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Understanding Sexual Politics and the #MeToo Movement through the Fiction of Carson McCullers

Alison Graham-Bertolini

Introduction

The #MeToo movement began in 2006 when social activist Tarana Burke coined the phrase to capture the experiences of Black girls and women who had experienced sexual violence. Then, in October of 2017, when (now-ex) movie director Harvey Weinstein was exposed as the subject of multiple accusations of sexual assault,[1] a mass mobilization of the hashtag began, with a wave of survivors of all colors, ethnicities, and classes speaking out on social media against sexual harassment and abuse.[2] The vast importance of the movement extends beyond allowing survivors to share their stories; rather, as noted by Catherine A. MacKinnon, the movement is imperative for "eroding the two biggest barriers to ending sexual harassment in law and in life: the disbelief and trivializing dehumanization of its victims" ("#MeToo"). Further, MacKinnon clarifies, the movement has brought many individuals to recognize and interrogate patriarchal structures that leave women at a disadvantage, such as the way that women are gendered as feminine ("#MeToo").

The idea that femininity is a learned construct builds on the work of second-wave feminist Kate Millett, who argues in *Sexual Politics* (1969) that the sexualization of power is the basis for women's (and some men's) oppression. MacKinnon notes that sexual stereotypes comprise the very essence of what it means to be "female" in our culture, explaining, "vulnerability means the appearance/reality of easy sexual access; passivity means receptivity and disabled resistance, enforced by trained physical weakness; softness means pregnability by something hard" (*Theory* 110). Gender socialization, she concludes, is the process by which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings that exist for men (*Theory* 110-111). The internalization of this belief makes many women vulnerable to sexual assault because they begin to believe in the reality of their own objectification. The #MeToo movement has

been valuable for stripping away such fallacies and validating women's existence on their own terms.

In "#MeToo Is All Too Real. But to Better Understand It, Turn to Fiction," Parul Sehgal discusses some of the many novels that have been published about the topic of sexual violence since the sexual assault allegations against Weinstein broke in 2017. She writes, "The #MeToo novel . . . has been applied to everything from Lisa Halliday's *Asymmetry*, with its gentle May-December romance, to Édouard Louis's autobiographical novel *History of Violence*, which recounts a rape and attempted murder" (Sehgal). While these novels are important for those researching and teaching the #MeToo movement, earlier fictional examples of the way that gender socialization has functioned in American culture have value for situating the movement in its historical context. Carson McCullers's fiction provides literary examples of girls and young women in the early-to-mid twentieth century struggling to resist inculcation into "appropriate" sex-role behavior. McCullers's fiction demonstrates exactly how gender is learned over time and why those learned behaviors are so dangerous to the social development and human liberties of girls in our culture. Reading McCullers's work also allows us to track the progress we have made in correcting the violence done to generations of women as the result of gender socialization. The short story "Like That," as well as McCullers's best known novels, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding,* depict how women in the United States have historically been indoctrinated into gendered lifestyles that objectify and dehumanize them, thereby robbing them of their basic human right to live full and unencumbered lives.

"Like That" was one of several short stories that McCullers wrote while taking writing classes with Sylvia Chatfield Bates at Washington Square College of New York University in 1935-1936. As McCullers's biographer, Virginia Spencer Carr, explains, McCullers's short fictions from that period are "direct predecessors to *The Mute*," the long novel that eventually became *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (62). *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) depicts many examples of the normative social practices that create gendered sexual subjects, especially as they effect boyish adolescent Mick Kelly, whom Constance M. Perry has suggested is "a fictional double of McCullers's willowy adolescent self" (37).

Perry writes, a "root cause of [Mick's] artistic failure is Mick's devastating sexual initiation" (36). She continues, "Mick finds it impossible to be both a confident artist and a sexually adult female because in her culture female sexuality is shameful and dirty, meant to be mocked in graffiti" (44). Perry highlights an important aspect of McCullers's fiction that has yet to be fully considered—the devastating moments

of sexual violence experienced or witnessed by her adolescent characters that shape how they inhabit their gendered sexuality. Arguably the most extreme example of this can be found in *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), in which twelve-year-old Frankie is sexually assaulted and escapes from what would most certainly have been rape. McCullers's fiction, I argue, anticipates the #MeToo Movement of the early twenty-first century not simply by featuring examples of sexual violence perpetrated on adolescent girls, but by depicting the devastating way that girls and young women were conditioned to inhabit disempowered sexualized bodies for the service of men. McCullers's work includes multiple examples of how gendered conditioning was normalized in the 1930s and 1940s. Her novels depict the impact of that normalization on the behavior and psyches of girls and women, and demonstrate why, because they are so normalized, such gendered behaviors are difficult for us to understand as learned processes today.

Part I: "Like That"

The short story "Like That" (1936) depicts the effects of rape culture on two young sisters in 1930s America and demonstrates the physical and psychological repercussions that they experience as the result of normalized misogyny. In 1930s America, just a decade after the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, there was a largescale return to the traditional belief that a women's place was in the home (Moran 1). With anxiety surrounding personal finances and the role of male head-of-households during the Depression years, writes Lois Scharf, there were increased attempts to reinforce traditional sex roles and behavior via "the rigid demarcation of sexual spheres" (144).

The simple premise of "Like That" belies the complex messages surrounding sexual spheres and gendered oppression of the time period: the young narrator does not understand why her elder sister "Sis" is so upset and depressed following a "bad date" (what I will assumptively refer to as a rape). The narrator concludes that she herself doesn't want to grow up if it will make her "like that" (73). The tragedy is that "growing up" required girls in 1930s United States to be codified into a system of submissive behavior that rendered them financially dependent on men, and had a devastating impact on their sense of self, their sexuality, and their ability to embody power and manifest joy. Women of the United States had demanded and earned the right to vote;[3] however, there was no shift in the assumption of male superiority and power.

"Like That" begins with the narrator recounting her close relationship with her elder brother and sister and then explaining how their fa-

miliarity swiftly deteriorates after eighteen-year-old Sis returns home from a very bad date with her boyfriend, Tuck. The evening gets off to a poor start when a handful of neighborhood children spot Sis and Tuck out driving together, and one of the boys from the neighborhood makes a suggestive comment about how closely together the pair are sitting (66). Judith Lorber writes in "The Social Construction of Gender" that "gendered norms and expectations are enforced through informal sanctions of gender-inappropriate behavior by peers and by formal punishment or threat of punishment by those in authority should behavior deviate too far from socially imposed standards for women and men" (121). The narrator picks up on the tacit suggestion that her sister is behaving inappropriately by sitting close beside Tuck without supervision. She recognizes the insinuation and the condemnation of her sister without ever explicitly realizing that the comment is sexualizing her sister and her sister's behavior. The young narrator is learning what is expected to maintain the gendered order—in this case, good girls don't ride alone in cars with boys. This scene captures the way that women are gendered over time through near invisible behavior policing, and how such norms and expectations "get built into their sense of worth and identity" (Lorber 122). As I will demonstrate, McCullers embeds examples of behavior policing throughout the story that showcase the problematic ways that girls are taught to acquiesce to gendered socialization.

Late that night, the narrator awakens to find that her sister is still out. When Tuck's car finally pulls up outside of the house, the narrator overhears hears Tuck speaking urgently, "like he was explaining something over and over again" (67). In the date's immediate aftermath, Sis cries and trembles and actively avoids being touched by her sister (67-68). Once in bed she tries to make her body smaller: "She was as far over the edge of the bed as she could get, her legs stretched out stiff and her hands holding tight to the edge and her face on one arm. She used always to sleep all sprawled over on my side" (68). Where typically she sprawled and took up space, now she works to diminish her physical body. Sis's reluctance to reveal the details of the evening suggests that what has happened has something to do with sex.

In the following weeks, Sis continues to refuse to talk about what happened that night, and shuts down almost completely. Such responses, including immediate shock, shrinking, shirking behaviors, ongoing silence, and depression are some of the documented responses of victims of sexual assault that are noted in the literature[4] today. Sis's inability to speak on her own behalf indicates her loss of agency and self-confidence and becomes a symbolic testament to a larger feminine disempowerment.

The possibility that Sis may have consented to sex with Tuck (a point that is unclear in the story), does nothing to alleviate the reality that male sexual aggression is excused (even encouraged) in our culture, and that shaming and blaming women for sexual contact has not changed much since the early twentieth century. Within the dating dynamic of the 1930s, Sis would know that "good girls don't," so unmarried sex would likely involve pressure or force that today would be constituted as rape. MacKinnon writes that "First sexual intercourse is a commonly definitive experience of gender definition." She continues, "For many women, it is a rape . . . What women learn in order to 'have sex' in order to 'become women'—women as gender—comes through the experience of, and is a condition for, "having sex"—women as sexual object for man, the use of women's sexuality by men" (*Theory* 111). Sex is a means of controlling women, of imbuing them into a social system in which they are defined exclusively as objects of male pleasure.

Young women, both then and now, typically receive many lessons about their expected chastity in conjunction with the conflicting message that sexual objectification is a normal part of womanhood. This socialization is a mechanism of social control that works to stabilize divisions in power and reinforce the norm. As a result, women learn that their bodies do not belong to them, but to the men to whom they answer, and who are positioned as superior to women in systematic ways. Writes Lorber, "As part of a *stratification* system, gender ranks men above women of the same race and class" (121). Thus, women's bodies are subjected to male desire in various forms, whether it is wanted or not (121). Sexual power gives men license to engage in activities such as unwanted catcalling, ogling, stalking, petting, and touching without sanction, as thousands of Tweets featuring the #MeToo hashtag attest. All women are adversely affected by the hierarchical ranking of the feminine as secondary to the masculine, although we must recognize, as first noted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, that intersectional identity characteristics such as race and class create circumstances that systematize oppression of women of color to a much greater degree.

In a flashback during which the sisters quarrel about Sis's first menstruation, McCullers captures the damaging impact of the reigning cultural attitudes toward women's bodies in the early twentieth century. The narrator first learns about menstruation after the death of her aunt, who dies while giving birth to a stillborn child (McCullers 70). Prevailing medical beliefs of the 1940s suggested that "uterine problems" in women resulted from "too much development of the brain" (Ehrenreich and English 66), casting unstated aspersions upon this nameless aunt whose "unwomanly" actions were likely believed to have led to the death of her child and her own subsequent death.

When the narrator observes that Sis's face after the rape mirrored her aunt's in death (70-71), the association she makes between menstruation and death becomes evident. Because menstruation was considered unmentionable, there was no one to answer her questions or disavow such beliefs. When Sis begins to menstruate, the narrator is "scared to death" (70) and "so mad I wanted to pinch and hit people" (70). Her anger stems both from the recognition that with womanhood comes risk, and that within our culture such risk is weaponized when biology is used to justify unequal treatment. The narrator's angry response to the onset of her sister's menstruation is therefore a logical reaction to a social system that rationalizes the disempowerment of women according to their biology.

The young narrator maliciously tells her sister that her menstrual belt "shows" beneath her clothing and that "It looks terrible"[5] (McCullers 71). She uses shame as a social sanction to punish Sis by making her feel self-conscious and insecure, and to unwittingly reinforce her sister's mistaken beliefs about her body's inferiority and dysfunction. Sarah Gleeson-White writes of this episode, "it is not difficult to see the onset of menstruation as a terrifying event that signals to the world . . . the arrival of a freakish womanhood" (16). Sis, unsurprisingly, cries "for a long time" and is reluctant to return to school after her sister makes this comment (71).

The shame that Sis feels after her first menstrual period and the shame that she feels after the incident with her boyfriend are one and the same: products of a learned system of gendered conditioning intended to strip women of power. Sis fears exposure when her younger sister taunts: "Anybody can tell. Right off the bat. Just to look at you anybody can tell" (71). After she is raped, Sis's fears are remarkably similar; she fears that others will know, just by looking, that she has engaged in sexual activity, which is censured for unmarried women and could have terrible social consequences if discovered.

When girls in our culture fail to adhere to social expectations, there are often highly undesirable repercussions that lead them to "a continuous and vigilant surveillance" of their own behavior (Millett 232). Failure to conform to stereotypes "reduces the individual, especially if a child, to an abysmal feeling of guilt, shame, unworthiness, and confusion" (233). The next episode of "Like That" reinforces how Sis and the young narrator are immured from a very young age in the process of gendered subjugation. This scene draws the reader's attention to the disempowerment of female bodies by revealing how girls are conditioned to yield to the physical desires of men via the forced acceptance of nonconsensual, unwanted touching.

The scene takes place on the Sunday following the rape, when the girls' father invites Tuck to have a glass of tea:

> Tuck sat on the swing with Sis and he didn't lean back and his heels didn't rest on the floor—as though he was all ready to get up again. He kept changing the glass from one hand to the other and starting new conversations. He and Sis didn't look at each other except on the sly, and then it wasn't at all like they were crazy about each other. It was a funny look. Almost like they were afraid of something. Tuck left soon. (71)

Sis and Tuck behave awkwardly in this scene; they are uncomfortable together, perhaps especially in front of the girls' father. There are many possible explanations for their discomfort; the text divulges only that something has changed the way that Sis and Tuck relate to one another. Tuck's gender allows him to walk away when he feels bodily discomfort—he leaves the scene. The girls, however, are sanctioned from accessing this very same resource without permission from their father. After Tuck leaves, the girls' father commands Sis, "Come sit by your Dad a minute, Puss" (71). Sis reluctantly obeys, perching on the arm of his chair and maintaining distance between them: "She sat stiff like Tuck had, holding herself a little off so Dad's arm hardly went around her waist" (71-72). Her father's request, while seemingly harmless, establishes (or reestablishes) the power dynamic between men and women. When the patriarch issues a command, the daughter is expected to obey, even when she is being told to do something that she does not want to do with her own body. The consequence of not doing so is to lose the financial security offered by the male. This is the essence of patriarchal hierarchy.

Her father asks, "How's my big girl getting along these days?" while the narrator explains, "Dad still likes to hug us up when he feels good and treats us, even Sis, like kids" (72). Sis is unable to prevent her father's physical and verbal impositions. McCullers depicts Sis's discomfort through the odd movement of her jaw, which she "see-saws" back and forth when she is distressed (72). Although nothing explicitly untoward is suggested in the physical contact between father and daughter, the attention is unwelcome. The girls are powerless to avoid the nonconsensual touching that has been initiated by their father.

Then, too, the nickname "Puss" is a derogatory pet name that implies powerlessness and smallness. It situates Sis as the passive recipient of her father's attention and favor, a pet whom he can reward or punish. Sis responds to her father by sitting stiffly on the arm of his chair, her discomfort plain as she "hold[s] herself off" from him (72). When her

father puts his arm around her, she "twist[s] a little bit, like she wanted to get up and didn't know how to without hurting his feelings" (72). Sis allows for her own physical and emotional discomfort for the sake of her father's feelings. Sis yields her own bodily autonomy by obeying her father's wish for her to sit beside him when she would rather leave the scene. She has been taught to value her father's desires before her own. This socialization is rigorous and continuous, and this moment is just one instance of the girls' gendered training. Millett writes, "the family not only encourages its own members to adjust and conform, but acts as a unit in the government of the patriarchal state which rules its citizens through its family heads" (33). Thus, the daughters of this family learn *from their father* that their bodies do not, in fact, belong to them, but belong to the men who assert authority over them.

The scene between Sis and her father demonstrates exactly how young women are taught to yield their bodily autonomy to men. The scene is constructed to show Sis's disadvantage in power relationships involving male desire. Sis, as a woman, exists in a state of physical and mental disempowerment, where she is not only expected to concede her autonomy to men but is *conditioned* to concede her autonomy to men. In any sexual encounter that she has, therefore, consensual or non, she will be left feeling powerless, and that something has been taken from her, and so will always feel guilt and regret. As Millett notes, "the large quantity of guilt attached to sexuality in patriarchy is overwhelmingly placed upon the female, who is, culturally speaking, held to be the culpable or the more culpable party in nearly any sexual liaison, whatever the extenuating circumstances" (54). This is important, because while not all sexual interactions involve coercion, women are still by and large are the ones who experience negative consequences attached to sexual behaviors.

The narrator of "Like That" concludes the story by revealing her wish "to ask [Sis] what was really the matter." She continues, "Was hers and Tuck's fuss so bad as that or was it that she was so crazy about him that she was sad because he was leaving? For a minute I didn't think it was either one of those things" (72). Here the narrator intuits that the problem her sister is facing is much larger than Sis and Tuck's relationship, that it will be a problem that she too will face as she moves through adolescence. The story concludes with Tuck and the girls' brother departing for college, leaving Sis, once described as "smart as she can be" (64), staring out of windows and writing letters (73). The narrator, now age 13, explains:

> Sis is thinner and sometimes to me she looks in the face like a grown person. Or like, in a way, something has suddenly hurt

> her hard. We don't do any of the things we used to . . . she just sits around or goes for long walks in the chilly late afternoon by herself. Sometimes she'll smile in a way that really gripes – like I was such a kid and all. Sometimes I want to cry or to hit her. (73)

Sis has acquiesced to the gendered systems within our culture that situate men as active and women as passive, men as dominant and women as submissive. She has, tragically, lost her ability to speak for herself. And while the narrator is unable to fully articulate her sister's malaise, she remains angry and resolved to do better: "I can get along by myself" she claims, and insists, "I can do what I want to do" (73). The tragedy is that succumbing to confining gender norms, at least to some degree, is the inevitable fate that awaits her. This explains why the final passage of the story is so heartrending. The narrator states,

> I skate and ride my bike and go to the school football games every Friday. But when one afternoon the kids all got quiet in the gym basement and then started telling certain things—about being married and all—I got up quick so I wouldn't hear and went and played basketball. And when some kids said they were going to start wearing lipstick and stockings I said I wouldn't for a hundred dollars.
>
> You see I'd never be like Sis is now . . . I don't want to grow up—if it's like that. (73).

Despite her resolve to never grow up, we know that the young narrator will eventually be devalued, objectified, and sexually exploited "like that." Her desire to remain young is a wish simply to remain autonomous and outside the control of social injustice.

Part II: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (1940), McCullers's most popular novel, takes up the theme of female disempowerment in the depiction of adolescent protagonist Mick Kelly. The novel includes a scene in which Mick experiences an awkward and humiliating sexual encounter with a boy from her neighborhood, Harry Minowitz. McCullers critics, including Constance M. Perry, have argued that this is a defining moment in Mick's development, and can partially explain why and how Mick, in the course of the story, goes from confident and rebellious, dreaming

of travelling and making music, to "ladylike and delicate" (*Heart* 304), someone who "crossed her legs and pulled the hem of her skirt down past her knees" (305) and who, by the novel's end, no longer hears music in her mind (301). Perry's *Carson McCullers and the Female Wunderkind* delineates the degree to which Mick Kelly's first sexual experience "crushes her confidence for an artistic life" (44). Building on this reading, I situate the powerlessness that Mick feels after sex with Harry as part of the systematic gendered socialization that pushes women to "perceive themselves and their lives through male eyes and so to secure their unquestioning acceptance of a male-defined and male-derived existence" (Purple September Staff, qtd in MacKinnon, *Theory* 111). Sex, in other words, requires Mick to reconceptualize her purpose and place in the world, so that she understands herself for the first time as "female and inferior in her culture" (Perry 43).

Although Mick does her best to forget the sexual encounter with Harry, she is changed by the experience and becomes cognizant of the way that she is perceived by men. Her fear that others can tell that she has had sex is akin to the fear that Sis experiences in "Like That" when she begins to menstruate. Gleeson-White notes that such examples suggest

> that the young women's pubetal bodies are burdensome because of their visibility, and are seemingly inscribed with inner secrets signaling the onset of what must seem like the 'sentence' of womanhood. As a result, the young girls are clearly marked as different—different from what they once were, and different from the models of ideal womanhood displayed before them. (16)

Mick's fear that others can "see" that she has had sex indicates how very concerned she is with how others perceive her. This sudden concern with her reputation signals a reduction of her self-confidence and agency. For assurance of her lovability, Mick turns to her younger brother Bubber/George, of whom she inquires, "Listen here, George . . . Do you love me? . . . But suppose I wasn't your sister. Would you love me then?" (269). For the first time we see Mick gauging her worth through the eyes of a male. So, too, the housekeeper, Portia, notices that Mick has changed, although she cannot pinpoint why: "What ails Mick? . . . She walks around and don't say a word . . . She getting to be a regular lady" (270). Mick suddenly feels that she is waiting for something that she is unable to name, so that "sometimes she would look all around her quick and this panic would come into her" (270). As the

result of having sex, Mick is pushed to inhabit a revised view of her own social and political importance.

According to social mores, Mick's first and most important role in the world is her sexual attractiveness, which can lead to the only social power that a woman in 1930s small-town America can possess. Four-year-old Baby Wilson, who conforms to the stereotype of living doll, is groomed by her mother to star in Hollywood pictures. Of course, becoming a star is an unlikely avenue to social power and prestige, as we see after Baby is accidentally shot in the head by Bubber Kelly, effectively ending her dreams. Young women of Mick's race and social class were expected to be socialized just enough to marriageable, to attain value via the patriarch who effectively owned them, because their main social cache was reproduction. Public constructions of women's bodies and social roles prior to World War II, writes Pamela Hyde, "represented a form of power which confirmed the 'self' of women as meaningful only in relation to men." She explains, "Women were glimpsing and, in many cases, enacting, social roles beyond the home. However, constructions in the popular media confirmed that women's 'real' social roles were fundamentally unchanged despite the opportunities that were emerging." Women, therefore, continued to "seek fulfilment and pleasure in a changing world by creating a body and a subjectivity which remained attractive and acceptable to men" (163).

Although he is otherwise a nice enough guy, shop keeper Biff Brannon repeatedly and routinely objectifies Mick throughout the novel: "He thought of the way Mick narrowed her eyes and pushed back the bangs of her hair with the palm of her hand. He thought of her hoarse, boyish voice and of her habit of hitching up her khaki shorts and swaggering like a cowboy in the picture show. A feeling of tenderness came in him. He was uneasy" (19). Brannon later acknowledges that his "love" (304) for Mick feels "not quite right. Yes. Wrong" (199), yet problematically, he cannot pinpoint why these feelings make him uneasy. Brannon, too, has been socialized. He is attracted to her youth, her vulnerability, and to her unselfconscious demeanor and still-boyish disregard for femininity, which we know because his feelings resolve late in the novel when he notices that "her rough and childish ways were almost gone" (304). Masculine gender socialization means that men are taught to be attracted to the qualities that classify Mick as naïve and available, easy pickings, and his for the taking if he so decides.

Soon after Mick has sex, she renounces her musical ambitions and drops out of high school to assume the responsibility of contributing to her family's finances. Her education is marginalized by her family, "not deemed as important as that of her male siblings" (Gleeson-White 35). It is expected that she will find a suitor and marry, just as her self-ab-

sorbed elder sisters, Etta and Hazel, are performing femininity seemingly for this very purpose (McCullers 36). Although Mick is complicit in the conditions of her life, her complicity does not counteract the fundamental unacceptability of her lack of choice—she finds that she must acquiesce to conditions that will structure and stratify her future according to her gender.

Mick is left at the novel's end with little recourse for intellectual stimulation, and no room to grow. She expresses hopelessness when she thinks: "What good was it? That was the question she would like to know. What the hell good was it. All the plans she had made, and the music. When all that came was this trap—the store, then home to sleep, and back to the store again" (299). Mick's metaphoric growth spurt that had her towering above her peers has come to an end—she has been stunted by structural misogyny.

What redeems this otherwise grim ending is that like the narrator in "Like That," Mick is still angry about the social pressure that is compelling her to conform. She is still resisting the systematic oppression that stands in the way of her freedom by planning to put aside "two bucks a week" toward purchasing a piano (301). As the chapter draws to a close Mick thinks,

> That was the way things were. It was like she was mad all the time. Not how a kid gets mad quick so that soon it is all over—but in another way. Only there was nothing to be mad at . . . It was like she was being cheated. Only nobody had cheated her. So there was nobody to take it out on. However, just the same she had that feeling. Cheated. (302)

Mick senses at some level how gender socialization has harmed her, has cheated her out of a full and unfettered existence and her own artistic potential.

Despite Mick's anger, which reassures us that all is not lost, the novel does not end with Mick's point of view. Instead, the novel concludes with Biff Brannon's perspective, the point of view of the objectifier. This decentering of Mick's voice highlights yet again the way that women are positioned as less important than men. Like Sis, Mick's artistic voice has been stifled and silenced as she matures into womanhood. Her inculcation into performative gendered behavior is almost complete as the novel draws to a close; sex and the social structures pushing her toward the conformity of femininity strip Mick of her artistic potential and block all avenues for growth.

Part III: *The Member of the Wedding*

McCullers wrote *The Member of the Wedding* over a five-year period, publishing the novel in 1946, five years after the publication of *Heart* and within the context of World War II. World War II provided women with the opportunity to work in ammunition factories, hospitals, and other public venues while young men were sent abroad to do battle. Yet, while the war resulted in many more opportunities for women in terms of paid labor, they were simultaneously expected to maintain their gendered femininity in alternate ways to ensure that the masculine position was not usurped (Hyde 164).

Set in small-town Georgia, *The Member of the Wedding* recounts a season in the life of protagonist Frankie Adamms, a twelve-year-old who is enamored by thoughts of her brother's upcoming wedding. That summer, Frankie has only two companions, her gender-fluid cousin John Henry West who lives next door, and Berenice Sadie Brown, the family's cook and housekeeper. Frankie's mother, we learn, died when Frankie was born, while her father works long hours and is rarely present.

That summer, Frankie, who also goes by "F. Jasmine," and "Frances," exists in a state of abeyance—neither child nor adult, "a member of nothing in the world" (461). Yet her yearning for experience and connection permeates her thoughts—so much so that she convinces herself that her brother and his new bride will gladly and willingly "take her" as their third, much as in marriage one "takes" their partner in a lawfully wedded union. Frankie's desire to be wedded to this couple points to Frankie's partial understanding of sexuality and union and belonging. It demonstrates her ability to see the possibility of happiness and union in dynamics other than that of cisgender heterosexual constructions.

Frankie has a vague awareness of sex, for at age nine, she was "startled" by a glimpse of the tenants in her family home having sex. Berenice assures her that what she had seen was "just a common fit," however, Frankie "knew from the voice's tones that there was more to it than she was told" (495). Then, too, the older girls in her neighborhood whisper about the things that married people do together, although Frankie harshly rejects the stories as lies (470). In contrast to her strong aversion to sexuality for white people, Frankie is fascinated by the story of Berenice's first marriage, at age thirteen, to the love of her life (483). Berenice's story is told in immediate juxtaposition to Frankie's recollection of having committed a "secret trouble" and a "secret and unknown sin" with a boy from her neighborhood, Barney MacKean. Berenice's story of underage marriage (and sex, presumably), fascinates and in-

spires Frankie, while her refusal to acknowledge sex between married white people, as well as attempts to deny her own secret sin, render sex nonexistent for white people, or if brought to light, shocking and shameful. This dichotomy in what Frankie perceives as normative shows that racial socialization has already begun to shape her ideologies, so that what she considers acceptable behavior for a young Black girl seems to her wrong for a young white girl.

Frankie's encounter with Barney is the culmination of a period of her youthful rebellion, during which time she commits a series of imprudent, childish infractions that push back at the gendered socialization that encroaches on the relative freedom of her childhood:

> She broke the law. And having once become a criminal, she broke the law again, and then again. She took the pistol from her father's bureau drawer and carried it all over town and shot up the cartridges in a vacant lot. She changed into a robber and stole a three-way knife from the Sears and Roebuck Store. One Saturday afternoon in May she committed a secret and unknown sin. In the MacKean's garage with Barney MacKean, they committed a queer sin, and how bad it was she did not know. The sin made a shriveling sickness in her stomach and she dreaded the eyes of everyone. She hated Barney and wanted to kill him. Sometimes alone in the bed at night she planned to shoot him with the pistol or throw a knife between his eyes. (482)

The encounter with Barney unravels Frankie to such a degree that she fantasizes about shooting him between the eyes, effectively transferring her emotional upset to the body of her perpetrator. Yet, the fantasy is not effective, for by the time the "dog days" of summer arrive, presumably a month or two later, she still fears him (482). It takes a "long time" for her memories of "the sin in the MacKeans' garage" to fade until it "became far from her and was remembered only in her dreams… nothing hurt her any longer; she did not care … she would not let things make her sad and she would not care" (482). This glimpse into Frankie's interiority reveals her reluctance to confront the actual trauma of the encounter.

The penultimate scene in the novel happens when Frankie keeps a "date" with a red-haired soldier at a downtown hotel/bar called The Blue Moon. After a short time in the barroom the intoxicated soldier propositions her: "'Well, Jasmine, how 'bout going on upstairs?' His tone was asking, but when she did not answer at once, he stood up from the table. 'I've got a room here'" (581). Frankie "did not want to

go upstairs, but she did not know how to refuse" (581). She goes with the man against her better judgment, so that "every footstep [she] took . . . felt somehow . . . wrong" (582). Once upstairs Frankie feels uneasy—and this feeling reminds her of how she felt during her encounter with Barney MacKean. The narrator notes, "A few times before she had known such silence . . . [during] that April afternoon in the MacKeans' garage . . . She was scared" (583). Frankie has good reason to be scared. When she starts for the door the soldier grabs her and pulls her down to the bed in an attempted rape: "In a second she was paralyzed by horror. She could not push away, but she bit down with all her might upon what must have been the crazy soldier's tongue—so that he screamed out and she was free" (583). Instead of letting her go, the soldier approaches her again, so that in self-defense she brings a glass water pitcher "down upon his head" (583). Afterward, Frankie's repressed memories come flooding back: "There slammed across her mind twisted remembrances of a common fit in the front room, basement remarks, and nasty Barney" (584). Frankie flees in fear, and never considers that the soldier was trying to commit a crime or that she might report him to the police or tell her father. Instead she fears going to jail for knocking him unconscious and tells no one, other than six-year-old John Henry, about what has occurred (585). Sexual harassment law did not exist at the time, and it is doubtful that Frankie's story would have been believed, a point that McCullers makes clear when Frankie asks her father, "if somebody hits somebody with a glass pitcher and he falls out cold, do you think he is dead" (586). Her father, who is not listening carefully, first needs her to repeat the question, and then replies nonchalantly, so that Frankie "feels a bitter grudge against him" well up inside of herself (586).

McKinnon, in her 2019 discussion of the #MeToo movement, calls out "deniers and apologists" (*Butterfly* xx), noting that widespread "victim-blaming" taking place before #MeToo impelled "anyone with more practicality than principle to silence themselves" (xx). If Frankie were to report the assault to the police her complaint would most likely be passed off with victim blaming—she would experience some version of "what was a 12-year-old girl doing upstairs in a private hotel room with the soldier in the first place?" and her reputation in the small Georgia town would be permanently harmed.

After Frankie's brother and his new bride drive off on their honeymoon without taking her along, Frankie falls into a period of despair. Upon arriving home, she sneaks out of her house in the middle of the night with plans to run away. She considers finding the red-haired soldier and marrying him, just so "the two of them could go away" (598). Yet minutes later she recalls "the silence in the hotel room, the silence,

the nasty talk behind the garage, [and] these separate recollections fell together in the darkness of her mind, as shafting searchlights meet in the night sky upon an aeroplane, so that in a flash there came in her an understanding. There was a feeling of cool surprise" (598). Frankie concludes that "she must find somebody, anybody, that she could join with and go away" (598). Yet Frankie's new "understanding" of sex, love, and relationships is even more flawed than before. Her thinking has shifted from the belief that she might find belonging within a group (the older girls in her neighborhood, or as the third partner in her brother's marriage) to the belief that she must become part of a heterosexual couple who will reproduce the status quo.

Frankie has been socialized to believe that to rid herself of loneliness she must form half of a white, straight, able-bodied couple who can reproduce themselves and their white, racist, sexist, ablest value system. Difference in any form is cursorily eliminated from her future. There is no future for a genderfluid John Henry West, who dies abruptly from meningitis, just as there is no future for a loved and respected Black friend or mother figure in this racist white world.

McCullers perfunctorily does away with both John Henry West and Berenice Sadie Brown in Part Three, indicating that she does not yet see a way for such difference to exist in Frankie's world. In a similar way she erases the potential for Frankie to escape the restrictive status quo of reproductive womanhood. The shift in Frankie away from rebellious seeker of possibility is apparent from the moment she discredits Berenice's ability to "appreciate Michelangelo or poetry" (602) and cruelly tells Berenice it is "just not in you" to understand new friend Mary Littlejohn (603). This slight toward Berenice is the first time that Frankie has indicated that she believes in her own white superiority. Frankie's inculcation into the white, cisgendered ideology of her small-minded Southern town is complete. Other potentials, like her hope of touring Luxembourg with Mary Littlejohn, are rendered childish fantasy. Frankie's enthusiasm for boring, staid, "marshmallow-white" Mary Littlejohn confirms the erasure of her broadminded promise even further, as does the fact that Frankie notices and is impressed by a basement and laundry room in her new home, icons of bourgeois American life (605).

Conclusions

Kate Millett argues that the "principal result" of a patriarchal culture is "the interiorization of patriarchal ideology" (54) by both sexes. In other words, we are socialized to believe that women are secondary to

men, and this socialization is enforced by the fact that all systems of power within our culture, including the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance, "are entirely within male hands" (Millett 25). Millett concludes, "those awarded higher status tend to adopt roles of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance" (26). Such were the sexual politics in 1930s-40s United States, when McCullers was writing and publishing her fiction. The short story "Like That" is perhaps the most explicit in detailing the damaging repercussions of rape culture on young women and the way that girls and women are taught first that they are sexual gatekeepers who must not allow boys and men to "go too far" while at the same time existing in a world that teaches them that their bodies are not their own. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, though less explicit about sexual violence, demonstrates how girls are incentivized to conform to gendered stereotypes, a conformity that does its own type of violence to the moral and artistic potential of young women and girls. *The Member of the Wedding*, written last of these fictions, depicts how rape culture is one outcome of racial and gender conformity, and how white women, within their conformity, often become perpetrators of racial violence against people of color.

At the end of the Second World War, many women left the paid workforce to allow men to resume the role of breadwinner and head of household. Women, in turn, "became increasingly constructed in terms of their value to men as wives and their value to the nation in reproducing the population" (Hyde 165). "The Cult of the Housewife," as it was later deemed, was maintained throughout the 1950s and it was not until the 1960s and 70s after the popularization of publications such as de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that women began to recognize the political nature of their personal experiences (Warhol-Down, et al. 1183). Yet for every step forward for women's equality it seems there was a step backwards. As MacKinnon notes of the 1960s so-called "sexual revolution," "No matter how profoundly women at the time believed that the sexual revolution was a movement to reclaim their own sexuality, the movement was actually directed by men toward further freeing their sexual access to women on demand and without consequences" (MacKinnon, "Forward" xiii).

During the 2016 presidential campaign, multiple women came forward to publicly report instances of Donald Trump's inappropriate sexual conduct. After his unexpected win against Hillary Clinton—the first female presidential nominee of a major party in U.S. history— the first annual Women's March on Washington was organized, attracting hundreds of thousands of marchers at the capitol and more than 3 mil-

lion additional people who marched in solidarity across the country and around the world ("Women's March"). Today, in large part because of the #MeToo Movement, those who have experienced sexual harassment, violence and/or abuse are publicly identifying, naming aloud, and pushing back against the systematic forces of subordination en masse. For so long such forces have been invisible, and so pervasive as to appear natural, and therefore fixed. McCullers was prescient in her ability to recognize the sexual exploitation and gendered inculcation of women and to see that the forces at work were social constructions, subject to change and repair. Her novels thus enjoin a powerful lesson about the history and impact of misogyny in American culture.

Notes

1. Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey of *The New York Times* and Ronan Farrow of *The New Yorker* are largely credited with exposing Harry Weinstein.

2. Dr. Lisa Corrigan, for one, notes the serious moral problem with "white women hijacking a hashtag started by a black woman" ("Introduction"), a concern that is all the more troublesome because of the history of white people ignoring or perpetrating violence toward people of color.

3. Not all women of the United States were permitted to vote even after the passage of the 19th Amendment.

4. See, for example, Lonsway, Kimberly A. and Joanne Archambault. "Victim Impact: How Victims Are Affected by Sexual Assault and How Law Enforcement Can Respond." *End Violence Against Women International*, Nov 2020, evawintl.org/wp-content/uploads/Module-3_Victim-Impact-11.9.2020.pdf. Accessed 27 May 2021.

5. For an explanation of menstrual belts see *The Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health* at www.mum.org/belts.htm. Accessed 27 May 2021.

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"No waste words, no big words": Style and the Search for Optimal Language in O'Connor's "The Barber"

Léopold Reigner

Flannery O'Connor's stylistic abilities are salient in all of her works, but her early story "The Barber" is remarkable in that the struggle of composition constitutes a major part of the theme of the story itself. In *The Critical Reception of Flannery O'Connor*, Robert C. Evans makes the case for focusing on O'Connor's stylistic achievements when analyzing her writing, first by reminding us that O'Connor saw herself primarily as an artist: "O'Connor was a committed formalist" (4) and then, in his conclusion, by advocating for a literary criticism that shares this point of view:

> Perhaps now there is a need more pressing than ever to discuss O'Connor *as an artist*, as a *gifted writer*, rather than (or in addition to) as a thinker or a theologian. Perhaps there is a greater need to focus on the minute details of her achievements as a stylist and on her skill in creating powerful forms [. . .] For my own part, O'Connor interests me first and foremost as an extraordinary skillful *writer*—someone who knew how to put words together effectively *as words*. (234-235)

O'Connor's 1947 master thesis *The Geranium: A Collection of Short Stories* contained six stories which showcased the author's burgeoning talent. It may seem that these early works would not prove a fertile searching ground for the study of style. Indeed, these stories are often considered as merely introducing the specificity of O'Connor's writing, while lacking in compositional maturity and deprived of the depth of later stories. Frederick Asals writes this about O'Connor's early stories in *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity*:

> Aside from their general thinness, they show what we might well expect: the young writer casting about for her own distinctive voice and subject, trying out various modes, from psychological and sociological realism to the comic portrait

> to the foreboding 'atmospheric' tale, testing her talents within recognized styles and subjects. If none of these in their conventional forms would precisely suit her gifts, elements of all would enter into the distinctive manner of her mature work. (9)

"The Barber" is one of these stories. It was first published posthumously in *The Atlantic* in 1970 and is not mentioned once by O'Connor herself in *The Habit of Being*. The main character is a liberal college professor named Rayber who fails to convince his barber not to vote for the racist demagogue in the upcoming Democratic White Primary. The political element of the story has much in common with O'Connor's treatment of theological differences of opinion in the rest of her work, and the story itself introduces several other aspects of her later writings. Furthermore, it stages a conflict born out of an impossibility to communicate in a specific and closed setting, a barbershop, which provides a good example of how O'Connor sets up a confrontation between two characters.

More importantly, however, and in connection with the analysis of O'Connor as a formalist writer, the story centers around language in a way that showcases her preoccupation with words as a young writer. It goes from the depiction of two languages facing off, one educated and liberal, the other plainspoken and anti-liberal, to a truly complex study of the approach to language within the art of composition.

Introduction of Themes and Devices

As Virginia Wray writes in her article "Flannery O'Connor's Master's Thesis: Looking for Some Gestures," "These six stories introduce the major themes" (76). Indeed, not only do they unveil the "central gesture late in the plot" (76) device which is the focus point of Wray's article, the stories make known several other motifs. In "The Barber," the main character suffers from an inner conflict that manifests itself through an ideological confrontation with other characters, culminating in a physical confrontation and the externalization of this inner conflict. The main character, Rayber, indeed ends up punching the barber out of frustration and leaves the barbershop in a state of disarray, with an almost animalistic portrayal: "The blood began pounding up Rayber's neck just around his skin. He turned and pushed quickly through the men around him to the door. Outside, the sun was suspending everything in a pool of heat, and before he had turned the first corner, almost running, lather began to drip inside his collar and down

the barber's bib, dangling to his knees" (25). The presence of the sun whenever the tension reaches its climax is another device often used by O'Connor. Furthermore, the theme of doubles appears through the main character's colleague, Jacobs: Jacobs alone belongs to the main character's social class, but he differs from him on crucial points, such as the desire to engage in debate with other characters.

The main thematical similarity between "The Barber" and later stories is the lead character himself. He certainly belongs to the restless yet inept intellectual category, which Asals sees as the main contribution of the story: "The context here is slight, the comedy has none of the bite of the later work, but this first attempt with the figure of the self-professed intellectual warrants at least mentioning" (10). Virginia Wray makes a similar observation in her previously mentioned article: "Rayber, a rather ordinary Southern 'school teacher' and the first of O'Connor's 'interleckchuls' whom she relentlessly parodies, aspires to be the 'philosophy man' that he thinks his colleague Jacobs is" (71). The very name of the character, Rayber, links him to another self-professed liberal intellectual, Rayber from *The Violent Bear It Away* as Jon Bacon points out in *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*: "The professor, who has the same name as the schoolteacher in *The Violent Bear it Away*, is the prototype of that smug, self-righteous, and ultimately impotent intellectual" (112). Much like this Rayber, the Rayber from "The Barber" believes his intellectual capacity means persuasion is only a matter of time since an uneducated mind could never resist an intelligent mind for long. Their ultimate failure is the defining feature of the characters' arc—other examples being Thomas in "The Comforts of Home" and Asbury in "The Enduring Chill." These characters share a sense of superiority that they get from proximity to a character they see as inferior and uncivilized and that they inevitably lose when their confidence is shattered by defeat. Their fictional destiny is characterized by a breakneck fall from intellectual grace. In this way, "The Barber" is, as Frederick Asals wrote, merely the first appearance of this type of character.

Irony, another device found throughout O'Connor's work, is strong within the story as the author describes an educated character endeavoring to use all his mastery of language and all his combined knowledge to enlighten uneducated characters who have fallen victim to the repetitive speech of a demagogue, only to fail miserably, get bested in both the political debate and the battle of wits, and resort in frustration to a decidedly unscholarly instrument: a punch in the face. The irony also serves a general satire denouncing the arrogance of the prototypical character, the self-professed intellectual.

However, it should be recognized that satire is achieved through a linguistic conflict, making language the central factor in the plot of the story. Indeed, the story is centered around a conflictual dialogue between the two characters, Rayber and the barber. In her letters to O'Connor, Caroline Gordon warns her of an overzealous flaw bedeviling her writing in *Wise Blood*, one which is also prevalent in "The Barber." While Gordon considers that the existentialist trend in writing leads authors to focus extravagantly on a character's thoughts—neglecting the action—she inversely faults O'Connor in a letter published in *Good Things out of Nazareth* for overly focusing on the action and foregoing spatial descriptions in such a way that only the action is underlined:

> Suppose we think of a scene in your novel as a scene in a play. Any scene in any play takes place on some sort of set. I feel that the sets in your play are quite wonderful but you never let us see them. A spotlight follows every move the characters make and throws an almost blinding radiance on them, but it is a little like the spotlight a burglar uses when he is cracking a safe; it illuminates a small circle and the rest of the stage is in darkness most of the time. (30)

In "The Barber," O'Connor sets the action in three places: the university, Rayber's house, and the barbershop (and the street outside it). The depiction of each space is very brief and the action begins as soon as the set changes. This, however, does not constitute a flaw in the way Caroline Gordon understands it in the aforementioned letter: "Focusing the reader's attention completely on the action is one way to make things seem very dramatic, but I do not think that you can keep that up all the time. It demands too much of the reader. He is just not capable of such rigorous attention" (30). Besides showcasing Gordon's limited respect for the reader and his/her attention span, this observation may apply to *Wise Blood* but not to a short story such as "The Barber," in which the focus on the action brings more immediacy and tension to the dialogue, the appropriate center of attention and central dynamic in a story about the difficulty of communicating across different social circles and points of view. In the story, communication is attempted by the main character for the purpose of persuasion, something that is often conveyed in O'Connor's work. In "The Barber," the theme is political and the main character is not a mystical outcast but a college professor attempting to free his barber from the clutches of a racist demagogue. Even before the subject is brought up by any character, Rayber defensively disputes the idea that his desire to defeat the

barber in a political debate is comparable to the religious purpose of preaching: "this is no mission of conversion; I'm just defending myself" (22). This ironically strengthens the link with the preaching theme. Rayber's obsession with persuading his barber not to vote for the racist candidate goes so far that he ends up writing a long speech, vowing to use "no waste words; no big words" (21), which falls entirely on deaf ears when he delivers it in the barbershop.

In *The Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*, Miles Orvell recognizes the quality of the dialogue in the story: "[. . .] she captures, with a mimetic fidelity that rivals Mark Twain, the native accents and mentality, the local raw material in its unique shape, that have always supplied strength to American writing" (6). Val Larsen, in his article "A Tale of Tongue and Pen: Orality and Literacy in 'The Barber,'" likewise recognizes the value of the dialogue, this time as an opposition between literacy (Rayber) and orality (the barber) which showcases larger contextual issues of culture and class: "[. . .] 'The Barber' is O'Connor's first and fullest meditation on language and the linguistic encoding of culture. [. . .] the political disagreement is only the surface manifestation of a larger conflict between antagonistic social classes and their distinct language traditions" (25).

If "The Barber" illustrates O'Connor's skillful composition of dialogue, both in its mimetic capacity and its meditation on culture and class, should it not also show a meditation on word composition itself? As Larsen writes, "Facility or lack of facility with letters impinges upon nearly every aspect of human life" (26). How could such a theme, tackled in an early work by a formalist writer concerned mainly with issues of composition, not be linked to her vision of literary language? Indeed, the conflict between the two characters—between two languages—stages not only a satire of a prototypical character and a capturing of social issues, but also an examination of different uses of language that may even be seen as a satire of bad writing.

The War of Words

The short story has value beyond the burgeoning of a device or a theme to come: it includes an already complex analysis of language and writing. Language itself is indeed the central theme of the story. A confrontation is staged between liberal professor Rayber's language of education and rationality and the language of demagoguery and intuition wielded by the barber and the barbershop's regular, identified in the story as "the fat man." These two languages outline not only the characters but also the locations (the college and the barbershop),

so that language represents the border between personae as well as between spaces. Jill Baumgaertner, in *Flannery O'Connor: A Proper Scaring*, identifies Rayber as "the odd man out" (36). As a character, he is defined by his educated language and is recognizable as such in the dialogue. On the contrary, the barber is defined and recognized by the plainspoken way he expresses himself. Likewise, the barbershop is a space of plainspokenness that Rayber attempts to enter and convert to no avail. O'Connor's story is therefore fundamentally about a war of words.

Both languages are easily identifiable, as is often the case when any writer stages a confrontation or dialogue between two characters of different nationality, region, ethnic or in this case, social background. Without the possibility of sound, grammar is the only way to distinguish them. Rayber is a professor and as expected his grammar is immaculate. He never uses double negatives but makes use of correlative structures: "I am neither a Negro- nor a white- lover" (15) and "big words" like "demagogue." He uses "Why" rather than "Well" as an interjection (18) and many verb-subject inversions such as "Why should he stay and listen to that tripe?" (18). The barber's language, on the other hand, can be distinguished through the barber's use of common English vernacular contractions such as "ain't," dropping the G at the end of "ing" endings, signaled in the usual way by an apostrophe in the text. Moreover, he uses many double negatives: "ain't nothin' gonna be good again until we get rid of them Mother Hubbards" (16). It even seems that O'Connor does everything possible to exaggerate the two languages in order to perfectly illustrate their differences, going as far as having the Barber use triple negatives with "Big words don't do nobody no good" (17). She invents two different styles of speaking: a literary and unwieldy style for Rayber and an oral and nimble one for the barber. From the very first dialogue, style guides the story as the differences in form announce the barber's superiority.

The barber's speech is dominant throughout the story. Quantity does not show this as most of the text focuses not only on Rayber's speech but also on his thoughts so as to convey his angst and the difficulty in expressing himself that proves to be his undoing. The preparation of the denouement therefore requires the reader's exposure to Rayber's thought process in order to show his rapid decline. However, the dialogues between Rayber and the barber constitute the high points of the story: everything else is a preparation to these confrontations, during which the barber is the character with the longest lines. This occurs mostly because O'Connor has him interrupting Rayber constantly: it happens no less than seven times in a ten-page story. Each of these times, we find ellipses at the end of an unfinished sentence by Rayber,

as in this use of free indirect speech: "Rayber thought that if the Barber would read a few . . . Listen, he didn't have to read nothin'" (17). At one point, the barber even interrupts Rayber's thoughts (18). The barber's dominance is clear here. He controls not only his own language but also Rayber's, evoking the strong relationship between language and power. In the space of the barbershop, the barber's plainspoken language is always dominant and takes precedence over Rayber's educated language. The power dynamics within the story are regulated by the style and structure of language.

In Rayber's aborted sentence, we may also witness the difference between the stilted rhythm of Rayber's discourse and the flowing cadence of the barber's sentences. Here, Rayber superfluously uses "that," a clear "waste word" that could be omitted after the verb of attribution "think." Likewise, the whole of the "if he would" construction could simply be replaced by a more fluid and concise "should." "Thought that" is entirely expandable. Rayber's sentence, transposed into direct speech, would read: "I think that if you would read a few . . . " Taking out all the "waste words" would lead to: "You should read . . ." The quantifier "a few" is another "waste word" as it is vague and provides no specific information. With this shortened sentence, the interruption by the barber may still exist but the differences in rhythm would not be as jarring, and the interruption would thus seem more out of place since it would obstruct the mention of a specific text. Rayber's stilted rhythm clashes with Hawkson's and the barber's language (there is a lack of distinction between the two since Hawkson's language is always a quote repeated by the barber). Indeed, as Larsen points out in his article, "Everything Hawkson says—or at least everything that Joe and then Rayber remember him saying—has a pronounced rhythm" (33). Varsen cites Hawkson's rhythmic use of present participles in the very first dialogue: "they was runnin' each other down, eatin' each other—throwin' jewel rocks at birds—skinnin' horses with their teeth" (15). Coupled with the repetition of "each other," and the mirror alliteration in [k] and [s] and [s] and [k] with "rocks" and "skinnin,'" Hawkson's rhythm is indeed flowing and lithe compared to Rayber's strained style. Likewise, the use of an alliteration is found in the climactic sentence "I'm the best damn demagogue in this state" (17). Moreover, the association between Hawkson and nursery rhymes ("Mother Hubbard," "Little Boy Blue") as well as his use of call-and-response show that not only folksiness but musicality is on his side. Musicality and rhythm are crucial factors for any formalist and here O'Connor lends this characteristic to the demagogue.

Still, Hawkson remains a mentioned character whose language only enriches the barber's, who therefore remains in control in the story. His

interruptions begin several times with an authoritative "Listen" and he uses such imperatives throughout the story, every time to assert his superior right to speak. He also uses second person pronouns profusely as well as rhetorical questions, common devices in public speaking to command the audience's attention: "Don't you want more money?" (18).

Furthermore, Rayber's discourse is consistently portrayed as lacking originality. Indeed, because Rayber is taken by surprise by the first conversation: "Rayber started in his chair. He had not expected to be approached so brutally" (15), he prepares extensively and exponentially for the two that follow. For the second conversation he memorizes arguments and counterpoints, this time expecting the political conversation to happen: "'Yes,' Rayber said and his brain darted to its store of preparations" (18). For the last conversation he goes as far as to write a whole speech that he learns by heart. Yet he remains completely unprepared to answer any rebuttal. It is made clear in the text that Rayber's anxiety and overpreparation causes his discourse to lack any kind of spontaneity. This goes along with the stilted rhythm of his lines to create the impression of the dominance of the barber's discourse. Rayber notably uses expressions that are already known to and disapproved by his audience, such as the argument "better schools [. . .] benefit everybody" (19) that he deploys to counter the fat man's argument that teachers all vote for the more progressive candidate, Darmon, simply because they would get more money in the budget for schools and that it is only a matter of self-interest: "All the schools are supporting Darmon. They stand to get their cut—free textbooks or new desks or something. That's the rules of the game" (19). Rayber's answer contains an alliteration in [b], but the indication that Rayber "sputtered" the sentence shows that he destroyed the rhythm with his diction. "Seems like I been hearing that a long time" (19) replies the barber, rebutting the argument for the sole reason that it has been used repeatedly. Rayber's use of known expressions causes him trouble throughout the story, to the point where he gets warned not to use certain expressions associated by the barber and the businessman to liberal talking points: "Remember, the fat man carped, you ain't gonna say, good govermint" (20). Rayber's language is thus treated as the simple parroting of the collective language of "liberals" and "the schools," deprived not only of spontaneity but also of originality. This is a recurring theme in O'Connor's style, one which Dorothy Walters underlined in her book *Flannery O'Connor*: "[. . .] through [. . .] banalities of dialogue, and reductive imagery O'Connor emphasizes the alarming discrepancy between inner image and outward impression" (27). This certainly fits

Rayber, who believes himself to have a superior knowledge of language and yet is shown as wanting through this medium specifically.

On the other hand, the barber's expressions actually parrot the demagogic politician's speech, even quoting him directly. Yet they are portrayed as effective arguments, often shutting down Rayber. When the barber argues that using big words does not mean anyone is intelligent and illustrates the importance of thinking by quoting a racist rant from his beloved politician, O'Connor uses free indirect speech to convey Rayber's response and the barber's winning argument: "Rayber wanted to know what that had to do with thinking. The barber thought it was plain as a pig on a sofa what that had to do with thinking" (17). The barber's reply is quasi tautological and the expression is only meaningful in its striking imagery and glaring plainspokenness, as well as the alliterations in [p]. This occurs once again when the fat man, who constantly agrees with the barber, parrots the demagogic candidate: "'The time has come,' the executive went on, 'just like Hawkson said, when we got to sit on the lid with both feet and a mule'" (19). Here we find assonances in [ɪ] and alliterations in [t]. Again, however, this only appeals to abstract emotional resentments against African Americans, and not to rationality, but this is the winning level in the barbershop that Rayber can only try to fake. In her book, Dorothy Walters writes: "The speakers rely on clichés instead of ideas, and they construct their 'philosophic world-view' from a series of slogan and truisms" (28-29). Though Walters' comment relates to "dialogue of the deaf" scenes in other stories (the doctor's office in "Revelation" and the train in *Wise Blood*) her words could apply to the barber and Rayber with the notable exception that there are two types of clichés: clichés full of imagery and rhythm used by Hawkson and the barber, and inferior clichés that forgo rhythm used or misused by Rayber.

Rayber's Futile Attempt to Alter Form in Order to Better Convey Meaning

Of course, one very important reason why Rayber's arguments and speech fall flat while the Barber's parroting of the demagogue's language and colorful but meaningless expressions succeed is that the audience in the barbershop is set against Rayber, who has his work cut out for him, as he explains to his colleague Jacobs: "You don't know this kind of ignorance" (21). Here, he admonishes his colleague for not going out of his comfort zone while he ventures into adverse territory, a barbershop that might as well be another country since the language and even the culture are so different. As Larsen writes: "[. . .] the col-

lege, hub of literate culture, is marginal, while the barbershop, center of oral culture, is located at the heart of the community, on the town square" (26).

The first sentence of the story, which is followed by a hard return and repeated a few lines below, showcases the main character's lack of belonging in his own city: "It is trying on liberals in Dilton" (15). But not everywhere in Dilton is it equally trying for the liberal Rayber. His university colleague is also very much prejudiced against African Americans, but the fact that he is described as "a man of his education" shows that he is manageable and we are told that Rayber "knew he could argue Jacobs down" (15). Where Rayber and Jacobs truly differ is in Jacobs's steadfast and seemingly principled stance to never debate, as is conveyed through a genuinely comic moment: "Jacobs had said: 'Skip it.' He had a class. His classes frequently occurred, Rayber noticed, when Rayber was about to get him in an argument" (15). Although this passage portrays Jacobs as afraid of confrontation and using phony excuses, this difference is almost portrayed as moral superiority on Jacobs's part: unlike Rayber, he does not feel compelled to establish his intellectual superiority. Still, Rayber and Jacobs are more like doubles, with Jacobs acting as a slightly improved version of Rayber, one unencumbered by Rayber's crippling self-righteousness. Language, not necessarily racism or political stance, still remains the clearest barrier between one side, Rayber (and by extension Jacobs) and the people in the barbershop. Even George, the barbershop's African American employee, and the only African American character in the story, does not belong to Rayber's side. George is forced by the barber to acquiesce to his rants and rebuff Rayber's clumsy attempts at showing off his liberalism for the African American employee. Rayber's appeals to George only end up putting the only African American character on the spot, potentially embarrassing him rather than providing support, which is a recurring flaw from liberal characters in O'Connor's writing.

The only place where Rayber is truly tested and that he eventually is forced to escape from is the barbershop. He enters the shop three times in the story, every time crossing a line and entering a space where it is truly "trying on liberals." The last time is after he prepares a whole speech to convince everybody in the barbershop, and this is evidently when he is at his most nervous: "He walked slowly, thinking what he was going to say in the shop and now and then stopping to look absently at a store window" (23). The story contains underlying violence with the blade-wielding barber pointing the razor at Rayber the first time he confronts him with his racist views, almost threatening him to force him to join his side: "The barber drew a clean path through the lather and then pointed the razor at Rayber. 'I'm tellin' you,' he said,

'there ain't but two sides now, white and black'" (15). The presence of the "fat man" who almost stands guard in the shop, reading newspapers, achieves the same menacing effect: "A fat man with an air of executive assurance came over near Rayber" (19). While the themes of space and violence reinforce the barber's dominance in the conflict, the real divide is always through language. Larsen writes that "The barber and most of his patrons are not readers, even though they are surrounded by a larger literate society" (26). The fat man is not truly an exception since the reading of newspapers is another way for O'Connor to drive a wedge between her characters: a college professor reads books, providing long-lasting wisdom and general truths, which take time to complete and attain, while a businessman in a barbershop reads a newspaper full of ephemeral truths and stylistic spontaneity. These differences echo the discrepancy in the characters' language. O'Connor herself discusses the difference between fiction and newspapers in her essay "The Teaching of Literature": "Good fiction deals with human nature. If it uses material that is topical, it still does not use it for a topical purpose, and if topics are what you want anyway, you are better referred to a newspaper" (126). The presence of the newspaper shows that while Rayber's use and understanding of language constitutes an example of misguided literacy, the barber and the fat man's language, though lithe and spontaneous, is ultimately "topical" and does not truly provide a positive backdrop against which Rayber's language unfolds. O'Connor does not oppose a good example with a bad one but a bad example with a worse one. And if the barber's language dominates Rayber's, it does not coincide with the ideal of word composition that would feed a formalist author's desire to write.

Indeed, the linguistic techniques used by the barber are rather coarse. The first speech given by the Barber is full of vernacular: "there ain't but two sides now, white and black"; "they was runnin each other down"; "they throwed him out" (15). This first salvo leaves Rayber speechless: "It was time for Rayber to say something but nothing appropriate would come" (16). Rayber, however, isn't speechless because of shock or a lack of ideas. He loves to argue, we are told on the first page. The reason is again his lack of spontaneity. Rayber anticipates it will be difficult to make himself understood to his audience since he assumes his college-educated type of discourse will not be easily understandable: "He wanted to say something that George would understand" (16). Of course the fact that the liberal Rayber underestimates George's comprehension skills is ironic, but his anxiety at not being understood really extends to the whole barbershop since his main worry when writing his speech later in the story is not to include any "big words." And indeed, soon after, he makes his first mistake.

While denouncing the race-baiting politician adored by the barber, he says: "'A good many people' Rayber said, consider Hawkson a demagogue.' He wondered if George knew what demagogue meant. Should have said 'lying politician'" (16). Rayber realizes he used a big word and failed to connect with the common people. His sense of superiority is immediately shattered when he realizes that the barber knows the word very well through its distortion by the politician, who, aware of the criticism, anticipated it by claiming it as a title. The barber quotes the speech:

> 'Demagogue!' The barber slapped his knee and whooped. 'That's what Hawk said!' he howled. 'Ain't that a shot! "Folks," he says, "them Mother Hubbards says I'm a demagogue." Then he rears back and says sort of soft-like, "Am I a demagogue, you people?" And they yells, "Naw, Hawk, you ain't no demagogue!" And he comes forward shouting, "Oh yeah I am, I'm the best damn demagogue in this state!" And you should hear them people roar! Whew!' (16-17)

It doesn't matter whether the barber or any in the crowd understand the word or even whether the politician does, what does matter is that the word used by Hawkson's educated opponents is known to the other side and rendered meaningless through a combination of blissful ignorance, mob mentality, and shamelessness. The effect is that while "demagogue" carries a negative meaning according to Rayber, it is a positive one to the barber. Rayber's attempt to use a rational counterpoint is thwarted by simple name-calling. This passage underscores the impossibility for the two characters to communicate effectively: the same words carry alternative meanings as if they belonged to different languages. The liberal candidate, known as Darmon to Rayber, even has a different name in the barbershop. He is Little Boy Blue, a nickname given to him by the demagogue.

Rayber's entrance into the foreign territory of the barbershop and the confrontation between the two languages lead to an interesting phenomenon whereby as the story progresses Rayber's language becomes more like the barber's. The first time is when Rayber uses the word "rotten" and bases his dislike of the demagogic politician on base financial interests and not high principles: "Don't you know that with a rotten governor I'd lose more money than he'd give me? He realized that he was finally on the barber's level" (18). This is an illusion, as the barber replies he doesn't mind paying for quality and Rayber pleads once again that that is not "what [he] meant" and he is being misunderstood. Before introducing his final speech, he repeats the exact

sentence that the barber had said to him when he wanted to reignite the political discussion: "You still a Mother Hubbard?" Rayber repeats the question without the proper inverted verb/subject structure, which breaks with his usual language: "You still a Hawkson man?" (23). Finally, when he dares the barber to allow George to listen, he uses the same vernacular structure: "You afraid to have him listen?" and worries that "he had made himself too much at home" (24). The story is also a progression of Rayber's attempted self-translation from the language of a college professor into the language of uneducated blue-collar characters, as if Rayber were a foreigner trying to enter a country and make himself understood to its inhabitants. When he wants to write a speech for these inhabitants his only concern is to aim for simplicity, for he believes that the reason his academic language constantly loses to the barber's plain speaking and categorical one-liners is that it is formally incomprehensible to them.

Of course, all of Rayber's efforts at self-translation fail. We know from the second sentence of the story how the confrontation ends: "After the Democratic White Primary, Rayber changed his barber" (15). The rest of the story can then be read as a satire of the liberal professor's pride. Indeed, the failure of his self-translation is steeped in his false sense of superiority, believing that because he knows "big words" he also masters "small" words and that all he has to do to convince victims of a demagogue that they have been duped is to "stoop to conquer" and get down to their level. Relying on the idea that "he who can do more can do less," the character believes effort is the only obstacle to success: "He could make everything in that shop squirm if he put his mind to it" (21). O'Connor's story makes clear this is wrong, making it explicit by having the character's wife say to him: "Just because you're a teacher doesn't mean you know everything" (22).

A Satire of a Mediocre and Misguided Writing Method

Rayber's mistake, however, lies in his belief that form and meaning are not linked, embodied in his plea to write a speech with "no waste words, no big words" (21). As we've seen, the notion of "big words" is ridiculed through Rayber's ignorance of "small words," which in actuality constitute another language he cannot master simply by dumbing himself down, no matter how hard he tries. Still, the notion of "waste words" is even more interesting as it mirrors the writer's own efforts to write a text that is perfectly concise, precise, and without any superfluous term. The precision of O'Connor's style was incidentally praised in

these words by writer E.L. Doctorow in an interview in 2013: "[. . .] the precision of the work is impressive, not a word wasted" (35).

O'Connor's story feeds an elaborate formalist study on the search for "perfect" language. Perfect language is here understood as the perfect combination of words to express an idea. This is Rayber's quest in "The Barber": "the reasons would have to be worked out—time and trouble. What was the matter with him? Why not work them out? He could make everything in that shop squirm if he put his mind to it" (21). Rayber believes that since he possesses more advanced knowledge than the Barber, all that remains to be found is the right words: "By the time he got home, he had the beginning of an argument. It would be filled in with no waste words, no big words—no easy job, he could see" (21). To Rayber, the difficulty resides in form, not content. His fancied understanding of what he considers to be the barber's unsophisticated language leads him to imagine a perfect speech according to the social circumstances of the barbershop, a concise speech containing only simple words. This plot therefore not only represents a social and political conflict but also stages the act of writing itself and its relationship with language, using a character who believes in his mastery of content but is uneasy about his control of form thereby questioning the very nature of the relationship between words and ideas.

The right word, or *le mot juste*, to use a Flaubertian intonation, is not present in the text, at least is not coming from the main character. Even though Rayber is rather pleased with his speech, the reader only gets to read the first and last sentences, not even completely at that, which provides very little information. The first sentence is: "For two reasons men elect other men to power" (21), preventing the reader from knowing what the two reasons are and therefore the gist of Rayber's speech. When Rayber delivers his speech, this sentence is changed: "Well, the way I see it, men elect . . ." (24) showing his attempt at self-translation. The last sentence of the speech, "Men who use ideas without measuring them are walking on wind" (21), is a clichéd expression, with the attempt to use expressions the same way the barber does but deprived of the plain-spokenness. Indeed, unlike "plain as a pig on a sofa," "walking on wind," while more lyrical, simply isn't as striking. It is, however, as meaningless, since the exact same sentence may be used to defend the exact opposite argument to Rayber's and there is again irony in the use of "walking on wind" to say virtually nothing. The unsaid is used here extensively by O'Connor: the ellipses cover a whole speech. Moreover, this speech may be seen as the central text of the story, containing the leitmotif of a main character whose attempt at spreading his political stance is the central plot point. This unsaid speech constitutes a deafening silence in the story, an absence of language that says so much it

becomes a presence: the speech is not only a failure (as we are told in the beginning of the story) but it is not even worthy of being communicated to the reader. The first and last sentence tell us Rayber attempts to combine his civic knowledge with the formal debasement of his own discourse according to what he believes the barber will understand, and we may imagine the core of the speech to be a blend of principled platitudes and transparent imitations of plainspokenness.

Of course, it could be said that O'Connor simply doesn't want to give too much importance to what is supposed to be a failed speech in the story, but the ellipses, the imagined blank space between the first and last sentence, constitute a very interesting device: the reader is told of a meticulously crafted text with multiple corrections and a general feeling by Rayber, its fictional author, that "the whole thing was effective enough" (21), and yet the reader may only wonder what it says. It is a device also used by Flaubert in a scene of *Madame Bovary*: the philistine pharmacist, Homais, having to announce to Emma Bovary that her father-in-law died, constructs a perfect sentence, elaborate enough to spare her feelings while still delivering the news. When she arrives, however, he is yelling at his assistant, forgets the whole thing and blurts out the artless: "Your father-in-law is dead" (245). Just like Rayber's speech, the sentence is a ghost in the text, its existence announced by the author yet never given. But its absence, as in Rayber's case, encapsulates the difficulty of composition experienced by the character better than a finished text would since it forces the reader to start, albeit probably only very tentatively, the composition process themselves by imagining what the speech or sentence might say. The reader's curiosity is used to show the difficulty of language through the absence of language.

Rayber's method of writing is to outline an argument and then "fill it in" (21) with words, as if ideas and language were entirely separate and all he had to do what simplify his usual discourse. This is not merely a satire of intellectualism, with Rayber ignoring the social gap which is the true separation between him and the barber, but also a satire of bad writing, with Rayber ignoring the interdependence of form and content. O'Connor, in this story, stages a character's struggle with language where the divide between inner and outer, quite familiar in O'Connor's work, comes from a failure to understand that when it comes to language inner and outer are inextricably linked and the gap between Rayber and the barber is a gap in ideas just as much as a gap in style. As Robert C. Evans points out in *The Critical Reception of Flannery O'Connor*, when discussing her work before her studies of New Criticism: "She already knew that choosing just the right word meant conveying just the right impression or idea" (30). Rayber's fran-

tic and confused attempt at composition therefore constitutes a complete counterexample to the art of putting words together.

This equivalency between form and content can be connected with O'Connor's own vision of literature in her essay "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," in which she extrapolates on the unimportance of the subject relative to form, expressing the idea that the way things are said is what produces content, not the topic itself: "There may never be anything new to say, but there is always a new way to say it, and since, in art, the way of saying things becomes a part of what is said, every work of art is unique and requires fresh attention" (*Manners* 76). Rayber's mistake lies in his belief that because the barber's opinions are steeped in ignorance and emotion, Rayber's superior ideas can only outstrip them. The reason for his failure is a fundamental misunderstanding of the act of writing. Rayber is ignorant of the fact that changing the form changes the idea. O'Connor uses theology to put forward her belief that form and content are, like body and spirit, inextricably linked: "The Manicheans separated spirit and matter. To them all material things were evil. They sought pure spirit and tried to approach the infinite directly without any mediation of matter. This is also pretty much the modern spirit, and for the sensibility affected with it, fiction is hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art" (*Manners* 68). Associating religion and literature, morality and writing, O'Connor describes writing as "incarnational" and style as a way of saying something which in itself conveys the content of the story. Rayber, as a character, is not simply a prototypical satire of a liberal self-professed intellectual but also a satire of a literary Manichean who separates content and form. Such opinions put O'Connor in the company of Flaubert, who notably wrote to Louise Colet about the harmony between form and content and the artist's parallel pursuit of truth and beauty through the incarnational potential of art: "Où la forme en effet manque, l'idée n'est plus. Chercher l'un, c'est chercher l'autre. Ils sont aussi inséparables que la substance l'est de la couleur, et c'est pour cela que l'art est la vérité même" ("Where Form indeed is absent, gone is the idea. Seeking one is seeking the other. They are as inseparable as substance is from color, and that is why art is truth itself"; my trans; Flaubert, *Correspondence II* 91).

There is in "The Barber" a lesson about writing, and Rayber's counterexample is one of a character who fails at authorship precisely because he mistakenly believes form and ideas to be separate and that all he lacks is form. The barber's rhetorical skills, though rudimentary and distinct from the ideal of the formalist writer, achieve a victory of form and idea. Form and content, body and spirit, must be understood as inseparable and interdependent to achieve the artist's quest for both

truth and beauty. This is why the simple sentence: "Big words don't do nobody no good" (17) is more effective than any part of Rayber's speech. It is at once performative foreshadowing and illustrative of the story itself. Besides O'Connor's first use of the self-professed intellectual as a character type, and the satire of intellectualism, she therefore develops in this early story a complex study of language or rather the failure of language as altogether unpersuasive, confrontational, and unsaid, uncovering a counterexample, taken from everyday political arguments, to the ideal writer. The timelessness of "The Barber" derives not only from the ongoing relevance of its subject matter but from the general and enduring truth its writing style uncovers about language itself because "the serious fiction writer always writes about the whole world, no matter how limited his particular scene" (O'Connor, *Manners* 77).

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Remembrance of Spaces Past: Spatial Poetics in Jacques Réda's *Aller à Élisabethville*

Lynn Anderson

Like Proust's Combray and Joyce's Dublin, Jacques Réda's Hardricourt is the prismatic lens that illuminates a life's work. In *Aller à Élisabethville* (*Going to Élisabethville*), he navigates childhood and adolescence through the displacement and destruction of occupied France.[1] This vivid memoir opens a past long locked away as a key to his work by specifically connecting themes pervasive in his writing to events that transpired in childhood and recurred in the subsequent devastation of World War II. As the war replays on an epic scale the traumatic sense of separation and violence that emerged from within his family and birthplace, we come to understand that Réda's writing is rooted in lived experience, and that poetic writing, for him, is a life relived and perhaps even a life redeemed.

In a Proustian moment that bears Réda's distinctive imprint, memories locked in the Seine's silty flow flood back when he heaves a block of stone into the current, hoping to release the subtle but powerful smell he remembers.[2] While Proust's madeleine merges intricate interior architectures with lost time, Réda's broader gestures open vistas encompassing the natural and built world as they extend to a horizon dazzling with promise. As these expanses reach from the river's Heraclitean flux to Hardricourt's hillsides, then meadows, and back to the Seine and its distant plains beyond, his sweeping movement recovers not only time, but crucially the spatial dimensions of remembrance as well, where "[. . .] tout ce que la mémoire fuyante du fleuve laisse enfoui dans la vase, un instant, m'a semblé palpable sous le soleil" ("[. . .] for an instant all that the river's fleeting memory leaves buried in the mud seemed palpable under the sun"; my trans; *E* 12). Knee-deep in the river whose smell becomes "[. . .] celui de l'espace quand il se libérait" ("[. . .] that of space when it freed itself"; my trans; *E* 44)[3] and alive to the world's transformative potential, his immersion emblematizes his visceral engagement with the depth of lived experience, a restoration and rekindling of spaces past that offers a vibrant corollary to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.[4] Consistent with Réda's vision of

the generative power of space, this smell of freedom from within space itself emerges from its own autogenesis, much as Réda wrests writing from the originary experience of exile and exclusion imprinted on him in Lunéville, the imprisoning birthplace that stands in Janusian contrast to Hardricourt's liberating spatial and creative horizons.

Crucially, in Hardricourt space becomes the imaginative force through which he registers loss and recovery. Throughout his work, space converges not only with freedom and poetic creation, "[. . .] l'espace, notre vraie demeure, notre liberté" ("[. . .] space, our true dwelling, our freedom"; my trans; *SM* 160), but is also a domain of striving and transformation. It is the desolate landscape of anguish in his first collection, *Amen*, the space of yearning and renunciation in "The Lost Bracelet," and the dimension where transmutation of the everyday extends from the luminous streets of *The Ruins of Paris* to microportraits such as "The Spider," where he explores the interstices of intersubjectivity with Frost's candor and La Fontaine's wit and wisdom.[5] While the critical literature and Réda's writing reflect the importance of space—urban, monumental, everyday—in his work, *Aller à Élisabethville* reveals the foundational influence of Hardricourt's spatial dimensions on his poetic imagination, as it brings space into being and opens new perspectives into literature's regenerative force.[6]

The primacy of space in Réda's creative trajectory parallels the spatial turn that has emerged within the arts, humanities, and social sciences over the course of his poetic production. A pivotal work in Réda's trajectory, *Aller à Élisabethville* probes the telemesnic seam where, like the spaces restored through the Seine's silty smell, distance and proximity converge. Akin to Monica Matei-Chesnoiu's discussion of telemesnic space in early modern drama, where there is "[. . .] a transmission of the sense of distant locations as if being in the middle of things" (9), this concept also illuminates Réda's approach to the confluence of multiple dimensions of experience through poetic writing. As Réda interweaves elements such as color, cadence, divergent locales, and temporal fluidity, his writing aligns with Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen's understanding of Edward Soja's "Thirdspace" as it applies to Shakespearean theatre, but which is also relevant to Réda's spatial poetics: "[. . .] a mode of spatial awareness, and also embeddedness, that combines the 'real' and 'imagined' to create a multi-dimensional conception of reality" (5). Given that we now understand, as Victoria Rimell observes, that "[s]pace is not just a physical entity we map, but a live, evolving thing that is created and shaped by culture, and in turn shapes us" (7), Réda's contribution to the intersection between literature and the increasingly spatial evolution of human inquiry participates in this growing awareness.

Jacques Réda (b. 1929) is a compelling figure in French letters. Long recognized in France as a preeminent poet and tireless chronicler of landscapes both urban and bucolic, his work spans an impressive range of forms and subjects. He received the French Academy's grand prize for lifetime achievement in 1993, the Bourse Goncourt for poetry in 1999, and served as editor-in-chief of the influential literary review *La Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1987 to 1995. Among the most appreciated contemporary French poets, his writing includes over fifty volumes of poetry, poetic prose, essays, and jazz criticism. In poetry, his virtuosic repertoire embraces free verse as well as the classical sonnet. His best-known works are by turns ironic, meditative, and poetic, where the attuned reader detects echoes of Montaigne's collegial reflections, La Fontaine's wry observations, and Claudel's incisive gaze. It is not surprising that Réda's work has drawn a growing following among English-language readers, augmented by translations that include *The Ruins of Paris*, *Treading Lightly: Selected Poems 1961 – 1975*, *Suburban Beauty*, *Return to Calm*, *Europes*, and *The Mirabelle Pickers*. In relating how Réda came of age during one of the world's most turbulent events, World War II, *Aller à Élisabethville* provides the origins of key elements that inform his work in a way that explores identity from a perspective that is at once, as Aaron Prevots notes of Réda's self-writing, "[. . .] literary, historical, ontological, and ethical" (103).

Throughout *Aller à Élisabethville*, leitmotifs of the places, sounds, and smells of Réda's childhood and adolescence convey the intensity of first love, the immediacy of war games conducted with a shifting alliance of friends, and keen insights into the world's beauty and incongruity. At the same time, he reveals sources of the inherent order and creative force of poetic writing that allow him to counter the destructive events around him during a boyhood and adolescence in occupied France. As John Taylor observes of *Élisabethville*, Réda focuses "[. . .] on the complex imaginary world that a child [. . .] can construct and sustain right alongside the most conspicuous horrors of adult malice" (14). For while he and his family were spared the direct devastation that many others suffered during this time, because he experienced the violence and upheaval of the German invasion, the privations and menace of the Nazi occupation, and the terror of repeated Allied bombings during the Liberation, he recounts his early life not just from the perspective of a precocious child trying to make sense of a world gone awry, but also as a witness to the fragility of life in the shadow of imminent destruction. These intense memories not only bring to life his own coming of age, but also portray more broadly a childhood shaped by the implacable destruction of war.

And yet, because he did not endure war's most extreme hardships, he emerges able to evoke the seemingly incongruous threads of beauty woven through the debris of senseless destruction. As conveyed by epigraphs from Dante and Napoleon, for example, the theme of "princesses" is elaborated in his young imagination through intense daydreams of heroism and chivalry augmented by Les Tourelles ("The Towers"; my trans), a girls' school in Hardricourt whose chateau-like architecture heightens the aureole of idealized transcendence the girls occupy in Réda's daydreams. These "princesses" serve as counterpoint throughout the narrative, as shown after his First Communion, when their white communion dresses scatter and melt like snowflakes into a mass of Belgian refugees fleeing the German invasion (*E* 46).

As natural correlates to his daydreams of heroism and princesses, other concerns—war games with classmates, together with strategy sessions and fighting forces of toy soldiers—come to obsess the young Réda, who recounts skirmishes and changing alliances with the combined seriousness of a child and adult's bemused retrospection. Throughout the text, we follow the shifting borders of friendship during the transition from childhood to adolescence, rendered all the more mutable by the vicissitudes of war that cause his parents to move him successively to different schools and locations to avoid the frequent bombings. During this time, he witnesses the sudden and implacable destruction of war when his school and then his neighborhood are bombed in raids that spare some areas while decimating others with no apparent logic, giving his war games a disturbing and very real correlate in the events around him.

If Réda continues to refigure a lyrical order from contemporary life in works such as *The Ruins of Paris* (1977), *La Liberté des rues* ([*The Freedom of the Streets*]; my trans; 1997), *Le Citadin* ([*The City Dweller*]; my trans; 1998) and *Europes* (2005), one senses this practice has been shaped by the will to bear witness to both the destruction *and* beauty he sees in the world. The recurrent undertow of loss throughout his work can be seen to stem from a belief that perhaps he was spared in order to account in some way for the destruction witnessed during the war. And while he no longer lives amidst war, the menace he often detects beneath otherwise placid appearances is informed by the threatened status of life he experienced in occupied France.

As Réda moves from childhood to adolescence in *Élisabethville*, the attention he initially devotes to arranging toy soldiers cedes to the desire to uncover the poetic potential of words. In their ability to be convened, orchestrated, and reconfigured, his imaginary brigades recast and replay the epic battles of the outside world, prefiguring the maneuvers of elemental creation and destruction needed to deploy

poetic language. As he turns from a world that is either preparing for or engaged in war, the self-created reality of writing replaces fictive games to become "[. . .] le jeu qui s'épuise lui-meme dans l'instant et sans fin s'y renouvelle"; ("[. . .] the game that exhausts itself instantly and renews itself without end"; my trans; *M* 67).[7] In the aftermath of the originary destruction within his family evoked in *Amen* (1968) and the "[. . .] misère et terreur, flames, débâcles" ("[. . .] misery and terror, flames, debacles"; my trans; *E* 66) of the war-torn world around him, the destruction of childhood war games transforms instead into the recuperation of a poetic order from what Réda terms "[. . .] les débris du massacre"; ("[. . .] the debris of the massacre"; my trans; *M* 68).

Even within an œuvre as prolific as Réda's, the years from 1990 to *Aller à Élisabethville* in 1993 are particularly productive. The five books published in this time express the primacy of revisiting not only his own past, but also that of literary forbearers such as La Fontaine, Wordsworth, Proust, Follain, and Renard. Born in 1929, it is as though, in approaching age sixty, his quest to give voice to "Tous ceux que j'ai perdus dans les coins obscurs de ma vie" ("All those I've left in the dark corners of my life"; *ART* 200; Feldman, *Treading Lightly* 127) gains new urgency at this watershed moment. And although Réda has always accorded importance to childhood, these books—*Le Sens de la marche* (1990), *Affranchissons-nous* (1990), *Lettre sur l'univers et autres discours en vers français* (1991), *Aller aux mirabelles* (1991), and finally *Aller à Élisabethville* (1993)[8]—foreground the significance he attributes to childhood experience.[9] As though preparing to uncover his own sources in *Élisabethville*, in *Le Sens de la marche* (1990) he follows the paths of precursors who were also inspired by a close bond to their origins, offering homage in poetry and prose to La Fontaine's travels in Limousin in 1663, Wordsworth and his Lake District, Jules Renard's Chitry,[10] the Canisy of Follain and Proust's Illiers. The collection of poems, *Lettre sur l'univers* (1991), for example, reflects the militarized imprint of his birthplace, Lunéville, with its active garrison and monuments to generations of war dead, while voicing deep concern for the fragility of all life menaced with human destruction.

Most significant in the work that traces his origins before writing Élisabethville, however, is the preceding memoir that recounts his life through age nine in Lunéville, *Aller aux mirabelles*.[11] While its translation into English has been praised as an "[. . .] autobiographical gem [. . .]"[12] at times conveying positive, even idyllic, dimensions of Lunéville, the account also reveals the town as the site of psychological wounds and the enduring sense of separation from family and society heard in the anguish of his initial collections, *Amen* (1968), *Récitatif* (1970), and *La tourne* (1975). As noted earlier, Hardricourt's link to space as a liberat-

ing force in Réda's work stands in contrast to Lunéville's closed and punishing spaces. The pivotal role of events in Élisabethville on Réda's life and poetic trajectory come into relief against the cloud of irreparable loss and exile that Lunéville casts over his life. For these reasons, taken together, *Aller aux mirabelles* and *Aller à Élisabethville* are vital to understanding what Maulpoix terms the "[. . .] le désastre et la merveille" ("[. . .] the disaster and the wonder"; my trans) that underlie his work.[13] As expressed in this early poetry and born from what he terms "[. . .] cet espace dévasté par ma naissance" ("[. . .] the space devastated by my birth"; my trans; *ART* 16),[14] these scarred origins shape his spatial poetics.

In *Aller aux mirabelles*, for example, he links his will to become a writer to the panic inflicted upon him by his aunt, who convinces him they are lost as they walk home one evening. This fear, however, launches a new identity he deploys to deflect and sublimate emotion through the written word. The child titles his first "book," though never written, *La Peur* (*Fear*; my trans; *M* 105) to exemplify this key moment of translating experience into language:

> [. . .] un choix s'était prononcé dans ma tête: je serais écrivain comme Fernand.
> Mais quoi écrire, sans bibliothèque ni bureau ? J'avais bien déjà fabriqué la couverture, plié les cahiers de mon premier livre, et j'en connaissais même le titre et le sujet : *La Peur* – une peur que j'avais éprouvée à la fin d'une promenade quand, par malice, Marie m'avait fait croire que nous nous étions perdus. Mais les pages restaient désespérément blanches. (*M* 105)
>
> [. . .] my mind was made up early on: I would be a writer like Fernand.
> But what would I write, with no library and no desk? I had already prepared the cover and folded the pages for my first book, and I even had the title and subject: *The Fear*—a fear that had seized me when Marie, for a joke, had me believe we were lost after one of our walks. But the pages remained desperately white. (Feldman, *MP* 83)[15]

This state of childhood fear and vulnerability recurs throughout his writing, showing the menace that Réda's later works often register was present in his boyhood home and generalized throughout the town.[16] Thus, while in *Aller aux mirabelles* Réda obliquely approaches but never directly states why he cannot bring himself to enter the street where he grew up, his dread is clear as he references it: "[. . .] cette rue

que j'évite depuis mon arrivée" ("[. . .] the street I have been avoiding since I arrived"; *M* 101; Feldman, *MP* 79); "J'ai bien pu éviter la rue, mais pas les souvenirs" ("I've managed to avoid the street, but not the memories"; *M* 103; Feldman, *MP* 81); or again, "J'approche lentement de la rue que j'ai jusqu'à present évitée" ("I am slowly approaching the street I've been avoiding until now"; *M* 114; Feldman, *MP* 88). Although he poses the rhetorical question, "Pourquoi avoir fait tant d'histoires?" ("Why did I make such an episode of it?"; *M* 115; Feldman, *MP* 88), the answer is clear: even when writing at age sixty, a physical and psychic dread spatially mantles both the neighborhood and his former home through a dual magnetism that repels him from his origins even as it condemns him to a perpetual return to this site of pain and fear.

As the place of birth fuses with a place of foreboding, fear at home, magnified as more than a single traumatic event, becomes generalized and symbolic in his work. Over twenty years before *The Mirabelle Pickers*, for example, home is a place of fear in Réda's first major collection of poems, *Amen* (1968). Here a pervasive and punishing authority reigns supreme as scenes of pain are forced on the subject's consciousness in claustrophobic interiors of bitterness and anger. In contrast to these imprisoned domestic spaces, it is not surprising that open space elsewhere in his writing is often figured as refuge or escape.

Extending beyond the family to the church and town, this sense of condemnation must have seemed universal. As he relates, "Ce que j'entends de la religion corrobore l'enseignement de la ville : tout a déjà eu lieu, aucune main n'effacera ce qu'un employé de mairie a consigné avec mon nom dans le registre : je suis dehors" ("My understanding of religion confirms what the town has taught me: everything has already happened, and no hand will ever erase what a town hall clerk recorded in the registry along with my name: I am on the outside"; *M* 78; Feldman, *MP* 60-61). And while Réda does not reveal the exact nature of this indelible mark against him in this or in any other work, its trace recurs in the rage, shame, and remorse that form a grim undercurrent in his writings. This key current in his work continues in the poem that serves as postscript to *Mirabelles*, but is absent from the English translation. Signaling Réda's intent to convey a summative statement by its title, "Coda," and final position in the book, the poem's omission is especially curious given the resoundingly somber note it strikes in confirming that this fateful verdict has followed him throughout his life, making him an outsider everywhere:

> J'ai vu Prague et Florence, Athènes et Venise,
> Et visité la vieille gare de Cahors.
> Mais partout, que je passe ou que je m'éternise,

J'ai le pressentiment de rester en dehors. (*M* 127)

I've seen Prague and Florence, Athens and Venice,
And visited the old station in Cahors
But everywhere, whether I move on or linger,
A foreboding tells me I remain on the outside. (my trans)

And although the book jacket of the *The Mirabelle Pickers*, the English translation of *Mirabelles*, describes the memoir as "[. . .] reflections, often whimsical, on the passing of the years [. . .] written with tenderness and humour," this poem's grim coda reinforces that the scars of society's exclusion continue to follow him from his earliest years in Lunéville. In omitting the impact of Lunéville's negative influence on Réda, this promotional description does not alert readers to the grim undertow needed to understand the complexity and scope of his work. As Marie Joqueviel-Bourjea recognizes, "La patrie ne s'offre donc pas comme Paradis retrouvé: elle ne figure pas le jardin d'Eden mais la pomme d'une connaissance interdite, barrée" ("The native land does not present itself as Paradise regained: it is not the Garden of Eden but the fruit of forbidden knowledge, choked off"; my trans; 220).

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the breezy commentary on *The Mirabelle Pickers*' book jacket elides the fatal pall Lunéville casts over Réda's life and work arose during a 2013 conversation with him. In response to my question about why he had not returned there to live as a respite from the fracas of Paris, where he has lived since the 1950s, especially given his idyllic portrayals of its calm nature and proximity to the countryside in *Mirabelles* and elsewhere in his work, his conversational tone ceded to a piercing gaze that reinforced the gravity of his revelation: "Si j'étais retourné à Lunéville, je m'y serais pendu"; ("If I had returned to Lunéville, I would have hung myself there"; my trans.)[17] The ensuing silence underscored the deadly weight of his pronouncement. This grim statement extends beyond revealing the tenuous edge between destruction and creation in his work to suggest that writing, for Réda, is the battleground where self-extinction and renewal converge, and perhaps also the lifeline that shields him from being drawn into the maw of trauma once more even while skirting its raw edges. In this light, the themes of suicide and near-suicide that recur in his work overall, but are notably absent from Élisabethville, can be seen as attempts to exorcise the adverse childhood experiences in Lunéville at the root of this trauma. They also provide a stark contrast to his adolescence spent in Hardricourt, seen in Élisabethville as a watershed period without this trauma that finally allowed him to chart a more positive trajectory.[18] The act of writing as the return to the site

of trauma, where its restorative process might reestablish the equilibrium needed to avoid plunging into the precipice, calls to mind Rilke's words to a young poet that art is born of necessity, "Ein Kunstwerk ist gut, wenn es aus Notwendigkeit entstand" ("A work of art is good if it has sprung from necessity"; Rilke, *Briefe* 6; Herter Norton, *Letters* 20).

A sobering example of this necessity in reworking themes of trauma appears at the confluence of two leitmotifs in his work, as the river, most often the beneficent presence seen in Élisabethville, veers in other works into the venue of suicidal ideation in which drownings or near-drownings in the context of suicide thematize the tension between ceding through death to escape the torment of Lunéville's originary condemnation, or acceding to life by channeling this torment through poetic expression.[19] In this context, the river emblematizes the poet's enforced exile, for no matter which shore he is on, he is always faced with the "other side" and with the shadow self who inhabits it, the Other (*l'autre*). The poem entitled "L'autre," in fact, portrays the phantom self's suicide from drowning in the river as a way of repairing "[. . .] la faute involontaire qui lui valut d'errer sombre sur notre terre / Sans comprendre son sort ni la langue d'ici" ("[. . .] the involuntary fault that caused him to wander darkly on our earth / Without understanding his fate or the language of this place" (my trans; *LC* 82).[20] One senses this is to expiate the double burden of being not only separated from society through the "involuntary fault" that echoes the condemnation from family, church, and town portrayed in *The Mirabelle Pickers* (*MP* 60-61), but also the weight of what is perhaps a poet's worse punishment, the inability to understand language itself.

The stakes of the poet's deadly face-off with this grim Doppelganger who "[. . .] [d]ort dans mon lit, boit dans mon verre" ("[. . .] sleeps in my bed, drinks from my glass" my trans; *LC* 102) are clear. For eliminating this haunting presence would end his own existence as well: "Il est tard maintenant pour que je me décide / A le quitter. Comment? Un double suicide?" ("It's late now to decide / To leave him. How? A double suicide?"; my trans; *LC* 102). The poem's title, "The Other Again" ("Encore l'autre"; my trans; *LC* 102) reinforces this recurring cadence of the painful but creative bond that conjoins these two beings in anguished lockstep. However fraught this confrontation, however, Réda's repeated returns to the river suggest an attempt at wholeness, as though his poetic vocation depends on putting together an irreparably shattered world.

When the river becomes the site of imagined suicides and accidental drownings, it is as though death might finally restore the subject to his shadow-self. A possible suicide attempt through drowning opens the novel, *Aller au diable* [*Going to the Devil*] (2002), for example:

> « Accident » demeura le terme officiel désignant ce que certains furent tentés de considérer comme une tentative de suicide [. . .] Moi, je ne savais pas. J'avais eu envie de m'allonger dans le canoë et de me laisser descendre au fil du fleuve, en regardant le ciel glisser entre les branches comme une route lumineuse, jusqu'à la mer. (*AD* 12)
>
> 'Accident' remained the official term that some were tempted to consider a suicide attempt [. . .] As for me, I didn't know. I'd wanted to lie down in the canoe and be carried along by the river's current, watching the sky glide between branches like a luminous route, all the way to the sea. (my trans)

The poet turns away from death, however, choosing instead to evoke this recurring drama through language that joins the separated pair in poetry. With the sky transformed into a "luminous route" in the passage above, the imputed suicide seems more a voyage of self-discovery than self-destruction, even as it foregrounds the paradoxical duality between self-expression and self-extinction, and figures space as escape and privileged destination.

Thus involuntarily subjected as a child to "[. . .] verdict préalable de séparation" ("[. . .] earlier verdict of exclusion"; *M* 76; Feldman, *MP* 59) from church, family, and society in Lunéville, at the same time this irrevocable sense of separation fuels a lifetime of writing on jazz and blues, first discovered during adolescence in Hardricourt through American Forces Network radio broadcasts.[21] Importantly, his seminal collection of essays and poetry on jazz, *L'Improviste* [*The Improviser*], opens by foregrounding separation itself as the foundational component of the blues in a way that clearly echoes Réda's own status as an outsider in his own land:

> Le blues ne chante donc ni la terre étrangère qui le supporte, où il s'est éveillé en même temps que l'oubli des origines, ni l'espérance d'aucun salut, mais l'intervalle désert et fascinant de la séparation [. . .] Mais qu'aimer sinon la séparation, là où il n'y a plus qu'elle? (*I* 26-27).
>
> The blues sings neither the foreign land that tolerates it, where it was born at the same time as its origins, nor the hope of any salvation, but of the deserted and fascinating interval of its own separation [. . .] But what is there to love if not separation, when that is all there is? (my trans)

His abiding admiration for the artistry of these musicians, whose solitary virtuosity rises above exile, can be seen to reflect his own experience of shaping improvised expression from difficult origins. In fact, in discussing his recent book on jazz, *Une civilisation du rythme*, he recently shared that writing, for him, is "[. . .] compensation pour ne pas jouer d'un instrument de musique" ("[. . .] compensation for not playing a musical instrument"; my trans; Anheim n. pag.) Significantly, the "[. . .] réitération de l'instant qui se déporte vers le tragique [. . .] où un changement profond et irrévocable s'est accompli" ("[. . .] the reiteration of the instant that veers toward the tragic [. . .] where a profound and irrevocable change has occurred"; my trans; *I* 308-309), Réda feels in jazz resurfaces in the recurrent theme of separation throughout his work and parallels the verdict of exclusion written by his name in Lunéville's town hall.[22]

As the destruction and displacement of World War II further reinflict this trauma, open space and its expression through poetry provide refuge from the condemnation of family and community. As Jean-Michel Maulpoix observes, from "[. . .] l'absence de l'identité et d'enracinement [. . .] Réda parvient à inscrire concrètement dans l'espace de son propre transit l'inconsolable défaut d'être qui devient ainsi paysage" ("[. . .] the absence of identity and rootedness [. . .] Réda comes to inscribe in the space of his own trajectory the inconsolable fault of being that thus becomes landscape"; my trans; Maulpoix 15). And while Réda does not mention these bleak origins in *Aller à Élisabethville*, Lunéville's closed, punishing spaces contrast with the freedom and release of the spatial expanses that emerge in Hardricourt.

Another striking absence in Élisabethville is Hardricourt's name itself. As with other authors who omit or deflect key aspects of their lives, in Élisabethville Réda effaces Hardricourt's identity even as he details its importance. For while he foregrounds the town and its specific locales as the setting of *Aller à Élisabethville*, complete with an annotated sketch as a pictorial coda, at no time does he reveal its name. And though he underlines the occasion of his family's move to Hardricourt as "[. . .] l'un des plus importants de mon existence [. . .]" ("[. . .] one of the most important in my existence [. . .]"; my trans, *E* 25), he never overtly elaborates. Instead, Réda's vibrant writing conveys Hardricourt's transformational power to lift Lunéville's restrictive bonds. Stepping off the train there for the first time, for example, he launches a panoramic traveling shot of the town and the countryside beyond, brimming with vitalistic sensuality. Hardricourt's picturesque tumble of houses leads through trees to an impressionistic expanse, where "Au loin, dans une plaine limitée encore bien plus loin par une ligne nuageuse de collines basses, de part et d'autre d'une très longe île

étroite aux arbres d'une exubérance tropicale, un fleuve opulent respirait et luisait " ("In the distance, an opulent river breathed and gleamed on either side of a long, narrow island with trees of tropical exuberance within a plain limned again by a nebulous line of low hills"; my trans, *E* 26). The luxuriance of this heady descent to the Seine and the countryside beyond opens onto a realm that contrasts with Lunéville's physical and psychic enclosures. Spatially aligning the town's importance with these freeing dimensions, he reveals it is "[. . .] comme si un panneau invisible avait pivoté" ("[. . .] as though an invisible panel had pivoted"; my trans, *E* 25). In this way, *Élisabethville*'s episodes flow together as a wide-armed embrace of a life finally begun, even amidst war's hardships and dangers.

Leaving behind the shameful weight of Lunéville's legacy, in Hardricourt he shapes a new destiny through language and imagination, as his poetic trajectory converges with this liberating landscape. For while he cannot control the "[. . .] misère et terreur, flames, débâcles [. . .]" ("[. . .] misery and terror, flames, debacles [. . .]"; my trans, *E* 66) of this time, he can determine his creative world through the power of the written word. Further showing the fierce beginnings of his poetic vocation when bullied as a newcomer with his friend Julius and dangled over a bridge by locals, he steels himself against this unstable world by creating an alternative one:

> Cette expérience allait modifier notre façon de voir le monde [. . .] amèrement instruits, nous en fîmes un monde de fer, qui ne le cèderait en rien pour sa dureté au véritable. Et tandis que celui-ci commençait de s'embraser, nous nous engagions de notre côté dans les convulsions d'une histoire qui n'a sans doute laissé que peu de traces, et peut-être même dans la mémoire de certains de ses acteurs (*E* 27).

> This experience would change our view of the world [. . .] bitterly instructed, we made a world of iron that was no less hard than the real one. And while the whole world began to catch fire, we plunged into the convulsions of a story that has doubtless left few traces, even in the memories of some of its players. (my trans)

Not surprisingly, their realm of imagined countries and mock battles includes an invented language that confers a coherence lacking in the outside world. Réda thus starts to register the relations between geography, history, and language that will extend to his meditations on space and time that shape a lifetime's work:

> [. . .] j'entrevoyais quels liens inextricables unissent la géographie à la géologie et aux profondeurs de l'histoire, et l'histoire elle-même au langage, puisqu'il s'agissait avant tout d'imaginer des noms. [. . .] je me vis contraint d'élaborer une langue, avec tout un système génératif, et une orthographe exotique (à dominante balto-hongroise) qui ramenait le disparate à un semblant d'unité. Ainsi naquirent des capitales et des villes secondaires – Lattarij, Cattilja, Brmytl, Aszun, Asanjè, Buncza, Maramaü –, rien d'autre d'abord que leur allure et leur sonorité barbares, mais strictement réglées [. . .] (*E* 34-35)

> [. . .] I could see the inextricable links between geography and geology and the depths of history, and history itself to language, since it was above all a question of imagining names. [. . .] I was forced to develop a language with a whole generative system and an exotic (mainly Balto-Hungarian) spelling that restored the disparate to a semblance of unity. Thus were born capitals and secondary cities - Lattarij, Cattilja, Brmytl, Aszun, Asanjè, Buncza, Maramaü -, nothing more at first but their barbaric look and sound, but strictly regulated [. . .] (my trans)

Striking in its syntactic and sonorous difference from French, it is as though he calibrates this new language for maximum dissonance to mark his distance from the locals who had cast him out, both in Lunéville and again as a newcomer in Hardricourt. Further, these sounds and rules prefigure a poetry in which space as a regenerative force will have a central role. The vitality of what he brands his "language" transfers to adulthood, where a key poem on poetic expression in *La tourne* begins, in fact: "Mon parler, c'est à vous que j'écris, à vous ma langue" ("My speech, it's to you I write, to you my language"; my trans, *ART* 195). And although his goal, as stated above, to restore "the disparate to a semblance of unity" applies to boyhood pastimes, more importantly it becomes a guiding principle of Réda's poetics.

This ongoing vision of maintaining communication with others despite threatened conditions comes further into focus during the summer of 1940. Due to the shortage of postal workers in Hardricourt just after France's surrender to Germany, the eleven-year-old Réda and a friend are pressed into service as letter carriers. Now under German occupation, the town's streets are mostly empty except for German soldiers. Partially inhabited, the eerie quiet registers a broader menace from the occupying forces, echoing the unsettling veneer of Lunéville's

military barracks and becoming a leitmotif for similar scenes that haunt Réda's later work:

> À cause des bouleversements de cette période, il y avait évidemment bien peu de lettres à répartir. Parfois une seule, pour tous les kilomètres de ce boulevard où, dans un silence inquiétant, s'alignaient les villas abandonnées, souvent pillées et saccagées, avec leurs jardins fous, et toujours, devant l'une d'entre elles—la plus cossue—des factionnaires casqués que notre manège intriguait. De ces heures d'aventure et de mystère (l'excitation de se rendre utile troublée par l'impression de n'être que le messager des morts), j'ai tiré la plus haute idée d'une profession qui en vérité le mérite. (*AN* 15)
>
> Because of the upheavals of this period, there were obviously very few letters to distribute. Sometimes only one, for all the kilometers of this boulevard where, in an unsettling silence, abandoned villas extended, often pillaged and ransacked, with overgrown gardens and always, in front of one of them—the most posh—helmeted sentries intrigued by our doings. From these hours of adventure and mystery (the excitement of being useful troubled by the impression of only being the messenger of the dead), I drew the highest idea of a profession which in truth deserves it. (my trans)[23]

Although Réda does not mention the Greek figure Mercury by name in this passage, he nonetheless aligns himself with the god's dual role as deliverer of messages and conductor of departed souls. Though brief, his time as a Mercury-like messenger scrutinized by occupation soldiers emblematizes his vision of the poet's mission, in which he will deliver his message to a threatened world despite forbidding circumstances, as the voice on the edge of extinction in *Récitatif* (1970); the visionary wanderer of *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977); the exiled Roman soldier of "Ex Ponto, V," who directs his message to readers over one thousand years in the future (*LU* 83); and the grim vision of a planet devastated by human destruction in *Lettre sur l'univers* (1991).

In spanning millennia and myriad perspectives, this range of reference informs the intertextual echoes that show Réda's deep bond with literary precursors to situate major events in his life within a universal continuum. *Élisabethville*'s two epigraphs, for example, place it under the sign of love's dominion over both poetry and war: Dante's tribute to Beatrice, followed by Napoleon's confirmation that love's wounds

equal those of battle. Extending these echoes into spatial dimensions, rather than launching *Élisabethville* in the dark wood that opens Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Réda chooses no less spatial, but perhaps more daunting terrain: the maze of highway exchanges that now riddles the once-simple route to his family's former home on the banks of the Seine. And though he is too young to serve in the short-lived French-German conflict, the war games he orchestrates with friends reenact the surrounding destruction through Hardricourt's hillsides and yards, thus drawing war's reach into the space of everyday life and prefiguring Réda's ability to evoke the deeper currents of lived experience that characterize his work.

But as the epigraphs convey, war does not eclipse the ascendance of the first of many Beatrices in Réda's work. Always situated within spatial frameworks that reinforce their emotional impact, his vision of the feminine ideal extends from dreams of princesses glimpsed in magazines at Élisabethville's beginning, to the ethereal Sonia Sydlowski silhouetted in the turret of their castle-like school, and to Janine, his neighbor's captivating visitor from New Caledonia with whom he canoes on the Seine:

> Très belle, évidemment (de vieilles photos prouveraient même qu'elle était superbe), aussi brune que Maryse était blonde, et de blanc toujours vêtue au-dessus comme par en dessous. Car, tandis que je pagayais avec précaution à un bout de la pirogue, elle, comme dans un poème ou dans un film, « laissant rêveusement sa main flotter dans l'onde », relâchait par moments, à l'autre bout, l'étroite pression de ses genoux lisses [. . .] ils étaient à la fois très purs, majestueux et tendres. (*E* 92)
>
> Very beautiful, of course (old photos would even prove she was superb), as brunette as Maryse was blond, and always dressed in white—both above and underneath. For while I paddled carefully at one end of the canoe, at the other end, as in a poem or film "letting her hand float in the water dreamily," she released by moments the tight pressure of her smooth knees [. . .] they were very pure, majestic and tender all at once. (my trans)

Not surprisingly, Janine's enduring influence as muse persists in some of his most idyllic and elegiac poems spanning over two decades.[24] While he often portrays the river with the attributes of a goddess, Janine embodies these qualities in a specific human form, a fluid sensuality revitalizing the surrounding space each time she appears. Adrift in the

canoe's protected, yet dynamically mobile space, her hand in the water links her to the river's force. While the river conveys continuity amid chaos throughout his work, this is especially true here, as their river-borne excursions during the summer of 1944 continue despite repeated bombings of Hardricourt's bridges and factories from American and British forces during the Liberation. As Eros and Thanatos merge in poems that feature Janine, the discovery of desire overwrites the debris of battle. Despite shrapnel in the gardens and death under the cherry trees, Élisabethville reveals the origins of the jewel-like radiance that suspends space and time, life and youth, when Janine and the river converge, illustrating yet again not only the river's regenerative power to restore the "[. . .] tout ce que la mémoire fuyante laisse enfoui dans la vase"; ("[. . .] all that the river's fleeting memory leaves buried in the mud"; my trans, *E* 12), but also the power of poetic language to enrich the present through pathways to the past.

As seen in this study, as a key spatial figure in Réda's work, the river's expansive dimensions offer a gateway to freedom and the world beyond self. Echoing the Proustian resurgence of memory when he heaved a rock into the river Seine's current at the book's beginning, through a final gesture that is at once departure and new beginning, in Élisabethville's closing scene he launches himself fully into its flow in a way that calls to mind the multidimensional trajectory that spatial theorist Edward Soja sees in Proust's madeleine, "[. . .] a madeleine for a *recherche des espaces perdus*, a remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost" (81). Having tried to reach Élisabethville several times with little success, as he descends the rapids toward Élisabethville's elusive promise, we understand that in a world where attaining goals may only reveal their tarnish, it is the process of going *toward Élisabethville, rather than reaching it, t*hat fuses desire, remembrance, and writing. As first seen in the river's generative force to bring forward "[. . .] memoire fuyante [. . .]" ("[. . .] fleeting memory [. . .]"; my trans, *E* 12), in exploring these spaces of loss and recovery, Réda restores bonds with past and present while navigating toward a future informed by both. From the opening tangle of highway exchanges to Réda's final release into the Seine's powerful current, *Aller à Élisabethville*'s convergence with the world's spatial dimensions speaks to our experience of being in the world, where we take the measure of our lives.

Notes

1. While "*To Go to Élisabethville*" is *Aller à Élisabethville*'s literal translation, "*Going to Élisabethville"* better conveys the impetus of going *toward* that fuels the narrative.

2. Launching the stone into the river at once evokes Réda's own experience and situates him in Proust's lineage. The scene of the madeleine occurs in the *Swann's Way* segment of volume one of Marcel Proust's masterwork, À la recherche du temps perdu, translated into English as *Remembrance of Things Past* by C.K. Scott-Moncrieff. As noted later in this introduction, in *Le Sens de la marche* Réda documents his admiration for Proust and his pilgrimage to the Illiers of Proust's childhood, the model for the Combray of *Remembrance of Things Past*.

3. The river's multisensorial convergence with space and freedom recurs as Réda compares its odor to other olfactory leitmotifs that emanate from locales in Hardricourt in this and other passages.

4. Noted geographer and spatial theorist Edward Soja aligns the multidimensional impact of Proust's madeleine with his seminal concept of "Thirdspace" in this way: "Thirdspace becomes not only the limitless Aleph but also what Lefebvre once called the city, a 'possibilities machine;' or, recasting Proust, a madeleine for a *recherche des espaces perdus*, a remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost [. . .] or never sighted at all" (81).

5. The poems "The Lost Bracelet" (trans. Jennie Feldman) and "The Spider" (trans. Andrew Shields) appear, respectively, in *Jacques Réda: Treading Lightly, Selected Poems 1961 – 1975* (35) and *Poetry*, January 2000, p. 188.

6. Studies that discuss space as an important feature in Réda's work include those by Lynn Anderson, Susan Harrow, Marie Joqueviel-Bourjea, Jean-Michel Maulpoix, Aaron Prevots, and Jean-Pierre Richard referenced at the end of this study.

7. While Jennie Feldman translated *Aller aux mirabelles* as *The Mirabelle Pickers*, I have referenced this translated line and the one that follows with the French title, *Aller aux mirabelles*, as the translations are mine and differ from Feldman's. Her translations of these passages appear, respectively, as "[. . .] the game that winds up the very moment it also, endlessly, starts anew" (*MP* 51), and "[. . .] the scene of carnage [. . .]" (*MP* 51).

8. Of these titles, because only *The Mirabelle Pickers* has been translated into English, the other titles remain in French.

9. Among the most notable examples is the passage that opens the section titled "An Illustrated Childhood" in the collection of prose and poetry, *L'Herbe des talus*: "À dix ans j'étais déjà vieux. Beaucoup plus tard, ensuite, j'ai rajeuni" ("At ten I was already old. Much later, then I became younger"; my trans; *HT* 15).

10. The grim associations Réda attributes to Renard's boyhood home bring to mind the dread of his own birthplace as described in *The Mirabelle Pickers*,

as discussed in more detail shortly: "A côté de la porte d'entrée, on a cloué un fer à cheval pour conjurer les sorts. Précaution légitime, quand on se souvient des drames qui ont endeuillé cette maison" ("Next to the front door, a horseshoe was nailed to ward off spells. Legitimate precaution, when you recall the dramas that have cast a pall over this house"; my trans; *SM* 122).

11. *The Mirabelle Pickers* is the title of Jennie Feldman's translation of Réda's *Aller aux Mirabelles*. Citations from this translation hereafter are noted as *MP*.

12. Online announcement of Réda's appearance at Oxford University's *Maison française*. 06 March 2013. *Unités mixtes des instituts français à l'étranger*, www.umifre.fr/c/4278. Accessed 26 December 2019.

13. This expression is drawn from the title of Jean-Michel Maulpoix's *Jacques Réda: le désastre et la merveille* (*Jacques Réda, The Disaster and the Wonder*; my trans).

14. The title of the poem is "Seuil du désordre" ("Threshold of Disorder"; my trans; *ART* 16).

15. It is curious that Feldman retains the definite article, *la* ("the"), in translating "*La Peur*" as "*The Fear*," as the definite article is typically dropped in translating this type of expression into English.

16. For an examination of the poetics of menace in Réda's work, see Lynn Anderson's "Du Chemin poétique au théâtre de la menace" ("From the Poetic Pathway to the Theatre of Menace"; my trans).

17. Author's conversation with Jacques Réda. Paris, France. 21 June 2013.

18. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, together with a growing body of research over more than twenty years, use the term, "adverse childhood experiences" (ACES), to refer to a spectrum of adverse events that can lead to continuing negative outcomes throughout a child's adult life (www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html. Accessed 17 Dec. 2020).

19. Examples include poems such as "Je regarde mais ne vois pas [. . .]" ("I look but do not see [. . .]" *ART* 173), "La grande vie" ("The Big Life" *LC* 85), and "Sextine du fleuve" ("River Sextine" *LC* 86-87). Especially grisly are *Treize chansons de l'amour noir* (2002), where depictions of death through suicide and murder include drowning, hanging, stabbing, and garroting, again suggesting that reenactment of violence through writing is an act of exorcism against the demons that haunt him.

20. The initial two lines of the sonnet's first quatrain, together with those of the first tercet, frame the rhymes of the first, ninth, and tenth lines—*rivière*, *involontaire*, *terre*—within the fatal triad of the river, the involuntary fault, and the earth, reinforcing the inexorable tragedy of the condemned poet's bleak wandering as an outcast not only from his own people but, more importantly for a poet, from language itself:

> Il aurait dû partir au fil de la rivière.
> N'en jamais revenir ou seulement noyé.
> [. . .]

Comment mieux réparer la faute involontaire
Qui lui valut d'errer sombre sur notre terre
Sans comprendre son sort ni la langue d'ici. (*LC* 82)

He should have left along the river.
Never to return or only drowned.
[. . .]
How better to repair the involuntary fault
That caused him to wander darkly on our earth
Without understanding his fate or the language of this place. (my trans)

21. Réda's work in jazz criticism includes *Une Civilisation du rythme* (2017), *L'Improviste, une lecture de jazz* (1990 and 2010), *Autobiographie du jazz* (2002), *Anthologie des musiciens de jazz* (1981), and collaboration on the *Dictionnaire du jazz* (2011). He has also authored numerous articles since 1963 in *Jazz Magazine*.

22. This passage is from the essay, "La Force de Bud Powell" ("The Force of Bud Powell"; my trans).

23. Perhaps writing this account in *Affranchissons-nous*, published in 1990, triggered Réda to further elaborate on his time in Hardricourt through Élisabethville, published in 1993.

24. Works where Janine appears include *La Tourne* (*ART* 169), *La Course* (77-78), and *Aller à* Élisabethville (92-99).

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ART *Amen, Récitatif, La tourne* [*Amen, Recitative, The Turn*]. Gallimard, 1988. (Originally published by Gallimard as *Amen* [1968], *Récitatif* [1970] and *La tourne* [1975].)

RP *Les Ruines de Paris* [*The Ruins of Paris*]. Gallimard, 1977.

HT *L'Herbe des talus* [*The Grass of the Slopes*]. Gallimard, 1984.

SM *Le Sens de la marche* [*The Direction of Movement*]. Gallimard, 1990.

I *L'Improviste, une lecture de jazz* [*The Improviser, A Jazz Reader*]. Gallimard, 1990, 2010.

AN *Affranchissons-nous* [*Let's Free Ourselves*]. Fata Morgana, 1990.

LU *Lettre sur l'univers* [*Letter on the Universe*]. Gallimard, 1991.

M *Aller aux mirabelles* [*Going to the Mirabelles*] Gallimard, 1991.

E *Aller à Élisabethville* [*Going to Élisabethville*]. Gallimard, 1993.

LR *La Liberté des rues* [*The Freedom of the Streets*]. Gallimard, 1997.

C *Le Citadin* [*The City Dweller*]. Gallimard, 1998.

LC *La Course* [*The Race*]. Gallimard, 1999.

AD *Aller au diable* [*Going to the Devil*]. Gallimard, 2002.

TC *Treize chansons de l'amour noir* [*Thirteen Songs of Black Love*]. Fata Morgana, 2002.

EU *Europes* [*Europes*]. Fata Morgana, 2005.

CR *Une civilisation du rythme* [*A Civilization of Rhythm*]. Buchet-Chastel, 2017.

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Europes. Translation and introduction by Aaron Prevots, Host, 2010.

The Mirabelle Pickers. Translation by Jennie Feldman, Anvil Press Poetry, 2012.

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« Ma langue est celle de la souffrance! » : La narration du trauma dans *Pagli* d'Ananda Devi

Andisheh Ghaderi

Et si je reviens…

…Ce sera pour leur porter le souffle de ma brûlure…

Ce nous fragile et multiplié, ce nous d'aile brûlées,

ce nous de miracles éteints,

ils ont voulu le murer sans jamais y parvenir

(*Pagli* 14)

Dans *Pagli*, Ananda Devi dépeint le trauma de la protagoniste féminine, Daya, qui, suite à un viol par son cousin et futur mari, se transforme peu à peu en Pagli – *la folle*. Le langage qu'elle déploie dans ce roman est fragmenté, alors que la narration, quant à elle, est instable et peu fiable, ce qui lui confère un statut non-normatif. Je propose que *Pagli* génère ce que Carla Harryman qualifie de « non/narration », puisque le roman « resist[s] narrative, reinvent[s] the structure of narration and perform[s] theoretical evaluations of the system of narration within the created world of their own design » (1). Harryman poursuit que ces textes « disturb categorical frames, foregrounding language such that narrative seems to disappear. They radically break rules of story-telling to stage a necessary disruption of asymmetrical power relations, the limits of knowledge, psychological and social operations of recognition and misrecognition […] (2). Le roman de Devi résiste à raconter l'histoire, car il se construit à partir des séquelles du traumatisme, d'où le constat que *Pagli* se présente comme un roman psychologique. L'auteure expérimente avec la structure des phrases et des chapitres, créant ainsi un langage du trauma et de la souffrance dans une narration non-linéaire. Ce désordre narratif suscite la confusion chez le lecteur tout comme le chevauchement du rêve et de la réalité.

Il se peut que ce soit une des raisons pour lesquelles le roman a été refusé par les maisons d'édition qui prétendaient notamment que *Pagli*

ne représentait pas suffisamment « [the characters'] minority status and 'difference' » (Waters 45). Selon Waters, « the lyrical, metaphorical style of her female-centered narratives, with their frequent disruptions, of grammar and syntax, echo many of the concerns and stylistic practices of exponents of 'écriture feminine'» (Ibid.). Waters ajoute qu'étant donné que ce roman offre un récit qui dépasse l'expérience habituelle des lecteurs occidentaux, il a été marginalisé parce que placé dans la série *Continents Noirs* chez Gallimard qu'on critique « for its perceived ghettoïsation of African francophone texts » (Ibid.). Le choix de Gallimard de mettre en avant l'aspect prétendument exotique du texte au lieu de la complexité du traumatisme camoufle le génie de Devi en tant qu'écrivaine.

Dans cet article, il s'agira d'analyser le langage et la narration afin d'exposer la métamorphose de la narratrice Daya, alors pleine de vie, à Pagli, femme morte-vivante et ostracisée par la société traditionnelle punitive. J'aurai également recours au concept de « lack of transference » proposé par Catherine Malabou qui explique comment le traumatisme subi dépossède les sujets traumatisés de leur capacité de raconter ce qu'ils ont vécu. Ensuite, je démontrerai dans quelle mesure ce traumatisme physique et psychique fait naître une narratrice peu fiable qui invente des personnages et des souvenirs pour exprimer sa douleur. Le lien étroit entre corps, douleur, langage et imagination est articulé par Elaine Scarry : « the story of expressing physical pain [ici le viol] eventually opens into the wider frame of invention. The elemental 'as if' of the person in pain ('It feels as if...'; 'It is as though...') will lead out into the array of counterfactual revisions entailed in the making.' (22). Enfin, à lumière des théories du trauma de Žižek, j'avance que l'auteure Ananda Devi dessine un avenir pour son île à partir du « death drive » de sa protagoniste transformée en morte-vivante. C'est alors la destruction du soi (et de son village) qui permettra ensuite de construire un monde meilleur.

L'hétéroglossie et la narration peu fiable

Dans *Pagli*, Devi recourt à l'hétéroglossie en employant plusieurs langues parlées à l'île Maurice. Le texte de Devi est écrit majoritairement en français, mais comprend aussi des mots en hindi et en créole comme « Pagli » et « Mofine ». Les titres des chapitres sont affichés en français suivis d'une traduction en créole mauricien comme « rencontre » et « zwen ». Cette traduction n'est pourtant pas toujours fidèle ainsi que l'illustre le chapitre « l'enfant effrité, Zanfan desire ». Pour Jeeveeta Soobarah-Agnihotri, ce procédé caractérise « la langue de folie »

ou « la folie de la langue » (176). Shoshana Felman, Martha Noel Evans, dans un ouvrage intitulé *Rhetoric and Madness*, explique que la rhétorique et la thématique s'engage dans une sorte de dynamique qui n'est ni symétrique ni diagonale et c'est cela qui crée un effet de folie dans le texte. Dans une narration non-fiable, les contradictions thématiques font que le lecteur pense qu'il y a une erreur de la part du narrateur:

> The narrator's mistake was precisely to believe that he was situated on the common axis of the rhetoric and the thematic of his madness. In fact, rhetoric and thematic do not work on the same axis, because they are situated on two radically different levels, they have no common axis. The relation that simultaneously links them and separates them is comparable to the relation Freud found to exist between the "dream-work" and the "waking thought"; between the two there is a "difference in nature", such that they cannot be compared. The "dream-work" (like rhetoric), does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself into giving things a new form [...]. In the same way, the elements that seem essential to the "content", to the thematic of a text, may be only secondary in the properly textual thought at work. What stands out as central in the content, very often is not; the specifically textual work, the rhetoricity of the text, is differently centered. (96)

Ananda Devi retrace la folie dans plusieurs axes. D'abord elle dote son texte du plurilinguisme qui serait autant le reflet de la société mauricienne que la preuve de la folie de Pagli. C'est à noter que, de façon plus générale, de l'écriture postcoloniale : « les romans postcoloniaux sont dans une situation de crise [...] de rupture, de cassure et la 'folie' décrit le mieux cet état des choses car, tout en voulant être génératrice du sens, elle se fait source de non-sens » (176). Pour donner un exemple concret, pendant la cérémonie de mariage avec son cousin/violeur, la narratrice prononce des vœux qui subvertissent les conventions d'un mariage traditionnel ; d'abord en créole, ensuite en français.

> Mais en versant le riz dans le feu, tête levée bien droite, je me suis mise à prononcer mes propres vœux :
>
> Mo priye u mo gagn kuraz dir non. Pu ki mo tuzur mazinn mo duler. Pu mo kapav get mo mari en fas e ki li lir mo laenn dans mo lizie. Mo priye pu mo pa swiv simen fam, simen mama, sime belmer [...]

> J'aurai toujours le courage de dire non. Je garderai en mémoire le souvenir de ma douleur. Je regarderai cet homme droit dans les yeux avec la certitude de ma haine. Je ne rejoindrai pas le chemin tracé de femme d'épouse de mère de belle-mère. (Devi 75)

L'emploie du future simple dans la traduction française « j'aurai toujours le courage de dire non » est affirmatif alors que la version en créole s'avère beaucoup plus atténuée, exprimant plutôt l'espoir de pouvoir agir d'une certaine manière : « Mo priye u mo gagn kuraz dir non » qui signifie « je prie que j'aurai le courage de dire non » mais qu'elle traduit comme « j'aurai toujours le courage [...] » (75). Cette traduction infidèle, rapproche le texte à ce que Freud- cité par Shoshana Felman, Martha Noel Evans - appelle « dream-work ». Les deux versions racontent deux narrations différentes d'un même thématique. Selon Freud, « the dream content and the 'dream-thought' (a mode of thought specific to sleep), are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. In and of themselves, the two languages could never understand or come in contact with one another: only the outside intervention of an *interpreter* can translate one into the other" (Felman, Evans 96). Donc, la réalité de son expérience traumatique peut être découverte entre les deux versions ou autrement dit parmi les lignes de contradiction et de non-sens thématique.

La situation de rupture et la source de « non-sens » évoqués par Soobarah-Agnihotri sont aussi révélateurs d'une autre stratégie d'écriture, celle de la narration peu fiable qui génère un ensemble d'histoires contradictoires inventées par la narratrice. Quoique le lecteur se voie confronté à une narration ambiguë et instable, elle s'avère être la transposition fiable d'un traumatisme profond. La narration et le langage chez Devi illustrent une condition psychologique que Catherine Malabou appelle « lack of transferrence », défini comme l'incapacité d'articuler et de communiquer, de manière compréhensible et cohérente, la souffrance subie par le sujet (252). En effet, la narration chez Devi se rapproche des récits des survivants des camps de concentration mis en scène par George Perec dans *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. Perec y reconstruit les souvenirs de son enfance dans un camp de concentration pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. Ces souvenirs relèvent tantôt de l'imaginaire tantôt de la réalité. La mise en page du roman reproduit d'ailleurs le récit dédoublé en utilisant deux types de police. Le narrateur est incapable de décrire son expérience telle quelle et invente, par conséquent, un univers dystopique régi par des règles cruelles. Le « W » symbolise deux « V » ou les deux « vies »

du narrateur : l'une autobiographique et l'autre fictive pour pouvoir surmonter le traumatisme qui a déconstruit le sujet. La tension entre les expériences vécues et fictives s'exprime donc par la forme et le fond.

Devi déploie un procédé similaire. Par exemple, à la fin du roman, dans un contexte « dream-work », lorsque les mofines emprisonnent Pagli et l'abandonnent à son sort, elle pense contrôler la pluie et pouvoir détruire ceux qui lui ont fait du tort. Qui plus est, elle est convaincue de pouvoir s'échapper de sa prison. Elle dit à Mitsy : « ils ne m'ont pas laissée sortir, je me suis échappée, lui dis-je. Je ne lui explique pas que je peux passer entre les barreaux… » (18). Quoiqu'emprisonnée, Pagli est capable de se transformer en vent et de sortir de sa prison – si l'on croit son récit. Dans son désespoir et sa rage, la protagoniste s'imagine des alliés dans la nature même :

> Et ils arrivent. ils arrivent, car moi aussi j'ai des alliés dans le temps, dans le climat et dans l'espace, croyez-vous avoir le dessus, si facilement, si simplement, non, je peux appeler ces cyclons qui me ressemblent, d'ailleurs c'est en moi qu'ils se forment en premier, je les nourris et les concentre dans mon ventre puisqu'il n'y a rien d'autre dedans (pas de toi qui attends de naître et de t'émerveiller devant le miracle de la vie), et puis je les accouche et ils s'envolent vers les nuages qu'ils chargent de colère. (122)

Plus Pagli s'approche de la fin de sa vie, plus la narration devient floue et l'imagination se substitue à la réalité. Dans les mots de Malabou, Pagli « profoundly modifies the vision and the content of the past itself. It creates another history, a past which doesn't exist » (252). Le fait qu'elle raconte sa propre mort provoque une certaine insécurité chez le lecteur qui se demande si le récit lui parvient d'outre-tombe.

La question de la fiabilité de la narratrice et de ses souvenirs se pose également par rapport au personnage Zil dont Pagli est amoureuse. « Zil » est le mot pour « île » en créole. Zil est une force qui habite Pagli : « je me cache le visage pour qu'ils ne te voient pas en moi » (13). Il est tout à fait possible qu'il s'agisse d'un personnage chimérique, car Pagli avoue elle-même : « Je t'ai créé de toutes pièces par la force de mon imagination » (83). Pagli se croit mariée à Zil le jour où il l'a touchée : « je t'ai épousé une nuit de nouvelle lune quand pour la première fois tu m'as touchée ? Je suis née et je t'ai épousé en même temps » (72). Or, elle met un point d'interrogation après « touchée », questionnant de la sorte la véracité de son propre énoncé. D'ailleurs, le livre se compose de deux parties principales intitulées « Pagli » et « Zil ». Si la partie « Pagli » explique le processus à travers lequel la société

transforme une adolescente innocente à une femme rebelle et folle, la deuxième partie, « Zil » serait, par parallélisme, l'imagination de cette femme rebelle qui aspire à être libre et aimée d'un homme qui n'est pas complice de la société oppressive. Tandis que les chapitres de la partie « Pagli » s'associent à la mort, les chapitres de la partie « Zil » sont porteurs d'espoir et de vie tel que l'indiquent les titres « aube » et « la vie ». Ces deux parties - Zil et Pagli - sont suivies d'un chapitre-clé qui s'intitule « l'enfant effrité, Zanfan desire ». Ce chapitre raconte l'histoire de l'avortement de Mitsy, un secret qui a réuni ces deux femmes : « c'est devenu mon histoire aussi et nous avons été réunies par ce secret » (95). Toutefois, la protagoniste ajoute juste après que « je ne sais plus où est la vérité. Si ce soir a existé ou si ma mémoire l'a créé de toutes pièces » (95).

Le plurilinguisme ainsi que la non-narration--c'est-à-dire l'impossibilité de raconter une histoire telle qu'elle a été vécue--sont ici symptomatiques d'un traumatisme qui, ensuite, pousse le sujet féminin à se révolter. Il faut se demander si la vengeance dans *Pagli* est une expérience vécue ou le fruit d'un monde psychologique « déconstruit » - « unmade » selon Scarry - à la suite du traumatisme subi par la protagoniste. Scarry explique que la psyché humaine évacue la douleur en déconstruisant le monde du sujet et le souvenir de cette douleur (70). C'est en effet cette douleur indicible qui pousse la narratrice à déployer un langage de folie et d'inventer des souvenirs non-vécus. Ce langage métamorphosé lui permet de verbaliser son traumatisme et d'y survivre.

Le traumatisme : la métamorphose de Daya à Pagli

Julia Effertz remarque que *Pagli* raconte la colère de la femme soumise vis-à-vis de la violence patriarcale à Terre Rouge : « dans le roman, Devi met en scène un environnement hostile et ambivalent qui s'autogénère et s'autodétruit à travers et par la violence. Terre Rouge, lieu-dit où l'action se déroule dans une atmosphère violente dictée par les traditions, est décrit dans un style à la fois poétique et violent, mettant bien en évidence une violence rougeâtre latente et mal supprimée qui soustendra tout le roman » (73). Le traumatisme se manifeste à la fois dans l'intrigue du roman et dans sa forme. Pagli, qui signifie « la folle » en hindi, devient le pseudonyme du personnage principal féminin, Daya. Le nom Pagli est donné à Daya le jour où elle reçoit une mendiante à la maison - un comportement qui va à l'encontre des traditions et codes sociaux de sa belle-famille qui lui donne donc un nouveau nom. Il est important de noter que Pagli adopte et assume ce nom dès le départ

: « une *Pagli*, une folle, oui, pourquoi pas ? Ils m'ont donné ce nom et je le prends, parce que je le suis » (Soobarah-Agnihotri 13). Le lecteur n'est pas tout de suite mis au courant de l'histoire qui se cache derrière la métamorphose de Daya en Pagli. Ce n'est qu'à la page 51 que la narratrice dévoile, dans le chapitre « noir », la source de l'obscurité qui pèse sur elle. Il s'agit d'un viol subi à l'âge de treize ans par son cousin et futur mari : « Le viol a eu lieu un jour où il est chez nous en congé » (51). La violence de cet homme met fin à son enfance.

Dans son analyse de *Pagli*, Geoffrey Hartman s'appuie sur la définition freudienne de traumatisme : « an event that is overwhelming penetrates the shield of the psyche. We either do not have time to prepare for it or whatever receptive capacities (or defenses) are in place, prove inadequate. Trauma results from an experience that lodges in a person without having been experienced, that is, without having fully passed into consciousness or stayed there. It is a 'foreign body' (Fremdkörper) in the psyche [. . .]. Unintegrated, it gives off strange signals » (257). Le traumatisme ne constitue pas un moment bien circonscrit mais plutôt un processus qui vise, et échoue, à intégrer ce moment dans la vie du sujet. Slavoj Žižek, quant à lui, explique que « the victim as it were survives its own death: all different forms of traumatic encounters, independently of their specific nature (social, natural, biological, symbolic), lead to the same result – a new subject emerges that survives its own death, the death (erasure) of its symbolic identity » (127). Par conséquent, le sujet est face à une étape radicalement différente de sa vie. La narratrice fait allusion à cette condition suivant l'événement traumatisant : « j'y suis entrée une fois [dans le noir] et je n'en suis plus ressortie. Je ne l'ai jamais oublié. Le souvenir est en moi comme un fœtus brulant » (Devi 51). Elle garde le souvenir du viol et l'utilise pour se révolter contre une société rigide, sclérosée et oppressante.

Malabou propose le terme de « lack of transferrence » pour décrire l'état psychique du sujet qui rend l'articulation du traumatisme incompréhensible pour autrui. En référence à Malabou, Žižek écrit « such violent intrusions resist any interpretation, that '*all hermeneutics is impossible*' [because] the trauma remains external to the field of sense, it cannot be integrated into it as a mere deterrent that triggers the resuscitation of a latent psychic trauma » (128, je souligne). Žižek donne l'exemple des survivants des camps de concentration pour illustrer ce phénomène. Il décrit une soirée pendant laquelle le survivant d'un camp essaie de raconter son expérience. Il n'arrive pas à s'exprimer ce qui fait que son interlocuteur finit par quitter la pièce.

Dans *Pagli*, c'est alors le traumatisme issu du viol qui fait émerger l'intrigue de *Pagli* et déclenche la métamorphose. Elaine Scarry argue que la douleur et la violence corporelle amènent les sujets à déconstru-

ire le monde (« unmaking ») pour ensuite le reconstruire différemment (« making »). Ce processus est bien décrit par la narratrice : « il ferme la porte, n'allume pas la lumière, nous sommes dans le noir » (53). La narratrice emploie le présent comme si elle revivait toujours cet événement du passé. Or, la souffrance la prive de la capacité de « transférer » cette expérience : « ce n'est pas la peine de raconter ce qui se passe ensuite. Il n'est pas possible de raconter ce qui se passe ensuite » (53). Selon Scarry, la douleur efface le langage. Elle s'appuie sur l'exemple de la torture : « Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it » (3-4).

Dans *Pagli*, le « unmaking of the subject », sa déconstruction et puis restauration (métamorphose), se révèlent dans la scène qui suit le viol : « on n'entendrait qu'un petit cri mince sortant de ces pages qui se transformerait en un chant, en une voix d'enfant totalement perdue, totalement orpheline. Et dont la douleur contenue et incomprise deviendrait vite insupportable » (53). La transformation du crie en un chant écrit dans un livre est, à son tour, une évacuation de fait traumatisant. Dorénavant, le remplacement de cri par chant est une autre déconstruction du monde de sujet qui sert à raconter le non-racontable. L'incapacité d'articuler le traumatisme se repend à travers le roman entier, jusqu'à la fin. Tout est fragmenté - les scènes, les événements, les phrases et la narration. Cette écriture fragmentée et le langage poétique du texte de Devi se manifestent avant tout dans le chapitre final « l'océan » dans lequel Pagli imagine l'avenir des habitants de l'île Maurice. La ponctuation demeure minimale et les phrases inachevées : « brisure salée sur ma bouche, embrun de glace et de mystère. Ombre ombre ombre » (153). Cette même déconstruction du langage et de la grammaire s'impose lorsque Pagli se confie à Zil : « je ne peux t'écrire que comme un poème sans rime et sans ponctuation parce que tu dépasses tout cela tu es mon miroir dans lequel je me vois belle » (83).

La démarche artistique dans *Pagli* ressemble à ce que Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo désigne d'« écriture de folie ». Elle définit ce terme en donnant l'exemple du *Journal d'une vieille folle* d'Umar Timol où « un homme devenu un monstre un jour d'apocalypse [...] veut refouler toute forme d'humanité de lui-même pour retrouver sa part bestiale. Rejetant en effet l'incapacité de cette humanité à vivre en concorde avec les aspirations de ce qu'elle pense être son âme et son esprit, l'homme s'épuise en volonté autodestructrice. » (201). *Pagli* met notamment en scène deux leitmotivs de l'écriture de folie, à savoir l'apocalypse sous forme de désastres naturels et la zooanthropie (thérianthropie) qui désigne la transformation d'un être humain en bête sauvage enrage qui galope en apportant le vent dans son île natale. A la fin du roman, Pagli, la femme enragée et emprisonnée se transforme

en cyclone qui détruit tout dans son sillage. En outre, Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo mentionne le choix d'Umar Timol d'écrire « entre poésie et roman, dans les formes d'une poésie en prose » (201). La généricité indisciplinée et incertaine que l'on retrouve également dans *Pagli* reflète la situation psychologique du sujet traumatisé.

Pagli en « death drive », un état psychologique

Suite à son viol, Daya éprouve une mort subjective qui est selon Žižek une mort psychologique et pas physique. L'expérience de la mort se double d'une trace olfactive persistante : « lorsque la porte est refermée, une chose horrible m'est entrée dans les narines. Une odeur de cadavre qui s'est accrochée à moi, dont je pensais ne plus pouvoir me débarrasser » (54). L'histoire de Daya/Pagli, le champ lexical de la mort (« cadavre », « cendre », « ombre ») et le leitmotiv du roman en général, qui est la folie, m'amènent à proposer une lecture à la lumière du concept de « death drive » introduit par Slavoj Žižek : « When a human subject falls victim to a traumatic intrusion, the outcome is the empty form of the 'living-dead' subject ... » (312). Le traumatisme brise le sujet qui est désormais aliéné de lui-même, vidé de sa substance. Cette mort suscitée par le traumatisme est dépeinte dans *Pagli* quand, à la suite du viol, la narratrice révèle qu'elle se sent tantôt désincarnée : « mon petit corps n'a pas de poids » (65), tantôt déconnectée d'elle-même, « je ne suis qu'un corps en attente » (83) ; comme si elle est entrée dans une sorte de purgatoire, voire un état de suspension.

Selon Žižek, ce nouveau sujet qui survit au traumatisme « is less a form of life than a form of death » (296). Dans le roman de Devi, la protagoniste Daya annonce la naissance d'une subjectivité morte-vivante qui adopte alors le nom de Pagli : « c'est ainsi que je suis née un jour de violence et de cendres » (55). Cette femme traitée de folle, Pagli, ne ressemble plus à l'adolescente Daya pleine de vie : « je suis devenue un être aux yeux éteints » (56). Selon Malabou, Pagli peut être considérée comme « another self which is affected, a 'new' self, founded in misrecognition. » (235). Quoiqu'elle ne reconnaisse pas cette nouvelle femme en elle, la narratrice l'accepte pourtant avec indifférence : « Pagli, pourquoi pas ? » (53). La protagoniste se croit une ombre, voire une présence absente : « [Mitsy] a fini de me malaxer. Elle s'est assurée que c'est moi, car elle sait que les ombres peuvent prendre tous visages » (18).

Pagli commence à voir le reflet de son malheur dans les yeux des autres femmes : « je suis entrée en moi-même et je ne suis plus sortie, sauf pour regarder les gens en face et pour voir en eux le manque de

courage » (54). Ce manque de courage que le personnage aperçoit chez les autres fait de son expérience une narration collective, car toutes les femmes ressemblent à des mortes-vivantes. Pagli passe les années de son adolescence chez une vielle femme qui lui raconte le malheur des femmes à Terre Rouge : « j'ai accepté d'entrer dans la douleur promise par la vieille tatouée qui m'a élevée » (55). Cette vielle femme lui dévoile, en créole, la vérité sur les mofines : « leur âme est une tombe [...] leurs vies étriquées ne verront jamais les horizons plus larges, ne verront jamais la grandeur des voiles sur l'eau » (55). Elle n'est pas la seule femme dont la vie est marquée par la rage, la vengeance, et la douleur : « [les mofines] elles apparaissent avec leurs grandes ailes déployées et leur rage » (18). Ces femmes qui garantissent la mise en pratique et la perpétuation des traditions patriarcales sont, elles aussi, des mortes-vivantes.

Selon Soobarah-Agnihotri, « [l]es mofines dans Pagli sont en suspens entre les deux mondes - elles ont un aspect réel dans les femmes de la maison en *Sucre glace*, et en même temps elles sont des présences invisibles planant sur le village » (182). Ananda Devi, quant à elle, décrit ce phénomène ainsi : « Je ne sais pas trop comment expliquer ce mélange. II revient également dans mon prochain roman, *Soupir*, ou le narrateur dit à un moment donné que les esprits qui les entourent leur semblent plus réels que les gens vivants. La frontière entre ces deux mondes devient de plus en plus floue. » (182). Pagli se distancie de tout ce qui représentent les mofines – raison pour laquelle elle est qualifiée de folle. Pagli est, dorénavant, en désharmonie avec son milieu. Par exemple, elle invite une mendiante chez elle et la fait boire dans le verre qui appartient au chef de la famille. Daya, la protagoniste révoltée, fait basculer le plateau des épices. C'est à ce moment précis qu'on la rebaptise Pagli. En regardant les graines tomber par terre, sa révolte prend une forme symbolique. Pagli dessine son visage et celui de Zil avec les épices. Qui plus est, les graines de cumin et de coriandre qui tombent, une par une, du plateau en métal représentent la révolte et la libération des femmes enfermées dans la cage des traditions. Il est important de noter que le mot « kay » en créole fait référence à « cage » ainsi qu'à « maison », telle la maison en sucre glace. Pagli libère les graines du plateau parce qu'elles n'ont de raison d'être que pour « parfumer la bouche vide des hommes » (48). Après cet acte de rébellion, les mofines menacent de la « faire prendre par les infirmiers et de [la] mettre à l'asile » (49). Pour elle, cet asile est une récompense plutôt qu'une punition parce qu'elle la comprend comme « à Zil ». Ce jeu de mot fait référence à l'homme dont elle est amoureuse.

Pagli devient cette graine qui tombe du plateau du métal. Sans remords, elle refuse la condition d'une femme soumise aux traditions. Un

aspect de la vie traditionnelle dont elle fait abstraction est sa responsabilité matrimoniale et maternelle. Elle ne donne naissance à aucun enfant et participe à l'avortement de Mitsy. Pagli, en tant que femme mariée, ne veut pas être la graine qui parfume la bouche vide d'un homme, c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne cherche pas le plaisir charnel auprès de son mari. Žižek écrit à ce sujet que « [t]his subject lives death as a form of life—his or her life is the death drive embodied, a life deprived of erotic engagement » (294). Après la cérémonie de mariage, elle défie son mari en lui montrant son corps pour ensuite le lui refuser à jamais : « voilà le corps que tu ne toucheras plus » (77). Elle refuse tout engagement érotique à son mari, et par conséquence, à elle-même, car ce corps est mort pour les deux protagonistes, à la suite de ce trauma qui le prive de cette fonctionnalité physique et naturelle.

La conclusion

Pour Pagli, l'idée de liberté est associée aux îles « Agaléga » qui font partie de la République de Maurice et où règnent l'amour et la nature : « la beauté des îles n'a d'égal que leur fragilité » (71). Là-bas, les gens sont différents : « ils sont habitués à avoir du bleu au cœur. Ils ne ferment pas leur portes le soir. Ils écoutent les oiseaux … » (72). Le chapitre « Agalega » précède celui du mariage avec son bourreau et, ce faisant, éclaire le comportement de Pagli qui l'amène à la désobéissance conjugale. La relation entre Pagli et Zil ne peut pas exister dans la société traditionnelle de Terre Rouge où l'amour n'est pas à l'origine du mariage et où la population hindoue demeure largement endogame. Rappelons que Zil est créole, c'est-à-dire de descendance africaine. Damlé explique que le choix narratif de Devi permet à l'écrivaine de raconter ce que les Mauriciens vivent à l'île Maurice : « Devi's metamorphic protagonists are intricately and subtly bound up with the political layerings and divisions of postcolonial Mauritian society » (497).

Malgré la mort de Daya/Pagli demeure l'espoir que Zil va reconstruire l'île, transformer la société, pour un meilleur avenir. Depuis sa tombe/cage, Pagli l'observe, ou s'imagine de l'observer : « il enlève une vielle femme d'une tombe de boue, il la porte sur ses épaules vers un lieu de refuge, puis il retourne chercher un enfant oublié … et il va se mettre à rebâtir Terre Rouge » (155). Ce rêve de la narratrice dépasse le simple contexte d'une vie individuelle et révèle des préoccupations concernant la société mauricienne dans son ensemble.

Pagli, plus que l'histoire d'un destin individuel, se veut aussi une critique de la situation féminine à Maurice en général. Devi met ainsi

en scène la femme mauricienne tantôt victime des traditions tantôt complice (les mofines). Erica Johnson argumente que

> [By] revealing women's willingness to use shame as a weapon against other women, Devi not only unveils how shame works as the subtext to cultural practices that regulate female conduct but also inaugurates an alternative model of female empowerment which lays claim to a larger sociocultural milieu than that circumscribed by Hindu customs. Through the trajectory of the eponymous heroine, the author unburdens the Indo-Mauritian female body of its historical allegiance to Mother India and brings her into an embodied subjectivity. (212)

Devi recourt à la non-hétéronormativité afin d'établir la relation de Pagli et Mitsy comme une force de résistance vis-à-vis d'une société qui les repoussent. Lorsque Pagli se retrouve avec Mitsy, le champ lexical se construit autour de la solidarité et de la tendresse : « lorsque Mitsy me pousse doucement dans son lit, c'est comme si des bras de sommeil se tendaient vers moi et m'enlaçaient voluptueusement, et je dors, d'un coup, comme ça, sans prévenir, parce que, pour une fois, je suis moi. » (Devi, 2001 : 19). Elle poursuit que « je ne sais même pas à quel moment Mitsy a commencé à caresser mon corps. Elle a lentement enlevé mes habits usés, déchirés par endroits, et les a jetés par terre comme un tas de chiffons répugnant [...] puis sa main s'est mise à voguer sur mon corps, rugueuse et sans but particulier, seulement très féminine. Elle m'a caressée comme seules les femmes savent le faire, sans heurter ... » (Devi, 2001 : 21). C'est ainsi que Daya imagine un avenir féminin sans aucun heurtement patriarchal ; un avenir qui enlevant les habits usés de traditions et de violence répands la tendresse sur l'île.

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Who Is the Monster Here? Community, Disability, and Violence in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) and Horacio Quiroga's "The Decapitated Chicken" (1917)

Ashley Bruder and Bridgette W. Gunnels

"Friends, she was once a beautiful woman . . ." who has become "the most amazing, the most astounding living monstrosity of all time," so the carnival barker warns the public in the introduction of Tod Browning's black and white film, *Freaks* (1932), as the frame pans around to show carnival goers looking down into a pen, their faces twisting in horror, some screaming. Browning immerses viewers immediately into the lives of the circus sideshow, the community of disabled who defend and protect their own to the death in this film, with strict and loving adherence to the "code of the freaks" (film dialogue). *Freaks,* one of Browning's first films after the successful direction of Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931), was a critical failure and personal relations disaster for its studio, MGM, mainly for the unconventional use of verified circus show "freaks" as actors, as well as for the very candid display of disability and violence. Film viewers are immediately introduced into an ambiguous emotional space of compassion and disgust, not knowing where or how to interpret reactions that lead us to either emotion. Meanwhile, in Latin America, turn-of-the-century naturalism, tinged with some horror and death, surged as Uruguay's Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937) published his first stories, including "The Decapitated Chicken" ("La gallina degollada" 1917). A tale of physical disability, loss, and family, the final violent climax of that story leaves readers reeling and yet back in the same emotional space that Browning's work develops, not knowing where to direct anger or disgust and ultimately questioning, who is the monster here?

The comparative analysis of these two texts points to how each of the structured narratives constructs the family within the parameters of normal/abnormal, abled/disabled, and love/hatred, all within the context of turn-of-the-century poetics and production. Both texts (HQ and Browning) encourage readers and viewers to evaluate the nature of

monsters, and the slippage between physical "normalcy" and psychological monstrosity. This study will examine how each text constructs frameworks of difference in explicit terms of disability, that then relate to the development, movement, and maintenance of community within each text. Finally, particular analysis and careful comparison of the climactic final scenes of each, in which violence and death yank readers and viewers out of ambivalence toward the freaks or disabled and project a message about family and community, allows for a new approach to Quiroga's work and an innovative, comparative approach to these two texts. The jump from short story to early film, *sonora* in Spanish, "talkies" in English, is not as far as one would imagine. Quiroga was a documented fan of silent films and even included as muses some of the more celebrated Hollywood film stars in short stories for the collection, *Más allá* (1935). Even more, the use of the short story as a prototype screenplay for early films is well documented, and Quiroga's own body of work reflects this trend[2], although the film version of "The Decapitated Chicken" never made it (Jitrik 46). *Freaks* itself was based on a short story, "Spurs," written by Tod Robbins.

On the surface, *Freaks* tells the story of circus life through the eyes of the circus sideshow. Hans, the midget, falls in love with the alluring and able-bodied trapeze artist Cleopatra, who fakes love and contracts marriage with Hans when she finds out that he is rumored to be the inheritor of a large sum of money. Cleo schemes with her lover, the strongman Hercules, to murder Hans and run away with his fortune. The community of *freaks* realizes this and the (melo)drama unfolds around keeping Hans safe from the able-bodied (the "normal") monsters, with the help of the community of both able-bodied (Venus[3], Phroso) and disabled sideshow performers. Ultimately the emasculation of Hercules and the disfigurement of Cleo (she is disfigured into a simulacrum of a "chicken woman" with wings for arms) at the hands of the disabled leave the audience in shock, or satisfaction, depending on the emotional empathetic sway of viewers.

Quiroga's story follows a similar path. The young, traditional marriage between Berta and Manzini endures the birth of four successive boys, each of whom suffers a lapse into mental and physical disability at the onset of a congenital disease around fourteen months of age. When a female child arrives, she is in perfect form and lives to the age of five without issue, to the thrill of her parents. The climactic ending has the four neglected boys brutally decapitating their sister in the kitchen in imitation of the act performed earlier by a servant preparing a chicken[4]. The story ends with the visual of the young couple embracing in the doorway to the kitchen, with a pool of their daughter's blood in the background.

Historical Approaches to Browning and Quiroga

"The Decapitated Chicken" was initially published in Spanish in the magazine, *Caras y Caretas* (Buenos Aires) in 1894, and then again in 1909 within *Cuentos de amor, locura, y muerte*. Quiroga's early style and form was influenced by the work of Edgar Allen Poe, Maupassant, and Rudyard Kipling, as his first work were stories of horror and the macabre (Jitrik, Fleming). The violence and death seen in much of Quiroga's work is consistent, but the horror and starkness of "La gallina degollada" is unique as it employs the use of children as agents of violence.

Freaks was a disaster for Browning's career. Although now recognized as an accomplished example of baroque theatre, the reception at the time was immediately negative, with the worst of the effects being the nearly thirty-year ban in Britain, alongside heavy editing (nearly half the original footage was cut) and censoring from MGM (Skal and Svada 163-164). Browning chose to employ actual disabled "sideshow freaks" as principal actors in the film, creating a unique (at that time) voyeuristic view into ordinary life of the sideshow that some later interpreted as breaks through the fourth wall, by inviting the audience into the lives of the characters with direct address. The violence and disturbing content was censored and *Freaks* remains a relatively "undertheorized film" (Herzogenrath 1) that avoids categorization directly. Imagined first as a horror film, later consideration of the eventual content and form moved the film in later years into more "art house, and finally, documentary" formats due to the use of "real freaks" (Herzogenrath 1).

John Thomas's 1964 review of *Freaks* in *Film Quarterly* provides a worthwhile point of historical reference for the reception and interpretation of the film during the 60s in the U.S. In contrast to earlier appraisals of the film, Thomas both recognizes the work as "in its own way, a minor masterpiece" and, critically, adopts a view of the film as something outside of the traditional horror film or monster movie (Larsen and Haller 167; Thomas 59). Thomas highlights the film's underlying impetus to identify with the "freaks" against the cruelty of the "normal" characters and acknowledges the tension between Browning's portrayal of the titular characters as simultaneously sympathetic and horrific (Thomas 59). This analysis aims to supplement Thomas's analysis, and those similar to it, by putting forward a novel reading of *Freaks* with respect to its construction of disability through placing it in conversation with "The Decapitated Chicken" and highlighting other (less studied) elements of the film.

Understanding how and why something or someone is coded as "freakish," "other," or "monstrous" is critical to the comparative analysis of these two sets of communities in both texts. Quiroga's short story and Browning's film seem to part from a similar baseline, still held today in some ways, that most non-normative determinations are couched in the implicit idea that biological wholeness is the desired or expected, and those who fall in the camp of non-normativity are likewise different in terms of psychologies and emotional sets. *Freaks* simultaneously pushed back on this idea while exploiting the community, while Quiroga's take is a more subtle critique, but we argue here that both intend for readers to ask the question(s) that McRoy and Crucianelli ponder: "In what ways is 'freakishness' construed socially, culturally, and visually? Does 'other' ness reside in the object being perceived or in the narrative and spectacular economy that informs the processes of perfection itself? Is it possible to not be a freak?" (257).

What is a Monster?

Quiroga's description of the "four idiot boys" of the Mazzini family is characteristically sparse and direct: "All day long the four idiot sons of the couple Mazzini-Ferraz sat on a bench in the patio. Their tongues protruded from between their lips; their eyes were dull; their mouths hung open as they turned their heads" (57). The physical description highlighting their outward disabilities as the initial marker of otherness forms the first introduction to the unlikely agents of violence. The male children of the family are all initially born in good health to the happy couple, as this description of the first child demonstrates: "The child prospered, beautiful, radiant, for a year and a half" before the onset of a congenital defect appears in the twentieth month of life (57). The birth of a second son saw the pattern repeat: "A son was born, and his health and the clarity of his laughter rekindled their extinguished hopes," only to experience the same fate at eighteen months of age (59). As each successive boy is born, only to develop later the same congenital condition, Quiroga shines a light on the deterioration of the family unit, namely, the relationship between the husband and wife. But embedded as well is the subtle critique of understanding otherness in terms of physical ability and outward appearance. Other descriptions of the children highlight the physical disability that sets them apart from "normal" children, as the story notes at one point, "They [the parents] no longer asked for beauty and intelligence as for the first born–only a son, a son like any other!" (59).

The trajectory of the family's experience with disability and ability is founded on Quiroga's words above, "a son like any other!" and the connection between "otherness" and "abnormality" and eventual violence begins to solidify with typical Quiroga pacing, bit by bit, as readers experience the devolution of the marriage, alongside the building of suspense and unease. Critics highlight the egoism of the young couple as a calling card, the incessant need to keep trying to improve whatever biological "wrongs" happen with their sons with a biological "right," as Holland notes that the young parents are "undeterred by their mistake, that is, swayed by their desire to deny difference" (67) in the quest to deliver a biological child that is not eventually marked by its disability or deformity.

While not explicitly stated, the four boys in Quiroga do not leave their house, and their bench on the patio is the main setting for the story. The daily routine of the boys is addressed only after the parents' marriage begins to break down, and the care for the children begins to suffer. The dialogue shows how the psychological labor begins to weigh on the parents in terms of guilt and blame, in that each begins to search for understanding and answers as to why they can't seem to produce a "normal" child. It starts with the use of pronouns:

> "It seems to me," Mazzini, who had just come in and was washing his hands, said to Berta, "that *you* could keep the boys cleaner."
> As if she hadn't heard him, Berta continued reading.
> "It's the first time," she replied after a pause, "I've seen you concerned about the condition of *your* sons."
> Mazzini turned his head toward her with a forced smile.
> "*Our* sons, I think." (author emphasis, 60)

The condition of the marriage is deteriorating; the union is a victim of suspicions and blame between the two parents: whose genetic faults created this "abnormality"? The textual economy prevalent in Quiroga's work allows readers to pick up cues that begin to foreshadow the eventual violence and death, but for the most part the first half of the story centers on the children and their lives as disabled. Empathy, compassion, or understanding on the part of the parents for the condition of the boys begin to wane, as the text confirms that while Mazzini's efforts to love the boys are "redoubled" (50) after the first birth, with each successive birth and decline the chore of caring for the boys proves too hard, and the breakdown of the family community begins. As the story progresses, but most especially after the birth of able-bodied Bertita, readers become spectators of the verbal, emotional, and physical abuse

of the idiot boys by parents who by now have finally achieved the goal of producing a genetically perfect child. In short, the able-bodied characters begin to embody psychological monstrosity, similar to the case in *Freaks*.

Freaks actively incorporates language that isolates and highlights difference and associates the disabled with the infantile, thus setting up the final violent end as unsettling and traumatic to readers and viewers, producing a level of "cultural anxiety" (McCroy 263) as the bodies in the film are transformed into "representations of the disabled body" that later "become the 'voyeuristic property of the non-disabled gaze'" (Hevey qtd. in McCroy 263). Readers and viewers are shocked to witness the violence enacted by the disabled in both texts, both in the case of the act of murder by the four boys and the calculated bodily revenge exacted on Cleo and Hercules by the sideshow community.

Contrarily, Quiroga's portrayal of disability is focused more on the effects that it has on the family initially, and its environs. Quiroga's four disabled boys don't go out of the house; they stay in their patio and have a caregiver who manages them once Bertita arrives. The economy of words creates the emotional space that allows for the descriptions of the able-bodied parents to evoke strong emotions on the part of the readers; readers interpret the narrator's tone of judgement about the way the parents respond to their disabled boys in private. For example, the able-bodied mother, Berta, reacts with disgust at the thought of caring for her disabled children once the able-bodied Bertita arrives, "[a]lthough even in the later years Berta had continued to care for the four boys, after Bertita's birth she virtually ignored the other children. The very thought of them horrified her, like the memory of something atrocious she had been forced to perform" (61).

In this example, the binary associated with able-bodiedness is inverted, whereby the whole parents of the four boys begin to show malignant characteristics, infections that begin to make the household a segregated space where the boys remain on the patio, out of sight, with a servant caregiver, while Mazzini and Berta live a public life with their daughter in the rooms of the home, in the city, and its environs. This spatial divide eventually provides the scene of the climactic death of Bertita, who attracts the boys' attention while attempting to climb the patio wall. For readers this is active psychological and emotional labor, moving the needle towards empathy in one direction or the other. Are readers naturally inclined to empathize with the parents, who have this heavy load? Or does empathy sway toward the abused boys, which leads readers to be more permissive of their (the boys') violence?

This same inversion is seen in the juxtaposition of the able-bodied characters of *Freaks*, Cleo and Hercules, as the embodiment of able-

bodied monsters. Even though the violent ending of the film would support the traditional approach of abnormal psychology as linked to latent violence, the difference between the two texts here is found in the intentionality of the violence, and the question of motive or revenge. It's important to highlight how *Freaks* introduces the key actors to viewers as childlike in behaviors, thus setting up the otherness of this group as something that is physical as well as psychological. As found in extradiagetic documents and promotional materials of the film: "its advertisements proclaimed that *Freaks* starred 'humans and half-humans' and that the film itself was a 'mystery drama [set] behind the scenes in a sideshow with strange and grotesque freaks and monstrosities playing principal roles" (Norden 88). With the film using vocabulary in advertising that undergirds otherness, "the strange and grotesque freaks and monstrosities" mentioned in the press book, not to mention the distinction of "human" and "half human" as characterizations, it delivers a more directed consideration of otherness, as viewers are primed to feel and interpret what will be seen from the start as something contrary to "normal," just like in "The Decapitated Chicken." There are moments that highlight a contrary view, however, and seem to destabilize the momentum in a film that wants viewers to align disability and abnormality with terror and violence. Mary Russo points out that the disabled community in *Freaks* is a model of tolerance but only up to a point; when someone tries to exploit one of them, their transformation from "children" to cold-blooded killers and mutilators is swift, unexpected, and chilling (Norden 92).

Early in *Freaks,* the matron of the sideshow, Madame Tetrallini, takes the group to enjoy the sunshine by a lake. Audiences are first introduced to the disabled characters here: the pinheads Zip (actor Elvira Snow), Pip (actor Jenny Lee Snow), and Schlitzie (as herself); "Half Boy" Johnny, who moves forward with the use of his arms because the lower half of his body is missing; Skeleton Man (Peter Robinson); a dwarf, Angelo Rossitto; and finally Randian, the "Living Torso," who has a trunk and a head only. In the scene, two passersby are shocked to see the group playing, and the dialogue reveals the bitter psychology inherent: "a lot of horrible, twisted things, crawling, whining, globbering . . . There must be a law in France to smother such things at birth, or lock them up." Madame Tetrallini decries this judgement, as these are humans under her care, and to her they are "as children." Viewers and readers are not programmed to expect violence from children, even adults who are developmentally cast as child-like due to disability. The formulation of otherness in these two texts is directly related to the development and maintenance of community and collective action based on an identified danger (in the case of *Freaks*, the able-bodied Cleo and

Hercules; in "The Decapitated Chicken," the able-bodied Bertita). To understand the violence committed in the climax of each, it's helpful to understand the community developed within each text. The context of birth in both texts and the feast scene in *Freaks* offer ways to view the complexity of otherness as developed.

As studied earlier in this essay, Quiroga's four boys are born sound in body yet develop the congenital defects later. The short story format allows for tension to build around each successive birth, which brings new hope to the couple, only to have hopes dashed at the moment of onset of the disease. In *Freaks*, a similar event is witnessed when the Bearded Lady gives birth. The differences can't be more stark. As the news passes through the circus that the birth has arrived, the sideshow community members all visit the bedside and look upon the newborn. Phroso, the able-bodied clown, drives this scene, as he and Half Boy Johnny proceed to the Bearded Lady's trailer, whereby Frances, the armless lady, pulls back the blanket with her feet, and Phroso sings, "Ah look at it! What is it? A girl!" Phroso then replies, "And she's gonna have a beard!" –the community around this very brief exchange highlights directly the difference between able-bodiness and disability in this film. The different vignettes that comprise the film seem to want to show life behind the scenes at the circus, which many have interpreted as one of the more compassionate community development angles of the film. McRoy offers that "[s]uch contradictions not only destabilize the plot, but inculcate within the viewer a contrary position of sympathetic detachment, thus challenging the whole notion of the necessity for subject identification in cinema" (261). McRoy later uses the term "benevolent exploitation" (261) to describe how the inclusion of scenes from the "ordinary life" of the actors paired with dialogue that is jokey generates shared community with viewers that later drives our reactions to the eventual physical violence that the sideshow commits.

The feast scene is a pivotal point in the film, as it firmly establishes the able-bodied vs disabled binary that links physical beauty and intelligence with monstrosity. To sum up, after the marriage of Hans and Cleo, a feast is set for all of the sideshow community to dine together to celebrate the couple. Both able-bodied and disabled are represented, both from the sideshow community as well as Hercules and Cleo. It's a relatively short scene, but very dramatic. In the scene, the sideshow community begins a ritual passing of a "loving cup" from which everyone drinks while chanting, "One of us, one of us, we accept her, one of us" with a refrain that sounds like *gubble gobble* interspersed. While a dwarf walks up and down the table taking the cup to each person seated, the camera pans back and forth from Cleo's enraged face, Hercules' constant laughing, and the reactions and faces of the

sideshow community as they partake. Eventually Cleo erupts, grabs the ceremonial cup and tosses all of the wine into the face of the dwarf, and dismisses all of the community in a rage screaming, "Dirty, slimy freaks!" As the others back away from the table, Cleo screams at Hans, who has been silent up to now, "Well, what are you going to do? Are you a man, or a baby?!" At that point, the Strongman interrupts and puts Hans on Cleo's shoulders[6] and the scene ends with the maniacal laughter of Hercules as Cleo walks around the table with her husband on her shoulders.

This scene is studied as a notable shift in the film out of the ambivalent space or the voyeuristic space mentioned earlier because it solidly moves viewers toward empathy for the sideshow community, as the ugliness of the able-bodied Cleo and Strongman are in full view. Viewers are set up to anticipate a typical revenge plot, and the remainder of the movie unfolds in straightforward fashion. Scenes that highlight the collective power of the minority community are filmed as tension builders, as the community protects Hans while Cleo tries to carry out the plan to kill him by poison.

Browning's intentions (or Quiroga's) may be rooted in fascination with disability or genetic abnormality, and the interpretation of each spectator or reader will be dependent upon "one's own notions of identity, difference, and 'freakishness'" (McRoy 265). The horrific aspect of both texts lies in the violence: both have textual indicators of intention, "gula bestial" (61); in the case of Quiroga, the graphic visualization of the boys dragging their sister across the floor by one ankle in a mirror image of what was done to the chicken earlier in the day (65). The Quiroga text is more subtle in the "othering" of the boys in comparison with Browning's visualization. While Browning does fall into the stereotypical trap of associating the *others* with strange and sinister actions, Quiroga presents the information with descriptive paucity, yet readers are left to draw similar conclusions about the morality of the "normal" people, in this case the parents, Berta and Mazzini.

Additionally, the moral judgement left to spectators leads us to understand the story as a devolution of love and marriage as the couple faces the trials of disability with their sons, only to see this breakdown magically "repaired" by the arrival of the physically perfect and able-bodied female child who outlives the genetic abnormality that presents itself in the males. From that point on, while the physical and outward "normalcy" of the relationship trends upward, the emotional and psychological effects on the disabled track downward, as evidenced by the abuse and neglect of the four boys. We see this as well with the changes described in "The Decapitated Chicken" in Berta and Mazzini, who after the birth of their daughter, "focused all contentment on their

daughter" (61) and the result was a "spoiled and very badly behaved" (61) child. Berta's relationship with her boys descends into the realm of neglect and psychological abuse, in no uncertain terms:

> Berta came in immediately; she never wanted them to set foot in the kitchen. Not even during these hours of full pardon, forgetfulness, and regained happiness could she avoid this horrible slight! Because, naturally, the more intense her raptures of love for her husband and daughter, the greater her loathing for the monsters. (63)

The boys are called "monsters" and are a "horrible slight" to Berta. Similar to *Freaks*, this pushes readers into that same ambivalent space of loathing for the behavior of the parents and uncomfortable spectatorship of the decay of a family and the disregard for human life. The particular ways both the Quiroga text and *Freaks* treat disability in a way that upholds an axiom of physical wholeness with normalcy are key. Understanding the development and maintenance of the various disabled communities is necessary for any critical reading of the eventual violence that is shared in the climactic endings of both.

Construction and Maintenance of Community

As has been shown, both works are explicitly interested in the construction of abnormality and disability, utilizing the characters and narrative to interrogate associations and conceptions that might otherwise seem natural or obvious. This eye toward contingency and impetus toward denaturalization extends also to the presentation of the social relations within the definite yet dynamic settings of each work. Community is not presented by either author as a given or as a static feature of a group of individuals, but rather as something which must be developed and maintained, is subject to internal and external tensions, and can involve (potentially violent) conflict. Whether in the form of a carnival sideshow whose members are present explicitly due to their difference or a couple aiming desperately to have children and be "normal," community is always bound up in a definite but highly complex and evolving web of historical and societal circumstance. The visions of specific communities presented by Quiroga and Browning, considered in light of one another and the analysis of disability elaborated previously, can offer broader insights into the nature and operation of actually extant communities, both those contemporary to the works analyzed here and in the present day.

The relationships between the performers in *Freaks*, both those central to its direct narrative and more secondary characters, are a focal point throughout the entirety of the film. This can be seen as a simple expression of its status as a melodrama, but paying close attention to many (seemingly narratively extraneous) scenes reveals deeper narrative and thematic relevance. In addition to forming an integral part of many readings of the film's much-discussed voyeuristic gaze, these moments subtly impart the intricacies of the communal relationships between the performers. Browning's exploration and interrogation of community within these scenes lays the groundwork for the climax of the film, and thus understanding them more deeply is a prerequisite for developing an interpretation of the shocking final act of the film.

In the opening moments of *Freaks*, a promoter regales a crowd with a description of "living, breathing monstrosities," taking great care to warn them about "the code of the freaks" in which an insult or injury to one "offends them all." At first, this scene may appear as an attempt to instill in *Freaks*'s audience the same sentiments the barker intends to evoke in the crowd within the film (namely, fearful intrigue), or as foreshadowing for the collective vengeance at the heart of the film's climax. It may also seem to be, upon closer inspection, a "self-cancelling plea for tolerance" that at once attempts to establish the humanity of the performers while simultaneously furthering their exoticization through lines such as "blunders of nature {whom} modern science is eliminating from the world" (McRoy and Crucianelli 258). These elements are crucial to note as they shape the viewer's reaction to the ensuing narrative, but this scene also attains a more subtle, yet crucial, relevance as the film progresses. Though the danger alluded to by the barker ultimately materializes in a highly direct manner, the code itself is perpetually absent. Despite being obscured by the problem of ambivalence and the difficulty of separating critical depiction from simple reproduction/affirmation, Browning subtly puts the lie to the barker's framing, showing the performers' united actions as the result of dynamic, visible community bonds rather than simple obedience to an arcane and unchanging code (Church 3-5).

Many of the early scenes of the film are dedicated to depicting and exploring these relationships. The numerous scenes Browning includes of the performers laughing with (and at) one another, aiding each other with their costumes, pursuing one another romantically, etc., reveal critical and highly specific details of the relationships between the circus members. Scenes such as the shared joy at the "bearded lady"' giving birth, or Venus and Frieda's frank conversation about the treatment of women demonstrate the strength of the performers' collective bonds. Crucially, however, Browning does not depict an ideal

or frictionless community, including just as many moments of tension, from Violet's evident distaste for her sister's new husband, to the many jokes that go unappreciated (at best) by their target and various instances of romantic strife. The importance of these moments is not that they offset or counterbalance the positive elements depicted, but that the complexity they add avoids replicating a mode of writing in which disabled carnival performers are patronizingly treated as "saintly" and "miraculous or angelic in spirit," and that these imperfections mirror the disharmonies (small or large) within historically extant communities (Brottman, "Return" 93). This sense of dynamism is crucial when examining scenes involving collective action, since it allows these narrative points to be read not as the product of some mystical code or inherent unity between physically non-normative individuals (which would affirm the lives and experiences of the performers as merely fearful spectacle) but as the product of active, living, human relationships. For example, the feast scene can thus be read as a celebration of these interpersonal ties and as a performative act to signify and enact the induction of another member into this community. Far from a bizarre and inexplicable ritual necessitated by a supernatural code shared between the performers, the feast seems instead to be a formalized affirmation of human community, mocked and opposed by the very characters who refuse to recognize the performers as human and their relationships as significant.

That this ritual is tainted by Cleo's poisoning of Hans the moment her violence begins in earnest is especially important and has roots within the earlier moments of the film both narratively and thematically. Cleo's lack of genuine consideration for Hans, and those deemed "freakish" more generally, is evident early on even before she learns of his wealth and constructs the plot that drives the film's narrative. Her affected demeanor around Hans and concern over his ability to loan her money provide room for early suspicion, but it is the first scene between her and Hercules that cements her malicious disregard. While luxuriating using the funds "loaned" to her by Hans, they are spotted by Josephine Joseph, a performer presented as "half woman, half man," whom Hercules pursues and violently assaults, prompting Cleo to laugh riotously. Both the audience of the film and the characters within it are aware of Cleo and Hercules's hostility toward those they consider abnormal well before Cleo's plan is revealed due to the severity of scenes like the above, which are clearly differentiable from the relatively minor conflicts between the other performers. It is explicitly stated by one character that "we're just filthy things to [Cleo]," immediately followed by an invocation of the consequences Cleo would face if she wronged Hans or any other member of the community.

Browning further emphasizes Cleo's cruelty through its juxtaposition with the warm acceptance of the performers, and demonstrates her inability to cope with the prospect of accepting those around her as anything other than monsters to be detested, mocked, or cynically used for personal gain. In Cleo, Browning presents a mirror of the attitudes held by broader society towards those perceived as "other," and contrasts it with the mutual care and concern of the very same individuals perceived as frightening and evil. In turn, this unwillingness to genuinely relate to, rely on, or care about those around her seals her fate: when Hans is threatened, the community around him responds organically for his defense; when Cleo is faced with the consequences of her actions she has no community to turn to save a lone co-conspirator, who is powerless against the fortitude of collective care.

"The Decapitated Chicken" shares a similar emphasis on the community at the center of the story's narrative, the Mazzini-Ferraz family. Instead of taking family as a natural and totally harmonious relationship, only disrupted by the encroachment of exterior malice and difference, Quiroga places the conscious construction and development of the family at the center of the work. From the couple's initial desire to raise children to avoid the "vile egotism of purposeless [non-procreative] love" (61) to their desperate attempts to conceive a "normal" child, and ultimately the literal violent murder of those hopes, Quiroga presents each successive moment with an eye towards the intricacies and inconsistencies of the relationships comprising this familial community.

As mentioned earlier, Quiroga begins the narrative with a description of the "four idiot sons" born to Mazzini and Berta and a brief mention of the neglect and disregard to which they are subject, before moving chronologically backwards to the origin point of this state of affairs: the simple unity of a young couple in love, and their hopes for "blessed consecration" and "renewal" of this love through procreation (61). Quiroga wastes no time in further troubling this already-undercut harmony, stopping only to briefly establish that "they felt their happiness complete" at the birth of their "beautiful, radiant" son before moving abruptly to the event which induces in the child something perceived by the couple and doctor as "idiocy" (58). After Quiroga's description of the couple as placing "all their love into the hopes for another son" and having the same event occur, we return to one of the most essential lines Quiroga offers for understanding "The Decapitated Chicken." He writes: ". . . all their passionate tenderness had not succeeded in creating one atom of normal life" (61). While the implications of this line regarding the couple's fixation on biological "perfection" and normalcy have already been explored, this moment also (in an intimately

related fashion) acts as an indication of the growing dysfunction of the familial relationship. By this point within the narrative, the idea of normalcy has become an overt fixation for the couple: they are unable to adjust their notion of what a family is whatsoever in order to genuinely care for and relate to their children, and so must continually defer their hopes to their next child. In highlighting this, Quiroga subtly indicates that it is not simple concern for their children that motivates the despair and bitterness felt by the couple, but rather that these sentiments are a product of their foreclosed conception of family itself.

This is more directly substantiated after the subsequent birth of twin sons, both subject to the same condition as their siblings, as the narrator states that this event "created that imperious necessity to blame others that is the specific patrimony of inferior hearts" (60). The explicit judgement employed here is striking: with very few exceptions, the narrator within "The Decapitated Chicken" offers descriptions of action and (especially) emotion, rather than providing any sort of moral framework with which to interpret the narrative. In breaking with this convention in a limited manner, Quiroga makes clear that the ongoing breakdown of familial relations is not an inevitable result of their children's difference, but rather a product of the parents' inability to positively contend with it. Through reading Quiroga and Browning together, it becomes apparent that this inferiority of the heart is not context-less nor isolated to an individual family, but rather is a consequence of specific forms of community that allocate and deny care and support along lines of gender, race, and (dis)ability.

These lines are expressed directly within Quiroga's narrative following the birth of Bertita, a product of the reconciliations between Mazzini and Berta after the imperious necessity to blame falls into a lull, and also the "normal" child sought after by the couple for so long. The family attains a new configuration as a result: any pretense of care and love for the boys virtually vanishes, giving way to neglect and a single-minded focus on Bertita to avoid the pain experienced upon being reminded of the other children. This rift ultimately widens, becoming intelligible as akin to a separation between two distinct families: the "normal" family of Bertita and her parents and the one comprised of the boys and their hired caregiver, with the existence of the former predicated on the axiomatic exclusion of the latter, similar to the inability of Cleo to accept any possibility of community with the performers in *Freaks*. However, despite the couple's best attempts, including the very literal spatial segregation described previously, this divide is never total or sufficient, and even the fulfillment of their long sought-after desire does not allow "their souls [to find] peace" (61). Even the presence of an individual outside the family hired to care for

the boys is insufficient, both for the preservation of this tenuous divide and for providing these children with adequate care. Quiroga addresses the latter directly, writing "the servant dressed them, fed them, put them to bed, with gross brutality. She almost never bathed them. They spent most of the day facing the wall deprived of anything resembling a caress" and juxtaposing this (mis)treatment with the abundance of attention and care heaped on Bertita (62). With regard to the former, it's apparent that Mazzini and Berta are haunted not only by the presence of their first four children, but also by the "lost respect" caused by their past strife, with Berta's presence only slightly easing the process of reconciliation after each "poisonous quarrel" (63). As such, the Mazzini-Ferraz family is left in a fragile state, the parents unwilling to genuinely care for or accept their disabled children but also unable to conclusively expel the boys and the horror they inspire, a state of affairs simultaneously predicated on, and threatened by, the neglect and mistreatment of those outside the "normal" family.

Violence and Climactic Rupture

It is at this stage that the family within "The Decapitated Chicken" begins to strongly resemble the social situation within *Freaks*, in that the communities in each exist in a brittle stability, shot through with tensions and moments of overt yet minor conflict. This births the climactic violence of each text, serving as a radical and evidently irreversible alteration of the state of affairs established previously within each text. Indeed, rather than a simple affirmation of the traditional associations between disability/non-normativity and wanton violence that are especially common within horror as a genre, the context of these actions within each work suggest the possibility of an alternative (or additional) interpretation. Given that both Quiroga and Browning draw consistent attention to the mistreatment and violence (overt or otherwise) directed toward the subjugated groups within each narrative, the violence at their conclusions can be taken as representative of a strike against the structures that reproduce and condone the suffering and exploitation of those who are excluded from the "normal" social group.

Browning himself interpreted the story upon which *Freaks* is based as a "clever fable about the cruelty of 'normal' people confronted with the humanity of 'abnormal' people" and altered several elements of the original text in line with this interpretation (Larsen and Haller 166). Cleo and Hercules are subject to an inversion of the established dynamic as a result of their violence toward Hans: the collective action

of the other performers makes them acutely aware of how little power they truly possess (socially as well as physically) and their attempts to deprive Hans of his life and fortune prove futile. In ironic fashion, Hercules the strongman is physically overpowered (and castrated in the original version of the film), and Cleo, who derived her social power from her exemplification of (white) feminine beautify and holds visible disgust for those she perceives as ugly or abnormal, is rendered physically grotesque. It's apparent that this fate is also one directed at Hercules and Cleo not for their position as able-bodied in itself, but their obstinate refusal to halt the violence and hatred they direct towards their fellow performers.

In addition to the sheer volume of scenes involving one or both characters directing cruelty at the disabled members of the sideshow, Browning provides a key for interpreting the climax in this fashion through a scene shortly before the climax. After learning of Cleo's poisoning of Hans, Venus confronts Hercules, demanding that he reveal the truth and (implicitly) abandon the scheme. Hercules begins to respond violently, but a cut reveals that the interaction is being observed by a number of the other characters, their presence preventing any further retaliation by Hercules. Crucially, both Venus and the other performers appear to aim to avert violence, and it is only when Cleo and Hercules demonstrate their malice for a final time (Cleo continues her attempt to kill Hans, and Hercules invades Venus's carriage seemingly intent on silencing her) that the other performers respond in kind. The actions of the community in *Freaks* appear as defensive acts, performed for the preservation of the life of Hans (as well as Venus) only after all other methods of de-escalation or reconciliation are exhausted. More than simply defending individual lives, the response of the disabled performers can also be read as a tacit recognition of the existential threat the two pose to the continued existence of the community. Not only do the performers' actions eliminate this threat, they make possible forms of life and relation precluded by the dynamics of subjugation and force employed by Cleo and Hercules, seen in a narrow form in the reconciliation of Frieda and Hans in the film's final moments.

Although it is substantially more difficult to impute a direct or conscious cause for the killing of Bertita in "The Decapitated Chicken" than in the case of *Freaks*'s climax, it is nonetheless evident that this moment acts (in part) as a similar strike against the conditions that reproduce their neglect and mistreatment. Insofar as the image of normalcy sought after by Mazzini and Berta is predicated both upon the effective exclusion of the boys from the sphere of the family (increasing as the narrative progresses) and the expectation or presence of a child

"like any other" to ground this pursuit, the violence committed by the boys shatters both aspects and makes impossible any reconstruction of this state of affairs. With regard to the former, the boys' gruesome actions position them as actively and significantly shaping the fabric of the family, destroying the illusion that they were (or could be) separate from the family, influential only in negative in the form of their parents' neuroses and anxieties. Crucially, this is the case regardless of one's reading of the intentionality of the children's actions, as the attempt to isolate and disregard them is clearly and explicitly established even if one does not consider their actions as a direct response to being "shaken and brutally shoved" when witnessing the decapitation of the chicken by their caretaker or being left while Bertita was treated to a walk with her parents (65). Regarding the latter aspect, in killing their sister, the "normal child" who embodies the aspirations of her parents, the boys cement Mazzini and Berta's inability to escape their actual conditions via adhering to the archetypal bourgeois family as ideal. In doing so, the boys force a reconfiguration of the social relations around them, precipitating (alternately) a near-total collapse of these familial bonds or a reconstruction of them in a dramatically different form. Indeed, Quiroga ends the work precisely on an indication of the social effects of the murder, as Mazzini and Berta seem to finally reconcile in the face of the horrific scene, desperately attempting to support one another as they witness the bloody scene before them (66).

These elements from each text can also serve to guide interpretation of the conclusion of each work on a broader level. Especially when considered together, *Freaks* and "The Decapitated Chicken" escape a simple moralistic evaluation: though both narratives can be discussed in moral terms, to do so would necessitate understanding the conflicts within each narrative through the binaries of moral/immoral, justified/wanton, or even liberatory/oppressive. Not only would this be at best a simple inversion of certain discourses surrounding disability and violence mentioned previously, it would require ignoring or reducing the rich portraits of social existence presented by each text as detailed thus far. It is more fruitful to understand these works broadly as narratives arranged around moments of rupture with an existing order, with this rupture appearing as a product of the dynamics (harmonies, tensions, etc.) established narratively prior to these two defining moments. In this light, "The Decapitated Chicken" reads broadly as a depiction of a family that is torn apart by the very difference produced within it. That is, given that the parents are unable to fully excise the boys or the difference they embody, or reconfigure their notion of family to accept and nurture that difference, the very family itself must collapse at the hands of those wronged by it. Similarly, *Freaks* communicates the dis-

ruption of a social hierarchy founded on cruelty and exploitation, with the most prominent purveyors of this violence failing to maintain this order in the face of the collective fortitude of the community formed by those subjugated.

However, it is essential to note that in both cases these breaks from the dominant order are in fact limited. Though the Mazzini-Ferraz family may be no more, the bourgeois family as a wide social relation is practically unscathed, and there is no indication what form of life awaits the boys after this collapse or whether it will be any kinder to them. Despite their triumph over Cleo and Hercules, the disabled performers remain subjected to the exploitative voyeurism of able-bodied circus goers and must continue toiling under barkers and promoters who cynically exploit their physicality for monetary gain. Even the final moments of the film end with a sense of foreclosed possibility: Hans, seemingly having escaped Cleo's machinations and the sideshow into private luxury on account of his wealth, is nonetheless haunted by what transpired and exists in effective isolation until he reconciles with Frieda[7]. This is not to say that both works communicate an overriding message of futility, but rather that their conclusions mirror the bounds of historical social transformation in that both illustrate significant yet limited change through violent rupture. Though the freak show depicted by Browning may have all but vanished as a present-day cultural practice, the oppression of disabled, intersex, and otherwise marginalized individuals remains a social fact with myriad forms and instantiations, whether in public form (expressed in *Freaks*) or a private one ("The Decapitated Chicken"). Browning and Quiroga force their audience to reflect on the difficulty of overcoming social domination in thought and, moreover, in practice, even when a moment of rupture arises.

Who is the Monster Here?

Categories such as "freak" are the product of complex and historically mediated systems of social signification and (often) subjugation. Given that these systems operate in ways that structure our perception of the world and shape interactions with other individuals, it is no surprise that these systems are often reflected in works of art (in both their creation and interpretation), which in turn can communicate aspects of and perspectives on these categories and systems. "The Decapitated Chicken" and *Freaks* are two texts that are situated in a particularly interesting manner historically, socially, and artistically, and thus provide a rich opportunity for investigation and analysis in this light.

Existing at once as works reliant on prevailing attitudes toward disability and traditions of genre (melodrama, horror, exploitation film), and also as responses to these traditions, both texts prompt their audience to interrogate not only the text itself but their own subjectivity and reactions to the subject matter. In this manner, these texts speak to a reality that is more than subjective, that goes beyond modern concepts of reader response or viewer reaction. Phroso tells Venus as she fails to laugh at his latest gag, "Oh you don't think it's funny? It's sad, is it? Well, it'll just panic 'em. That's how sad it is." Both Browning and Quiroga utilize this often contradictory span of emotions to give expression to the complexity of life that goes beyond dominant social boundaries and categories, inspiring a frenzied, interrogative impulse within the reader/viewer as they contend with the flurry of action and sentiment. This "panics" all to consider what psychological and emotional frameworks color or define the way they experience these texts, and to examine their own circumstances by engaging with artistic representations of historical and social reality from nearly a century ago. This panic is an enduring sentiment that makes the question even more relevant: *who is the monster here?*

Notes

1.The use of this word, *freaks*, runs contrary to and complicates the analysis presented here, as it employs a traditional binary that privileges able bodies over disabled because of the very systemic bias prevalent not only in early turn-of-the-century society but even today. Quiroga's story characterizes the four disabled boys as "idiots," and that short story is also built on similar foundational biases that we do not wish to uphold, yet find hard to separate from in terms of direct text quotes, analysis, and use of secondary sources that also use these terms. The analysis here studies cultural foundations of concepts of able-bodiedness as aligned with desirability, intelligence, agency, and perfection, and how these two texts complicate these traditional paradigms.

2. See Emma Susana Speratti-Pinero for a detailed description and review of the Latin American short story and its various film adaptations in "Horacio Quiroga, precursor de la relación cine-literatura."

3. Venus (alongside Phroso) is also positioned uniquely relative to the rest of the characters in the film. Though she is able-bodied, she explicitly positions herself as being in community with "decent circus folks," against Hercules and Cleo ("dirty rats what would kill a freak to get his money") but doesn't overtly identify with the disabled performers either. Nonetheless, she is consistently portrayed in her actions as a part of the community on a practical level.

4. There are striking similarities between Quiroga's "The Decapitated Chicken" and a short story by Joseph Conrad called "The Idiots" from 1898, which also involves the violent dissolution of marriage after the birth of four disabled children, though the two stories diverge significantly.

5. The scene in question involves the "human torso," Randian, a man with no legs nor arms, who is filmed lighting a cigarette and smoking it, without assistance, as he gazes directly into the camera. This scene in particular is also illustrative of the unique space that Browning created for viewers that teeters between discomfort and fascination.

6. This moment is a clear reference to "Spurs."

7. The epilogue in the released version of the film is part of the extensive series of revisions made to the film before release. Robin Larsen and Beth Haller discuss some of these revisions to the prologue, climax, and epilogue in greater detail.

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"All the Grey Deprivations": Wartime Austerity and Suspicion in Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude*

Robert Lance Snyder

In his introduction to a 2007 reissuance of Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), David Lodge mentions that by the time of this author's death in 1962, at the age of fifty-eight, his literary stock was "completely in eclipse." Since then the reputation of a man whom poet John Betjeman declared fifteen years earlier "one of the best living novelists" has improved, such that Hamilton "now stands somewhere between assured canonical status and the obscurity of the unread" (viii). The reason for this anomalous standing, Lodge goes on to suggest, is that as a realistic novelist with affinities to Charles Dickens and Jane Austen his work "does not fit easily into the categories of academic literary criticism and literary history. It was neither modernist nor consciously antimodernist, and it contained no anticipations of postmodernism" (ix). Beginning in the winter of 1943 when a Second Front was about to open in Europe, *The Slaves of Solitude* does not address the circumstances of warfare overseas but instead the impact of wartime austerity measures in England. In this regard the novel, I will be proposing, should be read in the context of an intriguing book, *War Begins at Home* (1940), that offers insight into the relatively quiescent "Phoney War" before the Dunkirk evacuation, the fall of France, and the Blitz's nightly terrors. First, though, we should recall a few baseline facts about that period.

Beginning almost immediately after 3 September 1939 when England declared war on Nazi Germany, the nation found itself confronted with widespread commodity shortages owing to its heavy dependence on foreign sources for essential products. With a population of approximately fifty million at the start of World War II, the United Kingdom was importing twenty million tons of food staples per year and more than half of its meat supply (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 12-30). Recognizing this vulnerability, Admiral Karl Dönitz ordered squadrons of German U-boats to undertake systematic attacks on cargo ships bound for Britain. The first provision to be rationed was petrol, but a sweeping array of other goods and amenities soon followed. These re-

straints on consumption levied a heavy toll on civilian morale, as *War Begins at Home* anticipated early in the conflict.

Edited by Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, two of the three founders of the Mass-Observation project in 1937, *War Begins at Home* covers World War II's first four months. A brief preface opens by positing that "one of the vital needs now in this war is that the Government should be fully aware of all the trends in civilian morale," for which reason the editors describe the work's empirical findings and voluminous reports as a "war barometer" (v). The piece's final paragraph then quotes with obvious approval President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's remark to the United States Congress on 3 January 1940 that "It is not good for the ultimate health of ostriches to bury their heads in the sand" (vi), anticipating Harrisson and Madge's later criticism of then-Minister of Information Hugh Macmillan under Neville Chamberlain (416). The book's final chapter, where this criticism appears, warrants close attention. It begins:

> British people can stand a tremendous amount of pain. [. . .] There is no danger whatever that morale on the home front will crack up, so long as morale is not treated as an ephemeral word, but is regarded as the attribute of human minds. And so long as these human minds are not regarded as uniform and just so many mathematical units, but are treated as variable and delicate human characters. After four months of war there are insufficient signs that our leaders have recognised these elementary facts. (413)

Indicting Chamberlain's conservative Cabinet for insensitivity to fluctuations in public morale, a failure in governance arising from estimating "human minds" as "just so many mathematical units," Harrisson and Madge concede that "war is a violation of the whole of our idea of civilization" and "brings to the secret-surface feelings of guilt" (415). Despite an aversion to the cultural regression that England's entry into war represents, they argue that neither wishful thinking nor reliance on outlasting the enemy offers any assurance of victory. When common ways—the editors cite rationalization, denial, and overindulgence—of dealing with war-related angst fail, the individual citizen may "retreat entirely into oneself or, on the other hand, [. . .] explode into violent aggressiveness." Then comes this key passage:

> However much the more logical persons may hate being at war, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it is essential (in wartime) to canalise anxiety [. . .]. In order to conduct a

> war thoroughly, we must [. . .] turn passive feelings into active feelings, and externalise violent hatreds which are ordinarily turned inwards within civilised individuals in this country. Similarly, personal, private ethics and desires have to be transformed, elevated and merged into a general pattern of the whole community. (424)

This injunction calls upon the citizens of a peace-loving democracy to become noncombatant warriors who redirect personal "ethics and desires" toward a common good. Wartime exigencies thus override privacy and mandate the activation of ordinarily repressed aggressiveness.

By inventorying "all the grey deprivations" of Britain's austerity decrees, *The Slaves of Solitude* dramatizes challenges posed by the ideational shift advocated by Harrisson and Madge (118). Set in Thames Lockdon, a fictive riverside village on the outskirts of London,[1] the narrative focuses on a boardinghouse known as the Rosamund Tea Rooms. There the dominating personality is Mr. Thwaites, initially depicted as a Dickensian character who, when dining-room conversation turns to news of the Russian Army's repulse of invading Germans, delivers himself of oracular opinions. Mr. Thwaites's farrago of nonsense presents him as a harmless fool, but things change when Vicki Kugelmann comes to reside at the boardinghouse.

The circumstances surrounding her arrival there prove to be deeply ironic. In her first acquaintance with the foreign-born veterinarian's assistant, Miss Roach, as Hamilton consistently refers to his protagonist,[2] takes "a certain defiant [. . .] pleasure in her enlightenment" regarding widespread fears among the Thames Lockdon populace that "a German spy was flaunting herself in their midst" (48). Seeking to buffer her friend, who at age thirty-eight is slightly younger than herself and who has lived in England for the last fifteen years, from local victimization, Miss Roach paves the way for Kugelmann to change her lodgings to the Rosamund Tea Rooms. What ensues, however, is that after Vicki moves into her new quarters, she quickly ingratiates herself with the boardinghouse's overbearing tyrant, bully, and "president in hell" (8). Intuitively grasping that the domineering Thwaites is a secret "disciple" of Adolf Hitler (13), Vicki Kugelmann, with her "fair complexion," "large blue eyes," and "shingled" blonde hair "in the manner of 1925" sets about captivating Mr. Thwaites (51). At this juncture, Hamilton writes, "It flashed across Miss Roach's mind that she had, conceivably, created a false mental picture of her new friend, that the lonely 'German spy' she had taken under her protection might, conceivably, lead a life of her own, with other protectors" (53). Although not yet convinced that her suspicion is reliable, Hamilton's main char-

acter cannot otherwise account for the thinly veiled aggression and insinuations of Vicki. The novel's encapsulated setting thus functions as a petri dish in which Hamilton traces the growth of a pathogen tied to a pervasive climate of deprivation and distrust. Whether or not Kugelmann is an undercover agent with covert ties to Berlin matters far less to Hamilton than the psychodynamics of a wartime ethos in terms of which she comes to be regarded as a "*femme fatale*" whose "deadly methods [are] slow but sure" (57).

That phrase, of course, calls to mind the mythic spy-courtesan Mata Hari (real name Margaretha Geertruida Zelle McLeod) of World War I fame who, because of her gender and chameleonic talent for seduction, became an icon of fateful duplicity (see Wheelwright; Horn 178-188; White 34-43). Her renowned skills in performativity threatened cultures inclined toward reductive assumptions about those of other nationalities, ethnicities, or countries of origin (Pattinson). *The Slaves of Solitude* captures this linkage in its depiction of Vicki Kugelmann's coy behavior soon after her arrival at the Rosamund Tea Rooms. In the communal lounge after dinner "the poor lonely German girl whom Miss Roach had once befriended against a multitude in the mood to stone her" proves every bit a match in deception for Mr. Thwaites (92). Charming him by her "girlish" way of smoking Turkish cigarettes and introducing Thwaites to a new card game, all the while "handling" the "old gent" by her vaguely sexual attentions (99), Kugelmann scores a first triumph in her new environs. What nettles the sensible Miss Roach about Vicki in this scene and others to follow is her obviously staged performativity in a gendered role: "It was odd, thought Miss Roach, the way that Vicki always managed, when talking to Mr. Thwaites, to turn whatever subject came up into a sort of contest between male and female, to somehow oppose feminine weakness and fastidiousness to masculine strength and insensibility" (103). Observing the ordinarily truculent bachelor's capitulation to the newcomer's wiles, Miss Roach extrapolates that the home front may be under subversive attack from within England's boundaries. The novel, in other words, can be read as testing Harrisson and Madge's call for individual citizens to "canalise anxiety" and redirect their ordinarily repressed aggression toward a collective enemy.

Whether that act of sublimation in *The Slaves of Solitude* succeeds is doubtful, principally because not only Miss Roach but also the other leading characters are caught up in a daily battle of trying to evade the dispiriting impact of wartime stringencies. These new realities make themselves felt in a variety of ways. Besides the precautions of limited indoor lighting and blackout curtains at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, for example, the earliest mention of a dinner served there specifies "warm

spam and mashed potatoes" (17), the former being a brand of precooked canned pork introduced by Hormel Foods Corporation in 1937 that became a regular provision for American soldiers in the field throughout World War II. Its complement of mashed potatoes, as Katharine Knight documents in *Spuds, Spam and Eating for Victory: Rationing in the Second World War*, figured prominently as well in culinary support of the war effort. Another indication of the conflict's impact on the inhabitants of the Rosamund Tea Rooms in Thames Lockdon (read "lockdown") is their postprandial routine of retiring to the facility's lounge to read, smoke, write letters, or knit for two hours or more every evening. After such a repeated "orgy of *ennui*," the residents "went to their bedrooms in a state of almost complete stupefaction" (23). Much later in the novel, after accounts of nuanced exchanges between an emboldened Mr. Thwaites and the woman he now repeatedly mocks as "Our Lady of the Roach" (141), Hamilton makes clear how his projected center of consciousness views the war's effect on civilians. As "a petty pilferer, incessantly pilfering," she reflects, it "pack[ed] the public places tighter and tighter" while simultaneously "emptying the shelves of the shops—sneaking cigarettes from the tobacconists, sweets from the confectioners, paper, pens, and envelopes from the stationers, fittings from the hardware stores, wool from the drapers, glycerine from the chemists, spirits and beer from the public-houses, and so on endlessly" (101). A later catalogue adds to these shortages such items for women as stockings, shampoo, scent, nail varnish, ribbon, scissors, and yarn (161). Meanwhile government-issued posters displayed prominently in public spaces admonish that

> She was not to waste bread, she was not to use unnecessary fuel, she was not to leave litter about, she was not to telephone otherwise than briefly, she was not to take the journey she was taking unless it was really necessary, she was not to keep the money she earned through taking such journeys where she could spend it, but to put it into savings, and to keep on putting it into savings. She was not even to talk carelessly, lest she endangered the lives of others. (100)

These proscriptions, as Marina MacKay has contended, impose a cultural norm of "compelled communality, diminished privilege, and obligatory stasis" (1600),[3] tantamount at the Rosamund Tea Rooms to strained sociality, that in *The Slaves of Solitude* challenges the popular myth of civilian solidarity during the Blitz (Calder 1991). Regarding the last point Harrisson writes in *Living Through the Blitz* that research

reveals "a massive, largely unconscious cover-up of the more disagreeable facts" concerning life in England during the early war years (15).

The default effect of proscriptive measures in Thames Lockdon, as Hamilton portrays it, is one of universal muffling or disconnection: "The earth was muffled from the stars; the river and the pretty eighteenth-century bridge were muffled from the people; the people were muffled from each other. This was war late in 1943" (2-3). In the mausoleum-like dining room of Mrs. Payne's boardinghouse, where half of its residents are seated at separate tables, an acoustical opposite, the stereophonic amplification of sounds no matter how slight or insignificant, arises during the intervals between Mr. Thwaites's hectoring pronouncements. "In the small space of the room, a word could not be uttered, a little cough could not be made, a hairpin could not be dropped at one table without being heard at all the others; and the general self-consciousness which this caused smote the room with a silence, a conversational torpor, and finally a complete apathy from which it could not stir itself" (9). Small wonder, then, that Miss Roach regularly visits the River Sun, the town's fashionable pub, as an alternative site for human interaction. There she meets often with Lieutenant Dayton Pike from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, who is awaiting reassignment to the war's new front, but questions what she thinks of as the seriousness or "consequentiality" of his romantic overtures. At the River Sun she also gets together frequently with Vicki Kugelmann, both in their late thirties and part of an emerging group of "respectable middle-class girls and women, [. . .] who had come to learn of the potency of this brief means of escape in the evening from war-thought and war-endeavour" (47). Thames Lockdon's local pub of choice is an outlying version of London's "saloon bar society" that P. J. Widdowson discusses at length in relation to Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941). The excessive consumption of alcohol, as Widdowson views it, "becomes a metaphor for some wider malaise" afflicting England's middle class at the time (118), which he regards as corrupted by "inner stagnation and decay" (117). Whether or not one agrees with this assessment, even the River Sun in *The Slaves of Solitude* becomes a place not of liberating, albeit temporary, escape but of further entrapment for Miss Roach.

That shift occurs at the novel's midpoint when Vicki Kugelmann begins to show her true colors. Invited by the protagonist to join her in rendezvousing with Lieutenant Pike at the River Sun for drinks before dinner elsewhere, the animated emigré quickly dominates the evening. Kugelmann's inanity and condescension surface when she remarks, "I'd really like a nice cocktail. Only you silly English don't know how to make a proper cocktail, do you?" Hearing that nationalistic slight, Hamilton's protagonist reflects:

> This was the first time that Vicki had alluded to the English in this way, and Miss Roach was not at all certain that she liked it. Willing enough as she was herself, at certain times, to disparage the English in a more or less conventional way—to deplore their manners, their cooking, their complacency, arrogance, and dullness—she yet found something peculiarly ugly and suspect in this disparagement of the English on Vicki's lips in the world of the present moment. If she didn't like the English, who did she like? The Germans? And if the Germans, what sort of Germans? The Nazi Germans? (114)

Miss Roach's suspicion increases when Vicki lapses into a slangy idiolect that she no doubt thinks is distinctively American and so will appeal, as in fact it does, to Lieutenant Pike. Hamilton comments: "The mere mention of 'cocktails,' in 1943, was frightful enough, but with the addition of 'Uh-huh,' 'Oh, boy,' and 'Wizard' a depth was reached of which Miss Roach had not even thought Vicki capable" (115). The rest of the evening, punctuated by the latter's semi-inebriated ventriloquizing of European toasts ("*Skol! Prosit! Santé!*") and English equivalents ("Cheers, old chap! [. . .] Mud in your eye! Down the jolly old hatch!" [117]), which to Miss Roach suggest a "semiotics of duplicity" (Hepburn 12), soon devolves into an alcohol-fueled debacle. At night's end, when both women are back at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, its newest guest, her German accent becoming more pronounced, reproaches her supposed friend for not being "sporty," mocking her as "Miss Prim" and "the English Miss." These aggressive caricatures understandably rankle Enid Roach: "Now she knew she hated Vicki Kugelmann as she had never hated any woman in her life" (127).

The bipolarity of ideologically driven war on the Continent invades the British home front in this scene. The reductionism it fosters can be gauged from this subsequent thought by the otherwise tolerant and self-possessed Miss Roach: "Was [Vicki] not, [. . .] when you came to think of it, exquisitely Nazi, exquisitely Hitler, exquisitely everything of that sort?" (132). The thrice-repeated adverb "exquisitely" hints at an oversimplification, one driven by personal affront, which is reinforced when a page later Hamilton highlights the reversibility of a typological identification: "In fact, if one interpreted Vicki Kugelmann in the light of some aspects of Nazidom, and if one interpreted some aspects of Nazidom in the light of Vicki Kugelmann, were not both illuminated with miraculous clarity?" (133). The question poses the classic conundrum of forensics—namely, to what extent do unacknowledged assumptions about what constitutes empirical evidence sway, possibly predetermine, conclusions based thereon? "It was all very confusing"

(134), decides Hamilton's heroine, but in her suspicion she has already identified Vicki's "Teutonic arrogance" as "precisely the one which, flowering in the world conditions of the nineteen twenties and thirties, had developed into plain, good-old, familiar, Jew-exterminating, torturing, jack-booted, whip-carrying, concentration-camp Nazidom" (133).

That way of Miss Roach's construing her victimization swells into conviction as her nemesis actively joins forces with Mr. Thwaites, already given to derision at her surname, in an onslaught of increasingly undisguised attacks on her integrity. "Then it was," the novel records after Vicki spurns an overture at reconciliation, "that she knew that it was war to the death—malignant, venomous, abominable, incessant, irreversible" (138). As Mr. Thwaites's daily campaign of persecuting Miss Roach becomes more overt, energized by his senile infatuation with Vicki, things soon escalate to a breaking point. Although "about the war [. . .] Miss Roach was an ostrich" (164), an allusion that recalls President Roosevelt's comment of early 1940 mentioned at the start of this essay, she finds herself left with no other recourse than direct confrontation when Thwaites, in the novel's climax, impugns her innocent relationship with John Poulton, the seventeen-year-old son of a widowed dressmaker friend of hers who, despite his artistic ambitions, is about to enter the military. Outraged by such base insinuations, Hamilton's protagonist pursues Mr. Thwaites upstairs to a second-floor landing at the Rosamund Tea Rooms and demands an explanation. When it comes, given his reply's coarseness ("Leave 'em alone until after a certain age!"), Miss Roach lashes out instinctively: "'How *dare* you say that!' she heard herself saying in a black mist, and she pushed out her hand, violently, half to strike Mr. Thwaites, half to throw the filthy suggestion out of her way" (200). This spontaneous action is tantamount to a release of that ordinarily repressed aggressiveness of which the Mass-Observation editors spoke in *War Begins at Home*. Readers cheer, of course, this moment of overdue engagement with the boardinghouse tyrant, but for Miss Roach there is only the bleak realization that "it was all over now" (201).

However the last clause is interpreted (does "it" refer to her previous sufferance of Mr. Thwaites's insults, to her continued living arrangements at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, or to more indefinite values such as the code of civilized behavior?), the narrative's resolution makes clear that "it was not all over" (207). The immediate context for this reversal is that, after a few days of loud groaning in his room following his altercation with Miss Roach, Mr. Thwaites dies of advanced peritonitis. Although the cause of Thwaites's death is wholly unrelated to his fall on the second-floor landing, as confirmed by a doctor whom she

consults, Hamilton's heroine is persuaded that she must leave Thames Lockdon.

Two other developments come into play at this point. The first is that Miss Roach's terminally ill aunt in Guildford bequeaths £500 to her niece, pending the receipt of which she will stay overnight at Claridge's in London before beginning a search for new accommodations. The second development is thematically more interesting. *The Slaves of Solitude*'s fifth chapter introduces an out-of-work actor, Mr. Prest, nearing age sixty and one of the boardinghouse's residents, who being regarded as "odd" sits at his own table in the dining room. Despite this marginalization the ex-comedian is an astute observer of human foibles. He viewed the Rosamund Tea Rooms, writes Hamilton, "with the supreme, leisured, and assured contempt of a cultivated man for Philistines of the most fearful type—with the disdain of an original and educated person who had seen life for small-town ignoramuses too confined and paltry in their outlook to take seriously" (76). Encountering Mr. Prest at a local bar, Miss Roach learns that, because he is working again in a Wimbledon production called "Babes in the Woods," the elderly trouper is moving out of the Rosamund Tea Rooms. Accepting his offer of tickets to see him perform at the Theatre Royal, she is delighted by Archie Prest's virtuosity in enchanting an audience comprised largely of children, who join in a "frenzy [. . .] of laughter and hysterics" at his antics in playing pranks on another actor (231). The innocence of comedic bravura is thus juxtaposed to the gravity of war and the impact of wartime's "grey deprivations." Seeing the "tears of joy and triumph" in Mr. Prest's eyes after the matinée, Miss Roach notes:

> There was an extraordinary look of purification about the man—a suggestion of reciprocal purification—as if he had just at that moment with his humour purified the excited children, and they, all as one, had purified him.
>
> And, observing the purification of Mr. Prest, Miss Roach herself felt purified. (233)

The same cathartic effect continues that evening when, after an enjoyable dinner with her kindly disposed employer Mr. Lindsell at Claridge's, Miss Roach repairs to the hotel's lounge amid another nightly blackout. "In addition to her sense of serenity and purification," Hamilton remarks, "there came a sort of clarification of mind, in which she could see in their correct proportions all the things which had occurred to her in the last few months" (238).

If this coda limns the power of art, here in the form of comedic pantomine, to effect a restorative transformation by exposing the impostures of everyday life and, in Hannah Arendt's famous phrase, the "banality of evil" (see Salton-Cox), Hamilton returns us at his narrative's end to the grim realities of World War II. Before Miss Roach retires to bed in her luxurious suite at Claridge's, he writes: "Then Miss Roach, knowing nothing of the future, knowing nothing of the February blitz shortly to descend on London, knowing nothing of flying bombs, knowing nothing of rockets, of Normandy, of Arnheim, of the Ardennes bulge, of Berlin, of the Atom Bomb, knowing nothing and caring very little, got into her bath and lingered in it a long while" (241-242). Her absorption in this fleeting moment of pleasure, unaware as Miss Roach is of the war's future course, bespeaks the plight of all those caught up in a global cataclysm. In the fiction of Hamilton and fellow late-modernist writer Jean Rhys, maintains critic Laura Frost, pleasure figures as "a zero-sum game" always "shadowed by anhedonia, an extinction of pleasure entirely" (164). It is fitting, then, that Hamilton chooses to end his novel with this inclusive prayer: "God help us, God help all of us, every one, all of us" (242).

The force of that petition, and the valence of Hamilton's tale overall, can be gauged by comparing it to two other texts published during the year in which *The Slaves of Solitude* is set. The first needs no introduction. In the opening section of *Four Quartets* (1943) titled "Burnt Norton," composed when the poet was taking his turn as a nighttime watchman during the incendiary bombings of London, T. S. Eliot describes a purgatorial "place of disaffection" that involves "Neither plenitude nor vacancy." Within this interspace can be detected

> Only a flicker
> Over the strained time-ridden faces
> Distracted from distraction by distraction
> Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
> Tumid apathy with no concentration
> Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
> That blows before and after time,
> Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
> Time before and time after. (120)

Nigel Jones, one of Hamilton's biographers, posits that the works of high-modernist British poets were "literally closed books to him" (345). If that claim is true, all the more remarkable, in light of Eliot's trope "Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs," is Hamilton's likening of London to a "crouching monster" in *The Slaves of Solitude*'s open-

ing paragraph. Although Jean-Christophe Murat calls this image a "worn-out metaphor" (para. 16), it reprises the atmospherics of Joseph Conrad's description of England's capital at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* (1902): "The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth" (27). Moving beyond that intertextual connection, here in its entirety is Hamilton's framing paragraph:

> London, the crouching monster, like every other monster has to breathe, and breathe it does in its own obscure, malignant way. Its vital oxygen is composed of suburban working men and women of all kinds, who every morning are sucked up through an infinitely complicated respiratory apparatus of trains and termini into the mighty congested lungs, held there for a number of hours, and then, in the evening, exhaled violently through the same channels. (1)

Shifting its representation of London from Conrad's visual register to a respiratory one, *The Slaves of Solitude* projects the idea of a metropolis that, contaminated by war's infection, has itself become monstrous. And those whom it "suck[s] up" and "exhale[s] violently" every day are the legions of commuting workers still trying to maintain a rapidly vanishing routine of normalcy given the ever-widening chasm between an epochal "Time before and time after."

The second contemporaneous text that sheds light on Hamilton's novel is James Hanley's surrealistic *No Directions* (1943). In an undated introduction to a reissuance of this work, Henry Miller comments that, given what it depicts as transpiring in a five-story tenement of Chelsea flats during a single evening's bombardment of London, "One feels that the author is not merely in the seemingly meaningless suite of events which are piled on one another pell-mell but in the débris and bric-à-brac of the mind itself. It is the language of utter disorder and demoralisation, maintained as rigidly and consistently throughout as is Kafka's in the nightmare he inhabits" (v). The edition's cover graphic of a detail from Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) showing a horse's gaping jaws with a protruding dagger captures perfectly the war's depredation on England's home front. Trapped in a London tenement during a German bombing raid, eight residents and two visitors nurture different obsessions related to what passes for normalcy amid the crisis. Hanley's novel, per its title, purposely provides no semblance of a plot. He gives readers instead only disjointed glimpses of people thrown together by the random circumstances of a relentless war. Aimlessness

and babble in his setting constitute the new norm. In such fiction as *No Directions* and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945), argues Rod Mengham, "the subject matter of documentary realism begins to turn strange, so that what can be seen starting to infiltrate the writing is the logic of dream or nightmare" (130).

Significantly, the only extended comparison of Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* and Hanley's *No Directions* begins by citing Bowen's distinction between wartime and war stories in her preface to the American edition of *The Demon Lover*. "By this measure," observes Murat, "the wartime story is [. . .] a deeply atmospheric kind of narrative" in which "'action' is superseded by a study of the conflicting moods that grip people who must, more often than not, be content to endure the hardships and shortages" to which they are subjected (para. 2). He then claims that, despite their quantum differences in style, both texts concentrate on "a specific, closely circumscribed place" to which characters "are always pulled back inside" and, secondly, that both narratives emphasize how "the various [. . .] shortages the war entails go hand in hand with a compensatory overflow of alcohol, words[,] and sounds" (para. 15, 19). Escapist haunts such as the River Sun in Hamilton's novel are reduced to staging grounds for "a Babel of impersonations" (para. 20) where, as previously pointed out, suspicion finds a fertile ground for confirmation. The only alternative to such places in *The Slaves of Solitude*, except for a riverside park, is the claustrophobic milieu of the Rosamund Tea Rooms. And there Hamilton's characters encounter "them*selves* as players who, manipulated into acts of silent, would-be assent by [. . .] a master of verbal tyranny, are repeatedly forced into positions of alienation from themselves and from what [. . .] would normally be their own thoughts, words, acts, and intentions" (Summers-Bremner 86). In this fashion the war brings about on England's home front near capitulation to the external forces of dispossession.

The end of Hamilton's novel leaves the future of Miss Roach indeterminate, but we can infer its short-term prospects from David Kynaston's magisterial reconstruction of the period in the first volume of his "Austerity Britain" series. Drawing heavily on Mass-Observation reports, he ends a long paragraph summing up England's post-war situation in 1945 as follows: "Meat rationed, butter rationed, lard rationed, margarine rationed, sugar rationed, tea rationed, cheese rationed, jam rationed, eggs rationed, sweets rationed, soap rationed, clothes rationed. Make do and mend" (19). These and other deprivations frame the everyday experience of another resident at the Rosamund Tea Rooms named Mrs. Barratt, a kindly disposed widow in her mid-sixties. *The Slaves of Solitude*'s fourth chapter presents a typical day for Mrs. Barratt. While Mr. Prest goes about his business, often

disappearing into London to seek out the company of former theatre cronies, and while Mr. Thwaites composes angry letters or makes trivial excursions into town, Mrs. Barratt either strolls in a nearby cemetery or, weather permitting, visits Thames Lockdon Park. This circumscribed refuge, its asphalt paths bordered by placards forbidding "walking on the grass, picking flowers, defacing the Corporation's property, removing its chairs, using the bowling-green, putting-green, or tennis-court without asking its permission, etc., etc.," is a place that "spoke [. . .] hideously of life-in-death, or death-in-life" (71). Every so often, though, someone of Mrs. Barratt's age might here meet "an old man—an ex-military man from India perhaps—to whom she would listen, Desdemona-like, charmed and impressed, at last walking back with him in the direction of the town and parting from him with an almost emotional feeling of having conversed with a 'gentleman'" (73). Hamilton's sure touch in such evocative passages reminds readers that, however much elderly boardinghouse pensioners may have descended from their former stations in life, they are still susceptible to idealizing, nostalgically, a past order of things—even despite having survived twenty years ago, when they were Miss Roach's age, the home-front depredations of World War I when German Zeppelins made over fifty raids on British cities and caused thousands of casualties. At the same time, Hamilton invests this imagined encounter in Thames Lockdon Park with a scathing cynicism. If the past is prologue to the present, he seems to ask, how long will it take his characters to awaken from their mesmerization by an outdated and always idealized version of their country's imperial past? Hamilton's protagonist in *The Slaves of Solitude* is not immediately enmeshed in this web of nostalgic delusion, but it seems only a matter of time before she too will become a lonely survivor of war's home-front attrition.

Notes

1. Rosemary Erickson Johnsen indicates that Hamilton and his wife Lois in 1938 moved into a flat in Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire, where they continued to live until after World War II. Although far distant from suburban London, the town became the model for Thames Lockdon in *The Slaves of Solitude* (159-60). Biographer Nigel Jones confirms this background information while commenting on Henley's "languid Edwardian atmosphere" (220).

2. Formality of address is the norm throughout Hamilton's novel, signaling a British code of etiquette dating back to the Edwardian era that persisted even amid the leveling circumstances of wartime.

3. These effects were experienced more acutely, MacKay elaborates, because modernism was associated with mobility and a corresponding freedom of movement. "Paranoid spatial contraction is the characteristic aesthetic of novels about the British home front" during World War II (1605), such that claustrophobia and immobility become markers of entrapment.

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T.S. Eliot at Merton College, The University of Oxford: 1914-1915

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T.S. Eliot's academic year at Merton College was book-ended by two momentous events, one global, the other personal, both devastating. In August 2014, the outbreak of World War I plunged the world into a massive conflict for four years and prematurely ended his stay in Marburg, Germany, where he had planned to attend a summer school course in philosophy and to improve his German before taking up his philosophical studies at Merton. In June 1915 his sudden, precipitous marriage to a British young woman, Vivienne Haigh-Wood,[1] after only a three-month acquaintance, plunged the couple into a miserable existence for many years. Indeed, his year at Merton affected his life in many ways and had far greater significance than it has typically been accorded. He met two of the most influential people in his life: the poet/critic/and mentor Ezra Pound and wife-to-be Vivienne. As he himself wrote fifty years later, "in 1914 . . . my meeting with Ezra Pound changed my life" (*Letters* xix). And his precipitous marriage to Vivienne in June 1915 was disastrous, but to some extent inspired *The Waste Land*.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1888, Eliot had a somewhat strict upbringing. Very intelligent, extremely shy and lacking in self-confidence, and restricted from participating in sports because of a congenital hernia, he was educated at Smith Academy and at Milton Academy. He went to Harvard from 1906 to 1910, followed by an important year in Paris, where he attended lectures by the famous philosopher Henri Bergson and became a devoted Francophile. At this time he wrote his first great poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which was not published until 1915. From 1911 to 1914, he worked on his doctorate in philosophy at Harvard, receiving a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship for the year 1914-1915 to study philosophy under Harold Joachim at Merton; prior to taking up these studies, he went to Marburg for a summer school.

He arrived in Marburg in mid July and lived with a German family. At the beginning of August, Germany declared war on Russia and then on France with the result that the summer school course was canceled, and the students were told that they could not leave Germany for two

nerve-wracking weeks. His five-day trip to London was equally harrowing, but he finally arrived on August 20, staying there until October 6 when he went up to Merton.

Arriving in Oxford by train, he would have taken a horse-drawn carriage to Merton and entered through the fifteenth-century gatehouse. The college had barely fifty students because many had already joined the military; of those attending, in addition to Britishers, there were six Americans, four Indians, and two Canadians (Crawford 208). Eliot's room was on staircase 2:1 in the St. Alban's Triangle, from which he had a view of Christ Church Meadow; he reported to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley that he was told by a college servant that he need not close his curtain because the window was so high that "It ud take a seven footer to look in" (*Letters* 70). Under the bed was a tin tub that was pulled out every morning for a bath, and Eliot boasted to his cousin, "I think I am the only man in the college who takes *cold* baths" (*Letters* 70). The students also had servants; a fellow American graduate student Brand Blanshard wrote that " a man old enough perhaps to be your grandfather waited on you like a footman, built a fire daily in your grate, [and] served in your rooms [. . .] a hearty English breakfast and a lunch of bread and cheese" ("Oxford" 889). Dinner was served in the college dining hall. Eliot, like most other students, wore a jacket-length gown over a brown tweed coat, a sweater, and gray flannel trousers ("Oxford" 890).

Although "reserved, shy [. . .] [and] rather frostily formal of manner," according to Blanshard ("Memory" 638), he made new friends. Chief among them was Karl Culpin, an undergraduate from Yorkshire who was quite a controversial figure for his adversarial stances. However, Eliot liked him and felt that he was "the most intelligent of the Englishmen at Merton" (*Letters* 85). Another friend was the aforementioned Blanshard, like Eliot an American graduate student. With these two, he went on a two-week vacation in December at Swanage, a seaside town on the south coast of Dorset. They read, took long walks, and visited tourist sites. Eliot impressed his two friends by reading *Principia Mathematica* at the dining table in the mornings (Blanshard, "Oxford" 893). I would suspect that he deliberately did so to gain their admiration; he was shy, but also calculating. A third friend was an Irishman named Eric Dodds, who was impressed with Eliot's "wide knowledge of contemporary English literature, poetry in particular" (Dodds qtd. in Crawford 221). Dodds invited Eliot to join a small poetry-reading group called the Coterie, to whom he read aloud "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; Dodds remembered that the members were "startled and, yes, a little puzzled, but less puzzled than excited" (qtd. in Crawford 221). Indeed, the poem was published not once but twice

in 1915, first in the journal *Poetry* in June and then in the collection *Catholic Anthology* in November, another positive achievement of his Merton year. A fourth friend was Norbert Weiner, an American graduate student also on a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, with whom Eliot shared similar ideas about philosophy. So, while quiet and shy, he had a not inconsiderable group of friends at Oxford.

Further, in addition to the Coterie, he was involved in other activities. He participated in rowing at the position of stroke (the rower closest to the stern who sets the number of strokes and the rhythm, typically the strongest rower), even winning a pewter mug, which he later lost, much to his chagrin. He occasionally played tennis (*Letters* 104), and he joined the Bodley Club, the Nineties Society, and the Debating Society; he wrote to his cousin on November 27 that at a debate on the subject "Resolved that this society abhors the threatened Americanisation of Oxford" he took the negative, "point[ing] out to them frankly how much they owed to Amurrican culcher in the drayma (including the movies) in music, in the cocktail, and in the dance" (*Letters* 77), referring specifically to the new dance craze, the fox trot. He then tells her, "my side won the debate by two votes" (*Letters* 77). In a letter of November 16 to his American friend and fellow poet Conrad Aiken, he notes, "life is pleasant in its way, and perhaps I also am contented and slothful, eating heartily, smoking, and rowing violently upon the river in a four oar, and performing my intellectual stint each day" (*Letters* 75).

Concerning that "intellectual stint," he attended in the fall term three lecture classes, two on Aristotle and one on Logic. In addition he had tough tutorials with Joachim, an Idealist philosopher and follower of F.H. Bradley, the subject of Eliot's doctoral dissertation. Because Bradley was in ill health and rarely went out in public, Eliot never got to meet him. However, he liked Joachim very much, writing in various letters that he was "perhaps the best lecturer here" (*Letters* 73), taught him "more about how to write good prose than any other teacher [he had] ever had" (*Letters* 824), and was "really almost a genius, with respect to Aristotle" (*Letters* 91); indeed, it was said that "if you started any sentence in the *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, Joachim could complete it for you, of course in Greek" (Blanshard, "Oxford" 892). Eliot wrote papers on Plato and Aristotle for Joachim, who reported to Professor J.H. Woods, Eliot's major professor at Harvard, that Eliot "worked most thoroughly and enthusiastically" and showed in his papers "the extent and solidity of his knowledge of Greek Philosophy" (*Letters* 118, n. 1). In the spring term he added a course on Plotinus to replace one of the lectures on Aristotle that had ended. And he gave

a paper entitled "The Relativity of the Moral Judgment" to the Moral Science Club at Cambridge in March 1915.

Furthermore, he told Eleanor that, as Merton was an exclusively male college, he was "surprised to find that girls attend the lectures here—come right into the college buildings, and attend the same lectures as the men. PS No one looks at them" (*Letters* 70). There is more than a hint of superiority and even disapproval here, and the last sentence in effect dismisses them as beneath notice.

Eliot's assessment of Oxford varied with his state of mind and, most especially, his correspondent. To his Harvard professors, he was typically positive and even enthusiastic. To Professor Woods he wrote in November that "the scholarship is very fine, and the teaching of philosophy [. . .] has aroused my keen admiration" (*Letters* 74), and in May he noted that "Oxford is very charming at this time of year" (*Letters* 107). To both his cousin Eleanor and Bill Greene, a friend from Harvard, he admitted that he wished that he had come to Oxford earlier and spent two or three years there before going to Harvard, remarking on his "highest respect for English methods of teaching" as opposed to our own, revealing to Greene that he found Oxford "exceedingly comfortable and delightful" (*Letters* 71). But in other letters, he is less than positive. To Eleanor, he wrote that "Oxford is not intellectually stimulating" (*Letters* 66), while his most damning and oft-quoted criticism was to his friend Aiken on December 31: "In Oxford I have the feeling that I am not quite alive," and "Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead." And, not holding anything back, he exclaims, "I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books, and hideous pictures on the walls" (*Letters* 81). I suspect that, to a large extent, this is a young man showing off and acting superior for his friend.

His production of poetry while at Merton from October 1914 until July 1915 is difficult to date with certainty, and the best that can be done for the most part is to give the more general dates of 1914-1915. In fact, he seems to have written only a few poems in this period, not surprising since he was working hard at his philosophy studies and was discouraged about his recent attempts at poetry. He wrote several poems before arriving and sent them in letters to Conrad Aiken: *Descent from the Cross*, which included "Oh little voices of the throats of men" and "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" and a war poem entitled "Up Boys and at 'Em," commenting "I enclose some *stuff*—the *thing* I showed you some time ago, and some of the themes for the *Descent from the Cross* or whatever I may call it. I send them, even in their present form, because I am disappointed in them, and wonder whether I had better

knock it off for a while. [. . .] Does it all seem very laboured and conscious?" (*Letters* 48-49).

Evidently he did "knock it off for a while" to some extent. In a letter of Feb 2, 1915 he sent Ezra Pound four lines of a poem titled "Suppressed Complex," remarking "I enclose one small verse. I know it is not good, but everything else I have done is worse. Besides I am constipated and have a cold on the chest. Burn it" (*Letters* 94). A letter to Aiken on February 25 contained the completed version plus another poem "Afternoon," but we cannot be sure of exactly when they were written other than sometime in 1914 or early 1915. The first is spoken by a shadow dancing in the firelight while observing a woman lying in bed; the shadow then passes out through the window as dawn approaches. The second is a satire of upper-class ladies who come to the British Museum to see Assyrian art. Lawrence Rainey suggests that the poem "Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?" was written between January and April 1915 (198), and clearly indicates a confused state of mind on the part of the first-person speaker who ends the poem, "I do not know what, after, and I do not care either" (l. 26). Crawford gives April 1915 as the date of "The Death of St. Narcissus," with an ambiguous and unsettling mixture of religious and sexual overtones (223), but Eliot in 1953 had guessed 1912 or 1913. All these poems reveal a young poet struggling to find his voice and subject. None were published until much later.

"The Boston Evening Transcript," "Aunt Helen," and "Cousin Nancy," satires of proper Boston society, were finished by August 1915 and published in the journal *Poetry* in October 1915 (*Poems* 426) through the agency of Ezra Pound, who had immediately recognized the talent of the young man soon after their September meeting. Eliot wrote that spring that Pound "was enthusiastic about my poems, and gave me such praise and encouragement as I had long since ceased to hope for" (*Letters* xix). Eliot even submitted some of his outrageously lewd poems, including "The Triumph of Bullshit" (dated November 1910 and containing the first appearance in English of the last word) and "Ballad for Big Louise" (dated July 1911) to Wyndham Lewis for his journal *Blast*. To Eliot's dismay, Lewis turned them down, telling Pound that, while they were "excellent bits of scholarly ribaldry," he was determined to have no "Words ending in -Uck, -Unt, and -Ugger" (*Letters* 94, n. 1). However, he did accept "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and "Preludes," written during Eliot's Parisian year and containing no offensive diction, for the second issue of *Blast*.

It is important to remember that, throughout Eliot's tenure at Merton, World War I affected everything: the number of students at the college, the inability to travel in Europe, and an overall and con-

stant feeling of depression and anxiety. Numerous young men who had been at Merton earlier had been or were to be killed or severely wounded, including Eliot's closest friend Karl Culpin, who was to die on May 15, 1917 from wounds received on his first day in the trenches (*Letters* 199, fn.1). As early as the second week of October 1914, Eliot was keenly aware of the losses of young soldiers, writing to his cousin that "Four recent Magdalen graduates have been killed already" and adding that "one feels very much the strain of the present situation even in Oxford [. . .]. I hope that we may not have to stand another year of it" (*Letters* 67), but of course there were to be four more long years. To Isabella Stewart Gardner, the Bostonian art collector who had opened in 1903 the museum which bears her name and which she designed as a fifteenth-century Venetian palace, he wrote on April 4, 1915 that the war "is very real and very frightful to me" (*Letters* 101). I think it is too easy to discount or simply not be aware of the many ways in which the war affected Eliot and countless others.

In the late winter and spring, Eliot was plagued with feelings of uncertainty about his future. On February 23 he received a telegram from Harvard with the news that his Sheldon Traveling Fellowship had been renewed for another year (*Letters* 95), which forced him to confront what he wanted to do in the immediate future—so the pressure was on. He did not want to stay in Oxford for the following year, and his original plan to spend the spring in Germany was rendered impossible by the war, which made many other options uncertain as well. On February 25, 1915, he wrote to Aiken,

> The great need is to know one's own mind, and I don't know that: whether I want to get married, and have a family, and live in America all my life, and compromise and conceal my opinions and forfeit my independence for the sake of my children's future; or save my money and retire at fifty to a table on the boulevard [in Paris], regarding the world placidly through the fumes of an aperitif at 5 p.m.—How thin either life seems! [. . .] I suppose that I shall be forced to a decision in a few days." (*Letters* 95-96)

His life was about to change dramatically. In March, he met Vivienne Haigh-Wood at a luncheon in the rooms of Scofield Thayer, a friend from Milton Academy and Harvard who was studying for a degree in philosophy at Magdalen College. They were apparently immediately attracted to each other for differing reasons.

Vivienne was an attractive young woman, vivacious and flirtatious, who had worked as a governess in Cambridge that winter. But she had

suffered from bouts of depression and various illnesses most of her life, something which Eliot did not know. Further, she was on the rebound from a serious relationship with a young schoolteacher named Charles Buckle, which had been ended by her mother upon their engagement by telling Buckle of her health and mental issues. However, Vivienne continued to meet him secretly and often, even though their engagement had been broken, until he left to return to the army.

Then she turned to Scofield Thayer as well as to Eliot. To Scofield she wrote in late February soon after the broken engagement, "I need cheering up badly—*awfully*—just now. You'd better come and do it!" (qtd. in Crawford 227), and he did. But when he suddenly canceled a date with her a few weeks before his return to America, she wrote a letter threatening that he might push her into a depression, an early death, and even suicide perhaps: "Remember the specialist's words, Scofield, & do not be the instrument of pushing me more quickly than is necessary into an untimely melancholia, or else, as he also prophesied, an early grave" (qtd. in Crawford 229). Clearly this was emotional blackmail. And she was on the rebound now from Thayer as well as Buckle.

At the same time, she and Eliot were seeing each other at dances and punting on the river. But Eliot was in a relationship of sorts with Emily Hale. He had asked his cousin Eleanor about her in a letter of October 14 (*Letters* 7) and in a letter of November 21 asked Aiken to order some red or pink roses for her for a play in which she would be acting in early December (*Letters* 76). However, in April, May, and June, he was very taken with the vivacious Vivienne, writing to his cousin on April 24 that in London he met and danced with "a few ladies" at hotel dances, finding them "charmingly sophisticated (even 'disillusioned') without being hardened; and I confess to taking great pleasure in seeing women smoke [. . .]. These English girls have such amusing names – I have met two named 'Phyllis' –and one named 'Vivien'" (*Letters* 105). On June 26, one week after the term ended on June 19 and only three months from their first meeting, he and Vivienne married suddenly at the Hampstead Registry Office without telling their parents beforehand and obviously without a formal engagement, simply unheard of for both at that time (see Seymour-Jones 88).

So why did these two twenty-six year olds marry so precipitously and secretly, a question that scholars have been trying to answer for years? The reasons were multiple for each. For Vivienne, she was charmed by the talented, somewhat handsome, and exotic (because American) young man and was convinced (by Pound) that she could help him become a great poet. She also was surely looking for self-affirmation after losing two lovers in quick succession, and her marriage would

be a form of revenge against her mother, who then could no longer control her. Finally, she told Bertrand Russell soon after the wedding when he was invited to dinner with the young couple (on July 9) that "she married him to stimulate him, but finds she can't do it. Obviously he married in order to be stimulated. I think she will soon be tired of him" (*Selected Letters* 45).

Eliot, as numerous scholars have noted, surely believed that such a lively wife could solve his problems with shyness and sexual inexperience (though such was not to be the case). He also was suffering from the death of his good French friend Jean Verdenal on the battlefield on May 2, which he had doubtless only recently learned. The shock and anguish would have been intense. Furthermore, war has often caused many young people to marry quickly with the possibility of death a constant, brought home all the more powerfully by the deaths of Verdenal as well as his other best friend in Paris, Alain-Fournier. He also had decided against returning to America and becoming a professor of philosophy as his parents wished, but instead staying in England and becoming a poet as Pound urged him to do. His uncertainty about the future, as noted earlier, was plaguing him as well. So by marrying Vivienne he was killing several birds with one stone. It is important to remember too that he knew nothing of Vivienne's physical and emotional problems. Finally, his first major poem—"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"—had been published that very month (June) in the prestigious journal *Poetry*, so he was certainly feeling confident about his career as a poet and maybe even celebratory.

Eliot hastened home to explain himself to his formidable parents, sailing on July 24 for six weeks in America. He went alone because Vivienne was afraid of submarines, a legitimate fear during the war and a measure of Eliot's desperation to make his actions acceptable to his parents that he dared to risk his life to do it. It is important today to realize the enormous power of parents at that time, and most especially Eliot's parents. Not only had he married precipitously, without his parents' knowledge or blessing, but he had married what was considered a foreigner, a Britisher, whom they had not even met. The traditions of marriage, especially in a conventional upper middle-class family, had not been followed in any way. Compounding these issues were the facts that he was abandoning his native country to live in a foreign country and that he was abandoning his parents' expectations that he would become a professor of philosophy at Harvard and have a distinguished career; in short, he had dared to reject his parents' beliefs and expectations. As Seymour-Jones notes, the news "hit them like a bombshell" (91); even though this biographer is often overly dramatic, in this case she is accurate.

Surely it was with fear and trepidation that Eliot crossed the Atlantic on at least a five-day voyage as he was to face his parents. I daresay that he was more terrified of his meeting with them than of the ship's being sunk by German submarines. It was doubtless not a happy six weeks in America, although there is no record of what happened, and it was surely a downcast young man who boarded the ship at summer's end to return to his new wife, where a depressing and unsuccessful marriage awaited, although perhaps he had high hopes upon arrival. These were to be dashed soon enough by problems with money, a wife who was constantly ill and difficult, and, more devastating, her apparent affair with Bertrand Russell, who had offered the young couple a room in his home.

For both of them, the marriage was a colossal disaster. Fifty years later, Eliot gave this bleak and brutally honest assessment: after asserting that he came to believe that he was still in love with Emily Hale when he married Vivienne, he wrote,

> I think that all I wanted of Vivien was a flirtation or a mild affair. [. . .] I believe that I came to persuade myself that I was in love with her simply because I wanted to burn my boats and commit myself to staying in England. And she persuaded herself (also under the influence of Pound) that she would save the poet by keeping him in England. To her the marriage brought no happiness . . . to me, it brought the state of mind out of which came *The Waste Land*." (*Letters* xix)

Eliot's year in Oxford was full of exciting and significant events that were to impact the remainder of his life in both positive and negative ways. He went on to become the most well-known of twentieth-century poets, in particular for the ground-breaking poem *The Waste Land,* which established a new way of writing and reading poetry, and *Four Quartets*. He was also a major literary critic, a somewhat successful playwright, and the director of the British publishing firm of Faber and Faber. He won many awards, including the Order of Merit from King George VI and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. The outcome of his marriage with Vivienne is well-known. He obtained a legal separation from her in 1933, but she continued to beg him to return and often came to the offices of Faber and to reading engagements, once with a placard that proclaimed that he had abandoned her. In 1938, her brother Maurice had her committed to a mental institution, where she died unexpectedly in 1947. Ten years later, Eliot married his secretary Valerie Fletcher, 38 years his junior, and they had a very happy marriage; indeed, she said in a 1994 interview, "He obviously needed

a happy marriage. He wouldn't die until he'd had it" (qtd. in Lawless 1). After his death in 1965, she was the literary executrix of his works and early in this century commissioned Professor Ronald Schuchard to oversee the enormous T. S. Eliot project, now complete, the publication of everything he ever wrote. At last Eliot scholars have access to this treasure trove.

One of the positive marks of his time at Merton came in 2010, the construction of the T.S. Eliot Theatre at Merton, the most recent addition in the 750-year history of the college and an absolutely first-rate space for lectures and presentations of all kinds. It is thus quite clear that Eliot's year at Merton was of major significance in a variety of ways both to his personal and his professional life.[2]

Notes

1. The first name of Eliot's first wife is spelled two different ways in the Letters. Authors of books on Eliot and/or his first wife seem to choose one or the other. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to spell it "Vivienne" throughout unless spelled otherwise in a quotation.

2. The original version of this essay was a lecture delivered to Mississippi State University students attending the Shackouls Honors College Summer Studies Program at the University of Oxford in 2019.

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Piers Plowman and the Reinvention of Church Law in the Late Middle Ages. By Arvind Thomas. University of Toronto Press, 2019. xiv + 288 pp. $57.75 (hardcover).

Arvind Thomas's monograph on Langland's understanding and "reinvention" of canon law constitutes a careful and detailed intervention into *Piers Plowman* studies, interrogating the intersection between private contemplation, ecclesiastical authority, and the laws (and ideas of law) that unite both. The study's thorough interest in the canonistic sources for Langland's poetics of legalistic theology builds upon the work of scholars such as Emily Steiner who have attended to the documentary contexts of *Piers Plowman.* A key aspect of this development is the way in which Thomas's reading attends to the integration of legal and poetic texts, which "employ common interpretative methods of engaging often identical textual sources in order to realize a common goal in their shared present" (10). Thomas's study constitutes a brilliantly detailed close reading of the poem as well as an expansive introduction to these canonistic texts for previously unfamiliar readers, and some of these texts may not have received extensive scholarly attention prior to this work. The study therefore substantially advances Langlandian scholarship as well as forms a significant addition to medieval studies more generally. Thomas's mode of reading between B and C as "versional reflections of and on canonist thought and practice" (9) allows the study to bypass traditional considerations of C as a revision of B in order to focus on their dialogic relation to one another, an immensely fruitful approach which I imagine will be followed in future *Piers* studies. In a vast area of potential, Thomas's introduction identifies penance as a theme and concern that recurs more frequently and significantly in *Piers Plowman* than in any other aspect of or issue within canon law, a precise approach that is true to the text. Though the study close-reads several key moments in *Piers Plowman*, the implications of these readings have wide applicability throughout the poem.

The chapters are constructed to follow the steps of the penitential process, giving the study a logical (and perhaps fittingly Langlandian!) interpretative chronology. The first chapter focuses on Mede's performance of contrition, using the writing of Raymond of Peñafort to identify the distinction in canon law between contrition and purgation, namely that contrition should not encapsulate or constitute completion of any of the other penitential stages (38-39). Thomas demonstrates the complicity of Langland's confessor in allowing Mede to invert the teaching relationship and thereby secure a corrupted form of "absolution" for her allies (49). A careful bilingual reading of con-

notations and word choice between Langland's Middle English and Raymond's Latin shows the detail with which Mede upturns canonist principles of penance. The chapter then links Mede's performance to Friar Flatterer's hasty and inadequate penitential process that, in turn, has the power to unseat and misalign Contrition's habits from his allegorical persona (60).

The second chapter investigates Mede's involvement in usury, comparing canonist writers such as Gratian, Raymond, and Hostiensis as they negotiate a widening practical definition of usurious loans. This definition has implications for Langland's portrayal of Mede between B and C, as C invokes the usury prohibition "not overtly by the literal name of usury, but covertly by its conceptual logic" (75). In accordance with the previously explored canonist thought on contrition, Thomas draws attention to the ways in which intentionality can itself constitute usury, simony, and adjacent sins, in canonist and scholastic thought as well as for Langland (78-79). The later part of the chapter focuses on the risk and doubt involved within the objects being loaned, using John of Freiburg's argument that loyalty becomes an issue in the loaning of non-fungible items (items which outlast their use in a loan) and this loyalty, in Langland's depiction of gift-giving between Conscience and Mede, becomes an explicitly theological issue (111). At the end of this chapter, Thomas's innovative mode of reading is showcased: rather than reading conventionally in the direction of law through to poem, Thomas considers how Langland's poetic interventions in canon law could themselves be constitutive of the history of canon law itself (114).

Thomas's third chapter explores the penitential stage of restitution, identifying a similar shift of responsibility from penitent in B to confessor in C as in the first chapter (120). Thomas demonstrates that the shift between B and C is grounded in "the almost unanimous canonistic position that the rule derives from or serves the law," with Repentaunce subverting this position by making a law from a rule (124). Here, Thomas develops this reading of institutional rather than individual responsibility by showing how Repentaunce departs from Simon of Tournai, despite their erstwhile similarities, in asserting that the confessor is accountable in Purgatory at Judgement Day were he to profit from restitution, and thus attempts to educate confessor as well as penitent (144-145). The last section of this chapter chronicles the allegiance between Repentaunce's speech and a contemporary Latin manual for confessors, elucidating the simultaneity of individual spiritual salvation and "the social claims of restorative justice" (150) and that, even more pragmatically, Repentaunce offers a comment on the potential limitation and misuse of papal powers of absolution (156-157).

The study's focus on ecclesiastical authority deepens as the fourth chapter examines Reason's focus on penitential satisfaction when punishing Wrong in the B and C, and analyses the tension between the status of criminal and of penitent. This can also be understood as a debate between mercy and the "rigour of royal justice" (169). In the course of this chapter, Thomas identifies the editorial and scholarly practice of reading concordances from Passus XVIII outwards through the poem, but then suggests this may not be the most appropriate method because Langland's quotations are dependent on their context (173). Thereby, Reason's "*Nullum malum*" ("nothing evil") quotation is used to "irrupt" the parliamentary trial with the canon law of penance in its reference to the divine judge. This perspective is argued, with characteristic brilliance, by attending to the grammatical interplay between imperative and subjunctive moods both in Reason's Latin and in his Middle English (179). The chapter then considers canonist writing that interrogates the terms of divine mercy, highlighting the contrast between thinkers such as Paul of Hungary, who warns against overreliance on divine mercy, and Hostiensis, who argues that nothing can be unpunished because Christ received the Crucifixion as punishment (182-184). The study's overarching thread regarding the responsibility of the confessor is picked up here with Reason's encouragement that confessors accurately assess penitential satisfaction (193), and this is again demonstrated to be a position intricately informed by canonist writing on penance. The chapter concludes with a comparison of Reason's teaching on the necessity for confessors to undertake this interpretative work to "the kind of satisfactory work that the labourer exemplifies" (196), a succinct and persuasive link to the broadest and perhaps most recurrent theme in the whole poem.

The final chapter repositions the study in a more traditional mode of allegorical reading, attending to the disparity between Patience's "patente" in B and the "chartre" in C. Following Emily Steiner, the chapter argues that the "patente" is an iteration of the Charter of Christ and constitutes a moment of personal Christological contact; however, the "chartre" in C is instead "mediated and institutional" and as such "presents the ecclesiastical institution as the intermediary between Christ and the sinner" (214). Relating to canonist thought on divine mercy that was detailed in the previous chapter, this "chartre" accordingly will defend penitents at Judgement Day who have completed all three stages of the penitential process, not promising salvation as does B's "patente" but rather offering legal representation on the condition of complete penance. Thomas maps this divergence onto Steiner's distinction between original and actual sin, concluding that B's "patente" is a Christological response to original sin and C's "chartre" is "a

church-centric document about actual sin" (218). The later sections of the chapter consider the sense in which, as the "chartre" looks forward to Judgement Day, Patience's method of exposition can be read as a "temporal deferral," departing from canonists Raymond of Peñafort and Thomas of Chobham in delaying the resolution between signs of contrition and the conclusion of confession until Judgement Day (230). Though Thomas does not argue for this in the chapter, I thought the deferral he identifies here was also pertinent to the manner of Hawkyn's confessions; they are reiterative and continuous without a secure resolution, perhaps constituting a parallel "deferral" experienced not by confessor in this case but by earnest penitent.

Indeed, this study is astoundingly detailed and thorough on its own terms, yet there were places throughout the monograph in which the original material on Langland's canonistic adaptations could have been persuasively linked to more widely-studied moments within the poem. The close of chapter three includes a brilliant reading of Trajan in relation to rules and laws, identifying the alignment of his perspective on the powerlessness of papal prayer with Repentaunce's concern "with the enforcement of the law irrespective of the papal power to dispense with it" (162). The vitality of this reading may leave readers eager for further comparisons across *Piers.* For instance, the negotiations and tensions between justice and mercy in the stages of penitential assessment (168-169, 202) seemed to harbor clear links to the debate between the Four Daughters of God at the beginning of Langland's Harrowing of Hell scene; given the depth and skill with which Thomas close-reads *Piers* throughout the study and balances this with awareness of consistent themes across the poem, readers may be understandably curious about possible analyses linking these moments concerning *satisfactio* forward in the poem to its most famous episode. Equally, the contractual loyalty analogous to the relationship between "the believing man and God" I felt was connected to the Samaritan's hand allegory: Thomas argues that the "hope" for salvation is analogized in the trust in eventual payment, with contractual loyalty as a site for theological allegoresis (111), and it seems the Samaritan uses the labouring hand to express a similar relationship in B.17 and C.19. Exploring further links to the most-studied moments in the text may have provided a more secure way into the book for a reader less familiar with Langland or canon law, and may have allowed the originality and utility of the study to be yet further illuminated. These connections are not indicative of deficiencies within this monograph and rather are symptomatic of its impressive range and excellence: drawing out some of these connections may be a job for future work, which this study will no doubt enable and inspire.

Furthermore, the study might have more overtly advertised its far-ranging implications with reference to Katie Walter's recent monograph *Middle English Mouths: Late Medieval Medical, Religious and Literary Traditions* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). Thomas identifies several expressions of the penitential process as bodily or medicinal, both in *Piers Plowman* and in the Latin canonist literature, and some brief references to Walter's work may have succinctly indicated the broad scope of the study as well as orienting it within recent work that considers penance from the perspective of spiritual medicine (especially the discussions on pages 30, 201, 204, 220). Perhaps relatedly, I found there was much fascinating material that had been condensed into footnotes; for example, the link to charity and gift-giving may have yielded further connections across the poem had it been given more space in the main body of the text (109, n. 131). More generally, there seemed to be some references to literary theory in the footnotes throughout that may have added a fascinating angle had this theory been explored more explicitly in the main text. Such explorations might also have enhanced the study's accessibility and further demonstrated the multiple intersections of medieval studies and literary scholarship that this study brings together.

This monograph is an incisive, intricate, and stunningly original intervention in Langlandian scholarship, with an extensive range of historical background, language, and intertext to offer its readers. Though most accessible to readers long familiar with Langland, the detail and care of Thomas's scholarship will be exemplary to scholars at all stages who seek to work on *Piers Plowman* and indeed the canonist literature that surrounds it.

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