatre's⁶ mission "...is to establish new spaces of action and reflection inside the contemporary Arab world and beyond it" (sabab.org). They work with ensembles of pan-Arab actors, and following the kaleidoscopic Arab model that inspired the text, *The Summit* featured actors from around the Arab world including actors from Kuwait, Syria, and Iraq. SABAB finds inspiration in "...the points of articulation—literary, historical, geo-political and imagined—that link the Arab World to a wider global context, and seeks to initiate new ones through a theatrical process." It was to carry out this mission of reaching across cultural and national boundaries that Sulayman Al-Bassam created his *Summit* and it guided much of the adaptation's evolution.

In September 2002, *The Al-Hamlet Summit* toured to the 14th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre. The Cairo performance caused "a riot outside the theatre" as "[w]ord about the play's political frankness had gotten around" (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 88). The show sold out and a crowd of three hundred gathered outside the theatre to demand tickets. Due to the large and increasingly unruly crowd amassed outside the theatre, the Festival Jury members had to be shuttled into the theatre through a "tight security cordon." Rumors began to spread that only Western audience members were being allowed in, and when the British Ambassador's convoy arrived, "...it was the last straw—blows were thrown, the theatre doors began to shake, police were called and people arrested, television cameras went to the ground," and the Ambassador was snuck into the theatre through a stage door. After the first performance of the play, the company obliged the raucous crowd by performing the show a second time with a midnight curtain. This was the English-language show's first performance in front of a mostly Arab-speaking audience and included simultaneous translations of the dialogue.

The initial reactions to this performance, both from audience members and the Arab press, were mixed. Some condemned the play for making a false link between Islam and violence and denounced its creator as a "Western traitor" (Al-Bassam, "Mad" 88). However, Al-Bassam was pleased that the majority of the responses, particularly from younger audience members, were positive and they lauded the production as addressing contemporary Arab concerns and presenting "...them to the West in a sophisticated and human form." The produc-

⁵SABAB's name comes from the verb *sabab*: to cause, bring forth, provoke, trigger, arouse, inspire, prompt; (noun): reason, cause, motive.

⁶SABAB Theatre is Al-Bassam's international touring theatre company.

tion received awards for Best Director and Best Performance at the Cairo Festival. In 2004, the Tokyo International Arts Festival commissioned an Arabic language version of the play and co-produced its tour, which began in Tokyo at the 10th Festival in February 2004. The production then toured to the UK, South Korea, Poland, Iran, and Kuwait. There was a revival in 2005 with tours to Denmark and Singapore.

Al-Bassam's motivation to totally jettison Shakespeare's language while maintaining his characters and the political spirit of the play is two-fold. Firstly, he argues that it was necessary to rewrite Shakespeare's text for his Western, English-speaking audiences because Westerners do not immediately recognize *Hamlet's* political import. In Brechtian fashion, Al-Bassam sought to distance his audience from the preconceptions of *Hamlet* that have rendered it politically void in most contemporary anglophone productions. However, Al-Bassam's choice to maintain the characters and much of Shakespeare's original plot line puts the production in dialogue with the version most readily recognized by Western audiences. Such adaptive practices, rather than undermining Shakespeare, resurrect those parts of the play's history lost through disuse. Secondly, like so many of his predecessors within highly censored emerging nations, Al-Bassam recognized the play's (and its author's) iconoclasm as a clever way to veil political commentary in sensitive Arab capitols. His inspiration, Al-Bassam argues, came from the "Elizabethan dramatists [who] used historical settings and poetic conceit to encode their political critiques and get past the censor of their day" (qtd. in Culshaw). The familiarity with the play in "...the Middle East...was a way around the Cyclops of the state censors." Al-Bassam was inspired by the play's original political roots, and Shakespeare's success as "...an innovator who took an old Elizabethan revenge theme and turned it into a tragedy of the total political process" (Gran 278). If the play's political import was to reach its Arab audience and bypass state censors, Al-Bassam needed Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. And if it was to reach his Western audience, *Hamlet* needed a facelift. In the tradition of global Shakespeare, Al-Bassam was able to breathe new life and purpose into Shakespeare's text, and through these processes, the hybrid tradaptation, *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, was born.

What *The Al-Hamlet Summit* became is a text bridging the gap between East and West, Sulayman Al-Bassam and William Shakespeare, the modern Arab and Hamlet. As Gershon Shaked explains in "The Play: Gateway to Cultural Dialogue," "Directors who try to bring traditional texts back to life...attempt to translate the tradition

and the language of the past into the language of culture close to that of the audience attending a play here and now” (Shaked 8). Al-Bassam’s adaptation succeeds in reinvigorating *Hamlet* for his targeted audience, and, in particular, breathes new political life into the play that creates a bridge between cultures whose shared history has been politically fraught. Al-Bassam hopes that his work can “...make its contribution towards building those frail bridges of cultural understanding that are so easily burnt by the dogs of extremism and war” (Al-Bassam, “Mad” 88). Theatre, Al-Bassam believes, can play a vital role in elucidating all sides of an issue and can challenge preconceived notions, something that Shakespeare understood “very well” (qtd. in Culshaw). Al-Bassam’s adaptation is based on keen understanding of Shakespeare’s original *Hamlet* and its original political verve. He also sees contemporary theatre as having a unique role on the global political stage.

Modern Arab history is punctuated by what Litvin refers to as “historical ruptures” (*Journey* 19). Beginning with the Gulf War and continuing through 9/11, the War on Terror, the Arab Spring, and the current turmoil in Syria and rise of ISIS, these ruptures have resulted in increased East-West tension. These historical ruptures lead to an existential crisis in the collective Arab identity that causes Arabs to question “To be or not to be” again and again. Despite Al-Bassam’s Kuwaiti heritage, it is the crisis of the collective Arab identity that prompted his decision to leave the location of *The Summit*’s action ambiguous. He explains that while “[t]he piece is set in an unnamed Arab country similar in its anarchy to Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion or Lebanon during the civil war, [t]he attitudes expressed and the questions raised [are]...common to many countries in today’s Arab world” (Dent). Through the ambiguous locality, *The Summit* captures the universal themes of “...the inadequacy of democracy, the militarization of the social sphere, [and] the failures of intellectual revolution” that permeate the Arab world.

Al-Bassam is cognizant of an Arab collective identity, and it is this collectivized identity that forms the basis of his adaptation. Such collectivization broadens the play’s impact and relevance to encompass the concerns of not just one Arab state but many. It also encourages the West to see the pattern of these historic ruptures throughout the Arab world and to analyze their effects distanced from the emotional and teleological pre-conceptions that come about when certain nations or figures are mentioned. So while Claudius may at times bear a resemblance to Saddam Hussein, Al-Bassam’s choice to engage with contemporary Arab politics through Shakespeare’s characters allows

the audience to examine the present state of Arab-West relations and internal Arab political unrest without bias.

Like Syria's Sa'dallah Wannus "...who articulated a search for an Arab theat[re] as a theat[re] of struggle and change," Al-Bassam argues that theatre has a role to play in politics (Zuhur 24). Zuhur would refer to Al-Bassam's employment of theatre for political ends as a "Brechtian impulse," for "Brecht theorized that the theat[re] can play a pivotal role in directing and changing a viewer's consciousness" (24) Al-Bassam argues that theatre provides a means of combating the "vacuous 'world views'" that are promoted by globalized politics. For Al-Bassam, globalized politics means that "[e]very Arab knows that George Bush said 'either you are with us or you are against us' and everyone in the West now knows that Saddam is bad," but such simplistic tautology "...does very little to increase dialogue between cultures" (Dent). Al-Bassam argues back that "...culture and theatre become vital [because] [t]hey permit complexity and difference and they permit the weak to be other than pitied and the cruel to be other than hated. Theatre challenges the accepted world views and breaks the mirrors of authority" (Smith 41). While Wannus makes a distinction between "...a theatre that is interested directly in politics and a theatre that conducts politics," it is clear that for Al-Bassam, theatre that is interested in politics cannot help but conduct politics (qtd. in Zuhur 24). Al-Bassam's aim for his *Summit* is to promote cross-cultural dialogue, and in the case of East-West relations, such dialogue is, at its core, political.

The Arab world is in flux as regimes crumble and nations struggle to rebuild, and as the Islamist movement clashes with Western-style modernity. Mona Eltahawy, in "A Generation's Passing Brings Opportunity," argues that as old leaders die out, the youth of the Arab world are granted opportunities for change. In 2004, Eltahawy wrote of an aging ruling class in the Arab world. She argued that "...the one thing our leaders cannot cheat or change is death" (Eltahawy). And while many Arab leaders paint themselves as sanctioned by Allah, she argues that "...when their day comes, there will not be an eclipse of the sun nor will blackness enshroud the people just because a human being has returned to his maker" (Eltahawy). Rather than buying into the fatalistic portraits painted by aging Arab despots, Eltahawy argues that the death of the current ruling classes will "...herald a new day tomorrow" (Eltahawy).

However, while Eltahawy's outlook in 2004 was decidedly hopeful, Al-Bassam shows more uncertainty. Al-Bassam's *Hamlet*,

like his Arab counterparts, is a character on the cusp of change. An old regime is dying out. His father is dead and his uncle, who has no heir, has taken Old Hamlet's place to herald in a "New Democracy." Laertes and Claudius become locked in a battle with Hamlet over what their nation can and should become, while the West waits in the wings to collect the spoils after civil war rips the country apart. Al-Bassam explains, "What interests me is that Hamlet looks at the dying days of an imperial order, the dying days of an aristocracy at a moment of historical change. The house of Denmark collapses because of the rot inside it. It is the dawn of a new moment in history" (qtd. in Jaafar). The death of the aristocracy, as represented in Old Hamlet's death, leaves the youth of the country fighting to form a new order while the West fuels the growing unrest. As Litvin asserts, "Hamlet straddles a cultural shift in which the social and moral system has given way before there is anything solid to replace it" (*Journey* 17). Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a play marked by uncertainty, its protagonist plagued by vacillation and, foreign and domestic threats. It is this uncertainty that drew Al-Bassam to his adaptation and it is this same uncertainty with which his audience is left.

Al-Bassam's *Summit* paints an Arab world poised between binaries in which Arabs struggle to carve out their place in the world. The play walks a delicate line that pits Arab versus West, public versus private, internal versus external, religiosity versus secularism, and "New Democracy" versus traditionalism. While its characters grapple with a rapidly changing nation, the outside world moves closer and closer, echoing a Cairo boy's chant in the hours immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks: "*Al-Kull mrtabit/Am-reeca qarabit*—Everything is linked/America just got closer" (qtd. in Al-Bassam, "Mad" 85). The external pressures felt by the Arab world after the 9/11 attacks are mirrored in Al-Bassam's adaptation. Fortinbras, the leader of an unnamed (possibly Israeli) Western force presses in on the crumbling nation. The movement of Fortinbras's forces on the border elevates the tensions within an already stressed political system. The Arms Dealer—played by a woman in the English language production of the play and an Englishman in the Arabic version—further the insider/outsider tensions by supplying weapons to each character, which fuels the growing internal unrest throughout the play.

The ghost-like presence of the Arms Dealer, the threat posed by Fortinbras's forces along the border, and the revelation of Claudius's position as the puppet of Western capitalism are central to the play's exploration of Arab-West relations. Al-Bassam argues that *The Al-Hamlet Summit* is an examination of the fatalistic entanglement be-

tween the Arab world and the West. The penetration of Western economics into Arab nations is at the center of this entanglement. Graham Holderness sees a vision of the inevitable link between fundamentalism, terrorism, and Western economics in Al-Bassam's adaptation. Al-Bassam, Holderness asserts, shows "Islamic fundamentalism and terrorist violence" to be "...the inevitable consequences of an alliance between native Arab despotism and the economic machinations of the West" (Holderness, "Introduction" 19). Claudius emerges as the prototypical Arab despot whose mission to modernize his nation is dependent upon Western finances.

Claudius's desperation to join the global stage, and therefore the global economy, as a formidable player is evident throughout *The Summit*. Like Shakespeare's Claudius, Al-Bassam's character focuses on establishing and maintaining his image as a strong and capable ruler. The public image he portrays is paramount in his bid for control. Disruptions to his carefully constructed public persona are met with immediate and violent retribution. During the celebration of the first meeting of the New Parliament, car-bombers attack the opening session and threaten a key pipeline. Rather than worrying about the attacks as a threat to his people or national stability, Claudius's immediate concerns are for maintaining an image of strength that will ensure the West's continued investment in his nation. He cries, "The investors are terrified!" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 52). The response, spearheaded by Polonius, is swift and violent. He tries to reassure Claudius by explaining that he is doing everything possible to uncover the perpetrators of the attack, including rounding up and torturing the Shia leaders of the People's Liberation Brigade (the political movement opposed to Claudius's rule). The extremist actions of bombings on the pipeline prompt an equally extreme government-sanctioned response: torture. In *The Summit*, extremism comes from all sides, and despite Claudius's desire to pave the way for a "New Democracy," it is clear that his democracy is anything but that.

As the play progresses, Claudius strives to conform to the secular capitalist image that will increase his ties to the Westerners who supply his weapons, and who he hopes will come to his aid as he and Laertes fight with both Fortinbras at their Southern border and Hamlet from within. While Claudius's identification as a Sunni marks him as a Saddam-esque figure, Al-Bassam avoids such direct allegory by maintaining an unnamed Arab state as the play's setting. "The Claudius character," according to Al-Bassam, "is a secular tyrant" and reliant on his Western "imperial masters" for both financial backing and approval (qtd. in Dent). Al-Bassam's characterization of Claudius as a secular

leader challenges Western preconceptions that often link Islam and tyranny or terrorist violence. Claudius's corruption is fueled by his desire for supreme and uncontested power. Additionally, while many previous Arab political adaptations of *Hamlet* omit Claudius's failed confession speech in order to maintain his image as the ultimate "opaque" tyrant and the play's sole antagonist, Al-Bassam's adaptation identifies the puppet masters of the West as the play's ultimate villain (Litvin, *Journey* 177). Al-Bassam's adaptation paints Claudius as "a puppet himself," rather than his more traditional role as puppet master. The true villain of the play "...transferred upstairs—to the United States, global capitalism, oil interests, and so forth," and Claudius becomes a monster of the West's creation (178).

While Laertes fights for Claudius against Fortinbras's forces in the south, Hamlet aligns himself with The People's Liberation Brigade (PLB) and identifies Claudius as an "imperialist dog" and "leader-by-proxy" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 64). Laertes identifies the nation's true enemy as the Western forces moving against the nation, as represented by Fortinbras's army. Hamlet, however, argues that the enemy is much closer to home. He recognizes "the stench of rot" hidden just beneath "the film of our perfumes" (34). He tries to win Laertes to his cause against Claudius: "The enemy on the border is the illusion they feed youThe real enemy is here, in the palace, amongst us" (58). Laertes, however, remains convinced that "[t]here will be no nation to fight over unless we defeat Fortinbras." Hamlet believes his country's future will only be preserved if they "...destroy the rot that devours it from within," but what neither man realizes is that the threat from without and the threat from within are one and the same.

The simultaneous threats that Al-Bassam's Arab nation faces, both within the nation's borders and without, have their roots in the West. While Claudius is a puppet of the West, Fortinbras is similarly painted as an agent of the West by the weaponry in his possession. Fortinbras's army is described by Laertes as having "...not a convoy, but a juggernaut, a 15 mile column of Merkava and British Centurion tanks" (*Summit* 52). The use of Merkava and Centurion tanks allude to Fortinbras heading an Israeli force as these tanks were used extensively in the 1978 and 1982 invasions of Lebanon, and as personnel carriers in Gaza, the West Bank and the Lebanese border. Both the Merkava and Centurion tanks have been used by Israel in conflicts with Lebanon as recently as the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

In Al-Bassam's footnote to Laertes's description of the advance of Fortinbras's army, he cites Peter Fisk's *Pity the Nation: The*

Abduction of Lebanon. Fisk's book explores the Israel-Palestine conflict and Al-Bassam's reference to it maintains the image of Fortinbras as a Western agent. The ties with Israel are further corroborated, but not explicitly stated, when, after Hamlet and Claudius have destroyed the nation from within, Fortinbras enters to lay "biblical claims upon this land" and proclaim "the dawn and the birth of the Greater Is—" (*Summit* 85). Fortinbras's final utterance, that could firmly identify him as the leader of an Israeli force, is silenced by white noise and leaves the audience to judge the origin and import of Fortinbras's invasion, and their own implication in the conflict between Middle East and West. Fortinbras's final words further complicate issues of religious extremism, as he is presumably a non-Arab, non-Muslim agent of the West. The religious impetus of his invasion thus broadens the audience's understanding of the ties between religion and violence and expands those ties beyond the stereotypes of Islamic fundamentalism.

In his yearning to become a global figure, Claudius unwittingly becomes an agent of the West and aids in the fall of his nation and its eventual capture by Fortinbras's forces. Claudius's alliance with the West represents the ultimate example of "Western political opportunism" (Litvin, "Record" 224). As Al-Bassam notes, Claudius's "Petro dollars" speech, an analog to Claudius's failed prayer in Shakespeare's original, "...is a moment of truth that moves away from the rhetoric of the political arena and where we see the man in desperate need of the hand that feeds him—and that he longs to bite. It is about the tortured relationship between the puppet ruler and his imperial masters" (qtd. in Dent). As the PLB, with Hamlet as their leader, gains further public backing, Claudius longs for Western support to combat the growing unrest and political radicalism within his country. He prays to the God of "Petro dollars," a composite vision of the West, and Western oil-backed global capitalism. He identifies himself as "...the poor, sluttish Arab, forgoing billions to worship you" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 71). Claudius is willing to hemorrhage assets and oil to gain recognition on the Western global stage. However, it is this struggle for a place within the West that has left his country easy prey to the machinations of Fortinbras and the Arms Dealer.

Claudius becomes a monstrous marionette of the West's creation, and in his time of most need, when the forces of Fortinbras and Hamlet threaten his personal and his nation's security, he is left pleading to an unfeeling God. He questions, "My nose is not so hooked, is it, my eyes so diabolical as when you offered me your Washington virgins and CIA opium. Oh, God, my ugliness does not offend you now, does it?" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 71). Even in his abandonment, he

wants to be considered part of the West and acknowledges a lack of identity without the West's approval. He pleads,

Your plutonium, your loans, your democratic filth that drips off your ecstatic crowds—I want them all, oh God; I want your vaseline smiles and I want your pimp-ridden plutocracies; I want your world-shafting bank; I want it shafting me now—offer me the shafting hand of redemption—Oh God, let us be dirty together, won't you? (71)

Like a victim of Stockholm syndrome, without the West, Claudius “cannot bear to be [him]self,” because his political and personal identity are entirely tied to his Western manipulators. Despite his characterization of his Western backers as false, treacherous and destructive, Claudius is dependent on the “world-shafting bank” of the West. Without Western purchase of his oil supplies and without its supply of weaponry and other support, Claudius's rule is revealed to be most precarious as the Hamlet-led PLB quickly closes in on the capitol.

When Claudius's supplication for Western aid fails—the nation is offered a UN peacekeeping force and a “summit meeting chaired by disinterested political figures”—Claudius is unwilling to accept that he is a pawn, even as he buys additional munitions from the Western Arms Dealer (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 83). He threatens the Arms Dealer to preserve his reputation: “Don't ever tell anybody I am a monkey, or I'll have you shot” (76). In his obsession with his public appearance, Claudius fears that others see him as the Western pawn he is even as he corroborates such a label by buying weapons from a Western arms dealer to fight Fortinbras, a force of the West, and Hamlet, himself an unwitting tool in the West's political machinations.

Even as Hamlet attempts to combat the puppet Claudius, he too falls victim to the West's machinations. Hamlet, like the rest of the play's major players, obtains weaponry, in his case bomb-making materials, from the Arms Dealer. The Arms Dealer refers to Hamlet's plight as “destiny” and argues that “[h]owever we curse and spit, kick and writhe...We nudge each other towards its manifestation!” (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 82). Ghost-like, the Arms Dealer paints a fatalistic entanglement of Western-Arab relations. She then reveals that pitting the factions against one another within the nation has been part of Fortinbras's design: “Fortinbras will be so pleased!” (82). Hamlet perceives his nation's total victimization to the West at the hands of the Arms Dealer too late to prevent his nation's downfall.

Similar to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Al-Bassam's Hamlet returns from studying abroad to find his uncle, Claudius, as the new President Elect and married to his mother. However, Hamlet's years abroad carry a new host of associations in Al-Bassam's timely adaptation, as Hamlet is painted as a westernized outsider upon his return. Claudius and Gertrude forbid Hamlet's return to school both because of the internal and external pressures that jeopardize the nation's stability and because of the threat posed by a Western education. Gertrude explains, "The University has long been the source of regressive trends amongst us; already it has changed you: your father and I have deemed it council to keep you away from such throbbing beds of lunacy" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 35). For the play's Western audience, academia is often considered a threat to established norms because of its penchant toward leftist and progressive ideologies. However, in a nation caught between the extremes of Western modernity and Islamic traditionalism, the university can pose a regressive liberal threat to a more traditional society.

Similarly, in the beginning of the play, the PLB paints Hamlet as a foreignized other unwilling to take up his charge to rid his nation of the threat posed by Claudius. They bomb the cities with propaganda leaflets that describe Hamlet as a "Murtad⁷ dissolute, gambling and whoring" with his nation's money "in the playgrounds of Europe" (43). The PLB, the leaflets claim, will take up Hamlet's duty to rid the nation of "...the evil forces of imperialism [that] have found a willing agent in the figure of Claudius." The leaflets further suggest that Old Hamlet's forensic tests have revealed that he was murdered in the same manner employed by the secret police under Claudius's charge, thus implicating Claudius's role in a *coup*. While the People's Liberation Brigade lingers in the play's background as the faceless ghost of propaganda, it is, unsurprisingly, the Arms Dealer who provides Hamlet with a copy of the propaganda that spurs his downfall. As the play progresses, Hamlet becomes the radicalized Islamist leader of the PLB, itself a backlash against Claudius's pandering to the West. While Hamlet believes that he is fighting for the best interest of his people and his nation, the Arms Dealer's role as instigator of Hamlet's radicalization is revealed in the simple act of providing Hamlet with the PLB's propaganda.

The Arms Dealer plays an active role in stirring the pot of growing tensions both internally between Hamlet and Claudius, and externally with Fortinbras. On the one hand, the Arms Dealer panders

⁷*Murtad fitri* translates to "apostate natural." It is a person born into a Muslim family who later rejects the faith.

to Claudius's lust for power: "Power suits you. You look like a King" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 46). Just minutes later, however, she proposes an alliance with Hamlet: "You have a great future, we would like to develop something with you, promote your agenda" (51). The Arms Dealer refers to a mysterious "we," emblematic of Western interests as a whole. While the Arms Dealer claims that the powers that be would like to promote Hamlet's agenda, it is clear that no one yet knows what that agenda is. Right before her offer of alliance, the Arms Dealer acknowledges that "nobody really knows what you're doing" (51). Rather than supporting Hamlet's agenda, however, the Arms Dealer's offer exploits Hamlet's personal and political turmoil in order to further an undefined Western agenda.

Although Claudius senses the Arms Dealer's ploy, with growing unrest within the nation and the steady advance of Fortinbras, he has no choice but to take on the role of a pawn offered to him by the Arms Dealer. While the Arms Dealer professes support of Claudius's new regime, offering assistance in the form of munitions and the media bonus of her presence at state functions, she also professes an agenda of mutual benefit: "Early bird catches the worm" (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 46). Claudius retorts: "And blood draws flies." Claudius knows the Arms Dealer has an agenda and that Old Hamlet's death and the war with Fortinbras have drawn her to the nation like a fly to carrion. She further intensifies Claudius's dependence upon her by pitting the image of Fortinbras—"so endearing, so forward looking, so modern somehow"—against the backdrop of Claudius's more regressive public persona to highlight what he must become in order to compete in the global arena with his enemy. Claudius responds at once with the proposition of a party to introduce the Arms Dealer to the ministers and sweetens the deal with a crate of Bordeaux (another symbol of the increased influence and influx of the West). Claudius knows that it is important that he demonstrate his alliance with the West to his fledgling nation's ministers in order to present a strong front against the advancing Fortinbras. It is further imperative that he prevent her from changing allegiances to the more "modern" and "forward-looking" Fortinbras.

Each delegate in *The Summit* meets with the Arms Dealer in turn, and after each meeting he (or she) comes away with a munitions box that symbolizes both his entrance into the political struggles of the country and his entanglement with the West. Their dooms, like Hamlet's fateful meeting with the Ghost in Shakespeare's original, are determined by their interaction with the Arms Dealer. Ophelia, like Hamlet, is driven to become a radical Islamist who dies in a suicide bomb-

ing. The harrowing death of the angelic Ophelia spurs Gertrude's realization of the inescapability of the political cycle: "No one is exempt. Exemption is impossible" (AlBassam, *Summit* 80). While trying to stop Claudius's onslaught against Hamlet, she too dies silenced, like Ophelia, and victim to the political cycle that Jan Kott refers to as the "Grand Mechanism" in which "...every great Shakespearean act is merely a repetition" (Kott 10).

In the final scene, when Hamlet's clash with Laertes and Claudius reaches its pinnacle, the Arms Dealer's role in the downfall of the Arab nation's leaders is made strikingly clear. Al-Bassam's stage directions, which reflect the English language production's stagings, state that as news reports fill the screen above the stage, each character in turn grabs the munitions box on his or her desk, removes the weapon within and moves to the front of the stage. As Laertes was the only character who did not meet directly with the Arms Dealer, he removes his father's munitions box to fulfill his role as "death's double" and Claudius's new right-hand man (Al-Bassam, *Summit* 80). Al-Bassam describes the scene: "Amongst these gathering mounds of information, each delegate waits for the confirmation of their own death" (83). As each character quietly awaits his demise, the patient stillness of the scene supports the inevitability of the play's outcome, and the incorporation of the munitions boxes serves as a symbolic implication of the West in the nation's downfall.

In a final act of manipulation, the Arms Dealer tells Hamlet that his father would have been proud, and that she is leaving the country as her work is done. She tells Hamlet, "I am happy to have been of assistance," but Hamlet warns her, "I will make you regret your assistance" (80). Hamlet laments that "[i]n the name of God I have invented a curse that writes the history of other nations in my own people's blood" (85). Hamlet understands that the civil war he is fighting is not for his people, as each side has been manipulated by the Arms Dealer, as the representative of non-Arab, Western nations. He realizes only too late that his country is in ruins because he, Claudius, and Laertes have become pawns in the history of other nations: "This perception of truth too late, is hell" (85). Hamlet enters his final battle with Claudius aware that this fight represents one with a greater force against which he cannot win, and that he has besmirched the name of God in the process.

Al-Bassam's adaptation takes *Hamlet's* internal and external concerns and dramatizes them as a play speaking "on behalf of Arab audiences" to the West. The play itself acts as a diplomatic mission

written in the language of the West (Shakespeare and English) and directed to both Arab and Western audiences (Holderness, "Introduction" 17). Because of its emphasis on Arab-West relations, the play acts as a *Mousetrap* in the Western world, but "[t]he cross-cultural construction of the piece create a sense of implication in the affairs of the other" (Dent). While Litvin argues that the play is ineffective in serving as a *Mousetrap* for Arab audiences and exacerbates Western stereotypes of Arabs, Holderness argues that the play has a

...capacity to generate dialogue across borders, dialogue that challenges and questions and enters reservations, but remains fundamentally an international conversation. As such, it offers an alternative, an urgently imperative alternative, to mutual misunderstanding and reciprocal violence. ("Introduction" 17)

Dialogue, however, is the only thing that the play offers as it fails to provide moral resolution. Al-Bassam claims that in the "...absence of authorial judgment...it leaves the spectator in free-fall and this is empowering" (qtd. in Dent). Al-Bassam empowers his audiences, both Arab and Western, to witness the reflections of their own roles in Arab-West conflict and avoids playing into stereotypical views of either side.

Although both Litvin and Holderness agree that there is a clear tie between Islamic fundamentalism and "the economic machinations of the west," Al-Bassam's failure to identify a hero on either side in opposition to these forces holds each side equally implicated in the violence that transpires (Holderness, "Introduction" 19). The fire within Al-Bassam's fictional nation, while fanned by the machinations of the Western Arms Dealer, was ignited by Claudius's greed and corruption. While the West toyed with the idea of allying itself with Hamlet, his increasing radicalization causes the Arms Dealer to abandon the crumbling nation to the ever-encroaching Fortinbras, himself a likely pawn of Western manipulations. Fortinbras's silence at the end further maintains the play's moral ambiguity as the eventual victor is never geographically or historically placed. Instead, the stage is laid for the continuing cycle of violence and political upheaval of the Grand Mechanism, and Al-Bassam's audience is left to search for a way out.



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Stereotypes, Sexuality, and Intertextuality in Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*

Suzy Woltmann

Towards the end of Alice Randall's 2001 novel *The Wind Done Gone* (*TWDG*), the reader is confronted by an epistolary inclusion: the narrator's mother, Mammy, writes from beyond the grave to negotiate a marriage proposal for her daughter. Mammy's voice is clear. As Cynara, the narrator, tells us, "...syllable and sound, the words were Mammy's" (162). *TWDG* retells the history of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (*GWTW*), along with the inclusion of Mammy's voice and identity as something far beyond being a mere appendage to *GWTW*'s protagonist, Scarlett. In similar ways, Randall gives voice to characters that lacked agency in *GWTW* and in doing so infuses them with complex personhood. *TWDG*'s countercultural approach signifies other literary works, especially its source text and slave narratives. The paper argues that *TWDG* intertextually parodies the portrayal of stereotypes and sexuality found in *GWTW* and highlights the African-American literary tradition through its use of irony, signposting front cover portraiture, and confirmation documents found in slave narratives. By doing so, the adaptation illustrates the continued haunting presence of slavery in today's cultural imagination and pushes against its ideological effects. This matters because Cheryl Wall, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Avery Gordon, and others show, African-American authors often rely on significant past works that constitute a sort of literary tradition highlighting racist discourse rather than analyzing the continuing and contemporary relevance of the horrors of slavery. The paper tries to modify the current theoretical discussion about postmodern adaptation which posits that reworking something that already exists intervenes in the previous political moment as well as the contemporary one to bring a new set of knowledge. This applies to *TWDG*; however, reworking and parody have a specific function that intersects with African-American literary criticism. This is essential since in Mitchell's iconographic text filled with nostalgia about the enslaved South, Cynara could not write her own text. There is no singular original she refers to, but rather a multitude of previous texts. *TWDG* responds in an original way to the romanticized view of the Confederate South created in Mitchell's immensely popular epic and to recurring race and gender issues in the years since its publication.

Randall's entire literary project is a self-proclaimed "unauthorized parody" that seeks to "explode" the mythos of its source text (cover). African-American authors often respond to racist discourse by

attacking “white racism through parody” (Gates 102). *TWDG*, on the other hand, accomplishes this by telling the story of Tara (here Tata) and representing Plantation from the point of view of one of its slaves thereby reversing the racist paradigm and benevolent paternalism set up in Mitchell’s text. In this adaptation, Scarlett is herself part black through a Haitian ancestress, and she and Cynara are half-sisters through Mammy’s affair with Scarlett’s father. This sort of intertextuality through “embedded signification” was viewed as copyright breach by Mitchell’s estate (Gates xxxi). Embedded signification is “revision through recontextualization” (xxxii), it creates something anew by referencing past works in a way that makes the adaptation become part of the original as much as the original becomes part of the adaptation (xxxii). Since Mitchell’s estate saw Randall’s choice to kill Scarlett as ending the potential for future adaptations, they took Randall to trial to prevent publication. Although the court found too many similarities between the texts to find Randall’s work unrelated, her claim for the social significance of parody (particularly for African-American authors) allowed for the novel’s publication. The case rested on the notion that *TWDG* is a “transformative work” (Grossett 1125). Much of this transformative work occurs in the novel’s use of countercultural voice that resists *GWTW*’s known narrative. *TWDG* democratizes the authoritative resonance of *GWTW* and demonstrates that there are other voices that exist in tandem with the canonical tale. These voices include marginalized characters from *GWTW* as well as a history of African-American literary work. This populates *GWTW*’s story world with a plurality of perspectives and intentions. By relying on a countercultural approach, Randall creates a dialogic text that destabilizes the notion of a dominant perspective.

While *TWDG* was published over sixteen years ago, it has been the subject of little literary scholarship beyond an insightful book review by Lovalerie King, who briefly notes the text’s practice of signification; an article by Nicole Argall, who defines Cynara’s journey as “Africana womanist” (231); an article by Bettye Williams, who argues that the impetus of parody “...is that the appropriation fuels a critical commentary on the original” (313); and a devoted chapter in Richard Shur’s *Parodies of Ownership* in which Shur applies what he calls hip-hop aesthetics to *TWDG*. Most other analyses of the novel focus purely on legality issues surrounding the copyright battle brought forth by Mitchell’s estate that sought to prevent publication of the adaptation. These responses use language from the court case and imagery from the novel as jumping off points to discuss larger issues of intellectual property, first amendment rights, the public domain, parody, and piracy. However, since *TWDG* has not been given much scholarly atten-

tion, it is important to do so because of the way it demonstrates African-American literary tradition and signification through the lens of adaptation. Although, the lack of scholarly attention given to *TWDG* is not correlated to its lack of popularity. The novel caused quite a stir at its (eventual) publication: it reached several bestseller lists and was even nominated for the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Perhaps the adaptation has not been given much scholarly attention because it reads as a literary criticism itself, pointing out historical inaccuracies, broad assumptions, and racist ideology permeating *GWTW*. In a 2001 interview, Randall stated that part of the inspiration for her parody novel was the pervasiveness of the phrase “I don’t know nothin’ ’bout birthin’ babies” which she often heard used in the Southern United States (qtd. in Kirkpatrick 4). This phrase is used by the slave Prissy in the film version of *GWTW* and Randall grew tired of hearing white people using it as an indicator of ignorance (4). While much scholarship has pointed to the racism inherent in the portrayal of slaves and romanticized view of slaveholder culture in *GWTW*, Randall tries a different tactic and revises the novel itself. Her writing invokes many specific moments from the source text but reframes them to give the black characters more agency and, of course, to add some titillation.

African-American feminist scholars argue that oppression takes place through racism, sexism, and classism, and that these categories cannot be parsed; and *TWDG* explores this intersectionality¹ through its main character, an enslaved African-American woman. *TWDG* reflects an ongoing historical dialogue about African-American experience, hence the paper uses African-American theoretical criticism. It relies on Hazel Carby’s argument about intersectionality, Cheryl Wall’s study “worrying the line,” Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s theory of African-American literary criticism, and Avery Gordon’s discussion of haunting in the sociological imagination. The paper uses the theoretical works of Carby, Wall, Gates, and Gordon in tandem to show how *TWDG* intertextually signifies African-American literary tradition. Carby claims that traditional feminist theory cannot account for the experience of black women in America. Since literature is inextricable from culture, the vigilant scholar must consider the variable heteroglossic interactions even within the same community (17). Wall addresses this heteroglossia to demonstrate how African-American women writers play with literary tropes to stake a claim in a new tradition that represents collective experience in individual ways. In blues

¹Kimberle Crenshaw headed the Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement that introduced intersectional theory

music, 'worrying the line' is an expression to describe changing the meaning or pitch of a melody; in African-American literary tradition, 'worrying the line' is like the signification and revision-as-process advocated by Gates and refined by Wall.

As Gates claims, signification and literary parody are used by African-American authors to "...create a new narrative space for representing the recurring referent of... the so-called black experience" (121). He argues that African-American authors signify and parody other texts to push back against dominant narratives. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates asserts a theory of African-American literary criticism that argues for the importance of signification or meta-discourse that involves doubling and re-doubling signs through repetition and revision (52, 57). He draws a parallel between African-American rhetoric and mythology to demonstrate that while this repetition and revision does respond to Western discourse, it also has roots in African history. Although African-Americans often respond to Western criticism, it also takes place a priori to this criticism. African-American literary tradition is not some monolithic entity being referenced, argues Gates, but rather a systematic approach to rhetoric through signification. Authors refer to other authors and their works and reuse thematic elements and motifs to create new rhetorical approaches to meaning. This extends Zora Neale Hurston's argument that "originality is the modification of ideas" rather than creating something entirely anew (42). Gates devotes an entire chapter to Hurston's acts of signification, which include formal revision of Frederick Douglass, Frances E.W. Harper, and Jean Toomer; later, Hurston's own work would be signified on by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and others. By referencing these specific acts of signification, Gates demonstrates the potency and continuity of a literary tradition long ignored in Western discourse. He gave a statement for Randall when she went to trial against Mitchell's estate, saying:

Scholars have long established that parody is at the heart of African-American expression, because it is a creative mechanism for the exercise of political speech, sentiment, and commentary on the part of people who feel themselves oppressed or maligned and wish to protest that condition of oppression or misrepresentation...and 'Transformative Uses'/ *TWDG* is only the most recent instance of a long and humorous tradition (Gates).

This assertion demonstrates the significance of the use of parody as a subversive response to oppressive discourse, specifically, for African-Americans.

Similarly, Wall also notes signification in the works of Walker, Morrison, and others, and argues that "...gender and class differences within black America complicate the color line" (6). She shows how stories by black women writers are negotiated intertextually and intergenerationally to recount past narratives. These writers show the impact of cultural memory through repetition, revisions, and allusions. This means that black women's writing, such as Randall's, is inherently intersectional and needs to be examined as it aligns with several literary traditions. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* argues that the living death of slavery continues to haunt not only African-Americans but also people from all races. Gordon shows how people are connected through complex personhood, a concept which "...means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward" (104). This entanglement allows for shared cultural memory and dialogic histories. In *TWDG*, Randall signifies this collective African-American experience by showing how slavery haunts the cultural imagination and alluding to other slave narratives.

While some² have found fault with Randall's zealotry (such as her choice to call *Scarlett* the tongue-in-cheek title "Other," for example), the paper on the contrary argues that zealotry is a large part of what makes for productive parody. Randall uses what Bakhtin deems internally persuasive discourse, which invites dialogic response because it is "half ours and half someone else's" (Bakhtin 582). Randall not only parodies her source text but also self-parodies via "extraliterary heteroglossia" through critique of the racist ideology set forth in Mitchell's view of the Reconstruction South (Bakhtin 7). *TWDG* does not make the argument that Mitchell's version of events is incorrect and only the adaptation provides the true, right story. Rather, it puts forth the notion that there may be more than one story operating at any given time and that "truth" is discovered through shifting individualisms rather than being a static category. Authoritative discourse gains its power from existing removed from the individual; it comes from no-place, no-time, and infinite power. Though we know that

²New York Times book reviewer Megan Harlan calls the novel, "sparse, flat and oblique."

Margaret Mitchell wrote *GWTW*, the distance in time between its composition, subsequent filmic popularity, and contemporary readings grants it a certain static power. Conversely, internally persuasive discourse invites dialogism because it is “half ours and half someone else’s” (Bakhtin 582). By rewriting an authoritative narrative, Randall calls for the reader to question their own notion of cultural truth and to consider the haunting presence of *GWTW*’s authority throughout the American ideological imagination.

GWTW is a vast bildungsroman that tells the story of charming but temperamental Scarlett O’Hara alongside the backdrop of the South throughout the Civil War. The book romanticizes a lost Southern culture through its focus on social etiquette, love entanglements, and a sympathetic view of slavery. Its main theme lies within the struggle for survival: Scarlett seduces multiple men and breaks with lady like tradition to stay alive and keep her land. In *TWDG*, however, the narrator Cynara shows a different view of growing up on Tata Plantation. Her mother, Mammy, still dotes on Scarlett (here Other) as she does in *GWTW*, but in *TWDG* this attention is seen as vengeful. Mammy cultivates Scarlett’s personality in an attempt to enact revenge against white men. Cynara is sent away from Tata because the plantation owner and Scarlett’s father, Planter, wants Mammy to focus completely on that Other without any distraction of her own child. Further in the novel, Mammy dies and Cynara and Rhett (R.), whom she has been having an affair with, move to Washington. In response to this, Scarlett drinks herself to death. While this moment is somewhat anticlimactic in the text, it signifies Randall’s true break with *GWTW*’s plotline. In another contentious move, Randall also fashions Scarlett’s love interest Ashley (Dreamy Gentleman in *TWDG*) and the prostitute Belle (Beauty) as homosexual. The novel is overtly parodic, but the implicit critique in *TWDG* works to problematize intersectional racism in *GWTW*.

Randall shows the plurality of voices in any given authoritative narrative and historicizes her characters in a way that signifies *GWTW*. The characters in *GWTW* refer to many literary works including several of Shakespeare’s plays and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and dozens of historical figures and events. In *TWDG*, Cynara similarly references her awareness of and occasional interaction with historical figures including Edmonia Lewis, Dredd Scott, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Tubman, Sally Hemmings, Francis Cardozo, and others. At one point in the text Cynara even goes to visit Frederick Douglass at his house. This appeal to authority through inclusion of real people who could vouch for her presence, intertextually parodies *GWTW* and

mimics the many autobiographical slave narratives that were introduced through someone else, usually a socially privileged white person. Cynara also demonstrates her familiarity with the English/American literary canon through a vast array of allusions including Calypso/Odysseus (13), Hansel and Gretel (37), Moses, Mary and Martha (50), and three of Shakespeare's plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cleopatra*, and *Othello* (90), which extends Scarlett's allusions to *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth* in *GWTW*. Cynara even references Daphne du Maurier's famous opening line to *Rebecca*, published just two years after *GWTW*, when she says that "Last night I dreamed of cotton farm" (13). The shift of discussion from vast English estate to a place of forced servitude is ironic: Cynara is a contemporary construction meant to expose the ways that slavery continues to haunt us today.

TWDG demonstrates this kind of intertextuality and haunting by problematizing several stereotypes about African-American women, in particular the Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes. Randall challenges racism specifically as it intersects with gender, embodiment, and sexuality, and demonstrates the oppressiveness of these stereotypes. By appropriating and twisting stereotypes about women and sexuality, she also responds to stereotypes about women and sexuality that take place in the source text, particularly those produced through an oppressive lens. Patriarchal narratives in the antebellum south elevated white female purity and prudence while casting black women into sexual tropes. They were either the Mammy, an unsexed older woman who was often considered part of the family, or the Jezebel, who was believed to have a voracious sexual appetite. As Patricia Hill says, the Mammy stereotype was purposely "...created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service" (qtd. in Sewell 310). *GWTW* helped to solidify the Mammy trope in a kindhearted but passionless flat character who tries to teach Scarlett the rules of courtship.

In *GWTW*, Mammy's only desire lies in her love for the O'Hara family, which is simplistic and unquestioning. She is depicted as old, black, and elephantine: she is "...a huge old woman with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant... shining black, pure African" (Mitchell 30). Yet despite her blatantly nonsexual portrayal, Mammy is oddly entwined with Scarlett's sexuality. While Lady O'Hara does not see through Scarlett's veneer of gentility, Mammy does, and takes it upon herself to chastise her charge when she feels she is behaving inappropriately. Mammy is also in charge of Scarlett's main means of attracting suitable mates—dressing in finery and lacing her tiny

waist—and dictates rules that Scarlett has to follow to properly enter society. Rhett recognizes her position as “real head of the house” (1212) and yet Mammy has little, if any, agency. She instead sacrifices her own individuality and sexuality for the O’Hara family, even to the extent that she keeps working for them after emancipation.

TWDG undermines this dominant narrative but shows how it still haunts by satirizing Mammy as an overtly sexual creature with complex maternal inclinations while keeping her title of “Mammy.” The juxtaposition of blatant sexual behavior with her sexless name parodies her positionality in *GWTW*. Here, despite her name, Mammy does not fit into the Mammy stereotype. By aligning a black mother character with subversive sexuality, Randall also invokes other slave narratives that accomplish similar projects. A shift in discourse takes place in *TWDG*. Mammy’s character is the only one to be still called by her name from the source text, but her characterization is vastly different, thus, problematizing any preconceived notions about what constitutes a Mammy. In *TWDG*, Mammy has strong sexual urges is sexually driven and not very stereotypically maternal, which plays on stereotypes that still haunt the American imagination. She purposely sets out to seduce Planter to produce mixed children. In historic depictions of the Mammy stereotype, she was a “direct juxtaposition” to the Jezebel and her largeness contrasted white beauty ideals (Sewell 310).

However, in a subversion of her character’s portrayal in *GWTW* and with the historical stereotype, Mammy’s sexual attractiveness in *TWDG* is founded in her blackness rather than denied because of it. She is physically everything that Planter’s wife is not, which is why he finds her desirable. In fact, Mammy’s nights with Planter were of “passion” while Lady’s were “civil rape” (Randall 49). This subverts the normative mode of understanding slaveholder/slave sexual encounters as non-consensual. It also satirizes the O’Hara’s relationship in *GWTW*, a passionless marriage with a 28-year age gap. Gerald O’Hara in *GWTW* is portrayed as a tender man who “...could not bear to see a slave pouting under a reprimand, no matter how well deserved” (29). In *TWDG*, however, Randall makes Planter somewhat monstrous, which shows the other side of the coin: that slavery corrupts absolutely and a person cannot be tender-hearted while owning slaves. Mammy uses her supposed love for the family to hide her secret project, that is, turning the Other into a revenge apparatus to take down white men. She and Prissy also kill white children born on the plantation to protect slaves from future slaveholders. This act violently rejects the attributes imposed onto her character in the source text and Randall utilizes this moment to show the many errors in assuming

truth in one authoritative narrative. Mammy refuses to adhere to the passiveness imbuing her character in the source text, and this refusal takes place in as shocking a space as possible. To take care of her black children and family, Mammy commits infanticide upon white children. Mammy's change from passionless caretaker to sexual murderer demonstrates an intertextual interpretation of sexual otherness. By rewriting Mammy in this way, Randall problematizes the portrayal of her (lack of) sexuality in *GWTW*.

Randall also invokes and complicates the Jezebel stereotype through her portrayal of Cynara and Belle/Beauty. Racist beliefs about black savages and their uncontrollable sexuality was a myth used by slaveholders and colonialists to perpetuate systematic oppression and control over black bodies. Black women were often conflated with hypersexuality and wantonness. Their sexuality was conscripted as inextricable from their race. The Jezebel was the "hypersexual, unrappable black woman" who signified the unrestrained lust of white masculinity (Leath 196). As Collins says, since "...jezebel or the hoochie is constructed as a woman whose sexual appetites are at best inappropriate and, at worst, insatiable, it becomes a short step to imagine her as a "freak" (83). The black women in *GWTW* are written as predominantly nonsexual, however, Mitchell portrays the prostitute, Belle, a woman who cannot contain her sexual excess, as "white trash" (12). The Slattery family is also portrayed as white trash, looked down on by the O'Haras and their slaves because they are poor and reside in the swamp bottom. The Slatterys have typhoid, which they pass to Scarlett's mother when she attempts to care for them. They are correlated with disease in a way analogous to Belle's sexual disorder. Since white trash are viewed as equal to or even below "darkies" (795), hypersexuality is conflated with racial dynamics. Further, while Mitchell does not explicitly include a black Jezebel character in her text, by writing such a strong Mammy stereotype she implies the existence of the flip side of the coin. A means by which the text responds to the Jezebel stereotype and diminish her "freakiness" is by writing characters who make use of the erotic to create more complex personhood. *TWDG* accomplishes this by rewriting Belle as a queer black woman and narrating Cynara's sexual encounters through her own voice, so that we as readers empathize with her.

In *TWDG*, Cynara has an ongoing sexual relationship with R., which would put her in the position of Jezebel's sexual excess if she were written as a flat stereotypical black character. Yet her sexuality here is something that brings her agency because she reclaims sexual embodiment from dominant white culture. At one point Cynara says,

“my body becomes my place to play. I become my own playing ground” (Randall 29). She locates sexual freedom in her own body even though it has been so long controlled by others through enslavement. While she is having sex with R., she closes her eyes and sees Other (Scarlett) (13). As a young girl, Other made a claim to Cynara’s mother’s breast that even her daughter was not allowed. Cynara sees this reflected in her later sexual liaisons with a rich white man, a representative of the patriarchal racism that allowed for the sexual commodification of female bodies. She writes of their lovemaking in maternal terms: “Sometimes when we are in bed and he’s sucking on one of my breast, pulling hard and steady so the pull only brings me pleasure, sometimes when he’s nursing on me, I smile, because he can’t get what he wants here” (16). This correlates with her frustrated desire to suckle at her mother’s breast and parallels her impossibility to nurse. R. “can’t get” what he wants from sucking on Cynara’s breast just as she could not get what she wanted from her mother. Her smile is a self-reflexive admission of this correlation. While the normative way to escape the Jezebel stereotype would be through the apparatus of marriage, Cynara ultimately rejects this in order to pursue her own sexual agency. R. asks her to marry him several times over, but Cynara chooses a life of being a wife-sanctioned other woman of an African-American Congressman instead. Marrying R. might have saved her from being considered a Jezebel to the remnants of slaveholder culture ideology, but Cynara demonstrates her choice to move past that dialectic into a more progressive paradigm.

Randall also shows how stereotypes about black women and sexuality are constructed through the ideologies of slaveholder culture when Planter says that Cynara will become a “trusted Mammy” one day (39). Though she is young and lithe when he says this, Planter displays knowledge that there are only two possible positionalities for black women, at least in the eyes of people like him: the Jezebel or the Mammy. Once Cynara no longer embodies the Jezebel stereotype, the only alternative left for her is to become a Mammy. This shows how stereotypes are reproduced through social rhetoric and the lingering effects of slavery. Randall’s employment of non-normative sexuality and satirical representations of stereotypes, therefore, does more than one form of work: it exposes problematic racist beliefs in its source text while also ‘worrying the line’ by alluding to an African-American tradition of engaging in the same process through signification.

TWDG also intertextually responds to *GWTW*’s exploration of the sexual dynamics of the antebellum south, which dictated that a woman who delayed engagement and sexual activity held the power in

a relationship. However, this power diminished when she accepted the suitor's proposal (Richardson 53). This courtship-driven public romantic life was heavily informed by the patriarchal expectation that young women defend their virginity and only acquiesce to the right man within the confines of marriage following a long courtship (53). As Mitchell asserts in *GWTW*, "...before marriage, young girls must be, above all other things, sweet, gentle, beautiful and ornamental" (Mitchell 56). It was the young woman's duty to exude these qualities but also to fend off improper suitors and make the proper suitor wait long enough to realize her worth. Sexuality and its consequences lay largely in the female domain. *GWTW* epitomizes this view of sexuality through Scarlett's interactions with men; she indicates the pervasiveness of these rules by undergoing social consequences when she "flouts" them (54). Scarlett learns how to act seductively, but "...most of all she learned how to conceal from men a sharp intelligence beneath a face as sweet and bland as a baby's" (Mitchell 58). Her charming qualities make her desirable to nearly every man she meets. However, she "...learned only the outward signs of gentility" (58), and has no interior gentility to support her veneer. For example, to entice Ashley after she hears about his engagement to Melanie, Scarlett flirts with every man at a social gathering, which demonstrates her ability to charm while also exposing her inherent problematic desire. Even her fantasies of winning Ashley indicate a desire to flout social convention. She imagines that he would ask her to marry him but that "...she would have to say then that she simply couldn't think of marrying a man when he was engaged to another girl, but he would insist and finally she would let herself be persuaded" (71). Scarlett believes in giving the appearance of gentility but does not feel the need to partake in it.

In *TWDG*, Randall intertextually satirizes portrayals of female sexuality found in *GWTW* by depicting several modes of non-normative sexuality. These include the implication of female sexual agency that would be impossible in *TWDG*'s textual predecessor, many interracial couplings, and Ashley and Belle as homosexual. Cynara thinks that she can possess the African-American congressman she becomes involved with, which means she may also be able to possess R. She wields sexuality as a potential weapon and means of entrapment, which shows appropriation of the normatively masculine realm. However, she simultaneously recognizes the intersections of oppression, she says that "One way of looking at it, all women are niggers. For sure, every woman I ever knew was a nigger—whether she knew it or not" (Randall 179). This shows Cynara's understanding that patriarchal oppression mirrors racial oppression. *TWDG* also includes a series of love letters between Lady O'Hara and her cousin

which allow the cousin, who is a black slave, to have his own textual voice, and in doing so intertextually parodies Lady's past love life in *GWTW* where Ellen O'Hara had loved her cousin, Philippe Robillard, who is "black-eyed" with "snapping eyes and... wild ways" (Mitchell 41). He, however, leaves her and she ends up in a passionless marriage with Gerald. Randall signifies Philippe's black eyes by making him entirely black. Cynara reads these letters and comments that it is the "...same story, different tellers; only the fact of death remained" (Randall 126), which self-referentially indicates this signification. If Randall is telling the "same story" as Mitchell, just with a "different teller," then it must still end in death (126).

TWDG also parodies *GWTW*'s representation of sexuality through its depiction of homosexuality. In *GWTW*, Gerald O'Hara tries to dissuade Scarlett from her obsession with Ashley by telling her that the Wilkes are "...queer folk... not crazy... but queer in other ways, and there's no understanding" their queerness at all (Mitchell 33-4). Here Gerald expresses his dissatisfaction with Ashley's bookishness and solemnity but Randall capitalizes on his use of the term "queer" to rewrite Ashley as homosexual. An astute reader of *GWTW* will notice the parodic intent in this palimpsest. Similarly, Randall satirizes transgressive sexuality through Cynara's homosocial relationship with Beauty, an old brothel madam. In *GWTW*, we first view Belle through Scarlett's parochial gaze. After Uncle Peter refers to Belle without using an introductory "Miss" or "Mrs.," Scarlett states reprovingly that she "must be a bad woman!" (Mitchell 150). Here Belle is a clear foil to Scarlett, who knows the rules for being a good woman but is forced into badness by circumstance. Mitchell constructs this foil at several points throughout the novel through linguistic and behavioral similarities. Scarlett is the "belle of five counties" (59), the "belle of the barbecue" (102), "a delicately nurtured Southern belle" (195), the "belle of the County" (219), and so on. Belle, on the other hand, is the "most notorious woman in town" (248); and yet, Scarlett wants to feel "superior and virtuous about Belle" but cannot, since she is "on the same footing" with her and "supported by the same man" (557). Belle showcases her wantonness through her dyed red hair, inappropriately vivid clothing, and her business as a prostitute. She represents what Scarlett could become if she keeps eschewing Southern belle tradition: calculating, shrewd, and purchasable. The boundary between the two blurs especially in the iconic scene when Scarlett dresses herself in drapery to seduce Rhett into giving her money to save Tara. Though reluctantly, Scarlett puts herself up for sale in a way that mimics Belle's more explicit prostitution. Mitchell seems to assert a naturalistic view here.

Belle and Scarlett are not so different after all and only the social environment that shapes them allows for different circumstances.

In *TWDG*, however, Beauty is more fleshed out than simply being a foil to another character. Randall rewrites her as a queer black woman who does sleep with Rhett and other men for profit but whose main labor entails nurturing other women. Beauty owns a brothel that she fills with girls she has purchased from slave-owners and has lesbian relationships with many of them. Cynara kisses her and another girl “for Beauty’s sake” (Randall 34), to thank her for her many ways of assisting young women. Beauty does not have to adhere to the religious norms of society and so “...didn’t wait for Sunday for communion” or wait for river baptism (23); instead, she creates her own religion simply by consuming, sharing, and cleansing each morning with her cup of coffee. She has a sort of mysticism and mystery about her as she “isn’t young” yet attracts suitors (23). Her dyed hair and painted face represent an attempt to pass as white rather than a visual wantonness and her reliance on feminine powers gives her a sort of potency not found in other characters. In fact, talking to Beauty causes Cynara to go “straight crazy” and to remember images of her mother, R., and Other (25). Beauty comes out by appropriating masculinity in a European fairy tale, Cynara’s dream reminds her of Hansel and Gretel, and when Cynara asks her if she’s “the witch or the grandmother,” Beauty replies, “Baby, I’m Hansel” (35). This intertextual twist of gendered sexual expectations further cements Randall’s recursive project.

TWDG also highlights the continued haunting presence of slavery in the sociological imagination by showing how contemporary literature can be used to call forth the ghosts of past slave narratives. The novel is palimpsestic, both as an adaptation and as a text written in the African-American literary tradition. The book heavily alludes to its source text and to many other narratives about black experience, meaning that the act of reading *TWDG* also implies remembering and rereading these past texts. It intertextually invokes slave narratives by employing several of their most potent rhetorical tools: irony, signposting front cover portraiture, and confirmation documents.³ These tools made slave narratives palatable to a primarily white (and often female) audience while still subversively exposing the horrors of slavery. Slave narratives have historically relied on a mix of visceral imagery that describe the horrors of slavery with some sort of appeal to authority or spirituality. Gordon shows how these narratives, much

³See Nicole Aljoe and Ian Finseth’s ed. *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas* and Harry Owen’s ed. *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery*.

like the discipline of sociology, combine autobiographic, ethnographic, and historic elements to further a political agenda. However, the political nature of these narratives required that they be not only believable but also consumable. To mediate this, slave narratives often told two tales: one that the author wanted to tell and one that was coded for a white audience. The slave narrative “forgot” many things to expose the horrors of slavery and its dehumanizing, objectifying nature. Simultaneously, it constructed the author as human and not too different from the intended audience.

The slave narrative meant to demonstrate how slavery perpetuates Otherness while contradictorily constructing the slave as sympathetic non-Other. The authors of these texts hoped to create a dialectic between reader and slave “...so that, in the best of narratives, the nexus of force, desire, belief, and practice that made slavery possible could be exposed and abolished” (Gordon 143). For example, to appeal to a white abolitionist audience, many autobiographical slave narratives use Christian imagery to show how religion was often used as justification for cruelty but also to prove that the author was civilized through religious indoctrination. It is an explicit act of double consciousness: such authors were appealing to the ethos of Christian authority while exposing its limitations at the same time.

Because of this double consciousness, autobiographical slave narratives often create ironic distance between narrator and text. There is a “dreadful irony” to how slave identity is still created within a dominant system of racism, classism, and sexism (Casmier-Paz 91, 98). Paradoxically, complex personhood is often located through a complicated identification with one’s oppressor and their space of privilege (97). Slave narratives often attempt to write a free (and therefore white) person’s story while simultaneously conforming to an identity handed down by the dominant class. The idea of the word “free” for slaves writing their narratives, Brewton argues, “...both draws from and contributes to the identity model of the white slaveholder...in an honor culture” (708). That is, their idea of “free” is connected to the idea of “respect” so integral to white slaveholder culture. Slave narratives were constrained by the ideological boundaries of white abolitionist readers both in what they would find believable and in what they would find not too different or too other from their interaction with the world. Davis and Gates argue that in writing a slave narrative, the slave writes himself into subjecthood (xxiii). Literacy was how “...the African would become the European, the slave become the ex-slave, the brute animal become the human being” (xxvii). To a slave, learning to read and write was, itself, subversive. Gaining mastery

over language was breaking the rules. By mastering the language of the oppressor, slaves who wrote narratives were able to fight for subjecthood in a society that tried to render them objects. All systems of slavery rejected the slave from belonging to the dominant hegemonic society, hence, the experiences people had while being enslaved were meant to deny them subjecthood. Writing their narratives allowed for an attempt to reclaim this subjecthood.

In *TWDG*, Randall capitalizes on the restraints and distance used in autobiographical slave narratives by taking an ironically different narrational stance. While still an ostensible act of self-fashioning and self-reflexivity, Cynara's writing takes place in diary form. She does not expect anybody besides herself to ever read it and thus gives an uninhibited glimpse into her life. As readers, we join Cynara in her sexual encounters with several men and women. We are privy to her darker thoughts including wishing evil for Scarlett and denying faith in God. At one point, she even claims that R. was her God for some time and still should be (Randall 148), but that she no longer believes in his saving powers. Cynara's irony is also self-referential. When talking about the power of reading and writing to create new interpellations, she says that "Othello's just a creation. Maybe just like me" (118). This gives a sort of postmodern existential irony, which is further established when Cynara angrily writes to "you," in her diary later in the text after the black Congressman reads it. "You" refers directly to the diary, but the sudden second person narration reads as a fourth wall break that also hails the reader as somebody with responsibility for Cynara's experience. With this "you," Randall seems to imply that we are all responsible for the shared cultural memory of slavery. By giving a more realistic view of an enslaved black person's thoughts than provided in autobiographic slave narratives, Randall mimics the ironic rhetoric imbued throughout these narratives but twists it for a postmodern audience. We as readers see how Cynara hides parts of herself and her thoughts from R. and other white people in a similar way to how slave narrative authors hid parts of themselves. Cynara writes an ostensibly personal diary that she later seeks to get published, which ironically shows how intimacy is put into circulation for money in a way that mimics Scarlett's and Belle's emotional and physical prostitution in *GWTW*. This ironic mimicry also shows how autobiographic slave narrative authors attempted to claim subjecthood but had to remain at an ironic distance from their work. It demonstrates how *TWDG* worries the line of these narratives and argues for their continued haunting presence.

Further, *TWDG* explores the power of linguistic irony. R. teaches Cynara how to read and write so that she can read her own slave sale notice and letter. The document upsets her. Even though Planter asks her new owner to treat her well, he still calls her a “thing” (Randall 36). She later writes, “I’m still playing pronoun games. Who is object; who is subject; is it me, or am I it?” (141). Haunting tells us that language is powerful and can invoke ghosts. This is perhaps best exemplified in Cynara’s refusal to call Rhett and Scarlett by their full names. Instead, she refers to them as R. and Other. The mulatto is “unspeakable” other (Gordon 222), but Cynara voices the unspeakable when she calls Scarlett, a mulatto in *TWDG*, Other. By projecting otherness onto Scarlett, Cynara names herself. She says “they called me Cinnamon” (Randall 1), indicating that the slaveholders call her Cinnamon but she does not accept this identity. Instead, she calls herself the name her mother gave her, Cynara, and only tells R. her real name as she is leaving him. She necessarily rejects many of the impositions placed upon her by her master, who is also her father, and in doing so affirms her connection to her problematic mother. As such, she refuses the enslaving patriarchal gaze, since she literally denies her father’s name.

Randall also writes the multitude of ways in which countercultural voices can enter the popular imagination by ironically disrupting, and therefore revising, normative discourse. Cynara writes that her thoughts and language often feel disjointed because of her fragmented identity. She puts them into some kind of order through her writing and through song. Cynara’s writing is how she ultimately begins a relationship with the congressman, who reads her diary and feels the power of her subversive words. Cynara accepts his reading of her diary because he can understand the reasoning behind her linguistic choices, but when members of the dominant white class attempt to understand her language she is defiant. Planter says he heard her “...making up little rhymes to sing” to herself (Randall 3). He attempts to control her song: “Cindy, come sing, come sing! Ain’t you my Cinnamon...?” (3), yet Cynara responds to this with reluctance. Her song is her own type of transgression from normative modes of discourse and when her enslaver wants her to perform it for him she goes silent, refusing to grant him that power. When Cynara is put up for auction, she hears her mother call to her in terms of pastiche (re)collected song: “Forgetting is to forgiving as glass is to a diamond, mockingbird. If that golden ring turns to brass, Daddy’s going to buy you a looking glass, mockingbird” (31). She alters the popular song in a way reminiscent of autobiographic slave narratives’ ironic revisions of hegemonic discourse.

Another tool Randall uses in *TWDG* that is taken from slave narratives is the use of a cover portrait to signpost something about its author. Cover portraits were often included in slave narratives to provide a “graphic point of reference” for the author’s embodied existence (Casmier-Paz 91). This framing gives the readers a point of reference for the slave as human. For example, even though Harriet Jacobs hides her corporeal form at the beginning of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to literarily deny her abuser’s sexual harassment, the reader is aware that at some point the text will have to come back to reconstruct the body as it appears on the cover. When the implied addressee (reader) completes the slave narrative, they are once again faced with the irrefutable personhood of the embodied author in the front cover picture. The picture creates a textual dialectic: it adheres to anticipated beliefs about the slave narrative by revealing the author’s race, but simultaneously subverts these beliefs by illuminating what would be read as the author’s civility. This follows in the tradition of sentimental literature front cover portraiture yet simultaneously satirizes it. By pre-figuring a specific visual picture and embodied identity, autobiographic authors transgressively deny the power of the implied abstract image of “slave.” As Casmier-Paz puts it, this is not the picture of a member of a “subservient class of servile human beings” (107). It is a picture of someone with a complex personhood.

Randall invokes Jacobs’ portraiture in her choice of cover art, thus, worrying the line of African American women’s literary tradition by referencing autobiographic slave narratives like hers. In her portrait, Jacobs stares straight ahead into the eyes of the readers as if to confront them frankly with her personhood. Her hands lie folded in her lap, perhaps to indicate that she is done with being forced to work. The person (assumed to be Cynara) on the cover of *TWDG* sits similarly to Jacobs, but looks to the side as if looking back not only on *GWTW* but also other slave narratives. The vector of the gaze signifies that Cynara no longer needs to directly confront the public about the horrors of slavery, but instead looks back to examine how past events can affect current ideologies. Rather than resting, Cynara is at work writing and reinscribing a problematic historical emplotment. Her glance backward and the way she seems to be hiding her words with one hand also reinforce the notion that her act of writing was meant to be a secret recording of her true thoughts. Further, Cynara’s portraiture is on top of what appears to be a leather-bound journal which is confirmed in the introductory “notes on the text” that declares it as a found document discovered among the effects of a certain “Prissy Cynara Brown” (vi). The placement of a picture atop a journal on the cover of *TWDG* creates a frame-within-a-frame-within-a-frame effect. This recursive

*mise-en-abîme*⁴ offers a framing metaphor for how literary “truths” come to be; Cynara’s process of writing is not a pure representation but rather an intertextual signification between and through texts.

Randall also worries the line of African-American literary tradition through her inclusion of confirmation documents including allusion to a slave advertisement. In Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, her assertion of agency and subsequent construction of a new identity is exemplified by her inclusion of the advertisement posted for her capture. This advertisement advertises her body as an escaped slave. It dates back to a time when she allowed herself to be defined by the oppressor; the advertisement is written by Dr. Flint and represents an embodiment of Jacobs from the past. However, the advertisement she includes in her text is an altered version of Dr. Flint’s original posting. Her depiction of the advertisement emphasizes her intelligence and includes certain details, such as the decayed spot on her tooth, missing from Dr. Flint’s description.⁵ This alteration indicates that Jacobs now has the power to manipulate dominant discourse and assert her own constructed identity. With this “ekphrastic self-portrait” (Blackwood 109), Jacobs conclusively denies Dr. Flint and slavery the power to define her. She portrays an image of herself as a woman, not slave; the subject now has a body to go along with her persona. It is not coincidental that this advertisement is placed quite nearly at the epicenter of the text since the moment when she decides to escape is the climactic moment of the narrative. This advertisement and depiction of her bodily form divides the text into enslaved and escaped, incorporeal and material.

Similarly, *TWDG* includes a description of “...words on paper, a bill of sale written out at the slave market in Charleston, a name and a price” (Randall 80). This bill of sale defines Cynara as a slave, yet her decision to include it in her narrative (also at nearly the exact center of the text) demonstrates that she feels some kind of power over her own identity at the time of her writing. While Jacobs includes her slave advertisement as a sort of exaltation of her escape from enslavement, for Cynara her bill of sale threatens to define her as slave. How-

⁴It is a formal technique of placing a copy of an image within itself, often in a way that suggests an infinitely recurring sequence.

⁵*American Beacon*’s July 4, 1835 “Advertisement” in Norfolk, Virginia says that Jacobs, “...is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address.” This ignores her intelligence and tooth which Jacobs includes in her revised advertisement.

ever, she ultimately uses it as a confirmation of identity, and her identity is further established through confirmation documents like those found in autobiographic slave narratives. These narratives usually open with a preface written by a white abolitionist of some repute who confirms the author's identity and makes a case for why their narrative should be read. This preface gives reassurance to potential readers that the author of the narrative is telling the truth about the horrors of slavery yet somehow has not been corrupted by it. For example, *Incidents* is introduced by Jacobs' white editor who claims that "...those who know [Jacobs] will not be disposed to doubt her veracity" (11). Similarly, Cynara's diary is prefaced with "notes on the text" written by an anonymous source who refers to Cynara as an "elderly colored lady" (Randall vi), thus, presenting itself as not-colored.

Another confirmation document included in *TWDG* is a synopsis of Cynara's medical history, which places the narrator's health issues as directly related to the success of *GWTW*. Cynara was hospitalized coinciding "...with the publication and movie premiere of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*," but otherwise lived a productive and fruitful life, "...frustrated only by her inability to get [her] diary published" (vi). By correlating the canonical text's notoriety with illness and frustration, Randall provides a useful metaphor of racist ideology as a sickness. The form of Cynara's text as a diary directly contrasts that of *GWTW* which is told from the third-person omniscient point of view and grants the narrator authoritative voice. We as readers do not question the story's events as we read because we are given no reason to believe that the narrator would mislead us. While Randall's court case rested primarily on the notion of parody as transformative, this inclusion seems a direct knock to Mitchell's slaveholder-sympathizer opus while also somehow calling into play the question of veracity: Randall implies that Mitchell's version of events is incorrect, but the events themselves still happened. At the same time, the reality of Cynara's diary is also corroborated by the introduction's assertion that pressed into it were a picture, a fabric token, and the poem by Ernest Dowson that inspired the title of *GWTW*. This series of confirmation documents reflects the intertextual recursive theme of Randall's work. The material items in *TWDG* represent a sort of cultural production that confirms Cynara's version of a tale we as Americans have come to accept at a cultural, ideological level while simultaneously calling to mind the multitude of autobiographic slave narratives that were written before this novel and continue to haunt our cultural memory.

Finally, Randall's revisionary intertextual technique parodies *GWTW* and invokes the African-American literary tradition of past slave narratives through Cynara's own sense of being haunted. Randall writes Cynara's version of the story to remind us that the ghosts of slavery still haunt us today; this is reinforced through Cynara's own experiences with this haunting. Sometimes these ghosts are positive; for instance, Cynara can make Mammy's recipes from memory (Randall 29), demonstrating the staying power of a woman no longer alive. Cynara says she is "more afraid" of her past with every passing day (30) and that she thinks of her mother more "as the days pass" (100). This indicates Cynara knows that the past is never actually over and that we are called upon to reckon with slavery's ghosts through reading. As a freed slave, Cynara does not have the option of looking the other way when slavery's trauma continues to haunt her. Conversely, R. "doesn't choose to remember" as he would rather not see the residual trauma caused by slavery (30). Mirroring Randall's own project, Cynara ultimately takes on the purpose of reminding her oppressors about this trauma. After Mammy dies, Other tries to mourn with her but is frightened off when Cynara says "boo" (44). This scene alludes to the "boo" attributed to ghosts especially as it takes place on Mammy's literal deathbed. Later, after Other drinks herself to death, Cynara thinks of her as a perpetually youthful ghost whose beauty will bloom "forever" in R.'s mind in a way that makes her live "forever" (100). By making the slaveholder occupy a haunting position, Randall ironically equates a memory of beauty that will haunt forever with a memory of ugliness that will haunt forever.

TWDG is just one example of how the intertextual nature of neo-slave narratives and adaptations can showcase the ubiquitous nature of oppressive ideologies. Because of the difficulties in penetrating dominant (white) discourse, African-Americans have often turned to different forms of rhetoric to preserve traditions, rituals, and legends (Donaldson 267). This rhetoric often uses irony, wordplay, signification, and lyricism to subvert authoritative discourse into language the oppressed could wield (Donaldson 267). Texts like *TWDG* that write back to dominant discourse find silences in their literature and "...retrieve them from the realm of the forgotten and give them voice" (Donaldson 268). In fact, Donaldson and others particularly identify *GWTW* as a "master narrative" that defines popular ideology regarding the antebellum South and slavery. There are other neo-slave narratives that write against this tradition, such as Edward P. Jones' *The Known World* and Valerie Martin's *Property*. In her unauthorized parody of *GWTW*, however, Randall more explicitly demonstrates how counter-cultural dialogue and the reclaiming of voice can destabilize racist

thought. Simultaneously, the novel shows how pervasive the residual trauma of slavery is in the American cultural imagination. *TWDG* parodies stereotypes and portrayals of sexuality found in its source text and alludes to slave narratives through irony, front cover portraiture, and confirmation documents. In doing so, it problematizes embedded cultural beliefs depicted in its source text that still exist today. This kind of problematizing is necessary if we are to ever move past hateful racist rhetoric and inequality. By pointing out the flaws of *GWTW* and satirizing them, authors like Randall provide a call for action to readers to introspect their own interpellations and then challenge oppression.



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Liminality and Bachelardian Space in Herbert Mason's *Gilgamesh*

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Gilgamesh is often read as an epic poem that relates Gilgamesh's quest for immortality after suffering the loss of a friend in terms of 'a hero's journey.'¹ The objective of Gilgamesh's quest, given that he is a hybrid figure, can be seen in terms of his gaining a sense of humanity. If human nature has a propensity toward egoism, we can see his transformation from unwieldy tyrant of Uruk to fortifier of the city as a way of bringing his humanity into proper balance with his society. At the same time he is in part divine, and if this leads him on an untenable search for immortality, we can see his prioritization of material legacy by the end of the epic as a way of bringing his divinity into balance with his humanity. In terms of a hero's character, Gilgamesh exemplifies a concordance between inner virtue and outward manifestation that much later thinkers, such as Plato and Confucius, elaborate in their own writings—a notion of justice rippling through the heavens, bringing the earth into planetary harmony, down to the organization of the state and physical body. The hero in this sense is not someone who merely embodies virtues; he is a microcosm of the virtues felt throughout the universe. In this sense virtue lives in two spaces—the space the individual body inhabits, and the larger space that belongs to the social order and beyond.

Yet, the tried and true explorations of *Gilgamesh* as an epic poem about a hero's journey—social and historical interest notwithstanding—tend to overshadow the project of examining the poetic language necessary to convey the character's fractured psyche—a project having its own merits in view of the fact that *Gilgamesh* has continued to speak to humanity for over a millennium. Thus, the present paper is less concerned with exploring the changes Gilgamesh's character undergoes that round him out as a hero, but with the prior question of how it is possible for poetic language and image to express such changes given the instability of the subject, and how he is able to survive the tremendous loss of his friend. Arguably, poetic image flexes

¹The most complete version of the epic was composed during the Middle Babylonian Period (c.1600–c.1155 BC), and concerns the exploits of a historical Gilgamesh, the posthumously deified ruler of the ancient Sumerian city-state of Uruk in the Early Dynastic Period (c.2900–2350 BC.) (Black and Green, 1992). I will assume that the reader is already familiar with the epic and its intriguing history; the main focus of this paper will be its poetic and existential themes.

between particular and universal, and often in the case of elegiac image, individual grief and communal sympathy. The image of Gilgamesh sailing naked across the river of death comes to mind. Elaborating *how* poetic image and word does so in the epic of *Gilgamesh* is the task of this paper.² Drawing on the work of Gaston Bachelard, I argue that *Gilgamesh* provides a case study of the way in which poetic image—even when stripped entirely of its particulars, facilitates the transformation between the two ‘kinds’ of spaces that Bachelard elaborates in *The Poetics of Space*: external, physical space and interior, psychological space. In particular, if we consider Gilgamesh as a liminal figure³ navigating the loss of his friend Enkidu, we can see some of the ways in which Bachelardian spaces are expressed through poetic word and image in *Gilgamesh*.

Since the intensity of this expression arguably depends on the character of the personal loss involved, the paper will ‘begin with a few remarks characterizing the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Their relationship can be seen as one founded in Hegelian recognition. It will then ‘turn to a prominent anthropological view of what it means for a liminal figure such as Gilgamesh to proceed through a liminal state. Describing these characters in a way that is existential and anthropological at the outset will help ensure that we do not psychologize the poetic lyricism Herbert Mason⁴ brings to his rendering of the text, as is important to a Bachelardian interpretation of any text. With those pieces in place, some ways might be considered in which ‘Gilgamesh’s journey is expressive of Bachelardian spaces.’⁵

²I do not draw a firm distinction between poetic word and image; after all, any image, used in poetry or not, is always somewhat abstract.

³I use the terms ‘liminal figure’ or ‘liminal persona’ equivalently to refer to any being who passes through a ‘liminal state,’ where ‘liminal state’ is a term I later define following the anthropological work of Victor Turner. Likewise the term ‘liminal passage’ is partly defined in terms of ‘liminal state,’ as it can be envisioned as a sequence of liminal states that the liminal figure passes through. Finally I use the term ‘liminal space’ to signify the relations that the liminal figure stands in who is part of an as-yet incomplete liminal passage.

⁴This paper relies on Herbert Mason’s ‘verse narrative’ of the epic of Gilgamesh for two reasons: a) It finds Mason’s translation to be the most lyrical version of the epic, even if not the most historically accurate, so in this way Mason’s version coheres with the paper’s overall supposition that lyric poetry as such can mitigate forms of loss, and b) this version of Gilgamesh carries a sense of the translator’s own personal loss as he indicates in the afterword of the text.

⁵The paper revolves around the assumption that in order to first understand the depth of Gilgamesh’s loss we need to understand the depth of his friendship with Enkidu. This relationship is characterized in specifically Hegelian terms for two reasons. First, as indicated already, paper utilizes Bachelard in analyzing Gilgamesh’s liminal passage, and any Bachelardian analysis eschews explaining the poetic in terms of the

Much ink has been spilt over importing Hegel into the service of literary analysis, but some of the ideas relevant to this paper have been explained here. One such idea is that the self cannot exist in complete separation from the other; one's sense of consciousness is only understood in relation to other consciousnesses: 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it exists in and for itself for another, i.e. inasmuch as it is *acknowledged*' (Hegel 178). Following Charles Taylor's explication of Hegel, two ideas will be useful for our purposes. First, Hegelian recognition is a relational expression. It always means 'recognition as human,' where humanity is perceived as a culturally specific concept. Second, Hegelian dialectic concerns how 'recognition' with the other is the basis for self-identity—in both constitutive and epistemic sense. Discussing 'recognition' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Taylor describes the process by which self-identity is informed by recognition:

Here we come to the basic idea...that men seek and need the recognition of their fellows. The subject depends on external reality. If he is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to him what he is. In the dialectic of desire, we are faced with foreign objects which we then destroy and incorporate; what is needed is a reality which will remain, and yet will annul its own foreignness, in which the subject can nevertheless find himself. And this he finds in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being (Anerkennen) (Taylor 152).

Recognition, in this sense, as it forms between human beings, is the first step on the way to achieving a 'total state of integrity' in which human beings see themselves as living in and part of a universe that is an expression of themselves. It is important to bear in mind that the dialectic of control is not one that arises out of psychological need; it is rather existential in character, pertaining to the conditions for the formation of a unified self or 'self-consciousness.' In *Gilgamesh*, ar-

psychological. So to proffer, say, a contemporary theory of friendship with its psychological baggage to characterize the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu would be out of place. Moreover, the notion of 'recognition' that Hegel develops is existential in character and if the existential is a more fundamental explanatory notion than the psychological then this approach is arguably less anachronistic than other alternatives. Secondly, the text of Victor Turner is meant to introduce the notion of liminality in the anthropological sense that arguably applies to cultures like that of the historical Gilgamesh, and—as we will see—provides a tangible model upon which the character of Gilgamesh can become 'invisible' and which aptly complements the development of Bachelardian space in Mason's poetic treatment of the epic.

guably both shades of recognition manifest: recognition between Gilgamesh and Enkidu as approximating a state of total integrity, and recognition between them as a meaningful construal of Babylonian social norms.’

Abusch and Mandel have written extensively on just how various versions of *Gilgamesh* represent Enkidu’s passage into civilization, Shamash’ ‘socializing’ influence, and so on. But suppose we dwell a little while in Enkidu’s pre-human state itself. Could it be envisioned as a sort of pre-lapsarian condition where Enkidu (or, at any rate, the animal part of his nature) already experiences a sort of total integrity? Considering how Mason renders Enkidu’s enlightened simplicity:

Enkidu was ignorant of oldness.
He ran with the animals,
Drank at their springs,
Not knowing fear or wisdom.
He freed them from the traps
The hunters set. (Mason 16)

Here, a depiction of that ‘blissful ignorance’ which has always been the bugbear of philosophy can be seen, except that Enkidu’s lack of wisdom is wedded inseparably to a form of solidarity with the animals—and this, in spite of his own nature as a hybrid being: ‘Enkidu was an animal and a man’ (Mason 15). Here, there is no perceived contradiction between ‘man’ and ‘animal’; just as in a state of total integrity there would be no perceived contradiction between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other.’ This is not to suggest an identification between abstract oneness with the universe and total integrity—‘animal’ and ‘man’ are still salient differences, even if they are as-yet unperceived for Enkidu.

But that Enkidu can see himself in the animals with which he shares his nature is indicative of his having realized partial integrity. Similarly, his is a nature that matches Gilgamesh’s nature *as a hybrid*⁶—he is the meteor of Anu that Gilgamesh was unable to lift—but because his own nature obeys a liminal logic that lies beneath his self-consciousness it is not perceived as a ‘problem.’ It is not perceived at

⁶That is to say, even if the parts differ that constitute each of their hybrid natures. One could say that the two have a bond in that they can relate ‘as other’—Enkidu differing in nature from the rest of the animals, and Gilgamesh differing in nature from the rest of his society. This difference in otherness is unperceived at the outset, but it is arguably still ontologically relevant to the recognition they later experience.

all. Only later, upon gaining a perception of that human part of himself, after the joint battle against the Bull of Heaven wherein he recognizes his own mortality, does he arrive at a terrible wisdom. In one of the more heart-wrenching sections of the text, as Enkidu is dying of his wounds, Mason echoes the initial life-rhythm of the Steppe:

Everything had life to me, he heard Enkidu murmur,
The sky, the storm, the earth, water, wandering,
The moon and its three children, salt, even my hand
had life... (Mason 48)

As is clear from the even placement of natural expressions in the second line, the difference between Enkidu's state of consciousness prior to the recognition of his humanity and after he has gained it, is a difference of valuation. The world is value-laden, presenting itself to an unformed consciousness in the first instance as animated. This is to some extent a Blakean idea—that the gods (the moon and its children) are stolen out of nature, and part of the poet's task ought to be to restore them to their proper place. So 'we see a desperate attempt in Enkidu's lyric murmuring to recall the gods and earth to being, or 'life.' But does the emphasis on Enkidu's mortality mean that he's been deprived in his short life of experiencing the better parts of humanity?

Having seen some indication of Enkidu's natural state prior to recognition, the paper moves on to underscore another passage that illustrates the kind of recognition Enkidu and Gilgamesh find through one another. The passage in question is the one where they meet in the marketplace (Enkidu goes on Shamash's request) and engage in a fight. We saw from our general discussion of Hegelian recognition that it isn't only a matter of an individual self-consciousness striving for higher levels of awareness (with the aim of total integrity), rather it is a dynamic between two persons who seek recognition as humans through one another, where 'human' is a culturally situated concept. Since strength was seen as a chief virtue in the Babylonian world,⁷ as well as most other ancient societies, it is reasonable to suggest that the Hegelian dialectic can sometimes work out on a purely physical plane.⁸

⁷Reflect on Gilgamesh's mental tiredness at the beginning of the epic, his petty jealousy, his inability to lift the meteor of Anu, and so on. Strength would be a show of success in these areas—a sign not only of his advancing to be a proper ruler but also a 'proper' human being according to the prevailing social norms.

⁸This occurs elsewhere in epic literature as well, e.g. in the wrestling contests in the Norse epic, *Grettir the Strong*.

The context for Gilgamesh and Enkidu's meeting at the marketplace is that it is a place where brides and other goods are exchanged, and as King, Gilgamesh has a 'right' to sleep with the 'virgin' brides. So, there is a further layer of recognition at work between Gilgamesh and his own society—which recognizes him partly on account of the fact that no one challenges him regarding the aforesaid right. This is important to bear in mind, in connection with the broad, inter-personal notion of 'recognition.' Since Enkidu exists outside society—he has to be socialized, by degrees—from learning what to wear, what to drink with the shepherds, who may be seen as facilitating this process only because they themselves are closer to the animal world than others—his challenge to Gilgamesh represents a challenge to the meaningfulness of this particular rite, as well as an *alternative source* of recognition for the commoners of Uruk. Much could be made of this relationship, especially with regard to the broader question of how we do ground any social practice, but the paper focuses on the theme of personal loss.

In connection to physically expressed recognition, consider how Mason renders the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. First we can see a hint of recognition from the people that Enkidu is 'stealing' from Gilgamesh: 'Where the bride was to be chosen, Enkidu stood/Blocking his way. Gilgamesh looked at the stranger/ And listened to his people's shouts of praise/For someone other than himself' (Mason, 23). In the description of their battle we see animalistic imagery that is reflective of Enkidu's nature:

They fell like wolves
At each other's throats,
Like bulls bellowing,
And horses gasping for breath
That have run all day
Desperate for rest and water...
A child screamed at their feet
That danced the dance of life
which hovers close to death. (Mason 24)

But as was foretold by the meteor that Gilgamesh would be unable to budge, neither Gilgamesh nor Enkidu emerges as victor: 'And a quiet suddenly fell on them/When Gilgamesh stood still Exhausted' (Mason 24). Mason renders this shared moment of recognition rather explicitly:

...He turned to Enkidu who leaned

Against his shoulder and looked into his eyes
And saw himself in the other, just as Enkidu saw
Himself in Gilgamesh (Mason 24).

Taken literally, one can imagine a stare-down in which each is poised to make another attempt at a ‘take-down’ and each sees a tiny image of the other—but this masculine sizing up is not what’s at stake. Identity in the form of the other is at stake:

In the silence of the people they began to laugh
And clutched each other in their breathless exaltation (Mason 24).

If Hegelian recognition between two individuals is a step on the way to attaining a state of total integrity in which one sees oneself fully expressed in the universe, we can see this moment in which Enkidu and Gilgamesh experience a height of mutual recognition as a momentary glimpse into a state of total integrity. At the level of the image, considered in itself, the moment of total integrity is their shared, joyous laughter as they embrace in ‘breathless exaltation.’⁹

So far we’ve seen how the early parts of Mason’s *Gilgamesh* respond to the concept of Hegelian recognition. The rationale for bringing in this “concept is the existential basis for their friendship; loss of his only friend will mean the loss of a critical source of recognition; and if recognition informs personal identity, it entails a (partial) loss of Gilgamesh himself. Thus, the intensity of Gilgamesh’s personal loss, even to the point where in his journey—he is utterly disconsolate at first and attempts to seek immortality in order to bring Enkidu back—his face becomes the face of ‘loss itself’ (Mason 72). Gilgamesh becomes what Victor Turner, following Arnold Van Gennep’s anthropological work, describes as a ‘liminal persona.’¹⁰ One could consider a figure to be a ‘liminal persona’ who proceeds through a lim-

⁹Readers of Milton will notice a parallel here to Eve’s moment of self-recognition in the mythical stream. Readers of poetry will want to note closely how much control over one’s own reflected image is warranted, on pain of defeating the necessary autonomy of the ‘other’ that is critical to maintaining the dialectic. In my own opinion, Milton overworks the image and it is his authorial designs over a pristine Eve that are ‘vain,’ not Eve’s own apperceptions of herself.

¹⁰Perhaps it could be argued that on account of his hybrid nature, Gilgamesh is a liminal persona from the beginning. However, it is an idea such that if it were to find true resolution anywhere, it would only be at the level of cosmological-symbolic description.

inal state,¹¹ where understanding of liminal state is included within Turner's line of thought:

By "state" I mean here, "a relatively fixed or stable condition" and would include in its meaning such social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree...or to the physical, mental, or emotional condition in which a person or group may be found at a particular time.... State, in short, is a more inclusive concept than status or office and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized (Turner 46).

Following Van Gennep, Turner takes up the notion of a state to define 'rite of passage':

...all rites of separation are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase....the ritual subject...is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and "structural" type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards (Turner 47).

The scope of this paper precludes focusing on every aspect of Gilgamesh in terms of his passage from separation phase to aggregation through liminal state,¹² and what these states might mean for him. Rather it will scrutinize Gilgamesh as a liminal figure, one who is caught up in the liminal passage and is in a certain sense invisible:

The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, "invisible." As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture....A set of essen-

¹¹Here it is reasonable to wonder which is the explanatorily primitive notion: 'state' or 'persona'?

¹²One might in fact argue that Gilgamesh and Enkidu, in their quest to conquer Humbaba, are ur-instances of neophytes of a Babylonian maturity ritual.

tially religious definitions coexist with these [cultural definitions] which so set out to define the structurally indefinable “transitional-being”...a name and a set of symbols (Turner 47).

Turner proceeds with a discussion of some of the symbols of decay and gestation (broadly, sorts of change) associated with initiation rites. It would take a much more comprehensive study of Sumerian texts to arrive at a conception of what these symbols might be for initiation rites in the historical Gilgamesh’s world, but if we pry apart such symbolism from its religious trappings, and in the spirit of Bachelard, root figural liminality in terms of *poetic* ‘name and symbols,’ we can develop a sense of how the lyric poem grapples with loss.

In *The Poetics of Space* “Bachelard’s phenomenological investigation of the poetic image—which he argues is explanatorily fundamental relative to psychological and psychoanalytic theory—concerns how poetic images culled from various works of poetry can articulate our relation to ‘kinds of space’—internal/psychological space and external/physical space. Drawing on Rilke’s letters, Bachelard elaborates his idea of space:

The two kinds of space, intimate space and exterior space, keep encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth. To designate space that has been experienced as affective space, which psychologists do very rightly, does not, however, go to the root of space dreams. The poet goes deeper when he uncovers a poetic space that does not enclose us in affectivity. Indeed, whatever the affectivity that colors a given space, *whether sad or ponderous, once it is poetically expressed, the sadness is diminished, the ponderousness lightened. Poetic space, because it is expressed, assumes values of expansion....*In this activity of poetic spatiality that goes from deep intimacy to infinite extent, united inidental expansion, one feels grandeur welling up....And wherever space is a value—there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties. Valorized space is a verb, and never, either inside or outside us, is grandeur an “object”...To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space’ (Bachelard 202, emphasis added).

When Bachelard is ‘applied to study Gilgamesh and Enkidu as figures navigating liminal space, it can be seen that the way Mason represents this space steers through these two risks, or misconceptions, about poetic space in general; a) that poetic space ‘encloses’ the reader

in the affective, and b) the space emerges as *yet another object* of consciousness, thereby losing its grandeur and foreclosing upon its oneiric value.

After receiving the blessings of the council of Elders and Ninsun, Gilgamesh and Enkidu depart for the Cedar forest to slay Humbaba. Arguably the two are already in a liminal place, having left the familiar walls of the city as well as their familiar social roles. But it is Gilgamesh's interior voice that reveals the expressive depth of the sacred albeit external space he is entering:

Her [Ninsun's] words still filled his mind
As they started in their journey,
Just as a mother's voice is heard
Sometimes in a man's mind
Long past childhood
Calling his name, calling him from sleep
Or from some pleasurable moment
On a foreign street
When every trace of origin seems left
And one has almost passed into a land
That promises a vision or secret
Of one's life, when one feels almost god enough
To be free of voices, her voice
Calls out like a voice from childhood,
Reminding him he once tossed in dreams. (Mason 32)

Where one might expect Gilgamesh's departure here to be a frightening or even traumatic experience, these aspects of the affective space are lightened by the intimacy of Gilgamesh's mother's voice, which reminds him of his home when 'every trace of origin seems left.' The carefully tempered emphasis on abstract nouns¹³ ensures that the reader does not conjure up a picture that would have the effect of objectifying liminal space, lending to Mason's verse narrative in this section what Bachelard in characterizing ancestral forests has called 'the immediate immensity of depth' (Bachelard 186). Speaking of the infelicity of 'psychological transcendentals' as a description of how ancestral forest spaces open up: 'It would be difficult to express better that here the functions of description—psychological as well as objective—are ineffective. One feels that there is *something else* to be ex-

¹³That is, I would emphasize the lack of proper nouns (which fix a concrete time and place) as opposed to the idea that many of the nouns used are archetypal.

pressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth' (Bachelard 186).

Relating Bachelard's concept of the ancestral forest back to Turner's conceptualization of the liminal, the voice through the Cedar forest is a way to emphasize the physical invisibility of the liminal figure. The king isolated in his hut as he undergoes an initiation rite is made 'invisible' to his subjects, stripped of his brightly colored status. In Gilgamesh it is the depth of memory, carried through a mother's voice, that assumes the expansion of poetic space—those deepest origins of ourselves which, like the sharp word of a god rebuking us in a dream, humble us, disclosing to ourselves our vulnerabilities, as opposed to enclosing us affectively around them. The part-God tyrant Gilgamesh was once only a child in Ninsun's arms. His mother's voice, internalized and yet promising to disrupt his pretense in order to express his immortality and disturb the sacred order (Humbaba had been appointed by the gods as protectorate of the Cedar Forest), is no mere sacrum—such as a mask or monstrous costume whose exaggerated features, according to Turner's view, serve the liminal figure as a form of 'primitive abstraction' that enforce some particular social norms (Turner 52). Rather, it is part of Gilgamesh's identity as a liminal figure, much as the notes of a melody constitute the melody even if the human tendency is inevitably to lose the thread, or the origin of one's narrative consciousness, especially during those glimpses, as Bachelard describes it, 'When the dialectic of the I and the non-I grow more flexible, I feel that fields and meadows are with me, in the with-me, with-us' (Bachelard 188).¹⁴

¹⁴One might explore the analogy between immense and yet intimate spaces and the melody further. Musicians often speak of melodic line as the horizontal dimension of music while harmony is the vertical dimension. Without the former music is soulless, without the latter it is formless, calling out for a renewed complexity that feels as if it desires externality. Bachelard writes in prayer-mode: 'May all matter be given its individual place, all sub-stances their ex-stance. And may all matter achieve conquest of its space, its power of *expansion over and beyond the surfaces by which a geometrician would like to define it*' (Bachelard, 202–203, my italics). Conceptualizing briefly harmony's vertical dimension as a force external to melodic line, and yet dependent on melodic line, analogous to those social-structural characteristic that from an anthropological point of view help to constitute the liminal figure's 'success' conditions for aggregation even while depending on him to complete the passage, one can see that Bachelard's point against the reductive geometric conception of space—which overlooks just how it can be driven inward—generalizes as a point against any given theory's claim to explanatory priority in construing liminal spaces; including Bachelard's own approach which views logos as a structural-organizing principle that has a right to explanatory priority (at least, as a source of value) over psychological theories.

The depth of Gilgamesh's own intimate immensity as a liminal figure is not only depicted by means of the mother-voice. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu reach the sacred cedars of the forest we see some of the ways that the liminal logic of 'neither this nor that' (or perhaps, 'both this and that') is revealed:¹⁵ 'They stood in awe at the foot/Of the green mountain. Pleasure/Seemed to grow from fear for Gilgamesh/...Some called the forest, "Hell," and others "Paradise"...But night was falling quickly/And they had no time to call it names,/Except perhaps "The Dark"...' (Mason 35). One can reject any form of essentialism about names here and still appreciate the point that the two friends and neophytes find themselves overlooking that indefinable state where 'normal' valuations cease to apply. Just as in their fight in the marketplace they briefly broke through that continuum of value from life to death—dancing in the face of it—here, in a state of exalted fear, the two hybrids momentarily step outside the spectrum between 'Hell' and 'Paradise'—whatever these two convenient designations might mean. Lost are the valuations that conveniently apply to space when sacred space is meant; likewise, the binary logic that appears to be seen in space (present as an object before consciousness) fades into a landscape consumed by dusk.

So far we've seen how Mason has used sonic memory and liminal logic to depict the sort of inner poetic space which Bachelard in his chapter on 'intimate immensities' describes in a phenomenological vein. As mentioned before, we can think of this in terms of a transformation between two kinds of space—internal and external—which can occur given the right sort of poetic catalyst. The scenes we focused on from *Gilgamesh*, roughly speaking, show the magnification between the Cedar forest and the mother-voice of childhood, and the deep-relation between them.

In conclusion, the paper focusses on some passages that relate specifically to Mason's treatment of Gilgamesh's liminality as a grief-torn figure who has lost his friend—his only source of recognition. The presence of Ninsun's voice, as the two embark on their journey to the Cedar forest, foregrounds Gilgamesh's continuous repetitions of

¹⁵See Turner, p.49 for further discussion of the liminal logic of processes of death and growth. There is also a general point to be made that the language Mason uses in the Cedar forest episode ceases to adhere to classical logic partly to call our attention to the fact that the descriptive function of language breaks down in application to a liminal space or transcendent object; the koans familiar to Zen Buddhism gear the neophyte to experiencing a moment of realization that offers insight into a non-dual world, while here the aim of contradictory language seems more to highlight the destabilization of the neophyte's consciousness during his passage to aggregation.

the name 'Enkidu' after Enkidu has succumbed to mortal wounds, which, in turn, serves to propel Gilgamesh forward through his states of grief, displaying Bachelard's sense of intimate immensity.

Another explication of Bachelard presents another way of conceiving of space, where the emphasis is on how expressive space allows one to escape the affective. Focusing on an example of the expansion of the intimate space of a tree, Bachelard considers the remarks of Joë Bousquet:

Space is nowhere. Space is inside it like honey in a hive. In the realm of images, honey in a hive does not conform to the elementary dialectics of contained and container. Metaphorical honey will not be shut up, and here, in the intimate space of a tree, honey is anything but a form of marrow. It is the "honey of the tree" that will give perfume to the flower. It is also the inner sun of the tree. And the dreamer who dreams of honey knows that it is a force that concentrates and radiates, but turns. If the interior space of a tree is a form of honey, it gives the tree "expansion of infinite things" (Bachelard 202).

When Bachelard is discussing the 'dialectics of contained and container' the point here is not merely that the honey threatens to spill out, that the space cannot be contained, it's that the honey/space is at the nexus of innumerable many other relations between the trees, the flowers, the sun, our perceptions of each of these, and so on. In the end, there is no delimiting by means of some further set or relations that we for whatever provisional reasons are apt to describe as 'basic.' Anyone who has experienced personal loss understands the sense in which the loved one, though no longer living, continues to stand in that nexus of memory, personal relations, affective and volitional dispositions, and so constitute a 'private' space of grief. You watch a sunrise and remember a remark from the loved one; you walk into the woods and see part of the trail bending into the undergrowth that would have presented itself as a perceptual affordance, or perhaps an object of curiosity, if the loved one 'were there.' There is, of course, a very real sense in which that person's past 'person-stage' continues to exist at that time.

In Mason's verse narrative, we can see how Enkidu's memory continually spills out of Gilgamesh's psyche in the form of the name 'Enkidu' which for Gilgamesh is personified by his friend's native attributes:

Gilgamesh wept bitterly for his friend.
He felt himself now singled out for loss
Apart from everyone else. The word *Enkidu*
Roamed through every thought
Like a hungry animal through empty lairs
In search of food. The only nourishment
He knew was grief, endless in its source
Yet never ending hunger. (Mason 53)

In this episode of grief, the scene immediately following Enkidu's death, we see Gilgamesh's state of loss as a name whose immensity is such as for us to be invited to 'roam' within it. The idea of grief as a self-perpetuating state is also conveyed by its description as a 'hungry animal' that can only ever feed on itself. Of course, one envisions the presence of Enkidu himself, but as no more than a phantom, occasioned by each token of the word 'Enkidu,' with the irony that this Enkidu is more assertive and domineering over Gilgamesh's thoughts than the Enkidu that quickly lost to Gilgamesh the argument to go into the Cedar forest (Mason 27).

Haunted by the name, Gilgamesh is disconsolate and goes to seek out immortality, not for his own sake, but for the possibility of bringing back Enkidu. As he proceeds on his journey on the Road of the Sun, it is Enkidu's name embedded in Gilgamesh's consciousness that helps to propel him forward, serving as a companion in his loneliness: 'Without a light to guide him,/Ascending or descending,/He could not be sure,/Going on with only/The companionship of grief/In which he felt Enkidu at his side./He said his name: Enkidu, Enkidu,/To quiet his fear/Through the darkness....He spoke Enkidu's name aloud/As if explaining to the valley/Why he was there, wishing his friend/Could see the same horizon...' (Mason 59-60). The contrast between the depth of sonic grief experienced in the first person and its third-person observation is reflected in Mason's description of Gilgamesh's echolalia as '...private mumbling [that] made both time and distance/pass...' and Siduri's conflation of Gilgamesh's grief as self-love and rage in his desire to find the boatman Urshanabi, as if Gilgamesh were seeking after his own immortality (Mason 62-66).

We often take for granted language that enables us to communicate ideas and objects distant in time and space; names call up the designated objects, renewing their presence in consciousness. Each person leaves traces of their existence on others, and Enkidu's existence for Gilgamesh is ever-renewed by the incessant incantations and his loss more keenly felt when 'Enkidu' is an empty sound for others.

Much as we saw Gilgamesh become 'invisible' in the sense described by Turner's 'liminal persona,' the name 'Enkidu' is presented as if inaudible, stripped of its meaning for others. When Gilgamesh has returned to Uruk there is a scene exemplifying this idea:

He entered the city and asked a blind man
If he had ever heard the name Enkidu,
And the old man shrugged and shook his head,
Then turned away,
As if to say it is impossible
To keep the names of friends we have lost.

Gilgamesh said nothing more
To force his sorrow on another. (Mason 91-92)

Dwelling on Gilgamesh's (failed) quest for immortality would be besides the point here. Perhaps instead we can close with an analogy that underscores Bachelard's ideas about intimate immensity. The individual Enkidu falls under many different descriptions, many of which, on account of their generality (friend, co-slayer of Humbaba, native of the Steppe, etc.) fail to carry the resonance of the name which encompasses all of these descriptions and is yet endowed with a singularity as expressed in lamentation. As Lyn Hejinian puts it in her summary rejection of closure: '...we can only know things and indeed only perceive them as things, distinct from one another, by virtue of their differences, and hence on the basis of their details' (Hejinian, 'Continuing Against Closure'). Hejinian suggests that true subjectivity offers consciousness a kind of polis, or site in which the self can see itself as one object among many. Recalling how Bachelard's related concern is to preserve space as something that is not experienced as an object, the sonic space afforded by the repetitious poetic employment of the name Gilgamesh prevents a private space of grief from becoming a public container in which a friend's loss is robbed of its particularity and incommensurable value. Yet, paradoxically, the name is also the basis of detail in terms of which we can come to have a sense of Gilgamesh's grief, perhaps alleviating our own grief by making it communal. Loss, which makes one in a certain sense invisible, implies all the more a need to be heard; and it is the lyric poem that can satisfy this need through the expansion of Bachelardian space. Generally, the mapping of formal poetic spaces of loss, and arguably the formal poetic spaces of love, as evinced by the use of names—the beginnings of depth—in these spaces, may testify to the complexity of the corresponding emotional states and help us to better recognize Bachelard's

insistence that we ought not reductively psychologize that which makes us human.



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Linguistic Contextuality: Deixis, Performance, Materiality

Aaron Finbloom

A deictic term returns the speech act to the world
—Jed Rasula, *The Poetics of Embodiment*

Introduction

Many linguistic theories posit that language is an ideal edifice (Suber 72-74), an incorporeal structure (Nancy 84), a system of pure difference (Saussure 115-120), a human-made informational network that can function outside of the human and beyond the contingency of a singular utterance in a particular place and time. Words can travel outside their time of origin. Sentences can move beyond the bodies that originally speak them or receive them. Language can perform here but can also perform there, where “there” can be extended to an infinite series of contexts. Language is able to perform in these respects because it contains functional signs which bring together signified and signifier and thereby establish a link between referent and reference. A sign stands in for a “real” thing, but words are not bound to the realness of the thing they represent. In this sense, words can have a life of their own. Language is: 1) atemporal, as it continues to signify outside of any given time 2) disembodied, as a word’s referential function performs irrespective to the speaker, receiver, or the embodied materiality of the words themselves 3) able to hold a semantic function (i.e. a word means something) or a semiotic-structural function (i.e. a word is distinguishable from what it is not) outside of any performative function which it may also hold.

Deixis¹ throws a wrench into this entire linguistic project by opening up a Pandora’s box of contextuality. Deictic claims complicate the immobility of language by claiming that certain words can only be understood contextually. These deictic words can only function within a specific spatio-temporal index that materially and spatially ties together: the bodies that contain them, the actions that they perform, and the time in which they are performed. For deixis, words

¹Deixis is the linguistic phenomena whereby certain words have referents that change depending on the context in which they are used. Linguists typically classify deixical phrases into locative (for example, “there” or “here”), identity (for example, “I” or “you”) or temporal (for example, “now” or “then”).

must be embodied, they can only be performed, and they are always only in one time.

More problems regarding the de-contextualized account of language are opened up by considering the difference between a word's written mark and spoken utterance. A structuralist Saussurean account of language marginalizes the importance of the materiality of language by noting that material arbitrariness is a determinative factor for language to function. Likewise, a Derridean account of language reduces the material difference between the phonic and graphic by locating the absentive feature of writing in vocal utterance as well. However, the anthropological-historical accounts of these two systems (orality and literacy) as found in thinkers such as Walter Ong and Eric Havelock make the blurring of the boundaries of these systems highly susceptible. From sensuous differentiation of sight and sound, to the removal of authorial intentionality, to arguments of inward embodied qualities of speech, to the contextual situatedness of dialogue, language continues to perform differently in these different material contexts and this performance has vast implications on subjectivity, temporality, and embodiment.

Another angle of approach to these considerations lie in the accounts of performative contextuality found in J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* and the series of in-depth responses by Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Eve Sedgwick. A foundational question for these authors is: how far does such a context reach? For Derrida the contextual limits are spatio-temporally infinite; context cannot hold its limits and this limitlessness is the very foundational aspect which makes language what it is. Butler and Sedgwick cannot follow Derrida this far, as one consequence of this Derridean limitlessness is an inability to mark differences between various kinds of utterances. For Butler this concerns utterances that break or injure. For Sedgwick it includes utterances that are periperformative spatial outliers. The only thing that is clear here is the messiness of the situation, and how these three authors are ready to embrace such a mess. For all three, words are bound to contexts, but the important question that follows is: to what extent? The answer to this question (i.e. the spatio-temporal limitations or qualifications of this context) will affect the way in which language performs, subjects are interpolated, and bodies are to be understood.

What follows is an analysis of linguistic function around these three aforementioned themes: materiality, deixis, and context. The fact that words can be written or spoken reveals that a singular utterance differs in linguistic function depending on this context (i.e. written or

spoken); however, this difference predominately changes the emotional, connotative, and performative elements of an utterance and leaves the denotative quality of an utterance unaffected. The phenomena of deixis reveals a more radical contextuality—namely that some words have referents that change depending on the context. This quality in deixis hints at the possibility that all language itself can be contextual—that words themselves are empty vessels to be filled in by the context in which they are uttered. What then follows is a post-structuralist analysis of the contextuality of language as found through Austin, Derrida, Butler, and Sedgwick that analyzes the very term of contextuality itself to see how far one context extends, how much can be enclosed, included, or occluded within a given context. Ultimately, this essay aims to provide an expanded linguistic framework that embraces contextuality and incites discursive practices to embrace the context of their utterances (and the design of these contexts) as a crucial factor which determines an utterance’s meaning, understanding, and communicability.

Connotative Contextuality—From Speaking to Writing

Authors have raised questions regarding the difference between oral discourses and literary discourses for millenia. One example being Plato’s *Phaedrus* which questions the legitimacy of written discourse over oral dialectic exchange. The differences—material, cultural, historical—between writing and orality create a perfect setting to stage our questions of contextuality. If an utterance changes its linguistic function as it changes from being written to being spoken then this would indicate that language is somewhat contextual. The crucial question that remains is to consider how this linguistic function changes, and—perhaps more concretely—what exactly does change.

The historian Walter Ong in his book, *Orality and Literacy*, takes up these questions as he explores the philosophical implications brought about by the rise of cultures of literacy. Much of Ong’s argument has to do with larger cultural phenomena of orality and literacy and so touches less on the linguistic function of written and spoken utterances; however, these socio-historical differences cannot be ignored as they too impact an utterance’s function and use. One cannot provide a full account of these differences here; however what can be noted is that many are tied to memory’s function in oral culture, typographical and topological movements in the development of literacy and print culture, and social apparatuses that connect oral cultures differently from literary cultures.

A particular distinction from which Ong draws many conclusions, and is shared by several other theorists, is the differing sensuous qualities of each medium. Sounds form events, and so sounded words uniquely exist in time and cannot be stopped or halted (Ong 32). It is this permanent fluidity of sound that leads Ong to make an ontological claim that sound exists only when it is going out of existence (69). Graphic interfaces move language into a topographical dimension where sight lays the groundwork for understanding and where the objects by which sight sees are stable and static. The relation to body here is somewhat more nuanced than it appears. For it would seem that both mediums equally allow for embodiment (graphic with eyes, phonic with voice) yet Ong clearly notes a de-centering of the body that occurs within writing. He explicates the embodied connections between vocalized performance and tactile movements. Examples include manipulations of beads, string figures to complement songs, bards plucking strings to accompany verse, and Talmudic rocking back and forth (Ong 66). Not only does written culture create less opportunity for embodied performative gestures, but the written word is removed from a lived-situation, from a “total, existential situation, which always engages the body,” which spoken words always modify (66).

This world of speech not only engages in a wide set of embodied practices, it also lives inside and amongst the body in a way writing is not able to. Ong outlines the interiority of sound argument, as similarly described by Hegel, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty noting that you, “can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound,” but that there, “is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight” (Ong 70). Ong then ties this lacking immersiveness of vision (and thereby of writing) to cultural developments of a unique externality, thing-like-ness, and objectivity. Writing allows for a radical disconnect from the world of objects dangerously lending itself to solipsism (100), and also pushes human consciousness to think of its own internal resources as more thing-like (129). In this sense, writing conditions the uniquely western performances of subjectivity that we have come to take for granted.

In Ong, we are supplied with a vast cultural cartography of how these two worlds of orality and literacy differ. The way in which oral word is embodied finds no corollary in the written word, which is able to subsist and exist outside of a body, to persist bodiless, unseen, and un-sensed. The living quality of a vocal utterance is tied to its temporality—its fluid movement can only exist within time like all living organisms—whereas the written word is atemporal, static and therefore lifeless. While Ong would most likely recognize that all language has a performative quality, and both cultures of literacy and orality

ground subjectivity (and in fact form a different kind of subject in each instance), oral culture bears a significantly more stark connection to the “real” world, the world where action resides. While it may perhaps be erroneous to extrapolate Ong’s claims about the cultures of literacy and orality to the linguistic performance of a singular sentence, the paper would, nonetheless, suggest such a move. For Ong, the written utterance performs via a removal from the lived embodied encounter that allows for greater object-oriented, topological, and static understanding. The oral utterance performs via immersive embodied practices that allow for a fluidity of meaning that is connected to action, community and the unique living moment of its encounter.

In Eric A. Havelock’s *Preface to Plato* many of these claims of Ong’s are echoed as he explicates the developments of a literary culture which overtook the oral poetic culture of Ancient Greece. While much of his claims have to do with particular developments within cultures of speaking and memorizing—Homeric poetry as cultural heritage, monological speech versus a Socratic insistence on breaking up oration to ask questions, distinctions between the functional qualities verbs and nouns, etc. Havelock ends his study with a pronouncement that the development of literacy radically aided the formation of a uniquely Western post-Platonic thinking which is abstract and disconnected from the embodied visual and material world of poetry (Havelock 303). A Platonic tradition of thinking, inevitably made possible and eventually perfected by the development of literacy, announces another vast cultural distinction between the phonic and graphic, one that ties the phonic to a world of imagistic embodied memorization, and one that links the graphic to a world of disembodied abstraction, and provides another layer of justification for Ong’s dichotomies between literacy and orality.

This disjunction between the performativity of text and speech which we find in Ong and Havelock is called into question in Paul Ricoeur’s *From Text to Action*. For Ricoeur, both speech and text retain the temporality of the event as, “the sentences of a text signify *here and now*” (Ricoeur 119). The lived world of speech is also found in the readerly experience of the text, just with different parameters of audience and subjectivity. For Ricoeur this readerly situation of the text, “is not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction” (121). This disjunction between intention and utterance does not occur in speaking (148) and a kind of coupled immediacy of intention and meaning occurs in spoken utterances, whereas this is lacking in the written word. Ricoeur, embedded in a

hermeneutical project, claims that textual moments are defined by a unique dialogical relation between one's self and the other of the text, a relationship which is mediated by the act of interpretation—defined as one's ability “to place oneself en route towards the *orient* of the text” (122). There are moments in Ricoeur's project where a kind of unification between text and action occurs, where actions are themselves quasi-texts (137-8) and where a division between an embodied world of gesture and movement can function similarly to a world of writing. These boundaries are blurred because of similar trace-like and inscriptive qualities that occur in both action and text (137-8).

However, in spite of these moments of graphic-phonetic unification, Ricoeur also identifies a key difference in linguistic function between speech and writing. For Ricoeur, when a spoken word is inscribed in writing what is carried forth is not the event of speaking, but rather the discourse—the “said” of speaking, its semantic function (Ricoeur 146). Drawing on Austin, Ricoeur identifies speech acts as having three linguistic properties—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary²—the first and less so the second of which cross the border between speech and writing; however, the third, the perlocutionary, troubles this divide:

But the perlocutionary action is precisely what is the least discourse in discourse. It is the discourse as stimulus. It acts, not by my interlocutor's recognition of my intention, but sort of energetically, by direct influence upon the emotions and the affective dispositions. Thus, the propositional act, the illocutionary force, and the perlocutionary action are susceptible, in a decreasing order, to the intentional exteriorization that makes inscription in writing possible. (Ricoeur 147)

For Ricoeur, both speaking and writing have the potential to convey meaning through a clear semantic process that is marked by a movement out of the embodied, material conditions that occur at the

²Austin identifies the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts in the following way. A locutionary act is, “the act of saying something,” which includes, “the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain ‘meaning’ in the favourite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference” (Austin 94). For example, “He said to me, You can't do that” (102). An Illocutionary act refers to the way we are using speech in this occasion (99). For example, “He protested against my doing it” (102). A perlocutionary act is the “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons” (101). For example “He pulled me up, checked me” (102).

instance of a word's utterance or inscription. However, it is only speech that allows for a non-semantic mode of communication, a sort of mysterious energetic transfer of emotion. Writing removes this possibility because the perlocutionary enigmatic transfer is, "the least inscribable aspect of discourse" (Ricoeur 147). So for Ricoeur the movement into writing is marked by a movement towards a greater "said-ness" of the words themselves, a movement towards greater locution whereas speech acts contain residue of an instantaneous transfer of intention. The mechanism of this transfer is not entirely located in the words themselves, but rather in the non-descriptive contextuality that holds unique powers of performativity.

A final account of the phonic-graphic divide that the paper will touch upon is found in Jakobson's *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*. At various moments in Jakobson's account it seems like there is a divestment of the embodied, motor-functions of sound in favor of a perceptual study of the quality of the sound itself (Jakobson 12-18). But this sound, the unit of the phoneme, is not to be analyzed purely scientifically or empirically; rather it is a sound which is imbued with meaning by its status as an agent of pure difference. For Jakobson, only the phoneme is purely arbitrary. Phoneme is the smallest linguistic unit that is divested with meaning; but even then the structuralist differential calculus is able to function. It is here that the body is brought back in, as voiced and unvoiced oppositions (and other embodied components of the sounds) are determinative of the phoneme's oppositional status (80).

One important consideration that Jakobson investigates is non-semantic phonic functions in sentences—for example a raised intonations at the end of a sentence. Jakobson remarks that, "such phonic devices give us no information concerning the cognitive content of sentences; they signal only their emotive or conative functions—emotion or appeal." (Jakobson 59-60) Emotion and impulse, both sites of embodied activation, are uniquely tied to non-semantic phonic devices. The phonic is distinguished through its ability to perform linguistic functions of pure emotive communication.

Jakobson's account, in the end, throws a mild wrench in the arbitrariness that lies in the center of the structuralist program. Jakobson gives an example that, "the opposition between acute and grave phonemes has the capacity to suggest an image of bright and dark," or another example of, "the Czech words *den* 'day' and *noc* 'night,' which contain a vocalic opposition between acute and grave, are easily associated in poetry with the contrast between the brightness of midday

and the nocturnal darkness,” arguing that the semantic meaning of a word may find correspondence with an emotional or aesthetic meaning that is only afforded by the phonemic externality of an utterance (Jakobson 112-113). However, over and against this movement which is favorable towards the poetic, the embodied and the material, it does not seem as though the materiality of the sound, that is, its embodied qualities, have linguistic function. The functional aspect of the sound continues to be its oppositional status. The structuralist focus on differentiation as being the sole value standard for meaning is merely removed from the signifier and signified and placed on the phoneme itself. The meaning of sound, and what “sound” is, is then radically re-defined and placed into a structuralist landscape. Body is continually displaced in favor of the intangible quality of difference.

So let us return to our original question: how does a sentence differ in linguistic function when it moves between writing and speech. As Jakobson shows, a written sentence, when spoken, could utilize phonemes that alter the emotions around an utterance. In other words, this transfer from writing to speech alters the perlocutionary act; however the denotative quality is unaffected. Jakobson’s account reinforces Ricoeur’s argument that the perlocutionary quality of an utterance is brought forth in vocalization but is diminished in writing. Both Jakobson’s and Ricoeur’s accounts linguistically bolster the cultural and anthropological arguments of Ong and Havelock. A written sentence removes context and gives the word a disembodied static transferability—an ability to move from one context to the next while retaining basic denotative functions. When this sentence is spoken, the embodied context of the sentence is added to this denotative function—emotional and enigmatic perlocutionary forces are brought into the performance of an utterance.

Deixis—Contextuality Becoming Denotative

With the phenomena of deixis we find a more radical contextuality of language. Not only do utterances shift their emotional or perlocutionary qualities when they change from context to context, but the referents themselves change as well. Deictic words change meaning as the context changes. The implications of this phenomena are vast—for it reduces the separation between words and ourselves, bodies and environments. Words are no longer pure abstractions, and so contextual elements (our bodies, selves, identities, surroundings) are not only shaped by language, but also shape language.

Emile Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* is a remarkable structuralist extension of Saussure's semiotic linguistic project. The systematicity of language, its arbitrariness, its contingency, its structure, are taken up from Saussure with remarkable precision and accuracy. Benveniste's project is a radical shaking-out of the bed pillows of those who claim to use language universally, but are actually only using it within an isolated Western-centric approach. He accomplishes this by performing a structural, and cross-culturally, synchronic and diachronic analysis on various parts of speech, most relevantly, his work regarding the nature of pronouns.

For Benveniste, in a typical structuralist manner, "I," "you," and "he/she" are understood by each term's opposition to one another. "I" is always the utterer and forms a foundational quality of subjectivity. "You" is not only the person other than the subject, but the one that I is speaking with and the only one I can speak with. Both "I" and "you" are then paired in opposition to "he" (the third person) which is not really a person at all, but a pure abstraction (Benveniste 201). "I" and "You" are grounded in a concrete dialogical interchange of the present instant (118); whereas the third person is radically displaced, is a non-person of no time, "extended," "unlimited," and "limitless" (204). In this sense "I" and "You" are the constitutive deictic claims; whereas the third person manifests abstraction and de-contextuality.³

With "I" as a foundational deictic operative, Benveniste goes on to define the boundaries of other deictic terms by setting them in relation to the function of "I." For example, he argues that "this" is the object indicated in the present discourse of the "I," whereas, "here and now delimit the spatial and temporal instance coextensive and contemporary with [the] present instance of discourse containing I" (218-19). All of these deictic terms, each unique in their relation to the present instant of discourse, share the common feature of being an 'ensemble of "empty" signs that are non-referential with respect to "reality" (219). These terms lack referentiality, as they function merely as reflexive tools that announce a particular intersubjective condition. A deictic term's performance is precisely this—to announce that I am here, beside you, in this particular configuration of space and time, in

³However, the contextuality that functions within deictic pronouns also applies to verb forms. For Benveniste, the verb form itself is, "always and necessarily actualized by the act of discourse and in dependence on that act." (Benveniste 220) Verbs are necessarily connected to distinctions of person as he cannot seem to find any language where verbs don't indicate the grammatical person (197) and so verbs too are always only manifested in the situation of discourse, and receive their form through the individuated contexts in which they occur.

relation to these particular objects that lack all designative qualities except for their “real-ness” beside us. In other words, they exist and that is all we can say about them.

Christine Tanz’s *Studies in the Acquisition of Deictic Terms* provides a rigorous psycho-sociological study into how children acquire deictic terms. While Tanz notes that deictic terms have a marginal status within a semantic approach to language (Tanz 9), she implicitly lays groundwork for linguistic and philosophical claims that are themselves outliers to these normative accounts of language. What are these limits of deixis? The terms that Tanz takes up are spatial relations (front/back), personal pronouns (I/you), demonstratives (this/that/here), and special verbs (come/go/bring/take) and verb tenses. While Tanz almost goes as far as to claim that the contextuality of language may reside in a broader range of utterances than those traditionally considered, she nevertheless provides an account by which a deictic term (such as I) can be delimited from a term like “chair.” Both “chair” and “I” can pick out different terms each time they are uttered, yet both seem to have a certain degree of contextuality, “the utterance does not establish the chair as a chair while it does establish an individual as the addressee” (Tanz 9). For Tanz, deictic terms have special performative qualities that establish the object in its very utterance. The referent only exists within the utterance, whereas non-deictic terms function in some capacity outside of their utterance.

While Tanz considers many aspects of deictic terms, spatiality holds a primary function in her account. Tanz claims that, “the most concrete and basic way that utterances are situated is that they take place in some physical location” (Tanz 70). She goes on to provide an in-depth account of varied spatial qualities of utterances, from the locative acquisition of front/back terms (13-14), to Somali suffixes which indicate the positionality of an object (70), to Piaget’s topological child-development models. The persistent “now” of an utterance is met with a manifold variety of spatial and embodied positions that determine the performance of a given word.

This embodied spatiality points to a hidden aspect of deixical formation—namely, that deixis is mediating phenomena between the pure spatiality of gesture and the abstraction of language. Tanz considers the possibility of there being a “pure” deictic indicator, “such as the gesture of pointing, which can be used to point to anything.” (Tanz 6) For Tanz, only gesture has the status of pure contextuality, as a direct relationship is formed between the body, the space of utterance and the indicator that are all brought together and exist wholly and en-

tirely only in that given moment's existence. Language removes this pure embodied element, for even deictic terms are not entirely contextual. Their linguistic status can be lifted from the immediacy of embodiment—an embodiment which forms a direct correspondence with context.

For Benveniste, the performative function of deictic terms carry a similar function to that of Tanz in that their capacity for switching I's and You's becomes the grounds for a dialogic reciprocity. However, unlike Tanz, Benveniste links deictic function to acts of interpellation. We, as subjects, are defined, identified and constituted by the instance of discourse which fills the empty deictic forms (Benveniste 227). Benveniste is decidedly silent on the notions of embodiment. The body is merely that which language is not. It is merely a position from which utterances occur—a kind of shrouded centrality with no form yet utters claims and thereby helps to ground subjectivity. For Tanz the body plays a role of primary importance as it presents the possibility of a pure deictic indicator (a pointed finger). The phenomena of deixis is constituted upon a vibrant spatial embodiment that performs without the aid of language's empty abstractions.

Jed Rasula in *The Poetics of Embodiment* provides an expansive and comprehensive account of deixis which spills out into the body, metaphor, and perhaps even all of language. He opens his considerations of the topic by stating that deictic claims “returns the speech act to the world,” and give priority to “context over text” (Rasula 63). In “normal” language words attach themselves to bodies, as a tree means a specific thing in the world; however deixis does not function in this way (Rasula draws on Tanz here to add that this explains why it is so hard for children to learn deictic claims). Deictic claims are, “mobile, interchangeable, and empty” (66-7) and in this sense, are completely decontextualized and contain a doubtful spatio-temporality all of which are a function of deixis as a linguistic category. It is precisely this interchangeability on the linguistic level that gives deictic terms the capacity to be filled and resolved in a particular instance (75).

Rasula undertakes an extended analysis of Jeffrey Kittay's and Wlad Godzich's *The Emergence of Prose* which helps create an expansive account of the performative function of deixis. Kittay and Godzich argue that prose has, “a textual space in which it holds together its discourses by referring one discourse to another, by positing deictic relationships between them” (Rasula 116). In this way, a reader of prose must come to terms with a radically disembodied multiplicity,

whereby subjectivity comes to be defined only in “the assignment of different, multiple, and short term positions” (76). As a culture increasingly becomes able to deal with deictic instability of positionality (305-6), it effects counterbalancing measures, namely the development of an “introspective dimension,” i.e. subjectivity (309).

While deixis comes to inform a multiplicitous embodiment, it also provides a metaphor for how the body comes to work as, “the body itself is a sort of deictic empty form, to be filled by the overt scenarios specific to social modalities of exchange” (Rasula 81-82). It is with this move, with emptiness as his hinge, that Rasula comes to identify emptiness itself (perhaps a positioning towards a Derridean absence) as “a structural feature of any semantic domain” (Rasula 81-82). This provides a sort of grounding for Rasula to include metaphor into his deictic system: “here is a figure that stands for another figure, a person in place of another person, or a thing in place of a person—here is an empty place that can be filled by anything at all” (136). For Rasula, the correlation between body and deixis is not an absolute coherence, as the body implies a particular relation to the performative. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s theories on corporeality and body image, Rasula identifies that while deixis has a neat distribution between terms—now/then, here/there—our body always exists alongside this distribution, tugging at it, affecting it, always pulling us towards action-potential. This is because our sense of corporeality is not coextensive with our flesh, and so there is a constant labor to re-work distance in space, into a “workable corporeality” (112-13).

Far from being a marginal linguistic phenomena, as it was used to be thought, deixis actually reveals prominent qualities of language, its relativity and its contextuality. And while Rasula only uses Barthes as a mouthpiece to say all of language is deictic, and only extends deictic status beyond its normal usage (pronouns, locatives, etc) to metaphor, what deixis does is reveal to us—in its inability to stick to objects—that its peculiar feature is actually a quality of both language and ourselves; language does not fully presence, does not fully adhere to a single piece of reality, and neither do our bodies. Deixis reveals emptiness as a fundamental gap between signified and signifier. This emptiness is what we play with when we play in language. This emptiness is filled in the momentary junctures of reality which ground us as subjects, and it is this ultimate groundlessness which causes, in fact forces us, to create the fictitious entity called “subject” (a kind of Humean fiction). Perhaps even most radically, this emptiness *is* our body—“the body itself is a sort of deictic empty form” (Rasula 81). Our

body, our subjectivity, our lives and our language are all contextual—they interpolate, they are filled by a moment, and then they move on.

Radical Contextuality—Derrida, Butler, Sedgwick

As we have opened up Pandora's box of linguistic contextuality, the question now becomes how far does it extend? What exactly is a "context"? What are its limits? This paper will now offer a comprehensive consideration of linguistic contextuality by focusing primarily on the concept of context as explicated in Derrida's *Signature Event Context*, Butler's *Excitable Speech*, and Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*. In these works, each author responds not only to John Austin's notion of contextuality as found in his *How to Do Things with Words* but also create a shared commentary on each other, as Butler responds to Derrida, and Sedgwick responds to both Derrida and Butler. This being the case, these thinkers will be treated in the same order.

Derrida with relation to the concept of contextuality in *Signature Event Context* finds agreement in Austin's notion of contextuality as it shatters the "concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept" (Derrida 1988: 13). But further carries it to a logical conclusion far beyond the likes of which Austin would accept. For Austin's account to function, for an utterance to successfully perform, an utterance must delimit the bounds of its context. Outside of an utterance's center, defined by a linguistic boundary that unites a particular performance to its intention and no other, there are various infelicitous performances which must be excluded. This is where Derrida catches Austin and notes that it is only because of these outliers that the utterance can perform in its centrality. That is, without a "general iterability" there could not be a successful performance (Derrida 17).

For Derrida a written sign—and writing here, while denoting graphic inscription, also refers to the trace-structure of all language (Spivak xxxix, lxix)—functions only because of its ability to break from the author's intention and the environment of its occurrence (Derrida 9) and because it is capable of being re-inscribed into an infinite number of possible contexts. This is what Derrida identifies as iterability. Moreover, Derrida maintains that this applies to spoken as well as written utterances stating that the structure of possibility for the utterance, "the sky is blue," "includes the capability to be formed and to function as a reference that is empty or cut off from its referent" (11). Writing, defined by this notion of iterability, implies a radical delimi-

tation of presence; based in absentive traces, writing offsets claims to its materiality, as it must, “be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general” (8).

Because linguistic signs function by an infinite series of iterations, context can never be delimited or bounded (Derrida 3) that is to say we never know where a context begins and where it ends. In this sense, contextuality begins to lose sense as a concept because all of language (every utterance) is equally contextual, in fact infinitely so, not because a given mark is never valid outside of a context, “but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [ancrage]” (12).

And what would then be the temporality of this infinite contextuality? The temporality is also thrown askew. Certainly an utterance is not determined by the present moment it is uttered. An ultimate delaying and deferment of meaning constitutes language. All *actual* moments of an utterance’s performance are not important for Derrida, namely because what grounds the possibility for a meaning to exist in that isolated brief moment in time is language’s iterable structure of unending traces. The temporary disclosure of meaning in one instance is temporary, fleeting, unanchored, de-centered—and if properly analysed and “deconstructed” one will see that meaning is ultimately abated and deferred. Derrida explodes the notion of contextuality leaving us in a post-structuralist fall-out zone where all individual instances and places are negated by a series of infinite disembodied traces—timeless and placeless.

In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler follows Derrida’s argument until its ubiquitous reduction that all utterances hold equal contextuality. She identifies that the Derridean iterative break from all context is, “the force of the performative” and it functions outside of meaning or truth via a structural account of language that operates autonomously from any semantic or social dimension (Butler 148-9). This is precisely where Butler departs from Derrida, as Butler wants to provide an explanation of performativity, of contextuality, that can account for why certain utterances “break from prior contexts with more ease,” and why certain utterances “carry the force to wound,” more than others (150). Derrida’s account, in its radical a-temporality and a-sociality, in its radical semiotic formalism, doesn’t provide an “account of the social iterability of the utterance” (150).

Butler’s main concern with Austin’s speech act contextual theory is that it cannot be contained in a given moment; rather a vast his-

tory of utterance must be considered and brought into the context at hand. This historicity of context is linked to the question of how a subject is constituted. For Austin, in illocution, “the subject who speaks precedes the speech in question”; however, for Althusser, the notion of interpellation implies that, “the speech act that brings the subject into linguistic existence precedes the subject in question” (Butler 24). Butler draws on Althusserian notion of interpellation to show that each act of interpellation, each moment of address (for example being called “hey you” by a police officer) animates a subject into existence (25). It is through ritualized performances of subjectivity (by being called this again and again) that a subject comes into formation. Butler then makes a crucial departure from Althusser’s ritualized account of subjectivization by resisting the complicity of sedimented language and ritual. For Butler, an individual *does* have power; not the power to move outside of history, but to choose a particular utterance’s usage and to hold responsibility for, “negotiating the legacies of usage that constrain and enable that speaker’s speech” (27).

In *Touching Feeling* Eve Sedgwick, takes issue with Austin in a similar Butlerian fashion by challenging the singularity of an utterance, the possibility of it being located within a given moment. Sedgwick assents to the works of Butler and Derrida, both of whom respond to the Austinian false presenced center. For these three thinkers an utterance’s spatio-temporal context cannot be easily and readily defined by a simple “there”-ness of its instance. But while Butler and Derrida focus on a temporal relocation of the utterance—via iteration, history, citation (Sedgwick 68)—Sedgwick moves to a project of spatialization, a kind of topology of the periperformative, defined as the outlying performances located tangentially and on the margins of a central utterance (5).

Sedgwick provides an excellent example in the statement “I dare you” and the implications of wussiness that it entails. If Butler were analysing this occurrence, she would most likely look into the interpolative history of this utterance and the multiplicitous cultures surrounding its usage; Sedgwick, on the other hand, considers those located spatially around the statement’s utterance—those complicit in its ability to function who witness the dare. Sedgwick considers what consensus we must assume to exist between these parties and what energy is required to disinterpolate, to count oneself out of this centered situation of negative attitudes towards wussiness. For Sedgwick, an utterance’s disinterpolation is always messier, stranger, de-centered (Sedgwick 69-70).

Sedgwick's account revolves around the notion of the periperformative, the strange neighboring terrain around the central performance (an example of centrality being the speaker who utters "I dare you). At the very moment an utterance is uttered, there are innumerable goings-on around that utterance that allows for it to be uttered and which perform alongside the main utterance. Sedgwick does the messy work of mapping out these suburban landscapes which are full of ambiguities, disavowals and negativities and insists that they are not any "less" in terms of their rhetorical force. Moreover, any attempts to calculate their distance from the center are bound to fail, as their spatial texture is non-uniform and non-homogeneous. The messiness of these vicinities implies multiplicity: multiple emotions, multiple illocutions, multiple locations (Sedgwick 78-9). All of this leading to a radical instability, and an incredible power in this instability—a power to destabilize the centrality of a performance.

For Sedgwick, this spatialization of performance helps make room for a unique account of "performative affectivity" that sidesteps "intentional or descriptive fallacies" (Sedgwick 68). This is accomplished in the "beside" that is afforded by spatialization—a dethroning of dualisms that includes a wide range of, "desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling," (8) and helps open an account of affect that allows also for a wider range of possible emotive attachments—not merely affects that surround the speakers of a central performances, but affects which can be attached to "things, people, ideas, sensations, relations," [etc.] (19). Sedgwick's account of the periperformative helps ground a theory of decentralized affect that stands in for a singular embodied quality of emotion. In this sense, the body is extended outwards, dissipated out into a wide range of possible places, entities and contexts.

Conclusion

As explicated in the introduction, language has a unique iterative structure that allows for words to travel between multiplicitous contexts. However, this does not mean that the differing contexts of its travel do not change something fundamental in the words themselves. A word can change from spoken to written; however, one may argue that those changes are predominantly connotative or perlocutionary functions. This alteration does not affect the referential or denotative quality of the word in transit. With deixis, this is not the case, for words mean differently as contexts change. And while one may argue that deixis is merely a marginal linguistic phenomena (that it only applies to a small group of words), deixis reveals a possibility within

language that can extend to its very center—the possibility that words are empty signs that are filled in by the contexts in which they inhabit. Once this possibility is granted, the next question that must be addressed is what is this contextuality that has been opened? Is it, as Tanz argues, merely the particular finger pointing at the particular object in a particular space and time? Is it as in Butler’s explication—the entire history of this pointing in various situated cultural contexts? Is it more aligned with Sedgwick’s account—those besides the pointing who allow for what is pointed at to be pointed at? Or is it Derridean—are these contexts limitless, extending to an infinite series of iterations and widening circles of contextuality that these iterations embrace?

As language becomes contextual and these contexts expand and contract their boundaries, so we too expand and contract. Our identities, subjectivities, and bodies are conditioned by these contexts. In order to understand who and what we are, we must understand where and when we speak and are spoken to. To make sense of language’s contextuality, to aid in this understanding, I believe it is helpful to turn to Butler’s and Sedgwick’s accounts. Derridean limitless contextuality doesn’t speak to the particularity of “social iterability” of an utterance and doesn’t help us make sense of particular cultures and systems of contextuality.

While Butler is interested in the question of why particular utterances break away more easily from past context, Sedgwick is concerned about the question of who periperformatively lies around the utterance, this paper is more deeply invested in the particular embodied, material, and spatial elements that lie within and around utterances. Of particular interest is the question of why certain discursive practices embrace the intentional creation, design, and fabrication of these elements, and some do not. In political discourse, not only are words crafted, but the dress of the speaker is considered, his/her placement, and the camera angle which broadcasts and captures these utterances. In theatrical discourse, scenery, gestures, stagings, and movements are considered as well. However, academic culture (for example in conferences, talks, or symposia) rarely intentionally design such elements—and consider such elements to be of marginal concern. I believe that these implicit claims of linguistic contextual marginality within academic cultures stem from misconceptions regarding the predominate perlocutionary, affective and emotional contributions that such contextuality brings.

In a kind of white wall approach, the academic conference seeks to diminish contextual elements (the embodied, spatial, material,

performative) such that the denotative quality of words is amplified. To extend Ong and Ricoeur's analysis, academic culture is primarily a literary culture (one that de-emphasizes the contextual, and emphasizes the "said" of what is said). However, I do not believe that all literary cultures must inherently foreclose contextual considerations.⁴ Operative within a given discursive culture is not an ontological foreclosure of the contextual, but rather beliefs regarding the importance (or lack thereof) of contextual considerations to determine an utterance's meaning and performance. It is my hope that by foregrounding linguistic contextuality greater reflexivity can be afforded towards contextual paradigms that are embraced (or rejected) such that a wider range of contextual operatives may be utilized.⁵

⁴Take for example the diverse and prolific field of contemporary electronic literature. This field has shown that literary utterances can intentionally design material, performative, spatial, environmental, and even embodied elements. For more on this see Katherine Hayles' *Writing Machines*.

⁵For a more in-depth account into these considerations regarding the contextuality of utterance within philosophy and theoretical discourses see Finbloom's article *Philosophy Becoming Para-Textual How to transform a philosophy text into a game?* 2016

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Bodily Humor and Ideologies of Disability in *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*

Shelby Ragan

Since the advent of the We Need Diverse Books movement in 2014, the fields of children's literature, library science, and publishing have been growing conscious of the representation of non-normative experiences in children's texts. Chloe Hughes and Elizabeth A. Wheeler's introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* on literature for young people acknowledges the potential for explorations of disability in children's literature as these texts shape diverse frames of reference for readers (262). Yet, as Beverley Brenna notes, there is a distinct scarcity of characters with identifiable special needs as protagonists as they have been "relegated to subsidiary positions" in children's books on North American awards lists over the last twenty years (100). This lack extends from awards lists to the general corpus of children's literature, where characters with special needs tend to serve as tools for the growth of the protagonist rather than embodying their own growth. Brenna notes that even while these secondary characters do not necessarily perpetuate stereotypes about the issues or disabilities they have, "...they also do not serve to correct stereotypes related to perceptions of people with exceptional needs as incapable of leadership or heroism" (100). Brenna connects the invisibility of protagonists with disabilities to the historical invisibility of people with disabilities in North American society. In her assessment of North American award-winning books in the last two decades, Brenna notes two specific titles that she considers "well worth attention" for their portrayal of characters with special needs: Cynthia Lord's *Rules* and Jack Gantos' *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (101). Brenna's basic description of *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* as a book that "...deal[s] with ADHD and offer[s] the potential of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in the depiction of the title character" does little to elucidate what makes the book well worth our attention, making further inquiry necessary (101). Similarly, following David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's work on narrative prosthesis, I acknowledge that narratives frequently rely on disability as a narrative device for challenging cultural norms, so that the character with a disability becomes a metaphor rather than a political and social agent (222-23). It is not enough, then, for a protagonist to be disabled, but the ideologies surrounding the character, and throughout the text at large, should also be interrogated for their depiction of disability. It is these issues that this paper tries to address through the exploration of the use of humor in the first book of the Joey Pigza series, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (1998). Drawing on theorists of humor in children's literature as

well as theorists working at the intersection of comedy and disability studies, the use of humor is framed, particularly bodily humor that relies on episodes where Joey's body is out of control, as a means of giving voice to the protagonist with a disability as well as critiquing the ideologies around disabilities in education. Further, the paper argues that Gantos' text ultimately reinforces the ideology of "normality" by having Joey, the disabled child protagonist of the novel, rejoin the class only once he can act "normal" because his medicine makes him "better."

Ideology is part of all aspects of our lives and "[a]ll things produced in a culture are expressions of that culture's ideology" (Parsons 113). McCallum and Stephens note that narratives cannot exist without ideology but that ideology is not inherently negative, as is typically assumed; instead, "[w]hether textual ideology is negative, positive, or more or less neutral will thus be determined by the ideological positioning of a text within culture" (359). If ideology is implicit in all texts, it becomes important to understand the ways in which ideology is employed by the texts, especially as they will impact the positioning of the reader toward the subject. Ideological analysis, then,

...scrutinizes the cultural work a children's story does: who it rewards or punishes (and why), how it depicts stereotypes and power-relations, and how it is oriented (as celebrating or critiquing) the existing social, political, and economic structures of the society in and for which it has been written or produced (Parsons 116).

McCallum and Stephens argue that "[r]epresentations of *transgression*...are an important way children's literature makes ideologies apparent and seeks to redefine or even overthrow them" (367). One of the most prevalent forms of transgression in children's literature comes in the form of humor, making comedy a potentially useful tool for critiquing ideologies.

Various scholars have addressed the prevalence of humor in children's literature, asserting that humor is never quite as simple as it may initially seem. David L. Russell's conceptualization of comedy in literature rests on the notion of the comic spirit, which he defines as "the optimistic denial of human limitations" (117). The heart of comedy, then, is optimism and revolution. He writes of comic vision as that which, "...gives childhood its relentless spirit, its revolutionary nature, its irrepressible optimism. The comic spirit looks at limitations as challenges to be overcome," and this outlook is sustainable only by children and visionaries (117). Russell situates his definition of comedy and the appeal of humor in the inability of characters to conform to

societal expectations. Humor comes from the juxtaposition of incongruous ideas and rebellious spirit of the differently abled person, and is further exacerbated by the value judgment (right or wrong) attached to those behaviors that are incongruous with societal expectation. Comedic “wrong” behavior extends from the inability to adhere to social norms, making comedy impossible without social order. Russell argues that as children grow older and become aware of social structures they come to enjoy the breach of these structures as well, leading to the delight in such comedic literature. Ultimately, though, the comic spirit encompasses the idea that in the end good will prevail and social order will be restored, as comedy “...rejects any tacit acceptance of a less than perfect world”(117). The readers are then still forced to contemplate the societal restrictions and imperfections as the upheaval of societal expectations causes child readers to become aware of and contemplate such expectations, Russell characterizes comedy as revolutionary, despite its ultimate return to social order.

Implicit in this idea of revolution and social expectations is the indication that humor is intended for more than just a laugh. Julie Cross, in her study of humor in junior literature, notes the shift in the way humor functions, “...from traditional, morally didactic texts which are largely concerned with ‘personal’ morality, to books that overtly deal with ‘serious issues’, often encompassing wider, ‘societal’ concerns, in which humor is also used to temper or mask a message in some way” (26). She also notes the standard use of humor to sugarcoat didacticism by masking overtly didactic messages with comedic elements (35). Humor, then, is a tool that authors use to teach their child readers some sort of lesson or message largely based on a serious social issue. Alternately, she also writes that “[s]lapstick incidents are frequently used to diffuse what might otherwise be quite serious situations, possibly creating relief from anxiety within the child reader” (29). Russell, too, ascribes to humor the power to grant child readers “...temporary psychological relief from [societal] restrictions” (118). Along with societal restrictions, psychologists address the use of humor to deal with seriousness in case of tragedy. Eric Jaffe refers to various studies of psychology that link humor and tragedy. He writes, “...jokes help people cope with the hard times in life” (n.p.). Humor, then, functions as a means of both addressing serious issues and providing relief from the experience of those issues.

The first type of transgressive humor Cross identifies in her study is the “deliberately transgressive character” or the “naughty” child, which she identifies as the primary type of humorous character that shows up in junior fiction (40). Cross links the experience of the deliberately transgressive character with Russell’s notion of temporary

psychological relief, noting that “[t]he child reader has the benefit of seeing/imagining a child getting away with behavior no ‘normal’ child could expect to get away with, and this is fun to read about” (42). She goes on to say that reading about “naughty” characters is “a ‘safe’ way of venting feelings as the transgression is vicarious and not ‘real’ and so there are no serious repercussions for the child readers” (42). If comedy is useful for delivering messages about serious issues to child readers, and transgressive humor, in particular, causes readers to question and think critically about the limitations of society, transgressive humor then seems to be the perfect vehicle for addressing important topics in children’s texts, which is just what Jack Gantos does with *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*.

While comedy and humor have been theorized in children’s literature, and the connections between comedy and disability have been explored in general, the role of this connection specifically within children’s literature has not been fully explored. There have been a number of instances in which scholars have taken up the use of humor within disability studies, most notably in the special issue of *Body & Society* (1999), the 2003 Disability Studies Quarterly Symposium, and the special issue of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* (2013). In their introduction to the special issue of *Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, guest editors Tom Coogan and Rebecca Mallet note the particular congruence of prominent frameworks in both disability studies and humor studies and the ways in which examining the two fields together can help to solidify our understanding of both (247). Similarly, Alan Shain argues that, “Humour allows a direct attack on dominant approaches to disability” (340). Shain frames comedy as a means of disability activism as it prompts audiences to think critically about disability. In particular, Shain draws on comedy’s attention to the abnormal to reverse the hierarchy between able bodies and bodies with disabilities; through his stand-up comedy, Shain asks his audience to identify with his experience as a person with a disability and laugh at the “outsider” with a problematic attitude or understanding of disability, while simultaneously addressing beliefs or perspectives the audience potentially holds themselves (338). Thus, it is “...the response I receive to my impairment—not my impairment itself—that is the fodder for ridicule” (339). In this way, then, disability humor has the potential to function as disability activism. Although we can see it as an element of activism and critique in Gantos’s text, it is ultimately Joey and his disability, rather than those around him, who become the source of laughter.

Due to his constant violation of rules, Joey, the narrator and protagonist of *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, might initially be read as

transgressive through his resemblance to Cross's deliberately transgressive or naughty character; however, Joey's transgression actually stems from bodily humor. McGillis argues that children's humor revolves largely around the body. He notes that, "Slapstick, caricature, parody, the grotesque, ridicule, and the improbable in human predicaments concern the body, and so too does nonsense" (258). In his overview of humor and the body in children's literature, McGillis describes bodily humor with such phrases as "their behavior was larger than life," "big bodies," and "excess in the aid of humor" (259, 262, 263). Bodily humor, then, can also be read as transgressive, in that it highlights the bodies' excess of social norms. Although McGillis is mostly referencing body mass, each of these phrases characterizes Joey's body very well, though he is never described as physically large. Joey's bigness and excess come in the form of his ADHD, which gives him excess energy which he cannot control and larger-than-life behavior that serves as a source of humor for the readers and often for other children within the text as well. Joey's behavior is often the cause of laughter for his classmates. He begins his narration with such a moment: "One day, we were doing math drills in class and every time Mrs. Maxy asked a question, like 'What's nine times nine?' I'd raise my hand because I'm really quick at math. But each time she called on me, even though I knew the answer, I'd just blurt out 'Can I get back to you on that?' Then I'd nearly fall out of my chair from laughing" (Gantos 3-4). Joey goes on to say that he eventually does this so many times in a row that his classmates are distracted and Mrs. Maxy sends him out into the hallway (4). Even after being sent into the hallway, due to his excessive energy, Joey goes on to bounce like a ball all over the hallway and then ties his belt and shoelaces together to unwind himself like a top and spin around (4). It is moments such as these, where Joey's body is functioning in *big* ways, that provide the main source of humor throughout the book. The difference here, though, is that Joey's behavior is not intentionally excessive, solely for the purpose of making others laugh, but rather inherent in his body and his disability, and the reader is asked to laugh at how Joey's disabled body performs, rather than at others' reactions to it.

While being the main source of humor, Joey's body is also the main source of conflict in the book. Even in the first scene, we begin to see the issue with the way Joey's excessive body is treated, particularly by adults and authority figures. When Mrs. Maxy comes out into the hallway as Joey is spinning around like a top, she tells him, "Settle down for five, and you can rejoin the class" (5). Mrs. Maxy is essentially telling Joey that he has to get his body under control in order to come back into the classroom, that he is being punished for his own body chemistry. She does not acknowledge that Joey's body does not

work in the same way as the rest of the children, and as such does not allow him to settle down, especially "...after lunch, when [his] meds had worn down" (3). Even while knowing that the alternative to not settling down is being sent to the principal's office, Joey is not able to follow such directions, as is made obvious by his response: "I nodded, and when she was gone I wrapped the belt and laces around my middle and gave it a good tug and began to spin and spin and slam into the lockers" (5). This episode encapsulates the entire first chapter of the book which works to frame Joey's inability to control himself because of a behavioral issue rather than a medical one, a framework which is carried out throughout much of the text. In the following chapters, Joey goes on to explain his ADHD, which he never names directly but rather refers to as being "wired," and the ways in which it causes him problems. He details incidents with his grandmother, his mother, and in his school that all ultimately come down to his inability to follow the rules, which are intended to exert normative control over his out-of-control body.

Despite his obvious inability to control his body in this initial scene and, as we learn later, Mrs. Maxy's awareness of his history, it takes several more incidents before Joey's situation is aptly dealt with. On his first day in Mrs. Maxy's class, after she has read his file, she "...give[s Joey] a fair chance to show just how good [he] could be," overtly indicating an understanding of his condition as one of bad behavior rather than a medical issue (18). When Joey demonstrates that he cannot control his energetic impulses, Mrs. Maxy sits him down and tells him the rules: "I had to stay in my seat, she said. No running, jumping, or kicking. Keep my hands on top of my desk. I wasn't allowed to look over my shoulder. No touching the person in front of me. No fidgeting and no drawing on myself. And I absolutely wasn't allowed to say anything until I raised my hand and was called on" (20). While these rules are not out of the ordinary as far as classroom rules go, they are not rules that Joey's body has the ability to follow. Jared David Berezin notes the seemingly immovable tension between ADHD and general classroom expectations embodied in James M. Christian's study of the literature of ADHS: "...symptoms typically worsen in situations that require sustained attention or mental effort or that lack appeal or novelty" (qtd. in Berezin). Although Mrs. Maxy should be aware that his disability prevents Joey from adhering to the rules, she goes on to tell Joey that her rules "apply to *everyone* in the class" and that she makes no exceptions (Gantos 20, emphasis in original). In *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson defines disability not as a property inherent to the body itself but as a "...product

of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (6). Joey’s body does not, and often cannot, do what cultural (and classroom) rules say it should, and as such falls within Thomson’s conception of disability. In an article on invisible disabilities, Ellen Samuels writes, “...the dominant culture’s insistence on visible signs to legitimate impairment,” and this insistence seems to be at work here (325). Although we can see Joey’s disability at work in his actions and inability to control himself, for all intents and purposes it is not considered a visible disability because he appears able-bodied. Thus, Joey does not automatically receive extra help or understanding as his lack of visible impairment perpetuates the cultural conception that he is “normal” and simply badly behaved. Mrs. Maxy expects Joey to be able to follow the rules as everyone else is expected to, although presumably exceptions would be made for other visibly more apparent disabilities.

Because Joey’s disability is not starkly visible, he is expected to adhere to the same rules as everyone else and when he cannot do so, he is punished just as he would be if his transgressions stemmed solely from bad behavior. The previous scene in which Joey is removed from the classroom is one of the examples of Joey’s punishment for being incapable of following the rules. Many such incidents occur in the novel, for instance, after Joey gets sent to the nurse for sticking his finger in the pencil sharpener, he is identified as being potentially dangerous to himself and others, but Mrs. Maxy still does not recognize Joey’s need for assistance and accommodation. Instead, she tells him that if he isn’t able to adhere to the rules, “...[they’ll] have to send [him] down to the special-ed class for extra help” (Gantos 25). Each time Mrs. Maxy addresses Joey’s inability to follow rules, she implies a punishment, so that even getting the special attention he needs because of his disorder becomes a punishment for being different.

Joey’s experience with alienation and punishment due to rule-breaking reflects a very real experience of children with disabilities, particularly ADHD. In her analysis of the Joey Pigza books, Marah Gubar states that, “[c]hildren’s texts that feature disabled child protagonists often share two primary goals: to allow children with impairments to see themselves represented in literature, and to persuade other child readers to empathize with their peers,” both goals which she identifies as present in the Joey Pigza series (219). Gubar’s statement implies that it is important that the texts present accurate portrayals of the experiences of children with impairments. Joey’s story does present an accurate portrayal of this experience, as is made clear by an article in which Berezin relates an anecdote from his youth where he was moved from his regular in-the-middle-of-the-class desk to a big grey desk at the side of the classroom because his “hyperactive-

unable-to-focus-finger-tapping-pencil-chewing-mind-racing-thirteen-year-old-self” could not function like the rest of the class (N.pag.). Berezin goes on to confess that it was a “privilege” to be in the same space with his able-bodied classmates, “...and my teacher suspended that privilege, separating me from my fellow students” (N. pag.). He emphasizes the importance, in this action, of the regulation of disabled bodies incapable of performing according to the rules: “...the disabled body performs abnormal behavior. Accordingly, the enforced segregation, and in turn subjugation of the disabled body’s performance of abnormality remains vital for the maintenance of the dominant class’s definition of normal versus abnormal, powerful versus powerless, valuable versus non-valuable” (N. pag.). Berezin’s description of his experience is uncannily similar to what Joey experiences in Mrs. Maxy’s classroom. Gantos is creating a realistic protagonist with a disability, as his story closely reflects that of an actual person with the same disability, but their experiences differ in terms of the visibility provided by each situation. Berezin notes that he “...performed [his] disability—[his] deviation from the norm—in a removed, yet visible space” and doing so allowed him to demonstrate “...the consequences, namely segregation and loneliness, of not performing the ‘normal’ expectation” (N. pag.). Gubar writes that the invisibility imposed on students with disabilities “...suggests that there is something shameful about having a disability” (224). The obvious similarities between Joey’s and Berezin’s stories not only emphasize the genuineness of Joey’s position as a disabled child protagonist, but also reinforce the reality of the ideology toward “accommodating” disabled bodies in the classroom that Gantos is critiquing.

Even when Joey gets help at school, the underlying ideological structure of bad behavior governs his interactions with the special education classroom as well. Eventually, Joey’s mishaps end up getting him sent to the special education classroom to get “a little extra help” (Gantos 35). Mrs. Jarzab, the principal, escorts Joey to the special education room and explains the situation to him by comparing it to other instances in which students struggle with material. She tells him, “[s]tudents who have trouble with math get extra math help. Or if they have trouble reading we give them reading help...But you can’t sit still very long and keep your mind on your work. So, we’re going to give you some sitting help” (35). Mrs. Jarzab likens Joey’s rule-breaking and subsequent expulsion to the special education room to a student struggling with a concept who needs tutoring. The issue here is not comprehension of a particular concept but capability. But even as she frames this move as giving Joey extra help, Mrs. Jarzab confirms Mrs. Maxy’s position that it is, in fact, a punishment. Joey tells her,

“Mrs. Maxy said I was going to be sent there if I didn’t settle down,” and Mrs. Jarzab tells him that the special education classroom will “...help [him] learn not to break [the rules]” (37). This indicates that even as he has been identified as needing attention and accommodation for his disability, the emphasis is on correcting Joey’s behavior to adhere to the rules, attempting to fit Joey into the normative standard, rather than changing to rules to accommodate Joey’s body. The focus of his time in the special education room, which is located in the basement—Joey calls it a dungeon—and contributes to the invisibility of the students with impairments, is to sit in “the Big Quiet Chair,” that is highly reminiscent of a time-out chair, and practice his sitting-still skills (38). When Joey gets too rowdy in class, he gets sent to the basement classroom for “a focus session” until he can calm down and be allowed to rejoin his regular class (45). The special education program, then, is operating under the same flawed ideology that Joey’s condition is a behavioral one that can be remedied by forcing him to follow the rules.

The faulty ideology that students with (invisible) disabilities should be able to adhere to the rules regulates the accommodations of the special education students at Joey’s school but does not truly help Joey. Cross notes that “...’child’ narrators in contemporary texts are homodiegetic—they are telling their own story—and so they are not narrating as all-knowing adults outside of the story, but are positioned as witty, ‘child’ characters addressing other youngsters” (56). The homodiegetic narration is particularly important here because it makes it possible for Joey to give us a glimpse into his internal consciousness. It is his narration that shows us that Joey is not intentionally misbehaving; he has good intentions and wants to stay out of trouble, but his body impedes that process. Early in the narrative, Joey says, “I am how I am because Grandma was born wired, and my dad, Carter Pigza, was born wired, and I followed right behind them” (Gantos 8-9). From the beginning, we are told that Joey’s excess energy is a physical product of genetics, a position which he reaffirms throughout the story. At several points, Joey expresses the sensations of his disability. His medicine, which works in the morning, tends to wear off after lunch, leaving him feeling “...as if [he] was sitting on a giant spring and it was all [he] could do to keep it from launching [him] head first up into the ceiling” (19). Several times Joey describes the difficulty he has in listening and paying attention; in one instance, he says, “I had nothing against questions. I just didn’t like listening to them, because some questions take forever to make sense” (34). Through these experiences, we see that Joey does not disregard the rules; he simply can’t focus on listening to them even though he *wants* to follow them. He makes attempts to self-regulate his body by “...[hanging] onto his desk-

top...with all [his] might...as if some giant was holding [him]" or "...[closing his] eyes and [sitting] on [his] hands because sometimes that helps settle [him] down like [he's] in [his] own straightjacket" (41, 49). But Joey's self-regulation of his body is not enough. He only goes to the special education room three times before the final incident that gets him sent to the special education center, and each of these three instances finds Joey relegated to the Big Quiet Chair to settle down. In fact, the main strategy is to let Joey tire himself out so that he falls asleep. While this approach does get Joey's hyperactivity under control, it does not allow him to participate in the learning atmosphere of the classroom. Rather than truly trying to address Joey's issues, the special education classroom, placed in an invisible space devoted solely to children with disabilities, resorts to the same ineffective tactics as his regular classroom.

It is because of the prevailing ideology that Joey's invisible disability is a behavioral issue that he becomes truly dangerous to other students, and it is his dangerousness that gets him sent to the special education center. The idea that Joey should be able to control his body and follow the same rules as everyone else, rather than being given the special attention and accommodation he needs, leads to a series of lapses in supervision, which ultimately lead to the final incident. After being left with a substitute teacher who was not aware of his situation, Joey sneaks out to an assembly for the gifted and talented students and decides that he is going to do something great for the world by making a bunch of bumper stickers (67). As he is working, Mrs. Maxy leaves Joey unsupervised, and when the safety scissors won't cut his poster board, he goes to get the teacher scissors. He's running back to finish his project quickly when he trips on the ear of a bunny slipper and accidentally cuts off the tip of another student's nose as he falls. Although this incident is an obvious accident, there is still more at work than appears on the surface. When Joey's class goes to the Amish farm on a field trip, Joey gets sent to the bus to wait while the rest of the students are carving pumpkins (a task too dangerous for Joey to be allowed to participate in). Despite knowing Joey's character thoroughly, Mrs. Maxy sends him to the bus alone, but instead of going to the bus Joey goes to find the shoefly pie the students got to eat that he was denied. The sugar buzz from eating an entire pie sees Joey climbing to the roof of the barn and jumping into a haystack and spraining his ankle. It is because of this lack of supervision that Joey ends up wearing the bunny slipper that he trips on. Then, when Mrs. Maxy has to go to a conference, she leaves no indication for the substitute teacher to introduce her to Joey's special needs, which allows him to slip away to the assembly for the gifted and talented students. Finally, Mrs. Maxy

leaves Joey alone with his project so that he has access to the sharp scissors and the freedom to run with them in his hands, which is when the accident occurs. It is quite likely that if Joey had been supervised in any of these situations Maria would still have the tip of her nose. While looking back at this incident, we may see a grotesque sort of humor in it—we were always told not to run with scissors and for good reason—but we must also acknowledge the serious consequences of the inability or unwillingness of these educators to provide Joey with the attention he needs.

Gantos positions the special education center as taking the right approach to dealing with Joey's disability. From the moment Joey arrives, the difference between Joey's regular and special education classrooms at his school and the special education center is obvious. Special Ed, Joey's caseworker, starts off by telling Joey that the center is "...definitely *not* a place where you go because no one else wants you or likes you anymore. It's not a place for punishment" (Gantos 96, emphasis in original). Immediately, Joey is given someone whose job it is to pay special attention to him and his needs, and the center is positioned explicitly as *not* a punishment. Special Ed goes on to tell Joey that his being at the center is not about him "being in trouble" but about "getting [him] better" (99). Joey's entire first day there is spent talking to Special Ed about his home and school life, with Ed trying to understand and help him as an individual rather than just trying to make him control himself. Through the center, Joey gets the attention he needs; they find the correct medicine and nutrition plan, along with working one-on-one to help Joey learn to make good decisions. While the workers at the special education center do not entirely disregard the behavioral aspects of Joey's situation, they also acknowledge that the situation is a combination of both medical and behavioral factors, which both need to be addressed. The success Joey has with this two-pronged approach to his disability, which is free from the dominant ideology perpetuated by the educators at his school, signals that the correct approach to take is the perspective that does not view Joey's disability as a behavioral issue that requires punishment rather than assistance and accommodation.

No one in the narrative ever comes out and says, directly, that the school's approach to special education is wrong. In an article written for *School Library Journal*, Jack Gantos addresses the topic of ADHD and how it should be approached in classroom settings. He writes, "Teachers and librarians need to be trained and equipped to spot their behavior and direct their enormous energy toward obtainable tasks. School systems need to address the issues of ADHD kids and prepare to meet their needs" (64). It is obvious that these are the

thoughts that Gantos is addressing through *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, as we see almost all of these issues come up.

Although Gantos has constructed his book to critique the perpetuation of certain ideologies about visible disabilities and special education, the text itself is also imbued with and perpetuates problematic ideologies of normality. Parsons notes that ideological criticism is generally not concerned with the beliefs or intentions of the author because "...the ideological landscape of a fictional story may unconsciously reproduce the author's values and assumptions without the author's direct awareness of her or his own biases" so that what the author believes or intends the story to say or teach "...may not give access to ideological positions in the text, many of which exist as covert curricula beneath the overt story" (115). The actual ideologies at work in a text, then, are often not explicit even to the author himself. McCallum and Stephens, too, address the invisibility of ideology: "Ideologies can thus function *most powerfully* in books which reproduce beliefs and assumptions of which authors and readers are largely unaware. Such texts render ideology *invisible* and hence invest implicit ideological positions with legitimacy by naturalizing them" (360, emphasis mine). These naturalized, hidden ideologies are, then, more dangerous than the ideologies a text may be explicitly critiquing because the reader is positioned to accept that ideological position without question. For *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, the naturalized, invisible ideology is that of normality.

Despite Gantos' efforts to construct a text that is appropriately sensitive to and representative of the experience of a child with disabilities and that critiques dominant ideologies surrounding the experiences of those children in school systems, Gantos ultimately maintains culturally dominant ideologies of normality. Douglas C. Baynton outlines the development of the concept of "normal" and its relation to people with disabilities. Prior to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the prevailing metaphor was of the natural versus the monstrous, but the concept of the natural "...was to a great extent displaced or subsumed by the concept of normality. Since then, normality has been deployed in all aspects of modern life as a means of measuring, categorizing, and managing populations" (18). He goes on to say that both the natural and the normal are "...ways of establishing the universal, unquestionable good and right...Both are constituted in large part by being set in opposition to culturally variable notions of disability—just as the natural was meaningful in relation to the monstrous and the deformed, so are the cultural meanings of the normal produced in tandem with disability" (18-19). Further, Lennard J. Davis writes that, "[t]o understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept

of the norm, the normal body” (3). He shifts the focus from the construction of disability to the construction of normality, since “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (3). Normality, then, is one of the most invisible and pervasive ideologies in our culture, and also one of the most detrimental to those with disabilities.

The ideological construct of normality shows up most predominantly in Joey’s insistence on his own normality and his inability to be a ‘hero’ until he gets ‘better.’ When Joey is on his dud medication that only works until lunch time, he describes the difference between his before and after lunch situations in terms of normality. Before lunch he feels “like any old kid” and “like a normal kid” whereas after lunch his “old self start[s] to sneak up on [him]” indicating that his unmedicated state is abnormal (Gantos 19, 28). Further, at one point Joey gets worked up and scours his house looking for his medicine in order to take a bunch of pills and “return [himself] to normal,” indicating that this internalized ideology endangers his physical health as well as his emotional and social well-being (85). When comparing himself to the other students in the special education classroom, Joey recognizes that “it wasn’t polite to stare at crippled kids” but it was okay for them to look at him because he was “normal” (37). It is important, here, to note the two meanings of normal to understand Joey’s internalization and use of the cultural construct of normality. In one respect, normal refers to the typical state of something. Normal can also refer to conforming to a standard. Each of these definitions is at work in Joey’s understanding of normality. On the one hand, Joey’s normal state is hyperactive and his body generally out of control, yet he claims to want to use his medicine to get himself back to normal. Normal here, then, refers to Joey’s ability to conform to the standard practices of other bodies that do not have the same chemical makeup as Joey.

Joey has internalized the ideology of normality as “good and right” and abnormality (read: disability) as bad and wrong; therefore, he rejects the idea of being identified as an abnormal (read: disable) person. The connection between normal and good is further emphasized by the number of times Joey and others equate his condition to badness and behavioral issues. Joey repeatedly refers to the effects of his time without proper medication as “bad behavior” and the first time he gets sent to the special education classroom for not being able to perform normatively, he equates himself to a “...bad dog that had pooped all over the carpet” (8, 41, 37). He even refers to his medicine as “...a little white round superhero pill on its way to beat up all the bad stuff in [him]” (28). For Joey, the parts of his body that do not and

cannot adhere to the social standards of normal are villains in need of punishment. In addition to equating his disability with badness, Joey rejects the categorization of badness himself, claiming that he's "not a bad kid" and that he's "a good kid" that "just got dud meds," further accepting the ideology that his condition is a moral defect (85, 76). Even the back cover blurb says, "Joey knows he's really a *good* kid, but no matter how hard he tried to do the right thing, something always seems to go wrong. Will he ever get anything right?" (Gantos back cover). It implies that even the presentation of Joey outside his own perspective emphasizes the association between good behavior and normality, thus, leading the reader to feel the same. While Joey's normal state, in fact, counteracts the cultural concept of normality, he insists upon his ability to conform to 'normal' behaviors.

If Joey's correlation between his disability and badness were also part of the critique Gantos is making in regard to the treatment of ADHD, we could read Joey's self-criticism as a comment on the damaging effects of the dominant ideologies surrounding invisible disabilities, but as it occurs at the end of the book and is never redressed, it just affirms this correlation. After Joey has a brain SPECT test, the doctor tells him that his "...problems are not neurologically severe," which indicates that Joey's disability is not as severe as it could be and he is closer to "normal" than he expected to be (Gantos 139). After this revelation, as Joey notes, "everything was different" (141). When Joey lifts up his shirt and his stomach is covered in Band-Aids, Special Ed finds the situation humorous (as opposed to the first time it happened and Ed was angry) because now "[i]nstead of being sick, I was just being a kid. Now that I was getting better, people could like me more" (140-41). While it is possible that the statement that people liked him more when he was getting better is merely Joey's perspective, it is a fact that the first time Special Ed finds Joey covered in Band-Aids, before they knew his full diagnosis, he is upset, whereas now they can laugh about Joey's behavior because, as the doctor informs them, "[i]t's normal" (140). Further, Brenna notes the importance of books with disabled child protagonists who are heroes and leaders in their own right, but Joey does not actually fit this bill. If Joey were to be a hero or leader *in his own right* the story would end with Joey achieving that in his disabled state. Instead, Joey is only a hero when he gets "better." We see this in his interaction with the mother of Harold, another student in the special education classroom. When Joey returns to school, which he is only able to do once he can perform normally and sit still, Harold's mother tells him, "You give me hope, Joey....If you can do it, then maybe Harold can too, someday" (153). Joey finds this amazing because he "...never thought someone would ever point to

[him] and say [he] gave them hope that someday their kid would be like [him]” (153). Joey’s hero status only comes once he has achieved normalcy and his body can behave as everyone else’s does. Further, once Joey has overcome his disability, his hijinks end and he is no longer the source of humor; thus, the bodily humor is not functioning as the kind of disability activism Shain outlines.

Perhaps this ending is inevitable because, as Russell notes, transgressive comedy demands a return to order, and social order is ultimately also subject to the ideology of normality. We see the same cycle in the next book in the series, *Joey Pigza Loses Control* (2000), when Joey goes to visit his father; the main conflict and source of humor in this story is when Joey’s father flushes his medicine patches down the toilet, veritably unleashing Joey’s disability and causing him no end of grief over the summer. Resolution only comes when Joey’s mom comes to pick him up and he once again has access to his medicine patch. Each of these books hinges on comedic moments of Joey’s disabled body transgressing social norms but the moments of humor only occur when Joey is unmedicated, positioning Joey’s body, rather than the larger cultural rules about how bodies should perform, as the problem. While the medication of ADHD is not inherently bad, the way Joey being medicated is framed in these texts, as a means of achieving a normal status, reveals an underlying ideology about disability that undermines the critique Gantos is making. It seems, then, that despite the usefulness of comedy in learning and the potential for its use as disability activism, Russell’s assertion that comedy sees limitations as challenges to be overcome is problematic when that comedy deals with disability because disabilities *are* essentially limitations, but using disability as the source of comedy posits it as something that needs to be overcome and ultimately reinforces normality. The trajectory of Joey’s next adventure reinforces the argument that even though Gantos is precise about critiquing ideologies about disability in his first Joey Pigza book, the truly powerful ideology remains the normal being the ideal. Russell’s assertion that comedy rejects the acceptance of a “less than perfect world” indicates that Joey’s out-of-control body is less than perfect, so that even as the comedic elements of the text are transgressive, they do not function as disability activism (117). Beverly Brenna praises *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* and Jack Gantos for the portrayal of a child protagonist with a disability. Joey is a funny, engaging, and realistic character who triumphs at the end of his story. Through Joey’s story, Gantos provides a pointed and valid critique of the ideologies that surround children with disabilities in classrooms. But while this explicit critique of ideology is important, it is perhaps more important to take a hard look at the “unconscious system of beliefs” perpetuated by our society (Parsons 113). These invisible ideo-

logies are the most dangerous since they are readily absorbed by readers without awareness and cannot be dealt with transgressive comedy.



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Feminism and Time in Recent Speculative Fiction

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“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”

—Donna Haraway

“We need writers who re[-]member freedom.”

—Ursula LeGuin

The aim of this paper is to explicate the usefulness of (a) feminist critique(s) of time, specifically those critiques posited by feminist ethicists Denise Ferreira da Silva and Karen Barad, in approaching an analysis of the political potential of science and speculative fiction (SF).¹ The paper is largely in response to popular media descriptions of the recent SF novel, *The Power*, as a feminist novel: a “feminist dystopia for the #metoo moment” (Fallon), and “...one of those essential, feminist works” (Charles). As a descriptor of *The Power*, the term “feminist” cannot mean something other than a mirror reversal of gendered power relations, putting women “on top,” playing into the antifeminist visions of right wing pundits and internet memes, and illuminating the confusion surrounding the goals of recent women’s marches worldwide.² The paper tries to reclaim the word “feminist” as having always at least the meaning of pursuit of equality and opposition to domination,³ and explores the possibilities for

¹In this paper, I will use the SF abbreviation to refer to both/either science and/or speculative fiction. Donna Haraway’s use of the acronym to refer to many forms of playful and questioning storytelling influences me (10), as does Walter Mosely’s description of speculative fiction as a genre that “...speaks most clearly to those who are dissatisfied with the way things are” (405). I am interested in speculative/science fictions that pursue the “what if” of scientific possibility, but also of ethico-political possibilities that differ from the modern paradigm.

²On the many aspects of the US women’s movement, see Amanda Hess.

³In an interview published last year, Judith Butler asserted that, “At a minimum, feminism opposes inequality, exploitation, and violence...” She goes on to say that a “...feminist ethics, and perhaps any ethic, should be committed to making life more livable for as many people as possible” (462). An acceptance of Butler’s proposal of an assessment of minimum commitments for the designation of an ethical position as feminist might prove useful in a world saturated with media, literature, and ethical and political positions claiming or referred to as having a relationship to the term.

feminist ethico-politico social movement with Silva and Barad.⁴ It suggests that SF texts in which character and plot demonstrate relations of non-domination and mutual responsibility tend to challenge both linear and static conceptions of time and refers to Barad's use of the concept of "hauntology" to describe the other kind of time that emerges in these texts. If SF cannot meaningfully propose utopian visions of the future in our time, as Fredric Jameson famously suggested (288-289), but can maintain an anti-anti-utopian stance in the face of the limits of the present, it is "haunted" time in SF that presents the anti-anti-utopian at its most potent. Ultimately, the paper claims that the SF novel may be anti-anti-utopian and/or feminist specifically because it also haunts the reader bringing the reader into the experience of nonlinear time. Carmen Maria Machado's recent collection of stories, *Her Body and Other Parties*, serves as a compelling example of the feminist possibilities of haunted time in SF. The haunted SF feminist text provides anti-anti-utopian visions that support the pursuit of a world organized according to a different ethical program; because *The Power* maintains both relations of domination and teleological time, it cannot imagine the haunted feminism of *Her Body*.

To briefly address the need for the word "feminist" in the context of an ethico-political analysis of SF: to the extent that the anti-anti-utopian enables a belief in a differently ethical world, any such world necessarily includes more equal relations between people of all genders. "Feminism" is a marker for the pursuit of that particular equality. Silva adds the words "black" and "poetic" in her description of an ethics adequate to changing the world: "A Black, Feminist, Poethics," because the world as it is is predicated on the abuse and enslavement of black bodies, and because poetry is a form of resistance to a "reason" leveraged against nonwhite and non-male being (85-86). With Silva, the word "capitalist" is used to describe "a certain kind of world," (85-86) in which white male subjectivity becomes a determining force. The word "queer" is also added as necessary to ethical change in the world and it is proposed that any anti-anti-utopian SF must be read in relationship with all of these terms: feminist, black, anti-capitalist, and queer. The historic social

⁴That is, I seek an ethic that differs from the ethic of capitalist violence and look to theorists who have explicated feminist ethics as differing from violence. I follow Ferreira da Silva in suggesting that a possible nonviolent ethic would mean, "...the end of the world as we know it" ("On Difference" 2).

movements that give meaning to these four words have also informed Silva and Barad's work in imagining other times.⁵

Struggles for social justice have a noted fraught relationship to the concept of a "future" time. In many analyses,⁶ the "future" is necessarily capitalist. It is only with the emergence of modernity that the concept of time as projecting and progressing line becomes an organizing factor in human life. This is the teleology of Hegelian and Marxist time, moving (straight) forwardly toward the undeniable time ahead. Before capitalist forms evinced a focus on growth, in Jameson's and others' analyses, people may have known time differently. Jameson describes this sense of time that emerges in capitalism as "...a different experience of temporality from that which was appropriate to a feudal or tribal system..." which demands "...a concrete vision of the past which we may expect to find completed by that far more abstract and empty conception...which we sometimes call 'progress'" (Jameson 284). Before modernity, Franco "Bifo" Berardi suggests a focus on linear time was contrary to a more Godly time: "Modernity started with the reversal of the theocratic vision of time as a Fall and a distancing from the City of God. Moderns are those who live time as the sphere of a progress toward perfection, or at least toward improvement, enrichment, and rightness" (Berardi 25). Though it is difficult to imagine any alternative conception of time now in late modernity, philosophers agree that capitalism introduces an emphasis on time as movement toward the future. Jameson additionally argues that the imaginary of a "better" future, like the description of utopia, has been a consistent project of bourgeois capitalism (Jameson 12). The vision of the future privileges bourgeois desire that is always predicated on the exploitation of the colonized world and the abuse of enslaved bodies. All characterizations of utopia are limited by the capitalist sense of time that informs the pursuit of utopia in the first place.

Utopian notions are further undermined by the history of pursuits of state utopia. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and Fukuyama's declaration of the end of history the capitalist future has changed again. There is a sense that the future has already arrived and is now closed. Capitalist progress is not reaching into a distant

⁵Denise Ferreira da Silva is often referred to as a thinker within the black radical tradition. See, for example, John D. Márquez and Junaid Rana, "Black Radical Possibility and the Decolonial International." In addition, Barad writes in "Posthumanist Performativity" that her theoretical framework is indebted to Butler, Foucault, Donna Haraway, and others whose thoughts have grown out of queer social movement.

⁶See Jack Halberstam in addition to Silva, Muñoz, and Bifo Berardi.

unknown, but maintains simultaneously a sense of time as linear progression and future as finally complete. Bifo writes that time now is “after the future,” a time in which future has become impossible, in the moment when “...the collective imagination becomes incapable of seeing alternatives to trends leading to devastation, increased poverty and violence” (Berardi 59). Political interventions that used to inspire feel hopelessly ineffective; the inevitable capitalist future becomes an interminable present. Just as the bourgeois capitalist at the height of modernity imagined the better future, neoliberal and late capitalist visions entail only a critique of the naiveté of any future-oriented socialist or communist utopian projects, already proven void.

Neither temporal framework (future-oriented or future-rejecting) offers a way out of capitalist exploitation, domination, and violence. Before the march toward future, we stew in permanent relationships of futureless abuse with no way backward or forward. There is no constant growth without coloniality and exploitation. There is no imaginable future remedy to the current reality of inequality without growth. The double bind prompts the global depression that Bifo analyzes (65).

Groups and individuals committed to the possibility of political change can be aware of the limitations of linear time and utopia and still struggle to avoid the organizing concept of a future. The static future of capitalism is, of course, an unsatisfying alternative as José Muñoz points out in *Cruising Utopia*. *Social movements* against the order of capital attempt to shift societal relations in the direction of equality and justice; the shift or movement entails a movement forward, toward a better time ahead (Muñoz 11). Even if people involved in movement accept the concept of “progress” as necessarily capitalist their work relies on a vision of future as improvement. For example, in Muñoz’s conception of a utopian queerness, queerness as an ethical or political stance must be situated in futurity. He refers to the 1971 manifesto of the radical group, Third World Gay Revolution, reading the “we” in their statement as “...a ‘we’ that is ‘not yet conscious,’ the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment” (20). From within the capitalist present, it is difficult to imagine a social movement not organized around the pursuit of the better future.

In the context of “no future,”⁷ or too much future, this paper discusses feminist ethicists Denise Ferreira da Silva’s and Karen Barad’s separate proposals of a need to rethink the choice between a linear temporality or a pragmatic or cynical presentism. Without reverting to a utopianism that reproduces the present, there are strains within these political feminisms that offer some possibility with respect to time. Both theorists take inspiration from quantum physics.⁸ They suggest, in different ways, that quantum studies of time reveal the fictiveness of all kinds of time, and the non-necessity specifically of capitalist time. Silva’s concept of the Plenum and Barad’s iteration of Derrida’s hauntology both posit temporalities beyond the *all*-future and *no*-future of capitalist modernity and postmodernity. This paper follows their work in proposing that these other temporalities might be necessary to the feminist ethical “minimum” of opposition to inequality, exploitation, and violence.

In “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics,” Silva describes the end of “a certain kind of world,” predicated on colonization and the abuse and exploitation of black and female bodies. Explaining the imposition of concepts of Time and the future on being, she states, “it is the notion of development that allows Herder and Hegel to transform the World into the Workshop of Time” (88). Development is, of course, colonial and capitalist development. For Silva, it is the “temporalizing of forms” that creates the racial dialectic: whiteness and blackness. Once there is an understanding of human history as progress toward, there is the privileged [white] Subject and the racial violence dependent on the Category of Blackness as “thing,” “arrested development.” There is always the threat to the Subject, however, that

⁷Muñoz’s text is partially a response to Lee Edelman’s *No Future* and what Muñoz refers to as “antirelational queer theory” (11).

⁸Physicist David J. Griffiths writes that quantum physics entails an “abrupt and revolutionary departure” from classical physics (viii). The essential problem that led to the development of quantum physics is the unpredictability of the position or state of a particle, just before measurement. Classical physics suggests that scientists should be able to determine the position/state of the particle; the actual unpredictability of the particle’s location/state required the development of theories that differ from classical physics, collectively called “quantum mechanics” or “quantum physics:” that either there are “hidden variables” that would help to predict the location of the particle, or the act of measurement itself might play a role in determining the location of the particle, or there might simply be no way to know. Either of the latter two approaches to the problem disturbs scientists’ understanding of the rigidity of the rules of classical physics (Griffiths 374-375). The quantum eraser experiment is particularly relevant to a discussion of how classical physics fails to explain the behavior of matter in time, the possible “real” influence of the present on the past, and time as nonlinear. That both Silva and Barad see the theories of quantum physics as potentially liberating from linear capitalist time motivates my investigation here.

Blackness will reveal the contingency of these temporalized categories. It is through the poetic/ethical release of "...the Subject into the World..." that Blackness/Black Feminism "...puts an end to the World of Time in which the racial dialectic makes sense" (90). Thus "Ending the grip of time restores the World anew" (90).

Silva further explains that her understanding of the necessary end of the world is inspired in her reading of twentieth century physicists. From quantum physics, Silva borrows the terms "non-locality," and "entanglement" (or "non-separability") to describe the characteristics of the world that might exist after the end of Time as an organizing force in the categorization of humans and things. In "On Differences Without Separability," Silva investigates the ethical implications of a quantum perspective on time and matter. (Because this paper is dependent on Silva and Barad's understandings of the physics involved, both of them are quoted at length.):

What if, instead of The Ordered World, we could image The World as a Plenum, an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time. For decades now, experiments in particle physics have astonished scientists and laypeople with findings that suggest that the fundamental components of everything, every thing, could be just such... What if, instead of the Ordered World, we imaged each existant (human and more-than-human) not as separate forms relating through the mediation of forces, but rather as singular expressions of each and every other existant as well as of the entangled whole in/as which they exist? (63).

In both works, Silva posits that the Plenum as an alternative to the "World," as a re-imagining of sociality based on the fictiveness of linear temporality and spatial separation, would be an "ethical opening." If everything in the universe is a constantly reshaping entanglement, there is no possibility of static differentiation between humans, and between humans and nonhumans. An ethics of non-locality and entanglement is the end of racial gendered violence.

In her own development of a feminist ethic, Karen Barad uses the same revelations of quantum physics to re-engage with the concept of "hauntology" as a disturbance of an ontology of distinct entities and

times. Derrida coined the now well-used⁹ term “hauntology” in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) to describe a theory of being, with reference to the many ghost metaphors in *Capital*, which recognizes that anything in existence balances between inaccessible past and unknown future (qtd. in Fisher 19). Unlike common-sense understandings of identity and existence, “Haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time” (Fisher 19). The [non]existent spectre is not necessarily benign. Martin Hägglund explicates, being “...will always be threatened by what it cannot integrate in itself—haunted by the negated, the neglected, and the unforeseeable” (82). In his brief, “What is Hauntology?,” Fisher writes that Derrida uses the term explicitly to describe the “lost” futures, prolific in modernity, which are neither present nor absent in postmodernity (16). That is, in late capitalism, the lost futures of capitalism “haunt” us with utopian visions that it cannot integrate.

In her “playful” exploration of time from the perspective of quantum physics, Karen Barad proclaims, “...*empirical evidence for a hauntology!*” (Barad, “Quantum Entanglements” 260). Looking closely at the quantum eraser experiment, which has demonstrated that delayed observations of matter passing through slits can somehow change the past behavior of the matter, Barad explains the connection between the experiment and an understanding of time: present, future, and past, as unfixed/haunted:

What this experiment tells us is that whether or not an entity goes through the apparatus as a wave or a particle can be determined *after* it has already gone through the apparatus, that is, *after it has already gone through as either a wave (through both slits at once) or a particle (through one slit or the other)*! In other words, it is not merely that the past behavior of some given entity has been changed, as it were, but that the entities’ very identity has been changed. *Its past identity, its ontology, is never fixed, it is always open to future reworkings!* The physicists who proposed the quantum eraser experiment interpret these results as the possibility of ‘changing the past’ (260).

⁹Many in queer theory have taken up hauntology as a way to think queerness with respect to capitalist heteronormativity: as a scary ghost. José Muñoz has used the term to describe the need for a return to the utopian, or at least the anti-anti-utopian, in queer politics (28, 42).

Barad goes on to say, however, that the quantum eraser experiment does not entail the complete erasure of the first identity (before the change). This is a changing of the past that cannot completely undo past wrongs but a change that leaves another haunting past. Barad writes, "...it is not the case that the past (a past that is given) can be changed (contrary to what some physicists have said), or that the effects of past actions can be fully mended, but rather that the 'past' is always already open to change' (266).

The openness of the past to change implies for Barad an ethics of responsibility to the past, to the dead, and to the future, the unborn. "To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' *are*..." (264): not one, or self, but irreducible entanglements of others. For Barad, that is, the hauntological real is proof that "we" all owe each other, that we have a responsibility to the past and future of the world. The responsibility is unending. It cannot be resolved into a final utopia- the hauntological ethic is the rejection of any fixed identity.

Both Silva and Barad present convincing arguments as to why we should engage a theory of temporality that differs from either the modern or neoliberal. Both share the vision of an ethics of possibility to change the past and future of capitalist and colonial horror. Ultimately, this haunting ethic is not wholly contradictory to Muñoz's concept of a utopian queer hauntology, which, he says, emphasizes the future *in* the present (56). A hauntological futurity does not correspond to either bourgeois utopian time or neoliberal end of time. It haunts both with an ethic of not only possibility but necessity of change.

Why might we leverage these [Black] [queer] feminist [po]ethical concepts, the plenum and the hauntological, in a reading of the "feminist" in science fiction? Building on an analysis of futurist projects as always contained within the imaginary of capitalism, and the anti-utopian as an expression of the interminable capitalist, Jameson writes that science fiction does not have the potential to provide us with the vision of the ethical, but only to show us what we cannot imagine in speculations on utopias that necessarily fail, restricted as they are by the hegemonic global imaginary that limits political thought (284). From Jameson's perspective, the best utopian SF does not succeed politically or ethically in its recommendation of any particular better world, but is meaningful in its refutation of

capitalism's narrative of itself as the final and only possibility. Thus, Jameson states, "...the slogan of anti-anti-Utopianism might well offer the best working strategy" (284).

Reading with Jameson and other SF writers and scholars, I propose that the concept of the hauntological might be an effective tool in the analysis of SF as ethically different from capitalism. It is the coexistence of multiple haunted times that allow narratives to defy the limits of capitalist utopian and anti-utopian futures imagining other ways into and out of time. These are concepts that affirm that capitalist time has no claim on forever, the future, or even right now. What exists is already haunted by an entanglement of time and matter in which there is no [straight]forward separation between human/thing, mind/body, and self/other. Further, anti-anti-utopian SF successfully haunts the time of reading, bringing the reader along in defying the limit of now and future. The novel "...becomes the site for an encounter with broken time" (Fisher 19).

SF has the potential to engage these hauntings, to illuminate entangled ghosts, or to maintain the fiction of a fixed ontology which prolongs the racial and patriarchal violence of capitalism. It often unfortunately does the latter. Scholars within critical race studies and gender studies have long decried the strong legacy within SF of racist, misogynist, and heteronormative characters and narratives. Still, some of those who are most aware of the problems of the genre are also the most vocal regarding the possibility of SF to exceed itself. Nalo Hopkinson's introduction to the collection of decolonial SF fiction that she edited, *So Long Been Dreaming*, expresses the tension that she feels as a racially aware person who loves science fiction:

...one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives... for many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appear out of nowhere...(8).

She goes on to say that her edited anthology is comprised of:

...stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things(9).

Like Jameson, Hopkinson is also thinking here about the radical potential of the narrative itself, before the act of reading, to express or hold the possibility of difference from capitalist hegemony. She does not necessarily contradict Jameson in her suggestion that the narratives make it possible to *think* about new ways.

In her proposal that we *read* SF queerly (23), Veronica Hollinger also investigates queerness as a concept that, in its attention to the fictiveness of gender and sexuality, turns the “real” into “fiction” in a way that asserts the influence of fiction on “real” social relations. For Hollinger, building on Butler and Haraway, queerness “...marks a utopian space... inhabited by subjects in process who are not bound by reifying definitions and expectations, and in which bodies, desires and sex/gender behaviors are free floating, and in constant play” (33). Hollinger’s use of “utopian” to describe the defiance of definition in “floating” and “play” resonates more with the rejection of capitalist limits than a bourgeois utopianism. In her expression of the effect of fiction on the “real,” the concept of a haunting of the reader and the reading time can be found.

Of these reflections on SF, only Hollinger’s explicitly refers to feminism, but all of them have a relationship to feminism, of collaboration as well as disruption and dissonance. They “interrupt [feminism] productively,” in the words of Donna Haraway (Schneider 149), to make sure that feminist interrogations of SF texts (like feminist interrogations of ethics) do not reproduce more of the same. But these are also approaches to SF that search deliberately for the haunting or the glimpse of the Plenum in the world. The “new way” of doing things, “browner,”¹⁰ less normal, and “queer,” “thrives” in a Plenum or a Hauntology, and not in an orderly, linear Time. Finally, it is interesting to see whether or not SF can entangle us, as readers, in the haunted time, thereby helping us to think beyond the anti-anti-utopian, toward the creation of a more ethical world.

What is to be understood, then, by the description of *The Power* as a “feminist” text? Is the text haunted by lost utopian futures? There are occasional moments in the book in which characters express an entanglement that does not settle well with the driving plot. This section of the paper, however, argues that these barely perceptible moments are stifled in a way that is reminiscent of capitalism stifling its spectres; the anti-utopian is much stronger than the anti-anti-

¹⁰Also see N. K. Jemisin’s blog on how a new SF after the #racefail conversations of 2009 might be more subversive of the normal.

utopian hauntings. The remainder of this essay visits both *The Power* and *Her Body* in order to search for “ghosts,” i.e. the missing futures and pasts of capitalist time, and to suggest that an ethically feminist text would do the same: not to kill the ghost, but insist on its presence/absence as beyond the suffocating capacity of capitalism.

The Power is a novel of several protagonists; however, much of the narrative centers around the figure of Allie, alias Mother Eve, a black, sixteen-year-old former foster child who has experienced physical and sexual abuse at the hands of multiple sets of foster parents. Allie acquires the power early on in the novel and has a particularly pronounced ability with it, in addition to a lifelong relationship with a disembodied voice, never fully explained (possibly, but probably not, the voice of Allie’s mother, possibly Allie’s own thoughts, and maybe the voice of God; the voice is more pronounced when she hasn’t eaten). Allie has always heard the voice, since before the awakening of her power in the “Time of the Girls,” and it has consistently helped to protect her from abusive adults, advising her in strategic maneuvers. The voice confirms that she should use her new-found power to kill her rapist foster father. After she does so, Allie sets out in search of her destiny, following without any doubt the instructions of the voice.

She ends up at a convent; the nuns welcome her, and Allie feels at home with them. A possibility opens early in the narrative then for a life of female community: “...[T]he company of women is pleasing to Allie... The girls have chores to complete, but when they’re done there’s the ocean for swimming and the beach for walking, there are swings out back and the singing in chapel is peaceful and quiets all the voices in Allie’s head. She finds herself thinking in those quiet times: Maybe I could stay here forever... “ (Alderman 45-46). That haunting utopian possibility is almost immediately foreclosed by the instructive supernatural voice, however, which tells Allie, “If you want to stay, you’ll have to make this place your own.” (46). From early on in Allie’s story, her own desire to be a member of community is usurped by the voice in her head telling her that she cannot have community, she must have ownership, in order to have stability. “Remember, sweetheart, the only way you’re safe is if you own the place. Allie says: Can I own the whole world? The voice says, very quietly, just as it used to speak many years ago: Oh, honey. Oh, baby girl...” (133).

Allie willingly follows the voice’s suggestion in establishing herself as the leader of other girls arriving at the convent, in expelling

the nuns from their home, and in faking miracles in order to start a new global religion that recognizes her own voice as the voice of the one true God (who has decided to adjust gender relations on Earth).

Meanwhile, women revolt in all parts of the world, overthrowing male oppressors. The wife of the dictator of Moldova, Tatiana Moskalev, kills her husband and establishes a new country, Bessapara, inhabited primarily by women who have been abused as sexual slaves and now find themselves capable of securing freedom. Though initially Moskalev and Bessapara are inspirational symbols of new possibilities for the world, Moskalev quickly devolves into mental instability, Bessaparans torture male servants, and independent men are forced into refugee camps and then slaughtered.

Possibly, one could argue that characters within the text resist the trend of normative females occupying positions of dominating power. Allie's friend and only rival in power, Roxy, doubts Allie's blanket rejection of possibilities for collaboration with men. Allie tells Roxy, "'You can't trust, them, though.' Roxy laughs. 'What, men? All men? Can't trust any of them?'" Allie says, 'Be careful. Find women you trust to work with you.' Roxy says, 'Yea, we've talked about this, babe.' 'You have to take it all,' says Allie" (132). This moment could be read as one in which Roxy asserts that Allie's model of domination, of assertion as self over and against others, is not the only possible one, but she ends their conversation by telling Allie, "You know, I think you're right" (132). Later, Roxy's brother steals her "skein," the source of her power, for his own use. Roxy must go on living without it, and without the power to dominate that she describes at moments as "the only thing worth having" (52). There is a sad hopeful possibility in Roxy's humiliation, that her skepticism might lead her to become the force for egalitarianism. But at last we see Roxy at the end of the story, sitting with her father after the death or incapacitation of all of her brothers. Her last words with a smile are, "Bet if I had a daughter she'd be strong as fuck" (372). There is another foreclosure here.

There is another storyline in the novel that raises the question of gender queerness, and again opens the possibility for an exploration of difference from domination. Jocelyn is the daughter of a powerful woman, Margot, who becomes Governor of New York. Though she is one of the first characters in the book to develop the power and she is the one who awakens the power in her mother, we learn early on that there is something wrong with Jocelyn's ability to utilize her skein. At times her power is too strong to contain, at other times it is completely absent. Then, the narrative tells us that Jocelyn is gay, possibly

bisexual, or possibly queer: “Jos quite likes girls. She quite likes boys who are a bit like girls” (171). Jos searches online for others like her, and meets and dates Ryan, a boy who has a skein, though it is a small one. Like Roxy, Jocelyn reads as a character who could introduce the possibility of nonconformity with abuse. Her character is downtrodden in a way that hurts her redemptive potential: bullied by her peers explicitly for her gender queerness, susceptible to her mother’s and to Allie’s manipulation, both of whom use her to secure their own power.

A beautiful moment is when Jos thinks of a plan to free herself from her mother’s control, through blackmail, in order to be with Ryan and fully accept herself as queer. Then she is attacked by Roxy’s brother, who has the stolen skein, her power fails and Jocelyn is injured beyond repair. In the last section of the narrative, she is not a conscious character, “. . .it becomes clear that she will never fully heal” (368). Margot has the last word: converting the threat to Jocelyn into evidence of the need for ever more power: “The most important thing is that our enemies, both global and domestic, must know that we are strong and that we will retaliate. . . Believe me, at a moment like this, you need to appear stronger than ever” (368).

Most terribly, the chapters in *The Power* are divided into sections that maintain a book-long countdown: “Nine years to go,” “Eight years to go,” “Six years to go,” “Five years to go,” “Can’t be more than seven months left,” and “Here it comes.” This is the future in its most invasive form, already telling us what the present must (and cannot) become. What is the book counting down to reach? From the manner in which the various threads of the story conclude—with Jos all but dead, Roxy imagining her daughter’s rise to power, Margot drawing strength from her queer daughter to become the preeminent dominant person in the US, and Allie in charge of Bessapara—the book expresses both the dominance of linear time and the inevitability of the final establishment of heteronormative female dominating power, a replica of the existing patriarchal order.

This is not the anti-anti-utopian imaginary of a difference from global capitalism. The conclusion of *The Power* is straightforward anti-utopia. Even in the moments in which the possibility of difference emerges, the countdown predetermines their failure to subvert the inevitable. From its Biblical epigraph, *The Power* tells us that dominating power hurts the potential of humanity and humans will never do anything else. But this is the myth of capitalism as expressed by Jameson: that there is no alternative to capitalism; the alternative will turn out to be the same. The promise of the future is the

retrospective avowal of the existing structure as the only possible one. By the end of the book, the ghosts are all dead.

The epigraph to this piece reads Ursula Le Guin's expression of a prescient ethical need (for "...writers who remember freedom") via Barad's call for an ethical re-mem-bering of past and time. Re-mem-bering in this context entails Barad's taking of responsibility "...for that which we inherit (from the past and future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' *are*..." (264). It is the same thing to say that re-mem-bering, of course, involves interaction with and responsibility for ghosts.

Both ghosts of anticapitalist possibility and more literal ghosts abound from the first page of Carmen Machado's collection of stories, *Her Body and Other Parties*. Machado cites poet activist Jacqui Germain: "My body is a haunted/house that I am lost in" (2). Reading this line after Barad, the haunting takes on a new meaning. The body as "haunted" is a not-necessarily scary place; the loss of self is not necessarily a horror. The lines propose a hauntological reading of the stories that follow, toward the imagining of responsibility instead of (merely) fear. Next, Machado takes example of Elisabeth Hewer: "...god should have made girls lethal/when he made monsters of men" (2). In this second epigraph, Machado references the same dynamic that overwhelms *The Power*: the sense that a liberation from abuse and murder entails (merely) a reversal of order. Interestingly and importantly, the wife does not kill the husband in the first story nor does she imagine killing him. Though the text immediately introduces the imaginary it also immediately erases it, pushing readings that question the meaning of "lethal" and lethal to what or whom?

The narrator of the first story, "The Husband Stitch," gives an account of her life and marriage that is "haunted" by other women's stories, particularly fables that have been recounted by many and which have many different endings. These stories appear suddenly in the middle of her own personal one and the narrator explains, "When you think about it, stories have this way of running together like raindrops in a pond. Each is borne from the clouds separate, but once they have come together, there is no way to tell them apart" (16). She instructs her reader in how to read the text out loud, implying that she understands the connection of the reader's own story to hers, as well. Throughout her tale, the narrator also makes jarring and wandering references to time: "over and over," "one afternoon," "again sometime," "one night" (22-23). Like all of the stories in the collection, "The Husband Stitch" is haunted by the spectre of love

between women and one woman in particular who appears at a class with the narrator, and a coffee date, and then vanishes. The narrator explains, “I am captivated by her, there is no other way to put it. There is something easy about her, but not easy the way I was—the way I am. She’s like dough, how the give of it beneath kneading hands disguises its sturdiness, its potential. When I look away from her and then look back, she seems twice as large as before” (23). Finally, there is no “end” to the story. The narrator apologizes (from beyond the grave?), “For these questions, and others, and their lack of resolution, I am sorry” (31).

The story communicates a sense of time that is eminently hauntological. Though the ghost of the murdered wife does not come back (in this version of the story) to kill the monster husband, the possibilities of multiple endings (and beginnings and middles) suggests ghosts/spectres of feminist ethics that exceed the imaginary of revenge. Maybe the wife ran away with the woman who was like dough. Maybe her husband did not teach her son to want to possess her. The stories are entangled and the versions of female characters, narrator, and reader, are responsible for each other.

In another haunted story, a queer woman contemplates her relationship with her partner named Bad. “Mothers” is a story so haunted by its possible outcomes that its difficult to untangle “what happened.” Did two women actually have a baby? Did the narrator escape into her fantasy life? Did Bad and the narrator kidnap two children? The timelines in this story make the relationship between the ghostly “fantasy” and the “real” entirely unclear. Bad and the narrator meet at a wedding in which people are dressed up in “...hats and veils... connecting them to millennia” (47). The two women become entangled and their times and places blend together: “We were somewhere in Little Russia, and then a drug store, and then a beach...” (49). The narrator states, “I felt like she was seared into my time line, unchangeable as Pompeii” (50).

The narrator says, “We were in love and I dreamt of our future.” The home in Indiana that she imagines is exquisitely vivid, down to the detail of food rotting in the fridge and which is fresh, with an altar to all of the feminist saints of all times. The description of the place and the women’s relationship in it extends for five pages, during which it no longer reads as a fantasy. The daughter, Mara, is real. This is after they have had the baby, the baby has grown up, and Bad has not left the narrator after abusing her.

Of course, the time and situation does change. A teacher (Whose? Was the baby real? But Bad left before the baby was school-age?) overhears Bad verbally abusing the narrator on the phone and tells her, “I’m just saying that if it always sounds like that, then even if you think something is there, nothing is there” (58). In the slippage of time, the love in the story becomes more real than the abuse, without erasing or hiding the abuse or the “Badness” of the part that is not “real.” The narrator constantly refers to the work of memory and exhorts other characters (imaginary ones?) to “remember.” “I realize—I remember—that it is spring” (59). “Then the not-memory washed away like a wet painting in a storm and I was in the shower, shaking, and she was outside, losing me, and there was no way for me to tell her not to” (61). “Mara, remember? Your own babies?... How you still love your little brother the ferocity of a star; an all-consuming love that will only end when one of you collapses?... Your lives sated and solid, strange but safe? Do you remember?” (62-63). These memories or not-memories are so entangled and inseparable that the narrator lives in all of them. The story ends with a decision still to be made (Mara’s) or a responsibility to be upheld (to be “good” mothers).

It is not necessary to explicate all of the stories in order to demonstrate the haunted time of the collection and its consequential vision of a more ethical world than the world of *The Power*. The narrator in “Mothers” expresses her belief in “...a world where impossible things happen. Where love can outstrip brutality, can neutralize it, as though it never was, or transform it into something new and more beautiful” (56). In Machado’s stories, the constant haunting of time creates characters who try to reshape both past and present in an ethical way, not an escapist one. The reader becomes tangled in the characters’ tellings too and is responsible for the effect of interpretation on the characters’ world. Both narrators and readers haunt the impossible or predetermined future with other more ethical realities.

Because *The Power* presents time as both linear and static (predetermined), it affirms capitalism’s narrative of its own inevitability, and of the inevitability of relations of domination. The countdown to the end in which women complete the project of gender reversal in domination also traps the reader in both frameworks of capitalist time: teleological and finished. On the other hand, Carmen Maria Machado’s *Her Body and Other Parties* haunts the time of reading with queer feminist nonlinear time. In stories like “Mothers,” detailed descriptions of contradictory futures entangle both the characters and readers in a possibility of multiple “real” times. Plots

and characters engage in simultaneous and convergent, but different moments, of reality and fiction “running together like raindrops.” It cannot be mere coincidence that every story also includes queer relationality among women with a consistent emphasis on mutual dignity and critique of domination. The anti-anti-utopian queer relationships come across as catalysts for the possibility of experiencing multiple times or vice versa. These stories and moments provide characters and readers with the “encounter with broken time” that hints at existence as hauntology.

If one of these texts can be meaningfully described as “feminist,” it is the one that both provides the encounter with haunting moments of equality in entanglement and non-separability. In attempting to read SF for ethical and political anti-anti-utopian possibilities, it may be useful to search for the hauntological. If both the future and the time after the future are capitalist (including strands of patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, abuse), the ethical feminist text might be one that successfully (for a moment, repeatedly, always) breaks time.



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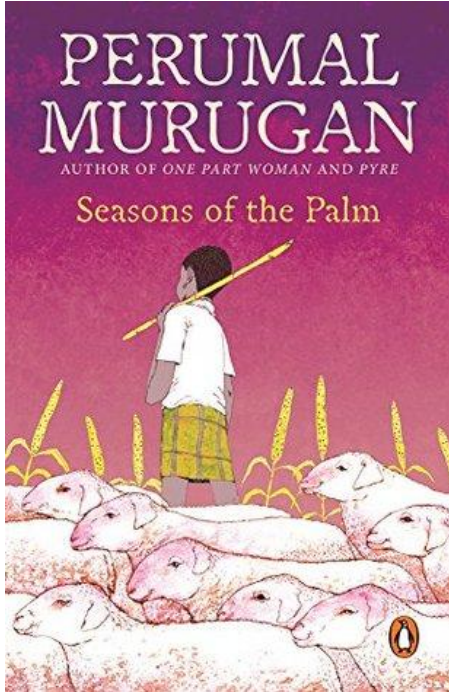
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Seasons of the Palm by Perumal Murugan. Translated by V. Geetha

Reviewed by Naveen John Panicker



SEASONS OF THE PALM. By Perumal Murugan. Translated by V. Geetha. Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2017; pp. 344., ₹299. ISBN: 9780143428367

God may be dead but the author most certainly isn't. The aspect of narrativisation inevitably foregrounds the author and brings him under the scanner; the manner and degree of representation, the nature of its politics, and estimations or valuations of authenticity and truthfulness are worked out against the historical, political, social, and individual personhood of the writer. At the heart of this debate lies the question of confer-

ring or denying narratorial authority: who may be deemed the most appropriate to speak, how, on what, and for whom. Such questions elicit concern, and rightly so, with regards representations of the marginalized and the oppressed. Perumal Murugan, a contemporary non-Dalit poet and novelist, writes within this conflict-riddled space; his writing aims to articulate the experiences of the marginalised and to represent, examine, and critique the oppression faced by Dalit communities in contemporary rural and urban Tamil Nadu.

Perumal Murugan is deeply aware of the difficulties inherent in the act of narrativizing and/or representing the other, and of the conflicts that arise owing to the irreconcilable chasm between the nature of his social, political, and historical position and of those whose experiences he attempts to articulate; this awareness informs his writing and lends it a certain sensitivity and clarity. *Seasons of the Palm* (2017) (translated by V. Geetha) has a certain rustic sensibility and is generously peppered with long descriptions of the countryside, of the villages and their inhabitants, of fields and crops, of temples, rituals, customs, festivals, myths and presiding deities, and of various forms of lives and livelihoods. The lives and stories of several of the central

characters are fleshed out in great detail, thereby rescuing them from becoming mere types, devoid of emotion and stripped bare of their humanity. This feature of the narrative, in the lucidity of its conceptualisation and simplicity of its linguistic expression, expands the narratorial horizon and enables a sense of realism.

Seasons of the Palm follows the life of its protagonist, Shorty, and his friends, Belly, Tallfellow, Stonedeaf, and Stumpleg, all of whom belong to the community of untouchables and all of whom are bonded labourers to land-holding farmers. Shorty is a bonded labourer who tends to his master's sheep and is generally responsible for small chores around his master's house. All of the untouchable characters, similarly, are tied to their masters and to their responsibilities, by fear, by societal norms, by conventions and traditions, without the possibility of change or escape. The evolution of the protagonist from a relatively carefree, lively, and enthusiastic child to a teenager resigned to the hardships in his life, broken and scarred by brutal and humiliating experiences at the hands of those to whom he finds himself enslaved, is brought out through the division of the book into three chapters, meaningfully titled 'Dust,' 'Fine Mud,' and 'Dry Earth,' in the order of chronology. The three states of earth denote the three states of Shorty's psychological make-up and the nature of its transformation as he attempts to come to terms with a state of unceasing, unrelenting, inhuman oppression.

Perumal Murugan manages to exploit the complex nexus between caste and religion and the subtle interplay between the traditional and the modern; social laws and cultural norms take upon themselves 'divine' authority with which to justify their continued existence and thereby perpetuate the status quo; this 'authority,' enmeshed in religious doctrine that dictates codes of conduct, is not merely employed by the upper castes to justify their acts of brutality and further cement their positions of superiority but is also employed by the lower castes to acknowledge and resign to what they see as their 'lawfully' mandated stations in life, thereby further cementing their positions of inferiority. The aspect of religion (and the manner in which it determines and structures the individual/social consciousness) in villages and small towns permeates the narrative. Superstitions and myths regulate the history of a community, constitute the nature of communal remembrance, and colour the individual and public consciousness.

The patron deity of the village, Munisami, is claimed by the upper castes as their own, with the untouchables actively denied from taking any part in temple festivals and even barred from entering the temple premises; if an untouchable dared to get close to the temple fes-

tivities, they would be chased away. This secondary status is internalised by the untouchable community; if Shorty or Belly were to climb into the grove where the idols of the deities are kept they would hastily clear out of the area, terrified of having done something wrong, of having unlawfully laid claim to a divine grace that did not, and could never, belong to them. The heavy burden of custom and tradition dictate the actions both of the adults and the children, driving them to internalise and perform/act out their inherited roles, whether of a 'master' or of a 'slave.' Although Selvan and Mani often ignore their elders who caution them against any manner of interaction with the 'untouchable' children, the qualities of brutality or of servility are enacted in the lives of these children, in their self-estimations and in their interactions with, and understanding of, each other. One may, nevertheless, perceive a certain ambiguity with regards certain social and cultural roles in the instance of children; Shorty is neither completely servile to Selvan, his master's son, nor is Selvan completely a tyrant to Shorty even as he tries to ape his father in the wilful exertion of the inherited authority.

The impossibility of escape from one's fate, and the futility of such efforts, pervades the length of the narrative in *Seasons of the Palm*. The sheer inhumanity that surrounds the central characters serves the function of chaining their minds and modulating their beliefs. The nature of this enslavement is poignantly highlighted through the names the author confers upon the principle characters, all of whom are denied proper names and are instead addressed by terms or labels such as Shorty or Belly, the former on account of being of short stature and the latter on account of having a big, round belly, while those characters who belong to the community of farmers, such as Selvan or Mani, are granted proper names and are addressed as 'Masters' by Shorty and his friends. The body is the sole means of sustenance for Murugan's characters. It is the body that plays an integral part in social politics, from which is derived life and towards which is directed death, an entity that both creates and destroys. The naming of untouchable characters in accordance with their particular physical characteristics thereby foregrounds the importance of the human body, both in its literal and symbolic manifestations.

The untouchable is allowed neither voice nor agency. The untouchable is duty bound to endure the trials of his/her life without the space or the possibility to register his/her protest. Although Shorty tries to get back at Selvan and makes fun of him when an opportunity presents itself, as when he keeps an increasingly furious Selvan waiting for his share of pilfered toddy while he sits on top of the tree, drinking to his heart's content, it is, nevertheless, a pyrrhic victory, the

only kind Perumal Murugan will allow his central characters, as their resistance is shown to be futile, invisible, lacking in teeth, and resolve. The futility and absurdity of life, and of the struggle to live, is brought to a close towards the end of the novel with the deaths of Selvan and Shorty, with Shorty's suicide resulting from an overwhelming sense of terror and despair at having inadvertently caused Selvan's death in a disused well. Shorty slowly moves towards his death, deeper and deeper into the well, utterly overcome by despair; in this manner, he experiences a certain sense of liberation, a feeling that eggs him onward through the promise of a freedom, unalloyed and absolute, that accompanies self-annihilation.

Perumal Murugan's writing meanders on, moving from scene to scene, from character to character, from story to story, from thoughts to reflections to observations, even as it constantly shuttles between the past and the present, bordering the thin line between reality and fictionality. His writing flows with a certain ease, whether it is painstakingly sketching the history of, and detailing the traditions and customs around a particular god, locality or ritual, or carefully shadowing, and faithfully capturing, a character's thoughts and sentiments as it moves from despair to joy to fear to hope to resignation. The fairly non-dramatic nature of his narratives, robed in the unaffected simplicity of its linguistic expression, is occasionally contrasted with instances of terrifyingly raw honesty that hits its readers with the force of its expression, deeply unsettling them. Although his writings bear the marks of a stark, uncompromising realism, every work of art and every instance of representation, nevertheless, is but a re-presentation of a thing, entity, or event; this brings to the fore questions not merely regarding the nature of the representation itself but also regarding the validity/authenticity of the narratorial voice. The perceived authenticity of a particular narrative is contingent upon the manner in which one determines the validity of the particular vantage point of the narrator, and although Murugan's representations of Dalits in his works have mostly invited praise, the fact of his birth as a non-Dalit might be discomfiting to some.

Murugan's writing occupies the interstices of historical, cultural, social, epistemological, and phenomenological modes of seeing and perceiving. Although his writing is located within certain geographical and socio-cultural domains within which it opens up debates on caste hierarchies, questions social, cultural, and traditional norms that justify and perpetuate a system of oppression and inequality, and critiques the insidious manner in which such notions and norms, when internalised, influence and condition the modes of thought and behaviour, his writ-

ing is primarily concerned with questioning and representing what it means to be human. Every individual operates in relation to another; an understanding, of an entity or idea, is arrived at against another; a thought, act, or belief shapes itself in relation to another thought, act, or belief. Murugan's writing, in this fashion, is concerned primarily with stories and the manner in which stories are formed, understood, or articulated in relation to other stories. It transcends, even as it works with, historical, social, and cultural frameworks and occupies itself with the distinctly, singularly, and yet transcendently human. Shorty's individual suffering is not only representative of the suffering endured by the victims of history, by those who find themselves at its receiving end, but it is also, rather poignantly, emblematic of the suffering inherent in the human condition. There exists in the narrative, simultaneously, both a sense of defiance and helplessness; the central characters in the text exist and operate within this liminal space between the possibility of agency and its impossibility, which forms and informs their understanding of themselves and of the nature of their relationship to the world around them. This complex ambivalence finds its expression in Murugan's writing, making it more than a mere critique of caste and social politics.

This concern with an insight into the ambivalent nature of individual motivation, critical yet sensitive consciousness of the contradictory desires that often underlie most human thoughts and actions, finds a certain parallel in the works of non-Dalit writers—such as U.R. Ananthamurthy in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1965) or Mulk Raj Anand in *The Untouchable* (1935)—who, like Murugan, were deeply engaged in articulating and representing the condition of the marginalised; this self-consciousness, to a certain degree, differentiates it from texts such as *Mallapalli* (1935) by Unnavu Laxmi Narayana, where the characters are mostly one-dimensional entities with fairly uncomplicated and straight-forward intents and aims, idealistic, and employed primarily for the purposes of critiquing the social and cultural frameworks of caste oppression. The social context is foregrounded, against which possibilities of redemption and social mobility are suggested, primarily through education and other social reforms. A detached criticality, alongside a deep understanding of the fragility of human beings and of the values and belief systems that condition and shape their transient existences, informs their writing and their texts. The character of Bakha in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable* (1935) struggles with deep internal conflicts throughout the length of the narrative, alternating between states of helplessness and resignation, between rage and acceptance; this is paralleled, to a certain degree, in and through the character of Shorty, although less emphatical-

ly than in the instance of Bakha, owing to latter being a mere child and therefore not yet being in possession of the vocabulary with which to adequately articulate the world to himself. The degree to which the locus of the narrative is grounded in the protagonist (along with certain other characters), Murugan's work bears a greater resemblance to the aforementioned works than to other contemporary non-Dalit writers—Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997) and Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* (2010)—who have explored similar themes in their works.

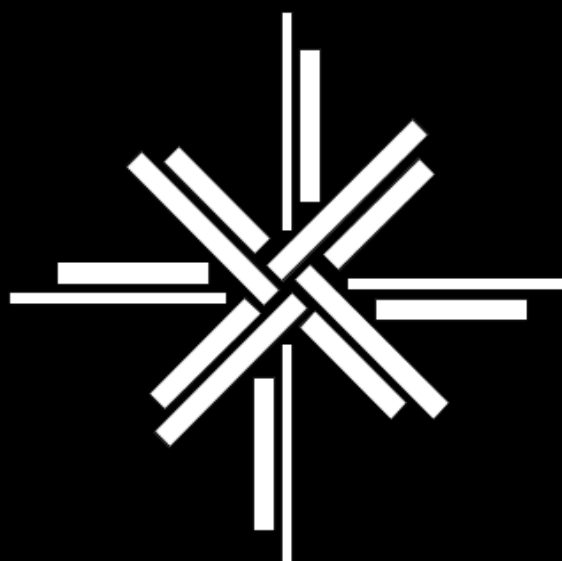
Murugan's writing, while powerful in the elegant simplicity of the mirror it props up for its society, is also sympathetic in its understanding of the fragmented, fractured, wounded nature of human existence, constituted in the unceasing and irreconcilable clash of fears and aspirations, dreams and destinies, and it must therefore be read, primarily, in the light of its introspective, sympathetic, and self-reflective tendencies and not merely the critical. It is this simple, generous humanity, an unalloyed awareness of itself and its failings, of the impossibility of forgetting and of the possibilities for forgiveness, of the fragility of human understanding, of the ambiguous and splintered nature of human agency, and of the price entailed by the human desire for redemption, that lends Murugan's writing a wisdom that is at once forceful in its insights and understanding in its judgements, at once imaginatively within and without the narrativized experience, thereby marking out a special place for his works in the cannon of Dalit literature. Although he is only too aware of the history of oppression which his works navigate, his writing, while concerned with the primacy of stories and the manner in which they are constituted, is primarily reflecting on the idea of human dignity against the monotony of the everyday, undignified human struggle for survival. With brutal honesty and simplicity, he explores the human quest for dignity, for redemption, and it is this inquisitive, deeply reflective sensibility that makes *Seasons of the Palm* an important and thought-provoking work for the ages.



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