Prize-Winning Student Essays

from the University of Massachusetts Amherst

English Department

2017-2022

Photograph of South College courtesy of University Relations,
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Foreword

On a campus with a deep and ground-breaking history of close attention to student writing across the undergraduate curriculum, probably no department does more to foster high quality student writing, in a range of genres, styles, and situations, than the English Department. Only the Writing Program, which has a close relationship with English, works more closely with more students in more kinds of writing projects.

It's not surprising, of course, for an English Department to be a center of student writing on an American college or university campus; but the range and quality of our engagement with student writing is notable and growing, from 100-level General Education courses to writing-intensive courses in the major to stand-alone writing-focused specializations to Honors theses in which students undertake especially ambitious writing projects. Our award-winning teachers use writing in a variety of ways, including low-stakes writing assignments like responses and forum posts and more substantial writing projects taken through an extensive drafting process, with peer and teacher feedback and opportunities for "publication" at the end.

Creative writing is of course a long-standing strength of the department, seen in our popular undergraduate specialization in Creative Writing (soon to be an official concentration), in the numerous creative writing Honors theses the department supervises every year, in our annual Class of 1940 undergraduate prizes in fiction and poetry, and in the department's long-standing support of Jabberwocky, our official student-run literary magazine.

The department is also home to a flourishing Professional Writing and Technical Communication program, which offers its own stand-alone undergraduate certificate program to students from

across campus. And there's growing student interest in the study and teaching of writing itself, which can lead to careers in the English Language Arts, both in the U.S. and abroad, as well as in writing-intensive work in community organizing, political advocacy, and social justice projects.

But the bread and butter of undergraduate student writing in our department, as in most English departments in the country, remains academic or scholarly writing, especially that associated with literary and cultural studies. The typical kind of assignment here has not changed radically over the past fifty years, but the kinds of texts students treat, the issues and problems they deal with, and the connections they draw between that work and sociocultural projects outside the academy have changed greatly in recent decades. However well defined the teacher's prompt may be in literary and cultural studies, the "papers" that result are today almost always deeply engaged with big questions and big ideas. For both teacher and student, such writing can be a thrilling intellectual experience.

The following publication is a collection of a dozen recent prize-winning academic essays written in undergraduate English courses at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Our goal in collecting them is to honor our student writers and showcase the writing done in undergraduate English courses at UMass Amherst, especially in writing contexts, like the academic essay, that don't always get the attention they deserve.

Every essay collected here was the winner of one of our three academic writing prizes, awarded annually in the spring. The three prizes are

- The Charles A. Peters Prize, given to the best essay on English literature written between 1558 and 1667. The essay must be at least 2,500 words long and must have originated from courses taken in the English department from the current or prior two semesters.
- The Sanderson Prize, awarded for the best essay on any subject. The essay must have originated from courses taken in the English Department from the current or prior two semesters.
- The Steinbugler Prize, awarded for the best essay on any subject written by a student in their junior or senior year. The essay must have originated from courses taken in the English Department from the current or prior two semesters.

All the essays are published here with the permission of their authors. Thank you to the current and former UMass Amherst students who have allowed us to collect and showcase their work. Thank you also to the faculty judges of these prizes, to Celeste Stoddard for her hard work every year helping manage these competitions, and to current UMass Amherst English major Emma Gill who has done most of the work to make this publication possible, including collecting the essays, securing permission to publish them, and editing and designing the book itself.

Finally, on behalf of these student writers, thanks to all those who helped them produce this impressive work: peer readers, family and peer supporters, and the relevant teachers, who prompted these papers and supported the writing of them in numerous ways.

David Fleming
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Editor's Introduction

Every semester I walk through South College and pass by flyers for our department's literary journals, all with similar prompts that entice creatives to take a peek: "Are you creative looking to show off your work, submit to The Scribe!" "Submit to Jabberwocky!" I usually just glance at these flyers, and typically with a five-to-ten page essay in my hand as I rush to class. I always pick up a copy of Jabberwocky when it's published in the spring, inspired by all of my peers' work. But I always have the same thought: "How are they doing it? How do they find the time to be creative when I have all of these papers due?"

Despite wanting more time for creative work, I still find a rush in writing an academic paper. I feel like a detective when I write a paper on a literary work: pinpointing certain moments in a text, drawing strings between all of them, communicating with experts through online research. When that stack of stapled papers leaves my hands after hours of reading and typing, I can't help but feel a sense of pride. But this pride often wanes, only sparked again when I receive my grade for the essay a week or so later. So when I saw that the English Department wanted an editor to create a publication of prize-winning academic essays, I was intrigued to say the least.

The goal of this collection is to celebrate award-winning academic writing in a publication similar to that of the department's other academic journals, which are more focused on creative writing. With this project I was able to read top tier work from award-winning students over the last five years, and it was nothing short of inspiring. From an analysis of performance and gender in *The Island*, to a study of synesthesia in *Bitter in the Mouth*, and to a reflection on the personal meaning of an academic essay, this collection highlights an array of interests and talent from the English department. Being able to shine light on these works was exciting for both me and the authors I spoke to. In reaching out to former students especially, many of them were excited that these essays have a place outside of their computer hard drive. I am honored to have created such a space for them.

I want to thank David Fleming for providing the space and guidance to work on such a project and wanting to celebrate the hard work of these students. I also want to thank all of the authors for their permission, contribution, and hard work. It was an honor to work on this project!

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Note on the Text:
This publication was created using Adobe InDesign 2022
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Steinbugler Prize 2022

White Feminist/Supremacist Theory in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*

MaryKate Boggan

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* shocked audiences with its early feminist themes. The novel was published serially in 1915 and the full text was finally compiled for readers and published in the 1970s. Despite Gilman's antecedence to the modern feminist movement, she tackled issues such as reproductive rights with a supposedly "progressive" lens. However, Gilman also clearly fosters a white supremacist undertone. She frames eugenics, a social theory that supports selective mating and the refusal of children to "unfit" parents to "breed out" certain traits, as a tool for bodily autonomy, despite its problematic political context (*Herland* 83). In the novel, this practice is framed as protectionary but mirrors incredibly dangerous social movements of Gilman's time. Gilman's other works also highlight her support for the "restriction" of reproduction among "many races [for] sheer economic and political necessity ... for a variety of reasons" while supporting a "definite increase in some stocks," namely attractive, able-bodied, and affluent white people, for the sake of maintaining "our highest types" ("Progress" 629). American second-wave feminist readers in the

1970s and 1980s took inspiration from these themes to further their own arguments for reproductive rights, using Gilman's basic ideas as confirmation for their demands for legal abortions. By appropriating racist literature for the advancement of their own agenda, white feminist leaders abandoned the concerns of women of color who faced forced sterilization throughout the 1940s to 1980s. *Herland's* embrace in predominantly white second-wave American feminist circles emphasizes the centering of white bodies in feminist advocacy and white ignorance towards the harms of eugenic theory.

This paper explores Gilman's works and their basis in white supremacy, whether stated outright or implied through her support of white supremacist social movements. The cornerstone text to this paper is Herland, but also references two of Gilman's articles, "Progress through Birth Control" and "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem." In order to properly present Gilman's participation in this theory and the appropriation of her literature for mid to late 20th century American feminist ideals, the author will also nurture the reader's understanding of Progressive Era social thought, sterilization abuse, and 1960s-1980s American feminism. Ultimately, this paper exposes both the underlying beliefs in Gilman's form of female empowerment and the harms of second-wave white American feminist ideals, which favored expanding abortion without addressing the sterilization of women of color.

Since there are no men in *Herland*'s society, women evolved to reproduce on their own. Any woman could mentally generate a pregnancy, but "if the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, [they] appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood" (*Herland* 83). Because reproduction was directly tied to thought, Herland residents were not only policing childbirth but also who should see themselves as a viable

parent. Herland's residents were overwhelming in support of these measures, as they believe it maintained a high quality of life for all residents. Gilman reflects this quality of life in her descriptions of Herland: a land with "no dirt ... no smoke ... and no noise" (*Herland* 21). Visitors to Herland noted how "everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all" (*Herland* 21). The land described by Gilman is clearly a utopia and something other nations should strive for. By providing eugenics as the key to population control and high quality of life, *Herland* endorses the ideology and readers are encouraged to support the movement in their own civilizations to see similar prosperity.

Gilman's other writings engaging with eugenics add further complication to the narrative she puts forth in *Herland*. In a rarely-cited 1927 article for The North American Review, Gilman claims overpopulation is the root of all social evils such as war, filth, resource scarcity, and labor exploitation. To Gilman, there are only two possible outcomes: "the unchecked increase and fight continually for places in the sun ... or ... [keeping] the population within rationally chosen limits" ("Progress" 626). She argues that "a mixture of people [would obliterate] all the slow- built distinction of races from which have arisen the special gifts of each to the world's progress" ("Progress" 626). She appropriates a caricature of Jewish people and their perceived "distinctive religious passion and ethical enthusiasm" to advocate for selective reproduction ("Progress" 626). This example carries significant nuance, as Jewish immigrants and Jewish Americans were victims of rampant antisemitism during this time period and still face religious oppression today. Though Gilman claims this example is based strictly on their faith's positive perceived characteristics, informed readers can also interpret this as the isolation of Jewish people from the rest of American society. Gilman herself was a part of a long lineage

of Protestant Christian leaders, a religiously privileged population (Living 1-11). This makes the decision to highlight a religiously persecuted group in a plea for a eugenic future highly questionable. Using these descriptions, Gilman convinces her audiences that not only must individuals reproduce at a lower rate but reproduce more selectively to maintain assigned ethnicities ("Progress" 626). In works beyond Herland, Gilman's preferences for eugenics and ethnic segregation are clear, which can provide further insight into the novel's underlying agenda.

While some may interpret Gilman's eugenic theories as well-meaning, the author turns antagonistic and places a hierarchy among different potential parents. She claims people "are taking every means to preserve the most undesirable stock" and advocates for "sterilizing the patently unfit" ("Progress" 627). The unfit, in Gilman's eyes, are marked by their economic, religious, and racial identities. She supports fellow eugenicists' demands "for the protection of women, especially the working class, from undesired and undesirable motherhood" ("Progress" 622-623). It is of incredible importance that she does not clarify if these pregnancies are "undesirable" for the working class mother or strictly from her middle-to-upper class projection. However, since Gilman rarely speaks of the individual but frequently references the "social result ... [of] an orderly and peaceful world," it is not a stretch to say this definition of "desire" is not based on the individual's wants but a ruling class' dictation ("Progress" 629). She also advocates for "restriction [to be] urged upon many races" with the goal of developing a population "less sex crazy than at present, and capable of rational continence when it is necessary" ("Progress" 629). The racial targets of these claims are clear in the earlier Gilman essay, "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem." Gilman shares in the American Journal of Sociology that the

"present status [of African Americans] is to [White Americans] a social injury" ("Suggestion" 78). African Americans, to Gilman, are "far inferior to other members [of society]" and "embarrass [White Americans]" ("Suggestion" 78-79). In quantifying the "superiority" of White Americans, Gilman claims that they "progressed in social evolution, say, to status 10" while African Americans remained at "status 4" and "should be taken hold of by the state" until they progress to the same perceived status as White Americans ("Suggestion" 79- 81). In this assertion of white power, Gilman supports removing all autonomy of life for African Americans and instead advocated for a type of conservatorship, placing White Americans as the decision-making party. This philosophy bleeds heavily into eugenic literature and unfortunately supports future exploitation. Through these texts in Gilman's collected works, it is clear that Herland is only a utopia for white women and women of color are instead "unfit" for reproduction or socialized life altogether.

While many view eugenics as a passing philosophical exercise among intellectuals like Gilman, the United States put these theories into practice and chose women of color as their primary victims. One of the first nationally-covered cases of sterilization abuse was of Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf, 12 and 14 years old, respectively. In 1973, the two black sisters were "unsuspectingly carted into an operating room [and] irrevocably robbed ... of their capacity to bear children," through funding from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare after giving the sisters pre-pubescent prescriptions of a birth control discovered to cause cancer (Davis 21). Though the legal rights of the sisters were defended by the Southern Poverty Law Center, they were forced to accept defeat after it was proven their mother, though illiterate, consented to the procedure on "a document, the contents of which were not

described to her" (Davis 22). As coverage of the sterilization of black women grew, many more injustices were published. Just 30 years after Gilman's death, Nial Ruth Cox of North Carolina was told if she refused to be sterilized, the state would "discontinue her family's welfare payments" (Davis 22). Cox was just one of 7,686 women and girls sterilized in the state of South Carolina under the state's "Eugenics Commission" (Davis 22). 5,000 of these 7,686 women and girls were black (Davis 22). In the midst of these cases coming to light, Dr. Clovis Pierce, a doctor from South Carolina, defended his own demands that "pregnant welfare women 'will have to submit to voluntary sterilization' if they wanted him to deliver their babies," (Davis 22). Women in the small town of Aiken, where his practice was based, had few other options, as he was the only obstetrician in the surrounding area (Davis 22). Pierce cited similar logic to Gilman, claiming "he was 'tired of people running around and having babies and paying for them with [his] taxes'" (Davis 22). His statements also create fear among local women receiving welfare, knowing that if they get pregnant, they will be sterilized after delivery. This is similar to Gilman's society in Herland, where women who are not seen as "fit" parents are policed against even thinking about pregnancy. Pierce's defense of his robbery of 18 women's wombs total and his vocal persistence regarding his philosophy fulfill Gilman's dreams as a eugenicist and white supremacist.

Unfortunately, women of many other marginalized ethnicities were also subjected to eugenic practices. By the 1970s, 24% of Native American women, 35% of Puerto Rican women, and 20% of non-Puerto Rican Hispanic-American women had been forcibly sterilized (Davis 22- 23). The U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare (now known as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) targeted women of particular races with

deceptive practices and propaganda. Angela Davis recounts that in a government-issued pamphlet to Native American communities, "there is a sketch of a family with ten children and one horse and another sketch of a family with one child and ten horses" (Davis 22). This image promises that families with fewer children will experience greater affluence, while families with more children will have fewer resources. These messages are paired with lies about the permanence of sterilizing procedures. Dr. Connie Pinkerton-Uri, a Choctaw physician, recounts her experience of a 26-year-old woman seeking a "womb transplant" following "a full hysterectomy (for alcohol) at age twenty after being told by an Indian Health Services (IHS) doctor that the procedure was reversible" (Volscho 17). Dr. Pinkerton-Uri went on to testify to the U.S. Senate, calling the procedures "genocidal" (Davis 22). Similarly, the U.S. government convinced Catholic leaders in Puerto Rico to endorse "population control" through birth control, leading to a 20% decline in population in just one decade (Davis 23). Author Bonnie Mass cites this incredible decrease in births as mathematically drastic enough to "[extinguish] the island's population of workers and peasants ... within the next 10-20 years, ... eliminating an entire generation of people" (Mass 92). Similar to Dr. Clovis Pierce's policing of local women on welfare, the United States government policed how Puerto Rican and Native American women thought about family and reproduction. In the eyes of Gilman and her contemporaries, these policies and practices would be considered "progress" for the American race, as it removes ethnicities she considers "unfit" for child-rearing. Modern, rational audiences see this as an extreme act of genocide upon people of color, funded by taxpayer dollars.

These genocidal actions took place under the social movement of second-wave American feminism. The movement's ignition is most commonly associated with the publishing and rapid spread

of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan's bestselling novel explored the "sense of dissatisfaction ... that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States," which she characterized as "the problem that has no name" (Friedan 15-20). Published in 1963, the text claims this struggle for fulfillment was due to the pressure placed on young women to become "the suburban housewife – ... the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world" (Friedan 18). With over three million copies sold, *The Feminine Mystique* inspired a movement for the emancipation of women from housekeeping and child-rearing roles. This included the promotion of women in the workforce, legislation against marital rape and workplace harassment, the right to separate credit cards and mortgages, and access to various forms of birth control (Grady). However, this second- wave feminist movement was entirely based upon the experiences of middle and upper-class white women. Constance Grady notes that "women who had to work to support themselves experienced their oppression very differently from women who were socially discouraged from working" (Grady). This isolates women of color and working-class women from Friedan's definition of "the young American [woman]" and deems many second-wave feminist efforts to increase the employment of women obsolete to their experience of womanhood (Friedan 18). The core differences in the concerns of white women, who were the perceived leaders of the second-wave American feminist movement, and women of color led to barriers in discourse and the alienation of the voices of women of color. White feminist leaders also ignored many outspoken black feminists who requested support to end the forced sterilization of women of color, "which was not a priority for the mainstream women's movement" (Grady). Since white feminists had more influence than black and brown feminists, their reproductive rights were prioritized in feminist

spaces and legislative actions. Second-wave American feminism was established to liberate women from monotonous household labor but failed to consider the experiences of women beyond this middle to upper class and white perspective.

Abortions were one of the main points of advocacy in the second-wave feminist movement, as activists believed liberation from unwanted pregnancies would lead to greater career opportunities for women. In 1964, the first national group for abortion law reform was founded as the Association for the Study of Abortion (ASA) and was shortly after followed by the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, first founded as the "Army of Three" in 1964 and then transformed into a national organization in 1969 (Planned Parenthood; NARAL). By 1973, seventeen different US states had either repealed their abortion bans entirely or extended further exceptions, such as abortion in cases of rape or incest or abortion when the mental wellbeing of the mother was at stake (Planned Parenthood). *Roe v. Wade* became the landmark ruling for abortion rights across the United States following its January 22, 1973 decision. The Supreme Court decided that women have the right to abortion while still maintaining their right to privacy as outlined by the 14th amendment (Lewis). The celebration of this victory did not last long, however. Within three years, the 1976 Hyde Amendment was passed, which made it illegal to use federal funds for abortion (Davis 23). This provision allowed three very specific exceptions for women who were survivors of rape or incest or were not expected to survive labor but did not take into consideration the desires of working-class women relying on government funding (Davis 23). Due to the economic barriers faced by communities of color, women of color were statistically less likely to have access to quality health insurance (Planned Parenthood; NARAL). Publicly-available data from the 1970s is limited, however, census studies from the 1980s and 1990s suggest

18.0% of Black Americans and 28.2% Hispanic Americans did not have healthcare coverage, compared to just 12.0% of White Americans (U.S. Department of Commerce). People of color who did have health insurance were less likely to have long-term coverage and more likely to go through a lapse in coverage (U.S. Department of Commerce). As abortions grew "beyond [the] reach" of many women of color, the primary options for accessible birth control were highly-dangerous illegal abortions or sterilization (Davis 23). As previously demonstrated, eugenics was masked as an opportunity for religious or economic fulfillment. With no safe, affordable abortions, many were forced to undergo sterilization, even after cases of abuse such as the pain suffered by Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf were exposed. The long-lasting impacts of this heavily-flawed sociological experiment excessively burden communities of color, exposing Gilman's "perfect" Herland and similar eugenic utopias as a precipitant to the attempted genocide of Americans of color.

Gilman's writings were considered lost for decades, but regained popularity following Carl Degler's 1956 article, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Theory and Practice of Feminism" (Rensing 100). Her work would see a resurgence from the 1950s to 1980s, with popular texts including *Herland* receiving major publication in the 1960s and 1970s (Rensing 100). The racist and eugenic themes omnipresent in Gilman's work were overlooked by white feminists or twisted to fit social movements for more accessible birth control and abortions. However, as white feminists read Gilman for inspiration in their own social ideology, they ignored cries for help from women of color. Angela Davis wrote in "The Historical Context: Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights":

> The abortion rights activists of the early 1970s should have examined the history of their movement. Had they done so, they might have understood why so many of their Black sisters adopted a posture of suspicion towards their cause. They might have understood how important it was to undo the racist deeds of their predecessors, who had advocated birth control as well as compulsory sterilization as a means of eliminating the 'unfit' sectors of the population. Consequently, the young white feminists might have been more receptive to the suggestion that their campaign for abortion rights include a vigorous condemnation of sterilization abuse, which had become more widespread than ever (Davis 22).

With clear nods to both Gilman and her ideology, Davis challenges her white peers and their failures to the black community. Though feminists argued for equality, they did not feel the physical, mental, and emotional suffering of women of color at the loss of their uteri was worth consideration. Instead, pieces like *Herland* and deeply racist Gilman articles bloomed into doctrine and white advocates settled for the protection of their right to family planning over people of color's right to family.

The logic used to target women of color for sterilization was similar to the logic Gilman shared in both *Herland* and "Progress Through Birth Control." Gilman clarifies her racial biases in "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem" and when these ideologies are combined, her clear suggestion for a world free of war, poverty, and dirt is the exertion of white supremacy. Eugenic theories left a lasting mark on communities of color in the United States, namely Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities. With this understanding, Gilman's novel is no longer a hypothetical utopian fantasy, but instead a haunting prediction of the pain generations of women of color must face in order to maintain the racist "cleanliness" so dearly desired by Gilman and other eugenicists.

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A Note from MaryKate Boggan:

"I am a fall 2022 graduate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst undergraduate English program. In addition to receiving my Bachelor of Arts in English, I also earned a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and a letter of specialization in Social Justice: Race, Gender, Class, and Ability. Outside of my studies, I work at the UMass Amherst Writing Center and the Office of New Student Orientation and Transitions and serve as the Vice President of Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority's Iota Chapter.

My essay was first submitted in the fall of 2021 to Dr. Sarah Patterson's English 269 course, 'American Literature and Culture After 1865: The Problem of Hierarchy in American Literature.' This analysis is inspired by a close study of reproductive history and representations of reproductive governance in literature. An expanded form of the piece will be submitted as part of my application for graduate studies in English and American Studies for the fall 2023 cohort. Currently, I am developing a research paper on family policing under the instruction of Dr. Libby Sharrow entitled, 'Who is the 'Unsafe' Family?: A Historical and Rhetorical Analysis of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act.'"

Charles A. Peters Prize 2022

Evil as Goodness and Ignorance as Intellect: Eve's Predicament in *Paradise Lost*

Eryn Flynn

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has been around for many thousands of years. In many popular contexts throughout history, the tale has been interpreted as the woeful plight of mankind at the hands of a woman, who falls for the Devil's tricks and betrays God, casting humans out of Paradise and plaguing them with mortality. When John Milton retold the saga in the 1660s, he ventured beyond the few lines in Genesis that describe Satan's temptation of Eve, and instead he wrote hundreds of lines of poetry exploring why Eve makes the choice to eat the forbidden fruit. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan is a frightfully cunning villain, able to bend logic in ways that it should seemingly resist. By overwhelming Eve in language and presence, deconstructing the threats of punishment, proposing alternative positive outcomes, and presenting himself as evidence of those outcomes, Satan convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. In presenting Eve's own justification for eating it, Milton characterizes her sympathetically, highlighting her honorable yet intrinsically corruptible humanity.

Satan bombards Eve, overpowering her with his words and presence. After Eve reiterates God's commandment not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, "she scarce had said, though brief, when now more bold, the Tempter...as no delay of preface brooking" begins his speech (Milton 9:664-676). As soon as she finishes her sentence, practically interrupting her, Satan, "more bold," launches into his carefully planned address, with no "delay of preface." Such words convey that Satan overpowers Eve with a certain level of aggression, as a lack of preface seems uncustomary and rude, and his boldness seems insistent and hostile. Nor is this behavior limited to dialogue alone, but it extends to body language: "so standing, moving, or to high upgrown the Tempter all impassioned thus began" his speech (Milton, 9:677-678). Satan physically raises himself, in snake form, to his full height in order to demand Eve's attention, as well as intimidate her with his possession of her space. While giving his speech, he is outwardly "impassioned," and emotional outbursts, such as yelling, often overwhelm those to whom they are directed, as Satan means to overwhelm Eve. With this demeanor established, the address Satan thus begins then continues from lines 9:671 to 9:732, completely uninterrupted. By overpowering, intimidating, and overwhelming Eve, Satan gives her no choice but to listen to his argument, and an argument is often more convincing when heard in its totality. Essentially, he forces her to face the Temptation: she cannot avoid it altogether, but she will have to either prevail or succumb to it.

As the main threat of eating the fruit is that she will die, Satan entices her to eat by diminishing the threat of death. He commands, "Do not believe those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die" (Milton, 9:684-685). Eve is newly created, lives with Adam, and only occasionally gets visits from heavenly hosts, so she has never been lied to before. She has not yet even learned what lies are or learned why someone would lie: to manipulate others. Satan,

aware of Eve's innocent state, uses definitive statements that go directly against God's orders, outright professing her safety from death. In doing so, he plants a seed no matter Eve's response. If she simply accepts his lies, he will easily take advantage of Eve's naivety; if she considers the possibility that he is lying, she must then also content with the realization of God's possibility to lie. Each instance results in the downplay of the threat of death, whether directly or indirectly, and invites Eve to eat the fruit without negative consequence. Moreover, should she have to face the consequence, Satan downplays the true magnitude of death, passively musing, "whatever thing death be" (Milton 9:695). Again, he lies, pretending he does not know what it is himself. This remark treats death as a nonconsequential matter and suggests that it is not even worth one's time to pursue an answer. Eve is safe, he makes it seem, in eating the apple, whether death follows or not.

After diminishing the threat of punishment, Satan offers Eve a multitude of rewards from eating the apple. He describes knowledge, the apple's gift, as a harbinger of life, acceptance, happiness, and goodness. He declares that the fruit "gives...life to knowledge" (Milton 9:686-687). This promise directly comes one line after Satan's denial of death with "ye shall not die"; consequently, the ending words to each line are "death" and "life." Such end-line juxtapositions manipulate the rhythm of the poetry so as to pivot from a drop in pitch into a crescendo, inverting the tone of voice from somber to hopeful. This happens despite his actual promise being knowledge, not life. Another alternative outcome Satan offers Eve is God's hearty approval, that he might "praise rather [Eve's] dauntless virtue, ...deterred not from achieving what might lead to happier life, knowledge of good and evil" (Milton, 9:696-697). By characterizing the pursuit of knowledge as courageous and heroic, requiring "dauntless virtue," Satan ironically describes the

breaking of God's single commandment nearly as an act of love for him. Also, the punctuation interestingly suggests that happiness can be obtained through knowledge of good and evil; once again, the promise of knowledge comes with something more, her increased happiness. Satan importantly characterizes knowledge as a means of achieving goodness. Now having defined knowledge as knowing the difference between good and evil, he rhetorically asks, "if what is evil be real, why not known, since easier shunned?" (Milton 9:698-699). Not only does he question the existence of evil, again downplaying true threats, but by suggesting one must know what evil is to avoid it, he twists logic so that breaking God's law becomes necessary to achieve goodness. Knowledge itself is a desirable reward, as well. Satan promises Eve, "Your eyes that seem so clear yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then opened and cleared" (Milton 9:706-8). He reminds her how truly ignorant she is so as to heighten the reward of achieving enlightenment. Ultimately, he says that "ye shall be as gods, knowing both good and evil" (Milton 9:708-709). By characterizing the acquisition of knowledge as a means toward life, approval, happiness, goodness, and even divinity, Satan tempts Eve by wrapping up the object of all of her desires into one irresistible object, pitting her devotion to God directly against all of her greatest wishes.

To prove all of the arguments that he has heretofore made, Satan presents himself, in snake form, as proof. He claims to have previously been merely a serpent, until the fruit gave him the mind and language capabilities of a man. His earlier dismissal of death, then, implies that the tree did not in fact teach him what death is, and likewise with his doubtful implication on the existence of evil. His own deceitful ignorance over the adverse effects of the fruit serves as a testament to Eve of her own safety from death as well as a likely indicator in the good outcomes of eating the fruit. To Eve,

he says, "Look on me, me who have touched and tasted, and life more perfect have attained" (Milton 9:687-689). He stands physically before her, apparently healthy and enlightened; if she does not question the truth of his words, then the only evidence she has favors eating the fruit. Moreover, his imagery-heavy language invites Eve to picture herself from his perspective, touching and tasting the fruit as if committing the sin already in her mind. By presenting himself as a guarantee of safety, Satan allows Eve to imagine giving into the temptation in her mind, and imagination is an important step in the realization of a goal.

Eve does not actually fall for all of Satan's guileful tactics, or at least not at first. Immediately after his speech, she remains thoughtful despite his aggressive, overpowering behavior attempting to dissuade her from doing so. After he ends his speech, Eve does not immediately reach out and grab the apple, "yet first pausing a while, thus to herself she mused" over the decision (Milton 9:743-744). Her pause indicates a stoppage of motion, and intentional act of stillness so as to avoid acting rashly, without due thought to her decisions. This is despite the fact that she has just observed "an eager appetite, raised by the smell so savoring of that fruit" (Milton 9:740-742). She is not merely peckish, but ravenous, and the fruit appears delicious and enticing. She stands so close to the tree that she can smell the fruit, even aggravating her hunger and perhaps inducing human responses like making her mouth water. Yet she is able to resist her physical impulses for the sake of her intellectual anxieties. Moreover, she muses to herself. Whether for better or for worse, she relies on her own decision-making process, not that of others.

She does not completely believe Satan's lies that she will not face death, though his diminished presentation of it decreases her fear of it. She says, "In the day we eat of this fair fruit, our doom is, we shall die" (Milton 9:762-763). She still believes God's words

of warning in what the consequences will be, directly dismissing Satan's promise that "ye shall not die" (Milton 9:685). However, she then asks, "How dies the serpent? He hath eat'n and lives, and knows...irrational till then. For us alone was death invented?" (Milton 9:764-767). Here, she displays an interesting relationship with Satan's lies: she neglects his promise of not dying, yet she does not question his identity or the story he tells of his own transformation. Moreover, she particularly observes that, although he has eaten of the tree, he lives as well as possesses much more knowledge than he previously did. If neither God nor the serpent are lying, then a possible logical explanation would be that death is reserved for humans alone. In this musing, Eve displays her logical capabilities as well as faults, straddling lies and logic in one swift thought.

Satan's promise of goodness via knowledge, in the end, is too much for Eve to resist. She says to the tree, "Great are thy virtues, doubtless, best of fruits, though kept from man, and worthy to be admired" (Milton 9:745-746). Acknowledging the fruit as virtuous and worthy of admiration reveals her belief in and desire for its power to grant knowledge and goodness. Her lack of doubt in its power shows her complete acceptance of Satan's claims over the tree's power. Moreover, she thinks of its as being "kept from man," as if it were buried treasure ought to be found, and though God has forbidden her to eat of it, "it commends [it] more, while it infers the good by [it] communicated" (Milton 9:746, 9:753-754). Satan has warped her logical reasoning so far away from trusting God that now, God's very forbiddance is proof of an object's value and, most notably, "the good by it communicated." She is particularly interested in the goodness she believes it can give her, even though against God's wishes. Indeed, goodness and knowledge, together, are what she seeks. She declares, "for goodness unknown, sure is not had, or had and yet unknown, is as not had at all"

(Milton 9:756-757). The idea of "goodness unknown" distresses Eve. The very merging of these two words into a single phrase, a single object, shows how intricately tied her ideas of goodness and knowledge have become at the hand of Satan's beguiling. She does not believe one can be had without the other. The fruit, however, is "cure of all," that is, it is her remedy for her regrettable ignorance (Milton 9:776). It is "of virtue to make wise": she believes it will grant her to knowledge and goodness, together in wisdom, that she seeks (Milton 9:778).

It is this perceived desirability, the key to the wisdom she seeks in tandem with the fruit's delectability, that eventually loosens Eve's grip on her own logic and self-restraint. Eve's self-reflection before eating the fruit occurs from lines 745 to 779, a total of 34 lines. In comparison, Satan's final speech, from lines 679 to 732, is 53 lines. That means Eve's reflection is nearly two-thirds as long as Satan's ploy, a significant amount of time to ponder her decision. However, her resolve breaks down when considering the fruit's desirability, both physical and intellectual. She considers the "joy" and "good" that the snake inherits as well as its ability to "cure of all" ignorance (Milton 9:770, 9:771, 9:776). She then observes that the fruit is "fair to the eye, inviting to the taste" (Milton 9:777). Previously, Satan had her imagine the touch and taste of the apple; now, she again engages her senses of sight and taste to find the fruit "fair" and "inviting." Finally, she asks, "What hinders then to reach, and feed at once body and mind?" (Milton 9:778-779). As she quotes the fruit's potential to feed both body and mind, she reveals that her reasons for reaching are to satiate her physical desires, her visceral responses, as well as her intellectual goal of higher understanding. Immediately following this question, "her rash hand in evil hour" grabs the fruit and she eats, dooming humanity to mortality and banishment forever (Milton 9:780). This

contrasts to earlier, when "pausing a while...she mused" over her decision (Milton 9:744). In this line, she is the subject, indicating her control over her actions. Now, after pondering the fruit's ability to satiate, "her rash hand" reaches out: she is no longer the subject, but her body is, reflecting how her actions are now reactive rather than intentional. Moreover, the action is "rash," made hastily and without proper thought. In such a way does Eve commit a sin, marking the first "evil hour" of humanity as the hour that humans first abandoned the faculty of reason.

Satan tempts Eve through intimidation, a false sense of safety, false promises of rewards, and a false personal testimony. Eve avoids the temptation for as long as she can keep her hunger and desire for knowledge in check, sifting through the logic set before her via his argument. In the end, however, she gives in, naively believing the rewards of disobeying God to be greater than the costs. By characterizing her as thoughtful and primarily concerned with knowledge and goodness, Milton bestows Eve with honorable human qualities, perhaps even heroic intentions. Her ability to regard the serpent as evidence, as well as attempt to sort through conflicting logical arguments, characterizes her as inquisitive, observant, and nearly scientific despite her limited capacities. Though honorable, she is naively trusting and ignorant to a fault, though that fault is not hers: she is born a woman in body but a child in mind, with no proper guidance or awareness of the world around her. She has no way of recognizing evil when he stares her in the face, much less when he masks himself and lies to her. More than anything, she is human, capable of faltering despite the best intentions. Milton, with such an incapable but noble tragic heroine, begs the question of his audience who is truly responsible for the Fall, and dubiously asks what they would do if put in Eve's position.

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A Note from Eryn Flynn:

"As a junior Commonwealth Honors student, and a major in both Art History and English, I love all things creative. The clubs that I actively participate in include the Art History Society, the Scribe committee of the Humanities and Fine Arts Student Leadership Group, and the UMass Belly Dance club, of which I am presently treasurer. Additionally, this fall I am conducting an independent research project with Dr. Katherine O'Callaghan in which I investigate the various roles of ghosts in literature and, more specifically, within the growing revival in Gothic fiction.

I wrote my essay on Eve's predicament in *Paradise Lost* in the fall of 2021 as my final assignment for Early British Literature. This class, led by Dr. Marjorie Rubright, was one of those rare gems that any good scholar loves—the perfect blend of true challenges and rewarding epiphanies. In it, I began to rethink notions on women's treatment in literature in a new light, and, as fate would have it, Eve from Paradise Lost was a fitting subject for my musings. This essay is a tribute to her and what I found when I dared to look closer."

Sanderson Prize 2022

Go To Hell with your Theatre: The Role of Performance in Athol Fugard's *The Island*

Christopher Govang

In their 1988 essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," gender theorist Judith Butler posits that "gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,'...As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Butler 11). Essentially, gender is much more malleable than it is often understood to be in society, and is instead a matter of performance. Although Butler's essay was published in the late 1980's, this idea of a less restrictive gender binary had been explored for decades before, one such instance being in *The Island* by Athol Fugard.

The Island, which follows two men on Robben Island during apartheid, uses performances, both literal and figurative, to question and challenge societal norms which are as prevalent today as they were at the time of its publication. In structuring John and Winston's story around a performance of *Antigone*, a play about a woman who stands up to unfair laws, Fugard allows *The Island*

to be as much a critique of the time period as it is a dissection of the gender binary and other systems of oppression. As a result, each performance in the play serves a slightly different purpose; John and Winston are introduced, then characterized, and finally developed not as "prisoners" or "characters," but as people whose stories reflect a brutal reality many were forced to endure.

The first performance between John and Winston within the play occurs at the end of the first scene: John pretends to be on the phone with friends from home while Winston eagerly listens. The telephone conversation with Sky and Scott has two primary functions. First, for John and Winston, the conversation is—at the start—a moment of catharsis, an opportunity for the two men to forget about their unrelenting surroundings and reminisce in memories of their lives as free men. This performance from John allows them both to be truly happy for a brief period of time, something that rarely happens during the play. When John mentions their wives, however, the joy that once inhabited the men melts away, leaving them both miserable as "The mention of his wife guillotines Winston's excitement and fun... [and] A similar shift in mood takes place in John" (Fugard 57). As much as the fantasy was pleasant, it was just that: a performance. Despite being enough to provide some respite from their situation, the memory of their marriages is more than enough to return them to their lonely lives in prison, unceremoniously killing all the pleasantness they had created to confront the emotions they cannot process.

The second role of this phone conversation is that it is the audience's first real introduction to the characters of John and Winston. Although by this point, in the scene, the *Antigone* plot has already been introduced, the two men have not yet been fully characterized as individuals with lives outside of the prison—the phone conversation provides the first look into how lonely the

two of them truly are. This becomes much clearer when Winston asks Sky to "...talk to Princess, my wife... I haven't received a letter for three months now. Why aren't they writing?" (Fugard 57). The isolation the two men feel is crushing them, and the progression of the phone conversation serves to demonstrate this to the audience and emphasize it with each other.

Another performance from John and Winston appears at the very beginning of the second scene, when Winston is wearing false breasts and a wig to play Antigone. Once Winston has the entire costume on, John begins to joke and "...fondles her breasts, he walks arm in arm with her down Main Street... He climaxes everything by dropping his trousers" (Fugard 59), resulting in Winston throwing the costume pieces to the ground in humiliation. This interaction, in which both men perform a role they cannot socially inhabit—John plays a free man and Winston plays a woman—provides the first ideas of gender performativity as would later be discussed by Judith Butler in "Performative Acts." To Winston, being dressed up as a woman is not inherently dysphoric, rather John's mockery of him dressed in women's clothing is what causes him discomfort. However, when John leaves the cell, Winston takes a moment to don the costume again and attempts to do poses evocative of what being Antigone (and a woman) means to him, but ultimately fails after laughing at himself. John's treatment of him, and eventually his own laughter at himself, stems entirely from his appearance as a woman rather than his actual gender identity, which alludes to Butler's idea of gender as performance. In that very moment when Winston is dressed as Antigone, his actual identity does not matter; instead, what is most important is what gender he is performing.

Mirroring John's mockery of Winston is Winston's enactment of John's life on the outside after his release. When John tells

Winston that he is going to be released, Winston tells an extensive story of his life on the outside, culminating in a moment of aggressive sexuality similar to John dropping his trousers to Winston's Antigone in the previous scene: Winston gets cut off by John after telling him he'll "watch [a woman], watch her take her clothes off, you'll take your pants off, get near her, feel her, feel it..." (Fugard 71). For John, this is far too much, and results in feelings of discomfort reminiscent of those felt by Winston hours before. The performance aspect of this scene stems less from presenting as another gender, but instead comes from an overtly crude portrayal of one's own gender identity; it more accurately represents overcompensation. The crude allusions to female genitalia that Winston provides in the scene are deeply aggressive to the point of near objectification, which does not sit well with John. As a result, the performance is used for harm; Winston's jealousy of John's release leads him to weaponize sexuality in a way that distorts his own identity, tapping into John's loneliness and his pain. This subversion of performance as it has been used thus far demonstrates how dangerous and powerful it can be when used for different purposes.

The fourth scene, John and Winston's production of Antigone, is the final opportunity the play takes to explore how performances affect the two men. Despite his hesitation in the scenes prior, Winston goes on as Antigone and performs the role opposite John as Creon. The play-within-a-play is faithful to the text on which it is based, but the most crucial aspect of it is the final image wherein Winston removes the costume separating him from both the literal and figurative audiences and addresses them directly: "Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home! Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death because I honoured those things to which honour belongs" (Fugard, 77). The quote in the context of *Antigone* and

The Island is exactly the same, as both Antigone and Winston (as well as John) were imprisoned for resisting an oppressive system—Antigone was imprisoned for burying her brother despite Creon's orders, and John and Winston have been imprisoned on Robben Island, a place which held political prisoners during apartheid. What results is a moving commentary on their situation through the voice of the ancient Greeks, their own form of resistance with what little means they have. In the production, Winston's abandonment of performance is a very significant shift, as it suggests that what is happening in the play is no longer make-believe, but is instead a version of reality examined through the lens of performance.

The most impactful performance in the play comes not from any particular scene or moment, but is instead a defining characteristic of the play itself: there are minimal props, set pieces, and costumes. In a lengthy stage direction before any lines are spoken, Fugard specifies that "the two prisoners–John stage-right and Winston stage-left–mime the digging of sand" (Fugard 47). Without the aid of visual cues, the actors playing John and Winston are forced to literally "perform" these actions, relying on the actual audience's imagination to fill in the blanks. The result of this—in combination with Winston's final address to the audience—is a blurred line between what is diegetic and what is not, and as the audience is forced to create the tools of John and Winston's oppression, they are unwittingly thrust into a position of power: it is their own mind that is keeping these characters in prison. It is due to this that *The Island* masterfully meddles with what the boundaries of performance are, questioning what constitutes reality versus fiction.

Although apartheid in South Africa ended roughly two decades after *The Island* was first performed, the situation in which John and Winston find themselves is one that reflects more contemporary discussions about oppressive, hegemonic structures that people

around the world are subject to every day of their lives. Especially considering the ongoing redefinition of gender identity norms, as ushered in by Judith Butler, *The Island* finds itself at a compelling intersection between past and present. As a result, it is more important than ever to consider how performances can equally uphold and dismantle repressive power structures.

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A Note from Christopher Govang:

"I'm an English and Legal Studies double major. Right now, I'm the managing editor of the official undergraduate literary journal on campus, Jabberwocky, and I am a new member of the UMass Theatre Guild. I'm always working on personal writing projects, fiction or criticism alike, though we'll see if any of them ever get done!

My essay was originally written for Stephen Clingman's class on South African literature. I'll admit, much like any other essay I have to write, I started out having no idea what I wanted to write about. Eventually, however, after finishing *The Island*, I found that I wanted to explore its ideas of gender performativity a bit further, since I hadn't really had the opportunity before. Writing this essay was very fun, given that it allowed me to combine a play not as many people know with analysis of more well-known gender theory. If I rewrote the essay, I would like to dive a bit deeper into the rest of the play–perhaps incorporating other works–as well as discuss other aspects of Butler's theories on gender and performance."

Steinbugler Prize 2021

Heroes of the West: Constructed Masculinity in *From Russia With Love* and *M. Butterfly*

Riley Jones

The texts *From Russia With Love* by Ian Fleming and *M. Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang offer vastly different versions of the recognizable spy narrative. The first, originally published in 1957, presents a familiar and glamorous account of James Bond's adventures in espionage, and the second, a play which first premiered in 1988, imaginatively depicts the relations between René Gallimard, a French Diplomat stationed in China during the 1960s, and a Chinese operative disguised as a woman. While seemingly distinct, both texts provide narratives that usefully reveal the constructed or unnatural nature of dominant understandings of heroic masculinity.

Both Bond and Gallimard might be read as figures embodying or attempting to embody heroic masculinity. Using Jack Halberstam's theories on masculinity found in the text *Female Masculinity*, I argue that in both texts, the masculinity of the heroic figure is constructed and validated by the gender performances of those surrounding him. In this way, both *From Russia With Love* and *M.*

Butterfly serve as useful documents for examining the constructed ideal of the dominant, heroic, necessarily white and heterosexual masculine figure. While both texts effectively expose hegemonic notions of masculinity to be mythologized and artificial, they do so in different ways. The former unconsciously and indirectly reveals the artificiality of masculinity through extreme simplification, while the latter does so consciously and directly through meta-narrative elements and the employment of multiple perspectives. Despite their differences, both usefully place this construction within particular colonial histories and social contexts, highlighting the particular ideological motivations behind this construction of masculinity.

In the book *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam describes the way that our conceptions of dominant, ideal, trustworthy and "heroic" masculinities rely on the existence of alternative masculine subjectivities which are visible because their masculinities are either excessive or insufficient. Halberstam writes,

> I...venture to assert that although we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust; many of these 'heroic masculinities' depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities. (Halberstam 935)

For Halberstam, while masculinity masquerades as essential, natural, or non-performative, it is actually constructed through its necessary contrast with alternative versions of masculinity that are wrong in some way. This process establishes white, heterosexual, western masculinity as both an ideal and the norm. Halberstam further states, "arguments about excessive masculinity tend

to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working-class bodies, and insufficient masculinity is all too often figured by Asian bodies or upper-class bodies" (Halberstam 936). Halberstam's theorizations are made visible in both *From Russia With Love* and *M. Butterfly*, in which both heroic masculine figures are validated through their contrast with the less desirable masculinities surrounding them. Their masculinities are even further validated by the hyper-feminine figures surrounding them which further establish their superior positions within Western, hetero-patriarchal regimes.

Bond's masculinity in *From Russia With Love* is constructed in contrast with the excess masculinities of Grant, Klebb and Kerim and also in relation to the hyper-femininity of Tatiana. While these masculinities aside from that of Kerim are not necessarily racialized masculinities, they do belong to characters whom the text attempts to "other" through its preoccupation with Western superiority over the East. Although Grant is technically English, he has defected from the West to work for the East, and the novel explains this defection through his pathological masculinity. Grant is described as excessively brutal, violent and unintellectual, all masculine characteristics present to an unnatural extreme. Grant is described as being drawn to the Russians because of their "brutality, their carelessness of human life, and their guile" (Fleming 15). Further, his non-normative sexuality distances him from what is understood as normal masculinity, which is necessarily affirmed through its heterosexuality. As is stated in the novel, "When he killed the occasional girl he did not 'interfere' with her in any. That side of things, which he had heard talked about, was quite incomprehensible to him" (Fleming 14). Like Grant, Klebb's masculinity is presented as excessive due to the fact that she is a woman, and therefore, any display of traditionally masculine characteristics is unnatural. Klebb

is described as the "most powerful woman" in the Soviet State, and also "the most feared" (Fleming 62). However, her position of power, as well as her very desire for power, is presented in the novel as a kind of pathological masculinity, heightened by "the peculiar nature of her most important instinct, the Sex Instinct" (Fleming 63). Both Klebb and Grant embody masculinities that are unnatural, and by placing them in comparison to Bond, his masculinity is constructed as correct and natural.

Kerim's specifically racialized masculinity also represents an unfavorable, excessive masculinity which affirms Bond's more understated masculinity. Kerim is described as having a "face vaguely gipsy-like in its fierce pride and in the heavy curling black hair and crooked nose...it was a startlingly dramatic face, vital, cruel, debauched." (Fleming 127). Like Grant, Kerim is depicted as exhibiting traditionally masculine characteristics to a brutal and undesirable extreme, in this case not due to pathology but due to his exoticism. Kerim is not an unlikable character, but the depiction of his excessive masculinity and sexuality does serve to balance Bond's more tasteful and desirable masculinity. This can be seen, in particular, in the way that Kerim speaks about women. In the novel, Kerim states, "in their dreams [women] long to be slung over a man's shoulder and taken into a cave and raped" (Fleming 140). Here, Kerim's brutal and impulsive sexuality is emphasized, highlighting the civilized and normal sexuality of Bond.

The normative and ideal sexuality of Bond is further highlighted by the presence of Tatiana, who embodies an exaggerated, hyper-feminine ideal which affirms Bond's heterosexuality, a characteristic necessary for the construction of normative masculinity. Not only is Tatiana beautiful within normative ideals of feminine beauty standards, but she is also, "guileless," "innocent," and "affectionate in nature" (Fleming 78, 91). In successfully exhibiting

the passivity and subservience of hegemonic femininity, Tatiana's presence as Bond's love interest allows him to play the masculine role of savior and protector of the innocent and helpless woman.

An analysis of this novel not only reveals the constructed-nature of Bond's masculinity through its contrast with less-desirable masculinities, but also outlines the political motivations for the celebration of this artificial construction. These motivations are obscured through the employment of naturalized logics, yet the novel's exaggerated reliance on these logics makes them visible where they are otherwise and often overlooked. *From Russia With Love* is a novel that does not consciously or directly acknowledge or challenge ideologies of gender, race or other power hierarchies. While it very clearly engages in a conversation about masculine and Western dominance, it does so without any explicit or implicit critique. All of the information provided, when provided by a character that the novel has deemed trustworthy through loyalty with the West, is meant to be taken at face value. This information includes justification for Western dominance, but also critiques of those who do not fit within traditional Western norms. In one such seemingly objective observation, the novel's omniscient narrator describes the Turkish locals, stating:

> these dark, ugly, neat little officials were modern Turks. [Bond] listened to their voices, full of broad vowels and quiet u-sounds, and he watched the dark eyes that belied soft, polite voices. They were bright, angry, cruel eyes...They were eyes that kept the knife- hand in sight without seeming to, that counted the grains of meal and the small fractions of coin and noted the flicker of the merchant's fingers. They were hard, untrusting, jealous eyes. Bond didn't take to them. (Fleming 122)

There is no double meaning suggested by this negative and racialized depiction; it is meant to be taken as truth. However, it is so dramatically singular and rooted within false stereotype, that it serves to dramatize or make a parody of the hegemonic ideologies which shape it. In this way, the novel unintentionally but usefully exposes the constructed gendered and racialized ideologies which shaped the novel's existence, and also places these constructions, such as that of masculinity, within the history of orientalism which allowed for the naturalization of Western dominance and Western social ideals such as the ideal of heroic masculinity.

In the play *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard's masculinity is similarly constructed by the alternative masculinities surrounding him, as well as by the idealized hyper-femininity of the character Song. However, it does so in a much more directly and self-consciously critical way. The play examines the role of masculinity within Western colonial projects in the East, specifically examining the European presence in China during the Vietnam War. In the play, Gallimard's ideas about heroic masculinity are constructed and shaped by his presence in the East, in a country of men who have been racialized to be effeminate or insufficiently masculine by comparison. Within this context, Gallimard's notion of ideal Western masculinity depends necessarily on its contrast to the East. While Gallimard is not shown interacting with any Chinese men other than Song, who he believes is a woman for the majority of the play, Gallimard's understanding of the East Asian people is emasculating at a political level, which necessarily seeps into his interpersonal relations. Gallimard states in the play that "Orientals simply want to be associated with whoever shows the most strength and power," and that they "will always submit to a greater force" (Hwang 45-46). The naturalized emasculation of the East Asian people in this play by the West serves to affirm Gallimard's

understanding of his own heroic masculinity, however, the play highlights the fact that this is a notion existing within Gallimard's head and that the version of reality depicted in the play is one that has been conjured up in his mind.

The presence of Song in the play, a Chinese man impersonating "the Perfect Woman," further serves to construct Gallimard's sense of his own masculinity, however the underlying fallacy of this gendered performance in the play effectively works to destabilize Gallimard's understanding of his own masculinity, exposing it to both him and the reader as something that is not natural, but is rather a myth reliant on the artificial performances of those around him (Hwang, 78). Song's performance of femininity, which is distinctly submissive and "helpless" validates Gallimard's position as powerful and superior (Hwang 60). Gallimard makes a point to comment on the "convincing" nature of Song's femininity, highlighting the fact that what he believes to be natural femininity actually requires overt performance to be actualized (Hwang 17). The fact that Song's idealized femininity is necessarily performed and artificial exposes Gallimard's idealized understanding of masculinity to be equally false and artificial.

Unlike *From Russia With Love*, *M. Butterfly* consciously discusses the artificial nature of hegemonic (white, heterosexual) masculinity, exposing it as a myth and delegitimizing its naturalized position of heroic superiority. The metanarrative elements of the play allow for a kind of irony or doubleness that complicates any simple reading of the information offered by the play. Gallimard is self-aware of himself as a narrator, and this element of the play emphasizes the fact that the reality being offered is necessarily subjective and biased.

The form of this text also allows for multiple speakers to have control or agency over the narrative. While it appears initially that

Gallimard has full control over the narrative being offered, towards the end of the play, Song disrupts the structure of the play, taking agency himself and disobeying Gallimard's orders. This is especially apparent in the scene just before Song discards his feminine disguise onstage despite Gallimard's protests. Gallimard argues to Song, "you have to do what I say! I'm conjuring you in my mind!" and yet Song changes anyway (Hwang 78). Both Gallimard and Song are conscious of their positions and both directly address the audience. Song's very presence in this play disrupts traditional and naturalized notions of gender, but he also uses his agency within the play to address the fallacies of Gallimard's understanding of masculinity, while simultaneously exploiting this for his own benefit, reversing traditional power hierarchies. In the courthouse scene, Song explains that he was able to deceive Gallimard because "men always believe what they want to hear," and because "when he finally met his dream woman, [Gallimard] wanted more than anything to believe that she was, in fact, a woman" (Hwang 82-83). Song argues further, "I am Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man" (Hwang 83). Not only does Song directly name and critique the constructed ideal of heroic masculinity, but he disrupts dominant power relations by exploiting this artificial ideal.

An analysis of *From Russia With Love* and *M. Butterfly* reveals the artificiality of hegemonic heroic masculinity. Further, it emphasizes the way that the value given to certain socially constructed identities over others reveals the way that the intimate and the political overlap. These texts reveal that controlling social ideologies like those which construct masculinity are not arbitrary, but instead emerge out of specific social histories and are recreated and further mythologized to legitimize social power hierarchies.

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Steinbugler Prize 2021

"Comfortable Wonderful Mother Creature": An Exploration of Maternal Forces in *The Secret Garden*

Isabelle Eastman

In her essay "Gardens, Houses, and Nurturant Power," Phyllis Bixler observes how mothering operates outside the constraints of gender, noting that "effective motherhood, like gardening, is a shared, communal venture" (292). The force of motherhood transcends some of the most concrete boundaries in *The Secret Garden*; social class, gender, and even mortality bend to the maternal forces of characters such as Dickon, the spirit of Mrs. Craven, and Susan Sowerby. Acts of mothering, such as Ben Weatherstaff nurturing the robin, or Mary rousing Colin from his bed using only the power of her voice, conjure tremendous awe for those who observe them. Through these depictions of maternal figures, Burnett proves that mothers are the changemakers of the natural world, and it is their power that sets healing and growth in motion. Even when actual mothers are absent, "effective motherhood" proves itself to be the most powerful force in the novel (Bixler 292).

In her article "Domesticating Brontë's Moors: Motherhood in *The Secret Garden*," Anna Krugovoy Silver argues that "because

seed propagation parallels human gestation, Burnett associates Dickon with pregnancy and birth, further underscoring the novel's argument that motherhood is not an essentially female activity but a human one" (Krugovoy 196). Despite his position as a young boy with no true children of his own, Dickon is able to occupy the space of a motherly figure to Mary, the secret garden, and his animals due to his nurturing demeanor. In a time when gender roles were so rigid, motherhood proves itself to be a particularly powerful force in *The Secret Garden* by allowing Dickon to assume the role of mother to his animals, befriending ponies and sheep during his wanderings of the moor. Dickon is never assumed to have lost any of his masculinity as a result of his caring ways. In fact, Mr. Roach describes Dickon as a self-sufficient and respectable boy: "He'd be at home in Buckingham Palace or at the bottom of a coal mine [...] He's just fine, that lad," and it is due to this trust in his character that Dickon is allowed to push Colin's chair-carriage (Burnett 120). Dickon is not only a caretaker to his animals, but he is deeply connected to each creature he tends to, leading Colin's observation that "his fox and his crow and his squirrels and his lamb were so near to him and his friendliness that they seemed almost to be part of himself" (Burnett 117). The Pan-like boy can interpret the cries of an orphaned lamb and the call of a joyous robin in the same way that a mother can understand her infant's cries. When Mary first hears of Dickon through Martha, she is told that "However little there is to eat, he always saves a bit o' his bread to coax his pets," a habit that reflects the sacrificial nature of his mother, who manages to find scraps of food for Colin and Mary even when she is scrounging to find food for her own children (Burnett 21). Dickon's maternal power lies in his ability to create life from nothing when he revives the secret garden, as well as his gift for communicating with animals as if they were not only the

same species as him, but as if the pets were his own offspring.

When comparing Colin and Dickon, boys of about the same age, their behavior and nature can be traced back to their experiences with their mothers. Dickon was raised by Mrs. Sowerby, a nurturing mother whose opinions on child rearing are respected even by those who are above her in social stature. Her caring ways, and her practice of raising children to run about freely, provide Dickon with what Linda T. Parsons refers to as "personal strength and security" in her article "'Otherways' into the Garden: Re-Visioning the Feminine in *The Secret Garden* (Parsons 262-263). In contrast, Colin, who lost his mother as an infant and has been raised away from any maternal influences, is "weak and hates th' trouble o' bein' taken out o'doors, an' he gets cold so easy he says it makes him ill." (Burnett 83). Essentially, without the presence of a sufficient motherly figure, Colin has developed into the antithesis of Dickon, and has no connection with the natural world. Even the environments in which the boys spent their childhoods were indicative of the maternal presence, or lack thereof: Colin is raised in the sick room, where his uncle tends to him, while wondering when the boy will die and if he shall inherit Misselthwaite Manor. This atmosphere, poisoned with negativity and patriarchal systems of lineage, is the opposite of the moor, where Dickon runs free and is kept company by the animals which he adopts. On the moor, death is a natural process for animals, resulting not in inheritances but in Dickon's adoption of an orphaned newborn lamb.

Effective mothering is what allows Dickon to graduate into maturity and manhood with ease, while Colin struggles to grow or heal due to the lack of nurturing available to him. The traits that accompany good mothering are more enviable than those that do not: Mary observes Dickon's understanding of the natural world and his connection to animals with absolute awe, while she secretly

nicknames Colin "the Rajah" because of his likeness to a spoiled and demanding Indian prince (Burnett 85). When Mrs. Sowerby is shocked by Colin's resemblance to his mother, Colin asks her: "Do you think...that will make my father like me?" and the ideal mother figure agrees that it will (Burnett 160). Just as Dickon's similarity to his mother gained him the approval of the men of Misselthwaite Manor, Colin became a more appealing character the more he pursued the qualities of his mother while spending time in her garden. There, he received the nurturing he has been deprived of through the "Magic" that healed him, and helped him to walk. In *The Secret Garden*, the act of mothering defines much more than womanhood because the care each of the young boys experience determines the quality of the men that they become. Overall, anyone in the novel who exhibits motherly behavior in a setting deprived of care — Dickon bringing his animals inside Misselthwaite Manor, Ben Weatherstaff raising the robin, and all the children tending to the secret garden — elicits a positive response from those who witness it, because motherly behavior is associated with benevolence and wellbeing.

In order to transform Mary and Colin from sickly and unpleasant children into healthy and adventurous individuals, mothering had to occur outside the traditional confines of gender and the nuclear family unit. While Victorian attitudes often dictated that motherly duties were performed by women and servants within the domestic sphere, it was Dickon's guidance that provided the nurturing support Mary and Colin needed to grow, despite his status as neither a woman nor a member of their family. In *The Secret Garden*, motherhood is not necessarily an isolating, home-ridden duty; Bixler's idea of "effective mothering" includes a community of men and women uniting to raise a child, or to nurture another life form, such as the garden (Bixler 292). For Colin and

Mary, who both spent their early childhoods in miserable isolation, being mothered provides an entrance to an existence that is communal, lively, and free. The children's time in the garden is a chance for bonding and connection; according to Silver's article, "Mary does not learn to mother through the traditional means of playing with doll and cradle; instead, she and Dickon rescue plants and abandoned animals, activities that connote broad conceptions of mothering not limited by gender or restricted to the home and nuclear family" (Silver 199). Mary's growth is due to the maternal influences of characters such as Dickon, Mrs. Sowerby, Martha, and the spiritual presence of Mrs. Craven in the garden. Burnett's depiction of the protagonist experiencing growth outside the confines of gender or a nuclear family structure prove that motherhood is more powerful than systems of class or patriarchy.

When Mary scolds Colin for his pessimism and lack of character, she proves that mothering is more than the presence of love, but a commitment to helping someone grow, even when it means being stern. When Archibald Craven failed to step in as a parent after his wife died, his wealth and social status did not make up for Colin's lack of a mother figure, leading to Bixler's conclusion on maternal presence:

> Women do not own houses in *The Secret Garden*; inasmuch as they nurture, however, they fill houses with a power without which the signature on a deed of ownership brings little happiness, as is dramatized by the life of Archibald and Colin Craven at the beginning of the story. (Bixler 296)

Colin's temperamental disposition and poor health were not a result of having no women in his life, but rather a lack of maternal nurturing. Mothering is once again proven to be a gender-neutral act by the fact that Colin was surrounded by a staff of female nurses, as well as Mrs. Medlock, but he failed to develop naturally until the arrival of Mary and Dickon, and his entrance into the secret garden, where he was spiritually connected to his deceased mother. In Mary's case, even the presence of her biological mother was not enough to ensure adequate mothering: the Mem Sahib was the opposite of nurturing, instead ordering her servants to "keep the child out of sight as much as possible" (Burnett 3). If women — especially those who give birth to children — can fail at motherhood, the development of their children is reliant on both men and women, regardless of familial relation, to step into mothering roles.

Out of all the motherly figures mentioned in *The Secret Garden* — Mrs. Lennox, Mrs. Craven, the robin's mate — the only one who ever appeared in conversation with the protagonist, Mary Lennox, is Mrs. Susan Sowerby. Mother Sowerby is cast as the ideal mother due to her child rearing practices, her ability to breach the boundaries of social class, and her likeness to the Virgin Mary. Like several authors of children's literature around the Victorian age, Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote a story about children having adventures outside the reaches of parental control. The setting of the secret garden, and Misselthwaite Manor overall, provided an ideal place for Mary, Dickon, and Colin to learn, explore, and grow stronger. While Mary and Colin did not choose to lose their parents, the alliance of all three children sought out the secret garden as a place to be away from the rest of the world, going so far as to forbid the presence of *all* adults once Colin was brought along. This intentional isolation made the presence of Mrs. Sowerby all the more meaningful; she was brought into the story by the children themselves, who seemed to will her to life just by the stories that Dickon told, similar to the role that a fairy godmother serves in a fairy tale. Tales of Dickon's mother were part of what got

Colin out of his bed, and into the world: "Even when I was ill I wanted to see you [...] I'd never wanted to see anyone or anything before," Colin cries out when he first meets Mrs. Sowerby (Burnett 160). While Mary and Colin are not biologically related to Mother Sowerby, her motherhood is so powerful that they experience an intense connection with her nonetheless. When she enters the garden, the children's response is as if Mother Sowerby emitted a magnetic force: "Colin began to move toward her too, and Mary went with him. They both felt their pulses beat faster," as though their bodies were somehow tied to this woman, even if she did not birth them.

After spending their childhoods in varying states of orphanhood, Mary and Colin are presented with the influence of Mrs. Sowerby, who manages to meet all of the needs the children were unaware they even had, making motherhood the force behind the strengthening of the novel's heroes. In addition to Susan Sowerby's presence in the stories that rouse Colin and Mary from their stifled existence in Misselthwaite Manor, she also raised Martha and Dickon, who each played key roles in getting Mary and Colin outside and connected with nature. Spending time in the garden brings color to the children's cheeks, strengthens them physically, and overall transforms their general demeanor. Similar to how the duty of motherhood in the novel is gender-neutral, the most effective mothering in *The Secret Garden* is demonstrated by Mrs. Sowerby, who Silver argues "provides her girls with the same physical space and freedom she does her boys, allowing all of her children to 'runs about an' shouts an' looks at things,'" a gender-neutral style of parenting that is not typical of the Victorian age (Silver 198). Mrs. Sowerby's knowledge of child development is so great that it allows her to pass between the strict social classes of the time period, usually in the setting of the moor. The moor, a space

separate from the rules of Misselthwaite Manor, is governed by laws of nature, allowing humans to take up animal roles, such as when Dickon becomes the mother of an orphaned lamb he finds there. Family boundaries become more transparent in this setting, allowing Mrs. Sowerby to assume a motherly role for Mary by approaching Mr. Craven and giving him advice about his niece. Rather than viewing this moment as a social transgression, Mr. Craven looks upon the lower-class Mrs. Sowerby as a "respectable woman" who said "sensible things" (Burnett 70). The power of Mrs. Sowerby's motherly influence is strong enough that she can rise above social restrictions to perform her duties, and still maintain a reputation as a knowledgeable woman.

There is not a fatherly figure in the novel who meets the children's needs in the way that Susan Sowerby does. Mary and Colin's fathers are generally absent, and Mr. Sowerby hardly even earns mention in the novel. Even though Mrs. Sowerby can hardly afford her gifts of a skipping rope and the secret deliveries of food, she still sends the presents to the children because she has an innate knowledge of their needs that only a mother can possess. Archibald Craven attempts to meet Mary and Colin's needs, but ultimately fails without the guidance of Mrs. Sowerby. He instructs the staff to give his son whatever he wants, expecting that to fulfill his needs, when what he actually needs is to be told "no" for once. Mr. Craven has no knowledge of what Mary wants, and is astonished at her request for "a bit of earth" (Burnett 70). Meanwhile, Mrs. Sowerby, who Mary can tell "knows all about children," communicates to Mr. Craven that the child should play outside as much as she likes, while Martha and Dickon take care of obtaining gardening supplies for Mary (Burnett 70). Due to extensive knowledge of how children get well and her gifts of a skipping rope and baked goods, Mrs. Sowerby became the chosen adult that Mary and Colin yearned to

meet, positioning her as the maternal ideal that every motherless child wishes for.

Mrs. Sowerby's innate ability to meet the needs of every child she encounters allows her to serve as a surrogate for the missing mothers of *The Secret Garden*. At one point, the children theorize it was not the Robin or Magic that brought them to the secret garden, but the spirit of Colin's mother, wishing for Mary and Dickon to guide her son back to wellness. Mrs. Sowerby accomplished this same mission when the stories of her reached the boy's sickbed, and he was given another reason to get up and explore the outside world. Mary's relationship to the secret garden is more metaphorical; her desire to get behind those walls is explained when she tells Dickon: "'They're letting it die, all shut in by itself'" (Burnett 60). The garden has not been cared for in ten years, and has gone a decade without love or care, similar to Mary's life in India, where she was neglected by her parents. While her children got Mary the supplies to make sure she enjoyed the garden as much as she possibly could, Mrs. Sowerby ran interference with the adults, insisting that Mary not be passed off to a governess and instead allowed to explore. Mrs. Sowerby's maternal power went beyond aiding just the children in their needs: she acted as a physical manifestation of Mrs. Craven's spirit one last time at the end of the novel, to communicate with Archibald Craven and reunite him with his son. Directly after he heard his late wife's voice calling him back to the garden, Mr. Craven received a letter from Mrs. Sowerby, echoing the exact same sentiment, as though her motherly powers extend to fulfilling the wishes of mothers who have passed on. Mrs. Sowerby is a stand-in for the lost mothers of the novel, as well as an excellent mother in her own right, raising twelve children with love and enthusiasm when so many other parents in the novel failed to raise just one.

For a character who seemed to profoundly impact each child who heard of her, it is noticeable that Mrs. Sowerby did not actually meet any of the children besides her son and daughter until the final chapters of the novel. It is possible that the allure of Martha and Dickon's mother was heightened by the fact that she only appeared in stories; her greatness did not need to be witnessed firsthand, but rather, it was so powerful that her own son and daughter wanted to talk about her all the time. Mrs. Sowerby's presence in the novel is mythical, and her role as the ideal mother of a miraculous son is strikingly similar to that of the Virgin Mary. Susan Sowerby, who is so minimally associated with the father of her children that it is almost believable she conceived without a man at all, is a caring mother figure who makes great sacrifices. While she is poor, she makes sacrifices to care for her children, resulting in an outpouring of love for her virtuous character. Mary's icy demeanor began to crack when she heard stories of Mrs. Sowerby, so much so that "When Martha told stories of what 'mother' did or said they always sounded comfortable" (Burnett 32). By not appearing in person until so late in the story, the character of Mrs. Sowerby's physical appearance was left to the imagination, allowing anyone to project an image of their ideal mother onto her. The Virgin Mary is another ideal mother, one who often appears in a blue cloak, which acts as a symbol of her sacredness as well as her closeness to the blue sky, and therefore heaven. When Mother Sowerby finally does appear, she is wearing "her long blue cloak [...] she was rather like a softly colored illustration in one of Colin's books" (Burnett 159). For Colin and Mary, Mrs. Sowerby's immaterial presence could have been an opportunity to imagine her as their own mother, and for her to look any way they would like, perhaps even resembling the ideal mother they read about in the Bible. The reader is left yearning, just like Colin and Mary, for their

own glimpse of the woman, as if the reader is an orphan as well.

Throughout *The Secret Garden*, characters like Mary and Colin learn mothering from observing the natural world just as much as they do from Mrs. Sowerby or Dickon. While the Sowerby family tends to them, Mary and Colin learn from their example how to tend to the garden, creating a cycle of nurturing care and connection to the natural world. More than anyone or anything else in the novel, Mary seems closest with the space in which she mothers: inside the walls of the secret garden. As she tells Dickon when she first shows him the garden, "Nothing belongs to me. I found it myself and I got into it myself. I was only just like the robin, and they wouldn't take it from the robin" (Burnett 60). This passage shows how the world Mary was raised in — a world dictated by social class and patriarchy — is severed from the natural processes of motherhood and ownership that continue to exist in nature, including in the secret garden. The secret garden must be kept a secret for so long because the systems in place would seek to separate Mary from her experiment in mothering, instead placing the duty of motherhood on biological mothers and women only. This forced separation is why Mary feels so connected to her garden, both of them shut away from the world for years in the absence of mothers to tend to them. The force of motherhood in *The Secret Garden* seeks to reunite children with motherly figures, and the strength of this force is so profound that it reaches outside the walls of the garden and bypasses all restrictions of gender, social class, and familial relation to make sure that Mary and Colin receive the care they so desperately need. Mothering shows itself to be a natural process that will occur against all odds and despite all difficulties because of the necessity to create new life.

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A Note from Isabelle Eastman:

"I graduated from UMass Amherst in 2021 with dual bachelors in English and History. I completed my Honors Thesis in creative writing with a manuscript titled "My Friends and Their Favorite Words," and participated in the history department's seminar and conference on the Daniel Ellsberg papers. I worked at the UMass Special Collections and University Archives, edited the English department journal 22nd Century, and was elected hiking chair of the UMass Outing Club. I wrote my essay 'Comfortable Wonderful Mother Creature: An Exploration of Maternal Forces in *The Secret Garden*' for Dr. Gretchen Gerzina's class on the Victorians in children's literature. After revisiting *The Secret Garden* for the first time since childhood, I was intrigued by how many characters in the book act as parental figures, even those who have no children of their own. Through the lens of the Victorian era, a time period so defined by gender roles, it was exciting to observe how domesticity and relationships to nature informed what it meant to be a mother.I continue to write, and have assisted authors Anne Cann and Ben Bradlee Jr. on their nonfiction works. I currently live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where I work as a library assistant."

Sanderson Prize 2021

An Essay is a Letter is a Poem: A Reflection on Writing at its Roots

Samantha Gallant

Dear reader, listener, Professor, grader,

I've started writing poems as letters. Letters to my melanin and to "the monster in my mind." Letters to the biological father I've never met and letters to myself. And truly, all my writing is a letter to someone or something. I would venture to say that all writing is a letter to someone or something. Sometimes that listener is simultaneously the writer, or was the writer in a past time. Sometimes that listener is never found, or was never invited. But, the writer always has one in mind. As a very audience-conscious writer, I sometimes write to please others at the expense of myself. I am currently exploring the possibility of writing to satisfy and entertain myself every time—sometimes at the risk of others' disapproval.

Prior to this current endeavor, I can vividly remember writing essays for English class my sophomore year of high school in which many hours and pages later I would be left with a jumble of words, strung together with hopes that my paper would be the quintessential image of the kind of essay my teacher had described in great detail. His assignments felt like puzzle pieces and Mad Libs,

there was an expected structure, and we were to fill in the empty spaces—with grammatically impeccable sentences of course. I was being asked to exist and operate in an unfamiliar space. A space in which my thoughts and ways of knowing were not compatible with the conditions at hand.

Writers always write within the context of a space. This space is constructed by the rules governing it, the people in it, the social and cultural norms for that space, and the way it physically manifests itself. In my sophomore English class, the rules that governed the space were the strict expectations about structure and organization, these rules were enforced and generated by my teacher and social and cultural norms were illustrated by his grammar lessons and the traditional ways of writing and knowing that he imposed. Neisha Green discusses having to operate in a similar space as a young student in her article, "THE RE-EDUCATION OF NEISHA-ANNE S GREEN" stating, "But as a younger student everyone kept trying to change me, shape me into a "newer, better" version of myself by policing and limiting my use of my codes and pushing agendas that focused on a standard that we know doesn't exist in the way that is usually professed." Green urges us to consider the consequences of asking students to practically breathe underwater, to function in worlds that don't make sense to them, or to throw themselves into the pits of processes that contradict the way in which they think or communicate. I, as many students, know the turmoil that comes with wanting to be seen as a "better" writer while feeling as though that meant shedding personal style and identity in exchange for ways of thinking and writing I did not understand.

Before I begin discussing the ways in which the "codes" and "agendas" of others dictate my writing less so now, I would first like to acknowledge the importance of the instructor as an audience

as a body. In the sophomore English class which I have described, the instructor was White, older, and male. I wrote not only in response to his explicit instructions, but in response to his age, his Whiteness, and his maleness, whether he or I was conscious of it. He was my audience. His Whiteness meant that if I were writing about Blackness, I was writing about it in a way that I thought would make sense to him. His maleness meant that if I were writing about feminism, I might carefully choose the words and phrases I use to describe instances of sexism. The teacher, grader, reader, and listener made me a little nervous.

In contrast: before my College Writing professor said one word on the first day, I knew that writing for her class would be a new experience, unaware of the great impact it would have on the writing I would produce. I had never occupied an academic space in which the reader/listener/Professor/grader was a younger, Black, woman. Her mere presence decentered Whiteness. She was my audience. And, my audience looked like me. When I wrote my first essay for the course on my personal relationship to Blackness, and to an experience I've had with racial violence, hesitations that I might have had when writing in the context of Whiteness were no longer present. I described my experiences as a Black woman without fear that my audience would misunderstand, misread, or reject me. The experience of writing in this course was less strenuous than ever before, it was somehow lighter, and more easeful. The listener, reader, professor, and grader made me comfortable.

While I had already somewhat outgrown the mindset I adopted sophomore year of high school, freshman year of college introduced me to a new, exciting, and open definition of successful writing. It was in my College Writing course that my professor urged us to meld discourses, instructing us to convert research papers into rhetorical speculative fiction pieces. She spent no time enforcing

any sort of rigid expectations and encouraged us to imagine possibilities for writing we were previously instructed against. It was in my College Writing course that I began considering "artwork" as interchangeable with the word "essay." Art is free and unbound by rules, and I like my essays to be the same. When I feel as though what I have articulated on the paper is no less interesting than the thoughts residing in my head, I am satisfied. For example, I grapple often with the complexity of writing as a social means. If it is clear that I am still grappling in this paper, and that chaos leaks into my work, I am okay with that. My thoughts cannot always or often be condensed into a five paragraph essay with a thesis statement, and I am now okay with that too. A. Suresh Canagarajah writes that, "writing is not just constitutive, it is also performative. We don't write only to construct a rule-governed text. Although it is important for texts to be constructed sensibly in order to be meaningful, we write in order to perform important social acts" (Canagarajah 602). When Canagarajah describes writing as "performative," it speaks to the significance of the audience. When I write now, although I am certainly aware of my reader, I am less concerned with whether I have broken the rules of power structures I would hope to dismantle anyways, and am more concerned with the impact on that reader and listener—whether what I have to say is interesting, impactful or simply understood.

Ever since taking the College Writing course, when I begin a work of writing, I am left searching for a "why." With every work of writing these "whys" are different: Why have I begun writing a poem about dancing in the grocery store? Why am I writing this paper on doors and thresholds as represented in *The Handmaid's Tale* when there are more explicit symbols and themes? Why am I choosing to write about the one Black main character in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*? Sometimes the reason I am writing

becomes apparent to me half way through an essay, or occasionally days or weeks after finishing. This "why" is sometimes what motivates me to write and sometimes what helps me reflect. At the very least, this "why" is what I am hoping to communicate to my audience. If I can illustrate why it is important to me, to you—the reader, I feel that I have been successful.

In "Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis," John Trimbur begins to untangle the complexities and importances of writing as deeply social; as expression and conversation. Trimbur writes, "In an era of diminished expectations, persistent economic anxiety, and a restricted political discourse, imagination and political courage are required if literacy is to be re-represented as an intellectual resource against injustice, a means to ensure democratic participation in public life" (Trimbur 294). There is a lot to unpack within this set of lines, but I think at its simplest, Trimbur is asking us to consider the social reasoning behind why we write. I believe that he is asking us to contemplate whether we might be gatekeeping the expression and communication rooted in written word when we hold people to a very subjective set of rules and standards. I note this because I have experienced using literacy as "an intellectual resource against injustice" and I have experienced attempting to participate in the ways that I have been taught are "correct." The latter did not make me feel as though I was contributing to "public life" in ways that were meaningful.

I've started writing essays as poems. Poems are all about style. "Grammatical errors" become moments for self-expression. Paragraphs flow like stanzas. The experience too, is simpler. I write as a sort of stream of consciousness first, and prepare it to be received by others second. But I think what I love most, is that when essays are poems, rules are grasped at the roots and undone from the power structures that had them planted.

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A Note from Sam Gallant:

"I am currently a Senior English major with Spanish, Education, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies minors. I love to write, whether it be poetry or a critical analysis of a text. This year I am doing a creative portfolio for my honors thesis that involves delving into the works of Black feminist poet Audre Lorde, while writing my own poetry collection that examines Black queer womanhood. Outside of coursework, I enjoy working at the UMass Writing Center and participating as an E-board member of the UMass Poetry Club.

I wrote this essay as a sophomore for the course 'English 329H Tutoring Writing: Theory & Practice,' a prerequisite to being a paid tutor in the Writing Center. I definitely remember writing this essay two years ago and so it is certainly interesting to look back at it now. I think I've grown in a lot of ways as a writer since then, but yet, I think I'm still grappling with some of those same questions and ideas I was grappling with at the time!"

Steinbugler Prize 2020

The Victimization of Antagonists in *The Bluest Eye*

Natalee Marini

Victimization is at the core of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Its main character Pecola is the victim of rape, internalized racism, and external prejudice. Likewise, her family the Breedloves and many other black characters besides are also victims of both internalized and externalized racial prejudice. What makes Morrison's depiction of victims different from most others, though, is that she portrays victimhood as a spectrum rather than a monolith to controversial ends. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father and rapist, is a prime example of a victim who acts outside the range of expectations; he internalizes the hate and prejudice that was used to hurt him and displaces the hurt onto others like his daughter, thereby transforming himself into assailant. Morrison makes it a distinct goal not to gloss over Cholly's initial victimization. She wrote in the intro to the novel, "I did not want to dehumanize the characters who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse" (Morrison xii). Victims-turned-antagonists like Cholly exist in reality, and if literature is sometimes the means by which to understand reality, it is important to once in a while recognize the grimness of victims

who do not display their hurt in societally accepted ways, to make an attempt to understand what brought them to the point of hurting others while also condemning their actions as inexcusable. By writing an extensive backstory for Cholly and by writing the scene of Pecola's rape from Cholly's perspective, Morrison gives the reader no choice but to grapple with their own conceptions of what a victim should look and act like; she humanizes a black man, gives depth to his pathology, when society would otherwise immediately demonize him as another stereotypically aggressive and violent brute.

Cholly Breedlove is, first and foremost, a victim and it serves the narrative best not to forget that. The trauma resulting from his first sexual experience as a young adolescent is what characterizes everything he thinks and does thereafter. Cholly loses his virginity to a young black girl named Darlene and "[t]heir bodies begin to make sense to him" in its initial moments of bliss before the moment is shattered "with a violence born of total helplessness;" two white men approach the two and force them to keep having sex at gunpoint while they watch (Morrison 147-148). He is seized of his own bodily autonomy, forced into sudden helplessness. It is a rape by proxy, an ultimatum to either die or be voyeuristically raped. Pitted against two white men who already systematically oppress him by virtue of their whiteness and his blackness, there is no mistaking him as anything but a victim in this situation both to the racism that drives the white men to antagonize him and to the very act of being forced to have sex. And yet, Cholly already in this moment begins his conversion to antagonism, making a walking paradox out of himself: he becomes both victim and assailant simultaneously. Rather than direct his anger and humiliation at the white men who are directly responsible for hurting him, Cholly "cultivate[s] his hatred of Darlene," his fellow victim, because it is

impossible for him to hate the "big, white, armed man [as a]...small, black, helpless" teenager without destroying himself in the process (Morrison 150). To hate something bigger than you, something systemic that has existed since long before you were born, is to hate something you have no power over. So instead he hates the one person "who bore witness to his failure, his impotence...[t]he one whom he had not been able to protect" because at least then he has the power to ignore her.

While Cholly's transformation from victim to antagonist begins as a way for him to seize back control in his life, to channel his rage outward onto something other than himself or racism, he later cultivates it further by emulating with his wife Pauline the sexual violence of his early adolescence. In this period of his life, Cholly's victimhood and antagonism enter a state of moral grayness. Sex, for him, became something irrevocably laced with violence and aggression. When he meets Pauline and falls in love with her, there is a little bit of romance spiked with sexual aggression mixed into their relationship. In narrating her life story, particularly those moments as pertaining to her husband Cholly, Pauline states that she "regard[s] love as possessive mating," implying that Cholly is possessive and controlling (Morrison 122). Furthermore, there are explicit passages describing their sex life using violent imagery, such as when Pauline admits that Cholly often rapes her now by "thrashing away inside me before I'm even woke, and through when I am" (Morrison 131). Even Pecola herself notices the aggression Cholly imbibes into sex, having overheard her parents having sex and remarking about the noises: "Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence" (Morrison 57). Sex, for Cholly, is something that cannot be separated from humiliation and aggression, and so he does with Pauline what the white men did to him. Now, though his trauma is still evident, he is physically emulating what white

men's crime against him by outright raping his own wife by choice. He calls it love, and he probably does love her, love being a relative term, but his actions have become inexcusable.

The scene where Morrison's refusal to dehumanize even the most egregious of antagonists in the novel comes to its zenith is when Cholly rapes his daughter Pecola, a scene that is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the novel; it hardly comes as a surprise, and yet it is still so visceral and disturbingly explicit that it surprises nonetheless. The violence of sex thus far in Cholly's life began as voyeuristic rape, became violent sex and purposeful rape, and now becomes the vile, incestuous, and pedophilic rape of his young daughter. In other words, Cholly does about the worst thing he could have ever done, and the crime shatters any ounce of victimhood he might have had left to call upon. That being said, despite being so truly awful in this moment, there is not a single sentence in the narration where he is outright demonized for his actions; Morrison steadfastly refuses the audience that kind of retribution for having read something so criminal. Cholly's backstory is what makes him a human, albeit an appalling human, in this scene. The violence of his encounter with Darlene and his rage at not being able to protect her combines with the warped coexistence of love and aggression in his relationship with Pauline, and thus Cholly's rationalization for his rape of Pecola is born. He uses the word "tender" often, remarking that his lust for Pecola is "not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness," and that "[h]e want[s] to fuck her — tenderly" (Morrison 162-163). The key word is "tender," because it shows that Cholly is not intentionally being cruel to his daughter but rather a father doing what he believes to be kindness even if his rationale for his actions is completely irrational. His ideas of love and sex are corrupted by the trauma he experienced in adolescence, as a victim

to a sex crime himself, and though his rape of Pecola — and even his treatment of Pauline — is inexcusable, Morrison provides the proper context to prevent him from being portrayed as a villain for the sake of being a villain. He is given depth and humanity, is fleshed out as a whole person, and this characterization spells out the harsh truth that rape is a crime committed by mankind rather than heartless demons.

In writing the rape scene from the rapists' perspective, Morrison also implicates the audience in the event. The audience is refused the satisfaction of seeing Cholly immediately condemned. Just as she refuses to dehumanize Cholly because it would spoil the message that Cholly is himself a victim beneath it all and that rape is perpetrated by human beings, so too does she refuse the opportunity for the audience to dehumanize Cholly as they would a rapist in real life. The audience has to come to the conclusion that Cholly's crime is inexcusable on their own after sifting through his tragic backstory. In other words, the audience has no choice but to first recognize him as a human who was first systematically injured before they can see him as the man who committed that atrocious crime; they have to bear witness to the crimes of Cholly's society before any judgement about Cholly himself can be passed. Cholly's victimhood manifested as corrupted views on love and in violent sexual encounters, but he is nonetheless a victim of the systemic racism so prevalent in the setting of this novel. This system has the tendency to portray black men as inherently aggressive anyway, denying its role in narratives like Cholly's or Pecola's, by taking the initiative to dehumanize all black men. Morrison counters even this by denying its reach into this novel; she forces Cholly to exist as a full-fledged human against all odds to spite anyone who would dare to blindly do otherwise.

Morrison's intent with *The Bluest Eye* is, in part, to humanize

every character as a person with their own thoughts and motives; characters like Cholly Breedlove may do awful, inexcusable things, but that does not change that fact that they may have once been victims themselves to a larger systemic issue or that victims do not always act how we believe they should. Additionally, her intent holds the audience accountable for recognizing not only these facts about victimhood but also the fact that crimes are not perpetrated by nameless, faceless monsters -- every crime ever committed was committed by a human being, and the gravity of understanding the dark potentialities of mankind is immense.

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A Note from Natalee Marini:

"I was an English major while I was at UMass, with a certificate in the Study and Practice of Writing. Now, I work as a middle school English teacher in Massachusetts.

I had just read *The Bluest Eye* for the second time that year when I wrote this essay for American Literature After 1865, and I was really intrigued by Morrison's stance on not making monsters out of any of her characters, even ones as questionable as Cholly. Villainous characters in general always tend to catch my eye in fiction, so I absolutely took this as an opportunity to investigate how a character with such a tragic backstory could become such a horrible person and still not be fully vilified by the narrative he lives in. I fully believe to this day that this is the best essay I have ever (and probably will ever) write. I wrote this on such an extreme time-crunch but had some much passion for the topic and the novel that I somehow churned out what is quite possibly the magnum opus of my time at UMass."

Steinbugler Prize 2020

"We Do Not Look in Great Cities For Our Best Morality": Urban Perspectives in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*

Jordan Leonard

In the world of Jane Austen, the physical environment in which the characters interact provides a crucial backdrop to the larger narrative forces at play. A striking feature of these environments is the fact that they don't often change: the largest distances encountered by Austenian heroines is often just a walk to the neighboring estate or a short carriage ride into town. The novels largely take place in environments Austen constructs herself, based in the reality of the gentry class. Estates like Mr. Darcy's Pemberley or the rolling green of Mansfield Park exist as entirely separate environments from more overtly political spaces of London or Portsmouth. Instead it is the domestic sphere, while still capable of being politicized, that becomes the dominant backdrop for the events of Austen's novels. Throughout Austen's body of works, there emerges a dichotomy between the rural and the urban, the domestic and the political. Depending on the interpretation,

Austen's deliberate distinction between city and country may be an illustration of her views on the morality of urban environments: the frivolity and ignorance of characters who come from the city emerges across many of her works. In *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, the environment is thematically embedded into the plot and development of character (particularly in regards to their respective heroines). While the personal and the political are ostensibly and decidedly separated in Austen, glimpses of the world outside of the domestic sphere appear when urban environments and its inhabitants are present, even in the distant background. Austen appears to assign morality to urban and rural environments, but her depictions of them create a much more complex view of the English social world and her characters' positions within it.

The moral discrepancies between urban and rural environments is a significant aspect of the themes addressed in *Mansfield Park* . This is made apparent in the comparison between Edmund's primary love interests: the fashionable Mary Crawford, and the far more provincial and conservative Fanny Price. Mary is wealthy and elegant, but ignorant of the 'country customs' that exist in opposition to the London attitudes she has been raised with:

> Guess my surprise, when I found that I had...offended all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish...coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs. (*Mansfield Park* 41)

Mary's lapses in manners while in the country, in this case trying to hire a farmer's cart into town, illustrate the fundamental differences between London and rural gentry environments such as Mansfield Park. Mary's London philosophy that "every thing is to

be got with money" highlights the key differences between urban and rural wealth. "Urban" characters such as Mary Crawford and her brother Henry are frank when concerning issues with money, whereas the issue of money for the rural gentry is almost profane. Mary, who arrives at Mansfield already endowed with 20,000 pounds (32), immediately makes it clear (through Austen's free indirect discourse) that she intends to marry for money: "Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well, and having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be made to his person than to his situation in life" (33). Mary's views on marriage are marked by a blunt practicality: she is aware that marriage is her primary means of maintaining financial security, and any emotions that arise from it are generally circumstantial. Marrying for money is a necessity for a woman of the gentry class if she would like to retain her station, and yet it is a reality that the rural gentry often avoid confronting directly. Issues of money and morality are tied inherently to the city (in this case, London) and the characters that originate there. Money itself in Austen is generally linked to morality, as a character's relationship with money is often an indication of their sympathies and reliability.

Fanny, by contrast, is affected by her romantic worldview and humble upbringing. While born in the city of Portsmouth, her formative years were spent on the country estate of Mansfield Park. Raised among her high-society cousins and under the relative care of Mrs. Norris, she eventually develops a loyalty to the customs and ideologies that accompany 'country' living. As she grows into a young woman of the gentry class, her morals and tastes align more with that of the rural elite. Austen illustrates Fanny's amiability through her visits with Mary, but the lack of substantial conversation between the two is striking. Mary is preoccupied with presentation and formal titles, while Fanny favors a congenial

warmth and familiarity. On discussing Tom Bertram's absence, Mary remarks that "'I am so glad your eldest cousin is gone that he may be Mr. Bertram again. There is something in the sound of Mr. Edmund Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother like, that I detest it.'" Fanny vehemently disagrees, crying:

> How differently we feel! To me, the sound of Mr. Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning—so entirely without warmth or character!—It just stands for gentleman, and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown—of kings, of princes, and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections (*Mansfield Park* 165).

Mary's distaste for Edmund's far less formal title is yet another indication that her objectives in marriage are largely financial, while Fanny's impassioned rejection of formal titles highlights her idealistic notions of status and love. If the two are each representations of the places in which they were raised, London becomes the objective and sensible counterpart to the romantic sensibility of Mansfield Park. As England's economic epicenter, London's cold and industrial nature allows the city to operate as a successful model of modern economy. Mary, similarly, is also trying to perform efficiently in order to function in a society that only values her for one primary role. The urban-rural dichotomy that assigns a higher morality to country residences ignores the larger societal factors that interfere: Mary's character at face value appears superficial and manipulative, but on further examination of the restrictive social conditions of gentry women, she is just as much a victim of her circumstances as Fanny is.

While the latter half of Fanny's childhood has been in Mansfield Park, she was born in the bustling city of Portsmouth. Much like

London, Portsmouth is a hub of naval and economic activity at the forefront of British foreign affairs (as opposed to Mansfield Park, which is secluded inland and begets the opportunity to ignore anything too distressing). Portsmouth is an industrious area that generates a significant portion of British wealth, along with the comforts that wealth produces. As Fanny grows into a proper lady of the gentry class, her connection to areas like Portsmouth fades. The place that was once her home is now an environment of hostility and unfamiliarity. She no longer identifies as the daughter of a sailor and disgraced gentlewoman: the visit 'home' to Portsmouth solidifies her complete departure from the identity she left as a child in Portsmouth. She finds herself unexpectedly homesick for Mansfield amid the city chaos:

> She could think of nothing but Mansfield...Every thing where she now was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them *here*... If tenderness could be ever supposed wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place...Here everybody was noisy, every voice was loud... The doors were in constant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke (*Mansfield Park* 345).

Fanny's growth and maturation at Mansfield is especially evident when she leaves the elegance and propriety of the country and re-enters the chaotic, 'uncivilized' world of Portsmouth. Her refined manners and taste distance her even further from the family she left there ten years prior, as she looks on in horror at her siblings and their lack of decorum. Fanny could have easily been in the same circumstances as her younger sister Susan, who, despite her own chaotic upbringing, "had an innate taste for the genteel and well-appointed" (329). Fanny and Susan represent a fundamental idea of the perceptions of social mobility. Fanny's ability to be molded into a genteel lady who marries into a large fortune is indicative of a more mobile social structure: she is born in the relative squalor of Portsmouth to disgraced parents, but is able to successfully fulfill her role as a gentry woman (marriage) through the education and refinement she receives at Mansfield Park. A woman of the middle class, given the proper environment, can supersede the role of an upper class lady through marriage and personal improvement. Fanny was not selected by her relatives at Mansfield Park because she showed potential, but because she was old enough to recognize the sting of parental neglect. She was a girl "'now nine years old, of an age to require more attention than her poor mother could possibly give [...]'" (*Mansfield Park* 5). Fanny develops her sense of propriety in this rural environment, after spending her early formative years in the relative squalor of a crowded house in the city. Through Fanny's triumphant rise within the upper-middle class through her upbringing at Mansfield Park, she uses the country environment as a means of education and personal growth. The city is restrictive and industrial, whereas the country provides an opportunity (for those in auspicious circumstances) for a lateral, but not unsubstantial, shift in status.

Austen's preoccupation with this shifting upper class continues in *Persuasion*, one of the last of her novels to be published. The precarity of the Elliot family's financial future looms over the novel's romantic plot, as Anne copes with the loss of her home and the prospect of growing old and unmarried. Her family's move to Bath represents a pivotal moment in Anne's romantic and financial

future. The fashionable resort town of Bath is a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of London and Portsmouth, but also to the smaller country communities of the rural gentry class. There is no sense of permanence attached to Bath: it is a place for leisure activities and idle gossip, but also a place where identities are always in flux. One's past, however questionable, does not matter as much in Bath as the state of one's drawing room or the number of cards left at their door. It is a place for people like William Elliot to engage themselves in the relatively urban social scene without fearing the exposure of anything particularly reprehensible about their character. It is a refuge for the likes of Sir Walter Elliot, who would simply like to be spared the embarrassment of acknowledging he has had to quit the comforts of Kellynch due to poor financial management. Anne, who would have preferred a "small house in their own neighborhood, where they might still have Lady Russell's society, still be near Mary, and still have the pleasure of sometimes seeing the lawns and groves of Kellynch" (17), is forced to relocate to Bath with Sir Walter and Elizabeth. The preference for a smaller but familiar house in the country, where she is able to maintain her connections, illustrates Anne's strength of character. Unlike her father, who might still "be important at comparatively little expense" (18) in Bath, Anne thinks little of arbitrary markers of social and economic status.

The emphasis on rural living and its distance from the more industrial and politicized urban regions sets the moral tone for much of the novel. Anne exhibits a constancy of character through her preference for the country that endears her to Wentworth far more deeply than his prior connection to Louisa Musgrove. As he walks with Louisa, Wentworth prizes her apparent constancy of character, a trait he later finds attractive in Anne: "'It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence

over it can be depended on. – You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm'" (74). With the novel's ultimate resolution in mind, this praise of Louisa's maturity and firmness of character is deeply ironic, as it is Anne who has been constant in her affections towards Wentworth through their nearly nine-year separation. The city of Bath plays a significant role in determining a true firmness of character, as it provides the optimal conditions for one's outward social appearance to change as they see fit. A city environment that prioritizes pleasure and conversation over one's true sense of morality sets Anne apart from her prospective romantic rivals for Wentworth's affection. Louisa's firmness, while once charming, manifests as an immature stubbornness that leads to a serious injury. Anne's father and sister in particular highlight the maturity and substance of Anne's character, made even more clear by her reflection on Bath:

> Here were the funds of enjoyment! Could Anne wonder that her father and sister were happy She might not wonder, but she must sigh that her father should feel no degradation in his change; should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignities of the resident landholder; should find so much to be vain of in the littleness of a town... (*Persuasion* 112)

Anne's view of Bath as a place of vanity, where the dignity and social standing of a man like her father may be salvaged, is indicative of her own firmness of character and preoccupation with immaterial concepts (which Austen herself places a greater importance on throughout the novel).

While Fanny Price's Portsmouth is the squalid chaos of the working and middle classes, Bath is a den of leisure and vanity for the English elite. Both cities represent a state of moral ambiguity,

and often exist as spaces in which the values and morals of the 'rural' upper class are suspended. Mary Crawford's observation about the city and its relationship to morality perfectly encapsulates the views of many characters in Austen. England experiences a period of precarity in regards to foreign affairs (as reflected in the naval references in both *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*), but also a revolution of industry and economy. The cities of mass industry like Portsmouth, while deemed undesirable by the likes of Fanny Price, are still inherently connected to the country gentry: the comforts of wealth, and indeed the wealth itself, is obtained through the port cities of Portsmouth and London. The image of Bath presented in *Persuasion* is another illustration of the connection between the rural elite and the morally grey aspects of city life. While less apparent in Bath, the city's tendency to engender duplicity creates an environment of moral ambiguity that both Anne and Wentworth deem a failure of firmness of character. The cities presented in these novels illustrate a complex view of the evolving global economy that must be acknowledged, even within the four walls of a sitting room.

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A Note from Jordan Leonard

"I graduated from UMass in 2020 as an English and Classics major, with a certificate in Professional Writing and Technical Communications—and grand ambitions of becoming a professor of English literature.

I submitted this essay during the summer of 2019, when I was fortunate enough to participate in UMass's Oxford Summer Seminar. The classes were small and entirely discussion based, and I had the opportunity to participate in a wonderful exchange of ideas with my peers and professor— discussions which ultimately helped me form the basis of this paper. While I had always been an Austen enthusiast, the intensive six week course made us all but experts in deciphering her prose. I learned that an Austen novel contains twice as much to analyze, as the things she leaves unsaid become just as important when we examine her social commentaries.

Part of this essay was written on a train from Edinburgh to Oxford, where I spent the day exploring the city and became determined that I would come back. After finishing my degree at UMass, I got my Master's in Classics and moved to Edinburgh, where I now work as a technical writer for an ATM software company."

Sanderson Prize 2020

Tastes Like "Chicken": The Role of Synesthesia in *Bitter in the Mouth*

Claire Harrison

Bitter in the Mouth tells the story of Linda Hammerick's youth in the South while paying particular attention to diction and language. In the novel, Linda recounts formative episodes from her childhood and adolescence while occasionally indulging in a historical anecdote. A significant portion of the novel examines Linda's synesthesia and the way it makes dialogue an audio-gustatory affair. Linda's ability to taste certain words creates another lens through which she sees the world. The novel uses the force and unabated nature of Linda's synesthesia to call into question the notion of "control" and what is voluntary and involuntary in the composition of a person's experience. Moreover, synesthesia serves as an allegory for race, shown in the way non-synesthetes react to Linda's condition. Through these various uses, *Bitter in the Mouth* ultimately employs synesthesia as a commentary on the shortcomings of language and the failure of understanding that can occur between individuals with different experiences. The specific choice to make Linda's synesthesia affect her perception of language and taste underscores the subjectivity of language and the disparity between

words and their meanings. Perhaps the extent to which we truly understand other human beings is more limited than we believe, because language reduces multifaceted sensations and experiences to a two-dimensional shorthand. Synesthesia therefore functions in the novel to challenge constructs—of race, of control— ultimately landing on the perpetrator and enforcer of them all: language.

Words are generally considered to be a tool that we use to communicate with one another. Linda's experiences with synesthesia in *Bitter in the Mouth* question the level of control we actually have over this so-called tool. The involuntary force of the flavors that Linda experiences when she hears certain words—what she calls "incomings"—causes her to have difficulty focusing in school, keeps her from watching the television and makes conversations exhausting (21). The tastes she experiences have no relation to the meanings of the words or her relationship to them. For example, when she hears the name of her best friend, Kelly Powell, spoken for the first time, "Kelly" tastes of "canned peaches, delicious and candy sweet" while "Powell" is "a raw onion, a playground bully with sharp elbows shoving all other flavors aside" (18). While the flavors that certain words produce are wholly unrelated to the actual words, their effect on her emotions is still significant. Even when there is a "happy coincidence of meaning and flavor," as in the case of the word "dill," the word is not "neutralized and without power," and it "could still disrupt, dismay, or delight" (29). The way a word's taste can disrupt or delight is best seen in the names of the men Linda has loved. She first noticed this effect in the name of her cherished great-uncle, Baby Harper: "'Babyhoney Harpercelery'...an unexpectedly pleasurable combination of flavors that made me wobbly in the knees" (43). Discussing her long-term relationship with Leo, Linda comments, "I fell in love with Leo the moment he told me his first name, which tasted of parsnips" (77).

Similarly, regarding her first boyfriend, Wade, Linda comments that "he was unremarkable, except for the taste of his name...'Wade' was orange sherbet in [her] mouth" (36). While Linda is aware that she has no control over the sensory response a word produces, these incomings nonetheless influence the way she consciously sees others and the feelings she actively fosters for them.

Faced with the involuntary influence of her synesthesia as shown above, Linda seeks to suppress the "incomings" and to use them to her advantage. After Kelly convinces her to vie for the role of "smart girl" in high school, Linda finds a way to "stop, or at least minimize...the 'incomings'" (21). Linda and Kelly discover that chewing tobacco can overpower "every one of the incomings" and that "cigarettes [are] even better than the dipping tobacco" (22-23). Later in life, Linda also learns that "alcohol and sex made the incomings barely noticeable" (154). Linda recognizes the way that, regarding her synesthesia, it is her "brain alone that is at work. The brain is a willful dictatorial processor, and unless it is diverted (good sex) or chemically manipulated (nicotine or alcohol), the brain prevails over the tongue" (155). In growing up with her ever-present auditory-gustatory synesthesia, Linda also learns how to manipulate her ability to her advantage. Linda notes that when she was eleven, she "had just learned the trick of stringing together words to produce the tastes that [she] wanted" (73). In coping with her mother DeAnne's abysmal cooking, Linda learns that saying aloud the word "again" produces the flavor of pancake syrup. Linda explains, "each repetition of 'again' was a revelation. The faster I said it, the more intense and mouth-filling the taste became" (75). Linda learns that a word could not only "diminish and deflect" but also "fulfill and satisfy" (75). Linda ultimately understands that while she cannot control the effect of her synesthesia on her day-to-day life, she can take advantage of this ability

for her own benefit. Linda equates this use of her synesthesia to when a person "touch[es] [themselves] for the sake of pleasure" and states, "we all have to learn how to use what we were born with for something other than the functional and the obvious" (75). Linda cannot control how she sees the world, but she can use her synesthesia to influence the way she lives within it.

As an involuntary quality of her identity and experience, Linda's synesthesia serves as a potent allegory for race. In using synesthesia as an allegory, the politicized filter is removed, and one better understands the effect of being misunderstood based on an involuntary aspect of identity, such as one's race. This effect is best seen when Linda discovers a PBS documentary on synesthesia while watching television. From the beginning, the reader notices the non- synesthetic interviewer's inability to understand synesthesia as a different, but neutral, lens through which a person perceives the world, rather than a limitation or affliction. The interviewer asks a man with synesthesia, "Would you say that living with synesthesia has been disruptive to your day-to-day life?" (217). The synesthetic man counters this question by asking, "Would you say that living with your sense of smell or your eyesight has been disruptive to your day-to-day life?" (217). The man rebels against the interviewer's attempt to conflate the notion of "different" with "worse"; his synesthesia means he sees the world in a way that does not conform to the usual five sense rule, but who is to say that any of us experience the world in the same way? Throughout the documentary, there is an attempt to "other" the people with synesthesia and to diminish their experiences as "worse." By experiencing the documentary from Linda's point of view, the reader sees the minute microaggressions that language regarding differences can produce. The documentary defines synesthesia as "the involuntary mixing of the senses," to which Linda rebukes, "Is your hearing or

your eyesight involuntary? They are automatic and, if you're lucky, always present" (218). Similarly, the documentary states that the man from the interview "suffered from auditory-gustatory synesthesia" and Linda interjects, "Suffered?...We suffered your insult, sir!" (218). In a second interview with a baker who hears colors, the interviewer attempts again to define the man based only on his synesthesia, asking "why he became a baker" and whether he ever considered "a career in music or, perhaps, as a visual artist" (227). The man responds that he became a baker "because that was what the army taught [him] to do" (227). In attempting to cover the story of his synesthesia, the interviewer ignores that his synesthesia is only a single part of who he is, and does not determine his entire life or outweigh his personal history. *Bitter in the Mouth* as a novel itself rebukes the notion of a single- story based on one part of an identity: Linda is a quasi-Asian-American with synesthesia, yet that is but a fraction of who she is, and it does not define her identity. Synesthesia in this work serves as an effective allegory for race because it shows the ways people who consider themselves as "normal" often attempt to make claims or draw conclusions about a person based on their race through othering language rather than trying to understand them as a multifaceted human being.

In discussing control and allegories, we dance around the most important point that Linda's synesthesia makes about language: language is a construct that does not bear as much authority as we believe it does. Language is subjective and influenced by personal experience, rather than being a universal medium of communication. Linda discusses this in explaining her limitations when describing her synesthesia and finding a match for her first memory of a bitter taste: "I have not yet found a corresponding flavor in food or in metaphor. But such a 'match,' even if identified, would only allow me the illusion of communication and you the illusion

of understanding" (15). Linda continues by explaining, "I could claim, for example, that my first memory was the taste of an unripe banana, and many in the world would nod their heads, familiar with this unpleasantness. But we haven't all tasted the same unripe fruit" (15). Linda describes the deconstructionist notion that, while we use the same words to communicate with each other, those words pass through a filter of our own personal experience which often creates a disparity between what is said and what is meant. Linda proposes that language exists to create a feeling of togetherness and safety, saying, "In order to feel not so alone in the world, we blur the lines of our subjective memories, and we say to one another, 'I know exactly what you mean!'" (15). Linda's connection to language through taste allows her a unique perspective into the way language really only exists two-dimensionally. When discovering the way words and their associated flavors could be pleasurable, Linda explains, "I...had to disregard the meanings of the words if I wanted to enjoy what the words could offer me" (74). Linda recognizes how "the letting go of meaning" is "a difficult step" because of the way we revere words as "resourceful and revealing" (74). Linda asserts that "we [grab] onto words because we [think] they could save us" (74). Linda believes that "to let go of meaning [is] to allow for the possibility that words didn't hold within them [the] promise of salvation" (74). She is challenging the way words are so dogmatically accepted and relied upon without considering their limitations. By experiencing flavors of words that are independent of their meaning, Linda learns to reject her world's unquestioning belief in language's reliability.

This proposed fallibility of language would not be so disconcerting if it did not have implications in the way we, as humans, relate to one another. In order to communicate our experiences to one another, we push what we want to say through the medium

of language, doing away with the incommunicable notions they provoke. However, the limitations of language do not have to limit the way we relate to one another, as long as we become comfortable with not fully understanding. During the PBS documentary, a woman with synesthesia describes the feeling a certain sentence induces in her and asks the interviewer, "Do you see what I mean?" (221). Linda comments, "the interviewer couldn't see what [she] meant. Nor could I. Not really. But the difference was that I believed her. The interviewer didn't" (221). Linda emphasizes that it is less important that we fully understand each other and more important that we just believe a person when they try to communicate their experience. Linda knows exactly how necessary it is to be believed because of her experiences telling her mother about her synesthesia: "I told her 'mom' tasted of chocolate milk. DeAnne, when she had heard this fact, had told me to hush my mouth" (247). When Linda returns home after breaking up with Leo, she re-meets her mother, now referred to as DeAnne Whately Hammerick, and shows her the PBS documentary on synesthesia. The next morning, DeAnne Whately Hammerick says "she had watched the program four times" (244-245). Her first question for Linda after viewing the program was "how much did it hurt... not to be believed?" (246). When Linda tells DeAnne Whately Hammerick that "mom" tastes of chocolate milk, she asks, "low-fat or whole?" (247). It is unlikely that Linda's mother could ever completely understand how it feels to taste words as Linda does, however it is the act of believing her and asking questions about her experience that brings Linda closer to her mother. DeAnne Whately Hammerick expressing empathy is more important to Linda than her knowing exactly how she feels. We do not have to be in complete mutual understanding to connect with one another.

Linda's synesthesia acts as a catalyst that leads her to explore

and question language's subtle influence on our attitudes and its shortcomings as a medium of communication. The lack of control over her synesthesia makes her consider the involuntary factors that affect our emotions and posits that we are less in control of our experience than we believe. The way people without synesthesia react to and speak about the condition shows the way we create perceptions of the "other" through specific language, especially when it comes to race. Through exploring her experiences with synesthesia, Linda ultimately considers the effect of language on our perception of others. *Bitter in the Mouth* contends that we hold onto illusions of complete understanding "in order to not feel so alone in the world" (15). However, Linda discovers that to know someone is not the same as totally understanding them. Instead, Linda shows that faith is more important than comprehension; one does not have to completely grasp a person's experience to believe them. There is only so much about how our reactions that we can control; we cannot control what we do and do not comprehend, but we can decide what we believe. In acknowledging that we communicate through a language based on subjective ideas, we can recognize that we need to work to see people fully.

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A Note from Claire Harrison:

"I am an English major hoping to graduate in the spring of 2023! When I'm not in class, I'm either working as a Peer Coordinator at the Commonwealth Honors College Advising Center or I'm falling asleep trying to read.

This essay was one of the first that I ever wrote as a UMass student. I wrote it in the fall semester of my freshman year for

English 200 with Prof. Caroline Yang. The class was an intro to the major that generally focused on constructions of race in literature. Prof. Yang is a phenomenal professor and she really helped me throughout the writing process! She encouraged me to engage with the text critically and to push my writing to be as clear and precise as possible. Her course and the essays I wrote for it affirmed my passion for the discipline and shaped how I read literature. As for what I think of the essay now...every time I read it I find more things to revise or new things I want to say. However, my dad tells me that if I'm inspired to say more by the end of writing an essay, it was a successful endeavor! I am tremendously grateful for this essay, the course and Prof. Yang for lighting my fire for the study of English."

Sanderson Prize 2019

"Fjord of Killary": An Ecocritical Reflection

Jordan Leonard

"In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society-the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere. As a critical stance, ecocriticism has one foot in literature and the other on land" (Wenzell 128). Cheryll Glotfelty's assertion regarding the relationship between the natural and social environments that surround a literary work is particularly relevant within the realm of Irish literature. Ireland's physical and political landscapes have been closely intertwined for centuries, an idea that has been reflected in both classical and contemporary works. Kevin Barry's "Fjord of Killary" is a prime example of this fusion between environment and culture. Set at the Water's Edge Hotel in the Fjord of Killary, the story is driven by what occurs beyond the lounge bar. Barry strikes a balance between the internal goings-on of the hotel (the speaker and his interactions with his patrons) and the conditions of the environment surrounding it. Not only do the events reflect what happens to the characters in the story (and by extension, the social 'world' around them), it also expresses concerns that directly affect the

natural environment.

When one thinks of Ireland, a series of images may come to mind: verdant rolling hills dotted with sheep and farmhouses, bars packed with friendly locals, and cobblestone roads lined with charmingly antiquated buildings. In "Fjord of Killary", Barry turns this notion on its head with his description of the fjord and the general gloomy atmosphere. Almost immediately, readers are given the sense that the setting exists outside the idyllic romanticized image of rural Ireland:

> It was set hard by the harbor wall, with Mweelrea Mountain across the water, and disgracefully gray skies above. It rained two hundred and eighty-seven days of the year [...] On the night in question, the rain was particularly violent- it came down like handfuls of nails flung hard and fast by a seriously riled sky god. I was at this point eight months in the place and about convinced that it would be the death of me. (Barry 2)

This departure from the "stereotypical" Ireland presents an issue that has permeated not only Irish culture, but also the international perceptions of Irish culture. The construction of a western green utopia, free from the tethers of the industrial east, was in part a response to British colonialism: as Ireland was taken over by the English, traces of "traditional" Irish culture (language, literature, architecture, etc.) began to fade away. Barry attempts to dismantle, or at the very least, subvert, this constructed Irishness through his depiction of the landscape. Even his narrator is temporarily swept up in the romantic vision of Western Ireland: "...The West of Ireland...the murmurous ocean...the rocky hills jard-founded in a greenish light...the cleansing air...the stoats peeping shyly from gaps in drystone walls..." (5). The speaker's idealization of the country

is also marked by the use of ellipses, a hollow imitation of Joyce (the quintessential Irish author). Barry's desolate scene is a stark contrast against the bright postcard images in popular culture. He paints an honest and accurate picture of the Irish reality: one that does not always include rolling hills of green and sunny skies.

Like the landscape against which the story is set, the time frame is another significant indicator of the issues addressed in "Fjord of Killary." Published in The New Yorker in 2010, it followed a period of immense economic growth (and subsequent collapse) known as the "Celtic Tiger." The aftermath was not only a financial crisis, but something of an environmental crisis as well. Barry subtly addresses the industrialization of the West through his colorful cast of Killary locals. Their preoccupation with roads and directions may be an indication of the cultural and environmental shift that came with the Tiger. Writes Barry, "The talk shifted to roads, mileage, general directions. They made a geography of the country by the naming of pubs" (2). Rather than using natural landmarks, the barflies seem to only be concerned with manmade highways and drinking establishments. Barry uses the social environment of the lounge bar, in addition to the land outside, to comment on the post-Tiger landscape: even the idyllic West of Ireland has been connected to the modernized East by paved motorways and businesses.

There is also an overwhelming sense of dread and decay, as if the land surrounding the hotel is slowly decomposing. The building itself is in a precarious state, eventually succumbing to the flood. Barry notes "the iodine tang of kelp [that] hung in the air always, [which] put me in mind of embalming fluid" (3). The land is representative of something that is dying, or at the very least beginning to corrode. The fjord itself is a product of glacial melting, which is an effect of a changing climate. Barry inundates the reader with

this imagery of decay, but also implies that something catastrophic is looming in the distance: "...the rain continued to hammer away at our dismal little world, and the sky had shucked the last of its evening gray to take on an intense purplish tone that was ominous, close-in, Biblical" (6). Within a narrower context, it may appear that Barry is referencing the impending flood. However, when analyzing the Irish landscape as a whole, it may also represent the imminent effects of climate change that threaten the future of the planet's ecological wellbeing.

Throughout "Fjord of Killary," the landscape itself becomes a character amongst the cast of eccentric Killary barflies and morose hotel staff. Barry's narrator is at constant odds with the environment around him: he seems to harbor disdain for his patrons and staff, and the harsh western weather sends him spiraling into a months-long depressive episode. The speaker's naive ideas about the rural west quickly fall away as he realizes that the romanticized vision of a green utopia is simply a construction bred out of the need for a monolithic "culture." The natural world in "Killary" plays a central role in Barry's commentary on cultural and ecological issues. The recurring imagery of precarity and decay serves as a means of discussing the delicate state of Ireland's economic and environmental affairs: just as the threat of the flood looms over Kevin and the bargoers, the perils of climate change and late stage capitalism are evident on both a national and global scale. The purple skies and smell of decay not only indicate an immediate threat to the Water's Edge and its inhabitants; it also represents the fast approaching consequences of a world that disregards ecological issues in the interest of capitalism. To quote Barry: "'It's end-of-the-fucking-world stuff out there'" (2).

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A Note from Jordan Leonard

"I graduated from UMass in 2020 as an English and Classics major, with a certificate in Professional Writing and Technical Communications—and grand ambitions of becoming a professor of English literature.

This essay was written for Malcom Sen's Irish Literature course, the first English class I took as a freshman. There is a vivid memory attached to the final submission of this essay: I felt as though, despite the time and care I had put towards writing it, it wasn't even worth the 35 cents it cost to print. I had no confidence in my ability as a writer, and had nightmares for weeks about receiving our feedback. A short time later our feedback came out, and the nightmares stopped. As it turns out, I had written a lucid analysis using an ecocritical framework- an area of study I was becoming increasingly interested in. Barry asks us to reject the romanticized notions of Ireland and its people, and I wanted to use this essay to explore the ways his imagery provides us with a metaphor for the impending climate crisis.

After graduation I spent a year in education, before moving to Scotland to do a Master's in Classics. I recently finished my degree, and am now working as a technical writer at a software company in Edinburgh (thanks PWTC!)."

Steinbugler Prize 2018

"The White Witch:" The Desire for a National Identity

Stacey Cusson

James Weldon Johnson's poem, "The White Witch," depicts a vampire-like witch who threatens to lure away young men and kill them. On the surface, the poem is a warning about interracial relationships and is a didactic approach meant to expose the risk. The poem involves a black body that risks lynching, and in this way, discusses the physical danger to black men who succumb to the lure of white women. However, by superimposing the desired image of the witch with the desired image of America, Johnson suggests the witch's role is a reduction of a larger danger—the danger of being lured by America's false enticements.

James Weldon Johnson's "The White Witch" depicts a white woman, but the woman is a witch who threatens young black men. The poem opens:

> O brothers mine, take care! Take care!
> The great white witch rides out to-night.
> Trust not your prowess nor your strength,
> Your only safety lies in flight;
> For in her glance there is a snare,
> And in her smile there is a blight. (Johnson 1-6)

The speaker immediately begins by warning his brothers of a white witch. The term evoked—"white witch"—implies a degree of agency: the white woman has malicious intentions towards the "brothers" or black men. He claims she is "[riding] out tonight," which connotes images of the KKK night riders who carried out "extralegal acts of violence targeting select groups, such as blacks, under the cover of night or disguise" (Horn). He also states that regardless of their traditional masculine attributes such as "prowess" and "strength," she will capture them because she is stronger—white destructive power and violence is greater than black masculinity. Instead, their only safety lies in flight, which is a recurrent trope in African American slave narratives, folk-lore, and contemporary black literature for escaping slavery for freedom. Even an innocent glance is a snare, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is a term for a noose ("snare"). This further connotes images of extralegal violence like lynching. Also, the OED describes blight as "any malignant influence of obscure or mysterious origin; anything which withers hopes or prospects, or checks prosperity" ("blight"). Thus, her smile is a disease of unknown origin that "withers hopes." The blight she casts punishes black males who catch her eye with peril and death. This acts as a warning for the brothers against the enticements of white sexuality.

However, the image of this witch isn't traditional. She is not a toothless creature who terrifies little children; she represents conventional feminine beauty:

> Her lips are like carnations, red,
> Her face like new-born lilies, fair,
> Her eyes like ocean waters, blue,
> She moves with subtle grace and air,

And all about her head there floats
The golden glory of her hair. (Johnson 13-18)

Red carnations are flowers typically associated with love ("Carnations") and white lilies "were said to have grown in the tears of Eve as she was expelled from Eden. The flower, associated with faith, purity and virtue, is the symbol of the Virgin Mary and her perpetual chastity" (Harding). Therefore, the witch lures men in with a promise of love and virtue, but this is exactly their downfall. She represents the white purity that racist America is intent on defending against miscegenation. By substituting fair for white, Johnson subtly highlights how the primary colors described are red, white, and blue: the national colors of the United States. Thus, the witch is a symbol for America. This symbolism is also reinforced by the fact that female pronouns like "she" have been used in the past to refer to countries. The witch's conventional feminine beauty is the Aryan ideal—fair, blue eyes, golden hair. The "golden glory" refers to gold coin or money, which also casts her as a symbol of national wealth. By juxtaposing the desire of the witch with America, the white woman's body becomes a symbolic enticement of the promised life of freedom in America.

However, Johnson reveals there is a disparity between the promise of America and the actuality. He states:

But though she always thus appears
In form of youth and mood of mirth,
Unnumbered centuries are hers,
The infant planets saw her birth;
The child of throbbing Life is she,
Twin sister to the greedy earth. (Johnson 19-24)

The witch always appears young and charming. Her mood, "mirth," is pleasurable and often used to describe religious joy

and heavenly bliss. Therefore, her happiness and thus, America's happiness is exaggerated. Although she appears to be young, she has lived for "unnumbered centuries" and was born alongside the planets. Like the planets, she is the child of life. Life's characterization as "throbbing" evokes phallic imagery. Also, the witch is declared to be a "twin sister to the greedy earth," which is a possible allusion to the earth goddess Gaia, whose violent attachment to the god Uranus ended in his emasculation. Thus, through the white witch, America is romanticized as a joyous place having a long, primordial history and as a potent source of life. The men are lured by the promise of life; however, the last line suggests that America is not all that it seems. While it seems like an enjoyable place, there is an underlying malevolence because America has the power to emasculate men who desire to form a union with it.

Johnson further discusses the disparity between reality and actuality as the speaker reveals the witch's conventional beauty is only a mask for her true nature, which is ancient, animal, and predatory. He states,

And back behind those smiling lips,
And down within those laughing eyes,
And underneath the soft caress
Of hand and voice and purring sighs,
The shadow of the panther lurks.
The spirit of the vampire lies. (Johnson 25-30)

Underneath the archetypal features of the beautiful white female body lies the savage, primitive, animalistic nature of the "panther" hunting for her prey. This depiction completely redefines the traditional connotations of whiteness. Western culture places black people on the negative side of its dualities—if it is between good and evil or beautiful and ugly, black people will be depicted as

evil and ugly so they can be dehumanized and oppressed. Thus, by imagining whiteness as vampirism, the traditional images of white as "good" and black as "bad" or "evil" are reversed. After Emancipation, white men needed to maintain a clear separation of black and white to maintain white supremacy, so white women were off-limits to black men. The white female was cast as pure and virtuous and black men as unrestrained animals; however, by consciously transforming the white form into one that is bestial like the panther, Johnson comments on the antagonism and mistrust blacks feel toward whites. In particular, Johnson's image of the white female body and its "vampiric" attributes become a warning against the enticements of not only white sexuality, but nationalist desire.

The white witch only remains seductive at a superficial level. He states,

> For I have seen the great white witch,
> And she has led me to her lair,
> And I have kissed her red, red lips […]
> I felt those red lips burn and sear
> My body like a living coal;
> Obeyed the power of those eyes
> As the needle trembles to the pole;
> And did not care although I felt
> The strength go ebbing from my soul. (Johnson 31-42)

According to the OED, "lair" has multiple meanings. Its many definitions include a place for "beasts of chase or of prey," "the resting place of a corpse; a grave, tomb," and "a lying with a person; fornication" ("lair"). This suggests the witch has successfully lured the speaker to her lair with her smile; however, this lair becomes his grave. He can feel her lips "sear [his] body like a living coal,"

which connotes more images of extralegal violence such as burning black men alive for having sex with, or allegedly having sex with, white women. Their sexual relationship is suggested by the phrase "as the needle to the pole," the needle and the pole being phallic images. However, the phallus, the symbol of masculinity, is trembling, which suggests there is an inversion of power. The witch receives power by being able to leave the black man to suffer for the mutual relationship as she secures her marginal position in white society. Thus, the speaker is emasculated and reduced to an impotence by the powerlessness black men feel when America prevents their inclusion into the national identity.

However, the witch is uncaring of the speaker's fate. The perspective switches in the next stanza to that of the witch when she chose her prey:

> And in your voices she has caught
> The echo of a far-off day,
> When man was closer to the earth;
> And she has marked you for her prey.
> She feels the old Antaean strength
> In you, the great dynamic beat
> Of primal passions, and she sees
> In you the last besieged retreat
> Of love relentless, lusty, fierce,
> Love pain-ecstatic, cruel-sweet (Johnson 49-54).

In Greek mythology, Antaeus ruled Libya and defended the Berber nations in North Africa. His power came from being connected to the earth goddess Gaia. The witch senses this power is "primal," which suggests it is primordial—having existed from the beginning of time. However, she seeks to destroy this power. As Hercules discovers, Antaeus seems impossible to beat, but he

has weaknesses, which is exactly what the white witch exploits. She does this by exoticizing the speaker, his passions—his cultural suffering. She also sees him separate from and defeated by a superior force—dominant white culture and ideologies—as suggested by the phrase "besieged retreat." Thus, by combining opposing words like "pain-ecstatic" and "cruel-sweet," Johnson highlights how the white witch conceptualizes the speaker's "otherness" simultaneously as a commodity for pleasure and as a target for prejudice. Again, the reference to Gaia suggests that the speaker is emasculated by their relationship. As Johnson suggests, because black men are "othered," their pursuit of an American identity is an obsessive tangle of love and hate that ends in emasculation.

Thus, the poem discusses the disparity of American myth and reality through questions of national belonging for black Americans. For black people, there is a dilemma of living in America from its colonial origins only to have full and unconditional acceptance as an American perpetually contested and deferred. The image of the white witch as a siren of false hopes is a reduction for this paradox of living in America. The speaker warns his brothers that those who are tempted by a desire to be with her—who are tempted by the desire of a national identity—will be entrapped by a lingering paralysis of alienation because their advances into American national subjecthood will always be blocked by their "otherness." American multiplicity—the existence of many, often opposite, sides of a concept—creates a hierarchy through the separation of identities and restricts humans from connecting. Thus, the speaker is disillusioned with trying to fit into an American identity. Ultimately, the failed promises of the black experience in America cause a sense of powerlessness and impotence because white America places black America in a dehumanized social position to be exploited. Although it seems like their position in society

will always be inescapable, Johnson suggests that his brothers take flight in order to escape the hostile white world—he suggests their identity should be separate from America's in order to escape white domination

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A Note from Stacey Cusson:

"I graduated from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst with a B.A. in English, a minor in African American studies, and specializations in creative writing and the study and practice of writing. Post-graduation, I work as a technical writer and occasionally write poetry in my free time.

My essay "'The White Witch:' The Desire for a National Identity' was my final essay for the Modern American Poetry course. When I chose my essay topic, I wanted to select a poem thatfelt

relevant today and also allowed me to combine my knowledge from my English, African American studies, and poetry courses. Johnson's poem was a perfect fit. Though Johnson's poem is a century old, his warning remains pertinent today. Black males; advances into American national subjecthood continue to be blocked because racial exclusion has never ceased—it has merely changed forms. Looking back at my essay now, I'm grateful I was exposed to multiple discourses at UMass that allowed me to thoroughly analyze Johnson's work."

Steinbugler 2017

Who Does She Think She Is?: An Analysis of Gender Identity in Shaw's *Pygmalion*

Maura Kolhonen

Critics of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* have traditionally focused on its ideas about class and social transformation. As a variation of the myth Pygmalion and Galatea, Shaw's play has been analyzed for its implications about class and what it means to be a lady: as examined by Michael Cornelius and Lisa Starks. Michael Cornelius, for instance, briefly discusses the notion of the "shallow distinctions between the classes" that allows Eliza's class to change (243); Lisa Starks examines how Eliza's clothes are representative of her class status and her development into a lady (45). The play certainly depicts a transformation in Eliza Doolittle's class, but closer attention to the text reveals she also undergoes some sort of gender transformation, as well. Throughout the course of the play, Eliza's gender identity is ambiguous, as demonstrated in each of the acts by the way she is described as a thing, the way she is defined by her clothing, and the way she is alienated from her own voice and speech, and has certain implications for the understanding of an independent woman in society.

Shaw's play is rooted in the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Pygmalion creates a statue of a woman that he adores and dresses in beautiful clothes and jewels. He ultimately falls in love with her and the gods bring her to life so that they can be together. According to Lisa Starks, Galatea, as Pygmalion's creation, acts as a "mirror of his own artistic genius and a symbol of ideal femininity" (44). Pygmalion finally finds the perfect woman to love in his own creation; that ideal woman is "programmed as a beautiful object of her father/lover's desire," having "no voice" and being "unable to speak her own desire" (Starks 45). Galatea is literally a thing brought to life for the pleasure of her creator: she has no agency, and she has no voice. Similarly, Henry Higgins takes responsibility for bringing Eliza to life as an upper class woman for the purpose of his and Colonel Pickering's amusement. However, their story puts a twist on the classic myth.

Much of the critical literature on *Pygmalion* seeks to illuminate the class transformations that occur over the course of the play, and describe the play as influenced by the social movements of the 1890s. In her analysis of the construction of "simulated women" in literature, Julie Wosk notes, "Shaw's play emerged in a period that had already witnessed important social advances for women in the realm of property rights and education" (23). Women in Britain and the United States were in the midst of their fight for suffrage, and many women were beginning to be able to support themselves (Wosk 23). In his study of Shaw's role in English feminism, Phillip Graham claims that Shaw himself was a supporter of the women's suffrage movement but believed that women must speak on their own behalf when addressing the issue (177). Consequently, many feminist scholars do not recognize Shaw as integral to feminist movements during the time and even after, but he most likely did hold some influence (Graham 178). John McInerney states

there is "plenty of evidence in our world to show that Shaw was right and his public women characters were prophetic," such as Major Barbara, in his examination of Shaw's "public women" (195). However, Eliza Doolittle's place in this world is unfixed. Michael Cornelius upon studying the idea of gender roles in *Pygmalion* describes her as "hardly a feminist icon," but where does that place her as an independent woman? (244) It is here that I will explore her objectification and gender ambiguity and their implications in relation to her transformation throughout the play.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Higgins, from the start, positions Eliza as a thing that he will transform into a woman, specifically through the use of her voice and speech. Yet, the results are not so clear-cut. In Act I, Eliza encounters Henry while he is on the street studying her speech as if he were observing an animal in the wild. Her accent is low and not always easy to understand, but as a phonetician, Henry is interested in different dialects. Here, Henry refers to her as a "creature" and declares that her "English...will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days" (Shaw 18).[1] Henry's choice of language depicts her as if she is something not quite human; she is some sort of beast lurking in the lower class areas in town. Throughout their exchange, Henry also calls her a "bilious pigeon," and "a squashed cabbage leaf," further contributing to her position as a thing rather than a fully formed person and adding to the idea of her gender ambiguity (18). Although Higgins' descriptions of Eliza are brutal, he is created as a comical character. It is clear from his lack of discretion that he has not been properly socialized, and this positions him as an oddly endearing man. However, Eliza is far from being the ideal woman, and as such, Henry positions her closer to "thingness" rather than personhood.

1 All future references are to this edition and shall be cited parenthetically in the text.

However, in this act, Eliza displays important characteristics that contribute to her development later on. First, she is independent: Eliza is a businesswoman who earns her own living by selling flowers. She says, "Oh do buy a flower off me, Captain. I can change a half a crown" (12). Here, as throughout the act, she demonstrates her persistence and business skills by coaxing people to buy flowers from her. In addition, her speech is unrestrained, both in what she says and how she says it. She calls Higgins an "unmanly coward" and often exclaims, "Aaaaah-ow-ooh" (17, 19). Unlike Galatea, Eliza is shown having her own identity before her transformation in which she can support herself without the help of a husband or male figure. Second, Shaw's play gives the Galatea figure a voice, and her voice is at the forefront from the very start. Nonetheless, Eliza's behavior and wild speech create Higgins' image of her as some kind of animal.

The opening scene in Covent Garden places Eliza in the public sphere. However, women of the time were believed to belong in the private, domestic sphere. In this scene, Eliza is not depicted as "constrained" by this typical construction (McInerney 178). She is independent financially and is not tied down by marriage. Furthermore, Eliza is never shown in her own domestic setting over the course of the original play; she is depicted in both public and private locations, but none of the private settings is her own home. The public/private divide is essential to female identity at the time, so where Eliza is physically present is important in creating her gender identity. The space she occupies is inevitably processed in relation to her gender, so never seeing her in her own domestic setting complicates her feminine identity. Furthermore, she is always being seen and/or interpreted by other characters through a "kaleidoscope of perceptions" (McInerney 181). These perceptions, coupled with her objectification, make it difficult to

determine who the real Eliza is, contributing to her character's gender ambiguity.

In Act II, Eliza enters the private sphere for the first time when she arrives at Higgins' house; however, the space doubles as his workplace. She arrives looking for Higgins to teach her how to speak like a lady. Henry, in turn, makes a bet with Colonel Pickering that he can "make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe" and goes on to tell his housekeeper to burn Eliza's clothes and "wrap her in brown paper" until her new ones arrive (29). Here, Higgins still speaks of Eliza as if she is an object. Even his housekeeper tells him that he cannot treat Eliza as if he "were picking up a pebble on the beach" (30). Although Mrs. Pearce refers to Eliza as an object, it is to make a point to Higgins that he should not treat her that way. Still, Higgins says that Eliza "doesn't belong to anybody" and that Eliza does not have "any feelings that [he] need bother about" (31-32). As if she were a statue, Higgins views Eliza as property, as was a historically typical view of women, and that she has no feelings. Still, Higgins has not yet created his Galatea, so he does not feel any adoration towards her; she is more like a chunk of marble waiting to be carved. This again, contributes to her "thingness" in Higgins' eyes, contributing to her ambiguous gender identity because Higgins still does not appear to classify Eliza as a person.

Eliza is further equated with an object when her father arrives at Higgins' house. Shortly after Alfred Doolittle's first appearance, he quickly reveals, "I want my daughter" and declares "The girl belongs to me" (41,42). Doolittle is looking for some sort of payout for his daughter, as evident in his asking, "Where do I come in?" (42). He puts on the pretense that he is concerned for her wellbeing, but tells Higgins that he "aint see the girl these two months past," demonstrating that he and Eliza do not have a close relationship

(42). Still, Higgins toys with Doolittle by trying to pawn Eliza back off on him, but Doolittle wants nothing of the sort. He explains his desire in this passage from his speech:

> ...if you want the girl, I'm not so set on having her back home again but what I might be open to is an arrangement. Regarded in the light of a young woman, she is a fine handsome girl. As a daughter she's not worth her keep; and so I'll tell you straight. All I ask is my rights as a father; and youre the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, what's a five-pound note to you? and what's Eliza to me? (45)

Here, Doolittle proposes that he would be willing to sell Eliza to Higgins. On the most basic level, Doolittle reduces his daughter to an object simply through the act of being willing to sell her to Higgins. He equates her with a "five-pound note," positioning her as a thing once again. She can be exchanged for money, or bought and sold, as if she is an object. Doolittle's relationship to Eliza is illustrated as unstable, which contributes to her gender ambiguity. He does not play the role of a typical father in this scene; his relationship with Eliza is more like a salesman looking to profit off her in some way. Although Eliza may be tied to Doolittle through blood, they do not have a firm relationship. Thus, Eliza does not have much familial attachment to a man, and she is unmarried, making her identity unfixed. Additionally, in his pitch, he focuses on Eliza's looks as being "handsome" (45). This appears to be his main selling point because he says that otherwise, she is pretty much useless; so, he again objectifies her by reducing her to her looks in his sales pitch. Possibly the most shocking part of this deal is that Doolittle does not really know what Higgins' intentions

are with his daughter; Higgins never explains his plan to him. For all he knows, Doolittle could be selling his daughter off as a sexual object. However, the scene does not become quite that dark. Certainly it is shocking to watch the selling of a person live on a stage, and the action is set in someone's home, rather than on a dingy street corner.

However, the question must be asked: why does the scene not offend more than it does? The scene touches upon a typically sensitive topic and certainly has the potential to escalate; however, it is instead humorous. At this point of Britain's history, plays were subject to censorship by the government, and Shaw has previously had plays banned due to what the censor would consider inappropriate content. So, how does this scene, with its potentially dark undertones, get approved by the censor? The scene creates concern that Eliza could be in real danger, but it eventually moves in a different direction. Shaw uses the melodramatic potential of Higgins as a possible sexual threat and creates a comical moment by stopping the escalation of the scene. Typically, clear binaries are used to create melodrama: good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, male vs. female, etc. Clearly, Doolittle's selling of his daughter can be characterized as wrong or bad; yet, it becomes funny as the scene plays out. This action falls into clear categories, just as the selling of a woman by a man emphasizes a clear gender binary. However, Eliza is an ambiguous figure, blurring the lines between many categories, specifically her gender identity. Perhaps this contributes to the diversion of melodrama in the scene. If Eliza does not fit into a clear binary, then the melodrama is difficult to construct. Thus, her gender ambiguity plays into the humor in this scene and drives it in a different direction. The scene has the potential to intensify the tension by selling Eliza's spirit and body away into a life of prostitution, but it instead deflates. Eliza seemingly has

nothing to lose by being sold to Higgins because of the way he is characterized, so the scene loses its possible bite. Perhaps this is how this scene made it past the censor. However, although Higgins is not a sexual threat, he is a threat no less. His educating Eliza strips her of her identity, which is also devastating.

Moreover, the edge is taken off because both Eliza and Higgins are not neatly positioned as sexual beings. Higgins is an aging, eternal bachelor who comes off as somewhat childish with his blunt and hurtful remarks. In the first act, he is introduced as not properly socialized, creating comfort for the audience in his eccentricity. In this scene, he does not have intentions of purchasing Eliza for sexual purposes; he simply wants to win the bet, making the moment not so biting because he has been positioned as an odd man with other priorities than marriage. He could be considered married to his profession, and Eliza is simply another project, again a "thing" to Higgins. However, Eliza is also not seen as a desirable female; she is described by Higgins as "deliciously low" and "horribly dirty," contributing to the audience's understanding of his lack of attraction to Eliza at this moment in the play. Shaw even states in the play's stage directions, "*She is not at all a romantic figure,*" making it clear when reading that Eliza is not the typical leading lady (10). The two characters' lack of sexual appeal and lack of romantic chemistry at this moment in the play adds to the Doolittle scene not being as offensive as it could be. The scene further contributes to Eliza's gender ambiguity because she is not positioned as an object of desire as is typical of many women in the theater.

However, the actress who inspired and first played the role of Eliza Doolittle, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, complicates the notion of Eliza lacking any appeal. Mrs. Pat was a well-established actress and a much beloved persona by the time she first appeared as Eliza

in *Pygmalion*; however, she was middle-aged and seemingly not in the position to play an eighteen year old young woman. Yet, her star power, charisma on stage, and relationship with Shaw created enough pull to land her the role. According to Richard Hugget, "...she could...outshine Shaw and not many people were able to do that," and Shaw eventually "fell in love, head over ears..." (10, 28). Although Mrs. Patrick Campbell was married with children, she had a flirty and close relationship with Shaw, even telling him in one of their famous correspondences, "thanks...for thinking I can be your pretty slut" (Shaw et. al 12). This, of course, is in reference to Eliza's being called a slut throughout the play, but it also has flirty undertones and demonstrates Patrick Campbell's cheeky personality. It appears that she, too, recognizes that her age could have affected whether she landed the role, and she thanks Shaw for considering her. Perhaps the actress' "...brooding sexual beauty" helped her play a younger role convincingly and contributed to Eliza's transformation into the attractive young woman she is revealed to be in the third act (Hugget 9).

Eliza becomes desirable over the course of the play, particularly in Act III. The act is set in the privacy of Higgins' mother's home, where Eliza is put on display at her at-home. Higgins arrives without notice, and tells his mother he has "picked up a girl" (54). In response to Mrs. Higgins' excitement at the prospect of a romantic partner for her son, Henry quickly asserts, "I don't mean love affair" and that he is looking for a woman who is like his mother (54, 55). Here, Higgins is again illustrated as being uninterested in Eliza romantically, and his admiration for his mother contributes to the characterization of his childlike qualities. Higgins reveals that he "picked [Eliza] off the kerbstone" and will be bringing her to his mother's tea party to see how she does acting like a lady in a semipublic setting (55). He attempts to calm his mother's nerves

about Eliza, saying "she has strict orders as to her behavior. She's to keep to...the weather and everybody's health –" (55). Higgins attempts to control Eliza in this setting to the best of his ability by restricting her conversation. Although Mrs. Higgins' home is private, the Eynsford Hills will be in attendance, providing Eliza with a sort of audience for her performance of being a lady.

Among them is Freddy, the son of Mrs. Eynsford Hill. He is a polite young man with no real skills who takes an interest in Eliza. Once Eliza enters the party, she immediately steals the guests' attention. She is "*exquisitely dressed*" and the guests are "*quite fluttered*" when they see her (59). Clara, Freddy's sister, "*sits down on the ottoman beside Eliza, devouring her with her eyes,* " and Freddy becomes "*infatuated*" (59). Eliza is positioned as an object in this scene through the gaze of others. Both Clara and Freddy take an interest in her because she "*produces an impression of...remarkable distinction and beauty*" (59). Clara wants to be like her, while Freddy wants to be with her. However, notice that Shaw does not say that Eliza is beautiful, rather, he says she gives the impression of beauty; it is as if she has rehearsed and now acts the part of a beautiful lady. Furthermore, she has rehearsed her speech and has guidelines from Higgins as to what topics she is to speak about. Although the content of her conversation is improvised and inappropriate, Eliza is very controlled in this scene. She plays the part of a lady in that she is dressed beautifully and can speak well, but she does not quite fit in, as demonstrated by her telling the story of who "done in" her aunt, as well as her spectacular exit (60). When asked if she is going to walk upon deciding to leave, Eliza declares, "not bloody likely," a term that would have been considered quite shocking to come from a lady's mouth and to be heard in the theatre at the time (62). Charles Berst illustrates the audience's reaction: "... Eliza's *bloody* brought a collective gasp, a brief, shocked silence, then

exploding laughter, wave upon wave, stopping the show" (18). The scene reveals an image of Eliza: a well-dressed, beautifully spoken woman. However, she is not quite the real Eliza because she is put under so many restrictions. Nevertheless, glimpses of her shine through in the content of her speech. This provides yet another situation in which her gender identity is ambiguous because she does not completely fit in as a lady, but she is also not completely herself in this moment. Although Eliza outwardly appears to be a lady, her inner identity is not so fixed.

As Eliza moves through the play, she finds herself back in Higgins' home in Act IV. The act takes place after Eliza has just won the bet for Higgins at the ball by convincing everyone that she is a princess. However, at Higgins' home, Pickering and Higgins do not congratulate or praise Eliza. Instead, Higgins exclaims, "Thank God it's over!" and Pickering says, "...youve won your bet, Higgins. Eliza did the trick, and something to spare, eh?" (74). Pickering's comment positions Eliza as someone, or something, performing a trick; it somewhat bears resemblance to how someone would talk about a talented dog. They continue to speak through and for her throughout the scene, taking away Eliza's voice. She becomes closer to a thing by not speaking in the scene. Furthermore, she becomes more like Galatea, the beautiful statue. This Galatea is also adorned in "finery," or beautiful clothes and jewels (75). She is at the peak of Higgins' transformation for her. Outwardly, she looks the part of the lady, and has performed it well, too.

However, something stirs within Eliza; her "*beauty becomes murderous*" as Higgins and Pickering ignore her before being told to turn out the lights and to tell Mrs. Pearce not to make coffee (75). She eventually breaks down and "*flings herself furiously on the floor, raging,*" when Higgins walks in and witnesses her tantrum (76). He objectifies her by calling her a "creature" and a "cat" as she

begins to argue with him and asks, "What's to become of me?" (76). Although this question is traditionally interpreted as referring to her class, it may be indicative of Eliza's gender ambiguity and the uncertainty of how she has changed and what it means. At this moment, Eliza realizes her identity has been stripped from her: she wears borrowed clothes, lives in Higgins' home, lives on Pickering's money, and speaks in a new fashion. It is unclear who Eliza is and what she is fit for because everything unique about her has been taken away. She struggles to imagine her future. Higgins suggests she gets married, which would help stabilize her identity through the connection to a man. However, she explains:

> We were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road...I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now youve made a lady of me and I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish youd left me where you found me. (78)

Eliza feels she has lost her independence and longs to go back to where she and Higgins met. This moment sparks associations with the scene in the second act where Alfred Doolittle sells Eliza to Higgins. However, the selling that Eliza speaks of here is taken more seriously, while also being more common; marriages are legal and happen all the time, but Eliza views them as the ultimate selling of self. In opposition to how the Alfred Doolittle scene creates expectations of melodrama and then thwarts them, this scene takes everyday social, political, and economic practices and makes them melodramatic; the true horrors of the world happen in commonplace acts in Eliza's eyes. She sees women as selling themselves into marriage, which would not be unusual for the time. McInerney discusses Shaw's, and his characters', views on marriage, and Eliza seems to reflect Shaw's own "...disdain for conventional marriage, which was for too many women the only

career option open to them, and often seen...as a kind of servitude" (190). The traditional structure of marriage is inherently gendered, with the power lying in the male's hands. Eliza, who has already been stripped of most of her identity, would become even more dependent on a male if she were to marry. He would gain all of her possessions and income, and Eliza would even have to give up her last name, a defining feature of any person. Eliza rejects the idea, which is a choice for her gender identity to remain ambiguous. She does not want to lose the little independence she has left and refuses to be categorized once again.

However, Eliza's relationship with Higgins somewhat genders her in the same way a marriage would, specifically through Shaw's use of the ring Higgins has given her. Act IV affords the audience a glimpse into Eliza and Higgins' history together. During their heated exchange, Eliza declares, "There can't be any feelings between the like of you and the like of me" (79-80). Then, she proceeds to give back the borrowed jewels she wore this evening to Higgins, claiming she does not want him to think she stole them. However, one ring was not borrowed, but rather bought for her by Higgins on a trip they took together to Brighton. Eliza states, "I don't want it now" and hands the ring over to Higgins, who proceeds to throw it "*violently into the fireplace*" (80). In this moment, Eliza once again rejects a gendered construct. Although the pair is not explicitly engaged, a ring is usually a symbol of that kind of union. Shaw teases the audience with this token of romance, even though the characters' lack of romantic chemistry was established earlier in the play. Nevertheless, when Higgins throws the ring into the fire, it seems the hope of a romantic relationship is lost. Eliza then "*goes down on her hands and knees...to look for the ring. When she finds it she considers...what to do with it. Finally she flings it down on the dessert stand and goes upstairs in a tearing rage"* (81). Eliza's contemplation of

the ring further complicates the scene. Perhaps she wants a relationship with Higgins and is just angry with him, or maybe she is rejecting the life that Higgins has offered her. She does not want to be Higgins' property, as signified through the ring; this moment can be interpreted as her decision to get her independence back. Perhaps this is the real transformation of Eliza, and she will be displayed in full form by the end of the play.

After storming out of Higgins' home, Eliza is again placed in a semi-public setting in Act V: Mrs. Higgins' home. However, it is interesting that she goes back to Henry's mother for support and guidance. Perhaps Mrs. Higgins is the closest person Eliza considers a female relation; her birth mother is deceased, she does not like her stepmother, and she mentions a late aunt. Her relationship with Mrs. Higgins unfolds as somewhat daughterly: Mrs. Higgins provides her with shelter and is concerned for her well-being. Mrs. Higgins meets with the newly wealthy Mr. Doolittle to discuss Eliza's next steps and concludes, " ...this solves the problem of Eliza's future. You can provide for her now" (90). Mrs. Higgins finds a way to give Eliza security that Higgins had failed to do in the act before. After admonishing Henry for not praising and thanking Eliza for her hard work to win the bet, Mrs. Higgins tells her son, "...I'm afraid she won't go back to Wimpole Street...but she says she is quite willing to meet you on friendly terms" (92). Here, Mrs. Higgins acts as a moderator in Higgins' and Eliza's fight, almost like a mother to two bickering children. This sort of relationship positions Higgins and Eliza in a kind of sibling-type bond, furthering to push them away from any sort of romance. However, Eliza is desirable in this scene and even with Mrs. Higgins' input, her future is not concrete.

When Eliza enters the scene, she is calm and collected, but has a knack for aggravating Higgins. In front of him, Eliza acts as

Higgins has taught her to act in public. However, she typically does not act this way throughout the play without his instruction, as in Act III. Here, she has not been instructed to act this part, perhaps to taunt Higgins with his own creation and flaunt a new sense of independence from him. Charles Berst describes this moment: "Now she can play with her old role ironically, mock Higgins cunningly, articulate what she feels better than he can, and assert her independence" (141). In response, Higgins exclaims, "...I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden; and now she pretends to play the fine lady with me" (94). Higgins describes Eliza as a "thing" that he has sculpted from cabbage leaves and asserts that she is not actually a lady but rather plays the part of one. Once alone and after an exchange of words, Eliza, having regained her voice from the previous act, declares that she will teach phonetics like Higgins. Higgins then expresses, "... I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this" (104). However, this is the first time Higgins says that he would make Eliza a woman rather than a lady or duchess. She no longer plays the role of lady in Higgins eyes; instead, Eliza is a realized woman. Yet, this is not without the help of a man, Higgins in particular. He takes the credit for this change, and echoes the Pygmalion myth through his admiration for this transformed Galatea. However, it is not until Eliza leaves his home that this transformation takes place, and Higgins takes notice of it when they are alone in the private sphere of Mrs. Higgins' home. Perhaps he can envision Eliza in this kind of space, and her suitability to it contributes to the notion that she is now a woman instead of a thing.

Furthermore, Higgins elevates Eliza to being on the same plane as he and Pickering in this scene. Not only is she a woman, but she now fits in with the men:

> Five minutes ago you were like a millstone around my neck.

> Now youre a tower of strength: a consort battleship. You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors instead of only two men and a silly girl. (105)

Higgins likens Eliza to an object once again, but this time, he means it as a compliment rather than an insult. He calls Eliza a "consort battleship' in admiration of her newfound "strength" (90). A battleship is a somewhat masculine object used to describe a woman, and Higgins goes on to say that Eliza, Pickering, and he will be "bachelors" together, using another masculine word to describe Eliza. This relates to the idea of Eliza's gender ambiguity in that she is feminized and masculinized by Higgins in this scene; again, she does not fit into a clear category, perhaps because of her newly found independence. Critic J. Ellen Gainor asserts, "[Eliza's] attainment of Higgins's sense of 'womanhood' allows her access to male identity" (232). She is a woman, but she is now making her own life decisions without the help or approval of a male partner or guardian, and this is what appeals to Higgins' new perspective. Eliza further performs a kind of masculinity by deciding she will marry Freddy and that she will "support" him rather than the other way around (103). After their conversation, Eliza leaves Higgins to attend her father's wedding, entering a public setting where she can use her independence and start her new life. According to Gainor, "She has chosen to return to a life independent of Higgins and Pickering, thus reasserting some of the original identity she had lost..." (239). Eliza regains some of the independence that she possessed at the beginning of the play and takes it with her as she leaves Higgins at the play's end.

As the conclusion of *Pygmalion*, the scene must come to some sort of resolution. Here, Eliza leaves after Higgins recites a list of chores for her to do, to which she makes clear she is a step ahead of Higgins by having already done them. Higgins' mother tells

him, "I should be uneasy about you and her if she were less fond of Colonel Pickering" to which Higgins replies "...Nonsense: she's going to marry Freddy," and proceeds to gawk and laugh at the thought (105). The scene suggests Eliza and Higgins will continue to have some sort of relationship after the play has ended, and it will be unconventional. Eliza has already done her chores and declares, "What you are to do without me I cannot imagine" (105). This statement implies that Eliza will stay in Higgins' life. Even Mrs. Higgins believes that they will remain in contact by saying she would be "uneasy" about their relationship if Eliza did not care for Colonel Pickering so much, but what she means is puzzling; is Mrs. Higgins afraid that Eliza and Higgins would get together if it were not for Pickering, or is she afraid they would never see each other again if it were not for Colonel Pickering? It does not appear to be the latter because of Eliza's behavior, but it would then position Eliza and Higgins as possible love interests. Higgins laughing at the prospect of Eliza marrying Freddy makes him come off as somewhat jealous or in disbelief that she would pick Freddy over himself. Shaw makes Higgins' feelings unclear at the end: he does not say that he is in love with Eliza, but he also does not say that he is not in love with Eliza.

However, a romantic ending is what audiences expect from plays like *Pygmalion*; although they may get some kind of romance through Eliza and Freddy, most expect the love story and "happy" ending to occur between the two main characters, Higgins and Eliza. Charles Berst explains that "Shaw protested that he could not imagine a less happy ending than marriage between a confirmed bachelor of 40, with a mother complex, and a girl of 18" (21). Shaw never imagined Higgins and Eliza joining in a romantic union, but rather maintaining a friendship. In her conversation with Higgins, Eliza confesses, "I...came – to care for you; not want you to make

love to me...but more friendly like" (103). In this way, Shaw subverts the audience's expectations, but also teases them with the idea of Higgins' jealousy of Freddy. The audience is left with an unconventional ending led by a main character with an ambiguous gender identity to perhaps demonstrate that women and men are more alike than different. In his essay, "Woman – Man in Petticoats," Shaw writes, "...a woman is really only a man in petticoats...I have always assumed that a woman is a person exactly like myself" (*qtd. in* Gainor 83). Shaw explains that he does not believe that men and women are all that different, and Eliza works to this effect in *Pygmalion*. Everyone has dreams, and Eliza's original dream was to work in a flower shop and better her life, not to get married to Higgins. Although in the end Eliza chooses to marry Freddy, Shaw demonstrates that a woman, like a man, can have other goals and interests than getting married and starting a family; women, and the societal gender roles assigned to them, do not have to be fixed. Eliza challenges societal norms surrounding her gender and presumably lives a fulfilling life after the play ends. Nevertheless, Shaw's ending remains ambiguous to many people and has left audiences confused.

Shaw wrote a sequel in which he discusses the fates of the characters after *Pygmalion*. In it, he affirms that Higgins and Eliza do not get together, and that she does indeed marry Freddy. He writes, "...people in all directions have assumed, for no other reason than that [Eliza] became the heroine of a romance, that she must have married the hero of it. This is unbearable..." (107). Shaw does not want his readers and viewers to rely "...on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories" (107). Instead, he wants people to take the ending the way he feels he wrote it: with Higgins and Eliza as friends rather than love interests. He goes on

to explain that the two are not meant for each other, expressing that since Higgins and Eliza are both strong-willed people, they will seek "...for every other quality in a partner than strength," which is why Eliza ends up with Freddy and not Higgins (110). She runs a flower shop and has Freddy work for her; however, she receives help from Higgins and Pickering as well. Her gender identity still remains ambiguous because she has the power in her relationship with Freddy, which is unusual based on society's standards for women during this time. Eliza recovers some of her lost identity by once again demonstrating her fiery personality and also by returning to where she started by deciding to sell flowers. Shaw uses this sequel to explain his ending, but feels the audience should have understood it in the first place.

Yet, many people were unsatisfied with the ending, and actors and directors found ways to create the romance that they felt belonged between Eliza and Higgins as the play concludes. In particular, Shaw's original Higgins, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, did not agree with the ending as written. Bernard Dukore writes that after Shaw stepped away from the production, Tree began to try to "sentimentalize" the play's conclusion (102). Berst states, "With the watchdog gone, Tree took off in all directions, having his romantic way by inflecting lines sentimentally, throwing flowers to Eliza just before the curtain dropped, and, in later performances, having her return prior to the end" (18). These actions clearly contradicted the resolution that Shaw had envisioned, and Shaw was furious when he found out (Dukore 102). Similarly, the movie adaptations of the play took liberties with the ending. In the 1938 film, Eliza returns to Higgins, insinuating that she will end up with him instead of Freddy. However, Shaw had pictured a flashforward at the end where Eliza was with Freddy running her flower shop, as outlined in the sequel. Instead, the director "...contradicts Shaw's

numerous comments – in stage directions, scene directions, and extradramatic and cinematic sources –" (Dukore 106). It seems that no matter how explicit Shaw was with his directions, the end was meddled with the moment he looked away. However, the play has withstood the test of time in its many forms and continues to be an important piece of literature.

Throughout *Pygmalion*, Eliza remains an ambiguous figure, constantly objectified and defying social and gender categorizations. She begins to move towards fixing her identity through marriage to Freddy, but is masculinized through her personality and her position of power in their relationship. Eliza will retain a relationship with Higgins, but only in an unromantic, unconventional way. Their lack of romantic attraction thwarts audience expectations and complicates the play's ending; as Higgins' Galatea, Eliza puts a feminist twist on the Pygmalion myth by regaining her lost voice and reasserting her independence from her creator after her transformation into a woman. In his sequel, Shaw notes, "Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable" (119). Eliza moves from a loud, independent, lower class girl, to a proper shell of a lady, and finally to a fully-fledged woman who's ready to take on the world. Her gender ambiguity throughout the play toys with the idea of fixed gender roles and works to portray women as capable, intelligent, and determined human beings, rather than subservient second-class citizens in a man's world.

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A Note from Maura Kolhonen:

"I graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor's Degree in Communication and English. During my time at UMass, I was a Commonwealth Honors College student, and I participated in the UMass Theatre Guild.

This essay was written as an exploratory project for my Modern European Drama course in order to apply honors credit to the course. My professor and I explored what plays would be interesting to dissect, and since I am a musical theater enthusiast, we agreed that watching *My Fair Lady* would be a nice jumping off point. From there, I read Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, as it is the basis for the musical *My Fair Lady*. I then fell deep into the research to support my essay about gender identity in the famous piece. Looking back at my essay, I am very proud of the final product, and I remember the many hours I dedicated to the project. Since graduating, I have held a variety of jobs, including working at Walt Disney World in Florida.

I am currently a Victim Witness Advocate in Essex County, Massachusetts where I assist victims and witnesses of crime throughout the court process."

Afterword

Reading these essays, I am reminded of one of the most difficult student questions for an English professor to answer: what does an A paper look like, exactly? As this collection of prize-winning critical essays demonstrates, excellent writing appears in many forms, and employs many different methodologies and theoretical bases (more on that later). At the same time, however, I am struck by the essays' commonalities; foremost, they share an energy that derives from passion for the subject matter and/or the argument they're making. This energy propels the reader through the texts and makes them a pleasure to read and contemplate, regardless of whether we are in entire agreement with their assertions or their evidence; what matters is the experience of encountering thoughtful, informed, and impassioned minds at work, and reading compelling conjectures expressed in lucid prose.

This is not to say, however, that these essays do not also evoke the pleasure of resonance; indeed, their resonances with the current moment in politics, culture, and the arts are manifold. To cite but one example: Rereading MaryKate Boggan's essay "White Feminist/Supremacist Theory in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*" the other day recalled to me a Washington Post article by Sydney Trent that I had read that morning titled "World's Largest Body of Human Geneticists Apologizes for Eugenics Role: The American Society for Human Genetics Examined its Past and the Racism of Some Geneticists." If you've read this far in the collection, you understand how prescient Boggan's essay, written for Professor Sarah Patterson, has proven to be. "White Feminist/Supremacist Theory in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*" is very much an historically-based analysis, skillfully weaving in secondary sources that highlight Boggan's expertise in Social Justice and Women,

Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Gender as a thematic and theoretical concern is another thread to trace through these essays; for example, Eryn Flynn's "Evil as Goodness and Ignorance as Intellect: Eve's Predicament in *Paradise Lost*," written for Professor Marjorie Rubright, mounts a spirited and compelling defense of Eve in book nine of John Milton's epic poem. Through meticulous close reading of Eve's interactions with Satan, Flynn ably demonstrates why and how Milton "characterizes her sympathetically, highlighting her honorable but intrinsically corruptible humanity" (14-15) in contradistinction to popular conceptions of Eve as the author of humankind's "woeful plight" (14).

Christopher Govang takes a different approach to questions of gender in his essay "Go to Hell with your Theatre: The Role of Performance in Athol Fugard's *The Island*," written for Professor Stephen Clingman. Although grounded in a close reading of the primary text, "Go to Hell with your Theatre" successfully analyzes Fugard's play through the lens of feminist philosopher Judith Butler's complex and challenging 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." For Govang, the drag performances of the play-within-a-play and even the performance of aggressive masculinity within the context of Robben Island prison correlate to Butler's urgent claim that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (Gender Trouble 137; emphasis orig.).

In a related vein, Riley Jones's essay "Heroes of the West: Constructed Masculinity in *From Russia with Love* and *M. Butterfly*," also written for Professor Clingman, takes up the construction of masculinity specifically by reading a novel and a play, two vastly divergent spy texts, through Female Masculinity, Jack Halberstam's 1998 classic work of literary and cultural criticism. As Jones

astutely observes, "Halberstam's theorizations are made visible in both [texts], in which both heroic masculine figures are validated through their contrast with the less desirable masculinities surrounding them" (32). James Bond, meet David Henry Hwang! You two have much to discuss.

The task of interrogating gender norms takes a provocative turn in Isabelle Eastman's essay "'Comfortable Wonderful Mother Creature': An Exploration of Maternal Forces in *The Secret Garden*," written for Professor Gretchen Gerzina. Here, expanding upon the work of critics Phyllis Bixler and Anna Krugovoy Silver, Eastman productively conflates nurturing and mothering, arguing that "mothering is … proven to be a gender-neutral act" (43) throughout this beloved 1911 children's novel.

Throughout this afterword, I have referred to essays as being "written for" a specific professor, and this is true, strictly speaking; there is a very real way in which undergraduate essays are written for an audience of one (and yes, we can tell the love letters from the hate mail. Both kinds of essays receive As when deserving). Yet Samantha Gallant reminds us, in her essay titled "An Essay is a Letter is a Poem: A Reflection on Writing at its Roots," written for Professor AnnaRita Napoleone, that while "all writing is a letter to someone or something" (52), the implied or imagined audience for student writing far outstrips, in many cases, the single human who will pronounce judgment upon it. With this insight, she implicitly invites us to reflect on the necessity and value of collecting and publishing exceptional critical writing by undergraduates; when invited to combine and juxtapose their learning across courses and disciplines, students regularly surprise us with the power of their erudition, their insights, and their scholarly intuitions.

Natalee Marini's thoughtful and sensitive essay, "The Victimization of Antagonists in *The Bluest Eye*," is a case in point. As of this

writing, the United States is reeling from the death of yet another unarmed Black man, Tyre Nichols, at the hands of six police officers, five of whom are Black; Marini's essay on the ways in which Black characters in Toni Morrison's challenging and controversial 1970 novel are "victims of both internalized and externalized racial prejudice" (58, emphasis added) thus feels both prescient and timely. As she demonstrates, Morrison denounces the actions of but refuses to demonize the "horrible" (63) Cholly Breedlove, the father and rapist of the novel's main character, but instead gives "depth to his pathology" (59). Marini argues persuasively that Morrison gives her readers "no choice but to recognize [Cholly] as a human who was first systematically injured before they can see him as the man who committed that atrocious crime" (62). In Marini's reading, Morrison lets no one – characters, readers, or the societies that shaped them – off the hook. As Morrison herself wrote, in her magisterial work of literary criticism Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, "I have to place enormous trust in my ability to imagine others and my willingness to project consciously into the danger zones such others may represent for me" (3).

Although not cited explicitly, another pathbreaking work of literary criticism, Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, casts a long shadow over Jordan Leonard's essay "We Do Not Look in Great Cities for our Best Morality: Urban Perspectives in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*." Leonard's astute observation that "Austen's deliberate distinction between city and country maybe an illustration of her views on the morality of urban environments: the frivolity and ignorance of characters who come from the city emerges across many of her works" (65) resonates with Williams's insights regarding the "powerful hostile associations" of cities with "noise, worldliness, and ambition," and positive views of the country as a place of "peace, innocence, and simple virtue" (1). Leonard deftly works out the implications of these associations in two quite different Austen novels through careful attention to their tone as well as their language.

Claire Harrison's essay "'Tastes Like 'Chicken': The Role of Synesthesia in *Bitter in the Mouth,*" written for Professor Caroline Yang, analyzes the ways that synesthesia in Monique Truong's 2010 novel functions as both a "potent allegory for race" (76) and as a means of conveying the idea that language is neither a transparent nor a "universal medium of communication." Rather, language is "a construct that does not bear as much authority as we believe it does" (77). These insights derive from the insights of philosophers of language and poststructuralist thinkers who have argued that "language is subject to contingency, indeterminacy, and the generation of multiple meanings" (Ryan 67).

Drawing on work in the burgeoning field of postcolonial ecocriticism, Jordan Leonard's "'Fjord of Killary': An Ecocritical Reflection," written for Professor Malcolm Sen, takes up the ways that Kevin Barry's short story subverts stereotypical descriptions of western Ireland and subtly gestures at the state of Ireland's economy and environment by emphasizing images of "precarity and decay" (85). As Leonard's essay demonstrates, postcolonial ecocriticism, which examines relationships between humans, non-human animals, and both the natural and built environments, has been a productive approach for literary critics who write about Ireland and proves particularly apt in the case of "Fjord of Killarny," which upends conventions of the pastoral that are too often deployed in depictions of the Irish West.

Dating back to at least 1613, the term "white witch" typically means "A witch who practices white magic; one who uses witchcraft for good purposes" (OED, "White Witch"). Written for

Professor Ruth Jennison, "'The White Witch': The Desire for a National Identity," Stacy Cusson's incisive close reading of James Weldon Johnson's poem "The White Witch" (first published in 1922), unpacks the multiple ways in which Johnson inverts this definition, making "white" synonymous with evil rather than good. Numerous scholars have delineated the intense vulnerability of Black men in the post-Civil War South, and in particular the brutal restrictions of what some have termed "racial etiquette" derived from the doctrine of White supremacy (Oshinsky 122). Cusson adeptly teases out the poem's subtext, "the danger [for Black men] of being lured by America's false enticements" (87). Her careful attention to the poem's language of the supernatural reveals layers of meaning easily overlooked by the casual reader.

Finally, Maura Kolhonen's essay "Who Does She Think She Is? An Analysis of Gender Identity in Shaw's *Pygmalion*," written for Professor Heidi Holder, identifies the various ways that Eliza Dolittle is objectified by the men around her. Kolhonen bolsters her reading of George Bernard Shaw's play, which premiered in 1913, with an array of literary criticism and historical work that allows her to situate Eliza's objectification and gender ambiguity in relation to the play's ending, which Shaw emphatically insisted was not romantic. That is to say, Eliza and Henry Higgins were never meant to be a couple. As she notes, however, "no matter how explicit Shaw was with his directions, the end was meddled with the moment he looked away" (113-14). The essay skillfully weaves together the two lobes of this argument, demonstrating that Eliza's gender ambiguity ultimately works in her favor, as she evolves by the end of the play into "a fully-fledged woman who's ready to take on the world" (114).

These award-winning essays all do an excellent job of immersing readers in the worlds of the texts they examine, whether the

Garden of Eden as evoked by John Milton, Jane Austen's late eighteenth-century England, or Shaw's London. But they also bring the wider world to bear on their texts, in innovative and creative ways. These essays open up their primary texts, illuminate them, allow them to breathe, and allow readers to experience vicariously the pleasures and challenges of working closely and carefully with them. Eloquent and carefully crafted, the essays truly exemplify what Derek Walcott has called "the grace of effort."

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