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Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon*: *The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* as Multi-Voiced Narrative

Corey M. Taylor

Of the three volumes of Zora Neale Hurston's writings published in the past six years, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* (2018), edited by Deborah G. Plant, is arguably the most significant.¹ *Barracoon* consists of interviews Hurston conducted in summer 1928 with Oluale Kossola, one of the last-known survivors of the *Clotilda*, a ship that in 1859 illegally sailed to Ouidah, a port in the current West African nation of Benin, to purchase captives that became enslaved in America. Hurston completed the project, her first book-length work, in March 1931. Valerie Boyd and Robert Hemenway, in their respective biographies of Hurston, note that agents and editors viewed the manuscript as the unfinished basis for a book rather than the final product (Boyd 221; Hemenway 160). Viking Press considered accepting it but insisted on the removal of dialect. Hurston refused, and *Barracoon* remained among her unpublished works for eighty-seven years (Plant xxii).

When she interviewed Kossola, Hurston was already an established writer with a distinct voice. But in *Barracoon*, Hurston attempted to minimize her voice. As Plant notes in her introduction, "Hurston's methods respect Kossola's own storytelling sensibility; [. . .] [t]he story Hurston gathers is presented in such a way that she, the interlocutor, all but disappears" (xxiii, xxiv). Other researchers have examined the effects of Hurston's decreased textual presence. Genevieve Sexton, who considered *Barracoon* an archival work, states that "Hurston makes her authorial influence invisible in the text by inscribing herself as a 'character' who 'listens' to the testimony and who could not be, in any meaningful way, the 'author.' She thus performs the function of hearing Kossola's testimony, playing the role of amanuensis" (197).² Additionally, as Hannah Durkin points out, "there are no examples of the slippery narrative voice and playful language for which Hurston's later anthropological writings are renowned" (603). Critics have therefore viewed Hurston as preserving, rather than analyzing, Kossola's story.

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Yet as with all of Hurston's writings, the textual and subtextual dynamics are more complex than they appear. Scholars who have written on *Barracoon* generally acknowledge Hurston's effacement from the text, but she performs only a partial disappearing act. Hurston writes in her preface that she presents Kossola's story "without the intrusion of interpretation," but her involvement was more extensive than she claimed (3). Hurston does not impose herself on Kossola or his story, but she functions as more than a transcriber by offering brief expository passages and interpretations—usually unspoken or implied—of what Kossola says. Hurston's organizational decisions also indicate her narrative involvement. *Barracoon* therefore occupies a unique position in Hurston's canon due not to her voice's absence, but rather to vocal interplay.

Along with textual interactions between Kossola and Hurston, extratextual voices can also be heard. Hurston was not the first researcher to interview Kossola and document his experiences, and she supplemented her primary material with secondary sources. Hurston, an independent anthropologist, received funding for her early-career fieldwork from a private citizen, not an academic institution. *Barracoon* is thus a multi-voiced narrative—written by Hurston, narrated primarily by Kossola, and yet those two voices, operating distinctly and in tandem, are not alone. Hurston's presence in *Barracoon* is greater than commonly acknowledged, and her expository passages, interjections, interpretations, and organization ultimately inscribe Kossola's perspective at the center of the text.

Barracoon's Extratextual Voices and Hurston's Multivocality

In December 1927, Hurston wrote to Langston Hughes, "I am leaving for the South on Wed. 14 on the 3:40 from Penn Station enroute to Mobile. I shall see Cudjoe [sic] Lewis first as he is old and may die before I get there otherwise" (Kaplan 110). She was a senior at Barnard College of Columbia University, studying under Franz Boas, the founder of anthropology as a discipline in the United States. But Boas was not advising this expedition: Hurston had signed a contract with Charlotte Osgood Mason, a patron of Harlem Renaissance artists, writers, and intellectuals, whose preferred title was "Godmother." In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston wrote that Mason "set aside two hundred dollars a month for a two-year period" for her to collect African American folklore and noted that her "relations with Godmother were curious" (175). Hurston sketches the odd contours of

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Mason's patronage: despite claiming a "psychic bond" with her patron, Hurston wrote that Mason would excoriate her for "anything in me, however clever, that felt like insincerity" (*Dust Tracks* 175, 177). In a passage that likely fueled Hurston's critics who felt she purposely adopted a subservient role, Hurston admitted that Mason expected her to "tell the tales, sing the songs, do the dances, and repeat the raucous sayings and doings of the Negro farthest down" (*Dust Tracks* 177).

Not only was Hurston contractually required to perform for or otherwise share with Mason the data she gathered, but Mason also dictated how Hurston could use it. Hurston gathered folk material, but it belonged to Mason, and Hurston was not allowed to adapt folklore in ways displeasing to her patron. The contract ultimately served as a controlling mechanism that gave "proprietary rights over the results of Hurston's labor" to Mason, an arrangement that was "almost perverse" in its power imbalance (Hemenway 109, 110).³ Such perniciousness cannot be justified, although *Barracoon* might not exist had Hurston rejected the terms. One of *Barracoon's* external voices thus belongs to Mason, who problematically supported Hurston's professional development. Hurston wrote to Mason twice in March 1931 about final revisions, hoping her patron would approve (Kaplan 212-14). Hurston dedicated the resulting manuscript to "My Godmother, and the one Mother of all the primitives, who with the Gods in Space is concerned about the hearts of the untaught" (n.pag.). Mason's presence, if not her direct voice, can be seen in the text at the start of one interview in which Hurston leveraged Kossola's good mood to "tell him about the nice white lady in New York who was interested in him. [. . .] I talked about the lady for a few minutes and my words evidently pleased him" (51-52). Hurston's observation that Kossola was "pleased" by the mention of Mason ("the nice white lady in New York") can also be read simultaneously as an appeal or a signal to her patron. As Jason Frydman contends, both Mason and Boas "encouraged" Hurston's nascent anthropological work and simultaneously "constrained and shaped her recording and recirculation of folk material" (107). Hurston's confrontations with institutional forces of patronage, academia, and publishing conventions "led [her] away from scholarly, oral, and performative recirculations of the black folk tradition and shaped the Hurston who has become so crucial to the literary canon today" (Frydman 110).

Hurston conducted research for *Barracoon* during her second trip into the field. Her first foray was six months earlier. During summer 1927, with the blessing of Boas and funding from Carter G. Woodson, a renowned historian and editor of the *Journal of Negro History*, Hurston traveled throughout the South on various assignments, one of which was to interview Kossola. Hurston resented the "hack work" Woodson

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paid her to do, which involved “investigating county court records” and copying “historical records about Fort Moosa, a seventeenth-century black settlement in St. Augustine,” activities that detracted from folklore-collecting (Boyd 153). When she did meet with informants, Hurston had trouble conducting interviews and did not produce the results hoped for by either she or Boas, in front of whom she “cried salty tears” upon returning (*Dust Tracks* 175). Hurston attributed her growing pains as a researcher to speaking “in carefully accented Barnardese” (*Dust Tracks* 175). Nevertheless, Woodson accepted two of Hurston’s articles for the October 1927 issue of *Journal of Negro History*.

One of those articles, “Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaver,” was Hurston’s first major scholarly publication. It was also extensively plagiarized, consisting of about “25 percent original research” with the rest—including the final seven pages—drawn uncredited and nearly verbatim from a book called *Historic Sketches of the Old South* published in 1914 by Emma Langdon Roche, a wealthy white woman from Mobile (Hemenway 96-98). Roche’s is the second extratextual voice in *Barracoon*, although Plant’s edition illustrates that Hurston handled secondary sources more carefully in the book than in the article. Hemenway deems Hurston’s ethical lapse an isolated incident, but also wonders if her attempt at “academic suicide” was a rebellion against her mentors’ strict expectations (99). Scholars have continued speculating on why Hurston might have plagiarized. Boyd writes that Hurston despised Woodson and sought to discredit him and his journal—or perhaps wanted to save the Kossola material for her own purposes (153-54). Sexton imagines Hurston’s mindset after her fieldwork frustrations, and the temptation she might have felt to draw from Roche (189-90). Raquel Kennon, meanwhile, considers the effects of, rather than the motives for, traces of plagiarism in *Barracoon*. She argues that Hurston’s theft of Roche’s work critiques the racism found in early ethnographies of Black culture, which relied on “unauthorized borrowings, smuggled liftings, and crude, sweeping distortions” (Kennon 83). She insightfully calls *Barracoon* “an amalgam text, curiously straddling two centuries and multiple genres, upending the imperial authority of Roche [. . .] by talking back to the ethnographic tradition” (Kennon 83). Both Sexton and Kennon interpret Hurston’s plagiarism as a noble but unethical corrective to Roche’s sympathy toward slavery and deployment of stereotypes.

However troubling, Mason’s and Roche’s influences contribute to *Barracoon*’s multi-voiced narrative. Even if this were not the case, Hurston’s writings have long been recognized as multivocal. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, to which subsequent analyses of Hurston owe a debt, Henry Louis

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Gates Jr. considers Hurston an exemplar of two foundational tropes in African American literature, the talking book and the speakerly text. In Hurston's work, according to Gates, "the concept of voice is complex, oscillating as a representation among direct discourse, indirect discourse, and a unique form of free indirect discourse that serves to privilege the speaking voice" (143). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black autobiographers established and signified upon the trope of the talking book, which relies upon dynamics of spoken and written communication and of cultural and racial assumptions about conveying information. The talking book established a literary voice based not on "the presence of voice at all, but of its absence" (Gates 181). Later authors revised the talking book trope—in Hurston's case this was achieved through the creation of the speakerly text, "whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition" and "signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features" (Gates 195). Gates reads *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the first speakerly text in the African American tradition.

While Gates focuses on Hurston's most famous novel, features of the speakerly text appear in her nonfiction. Hurston's anthropological writings are often couched in a hybrid creative/social-scientific style, and Gates names Hurston's scholarship as one reason why traits of African American expression can be considered in literary contexts (196). Largely a written record of one person's speech acts, *Barracoon* is inherently speakerly in the sense that it defers to the oral instead of the textual; it does not function rhetorically in the same ways as Hurston's novel, although Hildegard Hoeller argues that "Hurston [. . .] intertwines the two texts by rewriting and reinscribing *Barracoon* in her novel *Their Eyes*, signaling that the intertextual link between the two texts is constitutive of the later novel's meaning" (192).⁴ Hurston presents her voice and Kossola's voice separately and unevenly, juxtaposing them throughout *Barracoon* instead of blending them. Hurston represents Kossola's dialectal English as she heard it, not translated into "standard" English. As Lynda Marion Hill writes in *Social Rituals and the Verbal Art of Zora Neale Hurston*, she could only properly represent "the cultural history and context for Kossula's story" by letting him tell it in his own voice (66). Demonstrating that Hurston interpreted Kossola's words more extensively than previously acknowledged, even as she faithfully represented Kossola's voice, will show that *Barracoon* remains a "multiply vocal text" that reinforces Kossola's centrality (Gates 206).

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Hurston's Presence in *Barracoon*

As with any edited volume, numerous voices can be heard in *Barracoon*. Alice Walker penned a foreword; Plant's meticulous editing work provides context; and Hurston wrote a preface, an introduction, an appendix, and endnotes for certain chapters. But the narrative's heart is Kossola's life story—"heart" because it resides in the middle, nestled between the book's front and back matter, and pumps its lifeblood. As Sexton observes, "The text is organized into concentric narratives. The 'first' narrator is Hurston, writing retrospectively in 1931 about her encounter with Kossula in 1928. She includes her 'own' narrative of visiting with Kossula, sharing time with him eating, talking and performing other quotidian tasks as a means of demonstrating her connection" (197). Hurston's organization further indicates the presence of her voice; the structure helps convey her covert analysis. This section of the essay considers instances when Hurston enters the text: brief expositions, occasional interpretations, and structural choices. While Hurston's interjections occur less often than Kossola's narration, they ultimately enhance the power of Kossola's voice and his stature as an elder possessing wisdom.

In her introduction, Hurston recounts *Clotilda's* voyage and announces her intention to shift the conversation about slavery by interviewing Kossola: "All these words from the seller, but not one word from the sold. The Kings and Captains whose words moved ships. But not one word from the cargo" (6).⁵ After summarizing how the captives were transported, Hurston quotes Kossola for the first time: "This singular man who says of himself, '*Edem etie ukum edem etie upar*': The tree of two woods, literally, two trees that have grown together. One part *ukum* (mahogany) and one part *upar* (ebony). He means to say, 'Partly a free man, partly free'" (15; italics in original). Hurston translates something Kossola says in Fon—she does the same later and provides parenthetical asides to clarify Kossola's phrasings—but she also fleetingly interprets his words. The "two trees" of Kossola's experiences in Africa and America become a central metaphor upon which he signifies. Hurston elaborates on neither Kossola's partial freedom nor his singularity, instead noting that he has "sixty-seven years of freedom in a foreign land" before moving on (15). Hurston utilizes similar indirect interpretive strategies elsewhere.

Hurston subtly prods readers to consider for themselves Kossola's words, but she also hints at her ideas about his words' meanings while reproducing them. Such instances occur when she describes Kossola's shifting demeanor—one day, "full of gleaming, good will," another day, "gazing into dead faces in the smoke" (18, 49). Hurston's descriptors

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prove suggestive. For instance, on her first visit to Kossola she calls him by his original name, a gesture he appreciates. After some small talk, Hurston questions Kossola about his adoption of Christianity and if it conflicts with his African beliefs. When Kossola begins to cry, Hurston writes, “I regretted that I had come to worry this captive in a strange land” (18). By referring to Kossola as a “captive,” Hurston suggests that while his enslavement has ended, he remains in the “strange land” of America against his will. Her wording recalls the image of “two trees that have grown together” and forecasts a major theme: Mahogany and ebony, symbolic of Kossola’s American existence and African roots, have “grown together” but remain distinct.

Hurston course-corrects after Kossola responds to her query about belief:

[“]So dat whut you come astee me?”

I temporized. “Well, yes. I wanted to ask that, but I want to ask you many things. I want to know who you are and how you came to be a slave; and to what part of Africa do you belong, and how you fared as a slave, and how you have managed as a free man?”

Again his head was bowed for a time. When he lifted his wet face again he murmured, “Thankee Jesus! Someone come ast about Cudjo! I want tellee somebody who I is, so maybe dey go in de Afficky soil some day and callee my name and somebody dere say, ‘Yeah, I know Kossula.’” (19).

Hurston might have been surprised by Kossola’s question, since she “temporized” before stating her range of inquiries. Kossola urged Hurston to pivot to a broader discussion—she never again pressed him about Christianity—which helped foster their interactions. Hurston’s revised scope allowed Kossola to let her know what he wanted: to reconnect with kinfolk by sharing his story, letting them know he was still alive since a physical return to Africa was impossible. Hurston’s 1928 visit to Kossola succeeded where her 1927 visit failed because “she stepped back and allowed Kossola to direct the discussion” (Durkin 604). He was not a passive subject: When Kossola recounts his patrilineal heritage, Hurston writes, “I was afraid that Cudjo might go off on a tangent, so I cut in with, ‘But Kossula, I want to hear about *you* and how *you* lived in Africa” (20, italics in original). He counters with “a look full of scornful pity” and replies, “Where is de house where de mouse is de leader? In de Affica soil I cain tellee you ’bout de son

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before I tellee you 'bout de father" (20-21). Amy Doherty Mohr asserts that when he chides Hurston, Kossola introduces her to "his cultural and storytelling traditions, [. . .] indicating that it's time for Hurston to listen" (82). Understanding Kossola meant understanding the lineage to which he belonged.

From that point on, Kossola weaves his tale at his own pace. Sexton notices that "Hurston's character 'disappears' into the background until he falls silent, deciding he does not want to continue, or experiencing an inarticulable flashback to his life in Africa or to the violence he witnessed" (201). Hurston's strategic removals from Kossola's presence at the end of some chapters increase the magnitude of his utterances. Near the end of chapter one, while speaking of Yoruba marriage practices and the death of a tribal chief's young wife, Kossola stops abruptly and stares into the middle distance (23-24). In chapter three, Hurston notes that "Kossula got that remote look in his eyes" and grows silent after recounting his grandfather's funeral and mourning rituals (35). She gets up to leave and although Kossola notes that Hurston had not stayed for long, she correctly reads his nonverbal communication acts. Kossola offers to let Hurston pick peaches from his trees and says, "Doan come back till de nexy week, now I need choppee grass in de garden" (36). Similar scenes of Kossola sending Hurston away unfold in chapters six, eight, and eleven, usually after Kossola has told Hurston something momentous. Hurston's observations of and subtle reactions to Kossola's spoken and unspoken rhetoric demonstrate her anthropological acumen and awareness of his voice's primacy.

Hurston's disappearances and reappearances serve organizational functions that simultaneously denote her presence and strengthen Kossola's voice. As Mohr writes, "Hurston uses the space and silence at the end of the chapter[s] to stand for his grief and her own, allowing space for the reflections of the reader" (85). The reflective spaces created by Hurston's temporary withdrawals signal that readers should process what Kossola has said, and she further employs this tactic to suggest her purpose in compiling their conversations. Several chapters open with contextual exposition, which when combined with Hurston's occasional closing passages create narrative frames. This "repetitive bracketing technique" (Sexton 199) allows Hurston to structure her interactions with Kossola without overtaking them: "Almost every chapter begins with Hurston bringing a gift, usually food [. . .] to be shared between the two, and Hurston then initiates her questions when they finish eating" (Sexton 199). Hurston provides Georgia peaches, insect repellent, Virginia ham, and watermelon (25-26, 37); at Kossola's request, she drives him to buy turnip seeds, blue crabs, and melons (51, 69, 83). Her gifts sometimes spur Kossola to talk, while other times he

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remains reticent. These moments of fellowship, from which both parties took pleasure, demonstrate Hurston's abilities as both an anthropologist and as a creative writer. Hurston's offerings helped her gauge Kossola's willingness to speak before posing questions and served as a structural device when she drafted the volume. As Kennon claims, Hurston "brings these refreshments as a symbolic token of respect and expression of gratitude to a revered grandfatherly primogenitor whose own story reveals much about the silences in the historical archive of her own African ancestors" (87). Hurston combined the participant-observer model of field research with her literary sensibilities, making her presence felt in *Barracoön* without overwhelming Kossola's hospitality and agency.

Hurston's narrative voice and structural choices return attention to Kossola. Framing techniques do not appear in each of the twelve chapters: eight chapters consist of Kossola's near-unbroken narratives, in which Hurston appears only in short passages of scene-setting and dialogue—by design, since at these moments Kossola unspools his tale. The remaining four chapters are self-contained, featuring more of Hurston's voice and implicit analyses. This feature, too, is by design: some of Hurston's writing is logistical—counting the days between visits, describing Kossola's chores, saying what food they ate—while other passages describe Kossola's facial expressions, body language, or interactions with Africatown residents. Hurston's organization evinces her intentions for presenting Kossola's narrative.

Certain chapter titles carry interpretive weight and further imply Hurston's thoughts on the content. Seven of the twelve chapters have titles; while this inconsistency lends *Barracoön* an unfinished feel, the titled chapters serve important functions. Kossola speaks in chapter two, "The King Arrives," of his grandfather, an officer of King Akia'on, but the title refers to King Glèlè of Dahomey, who does not appear until chapter five. When Akia'on rejects paying tribute to Dahomey, and after an exiled resident tells Glèlè how to breach Bantè's defenses, Dahomean soldiers—most of them women—invade, mutilating and murdering townspeople unfit for slavery and capturing the rest, including Kossola (Hurston 44-45). Soldiers bring Akia'on before Glèlè, who tells his counterpart he is going to be enslaved; when Akia'on refuses, a female soldier beheads him (46-49).⁶ Kossola's old life ends and his enslavement begins, but neither he nor Hurston states this fact; instead, Hurston refers to an event in chapter two's title that occurs three chapters later. Kossola, not Hurston, narrates the defining moment of his life. Hurston must have realized there was no need to analyze Kossola's recollection of the march to Ouidah: "De heads of de men of Dahomey got 'gin to smell very bad. Oh Lor', I *wish* dey bury dem! I doan lak see

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my people head in de soldier hands; and de smell make me so sick! De nexy day, dey make camp all day so dat de people [Dahomean soldiers] kin smoke de heads so dey don't spoil no more” (48, italics in original). Statements that lay bare Kossola's trauma do not warrant interpretation, which would lessen the impact and seem insufficient compared to his own words. As Durkin writes, “Hurston's arresting confrontation with Kossola's mental anguish is a self-reflexive engagement with the limitations of her own account—the horror that Kossola has endured is beyond words and therefore beyond the textual record—that paradoxically adds emotional weight to his experience” (606). Hurston recognized the limits of what she could say about Kossola's terror, but her organization prompts readers to draw interpretive connections.

The title of chapter ten, “Kossola Learns About Law,” functions similarly. Kossola relates that on March 12, 1902, a Louisville and Nashville (L&N) train struck a horse-drawn buggy he was driving, even though he “holler[ed] to dem to stop 'cause I dere on de track” (79). He sustained three broken ribs and other injuries to his left side that confined him to bed for two weeks and, according to a doctor who later testified on Kossola's behalf, disabled him (Raines 152-53). Kossola claimed that the train did not signal when it traversed the crossing, a fact corroborated by witnesses. At the prompting of “[a] white lady on Government Street” who was among the witnesses, Kossola engaged “lawyer Clarke” to represent him (79).⁷ A court ruled in Kossola's favor in 1903. Clarke initially sought \$5,000 for his client, but the amount was reduced to \$650—none of which Kossola received. After the trial, Clarke told Kossola that the money was not yet available or simply ignored him. Then, “In de 1904 de yellow fever come in de Mobile and lawyer Clarke take his wife and chillun and gittee on de train to run in de New York 'way from de fever, but he never gittee in the North. He die on de way. Cudjo never know whut come of de money” (80-81). Kossola's statement enhances the irony of the chapter title: He learns that the American legal system, even when it appears to work in favor of Black people, is designed to work against them.

Chapter ten complicates *Barracoon's* treatment of justice and injustice. Early in the book, Kossola recounts laws against theft and murder being upheld in Bantè, and later laments that one of his sons, Fisheton (Cudjo Jr.), was shot in the neck by an off-duty Mobile sheriff's deputy. Fisheton died two days after being shot, while the deputy faced no repercussions and eventually became a church leader (26-32, 75-76). Hurston does not ask readers to consider this contrast, nor does she prompt readers to recall what Kossola said about capital punishment: “In Afficky de law is de law an' no man cain make out he crazy lak here, an' excusee from de law. If you kill anybody, you goin die, too” (31).

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“Kossola Learns About Law” resonates throughout the text without Hurston overtly emphasizing the parallels. Her barely discernible presence poses unanswerable questions: what is justice? Is justice possible to attain? *Barracoon* suggests these and other questions through the combination of Hurston’s organization and Kossola’s voice; it neither asks nor answers them outright.

At the end of chapter eleven Hurston receives Kossola’s permission to photograph him, provided that she gives him a copy, he remains barefoot, and he can stand among his family’s graves: “I want to look lak I in Affica, ’cause dat where I want to be” (89).⁸ Kossola’s American existence is marked by an unfulfilled longing for repatriation, and his conditions for being photographed prefigure chapter twelve, “Alone.” Loneliness is another textual motif and defining feature of Kossola’s reality. By 1928, Kossola had been a widower for twenty years and had outlived his six children. He enjoyed Hurston’s company, but she eventually had to leave. She uses loneliness as an analytical framework. The final four paragraphs, the lengthiest passage of Hurston’s prose since her introduction, contain a rare overt interpretation of Kossola. She reiterates his shifting moods, but also writes “on the whole, he was glad to see me, and we became warm friends” (93). Hurston notes the sadness of her departure:

He wanted to see the last of me. He had saved two peaches, the last he had found on his tree, for me.

When I crossed the bridge, I know he went back to his porch; to his house full of thoughts. To his memories of fat girls with ringing golden bracelets, his drums that speak the minds of men, to palm-nut cakes and bullroarers, to his parables.

I am sure he does not fear death. In spite of his long Christian fellowship, he is too deeply pagan to fear death. But he is full of trembling awe before the altar of the past. (93-94)

The image of Kossola holding the final “two peaches” of the season not for them to share, but as a parting gift, suggests that Kossola’s generosity is struck through with isolation and sadness. While the figure on the ridge stands alone, Hill contends that by giving Hurston peaches, “Kossola guarantees the continuation of his legacy. Hurston crosses the bridge and, upon doing so, gains assurance that Kossola has passed his story on to her” (68). Hurston would never again see or correspond with Kossola, but as Hill suggests Hurston’s visit was mutually beneficial.

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Hurston's closing implies that even if Kossola successfully transmitted his story, and although Kossola's extended family lived on his property and residents of Africatown sought his counsel, he nonetheless experienced a peculiar physical loneliness. His loneliness was physical because emotionally and mentally, Kossola was never alone. Perhaps Hurston lists a few pleasant memories because she had extensively demonstrated that Kossola lives with mostly unpleasant memories. While Hurston never verbally questioned Kossola's beliefs after he became upset, in her prose she doubted his Christianity. Kossola remains to her a pagan unafraid of dying, a teenaged warrior-in-training. Where Kossola truly worships, and what fills him with "trembling awe," is "the altar of the past" (94). She reiterates her stance in *Dust Tracks*, writing that Kossola merely "pretended to have forgotten all of his African religion. He turned me off with the statement that his Nigerian religion was the same as Christianity" (198). Fifteen years after interviewing Kossola, Hurston openly doubted his claims of belief, although the roots of that thought appear in *Barracoon*.

Kossola's Storytelling Voice

Hurston recorded Kossola's loneliness, but she also reproduced the range of his experiences. Even when accounting for Mason's and Roche's extratextual involvement and Hurston's extensive yet indirect commentary, the most vital perspective in *Barracoon* belongs to Kossola. As Kennon writes, "in [Hurston's] role as rhetorical intermediary, she participates in collaborative memorial storytelling in which the reader glimpses a fuller portrait of a man who indeed speaks, lives, loves, and mourns while exerting agency over his life" (84). Instead of vanishing completely, Hurston calibrates her appearances to maximize Kossola's presence. Along with the juxtapositions of and contrasts between Hurston's and Kossola's voices, the second method by which Hurston achieves a multivocality centered on Kossola is by portraying him as a storyteller. "I can't talkee plain, you unnerstand me," he said to Hurston, "but I calls it word by word for you so it won't be too crooked for you" (19).

Kossola's "crooked" language creates a rhythm that propels the narrative. Rhetorical questions and repeated phrases with slight variations punctuate Kossola's utterances, including "derefore," "you unnerstand me," "I doan forgit," "dass right," "Affica soil," "Americky soil," and "Oh, Lot." Hurston recorded these repetitions to give readers an accurate rendering of Kossola's speech. As Hoeller notes, "throughout the text Cudjo uses the phrase 'unnerstand me' over eighty times, insistently

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reestablishing the connection between listener and speaker in order to emphasize that his story must be understood rather than heard” (199). Kossola describes African drumming and singing and uses aphorisms and metaphors to emphasize a moral or make a didactic point. Above all, Kossola desired to speak with someone who could disseminate his story: “everywhere you go to tell everybody whut Cudjo say, and how I come in Americky soil since de 1859 and never see my people no mo” (19). Hurston demonstrates Kossola’s role as a storyteller with a need to articulate his tale. He was a griot of his personal history and of Yoruba stories, as Natalie S. Robertson writes: “The *Clotilda* descendants, and the children who lived in the vicinity of AfricaTown, learned some of their most valuable lessons not in school, but from Cudjo himself. Children, and adults, adored Cudjo for his ability to tell, and animate, folktales” (174). *Barracoon*’s appendix contains numerous examples of the folktales Robertson mentions. Hurston summarizes Kossola’s description of a children’s game and reproduces his retellings of West African animal tales and adaptations of Old Testament stories (95-113).⁹ In December 1927, Kossola told Hurston he “done fuhgit all dat” about Africa, which contradicts the vividness of the stories he tells the following summer, but then Hurston “tell[s] him a few stories, after giving him a chance to think, and he is delighted” (97). An outpouring of tales followed, including “Story of de Jonah,” which Hurston called “marvelous” (*Barracoon* 103-06; *Dust Tracks* 198). Despite relegating Kossola’s stories to the appendix, Hurston also provided ample evidence in the main narrative of his rhetorical prowess as a griot.

Barracoon often centers on cultural differences, injustices, and pivotal or tragic events. Kossola’s stories of life in America often expose hypocrisies through evocative language. He discusses his family’s mistreatment by both enslaved and free American-born Black people. When the *Clotilda* captives arrived at the Meaher plantation, “Everybody lookee at us strange. We want to talk wid de udder colored folkses but dey doan know whut we say. Some makee de fun of us” (60). Lacking cultural and religious frames of reference, during their respite from work Kossola and the others “dance lak in de Afficky soil,” which marginalizes them further: “De American colored folks, you unnerstand me, dey say we savage and den dey laugh at us and doan come say nothin’ to us” (62). Only a man called Free George, whose wife bought him out of slavery, befriends the *Clotilda* captives and advises them “not to dance on de Sunday. Den he tell us whut Sunday is. Nobody in Afficky soil doan tell us ’bout no Sunday. Den we doan dance no mo on de Sunday” (62). Free George helped acclimate Kossola and his shipmates to life in America, and later encouraged their conversion to

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Christianity, but his involvement also signaled the diminishment of Yoruba cultural practices.

Kossola's shipmates recognized his persuasive abilities and nominated him to appeal to Timothy Meaheer, whose family had enslaved them, to provide land and homes as reparation (66). After emancipation, several *Clotilda* survivors worked at Meaheer's lucrative lumber mill, where they were subjected to unsafe, inhumane, and exploitative treatment while making one dollar per eleven-hour shift—less than ten cents an hour (Robertson 139-40). Meaheer was unsympathetic, but Kossola remained undaunted. One day, he asked Meaheer how big Mobile was. When he replied that he did not know, Kossola said,

“Well, if you give Cudjo all de Mobile, dat railroad, and all de banks, Cudjo doan want it ‘cause it ain’t home. Cap’n Tim, you brought us from our country where we had lan’. You made us slave. Now dey make us free but we ain’ got no country and we ain’ got no lan’! Why doan you give us dis land so we kin buildee ourself a home?” (67)

Meaheer responded by berating Kossola and denying that he owed preferential treatment to the people he had enslaved (67).¹⁰ While Kossola's appeal did not work directly, his technique of posing a question and then elaborating an answer to make his case was rhetorically sound. The confidence Kossola's compatriots had in him was eventually rewarded, since through their collective efforts they purchased land from Meaheer—at full price—to “makee de Affica where dey fetch us” (68). Neither Kossola nor Hurston comments on the exploitation and racism the *Clotilda* survivors faced to establish Africatown, but the details Kossola mentions and Hurston records invite readers to recognize the situation's unfairness.

Assimilation in postbellum America proved difficult for Kossola and his family who, because of the Fourteenth Amendment, were United States citizens, but remained culturally othered. Africatown provided a buffer against the outside world, a refuge “that embodie[d] the genius and resiliency of Africans in the Americas, given the fact that they began their lives as captives dispossessed of all things material” (Robertson 144). The founders and residents of Africatown relied on their self-sufficiency and caring for each other to create a robust community. “We Afficky men,” said Kossola, “doan wait lak do other colored people till de white folks gittee ready to build us a school. We build one for ourself” (74). But the town's insularity and successes were not enough to protect its residents from larger, malicious forces. Kossola said that “colored folks whut born here, dey pick at us all de

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time and call us ig'nant savage" and "tell de Afficky people dey kill folks and eatee de meat" (68-69, 73). Charges of backwardness and cannibalism were to be expected from racist whites, but Kossola consistently reports verbal and physical mistreatment of his family by American-born Black people.

Kossola also explains cultural differences surrounding names: "In de Afficky we gottee one name, but in dis place dey tell us we needee two names. [. . .] So you unnerstand me, we give our chillun two names. One name because we not furgit our home; den another name for de Americky soil so it won't be too crooked to call" (72-73). Although Kossola and his family live among *Clotilda* survivors, they are not truly "home"; providing his children with two names both honors Yoruba culture and capitulates to American laws. It additionally, according to Sexton, "creates floating signifiers and signifieds, which constitute a power to identify and to define oneself" (205). The African and American names of Kossola and Abila's children represented a chance to establish their own identities, but like Africatown itself, having dual names did not provide adequate defense. Prefiguring his role as a parable-giver, Kossola employed an animal metaphor to explain why his sons resorted to violence when constantly provoked: "You see de rattlesnake in de woods? [. . .] If you bother wid him, he bite you. If you know de snake killee you, why you bother wid him? Same way wid my boys, you unnerstand me. If you leave my boys alone, dey not bother nobody!" (73). Despite the metaphor's vivid imagery and Kossola's social stature, his plea on behalf of his sons failed. Kossola seems to have concluded, long before he met Hurston, that Americans would never view Africans like him and his children as equals, let alone as fully human.

One of the final stories Kossola relates is how he became Africatown's parable-giver: "Ole Charlie, he de oldest one come from de Afficky soil. One Sunday after my wife left me he come wid all de others dat come cross de water and say, 'Uncle Cudjo, make us a parable'" (92). He then improvised vignettes about a parasol and riding on a train. Both Kossola and Hurston occasionally describe his body language, gestures, and inflection while delivering a parable (92, 98-99). By documenting Kossola's extemporaneous oral expressions, Hurston demonstrates his independence, his rhetorical skill, and his idiosyncratic voice. As Mohr explains, Kossola's "story, told in his own words, insists on humanness, consciousness, subjectivity, and citizenship in dialogue with Hurston. As interviewer, listener, and literary mediator, Hurston set the stage for an empathetic reading of *Barracoon* by a broader public in ways that could not have been imagined in its time" (90).

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Resonances and Recoveries

Barracoon testifies to human survival in the face of extreme suffering, and yet reading it as optimistic proves challenging. Kossola said of death, “we from cross de water know dat he come in de ship wid us” (74). He vividly recounts the deaths of his six children, three of whom died from illness. However, Fisheton’s death by police officer (unprosecuted), Adeniah’s death by vehicular negligence (unprosecuted), and Pollee’s disappearance (unsolved) carry unsettling contemporary resonances. The tragedies Kossola and his family experienced seem familiar, as if circumstances fueling race relations remain the same at their root, despite increased awareness of systemic racism and its deleterious effects. The book recounts events reaching back to the mid-1800s, but it reflects our current moment, being in no small measure “a story of miscarried justice and a rigged legal system” (Hoeller 211). The America described by Kossola provides neither opportunity nor safety. Hurston goes further in her autobiography, comparing Kossola’s “yearning for blood and cultural ties” to a “sense of mutilation” (*Dust Tracks* 204). Yet in *Barracoon*, Hurston captures Kossola’s voice and storytelling, even as her own voice and the voices of others inhabit the text. *Barracoon* does not erase the pain of the past, of Kossola’s “mutilation,” but the multi-voiced presentation and elevation of Kossola’s voice holds in abeyance the trauma of his separations.

Hurston would have delighted in the circumstances that greeted her book’s long-delayed publication. On April 9, 2018, one month before its release, a Mobile-based environmental journalist named Ben Raines, along with scientists from the University of Southern Mississippi and a team of professional divers, located what they assumed was the wreckage of the *Clotilda* in the Mobile River. Their findings were corroborated in May 2019 through archaeological research funded by national and international organizations (Raines 206-11). Recovered from Hurston’s archive like the *Clotilda* from the water, *Barracoon* has assumed its rightful place among Hurston’s works and within the larger African American and American traditions. Kossola’s odyssey of kidnapping, enslavement, and partial freedom contained the merits Hurston always knew it had, and her simultaneous absence from and presence in *Barracoon* enhances rather than obscures Kossola’s centrality. Even when Hurston attempted to minimize her involvement, the narrative remained marked by her voice and, to a lesser but still meaningful extent, the voices of others. *Barracoon* stands out in Hurston’s canon not because she eradicated her voice, but rather because her voice amplifies that of Oluale Kossola, whose story otherwise

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might have been among the millions silenced by the horrors of the Middle Passage and American slavery.

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Notes

1. The others are *You Don't Know Us Negroes and Other Essays* (2022), edited by Genevieve West and Henry Louis Gates Jr., and *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories from the Harlem Renaissance* (2020), edited by West.
2. Hurston spelled Kossola's name *Kossula*. Most scholars present his name as *Kossola*, and I follow suit unless quoting a source. Doing so aligns with Kossola's instructions to Hurston as to how he should be addressed: "My name, is not Cudjo Lewis. It Kossula. When I gittee in Americky soil, Mr. Jim Meaher he try callee my name, but it too long, you unnerstand me, so I say, 'Well, I yo' property?' He say, 'Yeah.' Den I say, 'You callee me Cudjo. Dat do.' But in Afficky soil my mama she name me Kossula" (19-20). Kossula renamed himself "Cudjo," but I do not use that name unless quoting a source.
3. Hurston's inability to secure publishers led to the termination of her contract with Mason on March 31, 1931, although she continued to receive occasional funding until September 1932 (Hemenway 110-11, 160). Due to another contract, Hurston owed Mason \$600 for the commercial failure of her 1932 play *The Great Day*, which was based on material collected under Mason's patronage (Frydman 109-10).
4. Hoeller's article analyzes Hurston's employment of images, motifs, and themes shared by the texts, including ships, gates, porches, listening, horizons, communities, and justice. Gates also discusses several of these features of the novel in *The Signifying Monkey*.
5. Hurston wrote that Kossola's story "stuck in [her] craw" because it unveiled the direct involvement of African nations in the transatlantic slave trade, thereby exploding the accepted narrative of American slavery (*Dust Tracks* 200). Hurston understood the significance of Kossola's story, but gamely masked her analysis of it in *Barracoon*.
6. On March 25, 1931, Hurston shared with Mason evidence confirming Kossola's memories: "I found at the library an actual account of the raid as Kossula said that it happened. Also the tribe name. It was not on the map because the entire tribe was wiped out by the Dahomey troops. The king who conquered them

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preserved carefully the skull of Kossula's king as a most worthy foe" (Kaplan 214). For details on the economic, agricultural, and political dynamics that fueled this conflict, see Robertson 79-87.

7. Ben Raines contends that the woman who helped nurse Kossola and urged him to sue the L&N Railroad was Emma Langdon Roche. Part of his reasoning is that her family's mortuary was on Government Street in Mobile, where Kossola was struck by the train; he also posits Roche's compassion toward Kossola during his convalescence allowed her to interview him for *Historic Sketches* (152-53).

8. Hurston recorded footage of Kossola in 1928 that "show[s] him to be handsome, active, and courtly" (Boyd 193). Durkin describes the film and argues that it is more important than the manuscript "not only for authenticating the existence of its interviewee, but also for providing him with a measure of self-representation which, although incredibly short, silent, partially obscured, and subjected to editing, resists the writer's mediating pen" (611). But Hurston's filmic documentation of Kossola was also problematic: Mason's money provided Hurston with equipment that "positioned her socially at odds with the communities that she sought to visit and invites readings of her project as part of a wider history of white voyeurism and cultural commodification" (Durkin 611).

9. Kossola regaled Hurston with more stories than she could include in *Barracoon*, the appendix to which includes seven stories and parables (96-112). In *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States* (2002), a posthumous collection of Hurston's field notes, the third of three appendices is called "Stories Kossula Told Me"—the same title as a section of *Barracoon's* appendix. *Every Tongue Got to Confess* lists 482 stories purported to have come from Kossola (265-79).

10. Timothy Meaher died in 1892, but his family continues to profit off the land he sold to the *Clotilda* survivors. See Raines, chapter nine, "Africatown—The Fall," 165-91.

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“Everything Illustrated”: Black Cultural Repertoires of Expression in Valerie Martin’s *Property*

Nicole Carr

At a 2013 inaugural luncheon, First Lady Michelle Obama ignited a virtual firestorm of controversy following John Boehner’s attempt to engage her in banter. As the Speaker of the House lightly patted her arm, Obama rolled her eyes. For many Black Americans watching this exchange, Obama’s nonverbal expression—specifically the rolling of her eyes—sent a clear message of her extreme dissatisfaction with Boehner. In fact, Obama’s facial expression, rigid posture, and subtle contortions of her body were quite familiar to many a Black viewer. On Twitter, Black users lauded Obama’s “side-eye” as “epic” (@Luvvie). For NewsOne, a Black-owned news website, Obama had performed an “Executive Side-Eye” (“Presidential Shade”). As its name suggests, the “side-eye” is typically performed by lowering the eyes and peering out at the person from the corners of one’s eyes. The praise Black viewers heaped on Obama highlights the visual rebuke’s rootedness in a coded look of Black nonverbal self-expression. Indeed, the vaunted “side-eye” spans the African Diaspora. In Guyana and Jamaica, the “cut-eye” operates as a visual assault that “cuts” up another person via looking them up and down (Rickford 299). In Haitian culture, the term for this phenomenon is “couper yeux” which translates “to cut (or cutting) the eyes” (299). While the “side-eye” certainly operates as a visual expression of disgust, disapproval, displeasure, or outright hostility, it also contains an element of satirical humor since the intended goal is to render the recipient a fool who cannot be trusted. Even more, the “side-eye” carries with it a performative element as the actor attempts to elicit laughter from members within their community. Thus, Obama’s deployment of the side-eye signified upon time-worn Black vernacular expressions immediately recognizable to members within our communities.

Although mainstream media picked up on the air of disapproval lodged in Obama’s nonverbal expression, reporters sidestepped the nuances of the look, whittling Obama’s “side-eye” down to “a moment of questionable body language” (Whitaker). For Black viewers, however, witnessing the most prominent woman in the nation, if not the

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world, employ a uniquely Black cultural code of expression to dismiss Boehner (and by extension a majority white GOP who consistently and openly flaunted its disdain for the nation's first Black president) was culturally affirmative in immeasurable ways. Indeed, it further solidified Obama's iconic status in Black spaces as the unapologetically Black "sista" from the Southside of Chicago who refused to suffer fools, including the most powerful white men in the world. For my purposes, Obama's "side-eye" opens up a theoretical space for considering how enslaved Black women and men negotiated their humanity by "checking" their enslavers via a series of unequivocally Black looks and phrases. Though a contemporary moment, the exchange highlights the richly complex Black cultural archive from which Obama drew her response.

As early as 1934, novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston began documenting the significance of performative actions to Black cultural language systems in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression." Distinguishing Black language norms as "everything illustrated," Hurston posits that the Negro's "very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures" (49). Although her primary address in the article is Black art, Hurston's premise foregrounds my analysis of Valerie Martin's 2003 historical novel, *Property*. Set on a Louisiana sugar plantation in 1828, *Property* centers on Manon, a white woman married to Gaudet, a white slaveholding plantation owner. However, much of the tension in the novel pivots on Manon's hatred for Sarah, the enslaved Black woman whom Manon's husband sexually abuses with impunity. If, as Stephanie Li asserts in her critique of *Property*, "recognizing the emotional and psychic needs at work in Manon's relationship to Sarah" produces "a greater understanding of how gender operates under bondage," then the goal of this essay is to engender a more robust critical engagement into Sarah's use of Black cultural repertoires of expression as a means of protecting herself from the crippling psychological and sexual trauma Manon and her husband inflict upon her (240). In some ways, my intentions mirror the practice Saidiya Hartman names as "critical fabulation" in that I am "listening for the unsaid" by reimagining what could have been (3). Thus, a fuller portrait of those typically silenced by the "violence in and of the archive" may emerge (Fuentes 5).

Sarah's defiance, paralleling the daily acts of resistance practiced by actual enslaved Black women and men within the plantation household, often surfaces in rather mundane interactions. These signifiers of Black cultural modes of expression remain largely unintelligible to Manon despite the air of unmistakable disrespect lodged within these looks and acts. As Manon ponders the rising number of runaways springing up, the sound of Sarah ripping an old gown for quilting inter-

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rupts her thoughts and she is suddenly possessed by “a desire to hear [Sarah] speak.” Tossing out a seemingly insignificant question, Manon inquires about Sarah’s son, Walter:

“What did the doctor say about Walter?” I said.

She glanced up at me, then back to her work, her expression as blank as a death mask. “He don’ hear.”

“Did he make any recommendations for treatment?”

“All master say he is don’ hear.”

Sarah’s decision to make her face “as blank as a death mask” positions her as a woman skilled in the art of performance. Her masking here is akin to Paul Laurence Dunbar’s entreaty for Black people to “let them only see us while we wear the mask.” Sarah, donning a “death mask” rather than a grinning one, nonetheless prevents Manon’s relentless attempts to blithely ignore the perilous plantation system collapsing around her. It becomes quite clear early on in *Property* that Sarah’s muted facial expressions and clipped responses mirror the air of rebellion swirling around the plantation. Again and again, Manon, in her actions with Sarah, Sarah’s husband, and other enslaved Black people dismisses or simply ignores the obvious clues of sedition around her. After discovering a Black man standing very still outside her window and gazing up at her house, a spot from which she herself notes is “quite an excellent command post,” Manon dismisses the man as a sentry and then perhaps a lover to Delphine, an enslaved Black woman on the plantation. Therefore the import of Sarah’s “he don’ hear” functions not only as a refusal to oblige Manon’s idle chatter, but as a double entendre: Walter doesn’t hear but Manon’s self-imposed oblivion to the impending insurrection marks her as a woman willfully escaping the realities of the world around her. While her husband cannot stop Manon from taking the sleeping tincture to escape his sexual advances, Sarah’s coded forms of communication repeatedly disrupt Manon’s sense of comfort.

This is evident in the same scene when Manon asks about the hearing ability of Nell, Sarah’s daughter: “Does that one hear?” (54). A seemingly innocent question, it nonetheless exposes the muted racial undertones of Manon’s inquiry. For Manon, Walter is “the violently conceived, incorrigible, deaf, and mute son” of Sarah and Mr. Gaudet, the literal embodiment of a perverse and inferior blackness (Sharpe 198). Walter’s inferiority lies in what his mixed-raced body represents:

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Black women's violent rape at the hands of white men. Thus, Manon's "Does that one hear?" reveals her adherence to the myth of tainted black blood. Therefore, the tête-à-tête between the two women is loaded with meaning, with Manon presuming that the source of Nell's perceived hearing disability is lodged within Sarah's lascivious black body. Most striking here is that Sarah purposely chooses not to verbally respond, instead performing an action in which "everything is illustrated":

For answer, Sarah laid the cloth in her lap, turned toward the creature and clapped her palms together, making a sharp crack, like a shot. The baby's hands flew up above the top of the box and it let out a soft cry of surprise. Sarah turned back to her work, her mouth set in an annoying smirk.

"Why not just answer me?" I protested.

She had come to the hem of the gown, which she pulled free of the skirt in one long shriek. (Martin 55)

Sarah's nonverbal response dismisses the offensive question with such poise Manon appears flustered and foolish for even asking it. She "swerves" on Manon with such calculated precision that she does not fully comprehend or register that she has been insulted: "Why not just answer me?" Crucially, Sarah, in not even dignifying the insult with a direct response, contests Manon's racist views while also forcing Manon to reconsider how to address her in the future. The "sharp crack" of Sarah's abrupt clap sounds "like a shot." Thus, not only does Sarah upset Manon's hope for a light-hearted conversation in which she can pry information from her servant but she also offers a foreboding sign of the rebellion that is to come, her clear knowledge of it, and the role she will play in ensuring both she and her daughter escape unscathed. Without even saying a word, Sarah reasserts her humanity by dividing herself from Manon just as she splits the hem of the gown from the skirt. Whether intentional or not, the image of Sarah tearing the skirt and the "long shriek" this action elicits recalls the fury she unleashes on Manon while fleeing the plantation household. Tellingly, the image of her riding atop a horse with "her skirt billowing behind her" is among the last memories Manon recalls about the night of the rebellion. Further, Sarah's "checking" of Manon buoys her up with a sense of righteous dignity—evidenced by her "annoying smirk"—proving that she is self-actualized and not, as is commonly accepted among some scholars, Manon's mere double.

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In “Telling Forgotten Stories of Slavery in the Postmodern South,” Susan Donaldson renders Sarah “a cipher, a successful rival for Manon’s husband, and something very like a double, a mirror of Manon’s own anger and victimization” (274). Amy K. King echoes this, conceptualizing Sarah as wholly inscrutable: “Because Manon vacillates between conflicting emotions regarding Sarah, the reader does not know how to interpret Sarah” (220). To be clear, both King’s and Donaldson’s critical assessments of Sarah are somewhat logical conclusions. Because Martin does not devote a single chapter or brief section to Sarah in *Property*, one yearns to hear her voice sans Manon’s seemingly omniscient presence. That *Property* is told via the first-person narrative of a slaveholding white woman certainly poses issues for readers seeking to know the intricacies of Sarah’s fears and hopes. However, a sizable percentage of what is known about enslaved Black people’s resistance often surfaces in the historical documents of white slaveholders. In her meticulously researched *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, historian Thaviola Glymph notes that despite white slaveholders’ scant mention of the enslaved Black people occupying their homes, their diaries and journals underscore the daily battles Black women waged against their white female enslavers:

In the diaries and letters of slaveholding women and men, enslaved women are seldom mentioned, but the exceptions are telling. Slaveholders wrote mainly about themselves. But the comparatively meager record they left on their slaves is rich on enslaved women in the plantation household. It is a record chronicling the efforts of mistresses and masters to organize the plantation household according to emerging ideas of domesticity, their own sense of power, and it is a record of slave women’s resistance to these efforts and to slaveholders’ sense of power. (66)

In some ways, the contours of Black women’s resistance are made legible via white women’s cataloguing their outrage at Black women’s impudent looks, silences, and nonverbal modes of expression. Enslaved Black women working for slaveholding white women appear in letters and diaries with the adjectives “slow and stupid” affixed to them, chastisement for their failure to perform according to their slaveholders’ preferred speed (qtd. in Glymph 67). Corresponding with her Northern family from her home in a tiny Louisiana river parish between 1856-1876, slaveholder Tryphena Fox detailed her ongoing attempts to train Mary, an enslaved Black woman on the plantation. Even after Tryphena sent Mary to her previous owner for “retraining,” Mary reverted back to

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her old habits, stealing cream and butter. Fox bemoaned Mary's refusal to "do right" except "when she pleases," writing "the better I treat her, the more impudent and lazy she grows" (68). For readers familiar with the personal writings of nineteenth-century white female slaveholders, Manon's musings on Sarah appear strikingly similar to the antebellum historical documents penned by women like Fox. Indeed, *Property's* air of verisimilitude is no doubt attributable to Martin's careful research on the antebellum period; Martin herself mentions the secondary and primary accounts she consulted in the Acknowledgements section of the novel. Therefore, reading Sarah as Manon's "double" because her words and actions are mediated through a white woman forecloses possibilities for examining the ways in which enslaved Black women routinely exercised agency, albeit limited, within the plantation household. If Sarah is freed from existing solely as a "cipher" to her white female slaveholder, her utilization of Black self-expression is made visible as it is evident she takes particular delight in fashioning her own identity.

Her penchant for deploying a Black cultural repertoire emerges in the pivotal speech that she delivers in *Property's* final scene. It is one of the rare times that Sarah speaks beyond a few clipped sentences:

"When you gets to the North," she said, "they invites you to the dining room, and they asks you to sit at the table. They offers you a cup of tea, and they asks, 'Does you want cream and sugar?'"

I was dumbfounded. It was more than I had ever heard her say. My uncle was right, I thought. She had changed; she'd gone mad. I took a swallow of my coffee. "And this appealed to you?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, raising her eyes very coolly to mine. "It appeal to me." (192)

On one level, Sarah is unmistakably defiant here, looking Manon right in the eye, thereby effectively destabilizing the strict social boundaries between that of slaveholder and enslaved. There is, however, another stealthier, less recognizable form of resistance operating just beneath the surface and embedded in Sarah's declaration of "it appeal to me." In black cultural parlance, Sarah is "reading" Manon. According to *RuPaul's Drag Race Dictionary*, the defining element of the "read" is a verbal rejoinder that "wittingly and incisively expose[s] a person's flaws" with such efficiency that the person's vulnerabilities are laid

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open like the pages of a book. For this reason, anyone can go on an angry tirade, but not everyone can “read.” “Reading,” a practice fundamental to Southern Black women, especially Southern Black church-going women, is marked by the “reader” verbally archiving another person’s flaws in such a way that the receiver of the “read” is left vulnerable, sometimes mouth agape. To be clear, “reading” and “side-eyeing” are not a new form of communication but rather old traditions exemplifying the uniquely coded and expressive language spanning the African Diaspora. Sarah’s speech, hearkening to the multi-varied complexities within African American communities, beckons a re-imagining of the ways enslaved Black people utilized “reading” to contest slaveholders.

As such, Sarah “reads” Manon with such efficiency that, in the words of RuPaul, “the library is closed.” Sarah coolly raising her eyes to Manon as she delivers her brief declaration exposes Manon’s pathological mindset in failing to comprehend the reasons behind an enslaved Black woman desiring to be treated like any other human being. Sarah’s incrimination of Manon closely parallels Toni Morrison’s “read” of whiteness as a pervasive illness sickening all white people who subscribe to and benefit from white supremacy. When Charlie Rose asked Morrison how she felt about racism during an interview, Morrison coolly redirected the question back to him, asserting that “white people have a very serious problem and ‘they’ should start thinking about what ‘they’ can do about it. Take me out if it” (“Interview with Charlie Rose”). For Morrison, the price of the white ticket, so to speak, leaves white people emotionally “bereft” by distorting their psyche. Miraculously, whites assume that it is Black people’s responsibility to solve the problem of racism that they themselves perpetuate and benefit from. This line of thinking fails to acknowledge that racism remains Black people’s burden only because whites have the power to abdicate and displace their culpability. Instead of explaining how politically loaded, insulting, and hypocritical his question was, Morrison conveyed her disdain both in refusing to dignify Rose with an answer and redirecting the question back to him and white people in general. This is precisely the point Sarah seems to make when she defiantly asserts her right to be treated like a human being. If you cannot understand why I prefer to be treated with respect, Sarah seems to say, then the problem is with you, not me. For both Morrison and Sarah, “reading” whiteness for “filth” assists them in sustaining their own black identities.

In *Property*, Sarah’s “it appeal to me” operates as a coup de grâce, shocking Manon into silence precisely because it reveals that she has simply been “passing” as a dull, disinterested enslaved Black woman well before she runs away. Sarah’s ability to disguise herself—she

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passes in the North as a white man—underscores her expertise in the art of performance and her ruthless determination to don whatever mask necessary to accomplish her goals. It is little wonder that Sarah's very dignified "read" of Manon leaves her stupefied. Following Sarah's speech, Manon must now contemplate a very different version of Sarah:

I considered this image of Sarah. She was dressed in borrowed clothes, sitting stiffly at a bare wooden table while a colorless Yankee woman, her thin hair pulled into a tight bun, served her tea in a china cup. The righteous husband fetched a cushion to make their guest more comfortable. It struck me as perfectly ridiculous. What on earth did they think they were doing? (192)

Sarah's chameleon-like quality renders her a purposely enigmatic figure, her true self hidden behind a carefully constructed façade Manon cannot penetrate. Significantly, Sarah's continuous deployment of a set of distinctive yet elusive array of Black looks and idioms designed to dismiss, rebuke, and "check" Manon with such aplomb that the insult goes virtually undetected challenges critics' tendency to romanticize the relationship between Sarah and Manon. To examine the complex power dynamics between Gaudet, Manon, and Sarah, Amy K. King draws on Terry Castle's lesbian counterplot theory. Castle, reconfiguring Eve Sedgwick's triangle of desire articulated in *Between Men*, instead focuses on the female-female-male triad in which "the possibility of male bonding is radically suppressed" due to the union between two females. Although King argues that *Property* "ultimately destabilizes the optimistic outcomes Castle sees in the triangle of female desire" since the theory does not "reflect the realities of societies that privilege ownership of other people," because her analysis is framed through the lens of the lesbian counterplot she presumes that there is indeed possibility for a feminist affinity between the two women due to their shared gender (213). However, perspectives such as these, prevalent also in Li's claims that *Property* explores the commonalities Manon shares with both her depraved husband and the abused Sarah, obscure Sarah's rape at the hands of Gaudet. Writing of Gaudet's sexual abuse of Sarah, King describes her not as a victim but as "Gaudet's lover" and on equal footing with Manon as a result of Gaudet raping her: "Sarah's position as Gaudet's lover causes Manon great turmoil, not because of Gaudet's exploitation of both women, but because Manon senses that her position of power is in jeopardy" (220). The danger in critiques such as these lies in not only minimizing Sarah's sexual abuse but also in absolving white women of power within

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the plantation household. As recent scholarship by Black women historians Stephanie E. Rogers and Thaviola Glymph show, white female slaveholding power was a routine, organizing principle within enslaved Black people's lives. Therefore, the true source of Manon's power rests not in her wifely duties but in her role as white female slaveholder. Consequently, Sarah gains no access to power or even material benefits from Gaudet forcing sex upon her. In fact, the precarity of her situation intensifies as a result of her fixed position, making her more vulnerable to harm from both her female and male slaveholder. This is why, with the rebels searching for the man of the household, Sarah momentarily pauses to point Gaudet out. In the midst of running frantically to secure her own freedom, she nonetheless watches as the captain of the rebels swings a knife over his head before bringing it down over Gaudet's neck (114). The intensity with which Sarah watches her rapist's decapitation is at odds with the passionate expression Manon maps onto Sarah when she glimpses her leaving her husband's room.

Even more significant, the violence that Sarah displays toward Manon in this same scene refutes critics' claims of Gaudet blocking Sarah and Manon from forging a relationship based on their shared gender. As Houda Hamdi asserts, the "myth of gender identification" is a defining element in *Property* since "Manon naively fails to understand that her slave's oppression is of a different order" (161). Hamdi's line of reasoning is particularly salient in the hellish scene on the night of the rebellion. With Gaudet dead, Sarah does not assist or offer Manon any help. Gaudet's death does little to dissuade Sarah from violently attacking Manon with such force it is difficult to infer that the two women could unite along gender lines in Gaudet's absence. Ignoring Manon's pleas for Sarah to stop and help her, Sarah turns on Manon "in a fury, tearing at my face with her free hand, her sharp nails digging into my already wounded cheek" (115). Sarah continues kicking Manon and biting her hand before finally gathering the horse's reins and disappearing into the night. The two women do not, as some critics would like, ride off into the sunset. Rather, Sarah leaves Manon "for dead" whilst fleeing toward freedom. In fact, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to suggest that had she more time Sarah would have arranged for Manon's execution at the hands of the rebels.

Thus, Manon's uses of white female slaveholding power erode any chances of affinity via her sexual and emotional torment of Sarah. Sarah's maneuvering through Manon's gendered displays of power symbolize the daily battles enslaved Black women fought within domestic spaces largely absent of white male dominance. Understandably, Sarah's checks to Manon's power often arise in the isolated interactions between enslaver and enslaved. For instance, when Manon notices the

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somewhat elaborate contraption Sarah has rigged so that her daughter may sleep more comfortably in the box—"a ticking mattress stuffed with moss and covered by a rag quilt" and a "loop of willow across the middle to hold up a piece of mosquito net"—she snidely asks, "Is she a princess?" To which Sarah replies, "If she not itchy, she won' cry" (6). The deceptive quality of Sarah's words lie in the material conditions of the scene itself: she is an enslaved Black woman forced to serve a white woman who will not even brush her own hair or fan herself without Sarah's labor. Therefore, the baby's presence poses a risk for Sarah as she threatens to interfere with Manon's unfettered access to Sarah's forced labor. This stark reality often produced lethal results for enslaved Black infants and children beaten to death by female slaveholders "tired of hearing the baby cry" (qtd. in Glymph 55). Here, Sarah's response challenges Manon's obvious disdain for Black children and Black motherhood. Sarah's terse words are an attempt to defend her child's life by using the one thing that Manon cannot invade: her mind. Whenever she speaks or looks, Sarah adopts a coded form of communication serving the purpose of protecting herself, her children, and other enslaved Black people in the plantation household. So often does Sarah respond with doublespeak, hooded looks, and sneers that Manon categorizes them as a series of expressions peculiar to Sarah: "For answer all I got was one of her smirks" (13).

In a moment eerily similar to that of Sethe's stolen milk in *Beloved*, and perhaps the most sadistic scene in *Property*, Manon, glimpsing a "drop of milk" clinging to Sarah's breasts, drops to her knees and forcefully guides Sarah's nipple into her mouth (Martin 76). The perversity of this scene lies in Manon swallowing and stealing Sarah's breastmilk; however, the scene's literary brilliance not only restructures white women as brutal slaveholders eagerly exercising their right to sexually assault Black women but also illuminates the wide-ranging depth of Black cultural modes of self-expression. Sarah uses the side eye to silently rebuke Manon. The sharp, deliberate, and upward slant of Sarah's chin away from Manon paired with her absolute refusal to look at Manon best embodies that particular air of disapproval and disgust lodged within the "side-eye." Sarah's "side-eye" forms the core of her nonverbal resistance to serving as source of enjoyment and comfort for Manon. With her mouth "set in a thin, hard line," Sarah assumes a decidedly rigid posture emerging in stark opposition to the soft, pliable, and comforting mammy Manon desperately wants and needs. Sarah's open display of defiance culminates in her refusal to cradle, or bring Manon's head closer to her breast. Unsurprisingly, Manon misreads Sarah's body language as solely an indicator of fear, thinking that Sarah is "afraid to look at me" (76). While Sarah undoubtedly experiences a

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wide range of emotions here, which most likely include fear, it seems that Sarah's use of the "side-eye" becomes the vehicle by which she rejects the exploitative script of Manon's imaginings, silently judging her oppressor. Sarah casts a "mean side eye," one rejecting the stultifying dominance of white female power.

This is one of the most refreshing elements of *Property*: Martin, despite being a white woman writing a book about an enslaved Black woman, revises saccharine myths of Black and white women uniting along gendered lines of oppression. As the late Toni Morrison's ringing endorsement on the front cover of the novel attests, *Property* offers both a "fresh" and "unsentimental look at what slave-owning does to (and for) one's interior life." Indeed, through Martin's descent into the mind of a slaveholding white woman living in the antebellum South, Michel Foucault's articulation of power as the force that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (30) is realized as a ubiquitous force, waiting to be seized by whomever. It is no coincidence that Manon emerges most resourceful when marshaling forces against Sarah's failed runaway attempt.

Yet Sarah's skill for separating herself from Manon by fashioning her own self-identity occurs long before she runs away and briefly experiences freedom disguised as a white man. Early in the novel, Sarah's utilization of "Black looks" surfaces when Manon steps outside for a breath of fresh air only to feel Sarah's gaze upon her. The work of late Black cultural critic and scholar bell hooks attests to the transformative power of looking. In *Black Looks*, hooks defines the "oppositional gaze" as "a site of resistance for colonized Black people globally" (116). Looking, hooks writes, becomes a pronouncement of authorial power: "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (116). It is clear that Sarah is practicing a similarly transformative stare despite her enslaved status. As Manon stands in the yard, she realizes that an enslaved Black person on the run could easily observe the entire layout of the house from her position. At the very moment that Manon realizes how vulnerable she is to an impending slave insurrection, Sarah appears in Manon's bedroom:

I looked back at my own window. The curtains seemed to be moving against something heavy, then they parted and Sarah appeared, holding her baby. She saw me at once, but she didn't start or turn away. She just stood there, her dress half-opened, looking down at me coolly. She's a nerveless creature, I thought. There really is something inhuman about her. After

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a few moments I grew weary of looking at her and went back into the house. (Martin 42)

For Sarah, the simple act of refusing to look away becomes an open act of sedition. In fact, Sarah's refusal to move merely because Manon wants her to do so expresses her commitment to open and frank acts of resistance. The sense of poise that Sarah assumes here is manifested via her refusal to "start or turn away." Despite her enslavement, Sarah's unabashed display of defiance is borne from her self-actualized status. Coolly *looking down* at Manon, Sarah tacitly refuses to acknowledge Manon's supposedly superior presence.

It is clear from Manon's description of Sarah as a "nerveless creature" that Sarah's unceasing ability to kowtow to Manon's authority is what truly unsettles her. Interestingly, Manon seems to make a conscious decision *not to* understand Sarah's defiance. Rather than deal with the implications of Sarah's clear challenge to her white supremacist power, Manon simply settles on the conclusion that she is a "nerveless creature." As I have been arguing throughout this essay, it is not simply that Sarah challenges Manon, but also that she reduces Manon to a fool by deploying a series of looks and phrases from a decidedly Black repertoire. Essentially, Sarah's unapologetically "Black look" unnerves Manon. Thus, Sarah, although she remains bound to Manon in the legal sense, carves out a space of creative self-expression that Manon cannot possess. This is no small thing, as Manon's violence against Sarah will most likely intensify now that her husband is dead. This is the nightmare that, for Sarah, "never ends." A sliver of hope for Sarah is her careful surveillance of Manon and the open "checks" to her authority.

When Manon awakens from a nightmare only to find Sarah intently watching her, she realizes that Sarah has been staring at her as she sleeps: "When I turned on my side, I looked down to where Sarah lay, the child curled up at her side, her wide eyes watching me, and I thought, She has been watching me like that this entire night" (13). Sarah's haunting presence confirms her understanding of Manon's predatory behavior. Within Black vernacular, the phrase "seent" connotes the wariness with which one regards someone who cannot be fully trusted. Needless to say, the full extent of Manon's exploitative behavior has been "seent" by Sarah. If Sarah is to survive Manon's cruel dominance, she must quite literally "stay woke," remaining conscious of Manon's scheming and devise creative psychological defenses to neutralize the impact of white supremacist violence.

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A Face-off with Self: Examining Black Exceptionalism and Cultural Rootedness in Teju Cole's *Open City* and Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt*

Zeba Shahbaaz

The performance of Black exceptionalism has often been debated and examined from sociopolitical, psychological, and historical perspectives as a way to reflect upon and critique the pervasiveness of racism and the influence of white supremacy on the Black psyche. In his seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon indicts white supremacy and anti-Black racism and suggests that its residual psychological impact can trigger internal paranoia and inauthentic performances of Black selfhood. Moreover, Fanon posits that the act of concealing one's cultural identity or ethnic roots as a means of survival and advancement in predominantly white or Anglocentric environments fosters a pervasive sense of self-loathing within Black diasporic communities. Notably, Fanon's emphasis on the residual internalization of Black self-hate due to the projection of anti-Black sentiment globally provides a critical ideological framework for examining how Black exceptionalism comes to be embodied and exchanged for social privileges and white acceptance by Black diasporic people to escape the feeling of "otherness."¹ Drawing from Fanon's ideological critique of white supremacy and Eurocentrism, "otherness" is reflected as a manifestation of racialized inferiority, perpetuating systemic oppression within colonized spaces. Contemporary Black diasporic writers Colson Whitehead and Teju Cole explore the trope of Black exceptionalism through the development of their protagonists in *Apex Hides the Hurt* and *Open City* and examine the ways in which these characters' internal conflicts pertaining to their racial and cultural identities coerce them into malleability and Anglocentric performances of selfhood in exchange for affiliation with white affluence. Furthermore, Whitehead's unnamed nomenclature consultant and Cole's Nigerian doctor Julius offer readers two complicated renditions of the Black psyche under siege of the "white gaze," as these Black male protagonists opt to desperately out-perform their white counterparts for personal validation while seeking to maintain their personal autonomy by

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masking their ties to cultural roots during their everyday encounters with strangers who look like them.

Black Exceptionalist Archetypes in Colson Whitehead's Novels

As an American novelist, Colson Whitehead has explored Black character archetypes from different historical and socio-political perspectives in an effort to highlight correlations between the two within some of his novels. While Whitehead critically engages Fanon's critique of performative Black exceptionalism closely through a Black male perspective in *Apex Hides the Hurt*, he initially examines this trope in his debut novel, *The Intuitionist*. Similar to his nomenclature consultant in *Apex Hides the Hurt*, Whitehead surveys the implications of racial exceptionalism and meritocracy through his Black female protagonist in *The Intuitionist*. In the novel, Whitehead's Black female protagonist Lila Mae Watson's role as a proficient and experienced elevator inspector takes a downward turn one day, literally, as the elevator that she is inspecting begins to freefall suddenly. In *The Intuitionist*, Watson is only the second Black elevator inspector to work for the Department of Elevator inspectors, and she is the first female elevator inspector to work in that department in New York City. Watson's character archetype is exceptional due to her occupational title and intuitive intellect, as well as her embodiment of racial progress as the second Black woman to be employed by the Department of Elevator inspectors. For example, when Watson is first introduced in the novel, Whitehead writes, "Lila Mae Watson," she says. "I've come to inspect your elevator." The man's lips arch up toward his nose and Lila Mae understands that he's never seen an elevator inspector like her before. Lila Mae has pinpointed a spot as the locus of metropolitan disaffection. A zero-point" (Whitehead 5-6). In this excerpt from *The Intuitionist*, Watson's race, gender, and professional competence are all simultaneously called into question by the man she encounters. This questioning arises from her precise and confident display of her professional knowledge as a Black woman elevator inspector. Watson represents the first of many exceptional Black protagonists that Whitehead develops in his novels to highlight professional advancement and upward mobility by Black people who live in contemporary American society.

Additionally, Whitehead's most critically acclaimed and awarded novel, *The Underground Railroad*, was published in 2016 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the National Book Award for Fiction, the Author C. Clarke Award, and the 2017 Carnegie Medal for Excellence

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(Whitehead). As a critical work of historical fiction, *The Underground Railroad* was also adapted into a TV miniseries, written by director Barry Jenkins, who is best known for his 2016 film, *Moonlight*. Like Whitehead's protagonist Lila Mae Watson from his first novel, his Black female protagonist Cora in *The Underground Railroad* must demonstrate exceptional grit and resilience in her fugitivity to survive and evade capture at any given moment. In both *The Intuitionist* and *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead initiates an examination of Black exceptionalism by focusing on female characters. He emphasizes their intuitive abilities and self-awareness as pivotal elements that enable their resilience and survival within oppressive, anti-Black environments. In his novel *Apex Hides the Hurt*, Whitehead delves into an exploration of educational background and the significance of social status for the Black male protagonist, who assumes the role of a nomenclature consultant. His performance of an assimilated white identity and elite educational stature through his occupational title serves as a mask for his ineptitude and internalized self-hate. It also unveils the intricate dynamics inherent in adopting the position of the Black exceptional, while simultaneously navigating the complexities of self-worth and concealed identity within privileged white affluent spaces, all in pursuit of personal agency and recognition.

The narrators in Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt* and Cole's *Open City* harbor existential crises and personal afflictions, which become physical at times, as they travel through immutable spaces and encounter different people that either reject or support their notions of self. Furthermore, these problematic protagonists' subscription to performing Black exceptionalism professionally, along with their attempts to capitalize on social currency with strangers who barely know them, keep them distanced from their multicultural and Black roots, and their dynamic "true" selves. Whitehead's third novel *Apex Hides the Hurt* introduces readers to an unnamed nomenclature consultant who creates catchy names for new products and places. Characteristically, Whitehead's nomenclature consultant is a bit bougie and is self-assured in his abilities to name and rebrand anything attractively, as his work assignments may call for it. The nomenclature consultant capitalizes on the success of his Apex Band-Aid brand every chance that he gets and continues to secure his professional ranking in his company through his work achievements. He privately relishes the racial tokenism that he receives and chooses to mask his true feelings of imposter syndrome through the literal and metaphoric infected toe that he hides underneath his business casual shoe while he's performing his job. In his latest gig, the nomenclature consultant is tasked with renaming the town of Winthrop, which was founded by Black settlers. The heir

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to the Winthrop family, a resident software millionaire, wants the town to be renamed “New Prospera.” But the nomenclature consultant has his reservations about the proposed new name by one of the town’s white descendants and uncovers some of its historical Black roots during exchanges with its current Black residents, namely its home-grown mayor, Regina Goode. The nomenclature consultant must face off with himself and his own complicated association with his Black identity in order to retain his professional reputation and credibility. Thus, he harbors subconscious doubts regarding the authenticity of his professional persona, even in private settings, as the inherent risk associated with his work and frequent travels threatens to expose his Black identity, leaving him vulnerable to racialized discrimination and professional scrutiny.

Deflecting Identity Politics and Examining Cultural Unrootedness

After the nomenclature consultant arrives in the town of Winthrop for work, he encounters a Black housekeeper in the hotel that he is staying in, and he finds her to be intrusive and overbearing as she persistently knocks on his door to clean his room, despite his propped “DO NOT DISTURB” sign (Whitehead 107). The Black housekeeper’s plea that she “needs to get inside” is met with the protagonist’s assured claims that “I’m okay,” even as he knows that he really is not okay in terms of his comfort in the space or room (36-37). The “DO NOT DISTURB” sign on his hotel room door offers a symbol of the nomenclature consultant denying the Black housekeeper a presence in his physical or mental space. The nomenclature consultant had made a practice of disassociating himself from blue collar workers, such as the Black housekeeper, to maintain his social and psychological superiority as a self-proclaimed corporate branding mogul. He loathes the thought of having to find common ground or small talk with her because he does not want it to infiltrate his focus or professionalism on the surface, and underneath that, he is afraid to unearth the town’s oppressive history and displacement of their Black residents. Psychologically, the nomenclature consultant believes that maintaining a certain distance from individuals within the town, including the Black housekeeper, serves as a strategy to avoid establishing personal connections and familiarizing himself with their identities. By keeping his interactions strictly transactional rather than immersive, he aims to uphold a professional boundary aligned with his personal preference. To change the name of Winthrop to something more dynamic, and get it exactly right without

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unnecessary outside influences, the nomenclature consultant knows that he will reluctantly have to immerse himself in the town's Black history for context. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison discusses and refutes the idea that Black diasporic pasts and experiences need to be filtered through the white imagination to validate them. She states, "Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical . . ." (Morrison 52). Whitehead's nomenclature consultant resists the idea of signifying with the Black housekeeper in the hotel in Winthrop just because they share the same racial background, and her sense of familiarity frustrates him because he sees himself as an embodiment of social progress professionally, while she represents the subservient and oppressed past in his mind. Whitehead provokes a satirical exchange between the protagonist and Black housekeeper in the hotel using the "DO NOT DISTURB" sign on the door to highlight the nomenclature consultant's absurdity in denying his own historical connection to the domestic worker, but also his insistence on generating new narratives about himself apart from his symbolic ancestor in the scenario.

In addition to generating new narratives outside of the white imagination, Morrison insists that "The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power" (15). Within this exchange in particular, Whitehead reveals the fragility of his protagonist's ego and the risks of his performance of Black exceptionalism when he encounters a symbolic ancestor in the historically Black town of Winthrop, as he can no longer hide his cultural ties or refute them while being immersed in that history environmentally. In symbolically and literally denying the housekeeper's entry into the hotel room as he worked his gig in the town of Winthrop, the nomenclature consultant could continue to deny his racial identity and historical rootedness. The nomenclature consultant's interpretation of the housekeeper's desire to enter his room as an "assault" reveals just how elitist he is, and it displays how hard he tries to escape his association with Black people, whom he perceives as lower-class and uneducated, to protect to his own public persona (37). Whitehead uses the housekeeper to symbolize a living ancestor of the freed Black people who founded the town of Winthrop. Her presence summons integrity from the nomenclature consultant for this particular gig, and it also prompts him to reexamine his decision to be an accomplice in the erasure of the town's freed Black founders through its renaming. As he climbed the corporate ladder, he had become afraid of being exposed as a fraud for evading his cultural or racial "rootedness." The nomenclature consultant found pride in his professional title and

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in turn distanced himself from a shameful historical past of shared bondage in order to sustain social transience and personal autonomy.

Maintaining rootedness to cultural identity through a connection with ancestral history and a sense of community can be a slippery slope for some Black diasporic people who decide to pursue personal autonomy through racial transience and social validation within white affluent spaces. Whitehead offers one illustration of a compelling Black male protagonist who consciously prioritizes personal agency over racial signifying in *Apex Hides the Hurt*. Teju Cole's Nigerian doctor in *Open City* represents the postcolonial Black diasporic subject, and his attempt to overcome the "fixed" migrant narrative that he reluctantly travels with due to his ethnic name and origin. In her essay "Cosmopolitan Dilemma: Diasporic Subjectivity and Postcolonial Liminality in Teju Cole's *Open City*," Delphine Fogang suggests that ". . . postcolonial African diasporic subjectivity is in flux as postcolonial subjects constantly remake their identities in new environments characterized by myriad forces of marginalization as migrants never full belong 'here'" (139). Cole has examined this notion of racial transience through many of the other characters in his literary works, and notably in his debut novel *Every Day is for the Thief*. As a Nigerian novelist, photographer, critic, curator, and author, Cole has reflected upon the difficulties that some Black diasporic people have in maintaining cultural rootedness after migrating to Westernized spaces for perceived educational or professional advancement. Cole's 2007 debut novella, *Every Day is for the Thief* follows an unnamed protagonist who returns to Lagos, Nigeria after spending fifteen years living abroad in New York City. Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* explores themes such as nationality, the African diaspora, and contemporary advancements in infrastructure and technology in Nigeria, specifically. Cole invites readers to develop a nuanced understanding of themes such as rootedness to home and cultural transience with respect to his protagonist's return home to attend his father's funeral and his acknowledgment of the changes that have transpired in Lagos while he was living abroad. Similarly, Cole's 2011 novel *Open City* continues his subject focus and survey of living abroad (outside of the continent of Africa) from a Black diasporic perspective. Cole's plot in *Open City* unfolds as his protagonist Julius, a young psychiatric resident, struggles to reconcile his half-German and half-Nigerian identity and attempts to make a name for himself while also trying to reconcile his own childhood trauma and feelings of dislocation as a migrant living in New York City. Julius's random walks through the boroughs of New York and his international travel afford him fugitivity from his racial identity and his past in Nigeria, while it also distances him from memories associated

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with familial trauma that are tied to his mother and personal name.² Although Cole initially explores themes such as Black exceptionalism and ethnic ties with *Every Day is for the Thief*, he expands upon these ideas further in his novel-plot for *Open City* through his development of a complicated Black diasporic protagonist that rejects his own multiculturalism and loathes the concept of cultural signifying on the basis of phenotype rather than mutual interests or social status.

While visiting Brussels, Julius arrives at a nightclub called Le Panais, where he encounters other Africans like himself, but instead of enjoying their company he immediately attempts to differentiate and disassociate from them because they openly embrace one another through body language and other cultural signaling while dancing. As he skims club Le Panais for its demographic makeup, Julius encounters several Africans whom he presumes are Congolese. Julius presumes he's at one of the "Black" clubs in Brussels based on the hip hop music that is playing, and he observes that the space is full of "young Congolese, all dressed up, fashionable, flirting with each other" (Cole 139). As he continues to speculate about the colorful clothing and intimate exchanges between the presumed Congolese crowd in club Le Panais, who to him looked "particularly African, like recent arrivals" with their long-sleeved shirts, afros, and shirts tucked in, he engages in an exchange with one of the bartenders who seems approachable and phenotypically like him (139). When he sits at the bar to have a drink, he learns from the bartender that the African people that he had read as Congolese were actually Rwandan. Julius's sense of cultural dislocation is only heightened as he reflects on the exchanges between the Rwandans in club Le Panais. Julius recognizes that his multi-racial and multi-ethnic background maintains his nomadic status, and without a true sense of community or kinship, he feels alone in the world. He envies the Rwandans in the club in Brussels, and naturally draws inward to process his sense of cultural dislocation and unrootedness as a Black migrant living in America after he observed them enjoying themselves.

Cole engages this notion of relational cultural connection and phenomenology through Julius's conversation with the bartender in club Le Panais. In "Rethinking African culture and identity: the Afropolitan model," Chielozona Eze claims that "Identity is no longer shaped exclusively by geography or blood, or culturally understood in oppositional terms . . . identity is now relational" (235). As Julius sits at the bar stunned that he has mistakenly identified the Rwandans as Congolese in his pretentious effort to distinguish himself from them, the bartender reveals to him that he is half-Malian and half-Rwandan, which establishes a relational and phenomenological connection between the men on their multicultural identities. Subconsciously, Julius becomes

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triggered in club Le Panais due to his own racial ambiguity and inability to culturally signify with other Africans readily, dialectally or through social exchange. His initial attempt to connect with the Rwandans that he observed based on skin color perpetuates further internal conflict within him as the half-German and half-Nigerian man that he is. Julius had never been one to identify himself or lead with his multicultural and racial identity in conversation with others, but with the bartender in club Le Panais, he felt like he had found a long-lost brother. He relishes the feeling of cultural rootedness in his immediate setting, and he does not want to become obliged to it for his sense of self-worth, for fear of losing his racial transience. Julius temporarily signifies with the bartender's multicultural identity to the extent that La Panais "had suddenly become heavy with all the stories these people were carrying" (139). He starts to feel connected to everyone's stories in club Le Panais from a Black diasporic perspective, because they all shared African ancestry, whether rooted in their migrant status, assumed ethnocentricity in affiliation with phenotype, eccentricity in wardrobe choice, or all of the above. As Julius becomes increasingly immersed in club Le Panais's racial demography, he momentarily embraces it as his own illegitimate cultural community. He temporarily relocates his African rootedness in club Le Panais only to reject it later as he meditates on the Congolese cleaning woman's subjugation that he witnesses in the Notre Dame de la Chapelle cathedral:

I thought that she, too might be here in Belgium as an act of forgetting. Her presence in the church might doubly be a means of escape: a refuge from the demands of family life and a hiding place from what she might have seen in the Cameroons or in the Congo, or maybe even in Rwanda. And perhaps her escape was not from anything she had done, but from what she had seen. It was speculation. I would never find out, for she possessed her secrets fully . . . (140)

Julius's sense of fugitivity apart from his African identity allows his presence to be transient around other Black diasporic people, unlike the Congolese woman, due to his multicultural phenotype, advanced education, and occupation as a psychiatrist. On the one hand, he envies the Congolese cleaning woman's distinctly African phenotype and colorful wardrobe aesthetic as she works in her bright-colored headwrap, and on the other hand he pities that she would likely remain subservient and indistinguishable from any other Black diasporic person to the "untrained" or uncultured eye. In New York City, Julius considered himself a good "reader" of people based on observations and conversa-

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tions with others alone. While in Brussels, he mislabeled and misread all of the Black diasporic people that looked like him as he was trying to escape his own multicultural identity, and specifically connections with his African roots.

Signifying through Disclaiming and Naming

The name that a person carries with them plays a critical role in how they identify themselves, and who is identified with them in terms of their ethnic or cultural roots. As it pertains to the Black diasporic community, the name that an individual is given through family lineage can become complicated if that individual desires to establish a sense of selfhood beyond the borders of geography, racial essentialism, and cultural rootedness. As Cole's protagonist, Julius, immerses himself into one of his meditative states to address his internal conflict with his personal identity, he begins to interrogate his non-Nigerian first name and why it makes him feel disassociated from his Nigerian cultural roots, as opposed to his middle name, which is African:

The name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and skin color, one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria. The name surprised me a little each time I saw it on my passport or birth certificate, like something had belonged to someone else but had been long held in my keeping. Being Julius in everyday life thus confirmed me in my not fully being Nigerian. (78)

E. James West discusses the importance of naming in the Black diasporic community, asserting that "Naming can be a tool for empowerment and/or oppression—a means of projecting ideas of social inferiority; a tool to reclaim and redefine individual and collective identity" (para 1). In *Open City*, Cole explores the complex interplay between personal agency and empowerment experienced by Julius regarding his African middle name. This exploration is further complicated by a traumatic incident that Julius experienced during his time at a military school in his youth, highlighting the challenges faced by a mixed-race individual.

Julius's early traumatic experience at the Nigerian Military School (NMS) during his childhood in an altercation with second-class warrant officer Musibau resulted in him disassociating from his Nigerian community in an effort to cope with the humiliation that he experienced and also the sudden loss of his father during that time in his

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life. Julius's experience of being violently confronted when he was accused of having stolen Musibau's newspaper resulted in the officer reprimanding him publicly, which consequently led him to spiral into an existential crisis in an effort to reconcile his racial identity and cultural disassociation. In his rant against Julius, the second-class warrant officer unforgivingly questions the adolescent's racial authenticity and class privilege. As the other boys stood around watching Musibau's emotional and physical assault of Julius, he seethes internally with hatred for military leaders like the second-class warrant officer because of Musibau's tendency to judge his young character and toughness based on Julius's personal access to privilege and his convoluted family name: "This is what happens to little rich thieves . . . these are the little maggots who swallow our country whole . . . He looked at me, a half Nigerian, a foreigner, and what he saw was swimming lessons, summer trips to London, domestic staff: and thus, his anger" (83). During Julius's traumatic childhood experience of Musibau's anger about his class privilege, and the perceived tangible advantages of his multicultural racial identity, he realizes that his name should have given him a sense of belonging to a community and particular geographical location. While he attended NMS in Zaria as a young adolescent, Julius could not escape the lack of cultural rootedness that he felt, as compared to other Nigerian boys who did not share his mixed-race ancestry and Western first name. Julius rejected the notion of unbelonging and racial ambiguity as a young adolescent among his Nigerian peers because he did not want to become a target for their aggression, as he was for Musibau. He loathed the idea that he might find solidarity with his peers through signifying with personal and community disassociation with "home." Julius "did not play the helpless orphan" whose father had passed from tuberculosis suddenly because he did not want to seem weak (81). He could have evaded the orphaned feeling and nomad status if he had been prouder of his Nigerian nationality while in the presence of others like him as a child. When he became an adult, and as he traveled through multicultural and racialized spaces like New York and Brussels, the contradiction of his name was given less credence, as he found that there were more people out there like him in the world who were planting roots wherever they may have migrated to in the pursuit of better opportunities or quality of life.

Like Julius in *Open City*, Whitehead's unnamed nomenclature consultant in *Apex Hides the Hurt* has a complicated name history. Whitehead does not grant him an actual name beyond his professional title because his racial identity and sense of self-worth has been rooted in his work. He became recognized as a "Quincy man" from his attendance at the prestigious institution, which spoke to who he was allied

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to in terms of pedigree, and he used his educational affiliation to his advantage to garner his elite corporate status as the “whiz kid” nomenclature consultant at the office. Remaining well-connected and associated to an institution like Quincy and its alumna also provided the nomenclature consultant with employee protections so he would not be exploited or overlooked for his contributions. In David Gates’s *New York Times* review of *Apex Hides the Hurt*, “Name that Town,” he describes the nomenclature consultant as a “legendary expert at naming commercial products. The apex of his achievement is to give the name Apex to a Band-Aid knockoff sold in a Benetton-ish variety of skin tones.” Additionally, it becomes apparent that the nomenclature consultant develops a reluctant affinity toward racial exceptionalism and tokenism because it validates his work and self-worth from his white-counterparts, and also disassociates him from the deficit model that was stereotypically attributed to Black people through the white gaze:

He landed Apex because he was at the top of his game . . . The other folks in nomenclature came to him with their problems, they bought him cocktails and he offered solutions to dilemmas . . . He was all booked . . . With the assignments he did take, he was getting faster and faster with his naming . . . Wage earning. Self-actualizing . . . A local magazine picked him as one of the City’s 50 Most Eligible Bachelors . . . And perhaps that feeling was in the mix when came up with Apex. He looked down on everything. It was so small. (57-59)

The nomenclature consultant was not quite like the other Black characters in *Apex Hides the Hurt* because of his professional accomplishments and air of Black tokenism performed in juxtaposition to working-class Black men, like Muttonchops, one of the hotel bartenders in the town of Winthrop.

When the nomenclature consultant encounters the hotel bartender upon his arrival in the town of Winthrop after a business meeting with its mayor Regina Goode and investor Lucky Aberdeen, he randomly names the bartender Muttonchops. Consequently, after renaming the bartender as his subordinate, he proceeds to exude his arrogance and tokenism in their small-talk exchange. Muttonchops asks about his occupation and the details behind it, and the nomenclature consultant “fell into to his standard explanation without thinking” as if the bartender would not be able to keep up or follow because he worked in the service industry (22). The exchange between the two Black men is approached by the nomenclature consultant with an air of nonchalance and elitism initially. He awaits Muttonchops’ response to his

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standardized explanation, which leads him to being knocked off of his “high horse.” Muttonchops responds, “People pay you for that shit?” (22). After hearing Muttonchops’ disregard for his professional occupation, the protagonist immediately retreats into self-consciousness: “He was at a loss. He’d kept up a good front for Regina and Lucky, but he couldn’t muster the necessary reserves at the moment. His foot throbbed in phantom pain” (22-23). The conversation between the two Black men exposes the nomenclature consultant’s elitism and inauthenticity during his everyday exchanges with people. He is unable to separate his professional title and job function from his racial identity and sense of self-worth. He thought that he had earned a certain amount of social currency, and that he had achieved a certain level of corporate notoriety as the coiner of the Apex multicultural Band-Aid brand. But after the exchange with Muttonchops, the nomenclature consultant becomes deflated and humbled to an extent. Muttonchops did not sing the nomenclature consultant’s praises for involuntarily naming him on a whim unknowingly, or for the other things and people that he had been naming and rebranding over the years with such arrogance and superficiality.

Within his company, he was considered the “whiz kid” who cleverly asserted the need for a multicultural band-aid—one that would blend in with the skin, and not stick out like a sore thumb, or infected toe like his. The nomenclature consultant evaded the feeling of absurdity in his job role because his performance was so good, as he had been told repeatedly. His ego was stroked regularly by the corporate elites in his office, who persistently affirmed his identity as a guy who was hired to name things on a whim as his talent, until he is physically and psychologically forced to travel outside of his comfort zone to the town of Winthrop and uncover its Black historical roots. Albie Winthrop, who is a descendant of the town’s namesake, takes a jog down memory lane during one of the nomenclature consultant’s exchanges with him, and reminisces about his time as a “Quincy man” too. Albie endorses the nomenclature consultant’s Black exceptionalism when he states, “I wasn’t sure I’d be able to trust you. But then Lucky told me you were a Quincy man, and I knew I would get a fair shake. A Quincy man is a man of his word” (67-68). This makes the nomenclature consultant feel uncomfortable, especially as Albie continues to attempt to signify with the protagonist’s racial identity through his ramblings about how the minority presence at the university impacted his own conservative liberalism:

You know what it means to be a Quincy man—we’re all brothers. It doesn’t matter where you come from, once you walk into

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those ivy walls, you're in the brotherhood. You got all kinds of people from all over the world . . . Had a black fella lived in my dorm. There were only five or six, but you have to understand the times. Good fella, quiet, Milton. I think that was his name.
(80)

Albie attempts to depict himself as embracing and living within a post-racial consciousness going back to his collegiate experiences. However, as he tries to portray himself as racially tolerant, Albie underscores his socio-political agenda through his intentional reference to his college days. Albie Winthrop insists that he supported minorities accessing certain opportunities, in limited numbers, similar to the nomenclature consultant's role and assignment to assist him with renaming the town of Winthrop. The underwriting in Albie's sentiment reveals that white men like himself could tolerate a handful of minorities in elite spaces. Albie's attempt at signifying with the consultant by using his token black roommate, Milton, makes the protagonist suspicious of the perceptions that he might hold of him as a Black nomenclature consultant, along with the other Black people in Winthrop despite his self-endowed "Uncle Albie" title: "He had found . . . that it was always a good policy to flee when white people felt compelled to inform you about their black friend, or black acquaintance, or black person they saw on the street that morning. There were many reasons to flee, but in this case the pertinent one was that the reference was intended to signal growing camaraderie" (80-81). Albie lobbies for the nomenclature consultant to accept his altruistic illustration of Quincy and how it shaped his tolerance of minorities. However, contrasting with Albie's depiction of college days at Quincy, Black mayor Regina Goode reveals how men like Albie Winthrop have contributed to the erasure of the town's Black history and its people. A critical turn in the novel's plot occurs when Regina shows the nomenclature consultant the parts of old Winthrop that have been gentrified or neglected by its affluent white descendants and other wealthy investors such as Lucky Aberdeen who haven't unearthed its worth yet, which adds to the consultant's apprehension about renaming the place apart from any prior knowledge of its racial history and because of his own lack of cultural rootedness.

Forging Community, Deciphering Dislocation, and Navigating Racial Transience

When the nomenclature consultant encounters Jurgen Cross, the town reporter for the *Daily Register*, he is not anticipating questions about

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his own Black authenticity in relationship to his current assignment in the town of Winthrop. As Jurgen prompts him for an interview sometime after his arrival in the town of Winthrop, the nomenclature consultant agrees to it and shares that he considered naming the town New Prospera. Midway through the interview, Jurgen finds the nomenclature consultant's rehearsed responses to be insincere and off-putting as he attempts to explain his contention for the new name that he is brainstorming: "New Prospera is what you might call the contemporary approach. Break it down into parts, and each part is referring to a quality that they want to attach to the town. They bring the external in, import it you might say, to this region" (105). Jurgen follows up the consultant's answer by asking, "Are you keeping it real?" (104). Following the reporter's probing of his proposed name selection, the nomenclature consultant responds with a short, "Yes" (104). After the interview is over with Jurgen, the nomenclature consultant recognizes that Lucky Aberdeen had sent the reporter to screen him and check his motives. Lucky had to be sure of the nomenclature consultant's ability to rename the town of Winthrop without interference from others or their ideas that it should retain some racial memory of its Black historical roots. Lucky wanted to know that the nomenclature consultant was an ally to the job assignment and not to Regina Goode or the other Black descendants in the town of Winthrop. It is only shortly after his exchange with Jurgen that the nomenclature consultant realizes that giving the town of Winthrop a new name would gentrify the town's Black history indefinitely. He realizes this but also understands his job assignment, which would turn a significant commercial profit for its investors and award him an unmatched level of professional notoriety if it were approached with the appropriate amount racial distance and self-interest on his part. Ultimately, the nomenclature consultant has to disregard the town's Black roots and disassociate his own Black identity from his job assignment in order to be successful in it. During his continued reflections about a prospective name for the town of Winthrop, the nomenclature consultant determines that there is only one person who could profoundly influence his rebranding of the town, and that was Regina Goode.

When the nomenclature consultant initially encounters Regina Goode, he is forced to immerse himself in the town of Winthrop's Black history. As they drive through the town of Winthrop, Regina shares some of the memories of her childhood through one of the streets named after her brother and extended family. She shares, "That's how you know what part of town you're in. Over here, the streets are people. They're your history, your family. Richards, Nathaniel. Goode. How you know you're home is when you see your name on the street" (128). The

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difficulty with the nomenclature consultant's namelessness is that it renders him somewhat apathetic toward Regina's lobby for the town of Winthrop to retain its true name, which should be "Freedom." Regina Goode, a descendant of the Black ancestors who founded Freedom, serves as one of the living archives of the town's history in Whitehead's novel. As Regina jogs her memory of Winthrop as a racialized space, she proceeds to indict Albie Winthrop (white descendant of the town of Winthrop), Lucky Aberdeen (investor), and the nomenclature consultant's right to rebrand the space with a name other than the one it was founded as: "Because you have to change everything, right . . . And—it was a lie. That's what it is, isn't it? If I ask you your name and you tell me something other than what it is, that's a lie. It should go back to Freedom. That's its true name" (127). After Regina's rant, the nomenclature consultant merely sits by as a passive bystander allowing her to vent off her frustrations about the town's recent gentrification and remodeling initiatives. The nomenclature consultant's namelessness is convoluted within the town's Black history, and the rally to rename it.

In the end, the nomenclature consultant chooses to name the town "Struggle," and juxtaposes the name of his Apex brand to its selection:

Freedom is what they sought. Struggle was what they had lived through. Apex was splendid, as far as it went. Human aspiration the march of civilization, our hardscrabble striving . . . Was Struggle the highest point of human achievement? No. But it was the point past which we could not progress, and summit it in that way. Exactly the anti-apex, that peak we could never conquer, that defeated our ambitions despite the best routes, the heartiest guides, the right equipment. (211)

Winthrop's Black ancestors did not receive redemption for their personal strides in history through the nomenclature consultant's clever renaming but were relegated to just another arbitrary job assignment that helped him earn another accolade on his resume in his company. Moreover, throughout *Apex Hides the Hurt*, the nomenclature consultant struggles to reconcile his Black exceptionalism and cultural rootedness with the freed Black founders of Winthrop because he has put his own self-interest first. He exchanges racial and cultural pride for corporate recognition and upward mobility, which is ironic to a certain extent because the sense of pride that Regina Goode held for the town of Winthrop is what helped to move her family forward and upward, as a free people proud of their Black history and rootedness. In "Old Afflictions: Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt* and the Post-

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Soul Condition,” Jessee S. Cohn suggests that as “the consultant becomes ever more aware of his own complicity and historical amnesia, his role as an agent of repression, this hurt is increasingly internalized in the form of self-loathing” (19). For example, toward the end of the novel, the nomenclature consultant laments his imposition in having to rename the town of Winthrop and regrets becoming too personal with the Black residents of Winthrop through conversation and learning about their town’s ancestral history from Regina Goode. As he is reflecting on these interactions individually, he recognizes his own dualism or double-consciousness in performing his Black exceptionalism repeatedly for his job and the approval of those that he sought validation from the most, affluent whites: “He liked his epiphanies American: brief and illusory. Which is why he was so disappointed that a week after the operation he still felt such deep disquiet. Pierce the veil, sure, that was one thing. To walk around with the weight of what he had witnessed, quite another” (198). In recognizing the forced gentrification of the space, the nomenclature consultant retreats to his infected toe, and relives the trauma from the hospital where it had to be amputated: “Delirious but well-dressed, which was why he was eventually taken to the emergency room, instead of being left to rot. The ghastly shock waiting underneath the adhesive bandage, and the amputation of his putrefying toe, no other option at that point” (198). The conflation of his Blackness and rootedness in the renaming of the town of Winthrop and the trauma of his amputated toe symbolize the consultant’s true positionality within American society. He is a fraud that would sell his soul for a gold-plated prize and is also an imposter rotting from the inside out due to his lack of personal integrity and cultural rootedness.

Cole’s protagonist Julius in *Open City*, and Whitehead’s unnamed nomenclature consultant in *Apex Hides the Hurt* both loathe signifying with other Black people in public as a way to show their cultural group loyalty because they perceive those interactions as performative rather than as authentic exchanges. For example, in *Open City*, Julius’s random exchange with Terry, an Afrocentric postal worker, makes the protagonist uncomfortable in terms of his racial identity and the prospect of signifying it in casual conversations with strangers. When Terry meets Julius at the post office, he immediately embraces him as “Brother Julius,” as if to say that they were “kin by skin” while living in a shared community (Cole 187). During their brief exchange, Terry signifies with Julius about the “Motherland,” and emphasizes just how lucky Julius is to have access to something “vital” that many Black Americans like himself do not: “And you brothers have something that is vital, you understand me. You have something that is vital for the health of those of us raised on this side of the ocean. Let me tell you something: I

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am raising my daughters as Africans” (186). The critical takeaway from this interaction between Terry and Julius does not occur until after the exchange, when the protagonist “made a mental note to avoid that particular post office in the future” (188). Julius’s decision to distance himself from Black Americans like Terry is a result of discomfort with his own multiracial identity and trauma. Consequently, Terry’s affirmation of Julius’s “visible” African-ness, mostly based on his appearance, drives Julius further into fugitivity from himself and his cultural roots.

It is Julius’s introspective reflections about himself, often surfacing during his walks or random errands, which provoke the unsuspecting criticisms that he develops toward his patients, neighbors, and public service workers like the Congolese cleaning woman and Terry, the Afrocentric postal worker. Julius’s walks allow him to exercise his judgments and stereotypes about others, which also demonstrate the ways in which he internalized and learned ways of performing elitism in Western environments for his survival. Julius had come to respect Dr. Saito’s “endless labor of scholarship, the various consolations of academia,” and adopted the Western culture that he had found solace in as a mental healthcare professional trying to escape his own vulnerabilities as a Black man (9). He is “learning the art of listening, and the ability to trace a story out from what was omitted” (9). The people that he treats using his occupation are his cover-up. They assist him with masking his anxieties regarding his own identity as he dissects them and their problems. The protagonist’s sporadic walks also allow him to maintain a transience through spaces, provided his continued physical movement and emotional dislocation from relative things and people. For example, as Julius is leaving Columbia Presbyterian, he heads toward his neighborhood, which is close to Harlem. Julius recognizes all of the racial and ethnic aesthetics in Harlem. As he walks through the space feeling culturally dislocated, he begins to stereotype all of the Black people and aesthetics that he observes, and particularly recognizes the absence of whiteness in the borough:

I saw the brisk trade of sidewalk salesmen: the Senegalese cloth merchants, the young men selling bootleg DVDs, the Nation of Islam stalls. There were self-published books, dashikis, posters on black liberation, bundles of incense, vials of perfume and essential oils, djembe drums, and little tourist tchotchkes from Africa. One table displayed enlarged photographs of early-twentieth century lynchings of African Americans . . . In the Harlem night, there were no whites. (18)

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In identifying the absence of whiteness in Harlem, Julius subconsciously rejects the notion that he could belong or feel at “home” in such an aesthetically Black space. Hence, his walks provide him with a phantom-like presence in which he can assume the racial categorization most suitable to his social interests. He meditates, “The walks met a need: they were a release from the tightly regulated mental environment of work, and once I discovered them as therapy, they became the normal thing, and I forgot what life had been like before I started walking” (7). Julius’s self-loathing and stream-of-consciousness styled narration could be juxtaposed to the nomenclature consultant’s casual assessment of the town of Winthrop’s long-standing efforts to erase the presence of Black people and their history through gentrification. While Julius’s walks perpetuate his physical and emotional distance from others, the nomenclature consultant in *Apex Hides the Hurt* conveniently evades labels and coerced immersion into introspection by branding places and things for those in power in order to sustain his own socio-economic privilege alongside white elites. Both authors, Teju Cole and Colson Whitehead, display their protagonists’ performances of Black exceptionalism through their conversations with strangers, their reluctance to racially or culturally identify with blue collar workers, and their tendencies to assimilate to Eurocentric values in the presence of affluent white people that they want to impress with their education and professional titles.

Conclusion: A Face-off with the Mask in Hand

Toward the end of *Open City*, Julius grapples with the unresolved dilemma of reconciling the disparities between his parents’ Nigerian roots and cultural experiences in order to establish an authentic identity as a mixed-race individual. He has no geographical or metaphysical place of his own that he can firmly plant with roots to signify a particular racial identity or nationality, which is at the center of his internal dilemma. At the end of *Apex Hides the Hurt*, the nomenclature consultant decides to take the high road, or so it seems, and renames the town of Winthrop “Struggle” in commemoration of the town’s free Black founders. Toward the end of the novel, he internalizes the town’s new name and conflates it with his own racial identity and cultural dislocation, “They will say: I was born in Struggle. I live in Struggle and come from Struggle. I work in Struggle. We crossed the border in Struggle. Before I came to Struggle. We found ourselves in Struggle. I will never leave Struggle. I will die in Struggle” (Whitehead 211). Cohn argues that “the solution the consultant opts for, out of the

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process that constitutes the narrative, is the name that somehow embodies the unthinkability of kidnapping, torture, genocide, and rape of his Black ancestors” (19). Whitehead’s protagonist enacts this form of self-betrayal and historical disassociation from Black history, in what was formerly known as the town of Winthrop, in an effort to mask his own connections to his cultural group as well as the internal and physical afflictions that he is hiding so that he is not judged incompetent to do his job proficiently and objectively. In this sense, Julius and the nomenclature consultant remain adamant through the end of Cole’s *Open City* and Whitehead’s *Apex Hides the Hurt* about maintaining their distance from cultural roots to sustain their personal autonomy and agency. Ultimately, Whitehead’s and Cole’s novels display how the phenomenon and performance of Black exceptionalism can be used to leverage professional successes, intellectual achievements, and social currency within white, affluent spaces. And they also reveal how dislocation from one’s cultural rootedness can provoke internal conflict and isolation from community or a sense of “home” due to masking one’s true self.

Notes

1. See Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) for further context about the idea of the racialized “other.” Said’s discussion of “othering” also provides a theoretical framework within postcolonial studies to discuss and critique the “white gaze” juxtaposed to Eurocentrism.
2. See Saidiya V. Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006) for additional context on the significance of naming and attempts to reclaim cultural rootedness throughout the Black diaspora due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

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“You Brought Me Here to Clean Up”: Mariama Diallo’s *Master* and the Racial Politics of PWIs in the DEI Era

Emily Ruth Rutter

When writer-director Mariama Diallo’s debut feature-length film, *Master*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2022, it put her on the map as a vital new voice in the subgenre of socially conscious horror. Diallo has also directed horror shorts, including *Hair Wolf* (2018), which addresses white appropriation of Black hair traditions and Black culture more generally; episodes of Hulu’s televisual adaptation of Zakiya Dalila Harris’s best-selling novel *The Other Black Girl* (2023); and the genre-bending HBO series *Random Acts of Flyness* (2018-2022). Released by the juggernaut Amazon Studios, *Master* is an especially compelling example of Diallo’s use of horror and satire tropes to expose academia as the site of endemic anti-Black violence.

The genesis for *Master* was inspired by Diallo’s undergraduate years at Yale University, “where there was this position of ‘master’ of every residential college, and it was a term that was really normalized.” She explains further that

I ran into the master of my residence hall years after graduating, and I referred to him as master. Being outside of that warped system really laid bare how perverse it was. But it was also kind of funny. I really had to look at myself and question why it took so many years to take a good look at a position that I had given to somebody in my life and what that meant for everything else. I don’t have a master, I thought, but I’ll write about one. I really wanted it to be a Black woman dealing with all the contradictions of being named to that position. (qtd. in Mahmud 29)

The key questions of *Master* thus become: Is it ever possible to inhabit the social location of “master” without perpetuating the anti-Black violence rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade? Moreover, are Black women, who are always already what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as an “outsiders within” academe (14), ever capable of feeling empow-

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ered in an environment that naturalizes the language and hierarchies of enslavement under the shibboleth of preserving tradition? Probing these critical questions, *Master* utilizes the horror genre to expose deep levels of hypocrisy between the now-ubiquitous rhetoric of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education and the entrenched manifestations of white supremacy that it is often meant to conceal.

In so doing, *Master* intervenes in a campus film and television tradition that has often focused on the experiences of anti-hero white male professors (such recent installments include Woody Allen's film *Irrational Man* [2015], Noah Baumbach's filmic adaptation of Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise* [2022], and Paul Lieberstein and Aaron Zelman's *Lucky Hank* [2023], a televisual adaptation of Richard Russo's 1997 novel *Straight Man*, among many others).¹ By contrast, *Master* centralizes the experiences of a Black woman administrator, Dr. Gail Bishop (Regina Hall), grappling with the long history of racist exploitation by America's institutions of higher learning. Amanda Peet and Annie Julia Wyman's series *The Chair* (2021) similarly focuses on Dr. Ji-Yoon Kim (Sandra Oh) in her brief and fraught stint as Pembroke University's first woman (and Korean-American) English department chair—a position from which she is ultimately removed by a mostly white male faculty. Cast in a highly satiric light, Justin Simien's film *Dear White People* (2014) also features Winchester University's only Black administrator, Dean Fairbanks (Dennis Haysbert), navigating an endemically racist environment while attempting to reign in Black student activists in order to temper the ire of Winchester's President Fletcher (Peter Syvertsen), who tells him unequivocally "Racism is over in America." Simien extends the subplot of Dean Fairbanks as a figure caught between competing forces further in the spinoff Netflix series *Dear White People* (2017-2021). *Master* joins this growing subfield of filmic and televisual texts that subvert the campus film's prototypical white gaze and illuminate the alienation and anxiety that becomes part of the experience of serving as the first and only administrator of color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

As the film opens, Dr. Gail Bishop has recently been promoted to become the first Black "master" (here, equivalent to a dean) at the fictional Ancaster, an elite liberal arts college in New England. Gail's navigation of the racial (and most often racist) politics of her fellow administrators and faculty parallels that of first-year student Jasmine Moore (Zoe Renee), who struggles to negotiate a toxic anti-Black environment in her residence hall and within her classes. Jasmine is especially targeted in a course taught by Liv Beckman (Amber Gray) who, it turns out, is masquerading as a Black woman—reminiscent of revelations about former Eastern Washington University professor Rachel Dolezal

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and former George Washington University professor Jess Krug.² Prior to these revelations, Gail advocates for Liv in her pursuit of tenure, despite her thin publication record, and also attempts to protect Jasmine from racial marginalization. In keeping with the horror genre, both Gail and Jasmine are haunted—Gail by the ghosts of the enslaved people who built and labored tirelessly without remuneration within Ancaster’s hallowed halls and Jasmine by the first Black undergraduate at Ancaster, Louisa Weeks, who was found hanging in the very same room she now occupies (Room 302). By the film’s end, Jasmine dies by suicide, Liv has earned tenure but her white mother has also revealed her true racial identity to Gail, and Gail leaves her “master” position in disgust, concluding that she was hired to be window-dressing for racial progress, not to effect actual antiracist change.

Black faces in high places are important at predominantly white colleges and universities, but as *Master* shows through its use of the tropes of both horror and satire, Black leaders facing entrenched resistance to change are neither capable of eroding nor should they be expected to erode longstanding traditions of white domination. Diallo also brings into view the ways in which white faculty and administrators are insulated and exculpated from redressing the prevalence of racism (and interrelated forms of oppression) on their campuses, while Black women in particular are charged with adjudicating bias and discrimination. Further, unlike the trajectory of many campus films in which administrators and faculty remain fixed (however begrudgingly) within their institutional roles, Diallo concludes *Master* with Gail leaving Ancaster, determining that stature within Ancaster’s ranks (or those of any PWI) is not worth what James Baldwin once termed the “price of the ticket.”³

In order to evince the sociopolitical stakes of *Master* within the current discourse about higher education, this essay first situates the film within the subfield of critical university studies and then offers a brief overview of the forces shaping what I have termed the DEI era in higher education, including the recent backlash to addressing (or even acknowledging) forms of injustice and exclusion. Next, I examine several scenes from *Master* that offer a striking counternarrative to right-wing caricatures of universities as hotbeds of leftist radicalism on the one hand and to the sanguine appraisals of inclusive progress embedded in university marketing campaigns on the other. While attentive to the diegetic world that *Master* creates, I emphasize the significance of the film for its unflinching look at higher education’s oppressive past and its residue on the present as well as the yawning gap it highlights between contemporary DEI rhetoric and the persistence of structural racism at PWIs. Ultimately, I argue that *Master* is a key installment in the contemporary campus film genre, for it trains an “outsider within”

gaze on an elite PWI and elucidates the unreckoned with—indeed horrific—legacy of white supremacy that continues to shape the higher-education landscape.

Critical University Studies

An early and astute observer of academe's exclusionary praxis, Patricia Hill Collins conceptualized the "outsider within" framework not only to draw attention to Black women's marginalization within her own field of sociology but also to suggest the critical importance of their perspectives within higher education—in other words, the sociocultural knowledge gained from centralizing Black women's voices and experiences. As Collins contends, "bringing this group—as well as others who share an outsider within status vis-à-vis sociology—into the center of analysis may reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches" (15). More recently and in ways that echo Collins's emphasis on the standpoint of women of color, Sara Ahmed has shaped the emergent field of critical university studies with a range of salutary texts—*On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), *What's the Use?* (2019), and *Complaint!* (2021)—detailing how intersectional oppression manifests in a higher-education arena that touts DEI as a core value. Roderick A. Ferguson likewise understands the framework of diversity within academe as one that justifies a selective incorporation of minoritized individuals so that "a broad and radical redistribution of social relations [is] indefinitely held at bay" (182). Jeffrey J. Williams, who coined the term "critical university studies," also observes that recent novels set on college campuses reflect, invoking Raymond Williams, a "structure of feeling" of "insecurity and pressure" and "depression rather than optimism" (581). I would extend Williams's description to include campus films such as *Master*, especially insofar as Diallo dramatizes the palpable sense of discomfort and precarity felt by Black students, faculty, and administrators at PWIs.

In what he terms the "university-cinema-industrial-complex (UCIC)," Curtis Marez points out that Hollywood films have historically "been central to the uneven incorporation and exclusion of different kinds of students, professors, and knowledges by lending glamor and the pleasures of cinematic spectacle to hierarchical academic racial formations" (5). As Marez also notes, the absence of women of color from campus films has served to shore up "dominant visions of academic value" and to justify the over-representation of white men in positions of power (6)—in this regard, *Master's* focus on the experiences

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of a Black woman academic at a PWI is especially significant. Lavelle Porter further argues that “representations of higher education have the power to shape public perceptions of the university and the professoriat, and they often reveal who is seen as included and includable in the university, whether as students, professors, or administrators” (6). Porter emphasizes that the subfield of “critical university studies. . . must have the experiences of black students, faculty, and administrators as a central component of that narrative” (164), and that film and televisual portraits of Blackademics have “more money, power, and influence” than novels and other forms of print literature (167). Viewers certainly recognize cinematic campus portraits as fictional, but these representations also shape how the public understands (or is given license to ignore) academe’s longstanding perpetuation of race and gender inequities, among other forms of oppression.

Moreover, horror is an apt medium for exposing viewers to the discrepancies between appearances and reality at elite PWIs, since the genre pivots on estranging and upending the familiar. In her germinal *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to the Present* (2011), Robin Means Coleman observes that Black horror films in particular have the potential to debunk anti-Black caricatures and stereotypes and to represent Black characters as “resistant to evil, whole and full, wise and aged, in full combat against evil, and at or near the center of constructions of goodness” (20). *Master* is a poignant example of the potential Coleman cites, for Dr. Gail Bishop is the film’s moral compass and, in a remarkable twist for a campus film, leaves the institution, resolving that she will no longer struggle against oppression at a school that has no intention of realizing the progressive promises embedded in its newly fashioned DEI slogans. As Coleman and Mark H. Harris note more recently, “Because race in America informs every aspect of life, Black horror, in many ways, is our social syllabus” (92). In other words, Diallo’s references to the horror genre are less fantastical than they are an accurate rendering of the terrifying ways in which white supremacy continues to impinge on Black life, both on and off college campuses. Marez likewise observes, “While historically, college films have skewed toward romantic comedy, in recent years the genre has turned toward horror” (180). Marez’s explanation for this genre pivot is the “state disinvestment in education and the expansion of student debt” (181). In considering *Master*, I would add that Black women filmmakers such as Diallo utilize the horror genre to call attention to the increase in university statements and marketing campaigns affirming the values of DEI even as discrimination and exclusion continues. In bringing these concerns to the silver screen, *Master* offers a striking contribution to how we know what we know about Black

women's negotiation of administrative roles at PWIs, as well as the current racial politics of higher education more generally.

Higher Education in the DEI Era

There is no specific date when the contemporary DEI era in higher education began. While its antecedents are in the Civil Rights and Black Power protest movements (which put needed pressure on historically white colleges and universities to diversify their campuses and curricula), the more recent framework of diversity, equity, and inclusion began gaining momentum in the twenty-first century, when a constellation of judicial and sociopolitical phenomena demonstrated the need both to hire more faculty, staff, and administrators from systemically marginalized backgrounds and to institute more inclusive and equitable policies. In the 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions, leading on many campuses to an expansion of efforts to recruit students from underrepresented groups ("Pivotal Moments"). Moreover, a U.S. census report released in 2015 noted that "by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone); and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born" ("Projections"). In addition to these admissions initiatives and paradigmatic shifts in demographics, the last decade has ushered in a groundswell of resistance to anti-Black violence, catalyzed by the viral sharing of videos documenting police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement that emerged in 2013 and had its highpoint with the watershed uprising of 2020 when millions took to the streets after the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among others.⁴ Progressive social movements for LGBTQ+ rights and gender equity (e.g. #MeToo) have similarly helped define an era in which institutions and organizations are more concerned—at least on a rhetorical level—with demographic representation, equitable practices and policies, and a culture of inclusion. Released in the wake of these developments, *Master* tracks this rush for the elite colleges and universities on which Ancaster is based to appear to be diversifying their ranks and shifting their cultural norms.

At the same time, *Diallo* shows the distinction between the hiring or promotion of sole Black administrators and faculty and the systemic moves necessary to dismantle hegemonic frameworks. As J. Nathan Matias, Neil Lewis Jr., and Elan Hope report, "underrepresented minority faculty (URM) comprised roughly 11 percent of tenure-track or tenured faculty in 2013 and increased to just 12 percent of tenure-

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track or tenured faculty in 2019.” As of 2020, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources reported that only 8% of administrators were Black and that “Black employees are underrepresented in administrative and faculty positions, the positions with the highest pay in higher ed” (“The Black and White”). Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. Gonzáles also observe, “The nation’s most prestigious universities were not established to educate women, people of color, or the working class. . . . While many of the formal barriers have been lifted, academic institutions remain, at their core, profoundly inhospitable to the experiences and points of view of those formerly excluded” (7). Accordingly, when Dr. Claudine Gay, the first Black president of Harvard, was pressured into resigning after only six months on the job—the shortest tenure of any president in the university’s nearly 400-year history—she rued the racialized and gendered hypervisibility and personal invisibility that led to her becoming the target of right-wing attacks. “It is not lost on me,” Gay wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed, “that I make an ideal canvas for projecting every anxiety about the generational and demographic changes unfolding on American campuses: a Black woman selected to lead a storied institution.” *Master* dramatizes the “outsider within” experience of precarity and discrimination that Black administrators and faculty are often subject to at predominantly white colleges and universities—institutions that were constructed to reify the power and privilege of wealthy white men in particular.

Indeed, Diallo’s film was released during a time when higher education is becoming yet again a cultural battleground on which conservative politicians are attempting to render illegal even the premise of DEI. In September 2020, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13950, “Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping,” which banned workplace diversity trainings and programs in organizations and institutions that receive federal funding. While in January 2021, President Joseph Biden revoked 13950 and issued a new Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government” (“Revocation”), conservative efforts to criminalize social-justice efforts in academe have only intensified in recent years. In June 2023, the Supreme Court struck down Affirmative Action in higher education, overturning *Grutter v. Bollinger* and removing race-based admissions as one of the essential tools used to diversify the student body. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has been tracking the progress of legislative initiatives that would prohibit DEI offices and initiatives, classroom discussions of race, gender, and sexuality, and using identity markers in admissions decisions. As of January 2024, 49 such bills had been introduced in 23 states. In December 2023, Oklahoma governor Kevin Stitt signed an executive order defunding

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and essentially banning DEI initiatives at public colleges and universities (Walker). In this climate, to be a Black university leader called on to usher in progressive change is a tall order. While Diallo does not reference the anti-DEI movement afoot in higher education and beyond, *Master* offers a compelling rebuke both to fearmongering about colleges and universities indoctrinating students with “woke” propaganda and to specious narratives of universities as inherently progressive and welcoming of all people and points of view.

Dr. Gail Bishop: “Master” or “Maid”?

From the film’s opening scenes to its closing shot, Diallo represents Ancaster as both profoundly inhospitable to Black people and self-serving in its exploitation of Gail (and Jasmine) to deflect attention from the ways in which its racist history haunts the present. Gail’s stately Peabody House residence offers consistent reminders that the Black women who have previously lived in this home were there as servants to the white patriarchs that preceded Gail—and in fact this servitude to white dominance is what the Ancaster powers that be similarly expect from her. When she first attempts to unlock the front door to Peabody House, Gail’s key does not work. Once inside, there is a plastic cover over a white marble bust of a white man in the corner of the living room, hidden under a thin veneer but still in plain sight—not unlike the legacy of enslavement and anti-Blackness that pervades Ancaster College more generally. Gail also finds a black-and-white photograph of a white family with a Black woman dressed in a maid’s uniform hovering in the shadows. When she throws a party and retreats to the kitchen for a glass of wine and respite from the tone-deaf comments of her white counterparts, she spills the wine and searches for a towel, only to find a “mammy” cookie jar tucked strategically out of sight. When Gail bends down to clean the hardwood floors, she sees the ghost of a Black woman on her knees whimpering while cleaning the same worn surface. With these symbolic reminders of Ancaster’s unreckoned-with anti-Blackness, *Master* consistently conveys to viewers that people of color are hired to change (or clean up) appearances but leave untouched the foundational ideologies structuring the institution.

As Ahmed emphasizes, “Diversity becomes about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than about changing the whiteness of organizations*” (*On Being* 34, emphasis in orig.). In this regard, as Gail prepares her speech about being the first Black woman “master” at Ancaster, viewers bear witness to the institution’s interest in Gail as a vehicle for touting its own racial progress without concern for Gail as a

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skilled and talented individual. As Gail sits in the dimly lit kitchen of the “master’s house” poring over her speech, Ancaster’s communications director is on speakerphone offering feedback that reveals the ways she is being tokenized. Gail reads out, “By choosing the first Black master, Ancaster is taking an exciting step,” to which the communications director interrupts her and corrects, “I think ‘thrilling’ would be a better word.” Gail then gets up to find a bottle of wine as she continues to read to the speakerphone, already fatigued by this exercise in which Ancaster exploits her in a self-congratulatory exercise. Gail continues: “thrilling step into today’s increasingly inclusive and diverse world. As the woman chosen for this honor.” The communications director cuts in again, “woman of color would be better.” An exasperated Gail reads on, “chosen for this honor, I am humbled to be part of Ancaster’s evolution. Even so there remains a lot of work to pursue this goal . . . And it won’t be possible without the help of donors like so many of yourselves.” Gail then opens the drawer she believes holds the wine key only to discover an infestation of white maggots on top of old linens—yet another symbol of a decaying institution attempting to make itself over as progressive (and one that recurs later in the film when maggots crawl out of Gail’s newly painted “master” portrait). The creepiness of the “master’s house” enclosing Gail combined with the voice of white surveillance controlling her every word demonstrates the precarity of the “outsider within” role she occupies. “It should come as no surprise,” Collins avers, “that Black women’s efforts in dealing with the effects of interlocking systems of oppression might produce a standpoint quite distinct from, and in many ways opposed to, that of white male insiders” (26). Accordingly, Diallo trains a Black woman administrator’s gaze on an elite PWI and, utilizing the characteristic dis-ease evoked by horror, exposes the structures and ideologies of white domination that Gail’s appointment to “master” are meant to obscure.

One of the most vivid demonstrations of the racial hypocrisy on Ancaster’s campus comes through the defamiliarization of DEI marketing materials. “The language of diversity,” Ahmed reminds us, “becomes easily mobilized as a defense of reputation (perhaps even a defense of whiteness)” (*On Being* 151). As *Master* builds to its disturbing climax, Jasmine is awakened by an enormous cross burning outside her residence hall and the camera then jumps to a marketing video that includes students, faculty, and administrators of several racial hues proclaiming, “I am Ancaster,” followed by the white Ancaster President seated at his desk telling the camera, “The one thing that is not Ancaster is discrimination.” The video then follows Liv in her office as she explains the launching of the Ancaster Alliance for an Inclusive Future (AAIF) and concludes with Gail at her desk telling

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the camera, “Now more than ever, let’s show the world who we truly are.” The camera then jumps to Gail and Jasmine watching fire crews clean up the damage caused by the cross burning, reminding viewers that “who we really are” is a campus ravaged by anti-Blackness with Black students and administrators left to attend to the psychological and emotional fallout on their own while being gaslit by (or even cast in) the marketing of the campus as a haven for, as Liv says of the AAIF, “radical inclusion.” “Simply put,” Ahmed observes, “those who are *less* represented are used *more* to represent the organization. The further away you are from the norm, the more you have to appear” (*What’s 150*, emphasis in orig.). As Ahmed contends and Diallo renders on screen, the institutional marketing of diversity becomes a twenty-first-century shield to deflect from the realities of longstanding structures of exclusion and marginalization.

During the English department’s debate over Liv’s tenure dossier, Diallo likewise suggests the ways in which Black leaders are rewarded not for being change-makers but instead for complying with the status quo. Several English department faculty members indicate their interest in Liv’s promotion as a sign of their own commitments to diversity and, importantly, as an avoidance of any allegations of racial discrimination. As Ariana González Stokas puts it, diversity “is used today as a value and a method to assert that universities are inclusive places because of the presence of difference, or multiculturalism as a concealment device for the responsibility to redress historical injustices” (10). Exemplifying this pattern, one of Gail’s white woman colleagues admits, “Honestly, I think she’s the perfect tenure candidate for right now” and defends that claim by emphasizing, “Liv Beckman is a woman of color in a faculty overwhelmingly not of color.” Another colleague concurs, “That is the image Ancaster should have.” During the discussion, the camera pans intermittently to close-ups of Gail’s concerned expression, as she listens uncomfortably to her colleagues’ tokenization of, at least to her knowledge at the time, her only Black woman colleague. The white woman department chair Diandra (Talia Balsam) is the most skeptical of Liv’s case and notes that she is unsure about Gail’s ability to be impartial because “you’re friends,” with the implication also being that, because they are both Black women, she will align herself with Liv regardless of her academic record.

Defending the supposed justness of academia’s rules, Diandra is invested in the myth of meritocracy, reminding her colleagues that they have “earned” tenure and that “we can look each other in the face and know that we belong here.” Importantly, Diallo does not cast this English department meeting in an especially satiric or horrific light. Beyond the dim lighting and heavy shadows that are pervasive through-

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out the film, this scene more or less captures a typical, though contentious, academic meeting, reminding viewers that what we are watching unfold hews close to reality. Gail, caught between the competing forces of her administrative duties to uphold Ancaster's norms and policies and her commitment to empowering Black women and Black people more generally, attempts to tread a middle ground. As Collins describes it, Black women as "outsiders within" academe are consistently negotiating "the tension experienced by any group of less powerful outsiders encountering the paradigmatic thought of a more powerful insider community" (29). Gail first defends Liv's publication record but also discloses that Liv now faces a student's (Jasmine's) complaint of being targeted and given a lower grade on an essay. Diandra commends Gail at the meeting's conclusion, "Thanks for speaking up, Gail. We really needed your voice at the table." The message is that, in order for Gail to succeed in her new role, she must preserve the anti-Black gatekeeping that has led to her being the only tenured Black woman in the department and the first Black woman "master" of the institution.

Gail's relationship with Jasmine is also key insofar as it represents the structural impediments to creating an inclusive space for Black students at elite PWIs, even when a Black woman occupies a leadership role. From the time she arrives at Ancaster, Jasmine makes every effort to fit in, befriending her white roommate, Amelia (Talia Ryder), and her friends and devoting herself to her classes, including Liv's. Nonetheless, Jasmine, like Gail, is consistently reminded that Ancaster's longstanding rituals and traditions include endemic anti-Blackness. Congruent with the eeriness characteristic of the horror genre, Jasmine is "othered" in every setting on campus. For example, her library books set off the alarm even after being demagnetized, leading to the search of her bookbag; the Black woman server in the dining hall is solicitous to white students but scowls at Jasmine; Liv fails her essay, ironically given Jasmine's lived experience with alterity, on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*; among a range of other racial micro- and macro-aggressions. When Jasmine speaks with Liv about the essay, Liv says condescendingly, "It can be really hard to make the adjustment to a school like this, especially for students of color coming from," to which Jasmine interrupts and corrects Liv—she is from the suburbs of Tacoma, Washington, and was class president and valedictorian. At every turn and despite her best efforts, Jasmine is sent the message that she does not belong. Midway through the film, these slights become threatening, when the word "Leave" is painted on Jasmine's door along with a noose hung on the door handle, which is followed by the aforementioned cross-burning. Only Gail, who is becoming increasingly aware of the discrepancy between the equitable

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space Ancaster purports to be and the discriminatory one it actually is, seems to understand that the problem is not with Jasmine but instead the institution.

Toward the film's climax, Gail rationalizes to Jasmine, who is being hospitalized after a fall caused by running from "the witch" (a ghostly figure who, as it turns out, is likely Liv in her black-hooded coat), that she should persevere at Ancaster because "it's not ghosts, and it's not supernatural. It's America. I went through it, and I understand. . . . It's everywhere." After Jasmine is released from the hospital, she returns to campus, and when Liv questions why she is back so soon, she repeats Gail's words "it's everywhere," having concluded from her mentor's experience that there is no escape from the terror that has characterized Jasmine's existence since she arrived on campus. Later that evening, Gail finds Jasmine hanging from the ceiling in her residence hall room. With its horror tropes and sinister and foreboding mood, *Master* raises significant doubts about the costs of negotiating an environment built to preserve white privilege and power. As Gail queries Liv after Jasmine's suicide, "I always thought that this was the prize. Sticking it out, surviving, enduring. What are we really doing it for?" Ahmed notes a similar exhaustion that sets in for those called upon to diversify historically white spaces: "Diversity workers too can be used to create the appearance of doing something or used to create an impression that diversity is being done. Diversity workers can end up being depleted not simply because of how much effort is required to do what they do but because of how much effort is expended in not bringing something about" (*What's* 156). Put another way, Gail comes to the realization that both she and Jasmine have been used to "create an impression" without regard for the pain and suffering that such self-sacrifice and mistreatment causes them personally.

Further, in *Master's* revelations about Liv, Diallo exposes white appropriation of Black experiences as a way to capitalize on the recent emphasis on diversifying PWIs, however superficial some of those efforts may be. In the process, Diallo suggests the ways in which diversity gains are measured by superficial shifts in appearances, not structural reconfigurations or interrogations of white leadership. In her meeting at a diner with Liv's mother, a white woman who has sought Gail out to reveal Liv's true racial identity, Gail recalls the headline "[Liv] Beckman Tenure a Win for Diversity," realizing that Liv, too, has leveraged Ancaster's concerns with at least appearing racially heterogeneous and inclusive to her own ends. When Gail heads to Liv's tenure party to confront her, the camera follows her in slow motion as she glares at her white colleagues gleefully imbibing wine and consuming charcuterie, painting a grotesque portrait of this self-congratulatory

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coterie who has not realized (and likely would not want to know) that the party's honoree (Liv) is not a "win for diversity" but is in fact racially passing as a tick in their diversity box.

When she confronts Liv in front of her white colleagues, Gail similarly puts the lie to the DEI slogans at Ancaster and the elite PWIs it is designed to represent. Gail tells her white colleagues, "You have been getting tutorials on Blackness from a white woman [Liv] who you only gave tenure because a Black girl died." When Liv and other white women try to interrupt her, she stops them and says unequivocally, "You people are so divorced from reality that you literally can't tell Black from white. That's what this place does. That's what happened to Jasmine. I know! It might not be white hoods and minstrels, but it's there. It's like a ghost. You can't catch it, you can't prove it!" When Diandra tells Gail to "calm down," she retorts, "She died!" underscoring the high stakes of colluding in the culture of white supremacy that led Jasmine to take her own life. While racist ideologies are often hidden beneath the surface and difficult to pin down (as Gail's ghost metaphor suggests), *Master*, with its horrific rendering of Gail's "outsider within" experience, "proves" their existence.

In perhaps the most profound statement in this climactic speech, Gail tells them, "I was never a master. I'm the maid. You brought me here to clean up. I didn't change anything. I didn't do anything." Putting the lie to notions of institutional progress and her own promotion to "master" as a key signifier of it, Gail enjoins her white colleagues to recognize the ways in which they have exploited her genuine desire to change an institution bent on perpetuating racial hierarchies and inequities. Although Ancaster hired Gail into a leadership role, the film consistently demonstrates that the institution has no intention of making its promotional messages about DEI a lived reality. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney aptly describe the academics after which the character of Dr. Gail Bishop is fashioned: "Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings" (26). Ancaster needs Gail's vision for change, but it only intends on using her appearance (and, at least for a time, Liv's) to deflect criticism of its longstanding investment in white hegemony.

Master likewise critiques the ways in which white administrators and faculty members feel little to no responsibility for dismantling the racially biased systems from which they benefit. After Liv continues to deny, with all evidence to the contrary, that she is white, and rushes out of her tenure party donning a black hood (harking back to the hooded figure Jasmine mistook for a witch), an exhausted Gail sits with her white colleagues as they try to offer reassurance that they, too, are feeling the weight of a grueling semester. Gail's colleagues' comments ("I

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really understand how you feel, Gail. It's the end of the semester, we're all worn out and exhausted, all of us"; "I have a tension knot the size of a golf ball"; "it's a lot of stress"; "the administration has not been prioritizing self-care") only exacerbate her "outsider within" sense of alienation and even contempt. Gail realizes that they have neither attempted nor do they feel compelled to attempt to see the oppressive forces at work at Ancaster or other predominantly white spaces.

Gail's colleagues' complaints thus become satiric fodder as the camera remains fixated on her gaze as she surveys the *mise-en-scène* of photographs and ornate portraits of white men (the original "masters") who built and maintained Ancaster that adorn the walls. Intensifying the sense that Gail is under threat, the drumbeat on the foreboding score becomes more insistent as she scans the room and makes eye contact with the ghosts of Ancaster's past and recognizes their faces in those of her current white male colleagues. In fact, this is one of Diallo's signature moves throughout the film, as the camera consistently lingers on Gail, and at times, Jasmine, gazing into the painted or photographed portraits of Ancaster's historical leaders, suggesting that the ideologies held by the men who institutionalized white supremacy at elite colleges and universities still preside over these educational spaces. As Craig Steven Wilder reminds us, "The academy never stood apart from American slavery—in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage" (11). Ahmed likewise notes, "We have many struggles at universities because universities are occupied by many histories" (*Complaint!* 23). Finally, Gail comes to the realization that this history of Black exclusion and persecution that her promotion was meant to signal an end to is still Ancaster's guiding hand. As the camera slowly zooms in for a close-up, Gail says softly but resolutely, "And it's never going to change."

Recognizing the intractability of Ancaster's hegemonic ways of knowing, Gail leaves the party and, ultimately, the institution altogether. As Laura Wright notes in her brief examination of the film, "by the time [Gail] resigns, she realizes that her job is simply that of a maid, hired to manage the diversity mess that her campus, like so many others, is trying to manage" (22). As she walks across the campus green, Gail hears the distinct crackle of radio static coming from a police radio and slowly turns her head to the right to see what danger lies behind her. She hears over the police radio, "A suspicious female on the freshman quad. Please check it out." A white campus police officer calls out to her for identification. When she turns around, he questions, "Faculty? Mind if I look at your I.D.?" Gail tells him defiantly, "No, I don't work here. I was just on my way out." The film then closes with Nina Simone's forceful rendition of "I Shall Be Released" as the

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soundtrack for Gail's exit from the campus grounds. As Gail's frame recedes from view, the camera remains focused on the foreground and the Black men laboring to clean the sidewalks and empty the garbage bins, reminding viewers of the racial hierarchy that has stayed intact on Ancaster's campus since the days of enslavement.

Master thus offers a critically significant counternarrative, on the one hand, to the rhetoric of DEI at PWIs and, on the other, to the anti-DEI movement attempting to make any effort to chip away at white dominance illegal. As Richard Brody notes in his *New Yorker* review of the film, "'Master' is a tensely effective, terrifyingly affecting drama that's also a virtual vision of the power and the purpose of the modern right-wing war on truth." For instance, in his support of a Texas bill aimed at eliminating DEI initiatives, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson stated, "I don't believe in solving a problem that doesn't exist. . . . [DEI offices] are fighting yesterday's war. We have much more important things to be fighting against right now" (qtd. in Knox). Florida governor Ron DeSantis, among a host of other Republican politicians, have made similarly erroneous and inflammatory moves to prohibit, as the governor's office put it, "DEI, CRT, and other discriminatory initiatives" ("Ron DeSantis"). Diallo puts the lie to such claims, elucidating through her portrait of a Black woman administrator the often-covert ways that historical oppression manifests in the institutional mechanisms of contemporary PWIs. As Coleman and Harris affirm, "Black horror's triumph is its ability to reflect more deeply on the ways in which Black history has been and continues to be Black horror" (304). Indeed, Dr. Gail Bishop's horrific realization is that she was never expected to be a trailblazer but instead a token (not a "master" but a "maid," as she puts it).

In denaturalizing the default white gaze that prevails in many campus films and at PWIs more generally, *Master* depicts academe as fossilized in its ideologies as well as hypocritical in its self-congratulatory advertising of diversity while leaving untouched its inhospitable climate for Black women in particular. Considering the film alongside popular discourse about DEI also reveals further layers to the conversation often occluded by simplistic denunciations, or conversely, championing of inclusive rhetoric without substantive plans for progressive change in university structures and policies. In her focus on Gail's navigation of an anti-Black landscape, Diallo encourages viewers to consider the changes to both academic ways of knowing and white administrators' responsibilities that must occur alongside the hiring of Black administrators and other leaders and faculty of color. As Collins points out, "a variety of individuals can learn from Black women's experiences as outsiders within: Black men, working class individuals,

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white women, other people of color, religious and sexual minorities, and all individuals who, while from social strata that provided them with the benefits of white male insiderness, have never felt comfortable with its taken-for-granted assumptions” (29). Troubling the default reliance on “white male insiderness” as the viewpoint through which the culture and traditions of academe are understood, Diallo reminds us that patterns of tokenizing Black campus leaders, exculpating white administrators from responsibility for addressing injustice and inequities, and leaving structural biases intact often continue even as the rhetorical frameworks of DEI have become institutionalized.

Moreover, in the actual political arena upon which this fictional portrait is based, conservative politicians are right to note that the struggle for racial justice has shifted, but the core issues that generations sought to redress (namely, endemic racism) are still at work but in new guises, which *Master* tracks with aplomb. As Harris and Gonzáles aver, “hiring additional faculty [or administrators] of color is necessary but does not solve the problem. Rather, what is required is transforming academic culture so that it welcomes and embraces those who are currently regarded as ‘other’ and increases the opportunity for alternative points of view to challenge dominant ideologies and deep-rooted social hierarchies” (8). Or, as Ahmed puts it, “being appointed to transform an institution does not necessarily mean the institution is willing to be transformed” (*Living* 94). With her satiric rendering of diversity marketing campaigns and Gail’s harrowing and short-lived tenure as the first and only Black administrator at Ancaster, Diallo makes this discrepancy between demographic and institutional change strikingly clear. Perhaps most importantly, *Master* prompts viewers to ponder what it would actually take to reckon with the oppressive histories of colleges and universities and to transform PWIs in particular into institutions dedicated to reparative justice.

Notes

1. Less recent examples of campus films featuring white male anti-hero professors include Tamara Jenkins’s *The Savages* (2007), *Wonder Boys* (2000) (Curtis Hanson’s filmic adaptation of Michael Chabon’s similarly titled novel), Gus Van Sant’s *Good Will Hunting* (1997), and James Bridges’s *The Paper Chase* (1973), among others.
2. In 2015, Rachel Dolezal, a white woman, passed as Black before being outed by her parents but continues to insist that she is not white (Johnson, Pérez-

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Peña, and Eligon). Liv's storyline more or less parallels Dolezal's racial passing, public outing, and defiant refusal to admit that she has exploited Black pain to advance her career. In a 2020 piece she published in *Medium*, Jessica Krug, a white former George Washington University professor, outed herself as having long passed for Afro-Latinx (Flaherty).

3. *The Price of the Ticket* is the title (and title essay) of James Baldwin's 1985 collected works of nonfiction; a documentary with the same title was released in 1987.

4. According to polls and tallies of protestors at Black Lives Matter rallies during the late spring and summer of 2020, this uprising constituted the largest movement for social change in U.S. history ("Black Lives Matter").

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Leaving Herself Out and Putting Herself In: Revision Strategies in Mary Chesnut's Revised Civil War Diary

Wendy Kurant Rollins

When C. Vann Woodward published the third edition of Mary Boykin Chesnut's *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* in 1981,¹ he revealed a surprising fact about Chesnut's work. As Woodward discusses in an introductory essay, "Diary in Fact—Diary in Form," while Chesnut's work was based on a diary she kept during the war years and retained the diary form, the text was heavily revised, with its most thorough revision occurring some twenty years after the Civil War. The extant iterations that led to *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*—the original wartime diary, its 1870s expansion, and the two drafts of the extensive revision composed in the 1880s—give scholars of autobiography an opportunity to explore how Chesnut's formation of her identity adjusted over time. In *Narrative Discourse*, Gerard Genette distinguishes three distinct meanings for the term *narrative*. Narrative can be "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events" (25). It can also refer to "the succession of events . . . that are [the narrative's] subject" or the *story*, or to "the event that consists of someone recounting something" or "narrating" (25, 27). Furthermore, Genette establishes the analytic category of *voice* to assess narrative's "relation with the subject (and more generally with the instance) of the enunciating" (31-32). Works that present themselves as diaries imply that there is very little distance in that relation between the narrated I—what Genette calls the "hero" of the narration—and the narrating I telling the story, though Genette notes that even in real diaries the I toggles between "prerecorded" and "live" accounts of what the narrated I thought during the events and what the narrating I thinks during the recounting of those events (218). The more time that passes between the narrated I's experience of the narrative event and the narrating I's narrating of that event, the more the "difference in age and experience . . . authorizes the [narrating I] to treat the [narrated I] with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority" (252). Similarly, in her study of Southern women's writing, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw asserts that these texts demonstrate distinct narrating I's "whose more mature age,

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life experience, and contemporaneous historical moment at the time of composition shape the perspective on the past” (5). Given the composition history of Chesnut’s work, we get multiple and different narrating I’s reflecting on the narrated I’s experience. Here I will focus primarily on two of Chesnut’s many narrating I’s—the one of her original war-time diary and the one of the second 1880s draft²—to consider how the historical moment, particularly the intensification of true womanhood ideology in the postwar years, inflected Chesnut’s self-representation.

Chesnut was an elite white Southern woman writing when true womanhood and separate spheres beliefs were not only ascendant but further reinforced by the ideology of the Lost Cause. American wars often have a profound impact on gender prescriptions, and the American Civil War was no different. As argued elsewhere,³ the twenty-year period following the war saw a redoubling of true womanhood ideology in the South because it was an essential adjunct to the myth of the Lost Cause. Lost Cause rhetoric held that white Southern men had fought to protect their homes, and to prop up that justification, white Southern women—through their separate spheres association with domestic spaces—were expected to show unshakeable loyalty to domesticity and to the men’s sacrifice. One might reasonably expect a female narrating I ensconced within that cultural context to reconstruct her memories of past events in accord with its demands. According to Prenshaw, the autobiographies of elite Southern white women show intense concern about “intruding the female self upon the male-dominated turf” of publishing, in line with true womanhood’s prohibition against public display. While “[t]he constraints against public display . . . [were] felt generally by nineteenth-century European and American women,” they were “especially intense in the American South” and still evident in early twentieth-century productions (Prenshaw 2). To avoid violating this prohibition, Southern women writers typically focused “attention not on the self but the selves and events that surround the writer”; in short, the self is replaced by “the self’s surround” (Prenshaw 26). Additionally, these works often demonstrated their writers’ domestic devotion by adopting a “memorialist, elegiac” tone about the Southern past, especially if the writer was a member of the former Southern elite (Prenshaw 16). Kimberly Harrison further confirms this tendency in her study of Civil War diary rhetoric: “As during the Civil War, [Southern white women’s] rhetorical actions were frequently in the service of paternalistic Southern culture, a culture that with peace encouraged them to be private rebels and to silence outward expressions that could challenge Southern hierarchies of gender, class, and race” (144).

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Chesnut seems to follow the lead of her peers in both extra- and intra-textual statements about her intentions. Describing her revision efforts in a June 18, 1882 letter to former Confederate first lady Varina Davis, Chesnut says, “how I wish you could read over—my Journal—I have been two years over looking it—copying—leaving my self out” (Wall 83). Within the revision’s text, Chesnut further explicitly commends autobiographical works that suppress self: “Those Tarleton memoirs, Lee’s memoirs, Moultrie’s, Lord Rawdon’s letters – self is never brought to the front. I have been reading them over and admire their modesty and good taste as much as their courage and cleverness” (MWWC 194). Appearing to practice what she preaches, Chesnut also asserts that she writes to provide “*memoirs pour server* [that] may some future day afford dates, facts, and prove useful to more important people than [herself]” (MCCW 301). Nonetheless, while she might appear to be leaving herself out by removing some explicit statements of self, she puts herself back in, and this self is anything but elegiac about social expectations impacting Southern white women. Chesnut’s constructed identity in the revision resists true womanhood ideology to a greater degree than previously thought and certainly much more so than many of her peers during the boom in Southern women’s war narratives when Chesnut wrote. Many of her alterations instead serve to shape her marital relations as a metaphor for her wartime experience and to amplify her critique of devotion to the home.

Some Chesnut scholars have argued that true womanhood’s prohibitions against taking a public role have strongly influenced Chesnut’s editing and narration choices as she moved from the original diary to the 1880s revision. Melissa Mentzer points to excision of personal assertions as a major way that Chesnut left herself out of her revision. She notes that the

primary difference between the original journal written during the war and the revised work is the lack of references to Chesnut’s personal life, including her marital discord and her use of opium. . . . Such personal quarrels are not included in the revised journal, and neither are the author’s ambitions for her husband and herself as the Confederacy forms and chooses its leaders. (50)

By leaving out these personal references, Mentzer argues, Chesnut changes the narrating I to release it from gender prohibitions:

The narrator-protagonist’s primary identity is no longer the wife of James Chesnut. On one level, she emphasizes instead

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her role as witness and reporter of the events of the Civil War. This strategy represents and re-presents Mary Chesnut as a particular speaker not bound by the same cultural restrictions that would silence the author, the wife of James Chesnut. The war is her justification for speaking in her text. The elimination of the most personal references to herself draws attention away from the Mary Chesnut of the original journal and towards the war and a revised narrative-persona with a revised role. (50-51)

I agree with Mentzer that Chesnut does make some use of the blunt instrument of excision as a technique of textual self-erasure, particularly targeting strong emotions. What she expunges points to subjects she felt to be unacceptably self-centered, and she sometimes went even further than simply leaving them out of her revised diary. One such subject is her vanity about her charm. In one original entry, Chesnut scorns Judge Withers's suggestion that "Mr. Mallory is attentive to me to propitiate Mr. C & himself" because Mr. Mallory was not "half so attentive to me as he used to be in Washington—for the best reason" (*PMC* 19-20). Her own charisma, she implies, is reason enough for Mallory's attention. When she revised this entry, Chesnut left in Withers's comment and left out her own rebuttal (*MCCW* 14). In another original entry, Chesnut openly brags of her power to charm men:

Poor Mrs. Browne. How she hated my coming—actually shed tears. <<I can make any body love me if I choose. I would get tired of it. Mr. B too. How excessively complimentary he was that night at the party,>> & so nicely done that any woman might have been proud of my three attendants that night, <<Goodwyn, Browne, & Hilliard!!! Wonderful.>> (*PMC* 40)

It is no surprise that Chesnut left this entry out of the revision; she went even further than that, erasing from her original diary the sections indicated with double angle brackets.

However, it would be incorrect to say that Chesnut fully "leaves herself out" of her revised diary by excising subjective and emotional passages on subjects implicated in cultural prescriptions for women. Chesnut's presentation of self in her revised diary is both more nuanced and more moderate than her stated intentions. An example of her changes to an entry regarding her drug use will serve as an introduction to the parameters for how much self the revision retained. In the original diary's March 18, 1861 entry, Chesnut describes an upsetting encounter and the panacea she sought from opium: "Yesterday

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on the cars we had a mad woman raving at being separated from her daughter. It excited me so. I quickly took opium, & that I kept up. It enables me to retain every particle of mind or sense or brains I ever have, & so quiets my nerves that I can calmly reason & take rational views of things otherwise maddening” (*PMC* 41). The self in the original version regards the other woman’s emotional excess as contagious and uses the drug as an external control to ward off emotions; opium dispatches potential hysterics and imbues her, at least in her own estimation, with objective sense. The revised version of this scene omits the drug use but also makes a significant addition to the emotional state of the narrated I missing from the original: “There was tragedy, too, on the way here. A mad woman, taken from her husband and children. Of course she was mad—or she would not have given ‘her grief words’ in that public place. Her keepers were along. What she said was rational enough— pathetic, at times heartrending” (*MCCW* 29). While the self of the original diary recoils from the mad woman’s emotions, the self of the revision sympathizes with the woman, recognizing that what she suffers is a tragedy and feeling her pain. Chesnut also alludes to the fine line that separates the rational woman and mad woman. Chesnut has grief words too—she speaks them within the original entry:

I wonder if other women shed as bitter tears as I. They scald my cheeks & blister my heart. Yet Edward Boykin “wondered & marveled at my elasticity. Was I always so bright & happy, did ever woman possess such a disposition, life was one continued festival,” &c, &c, & Bonham last winter shortly said, “it was a bore to see any one always in a good humour.” . . . Much they know of me—or my power to hide trouble. (*PMC* 41)

When she observes in the revision that the woman must be mad or she would not speak her grief in public, Chesnut condenses into a brief gesture the connection that could be inferred from her original entry but that was not explicitly acknowledged there: many women have grief words and the words themselves are rational; it is the public expression of them that makes the difference between the label of sane or mad. In the original, the drug use offered her an external control that also removed her ability to empathize. In the revision, the drug’s effects are textually replaced by the rational ability to analyze similarities and distinctions united with the emotional ability to feel for another’s pain. She is not simply replacing her emotional self with an objective self but rather is creating a self whose emotions connect to larger themes within the self’s surround.

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Mentzer also points to Chesnut's removal of incidents of marital discord that might call into question her Lost Cause-mandated domestic devotion. While Chesnut does edit out several mentions of arguments between herself and James Chesnut, Chesnut's revisions to these arguments indicate that she was editing her husband's emotions more than her own while also shaping their conflict into a metaphor for the wartime atmosphere. In both the original and the revision, Chesnut highlights their contrasting temperaments.⁴ Chesnut's diary describes James Chesnut as "*reticent— & like the Indian too proud to let the world know how he feels*" (*PMC* 32). As she moves to her revision, she asserts that he is "cool, quiet, self-poised," while she is a "stormy petrel" (*MCCW* 42). In another revised entry describing an emotional parting between Chesnut and a friend, she harangues her husband and John Preston,

You, you cold, formal, solemn, overly polite creatures, weighed down by your own dignity. You will never know the rapture of such a sad farewell as John Means and I have just interchanged. . . . John Means does not suppress feelings at the unexpected meeting with an old friend. And a good cry does me good, too. It is a life of terror and foreboding we lead, my heart is in my mouth half of the time. But you two—under no possible circumstances could you forget your manners. (*MCCW* 418)

This characterization of James Chesnut as reserved and stoical in comparison to her emotional expressiveness guides most of Chesnut's deletions within the passages of their personal quarrels.

Despite its insistence on James Chesnut's reserve, the original diary records numerous unreserved "scoldings" and "snubbings" of his wife. Chesnut writes of a "husband scold" on April 8, 1861, and "a row with Mr. Chesnut" on May 4, 1861 (*PMC* 56, 66). On July 25, 1861, she asserts that "Mrs. Davis said I let Mr. C *bully* me," and, less than a month thereafter, Chesnut lists the day's visitors and laments, "Mr. Chesnut made the visit detestable by grumbling & complaining & talking *at me* all the time & abusing every body. . . . I feel miserable to day" (*PMC* 105, 127). The falling fortunes of the Confederacy only intensify his unpleasant behavior. In the diary's May 9, 1865 entry, Chesnut reports that, anticipating the imminent loss of his property at war's end, James Chesnut "cannot forbear the gratification of taunting me with his *ruin*—for which I am no more responsible than the man in the moon. But it is the habit of all men to fancy that in some inscrutable way their wives are the cause of all the evil in their lives" (*PMC* 240). Chesnut's diary shows that, in personal quarrels with his wife, James Chesnut fre-

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quently failed to show stoicism. She omitted every one of the preceding examples from her revision.

Along with these deletions, Chesnut's revision retains and further develops scenes that highlight the friction between his no-nonsense personality and her emotional expressiveness. This suggests that her editorial motives arose more from a desire to develop theme than to concede to cultural prescriptions. Chesnut interspersed her work on her diary revisions with work on three novels, and so fiction techniques were very much a part of her shaping of her wartime diary. One such shaping occurs when they are in Charleston just before the surrender of Fort Sumter, a time that Chesnut portrays with a focus on what Steven M. Stowe calls "warfare's twins, loss and possibility" (47). In his exploration of Southern women's Civil War diaries, Stowe notes that wartime's twins are often represented in these diaries as romantic flirtation with "war-brought men" that were as "excitingly or dangerously volatile" as the war itself (77, 73). Chesnut chooses not to accompany her husband on an excursion to some islands near the harbor. In the original entries, James Chesnut responds to this news coldly at first, giving her "his *cheek* for farewell," and Chesnut suspects he may be harping on her relationship with former South Carolina governor John Manning, with whom he has accused her of flirting before. On his return, James Chesnut's jealousy erupts: "<<Mr. C came home so enraged with my staying home, he said to flirt with John Manning, that I went to bed in disgust>>" (PMC 51). When Chesnut revised these entries, she clarifies her reason for staying behind—"A long dusty day ahead on those windy islands. Never for me"—and omits James Chesnut's sulking and accusation. However, she augments the original passage's "[went] to dinner with Gov. Manning" into a description that makes clear the abundance of charm and attention lavished upon her by her escort:

Now a loud banging at my door. I get up in a pet and throw it wide open.

"Oh," said John Manning, standing there, smiling radiantly. "Pray excuse the noise I made. I mistook the number. I thought it was Rice's room. That is my excuse. Now that I am here, come go with us to Quinby's. Everybody will be there—who are not on the island. To be photographed is the rage just now."

We had a nice open carriage, and we made a number of calls . . . the handsome ex-governor doing the honors gallantly.

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He had ordered dinner at six—and we dined *tete-a-tete*. If he should prove as great a captain in ordering his line of battle as he is in ordering a dinner, it will be as well for the country as it was for me today. (*MCCW* 39)

Chesnut did make a slight change to hide her vanity; the revision originally called Manning “my handsome ex-governor” and later replaced the “my” with “the.” However, Manning’s flimsy excuse for disturbing her solitude, his attentions, and her clear enjoyment of them dramatize rather than conceal the charge of flirting. The thing most hidden in this revision is James Chesnut’s peevish outbursts.

Arguably, Chesnut’s revision of her outing with John Manning makes him look like the flirt, but elsewhere Chesnut does not conceal that the label could be equally applied to her. Two entries in Chesnut’s original diary show the exchange of flowers symbolic of love and devotion between men and women who are married to other people, and Chesnut gets her share as well. On April 2, 1861, “John Manning brought me a bunch of violets” (*PMC* 53). Two days later, she is disgusted by the behavior of men around Lucy Holcombe Pickens, whom she finds “silly & affected . . . looking *love* into the eyes of the men at every glance,” particularly when “[William Porcher] Miles beg[s] for [the] violets” Mrs. Pickens wears. However, shortly thereafter, Chesnut “met Sam Shannon waiting to give me three heart’s ease—and Mr. C said I was as great a flirt as Mrs. Pickens” (*PMC* 54). The diary consolidates these events into one entry:

Met the lovely Lucy Holcombe, now Mrs. Governor Pickens last night at the Isaac Haynes’. I see Miles now begging in dumb show for the violets she has in her breastpin. She is a consummate actress and he well up in the part of male flirt. So it was well done.

“And you who are laughing in your sleeve at the scene—where did you get that huge bunch?”

“Oh, there is no sentiment when there is a pile like that of anything.”

“Oh! Oh”

Today at the breakfast table—a tragic bestowal of heartsease. Well-known Inquirer, once more, in austere tones: “Who is the flirt now?”

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And so we fool on, into the black cloud ahead of us. (*MCCW* 40-41)

While the revision conceals Chesnut's pique and the names of the flower givers, it does not conceal that Chesnut is as much a participant in flirtatious behavior as the others. Importation of Manning's violets into the consolidated entry intensifies the comparison made by the "well-known Inquirer." The final sentence points to a further motive for combining numerous scattered mentions into fewer, more developed passages. Doing so strengthens the parallel between the Chesnuts' conflicting personalities and the Southern elite's conflicting responses to the war. Wartime is at the root of both the stimulating events that match Chesnut's flirtatious "fooling" and the "dark cloud" of potential death and destruction that matches James Chesnut's austere demeanor. Rather than replacing the self with its surround, Chesnut puts the two into a mutually reinforcing relationship.

Another set of revision entries describing Chesnut's time in Richmond in the winter of 1863 also illustrates Chesnut's eye for creating parallels between her self-representation and the historic moment. Stowe's study of other Civil War diaries indicates that cognitive dissonance marked that moment—as the war dragged on and Confederate losses accrued, socializing ramped up. He observes that Lucy Buck, "not a diarist to fill pages with emotional scenes, told of 'wild' parties" and that Kate Stone "went to parties and was relieved to 'talk nonsense again'" even though she was disturbed to do so "when the losses of war were so great" (78). Unsurprisingly, Chesnut too throws herself into Richmond socializing. After several near misses, James Chesnut "laid the law down" regarding Chesnut's inveterate love of parties:

"No more feasting in this house. This is no time for junketing and merrymaking. There is a positive want of proper feeling in the life you lead."

"And you said you brought me here to enjoy one winter before you took me home and turned my face to a dead wall."

He is the master of the house—to hear is to obey. (*MCCW* 503)

Obedience is soon forgotten, as an entry eight days later shows James Chesnut coming home to a "party in full blast." Though Chesnut "trembled in her shoes," her husband "behaved beautifully" and only spoke to her about it later, saying, "No more parties. . . . The country is in danger. There is too much levity here." Though Chesnut describes herself as

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“very penitent, subdued, submissive, humble” (*MCCW* 508), her socializing continues at an only slightly slower pace. Another laying down of the law seems imminent when, a month and a half after the last command, Constance Cary “described my parties to J.C. as ‘little orgies.’” James Chesnut does not reprimand his wife directly, but a week later she hears him say to one of the slaves, “I say Moll [?], that was a queer speech of Miss Cary’s. I do not like *my house* (‘apartments—second floor—Mrs. Grundy’s,’ said I) to be so spoken of. Really, I will be afraid to leave home” (*MCCW* 569). The Richmond series demonstrates that Chesnut’s extroverted self is not forced into the shape of either domestic paragon or objective reporter. She expresses the very undomestic ideas that she prefers socializing to the “dead wall” of home life and that her husband’s commands need not be accepted entirely or uncritically, so this narrated I is not overly constrained by these gender prescriptions. Finally, as with her earlier Charleston entries, Chesnut develops the conflict between her self’s desires and her husband’s dour propriety to reinforce the paradox of the passages’ setting. The Confederacy’s capital is the center of Southern society. However, post-Gettysburg, it is also, as Chesnut’s entry two days before the first party prohibition observes, a city where “[g]loom and unspoken despondency hang like a pall everywhere” (*MCCW* 501).

Mentzer also points to Chesnut’s use of unnamed ensemble speakers as a technique for removing herself from the narrative and avoiding censure for questioning gender prescriptions. Delegating her thoughts to others “fragment[s] her narrative persona, so that no autobiographical I, no creatively restructured persona representing the author exists at the center of the text, as we would expect in an autobiographical work” (54). In that way, Chesnut defuses accusations of self-display and apostasy against true womanhood. Furthermore, the safety in numbers and anonymity allows the ensemble to express spicier opinions than a single named woman could. Mentzer argues that, by replacing “the voice of individual experience” with “the voice of many women’s experience,” Chesnut uses the female ensemble to “challenge their society’s private and public structures without fear of reprisal” (52).

Chesnut certainly delegates one of her most daring expressions to an ensemble of women. Chesnut’s original diary contains a notable screed in which she excoriates patriarchs who fathered children with their slaves yet “seem to think themselves patterns—models of husbands & fathers.” Their wives and daughters imagine those mixed-race children in their households “drop from the clouds,” or at least “pretend so to think” (*PMC* 42-43). The sentiment of this original entry informs her revised entry for August 27, 1861, but this time the opinions are spoken within an extensive conversation among an unnamed “assemblage of

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army women or Confederate matrons” knitting for soldiers. As Chesnut did in her diary, a speaker indicts the libidinous patriarchs and the performative nature of female virtue, asserting that the miscreant’s “wife and daughters in the midst of their purity and innocence are supposed never to dream of what is as plain before their eyes as the sunlight, and they play their parts of unsuspecting angels to the letter.” The speakers link this subject to general male tyranny. Women do not protest because the patriarch is “so furious in his temper and thunder[s] his wrath so at the poor women” that they are “glad to let him do as he pleases in peace, if they could only escape his everlasting faultfinding and noisy bluster” (*MCCW* 169). A revised entry two days later renews the subject of tyrannical men, and again an unnamed speaker describes a respected patriarch as one who “thinks that it is his business in life . . . to prevent the women from such frivolous things as pleasure, &&&c” (*MCCW* 181). To further obscure ownership of her opinion, Chesnut adds other speakers who present caveats and counterargument. In the first conversation, a speaker insists those “make-believe angels were of the last century”; today’s wives “know—and . . . won’t have it.” Another opines that “those of you who are hardest on men here are soft enough when they are present” and declares herself a “friend to man” (*MCCW* 169-70). In the second conversation, Chesnut adds in the unattributed countering opinion that “[a] woman who talks that way is a dangerous character” and literally places herself at the margin of events, at the edge of the room, thinking rather than speaking: “I sat placidly rocking in my chair by the window, trying to hope all was for the best” (*MCCW* 181). However, while Chesnut sometimes delegates her own thoughts to ensemble speakers, the ensemble speakers do not replace her narrated I as much as they augment it.

Most of the opinions of the ensemble are supported by Chesnut in her own voice elsewhere in the revised diary. Like the unnamed speaker who says that contemporary women “know” about their husbands’ wrongs and “won’t have it,” Chesnut identifies herself as one who will hold her husband to account if he fails. Observing that “[w]hile love lasts, forgiveness of love’s wrongs are impossible,” Chesnut feels certain that “[t]hose dutiful women who piously overlook, well, everything, do not care one fig for their husbands—settled that in my own mind years ago” (*MCCW* 334). In concert with the revision’s frequent ensemble discussions of tyrannical husbands, Chesnut adds her own protest, focusing on the use of money to subordinate women. She establishes that she and her husband “had our share of my father’s estate” when they married, “and it was spent for debts already contracted.” Despite her financial contribution, she is made to feel subordinate by her husband’s responses to her requests for money:

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why feel like a beggar—utterly humiliated and degraded—when I am forced to say I need money? I cannot tell, but I do. And the worst of it is, this thing grows worse as one grows older. Money ought not to be asked for or given to a man's wife as a gift. Something must be due her. And that she should have—not as now, with growling and grumbling, warnings against waste and extravagance, hints as to the need of economy. Amazement that the last supply has given out already. (MCCW 284-85)

Chesnut also uses her commentary on her reading to further criticize male behavior.⁵ Of Edmond About's novel *Germaine*, she sneers, “[i]t is only in books that people fall in love with their wives” (MCCW 523). Jemima Montgomery's *At Odds* allows her to confirm the ensemble's opinion of men's unilateral fault-finding: “Interesting—to the fascinating point. If impossible. Men never pass self-denying ordinances after they are married” (MCCW 570). Chesnut is more vehement in her opinions when she puts them in the mouths of other women, but her own protests support the indictment of male “everlasting faultfinding and noisy bluster” asserted by the ensemble.

Mentzer includes ambition as forbidden by the “cultural restrictions that would silence the author” as “the wife of James Chesnut” (50-51), and Chesnut makes use of an unnamed speaker to disassociate herself from her intense desire that James Chesnut get a diplomatic appointment to England. The original diary expresses Chesnut's disappointment in her own voice when her husband is not chosen to be the Confederacy's minister to England: “Mr. [James Murray] Mason is nominated for the Minister to *England*. There goes my bread & butter on the *buttered* side. JC would have suited that place better than any man in the Confederate states says MBC” (PMC 144). In the revision, Chesnut gives her thoughts to an unnamed speaker among the aforementioned Confederate matrons:

“Mr. Mason's going to be sent to England.”

“Do you hear? There goes your bread and butter—and on the buttered side. In your heart you have been dillydallying, hoping your husband and you would be sent there.”

The person to whom this statement is addressed, identified as “she who explained the Mirabeau-friend-of-man allusion,” responds with a tragic-comedic quotation, and the conversation continues on with no indication of who says what (MCCW 170). Again there is an ob-

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scuring counterargument—one speaker asserts that “the English will like Mr. Mason”—but most of the unnamed speakers question the usurper’s abilities (*MCCW* 170-71). Nonetheless, if the discussion of Chesnut’s ambition is widened to include James Chesnut’s pursuit of election to the Confederate Senate or a similarly prestigious role in the Confederacy, there Chesnut’s ambition is directly expressed.

Again Chesnut makes several edits not to hide her ambition but to hide her husband’s lack of it. Her original diary is full of exasperation at James Chesnut’s lackadaisical pursuit of his political career. James Chesnut equivocates over what he wants to do, and Chesnut writes that she is “afraid Mr. C will decide too late as usual” (*PMC* 140). In the run up to the Senate election, Chesnut is beside herself with her husband’s inattention to potential allies. She reports having “a row with Mr. C for not wanting to answer John S. Preston’s telegram” and lecturing him on “the prevailing *insolence* of office” (*PMC* 146). A month later, Chesnut fumes again: “JC dashing aside letters & not answering them as if he was *heir apparent* to the throne of the *world* & his election certain!” (*PMC* 165). When the crucial election is two months away, Chesnut notes with disgust that her husband gives more attention to his family’s plantations than to his political career: “I could not have devoted myself heart & soul to my private interests at such a time—not taking even so much interest in public affairs as to write a decent answer to letters” (*PMC* 191). All these statements disappear from the revision with the exception of one minor example of the consequence of James Chesnut’s inattention: “Tobin named his company Chesnut Rangers. Mr. C forgot to answer his letter telling of the compliment for a fortnight. Lo! we saw in the papers that he had changed the name. It is now ‘Hammond Huzzars’—huzzah!” (*MCCW* 248).

Chesnut replaces these criticisms of her husband’s passivity with commentary that instead portrays him as too high minded to pander. In her revision, Chesnut blames her husband’s failed Senate bid on the political decisions and machinations of others: “Mr. A.H. Boykin refused to allow Mr. Barnwell and Mr. Chesnut’s [names] to be placed together. He thought as Mr. C was the incumbent he should be reelected first—&c&c. Mr. Barnwell’s friends then coalesced with Orr, and these two are our senators.” Had Boykin not insisted on that order of precedence, “the skillful manipulations of their electioneering friends” might not have lifted Barnwell and Orr over James Chesnut (*MCCW* 254). When the diary reflects on the loss two weeks later, Chesnut again emphasizes her husband’s high-mindedness in contrast to the pettiness of others. After noting the risk of “leaving yourself in your friends’ hands in political affairs,” she comments that Boykin thought others resented James Chesnut’s *hauteur*: “Another thing urged against

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Mr. C—the only night he was in Columbia, he stayed in his own room, did not go to see anybody, thought it unseemly to electioneer for such a place as senator. The legislators thought otherwise—and that he was too grand and that a taking down would do him good” (*MCCW* 265). James Chesnut emerges from his wife’s revisions as one too noble to succeed in such a mendacious political environment.

As for her own expressions of ambition for James Chesnut’s political success, Chesnut retains many of her earlier statements with hardly a change. The original “Why was I born so frightfully ambitious,” Chesnut’s exclamation as James Chesnut chooses not to go in the army, becomes “[w]hy am I so frightfully ambitious?” in the revision (*PMC* 130; *MCCW* 151). When James Chesnut isn’t elected to the Senate, Chesnut’s original and revised entries describe her disappointment in the same terms, as “a heavy fall” that has left “inward bruises” (*PMC* 211, *MWWC* 253). Chesnut further owns haranguing her husband about his campaign, reinstating what she erased elsewhere because it accompanied criticisms of her husband’s passivity: “How I tormented Mr. C. Do this—do that—do not do the other—you will give offense, make enemies, &c&c. I can’t say that he ever heeded my ‘sage advices’ in the least” (*MCCW* 254). In saying this, Chesnut leaves herself open to censure for her “unwomanly” interference in the public realm while protecting her husband’s reputation by showing his resistance to it.⁶ Further, Chesnut does not conceal her dissatisfaction with her husband’s appointment to the South Carolina Executive Council in early 1862: “If I were asked to go into such a council, I would throw the nasty office in their faces” (*MCCW* 275). In April 1862, Davis offers James Chesnut a place on his staff, which Chesnut calls “a way opened by Providence from this slough of despond.” However, James Chesnut refuses it at first, thinking his duty was to remain in South Carolina, and Chesnut is candid about her frustration: “I have no taste for self-abnegation. I do not love to be flayed alive. I do not like endless rows of pins stuck into me in this grand court of the Great Buzzfuzz” (*MCCW* 327). Eventually, James Chesnut does become Davis’s aide de camp, and Chesnut was no doubt jubilant.⁷ Chesnut’s retention of her ambitious statements indicates that fear of violating that particular gender prescription did not inform her revision strategy. Her reason for being ambitious for her husband’s political advancement even more strongly confirms resistance to true womanhood’s emphasis on devotion to domesticity.

As she has done before, Chesnut moderates her most vehement statements about her Camden family, specifically her in-laws. The original diary accuses her father-in-law of miscegenation. When Chesnut rails at hypocritical patriarchs who keep “concubines” in the same home with their wives, she alludes to Genesis, saying “wife Leah

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does not suffice. Rachel must be *added*, if not *married*" (PMC 42). A few months later, while staying with her in-laws in Camden, Chesnut passionately declares her inability to follow the commandment to honor one's parents: "Merciful God! forgive me if I *fail*. Can I respect what is not respectable. Can I *honor* what is dishonorable. *Rachel—& her brood*—make this place a horrid nightmare to me. I believe in nothing with this before me" (PMC 82). Her father-in-law is tacitly identified, if not directly named, as the perpetrator who added a Rachel to his household. In addition to delegating her speech against patriarchs to an ensemble of anonymous women, Chesnut makes no mention of these suspicions of her father-in-law in her revisions. She also edits out her criticism of her father-in-law's lack of support of his son. Her hints of her father-in-law's failures as a husband in the original diary are directly followed by explicit condemnation of him as a father:

Mrs. Davis told me everybody described my husband's father as an odd character—"a millionaire who did nothing for his son whatever, left him to struggle with poverty, &c." I replied—"Mr. Chesnut Senior thinks himself the best of fathers—and his son thinks likewise. I have nothing to say—but it is true. He has no money but what he makes as a lawyer." (PMC 43)

The repetition of the phrasing in both her description of licentious patriarchs who "think themselves patterns" and Mr. Chesnut, Sr.'s view of himself as the best of fathers indicates that, in Chesnut's opinion, both views are equally deluded. These criticisms are omitted from the revision without even a hint from anonymous speakers. However, what she leaves in about her in-laws clearly asserts her refusal to venerate her family.

Overall, Chesnut's representation of her in-laws paints them as intellectually torpid and oblivious to things outside of their narrow concerns. In her original entry for November 25, 1861, Chesnut says that she saw her husband off to Columbia alone because she could not endure her in-laws' "*frivole frivale*" and "deep & abiding interest *only in trifles*" (PMC 207). Her revision leaves out her avoidance of them but retains her representation of why their company is unbearable: "And now there is nothing but frivle fravle talked in this house. And the earnest interest, the deep and abiding [interest] they feel, apparently take in it—and in that only—while outside, 'the torn sail, and the tempest howling.' To me this calm monotonous baby talk is maddening" (MCCW 242). When she escapes from Camden to the more stimulating atmosphere of a city, she makes a point of the difference. While in Columbia, she observes that "[a]fter life at Mulberry, it is a waking

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up. There, one absorbing interest for all. That and nothing else: Mrs. Chesnut's health—what he eats, what she says, and nothing more" (*MCCW* 275). Such tedium stifles her mind and causes physical pain. After her return to Camden, she says that, though she "had not an ache or a pain in Columbia," now she had a headache from the "dullness striking in" (*MCCW* 276). Not surprisingly, she often seeks reasons to leave Camden.

When Chesnut records an occasion when her in-laws' self-absorption causes her considerable pain, she does moderate her original response; however, in doing so, she pointedly refuses to accept their domestic values. In her original diary, Chesnut laments,

Mrs. Chesnut was bragging to me with exquisite taste—me, a childless wretch, of her twenty seven grandchildren, & Col. Chesnut, a man who rarely wounds me, said to her, "You have not been a *useless* woman in this world" because she had so many children. & what of me! God help me—no good have I done—to myself or any one else—with the [power] I boast so of—the power to make myself loved. Where am I now. Where are my friends. I am allowed to have none. (*PMC* 44 - 5)

Chesnut's original response to her in-laws' callous comments internalizes their judgments and pronounces herself useless because of her failure in her family role. When she revises the incident, she replaces her self-doubt with coolly sardonic commentary that rejects their views. After noting the impending marriage of a woman to a man with ten children, Chesnut prefaces her in-laws' cruel conversation with an observation that links them to Camden's tribal mentality:

These people take the old Hebrew pride in the number of children they have. True colonizing spirit. No danger of crowding here—inhabitants are wanted.

Old Mr. C said today, "Wife, you must feel that you have not been useless in your day and generation. You have now twenty seven great-grandchildren." (*MCCW* 32)

Chesnut's narration is almost anthropological but not objective. Rather than indicating her submission to their estimation of her, her narration sits in judgment of them, finding them anachronistic.

In addition to her critical depictions of her family members, Chesnut most violates cultural prescriptions for women through her frequent and detailed explanations of why she is so ambitious for her

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husband's political career. It is because she cannot bear "private life" in her so-called home of Camden. Unlike the domestic woman whose whole world centers on the home, Chesnut passionately declares her desire to escape Camden to such a degree that Julia A. Stern's interpretation of the diary through the epic lens likens her time in Camden as a sort of death or relegation to the underworld (45). Like her original August 29, 1861 entry, Chesnut's expression of her fears about James Chesnut's Senate bid point to dread of being trapped in Camden: "If so, think of being [illegible word, possibly "relegated"] to Camden—those long, long, weary days. Outside friendships with only a handful of people" (*PMC* 142). The revised entry not only retains the original's theme of public life being preferable to private life but expands upon the perils of private life:

My experience does not coincide with the general idea of public life. I mean the life of a politician or statesman. Peace, comfort, quiet, happiness, I have found away from home. Only your own family, those nearest and dearest, can hurt you. Wrangling, rows, heart burnings, bitterness, envy, hatred and malice, unbrotherly love, family snarls, neighborhood strife, and ill blood—a lovely brood I have conjured up. But they were all there, and for these many years I have almost forgotten them. I find them always alive and rampant when I go back to semi-village life. . . . Everybody knows exactly where to put the knife. (*MCCW* 176)

One could hardly think of a statement that is more critical of domesticity than this one.

As if the first expansion wasn't sufficient, Chesnut then amplifies her revised statement with an even longer monologue describing the many pains of "private life." This monologue is lightly disguised as the words of a "Mrs. _____," repeated while "[c]oming home" from "a ladies' meeting," but the details of the statement coincide with Chesnut's earlier expression to such a degree that there is little doubt to whom these words belong. After describing constant interruptions and officious advice from "the familiars of the Inquisition," the anonymous lady's story continues:

"Private life indeed!" She says her husband entered public life and they went off to live in a faraway city. Then for the first time in her life she knew privacy. She never will forget how she jumped for joy as she told her servant not to admit a soul until after two o'clock in the day. Afterwards she took a day.

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Then she was free indeed. She could read and write, stay at home, go out at her own sweet will. No longer sitting for hours with her fingers between the leaves of a frantically interesting book while her kin slowly dribbled nonsense by the yard. Waiting, waiting, yawning—would they never go? Then, for hurting you, who like a relative? They do it from a sense of duty. For stinging you, for cutting you to the quick, who like one of your own household? In point of fact, they only can do it. They know the raw. And how to hit it every time. You are in their power. (MCCW 180-81)

The shared themes of boring family talk and of relatives' uncanny ability to hurt one, as well as her husband's former position as a U. S. Senator, mark this as Chesnut's own views. It is possible that Chesnut intended to cut the earlier statement in her own words and substitute the surrogate's statement but did not complete the change. Even if that were the case, given her other statements about the tedium of Camden, her criticisms of her relatives, and the lack of any counterargument from Chesnut, having a surrogate speak these words would hardly have absolved Chesnut of the charge of countenancing "unwomanly" attitudes.

The pressure for a nineteenth-century white Southern woman to submerge her identity into marriage and family and to present a hagiography of Southern culture was tremendous. Chesnut certainly was not immune to that pressure, as her many elisions attest. However, while as scholars we need to recognize the ways in which contemporary culture shapes or distorts the presentation of the narrated I, we should also give attention to the moments of resistance. These iterations of Chesnut's Civil War work gives us a rich text that features both concessions and defiance.

Notes

1. The first and second editions, both titled *A Diary from Dixie*, were edited by Isabella Martin and Myra Lockett Avery (1905) and Ben Ames Williams (1949), respectively.
2. Chesnut's original wartime diary has been published as *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*. This work will be referred to as *PMC* in subsequent citations. The second 1880s revision is the primary source for *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, which will be referred to as *MCCW* in subsequent citations.

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3. See Kurant.
4. Though Julia A. Stern ultimately “steer[s] away from [discussing] the occasionally tempestuous state of Mary and James Chesnut Jr.’s marriage” in favor of exploring Chesnut’s “other intimate bonds,” she also acknowledges that the revision clearly signals the contrast between Chesnut’s “highly emotional and expressive, often sarcastic, temperament” and that of her “stoic and reticent mate, a man for whom honor was all and display was anathema” (12, 13).
5. Julia Nitz’s exploration of the use of literary allusions in white Southern women’s Civil War diaries comes to similar findings, arguing that these authors used allusion to “explore facets of Confederate identity and their role as women in a patriarchal society” (11).
6. This is not to suggest that Chesnut didn’t have some ambivalence about her ambition. Nitz interprets Chesnut’s allusions to Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras* and Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* while critiquing James Chesnut’s unsatisfactory professional behavior as “mentally chastis[ing] herself for meddling in his affairs” (63).
7. James Chesnut’s appointment to Davis’s staff is mentioned briefly in the revised diary’s “Memoir” section, which covers a period from late 1862 to late 1863; Chesnut says that she burned the original of that period while fleeing Union troops.

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Can Erica Kane Write a Memoir?: How Erica Kane's *Having It All*, Susan Lucci's *All My Life*, and Ruth Warrick's *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler* Refashion Daytime Celebrity Memoir

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At a used bookstore in central Texas twenty years ago, I found a copy of *Having It All* (1997), a book published by Hyperion in conjunction with ABC Daytime Press. The title, in gold, is smaller than the name of the author, in red: Erica Kane. Kane, “arguably the best-known character in the history of televised soap opera” (*Current* 351) and “the genre’s most celebrated siren” (Traister 9), was played exclusively by Susan Lucci. Erica Kane Martin Brent Cudahy Chandler Montgomery Montgomery Marrick Marrick Montgomery¹ is a fictional character from ABC’s *All My Children*, which ran from 1970 until the show’s cancellation in 2011.² Lucci became synonymous with both *All My Children* and daytime television more largely: among other noteworthy mentions in popular culture, Lucci played Kane on an episode of *Saturday Night Live* in 1990, when she hosted the long-running sketch show, and served as the inspiration for two Barbie dolls (in 1998 and 1999). *Having It All* is presented as Erica Kane’s newest memoir—her third, she explains in the book—and she proudly notes that it is her “first without a coauthor” (3).³ This fictional memoir of a fictional character, though, exists in the real world and has now outlived the show it promotes. It’s neither the first of its kind nor the first connected with AMC: in 1980, Prentice-Hall published *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler* by Ruth Warrick, who played Phoebe Tyler, with Don Preston. More recently, Susan Lucci’s *All My Life: A Memoir* was published in 2011, with Laura Morton. Together, these books—*The Confessions*, *Having It All*, and *All My Life*—demonstrate how image and stardom are commodified and make particular cultural use of life writing forms.

The books physically resemble one another: the dust jackets for Kane’s and Lucci’s books feature Lucci’s face on the front and back cover and deploy a color scheme of red, black, and white; Lucci’s and Warrick’s feature their faces in $\frac{3}{4}$ profile, looking over a shoulder, clad

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in red. Together, they demonstrate that self-authorship is essential to contemporary American identity construction while simultaneously cautioning readers about the ease with which identity can become a commercial product and a persona can overshadow other subject positions. Reading them as a set, a series based on a series, exposes both the possibilities and pitfalls of celebrity life narratives and the cultural work they can do. As Katja Lee notes, “There is a play of identities at work here that issues from how a broader society and cultural context interact with the object in question” (3). The objects in question have now outlasted the program they served, extending the lives and experiences of the actors and the characters beyond the diegetic spaces of *AMC*. In so doing, they memorialize those associated with the show, and ultimately, the show itself.⁴

Kate Douglas writes “that in the promotion of popular culture, ‘the personal’ is profitable” (807), and Julie Rak observes that “self-representation and the consumption of other people’s identities in popular culture has become central to how Americans are getting, distributing, and consuming information” (328). For actors who played the same character for decades—as Lucci did for forty-one years and Warrick for thirty-five—the conflation of actor and character into one not only allows for but in many ways is predicated upon the potential for such commodification. The existence of these three books, and the others like them,⁵ underscores the demand from readers and audiences to know more about the lives of both the characters and the actors.

Importantly, within the last decade, the number of serialized daytime dramas has declined steadily. *AMC* aired for forty-one years, fewer than *As The World Turns* (fifty-four years) or *Guiding Light* (seventy-two, including radio), underscoring the significance of soap operas to American media for most of the twentieth century.⁶ They were especially crucial for female audience members. In her homage to soaps, published the week the final ABC episodes of *AMC* aired, Rebecca Traister writes that in these shows women were the central figures rather than relegated to secondary characters. “Instead of playing girlfriends and mothers to male heroes, soap women were the planets around which an array of husbands, lovers, and colleagues mooned,” she explains (10). On soaps, because they were written with a female audience in mind from the beginning, “women *generated the action*; they didn’t just respond to it. [. . .] Soap women were pianists and psychics, diner owners and mayors, spies and waitresses. And they didn’t just have love lives; they had jobs and friends and extended families and real-estate concerns with which to fill their many plotted hours” (10, italics original). Defining the form, Anna McCarthy observes that the genre’s “narrative characteristics and institutional forms are deeply rooted in

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a particular, and most certainly *gendered*, cultural history of the home as a target of consumer address” (74, italics original).⁷ The roles of audience members as viewers and as consumers is interchangeable, and that relationship is by design. The action of daytime dramas is generally confined in some way to the home or to spaces where public and private experiences overlap, like hospitals or offices, which continue to allow for characters to have conversations (Joyrich 131). That these are everyday experiences in everyday locales intensifies viewers’ perception that they are part of the characters’ intimate lives.

The composition (and, considering *Having It All*, the existence) of these memoirs is connected to viewers’ expectations of the dissolution of public and private spheres, and it compounds the challenge to distinguish reality from fiction. Echoing Rak and Douglas, yet writing about television, Lynne Joyrich explains that it is “personality” that is

the new value and sole referent—a condition central to today’s consumer culture in which TV takes the leading role. Personality is one of the primary selling points of television, the basis of its performers’ appeal. Producing a sense of intimate contact, personality on television is an effect of TV’s *fiction of presence*. [. . .] Personality is then constructed as an outer layer, readable to all and therefore for us to have—or, as the commercials imply, to buy. (138, italics mine)

Such availability and *knowability*, emphasized because of the presence of television and amplified by the volume of daytime serial dramas—airing for between thirty and sixty minutes a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year—brings the characters and their dramas into the domestic spaces and lives of viewers. That there are some forms of television people understand as “real”—the news, for example, or reality television—and others that are understood as “fiction”—scripted television dramas or situation comedies—belies the more messy fact that reality television is often scripted, and narrative forms are often grounded in truth-seeking. Indeed, Joyrich suggests, “The production of such fictions of the real defines the role of TV in both its ‘realistic’ (news, live television) and imaginary (narrative) forms—both provide the illusion of actuality and bolster our sense of the reality of the stakes” (137). The slipperiness of these televisual genres have correlatives in literature, too, as readers have certain expectations about genres—i.e., fiction relies on imagination more than nonfiction—or that a fictional character could write a real book.

The porous nature of these boundaries extends to persona as “the persona and its constituent performances are framed as quite real: they

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are not false or fictitious” (Lee 5). They “can be strategic, legitimate, and authentic,” and any “preoccupation with representation or referentiality to some degree does not make sense because the performance *is real* and [. . .] makes no claim to represent an internal reality” (Lee 5, italics original). In the case of this trio of memoirs, the “reality” they engage is one in which the universe of fantasy-creation takes primacy. The escapist space(s) they construct are more real than those of other scripted television programs, although the program is also, of course, entirely fantasy. Lucci’s Kane and Warrick’s Tyler are two of the characters who most exemplified that fantasy, and they are the ones who use memoir as a mode through which to consider—and expose—that slippage.

Given the speed with which daytime dramas are produced, they are especially well-positioned to respond to reality within fictional realms, nimbly incorporating current events into their narratives. They have done so since their inception, which is part of the possibility of serialized storytelling and a crucial feature of the form. “Melodrama offers a way to assert the ‘actual’ drama of life” (138), writes Joyrich, and Warrick and Lucci both write about the form of daytime drama and how it works from the perspective of those connected to it. Warrick describes *AMC* as “a teaching medium that neither preaches nor lectures”; rather, it is one in which audiences “*experience* problems vicariously” and “measure their own beliefs against the decisions and actions of the characters” (137, italics original). She suggests that this realism may “hel[p] to explain why soaps are no longer solely the province of ‘bored housewives,’ if indeed they ever were. Recent surveys have shown that nearly forty-five million people watch soap operas daily” (137). *AMC*’s writers, and especially its creator, Agnes Nixon, were committed to “bring[ing] complicated issues to the forefront” in order for the story to seem “natural and real” (Lucci 96). Lucci explains: Nixon “included these modern-day issues and concerns in order to draw in a larger audience but also to speak to that broader audience about what issues she thought were relevant to their lives” (97). Such swift response to current events and issues comprise no small part of the form’s sense of reality, even if fiction.

Lucci explains how tirelessly *AMC*’s writers incorporated stories of contemporary life, including sexual violence—such as the backstory of Erica’s rape as a young teenager—along with issues including war, disordered eating, sexuality, and abortion. For example, one of Erica’s daughters, Bianca, is heralded as the first major character on a central daytime serial to be a lesbian (Healy). Likewise, before *AMC*, as Lucci explains, “no daytime show had ever dealt with the Vietnam War in depth. Agnes chose to write about Vietnam at the height of the war,

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making it every bit as controversial on the show as it was in our country” (96). Nixon was “long recognized as a pioneer for serializing social issues (such as AIDS, drug addiction, and abortion)” (Leaker 44), and Lucci provides insight into one of the most famous storylines in the show’s history: legalized abortion. While Lucci’s perspective in *All My Life* is that of an actor, learning her lines and hitting her marks (“My sole focus was to play the scenes strictly from my character’s perspective. In the thick of things, and from Erica’s point of view” [Lucci 97]), she provides crucial insight into the cultural effects of daytime’s ability to respond to current events. Recalling the storyline of Erica’s abortion, Lucci writes:

Agnes started writing the story on the day after *Roe v. Wade* was decided. The Supreme Court had just declared that women had the constitutional right to choose, which became front-page news all over the country. When it aired, the story made television history because it was the first *legal* abortion ever portrayed on television. The television show *Maude* aired a controversial abortion episode in November 1972—two months before the passing of *Roe v. Wade*—but Maude’s choice was to have an illegal abortion, whereas Erica was free to make the decision without breaking any laws. (97, italics original)

Lucci subsequently provides readers with her narrative of this storyline, both its onscreen content and its responses. After the storyline aired, she recalls people stopping her on the street telling her she should be in bed or “back in the hospital” because she had just had an abortion (102), and details the experience of “going places where people stared at [her] in judgement. ‘There goes that Erica Kane! Imagine, she had an abortion!’ The tsk-tsks were audible everywhere,” Lucci notes, even at church:

I remember going to confession one day in my hometown. I was seated in the pews saying my penance and there were people down the row and in the pew in front of me. As I continued, they were whispering loud enough for me to hear.

“Oh my God!”

“Can you believe she is praying?”

“I’m disgusted.”

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I wanted to remind these women that *I* didn't have an abortion—my fictitious character did. They weren't judging the character I play—they were judging me, the actress. (103, italics original)

That the first legal abortion appeared on television in a daytime drama underscores the speed with which writers were able to respond to current events, making the reality of the fictional show all the more salient. Such reality is of the essence when considering the response of audience members to Lucci in church or on the street. Erica Kane transcends their television screens and takes over when Lucci is in public, demonstrating the convincing nature of the fiction: Lucci and Kane are inextricable. "Self-life-writing" is about "a mediated self," as Lee reminds us: "That text is actually performing a life, producing a life" (3).

Erica Kane, then, is a text, producing a life, inhabited or animated by Lucci. Lee explains that in our "recognit[ion]" and "appreciat[ion]" of a text "as a discrete cultural object or artifact that has a life of its own," we may also consider that these "texts may have personas of their own" (3). Looking at Lucci's and Kane's memoirs, regarding her portrait(s) and self-presentation, only furthers their seeming interchangeability or, perhaps, Kane's ability to overtake Lucci entirely. Kane and Lucci need separate textual spaces in order to differentiate one from the other, especially given their conflation onscreen and off, as *AMC* takes over their lives. Writing about another celebrity work of life writing, Laura Laffrado observes that "The title of Roseanne's first autobiography, *Roseanne: My Life as a Woman* (1989), confirms Margo Culley's observation that 'white women autobiographers reinscribe their gender in the title of their texts despite the redundancy of that act'" (296), yet for the trio of books I consider, "woman" is conspicuously absent. Instead, these texts reinscribe *AMC*, echoing the title of the show with the use of "All" or "All My"—*Having it All* and *All My Life*—or emphasizing the melodramatic along with the *AMC* character's name in *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler* or in positing Kane as the exclusive author of *Having It All*.

Laffrado also considers the presentation of femininity on *Roseanne*'s dust jacket, drawing on Sidonie Smith's and Mary Russo's work on the deployment of femininity and how, for Roseanne, "To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off" (297). For these three memoirs, while femininity is heightened, it is underplayed in comparison to the covers' emphasis (and encouragement) of the conflation of actor and character (Erica/Susan, Phoebe/Ruth). The idea that "identity can be commodified" (Rak 328) is the message of the paratextual elements more than the substance of the autobiographi-

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cal elements. “Studying auto/biography within popular culture,” Rak observes, “is a good way to examine how truth is produced, consumed, bought, sold, or even—sometimes—how identity itself is resistant to its own commodifications in the twenty-first century” (329).

The print/literary possibilities for fictional characters like Phoebe Tyler and Erica Kane demonstrate the potential of transmedia storytelling, described by Derek Johnson as “the production and maintenance of fictional ‘worlds’ [. . .] that consumers experience in collaboration with one another by piecing together narrative materials professional producers have strewn across media platforms” (30). Such production and maintenance is especially noteworthy here given the fact that the characters’ lives and experiences move from one medium across others—from television to in person events, print, or Barbie dolls. Johnson explains that “media franchising pursues horizontally multiplied production of media related through some shared, familiar content, each product with its own separate considerations of distribution and consumption” and emphasizes the importance of the fact that “franchised media content [is] *serially* produced” (41, italics original). Reading this trio of memoirs as serial allows further consideration of repeated exposure, across media, in the service of collapsing fiction and reality, person and persona.

At stake in this analysis is a reckoning with how life writing participates in, or perhaps makes possible, approaches to transmedia storytelling that challenge conventional understandings of subjectivity. Leigh H. Edwards puts it this way in her consideration of Dolly Parton’s “authenticity narrative”: “not only does her branding acknowledge that the authenticity [she projects] is knowingly manufactured, it does so in a way that questions larger cultural categories” and “purposefully crosses U.S. political and cultural divides in a way that allows different groups to claim her as their own” (2). Parton uses “authentic” experiences in the creation and maintenance of her brand. In the case of the texts associated with *AMC*, interestingly, it is the *fictional* status of Kane and Tyler that makes them seem most real. In what follows, I look explicitly at *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler*, *Having It All*, and *All My Life*, identifying how these texts and their authors weave together fiction and reality, and interrogating how the authors’/characters’ experiences and the experiences of making illusions seem real. The intersection of life writing forms and soap opera celebrity provides readers with a unique glimpse into how identity and personas are created, maintained, and empowered.

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The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler

The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler is by and about both Ruth Warrick and the character she played, Phoebe Tyler. In a foreword, legendary comedian (and occasional AMC cast member) Carol Burnett notes that Warrick is the person who, at the time of publication, worked to promote AMC the most, “traveling to every part of the United States giving interviews, speaking, and making appearances on ‘Soaps Alive’ shows” (viii).⁸ Yet Burnett also points to one of the most complex elements of the way these books manifest and encourage a collapse between actor and character, what she calls “one of the central conundrums” of the book: Burnett notes that Phoebe is Warrick’s “alter ego” and it is unclear “where the personality of Ruth leaves off and Phoebe begins” (vi, x). In textual moments such as these, where the borders between reality and television blur, the work of these books becomes clear. Warrick poignantly explains this phenomenon when she writes that, “If Pine Valley,” the town in which AMC is set, “is something less than real, it’s also, in an odd way, something more than what we mean by fictitious. And the same is true of its inhabitants; all of us who play parts on the show must have had the same eerie feeling that the characters we assume are somehow more than just actors’ parts. So if I have trouble answering the question, where is Pine Valley,” she concludes, “imagine how much difficulty I must have with Who is Phoebe Tyler?” (14).

Structurally, Warrick moves back and forth between personae. “I’ve called this book *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler*,” she writes, “which surely implies that it is, at least in part, *my own* autobiography. But,” she continues, “*Phoebe* also owes her existence to many other people” (14, emphasis mine). Alternating between providing Warrick’s autobiographical sketches in chapters beginning with a pre-colon title, “The Road to Pine Valley,”⁹ and a day-in-the-life of filming as Phoebe, *The Confessions* provides a bifurcated, temporally complex representation of what Warrick means when she considers that “eerie feeling”: a dissolution of the boundaries between person and persona, fact and fiction, lived experience and filmed reality. The third chapter, “Pine Valley: Later that Morning,” furthers such blurring as it begins in second person, allowing the reader the vicarious pleasure of imagining they too are in Pine Valley—both fictional town and working set. “You go through a door and down a short corridor,” Warrick writes:

now, as you pass between the music director’s lair and the control room, things are quiet. At the end of the short corridor you face another door, this one festooned with warnings: No unauthorized persons beyond this point. No admittance when red

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light is on, etc. On the other side of this door is Pine Valley—the “real” Pine Valley, as seen on television screens five hours each week throughout the year. It is the ABC studio devoted entirely to *All My Children*, and it is worth a long look. You are hereby authorized to open that door. (36, 37)

The authorization to look, to open the door and textually inhabit the studio—the “real” Pine Valley—is one of the promises proffered by the “confession” of the title: Pine Valley and its denizens are both real and not, and so are the confessions confided therein.¹⁰

The opportunity for the reader to inhabit this fiction is directly in line, too, with the live visits soap opera actors regularly made to shopping malls, restaurants, and other public venues. “Soaps Alive!” was one such program, noted by Burnett, which brought stars to malls across the United States beginning in the late 1970s. As Judy Klemensrud explains in her coverage of one such event, when Ruth Warrick and Nick Benedict (AMC’s Philip Brent) made an appearance at the Sunrise Mall in Massapequa, Long Island, in early 1979, “a crowd of 2,500, many of whom were screaming and weeping, had to be restrained by five security guards.” “The fans surged against restraining chains and hung over the balcony in the split-level, enclosed shopping center,” Klemensrud continues. “Most of them were women, including many in their 20’s and 30’s who had brought their babies along in strollers. There were also a number of women on crutches, women in wheelchairs and working women who had called in sick for the day.” These events gave fans the chance to speak with the actors, in character for the events, further dissolving the lines of fiction and reality for audience members.

Warrick opens *The Confessions* with a similar scene, in 1976. Hoping to speak with Lillian Gordy Carter, “Miss Lillian” and mother to then-Presidential hopeful Jimmy Carter, Warrick calls the Carter-Mondale headquarters in Plains: “to ask if I could interview her for my book. I had read that she was a fan” (1). The receptionist tells her that Miss Lillian is unavailable and gets ready to hang up the phone when Warrick announces that *she is* Phoebe Tyler. With this revelation, Warrick immediately receives Miss Lillian’s private phone number and calls her:

“This is Phoebe Tyler,” I said.

Before I could utter a word of explanation, Miss Lillian was off and running. “Why, I don’t *believe* it,” she said. “I was just now watchin’ you on the TV. You were bein’ so *mean* to Linc and poor Kitty. How come you ah such a *bee-utch*?”

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After that, what could Phoebe do but go down to Plains and defend herself? (1, italics original)

When Warrick travels to Plains, she observes that “most people seemed curious and pleased to meet a familiar television face” and she signs autographs and answers questions while staying in character, just as for “Soaps Alive!” (2). The publication of *The Confessions* anchors the fictional character in a textual reality provided by life writing, collapsing the boundaries between actor and performance, making any separation between them nearly impossible. Erica Kane’s *Having It All* takes a different approach.

Having It All

Rather than opening with a prologue featuring a soap opera actor inhabiting their character and exposing that slippage, *Having It All* fully engages in its fiction, cover to cover.” It begins with a dedication in the style of a letter, presented in French Script font and signed by the author, Erica Kane. “This book is an outpouring straight from the heart,” she writes, “a love letter to you, my adoring and adored legion of loyal fans.” The dedication is followed by an acknowledgements page, in which she describes her book as “elegant, slim, breezy,” and “erudite,” and in which she thanks her “Creator,” her editor, and her friends in the “Pine Valley Writer Support Group.” What follows is an eleven-chapter book, memoir with a liberal dose of self-help, in the guise of Erica Kane. “I’m reclined in an Adirondack chair under a willow tree in the garden of my six-acre estate, Linden House,” she begins. “I write these words on the vellum pages of a silk-bound notebook with my initials emblazoned on the cover in scarlet thread. This is my third book, dear readers, my first without a coauthor” (3). Taking the form of an extended letter, engaging the practice of confession, *Having It All* allows Kane the chance to enact with audience members in direct address, akin to “Soaps Alive!” It links the texts in their use of second person, but while Warrick provides readers with behind-the-scenes access to the studio, Kane never breaks the fourth wall.

In analyzing *Having It All*, I see striking similarities to Janice Peck’s observation about the essential role of self-(re)presentation in daytime talk shows and therapeutic discourse. Peck’s argument that daytime talk shows, particularly those “hosted by women, oriented to women’s concerns through ‘feminine narrative’ conventions, and directed at a primarily female audience,” “produce/narrate their lives and comment on those of others” while “home viewers consume/interpret these nar-

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ratives in light of their own biographies” (134), is especially resonant here, considering how the soap character produces and narrates her life for a similar audience. The slash Peck uses to emphasize the collapse between “produce/narrate” and “consume/interpret” underscores movement between and across these positions, illuminating their porousness. Indeed, Peck points out that the idea of confession itself “is premised on the existence of an empathetic other who validates and recognizes the speaker’s self-narrative” and that daytime television, specifically in talk shows, but as I suggest here, across sites of transmedia storytelling, has “incorporated therapeutic, confessional discourse as a narrative strategy related to their female viewership” (136). Reading these memoirs as fundamentally geared to that readership—predicated upon the soaps’ audience base—links the authors’ rhetorical strategies both temporally and textually with those readers/viewers, deploying confession and direct address.

While Kane doesn’t explicitly suggest that *Having It All* is a self-help book, she explains that the reason for the writing is that she is unable to answer all of her fan mail individually and explain “The biggest secret to Having It ALL” (4, caps in original). Her secret? “Understanding it’s simply a state of mind. Therefore, anyone can achieve it. Easily. Though not necessarily at the level I enjoy” (4). What follows in the book are her “steps” to “having it all.” Such steps, along with the use of second person and the chapter titles (ranging from “Self-Love” and “Money” to “Marriage and Divorce,” “Motherhood,” and “Pitfalls”), underscore how the book engages the forms of self-help literature.¹³ Micki McGee explains that “between 1972 and 2000,” during which time both *The Confessions* and *Having It All* were published, “the number of self-help books more than doubled, increasing from 1.1 percent to 2.4 percent of the total number of books in print” (11-12). And, as I note elsewhere, the concept of self-mastery—whether in fact or simply in possibility—is central for both memoir and for self-improvement literature as it requires an understanding that a subject is unique, “worthy of both documentation and reading,” as well as the possibility of emulation (Stamant, “Our Stories” 118). Kane draws on readers’ understandings of the form and her biography to posit what would be Erica Kane’s guidance, were she real, based on Kane’s experiential history. For example, the fact that she has been married repeatedly, she suggests, makes her an ideal person to provide marital advice: she bases her advice on her many failures in matrimonial longevity and sees herself as an unheralded expert whom many desire to emulate. Joyrich observes that American consumers’ fascination with “personality” and “images of well-being is tied to the rise of a therapeutic discourse that is central to media culture and consumer society” because, in working to find a

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“‘real’ self, they are led in circles, a situation which reinforces rather than resolves this sense of weightlessness and the process of rationalization. The same sense of *unreality* that nourishes the melodramatic imagination, then, fosters a consumer culture bent on supplying a simulated image” (138-39, italics mine). As these audiences can be found in malls, potentially purchasing a book through which they can learn ways to improve themselves, they are thereby part and parcel of that consumer profile baked into the soap opera model from inception.

The circular relationship between reality and unreality is especially compelling in a work like *Having It All* because Kane’s many successes (and failures), along with relying on blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, hinge on the serial structure of soap opera storytelling. The elements of seriality dovetail as well with what both Mary-Ellen Brown and John Fiske present as part of so-called “feminine narratives’: lack of closure, an emphasis on process and intimate dialogue, a correspondence to ‘real time,’ and a focus on relational issues” (qtd. in Peck 136). Such therapeutic discourse is also connected to the proliferation of self-help genres, both televisual and in print, and are on display in both *The Confessions* and *Having It All*. Reading these memoirs as serial extensions of *AMC*, itself notably serial, allows us to consider the transmedia landscape of self-help. As Peck underscores, trans/media spaces

have become an increasingly important site of such help-seeking activity; it is no accident that a proliferation of self-help books, support groups, state and private treatment agencies, and the ever-expanding Twelve-Step “recovery movement” has accompanied a rapid growth in mediated forms of therapy. [. . .] It is in this emphasis on the self as the source of one’s suffering and the logical site of solutions that the TV personality system, synthetic personalization, and therapeutic discourse come together in the service of legitimating the existing social order. At the heart of this complex synthesis is the concept of the “free individual” as author and agent of her actions and destiny. (142)

The “free individual” here is an important concept to consider when the actors are captive to the characters they play, the narratives others have written for them, and that “TV personality system.” Life writing forms often seem to be about negotiating the freedom to textualize a subject, but in these cases, the subjects in question are already texts, already producing lives.

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The elements of fiction that viewers may often associate with daytime serials—a dozen marriages, fortunes gained and lost, returning from presumed death, bouts of amnesia, etc., to use some examples from Kane's own storylines—are, in these narratives, normalized and presented as situated in a particular subject. "If you're blackmailed," for example, Kane instructs, "refuse to pay. This is a lesson I've had to learn many times. Occasionally, even my closest relations have tried to blackmail me, but extortion, demanded or given into, never pays" (40). Kane, then, as the "free individual," refuses to pay ransom demands, and relying on her experience as the foundation of her advice, underscores her own participation in her destiny. Readers know, however, both that this is true—in the sense that it did happen on the show and her wisdom is hard earned—and also that it is absolutely false—in the sense that it was a script for a fictional program and the advice is perhaps not as useful in the daily lives of audience members as it would have been for Kane. These texts, then, underscore how the discourse of self-help and the autonomous subject perpetuates other teleological forms and is linked closely with some forms of autobiographical works.

All My Life

The striking aesthetic resonances between Lucci's *All My Life* and *The Confessions* and *Having It All* indicate that they could be considered as a set, but there are also slippages between Lucci's and the others beyond those on the surface. *All My Life* also includes a letter to her "fans," which, like the letter that begins *Having It All*, is signed in script. In *All My Life*, the letter itself is printed in a conventional font (and thereby much more readable); Lucci's letter also comes at the end of her memoir, rather than functioning as an introduction. This letter is one of the few places in *All My Life* that enacts the second person so central to *Having It All* and parts of *Confessions*. The final chapter of *All My Life*, "My Favorite Things," riffs on *Having It All*'s Q&A as Lucci closes out the text anticipating the questions people would ask by providing several lists of her five favorite things in various categories, including the people she admires the most (Oprah Winfrey), "Five Secrets to Perfect Skin," "Five Secrets to Keeping Fit," and meals, music, and the like (312-18). Interestingly, the several lists following the list of those she admires are all "secrets," reinforcing the idea of confession.¹⁴ *All My Life*, however, functions in many of the ways we would expect from a celebrity memoir, providing a relatively straightforward portrayal of Lucci's life.

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Just as Warrick's self-representational chapters are all titled "The Road to Pine Valley," suggesting that Pine Valley is her final destination as a person and an actor, so too does *All My Life* consider Lucci's arrival on AMC as its pinnacle. In fact, *All My Life* opens with what has been a central narrative in Susan Lucci's career: her nineteen-year long losing streak for Best Actress at the Daytime Emmy Awards.¹⁵ The book begins thus:

"The streak is over!"

When I heard the very charming Shemar Moore utter those now-famous words onstage, my first thought was that he was announcing some play-off score for the audience. I had been to many charity events over the years where the MC kept the crowd up to speed on important sports scores, so I honestly didn't realize what was happening. The truth is, after my ninth Emmy loss, I couldn't hear the name of the person who won anymore. I would become numb as the winner was called out because, well, I had lost so many times. (vii)

All My Life begins with this "now-famous" scene underscoring how important Kane is to Lucci and how playing Kane for decades is intimately tied to how Lucci understands her work and herself. Lucci writes repeatedly about how uncomfortable she is about the prospect of writing autobiographically and that she was inspired to write her memoir because of AMC fans' inquiries about her life. "People wanted the book to be about me from me," she writes. "Everyone agreed that virtually anyone with a television knows Susan Lucci as Erica Kane, but no one really knows much about Susan Lucci" (3), so she decided to embark upon the project. "After forty-one years in front of the camera playing the unstoppable Erica Kane while successfully shielding and protecting my privacy and the privacy of my family," she continues, "I am closing my eyes and holding my breath as I begin to peel back the curtain of my life, hoping it is the right thing to do" (3). "I am generally a very shy girl," she explains elsewhere, "but if I want something, I will always find a way to get through my discomfort and make things happen. (Like writing this book)" (54). The introduction is thereby addressed to a "you," an anticipated reader who is a fan who has sent one of these letters of inquiry or who has wanted to know, again linking the trio of books. For Lucci, though, unlike Warrick or Kane, the process is an uncomfortable one, "different and challenging," because she has never "candidly discussed [her] private life in public" (3). Her capitulation to share is presented as another element of her life as Kane: for the

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sake of the show and the character, she is willing to write about her life. Or, as Hannah Yelin puts it: "It is precisely because of the opportunity memoir creates to present a carefully constructed self that it can helpfully tell us something of how a star wishes to be received, offering as it does the possibility of an intervention into a star image that is often constructed beyond the star's control" (122).

All My Life, in many ways, follows the pattern Lee identifies as central to contemporary celebrity memoir, particularly those written by women, which "offers up a persona of the past self as 'just a girl' from humble, country, or 'ordinary' origins" (4), which in Lucci's case, is that of a Yonkers-born kid who grew up in Long Island, New York (3-4). She writes about her father's appreciation for the arts, particularly visual arts and music, and about his Italian parents; she describes her "beautiful," "striking" mother and her Swedish maternal grandmother (5-10). She also, though, writes about how she loved performing, underscoring, as she recalls, her destiny in acting: "Although I was *painfully* shy as a child, I came out of my shell whenever I was acting, singing, dancing, and making believe I was someone else" (9, italics original). "That's how we knew I'd grow up to play Erica Kane," she continues. "To be certain, I was a totally different kid when I would perform" (9). Her "ordinary" origins laid bare, she links that past self with the persona of Kane that illustrates her success. Lee explains that the trope of humble beginnings "carries out a particular kind of persona for the famed woman's past self, but also does critical persona work for the present self because it functions as a yardstick to measure her present success (gauged by distance from those humble conditions) and her authenticity (gauged by proximity to the values and identity forged under those conditions)" (4). Here, that yardstick is Erica Kane, and the way readers know Lucci's self-representation within the memoir is authentic is because she was three and singing "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets," from *Damn Yankees* and "we knew I'd grow up to play Erica" (italics mine), an Erica Kane anthem if there ever was one.

Interestingly, while some television celebrity women's memoirs underscore how limited the range of potential lives there could be, Lucci's (and Warrick's and Kane's) revels in the capaciousness of possibilities. Martin Danahay, for example, sees Kathie Lee Gifford's 1993 memoir as "attest[ing] to the power of television in American culture to prepackage identity," noting that Gifford "accepts the commodification of her own life in creating her TV personality" (129). Danahay notes that what's "disturbing" about Gifford's memoir is how "her life is entirely prescribed and proscribed by the range of narratives available on television. Her text is an embodiment of the 'commodification of autobiography' through prepackaged TV identities. Hers is a TV iden-

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tity and a TV autobiography. Reciting her autobiography confirms the power of TV to produce identity” (128). This is a fascinating analysis against which to read Lucci’s memoir because while Lucci certainly engages a TV identity and while *All My Life* is unquestionably a TV autobiography, because of *Kane*’s ability to transcend and transgress expectations for women and challenge all kinds of social norms, *Lucci* presents herself in the kind of mold that *Kane* allows; the same can be said of Warrick and Tyler.¹⁶ One example of such confrontation takes place early in *All My Life*, as Lucci recalls being told that she might run up against obstacles in her acting career because, as one of the top executives at CBS told her, without blond or red hair or blue eyes she “might be considered a little too ‘ethnic looking’ for television” (44). Lucci suggests that some of the audience’s desires were technological rather than racist, noting in particular the shift from black and white to color television sets—“No one wanted to watch a brunette when they could watch a fiery redhead or golden blonde,” she explains (45)—but she also pushes back on the executive’s comment by providing alternate examples of successful brown-eyed brunettes in media and concludes: “There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that my ‘look’ would become my calling card” (45). While some readers may see her confidence as naïve or optimistic, her response is also immediately recognizable by a reader familiar with *Kane*, as it is something she would have said and done. Certainly, this underscores the “power of TV to produce identity,” as Danahay indicates, but because it is the power of scripted television written by Agnes Nixon for a particular audience, the identity it produces is significantly different from those Kathie Lee Gifford had to work with.¹⁷ It is, as Lucci was told when she accepted the role of *Kane*, “the part of a lifetime” (65). “I had no idea,” she says, “that this expression would end up being so literal” (65).

Refashioning Daytime Celebrity Life Writing

The slipperiness between Lucci’s memoir and *Kane*’s demands that readers consider the nature of serial self-representation as readers toggle between voices and performances. *Kane* notes that *Having It All* is not her first memoir: she refers to the other books, including the “best-seller, *Raising Kane*” (4), a memoir of childhood ghostwritten by Mike Roy, “one of the great loves of [her] life” (60), exclusively published in the fictional space of the show in 1983. In *Having It All*, she details her complex relationship with her father who, as she writes: “left us. He walked out on my mother and me, went to Hollywood. (See *Raising Kane* chapters one through ten, eighteen, and twenty-three

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through twenty-six). Little girls abandoned by their daddies almost always have disastrous relationships with men when they grow up. I was no exception. (See the balance of *Raising Kane*)” (22).¹⁸ Her second memoir, *Erica Kane: Beyond the Pain*, co-written with her brother-in-law Edmund Grey and published in the mid-1990s—again, solely on the show—comprises what she describes as her “Phoenix rising from the ashes saga” (8). That Roy and Grey, along with the books themselves, exist solely in the televised world makes no difference to the voice of *Having It All*. Further, in its last chapter, Kane provides a series of questions and answers. In response to a query about “the wickedest thing you ever did,” Kane writes that she’s “amazed by how often [she is] asked this question.” She continues: “The answer is: I have no idea. My life is an open book—three books, actually. Take a look and decide for yourself” (145).¹⁹ That *Having It All* exists in the real world seems immaterial as she invites readers to search out and read those other memoirs, treating us as denizens of a reality in which Pine Valley and Erica Kane exist.

The seriality of her project—and one of the connections I see across all of these texts—links back to the serial nature of daytime drama and to serial culture more largely, refracting both the author (Kane/Lucci/Warrick) and the character (Kane/Kane/Tyler) through celebrity production. The seriality of these texts subverts expectations about narrative closure and their serial character development subverts expectations about lived realities. Warrick herself explains the stakes of such seriality clearly and with comparisons to other narrative forms:

The three-act play, like the nighttime dramatic show or the movie or the novel, distills experience into a single series of circumstances leading to a climax that will, one way or another, resolve the conflict. The soap opera, since it consists of many plot strands and since those many story lines will continue next week and next month, cannot achieve that cathartic resolution. What it *can* offer, however, is a *series* of catharses, with one story reaching a resolution (often temporary) while another one builds toward its own crisis. [. . .] A continuing story is like a river: racing over rapids one moment and gliding tranquilly another; sometimes crashing over a waterfall or being stopped, temporarily, at a dam—but always going on toward the distant sea. A daytime serial, with its large cast and intricate braiding of plots, flows like a whole mapful of rivers, each feeding into or branching off of another, some growing stronger while others twist or turn or disappear altogether.

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Ironically, those who argue that the soaps are not realistic seem determined to disregard the obvious: The two-hour movie, the three-act play, or the one-hour episode of a nighttime dramatic show or situation comedy simplifies and isolates one set of characters and one chain of circumstances in a way that real life never does. The soaps, with their large casts and broad tapestry of stories, actually mirror at least one important aspect of reality in a far more direct fashion than any play ever could. (135, italics original)

One mirror available to Warrick is that of serial memoir—with many characters and different, sometimes competing, storylines—and it is a form that she notably does not mention, but the connection is clear.²⁰ Refusing narrative closure also makes space for characters who are not the ones to draw stories to their conclusion. Instead, as Martha P. Nochimson indicates: “You have a different vision of social problems and of gender if you don’t have a concluding scene. [. . .] Other things can happen, things that are more subversive” (qtd. in Traister 10). Within the form of soap operas is, then, a “contained radicalism” (Leaker 42), which I argue is linked to the potential for examining something like *Having It All*: the form exposes the norms of and expectations for American autobiographical self-representation and repeatedly undermines them, often counterintuitively, and in the service of, if not narrative, then at least a valuing of the longevity of characters and identities. Serial self-representation’s association with the potential for verisimilitude links this analysis to other considerations of postindustrial transmedia narrative.

Another reason that the material existence of these texts is important is because, as Warrick notes, discussing the video recording practices of the 1970s and early 1980s: “Past episodes of [AMC . . .] will never be seen by your grandchildren.” “In fact,” she continues,

they will not be seen again by anybody; the show’s most moving or controversial moments can never be rerun for its critics or its supporters. Because videotape, unlike film, is reusable, and the sobering fact is that all the show’s tapes have been recycled many times for simple economic reasons. (Tape is expensive, as is storage space, so only those scenes destined to be flashbacks are preserved even temporarily.) So cherish your favorite memories, because you’ll never have a chance to enjoy those scenes in rerun. (137)

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For a while, reruns were available on SOAPnet, a Disney-ABC owned channel that showed previously-aired soap episodes, both shows currently on air and those that had been canceled (James).²¹ Even so, older episodes were unavailable, and as technology shifted, the various formats on which past episodes were recorded—VHS tapes one might have in an attic or a basement, for example—degrade and become unusable. Instead, what lasts are the books: the photographs and words about the show and the characters from people like Warrick and Lucci, and even Kane, who remind us of what an interesting phenomenon daytime drama was, and how their lives—and ours—were transformed by the reality of its fictions.

Using life writing as the mode through which to bear witness to both the actual storylines and the cultural implications of them jives with the larger import of self-representational texts. Traister describes it this way: “Embedded between the melodramatic and the wackadoo were searing stories about race, sexuality, rape, and stigma. [. . .] Daytime dramas were transgressive, unhinged from traditional expectations, loopy in their freedoms, and powerfully popular,” lamenting that “nothing like that afternoon block devoted to drama by and about complicated women exists any longer. That’s a real loss” (10). At the time of cancellation, soaps were replaced by non-scripted shows about food and “personal transformation” (Traister 10), which themselves are now long gone; these replacement shows seem, at first glance, to fit more squarely into our larger cultural interest in reality but were, if longevity is a sign of desirability, less desirable than their precursors. They also seemed less real. As *The Confessions of Phoebe Tyler*, *Having It All*, and *All My Life* demonstrate, fantasy within long-running scripted programming allowed for transgressive, impactful characters who knew the value of life writing in and for persona-making and world-building, particularly during the height of the “memoir boom,” a moment of dramatic increase in the number of autobiographical books published that “roughly tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s” (Gilmore 1, n1) and “increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008” (Yagoda 7). The public’s interest in stories of the self extends, as demonstrated through these three books, to stories of selves that are only nominally autobiographical but that engage autobiographicality to underscore how porous and productively generative the boundaries between fiction and reality, person and persona, truly are.

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Notes

1. It depends on how you count, but Kane was married at least ten times.
2. *AMC* was briefly reprised in 2013 by Prospect Park and ran on Hulu; Lucci—and thereby Kane—did not appear in this version.
3. There is no other author listed, either within the text or on its publication information page, and I have not been able to find out the actual author. The publication information says that it is by Erica Kane, “fictitious character.” I therefore refer to Kane as the author.
4. Warrick died in 2005.
5. There are plenty of examples connected with other shows, but my inquiry concerns these because of their autobiographical implications and connection to one specific program.
6. Given my focus on *AMC*, this analysis centers on American soap operas; they are, though, a global phenomenon.
7. Joyrich argues for soap opera as melodrama because soaps deploy central melodramatic techniques, including music and the rhythms of “exaggerated fluctuations, marking the discontinuities of emotional experience as the plots slowly build, amidst much delay, to dramatic moments of outbreak and collision before sudden reversals of fortune begin the movement again” (131).
8. “Soaps Alive!” according to *The Confessions*, was “the brainchild of a New Jersey housewife and part-time PR expert named Harriet Epstein who felt the stars of the daytime serials would draw crowds at least as large as those brought in by sports or arts-and-crafts shows” (5). See also Klemensrud. Such promotional events continued across the decades; I attended one in Austin, Texas, in the early 2000s.
9. Following Carol Burnett’s foreword, an introduction, and a prologue, *The Confessions* features nine chapters, including: “Pine Valley: Later that Morning,” “The Road to Pine Valley: Mrs. Citizen Kane,” “Afternoon in Pine Valley,” and “The Road to Pine Valley: Hollywood.”
10. This approach is similar to how Martin Danahay describes what Kathie Lee Gifford does in *I Can’t Believe I Said That!* (1993), in which Gifford “performs the commodification of her own life” and “creates the illusion that [she] is ‘talking’ to the reader as an intimate confidante” (124). Gifford’s replacement on *Live! with Regis and Kathie Lee* was Kelly Ripa, notable *AMC* alum. Ripa’s *AMC* experiences, both in terms of the fictional character she played and her real life (meeting and marrying *AMC* alum Mark Consuelos), have been instrumental to her daily performance on *Live!* Incidentally, the show is now *Live with Kelly and Mark*, which Ripa and Consuelos cohost. That their experience playing a romantic couple onscreen led to an off-screen relationship and long-term marriage is central to the how their relationship is manufactured and discussed in media (including *Live!*).
11. Also true for Kendall Hart’s novel *Charm!* (2008), a spin-off from *AMC* and purportedly written by Hart.

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12. Having watched *AMC* from early childhood—my mother’s show became mine—I once mentioned to a professor in college that I had been unwell and spent part of a sick day catching up on *AMC*. She not-so-subtly suggested that the show was partly responsible for my malaise, exemplifying a larger cultural link between the way illness and ability are associated both with gender and sexual minorities and, crucially here, viewers of soap operas.
13. I use “literature” capaciously; *Having It All* is almost unreadably terrible. For my argument, though, that is part of its appeal.
14. In the paperback version of *All My Life*, Lucci adds an epilogue addressing *AMC*’s cancellation, situated between the letter to her fans and her “favorite things.”
15. Lucci’s losing streak (and subsequent win) is such a cultural touchstone that, in a 2024 discussion of egregious Oscar snubs, film editor Stephanie Goodman writes of their choice: “Even Susan Lucci has won once” (“Spurned”).
16. Gifford is also a serial memoirist, authoring seven memoirs, not including cookbooks.
17. The same can be said for Ruth Warrick and Phoebe Tyler, as Tyler’s characterization was one of self-assuredness and confidence.
18. Diegetically, *Raising Kane* was adapted into a biopic produced by one of Kane’s former husbands, Adam Chandler; she hoped to play herself in the movie.
19. A fourth memoir, *Uncensored*, was published after *Having It All*, but only on the show.
20. See my *Serial Memoir: Archiving American Lives* (2014) for an extended discussion of seriality and contemporary life narrative.
21. SOAPnet aired from 2000-2013 and was replaced by Disney Junior (James).

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“Ver had His Wit”:
The Oracle of the Bottle in Ben Jonson’s
1623 First Folio “To the Reader”
Epigram

Roger Stritmatter

All things that shine through a veil show the truth grander and more imposing: for
fruits shine through water, and figures through veils.

–Clement of Alexandria, “Reasons for Veiling the Truth in Symbols” (c. 180 C.E.)

The very hiding of truth in figures is useful for the exercise of thoughtful minds.

–Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ninth Article (1274)

He that writes other verses upon my verses, takes not away the first letters, but hides
them.

–Ben Jonson, *Discoveries* (c. 1623–38)

Be it thy glory then, that we may say,
Thou run’st where th’ foote was hindered by the way.

–Thomas Cartwright to Ben Jonson (1638)

In a previous issue of *South Atlantic Review*, my essay “Through a Glass Darkly”¹ explored interconnections between formal and figurative aspects of the Shakespeare First Folio paratexts to demonstrate the close association between “wit” and numeration in Ben Jonson’s poetic praxis. The analysis showed that the five First Folio poems—by Jonson, Leonard Digges, Hugh Holland, and I. M.—are calibrated to form a superstructure based on the “elvish” number eleven. It was, finally, concluded that Jonson’s relationship to Shakespeare was and remains an unsolved enigma that Jonson is daring his readers to “figure out.” This companion essay applies these insights to help solve Jonson’s riddle. It will show, in fact, that Jonson’s application of the ancient and

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widely known aesthetic doctrine of the “form within the form” in his First Folio “To the Reader” epigram, written to accompany the ungainly Droeshout engraving (itself long suspected of satirical design),² goes beyond undermining the traditional attribution of the “Shakespeare” works. The leading theme of duplicity is inwoven, visible in the vertical acrostic “TWO” constructed by the typographic device of offsetting alternating lines as well as implicit in the poem’s persistent equivocations (fig. 1). Subscribed to Jonson’s poem are his initials, “B.I.”

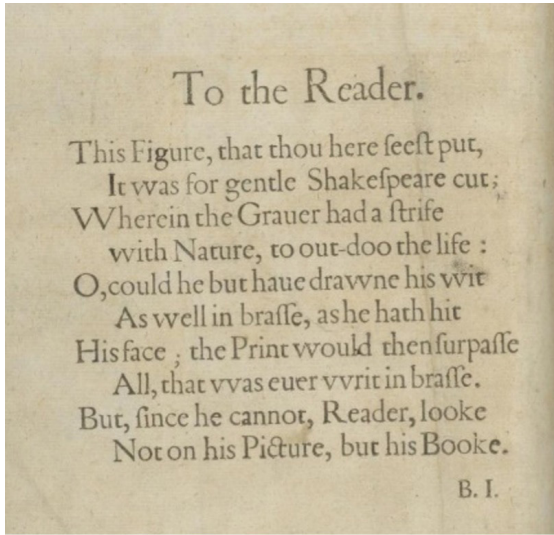


Fig. 1

To the Reader by “B.I.” on the first verso (or “left”) page of 1623 Shakespeare Folio. Note the vertical acrostic TWO formed by the offsetting of the lines.

Perhaps due to its sinistrality, and certainly on account of its evasive rhetoric, Shakespeare scholars have long found this epigram to be perilous critical territory. It has a long history of being either omitted entirely from relevant collections, reproduced with inadequate context, supplied but passed over in silence,³ or even republished in formats that could be readily construed as mocking scholarly standards of consistency and objectivity. Perhaps the best example of this extraordinary finding is in Roland B. Lewis’s 1941, Folio-sized two volume OUP/UCB collection of Shakespeare documents as faithfully reproduced below.

While visually defacing Jonson’s poem (fig. 2), Lewis assures readers that “there was nothing new and original about [his] commendatory verse on the Droeshout engraving except that it was crisper, briefer, and more epigrammatic than many others containing the same idea”

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(II:552). If the purpose of these editorial conventions and beliefs is uncertain, we may be sure that this conventional focus on the alleged lack of originality of Jonson's poem avoids more relevant questions of how Jonson made use of precedent to further his own original design. Coupled with inappropriate ad hoc surrealism in an allegedly scholarly reproduction of the document, such diversions from intellectual relevance set a dismal standard.

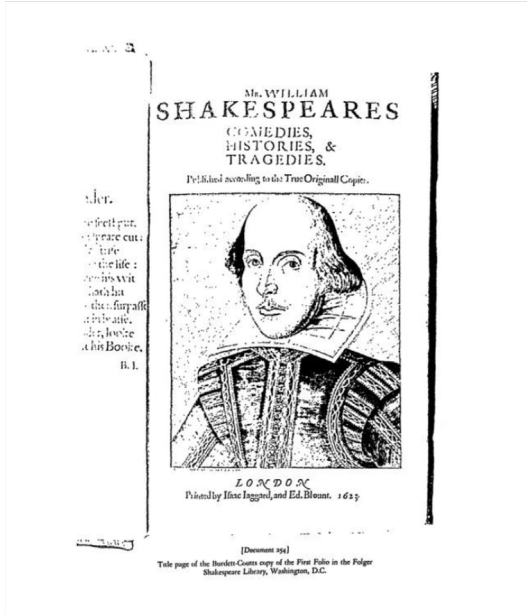


Fig. 2

Reproduction of the first spread of the 1623 Shakespeare First Folio in the OUP/University of California Shakespeare sourcebook by Lewis (II:554, Document 254). The defacement of Jonson's poem is remarkable in a Folio sized two-volume, set of reproductions of original documents (955 oversized pages), containing numerous foldout full-scale reproductions measuring up to 20x17 inches. The purpose of such a strange representation is not discussed in the book's hundreds of pages of commentary on 276 original Shakespeare documents.

E.K. Chambers reproduces the poem removed from its context with the engraving and then prudently says nothing else about it in his two volumes of his *William Shakespeare: Facts and Problems* (1935). Samuel Schoenbaum finds Jonson's poem so dubious that he can find no place for an image of the poem in his oversized OUP *Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975) but does pause to summarize it as "consist-

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ing of a few perfunctory lines of commendation” before proceeding to deflect further inquiry by insisting that “only an over-subtle reader will detect a latent irony in Jonson’s conclusion” (258). And more recently, as paraphrased by Ian Donaldson in a characteristic misreading, the epigram’s message is both transparent and unproblematic: Jonson is “Vouching for the fact that Martin Droeshout’s engraving was indeed ‘for gentle Shakespeare cut,’ and (to the lasting confusion of those wishing to propose an alternative authorship) that the person depicted was indeed responsible for the works presented in this volume” (371).

Such circumlocutions and strained assurances not only evade the implications of their own unexamined signs of dubiety but also miss the latent ironies of Jonson’s rhetoric and the implications of the fact that Jonson’s jaunty ten-line tetrameter verse imitates a Spanish form used in the sixteenth century for satire or insincere love (Ready 51). The clash between art and nature in Jonson’s poem, while not unprecedented, also raises serious questions about the intent of his Folio epigram. In his *Discoveries*, Jonson—like almost any other Renaissance arts theorist—sees the proper relationship between art and nature as complementary, if not symbiotic: “As Simylus saith in Stobæus, Ουτε φύσις ίκανη γινεται τεχνης ατερ, ουτε παν τέχνη μη φυσιν κεκτημένη, without art nature can never be perfect; and without nature, art can claim no being” (VIII:639).⁴

Jonson’s role model and alter-ego, Horace, in his “Ars Poetica” as translated by Jonson, likewise construes the healthy relationship between art and nature as one of collaborative sympathy and mutual assistance:

’Tis now inquired, which makes the nobler verse,
Nature, or Art. My judgment will not pierce
Into the profits, what a meer rude braine
Can [do], or all toyle, without a wealthy vaine;
So doth the one, the other’s help require,
And friendly should unto their end conspire.

(VIII:353; ll.581-86)

In Jonson’s ethic, art and nature, like wealth and talent, should “conspire,” not “quarrel.” Let us see how Jonson applied this idea in his First Folio epigram.

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The Oracle of the Bottle in Jonson's Art and Literary Fraternity

In his exemplary essay, "Full Circle: The Poet as Vessel" (112-57), Richard Peterson identifies Plutarch's *The Oracles at Delphi* as a key primary source for Jonson's idea of the "form within the form."⁵ As Plutarch records: "Certain men with a gift for poetry were wont to sit about close by the shrine waiting to catch the words spoken [by the oracle], and then weaving about them a fabric of *extempore* hexameters or other verses or rhythms as 'containers' (ἄγγεῖα) so to speak, for the oracles" (Babbitt V:331), like placing a fortune inside a cookie. Plutarch's account of the oracle is one of the earliest descriptions of the ancient practice of steganography (literally, "covered writing"), defined as the "art of hiding information in ways that prevent the detection of hidden messages" (Johnson and Jajodia 26).

The Delphic priests required such evasive methods, Plutarch explains, in the face of "wicked men"—ambitious oracle-seekers—who threatened violence to obtain a desired prophecy or retaliate for an unfavorable one:

There were naturally some things which it was well that despots should fail to understand, and enemies should not learn beforehand. About these, therefore, the oracle put a cloak of intimations and ambiguities which concealed the communications so far as others were concerned but did not escape the persons involved nor mislead those that had need to know and gave their minds to the matter. (Babbitt V:333-35)

Being "not willing to keep the truth unrevealed," the Delphic method caused the "manifestation of it to be deflected like a ray of light, in the medium of poetry, where it submits to many reflections and undergoes subdivisions" (Babbitt V:333-35). This description of truth diffracted as if through a prism into distinct subdivisions or frequencies of light not only describes Jonson's evasive wit in his Folio epigram but more generally provides a template for steganographic methods, anticipating Francis Bacon's distinction between surface and plaintext messages in his influential Book VI of his *Advancement of Learning*.⁶ Plutarch's account of the Delphic method further foreshadows the application of literary steganography in sixteenth-century Europe, not to mention the widespread use of steganographic schemes and strategies in modern cyber security.⁷

One especially potent Renaissance variation on the theme of concealed forms, made known in Plato's *Symposium* and later treated

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by Erasmus, Rabelais, and Thomas Browne, was the Silenus Box, a figure described by Erasmus as a “case carved like an ugly Silenus” that can be “opened to reveal beautiful, precious objects” (Lepage 43). Erasmus, writing at his most piquant in his *Sileni Alcibiadis* (1515), compares the Silenus box to Socrates: “Anyone who looks deeply into the nature of things will find that no one is farther from true wisdom than those who, with magnificent titles, clerical hats, expensive belts, and jeweled rings, profess to be absolute sages” (1486, my translation).⁸ Lucy Razzall in her 2021 “The Renaissance of the Box: Metaphors of Interpretation,” confirms the epistemological implications of the Silenus Box. Such boxes became

humanist commonplaces for thinking about the potential challenges of discerning hidden truths . . . Like Portia’s casquets, which must be literally and intellectually unlocked, The Silenus requires the reader to know that they must get beyond an off-putting outside to locate hidden truths. (23)

One variation on this theme that is urgently present in Jonson’s work, noted as early as Huntington Brown’s 1929 study,⁹ is Francois Rabelais’s metaphor of the “Oracle of the Bottle” in chapter forty-four of book five of *The Deeds and Sayings of the Good Pantagruel*. In his own copy of the 1599 edition of Rabelais’s *Oeuvre*, which survives in the British Library (Lake 36), Jonson observed the concept of the Oracle of the Bottle (fig. 3).

In Jonson’s Rabelais, the text enclosed in the graphic image of a bottle illustrates the proverb, *in vino veritas* (“in wine, truth”). But while the bottle thus holds “verité,” it is also “toute de mysteres” / “full of mysteries.” The emphasis on such higher values as truth or “mysteries” shows that neither Rabelais nor Jonson are alluding to crude inebriation, but rather to the distilled poetic intoxication of metaphorical “poetical rapture,” perhaps lubricated with alcoholic spirits, that yields difficult knowledge and novel forms of expression (Hyland). Rabelais’s verse ends with a ritual vow for the initiate to turn an eager ear to the truths and mysteries of the bottle. Either a Silenus Box or a Bottle would do, but mysteries, like all memories, required a *place*, a container.¹⁰ As Daniel Jütte has recently shown, Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century was a “veritable age of secrecy,” a time when “‘good’ secrecy extended across all fields of life” and secrets were relished by all “because they considered true and important knowledge to be secret by definition,” while few “believed that divulging secrets was *per se* a good thing” (viii).

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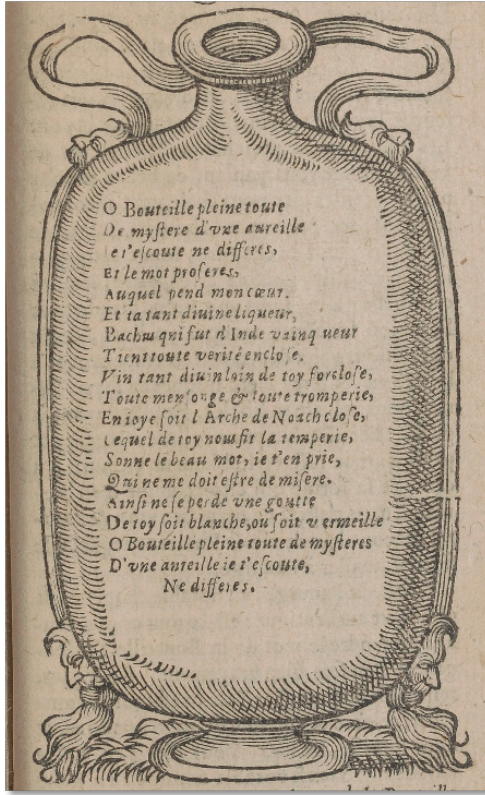


Fig. 3

The Oracle of the Bottle, in the 1599 edition of Rabelais' *Oeuvres* of which Jonson owned a copy: "O Bouteille pleine toute / De mystere d'une aureille."

Judging by his elaborate exploration of the motif of containers in his masques and poems, Jonson evidently relished both secrets and containers to put them in. In an "image that is of a piece with his powerful metaphorical use of the bodies of his praised subjects elsewhere," as Peterson puts it, Jonson in his 1623 "Epistle Answering to one that asked to be Sealed to the Tribe of Ben,"¹¹ conceives his own body as a "frail pitcher," tossed on waves of adverse circumstance:

[Jonson] plays on several interrelated traditions, mainly classical, about containers and their contents; the body as frail *vas*, or vessel; the oracle or poet as a vessel of Apollo; the wise floating earthen pot of Aesop's fable, which refuses the jostling company of the rich brazen pot in their common journey

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through life's waters; the sealed alchemical vessel in which transformations take place; and finally, the tun or pottle as the container of inspiring wine and truth. (Peterson 113)

This rich diversity of sources and thematic variations point to the depth and sophistication of Jonson's playful elaboration of the great philosophical and literary theme of "the container and the contained." The context lends gravitas to the occasion, since the "Epistle Answering" is a constitutive document of Jonson's "tribe" and therefore is intimately tied to Jonson's own aesthetic, sense of self-worth, and posthumous reception and reputation. To be "sealed" to the "Tribe of Ben" meant to apprehend the potency of the oracle, a symbol to which Jonson's "mind kept returning" for "poetic inspiration," a metaphor for "self-knowledge, and freedom from deception" (5) that is at the heart of Jonson's mythopoesis. Over time the "Oracle of the Bottle" also became the clubhouse emblem for Jonson's drinking fraternity, headquartered in the Apollo Room in the Devil Tavern at Temple Bar (c. 1600-1638). In Jonson's lines placed over the door of the room, published posthumously in his 1692 third folio ("Leges Convivales"), the oracle is revered for speaking "out of his bottle" with "divine" answers¹²:

Welcome, all who lead or follow,	
To the Oracle of Apollo—	2
Here he speaks out of his Pottle,	
Or the Tripods, his Tower Bottle.	4
All his Answers are Divine,	
Truth itself doth flow like Wine. (748)	6

The song's first line activates the metaphor of dancing, long a staple in the multimodal artistry of Jonson's masques. Jonson may have gotten the association between the bottle and the dance from Rabelais's account, where the oracle already proceeds from dancing. In book II:45 the voyager Panurge, before he could receive the sacrament of the oracle, is led into a "circular Chapel [that] was contrived with such Symmetry, that the Diameter of the Projection was equal to the Height of the vaulted Roof . . . There Bacbus, the noble priestess, made Panurge kneel and kiss the brink of the fountain; then bade him rise and dance around it three Ithymbies" (II:444).¹³

Besides its obvious association with Dionysian revelry, the dancing in the masques of the Stuart court often involved the dramatization of political messaging, with masked "boundary crossing between audience and performer in the form of dancing [that] appeared in the mummings and disguisings" (Winerock). King James enjoyed spirit-

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lubricated entertainment featuring his favorites' dancing; the juxtaposition of masque and anti-masque was designed to placate the queen by dancing away the vulgar message of inebriate corruption to arrive at the virtuous abstractions of courtly ideals in the masque proper—to commend spirited messages of more ethical rule.

Jonson's close study of the connection between number, dance, and poetics is featured in his 1617 *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, a production that juxtaposes a crew of awkward dancing bottles in the anti-masque with the gracefully inspired human dancers of Jonson's main masque.

Daedalus, Jonson's master-inventor, the contriver of labyrinths, machines and puzzles, directs the dancers:

Come on, come on, and where you go
So enter-weave the curious knot,
As ev'n th' observer scarce may know
Which lines are Pleasures, and which not. (VIII:488, ll.253-56)

In this masque, Stephen Orgel observes, Jonson's focus on the measured cadence of precise "feet" to construct a "curious knot" becomes an expression of his identity as the choreographer, providing instruction to the dancers to accompany the subtle expression of his poetic rhythms:

The dancers are urged to make their movements "measured, and so numerous too, / as men may read each act you doo." "Measured" can refer to the choreography; a measure is a slow dance, like a pavane. "Measured" and "numerous" (consisting of rhythmical units) can both refer to music. But as qualified by the following line, both adjectives become literary terms: the movements are to be ordered and made of up verses. In this way the *reading* of choreography takes on its full meaning, for Daedalus' injunction is to turn the dance into poetry. (179)

The "measured" character of both dance and verses mirrors the carefully managed role of alcohol in Jonson's ethos (fig. 4).

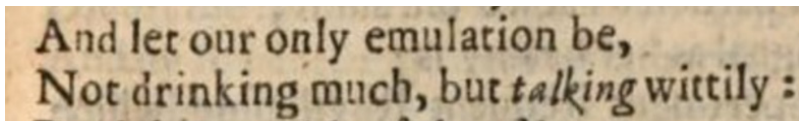


Fig. 4

Jonson's "Rules for the Apollo Tavern" prioritizes wit over drunkenness ("Leges" 747).

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Alcohol consumed in moderation raises the spirit of genius, but the goal of the “tribe” is “talking wittily,” in witty measure.

Jonson’s clubhouse song also refers to the “tripos” (l. 4), a three-footed stool or altar sacred to Apollo, from which Delphic Priestesses delivered their oracles. At Cambridge University, the term was applied to the stool on which BA candidates sat for exams. Plutarch explains that the tripod stands for the three stages in logic: hypothesis, testing, and conclusion.¹⁴ In another of Jonson’s sources, Athenaeus, the tripod signifies truth-telling: “Of those who speak the truth, we say that they ‘speak from the tripod’” (qtd. in Peterson 116). Thus, in Jonson’s mytho-poiesis, the Oracle of the Bottle combines a methodology for concealing the truth in “measured dance” with one for revealing it through inductive inquiry and hypothesis testing. Applying such methods, the values that Lake associates with Jonson’s Bottle—“poetic inspiration,” “self-knowledge,” and “freedom from deception”—will achieve a superlative expression in Jonson’s First Folio epigram.

Ciphered Names in Jonson

Jonson’s stance towards “secret writing,” as Hannah J. Crawforth explains, is both defensive and creative. In the Induction to *Bartholomew Faire* (1611), he ridicules the “state-decipherer or politic *picklock* of the scene,” interpreters “so solemnly ridiculous as to search out who was meant by the *gingerbread*-woman, who by the *hobbyhorse-man*, who by the *costardmonger*” (VI:17, ll. 137-40). In his 1623 “Execration against Vulcan,” he facetiously itemizes several extravagant modes of literary encryption: “riddles,” “Logogryphs,” “Palindromes,” “Anagrams,” “Eteostichs,” “Acrostics,” “Telestichs,” “jump names,” and the “finer flames” of such shape poems as “eggs,” “cradles,” a “pair of scissors,” or “a comb in verse” that he does not use (VIII:204). Yet while Jonson in “Execration” purports to be entirely innocent of such evasive tactics, throughout his works he makes generous use of tropes of concealment and revelation.

Jonson’s oracle evidently distills truth preserved in more craftily wrought bottles. His superficial denials of cryptic intent in “Execration” echo an earlier, deliberately provocative use of the word “cipher” in the dedication of Jonson’s *Epigrammes* to William Herbert Earl of Pembroke. In 1616, when the *Epigrammes* were published, Pembroke had just been appointed Lord Chamberlain of James’s Household and had, therefore, gained control of the Jacobean theatre and the ultimate power of theatrical sponsor and censor-in-chief. To a man like Pembroke, the word “cipher” could not fail to evoke familiar asso-

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ciations with the ideals on which his authority and power depended. Sometimes said to be the richest man in Jacobean England, and certainly the most generous arts patron, he also had the authority to hire a new Master of the Revels to replace the aging George Buc (Ogburn 217)—a position to which Jonson aspired:

My Lord, while I cannot change your merit, I dare not change your title: it was that made it, and not I, Under which name I here offer to your Lordship the ripest of my studies, my Epigrammes, which though they carry danger in the sound, doe not, therefore, seek your shelter, for when I made them, I had nothing in my conscience, to expressing of which I did need a cypher. (VIII:25)

Only a fearful prince—or poet—Jonson implies, needs a cipher, but as Jonson is wholly innocent of any malice or breach of decorum, he has no need for such indirection. It is not required, he implies, because he and Pembroke share an understanding between them.

The dramatic appeal of ciphered discourse is on full display in “The New Cry,” written in the aftermath of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, in which Jonson’s wit targets one of his favorite character types for satire: the “ripe statesmen” of the Jacobean court, who “buy the names of books,” carry about translations of the fashionably subversive Tacitus like stage props, and eagerly consume the latest sensational news bulletins:

They all get Porta for the sundry ways
To write in cipher and the several keys
To ope’ the character. (VIII:59, ll. 25-27)

“Porta” refers to Giambattista della Porta’s state-of-the-art encryption manual, published in Naples in 1563 (fig. 5).

Della Porta’s title page sets forth an essential premodern ambiguity; the “vulgar” translation of the title would be “Concerning Ciphers” (*De Ziferis*) but in the Latin this is also given as *De Furtivis Literarum Notis* (“Concerning the Furtive Notes of Literary Things”), a significantly more complicated idea that breaches the customary modern division between the cryptographic and the literary to provide tools of equal value for the spymaster or the poet. Jonson’s fashionable proponents of the “new cry” suffer from the same superficialities as those he ridiculed in “Execration against Vulcan.” They fail to understand that cryptography should be reserved for oracles of vital truth.

Charles J. Mendelsohn, a foremost authority on Renaissance cryptography, identifies della Porta as “the outstanding cryptographer of

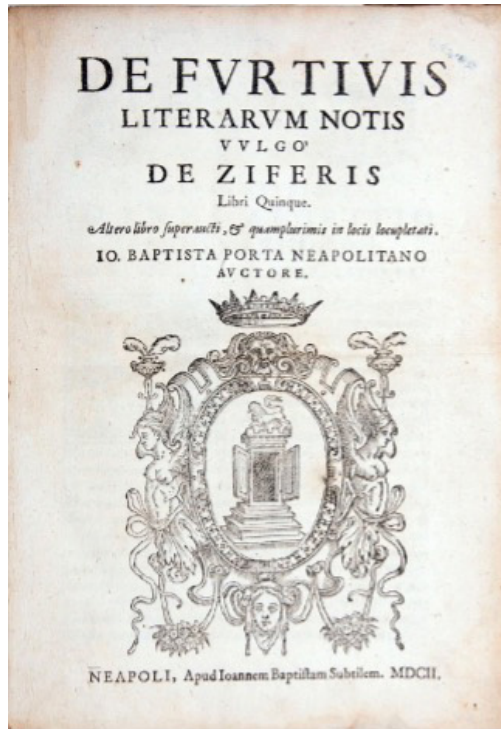


Fig.5

Della Porta's *De Furtivis Literarum Notis*, the state-of-the-art Encryption manual first published in 1563 and cited in Jonson's "The New Cry" (c. 1606).

the Renaissance. . . . among those whose works can be studied, he towers like a giant" (Kahn 143). As David Kahn explains, while frequency analysis¹⁵ had long been used as decryption strategy, "Porta anticipated all other writers on the subject [of cryptanalysis] by describing what is today regarded as the second major form of cryptanalytical technique—that of the probable word," a method of inference by which the interpreter can "make a shrewd guess" at encrypted content by assessing the larger context of the communication (140).

"Cipher"¹⁶ in Jonson's post-Gunpowder-plot poem implicitly alludes not only to della Porta's methods of diplomatic encipherment but also symbolically to the various forms of secret writing through which Jonson and his Jacobean literary colleagues exercised their faculties of "wit." Jonson's gaggle of courtly sycophants not only own Porta but boast of applying his most superficial methods:

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They've found the sleight
With juice of limons, onions, piss, to write
To break up seals and close 'hem. (ll. 27-29).

As an insider and eventually government witness in the case, Jonson knew of documents written in "invisible ink," discovered because "the size of the paper and the smallness of the apparent contents roused suspicion, and the letters were examined and used in evidence" against the alleged conspirators (XI:18).

Coupled with his appeals to coterie readers, his commitment to literary precision, and his dedication to poetry that will "last an age," Jonson's familiarity with della Porta and fascination with the "cryptographic" raises fundamental questions. Does he satirize these fashionable readers of Porta because he scorns the concept of "secret writing"? Or is he just a smarter "cryptographer," a keen shift at "breaking seals" and "closing" them? The answer, as Hana J. Crawford emphasizes in her "Court Hieroglyphics: The Idea of the Cipher in Ben Jonson's Masques" (2011) is beyond reasonable doubt; Jonson drew on "the discourses of cipher in order to construct hidden forms of meaning" (139). Jennifer Brady (1983) concurs that "Jonson's shrewd use of the idea of ciphering provides the key to an analysis" (105) of the dedication of his epigrams to Pembroke; Anabel Patterson sees him as a writer whose frequent clashes with censorious critics led him to develop a "social theory of literature, a poetics of censorship" (57); to William Slights (1994) the "driving social force, distinctive dramatic techniques, and persistent interpretative puzzles [in Jonson's late plays] are related in one way or another to secrecy"; Jonson's "chosen poetic strategy" concludes Richard Dutton (2003), is to "involve his readers in a process of critical inquiry" (19).

Of course, there are always people who know secrets, and people who think they know them. The politique gossips of Jonson's satire "know the states of Christendom," but not "the places"; preoccupied with transient politics, they neglect the renaissance concept of topical logic, in which "places" were the "seats of argument."¹⁷ They purport to "ope" the "character" but fail to follow the Delphic admonition to first know themselves. As elsewhere in Jonson, the word *character* here occupies a fertile intersection of semiotics and psychology. In della Porta, it refers to a letter or printed symbol, but to Jonson it acquires further senses, applying also to either a *literary* character or an *ethical* one, as in the sentence: "Ben Jonson: a man of honest character."

Another book that furnished Jonson's knowledge of (encapsulated) literary encryption was Francesco Colonna's Renaissance classic *Hyperotomachia* (*The Struggle of Love in a Dream*, 1499), a book

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Jonson owned and heavily annotated.¹⁸ John L. Lepage observes that Colonna's illustrated book is overflowing with images of "containment": "ornamental globes, urns, pots, tubs, cornucopia, drinking vessels, and architectural form, as well as statuary in architectural settings" (11). These emblems of the container and the contained are further expressed in the book's ekphrastic encipherment spelling out a thirty-eight letter dedication to the author's muse "Polia" (fig. 6).



Fig. 6

The author's concealed inscription: "POLIAM FRATER FRANSISCUS COLUMNA PERAMAVIT" ("The Franciscan brother Colonna swears undying love to Polia"). Image courtesy of en.chessbase.com/post/francesco-colonna-first-human-chess-reference.

Such steganographic, acrostic-style encryptions distribute plain-text uprights at systematic, keyed intervals—in designated places in the cover text. These places—laid out in this case on the successive initial capitals of the chapters—spell out the concealed message. Such schemata are similar in conception to the "topomorphic"¹⁹ strategies studied by Maren-Sofie Røstvig and the memory palace traditions documented by Francis Yates and others. These go back in European literature to Cynewulf's c. 900 C.E. acrostic signatures²⁰ or the figurate poems of Rabanus Maurus (780-856 C.E.) and Publius Optantius (c. 400 C.E.).²¹

Jonson, Abbreviated

One form of encipherment demonstrably used by Jonson was abbreviation. Della Porta devotes an entire chapter to this ancient practice,

which is also a topic of inquiry in Horace, Plutarch, and other ancients.²² From his examples, he concludes that “it must be gathered that all sciences are accustomed to using their own characters, both more secret and briefer, in which the business of their trade is conducted” (8).²³ The title page of *Epigrammes*, dedicated to Pembroke, illustrates Jonson’s exploration of the close historical and semiotic connection between abbreviation and encryption (fig. 7).

EPIGRAMMES.

BOOKE.

The Author B. I.

L O N D O N,

M. DC. XVI.

Fig. 7

Title Page of Jonson’s 1616 *Epigrammes*, by “The Author B.I.”

Jonson’s abbreviation of his name follows a practice commonly employed in the Renaissance of using initials to encipher a name (Williams), replacing clarity with ambiguity or plausible deniability. Just as an epigram strives to condense the force of wit, the abbreviation “B.I.” is the most potent, minimalist expression of Jonson’s own identity and satirical character in the *Epigrammes*. “B.I.” signifies Jonson in his essence, expressed in the briefest “character” possible. On Jonson’s title page, the ambiguous initials follow the technically superfluous “The Author,” an arrangement that joins the reductive force of initials to an unprecedented title-page assertion of authorial control.

In both his “Execration against Vulcan” and his dedication to Pembroke, Jonson’s insistence on his innocence exemplifies what Anabel Patterson has termed an unreliable “disclaimer of topical intention,” one which is “not to be trusted.” Instead, such statements “are more likely to be entry codes to precisely that kind of reading they protest against” (65). Jonson, concurs Dutton, was a master at “drawing attention to something in the writing by publicly insisting that it is not there” (141). To Pembroke, then, while insisting on a conscience that requires neither evasion nor concealment, Jonson is also advertising his facility with modes of secret writing. Jonson, it seems, was a knowledgeable practitioner of such esoteric arts, a literary “architect of wit” who scorned incompetent and corrupt encryptions such as writing in invisible ink on a nearly blank sheet of paper. His encryptions will be so good that they are only perceptible to those familiar with what della Porta would call “the business of his trade” through knowledge of its abbreviations.

Jonson's First Folio Epigram Revisited

Appearing on the first verso page of the 1623 Folio facing Martin Droeshout's ungainly engraving, Jonson's epigram has a long history of being ignored or deprecated by Shakespeare biographers who seem anxious to avoid calling attention to its manifest peculiarities or to detecting in it any subtlety worthy of literature. Such neglect is ironic. As Harry Newman has noted, the Folio's paratexts are "essential to the research and teaching of an author whose canonical identity has long been—and continues to be—shaped by paratextual apparatuses" (313). Although placed on prime real estate in the book, on the verso side of the book's first leaf facing the Droeshout engraving, the very first of seventeen pages of Folio paratexts, Jonson's epigram is also situated ominously on the verso or sinistral side of the book's first spread (fig. 8).²⁴

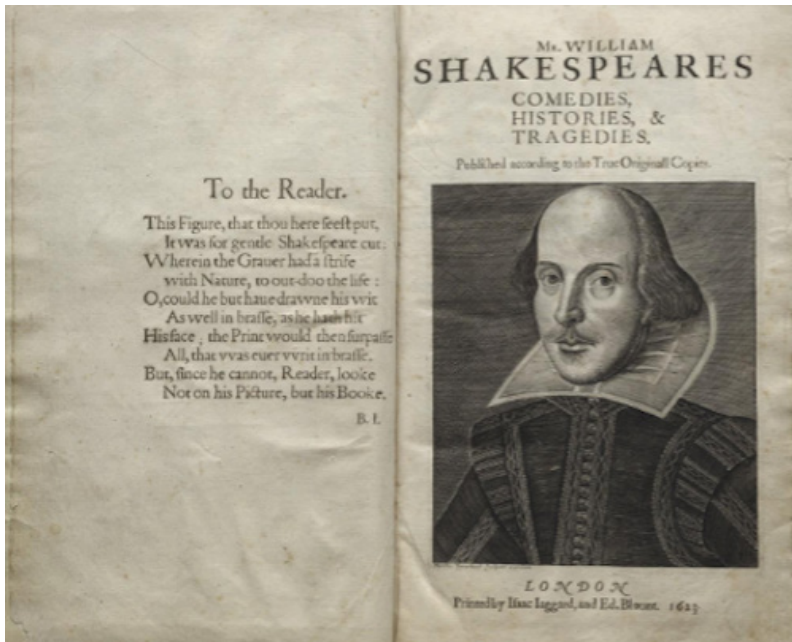


Fig. 8

Jonson's epigram facing the title page with Droeshout engraving.

In her candid assessment, Leah Marcus construes the combined effect of the poem and the engraving as "iconoclastic" and "rhetorically turbulent," setting the reader off on a "treasure hunt" for "the real author" (19). Jonson's epigrammatic poem consists of forty iambic feet

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distributed across ten lines, a number emphasizing solidity, squareness, and permanence. The ten-line tetrameter form (fig. 6) is rare in seventeenth-century English poetics but was a popular form in Spain, where it was known as the *décima* (the “tens”) or “little sonnet.”²⁵ But while Jonson’s epigram imitates the Spanish form, it is printed in a large, fresh Dutch typeface considerably more elegant than that used in the main body of the book. The title itself is also oversized, giving it special prominence and perlocutionary force (fig. 9).

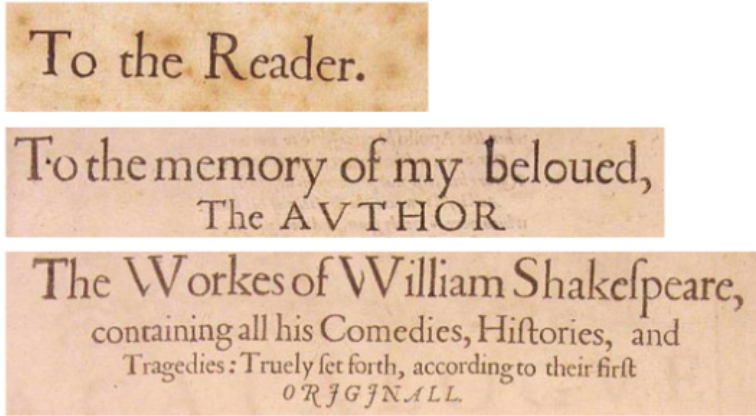


Fig. 9

At approximately 24 pt, Jonson’s “To the Reader” title is as large as the encomium title “To the memory of my beloved” (πA_4r) and headline for the actors’ page reading “The Workes of William Shakesppeare” (πA_6r) (Bewley 28).

If everything, even the form, is to be prophetic, then the fusion of Dutch type with a Spanish form may symbolize hope for peaceful reconciliation in the cold war between Catholic Spain and the Protestant nations of Europe including England and Holland. Gabriel Ready credibly posits that the form is another sly hint connecting the Folio to the politics of the 1623 Spanish marriage crisis.²⁶ Moreover, in the native English tradition tetrameter verses had been, at least since the fourteenth century, used for prophetic speech: as late as the seventeenth century a “large proportion” of such prophecies were still “composed in tetrameter or template meter” (Weiskott 75).

Jonson's First Folio Oracle of the Bottle Decrypted

Published eleven years after Friedman and Friedman's opus *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* had cleared the deck of decades of error and Baconian crypto-babble, Charlotte Armstrong's 1969 "novel of suspense," *Seven Seats to the Moon*, proposed an original and penetrating steganographic reading of Jonson's First Folio epigram. The novel's narrator, J. Middleton Little (a character, like his name, always "in the middle"), goes by the short form of his name, J. In Armstrong's *Seven Seats to the Moon*, J's father solves Jonson's riddle (fig. 10).

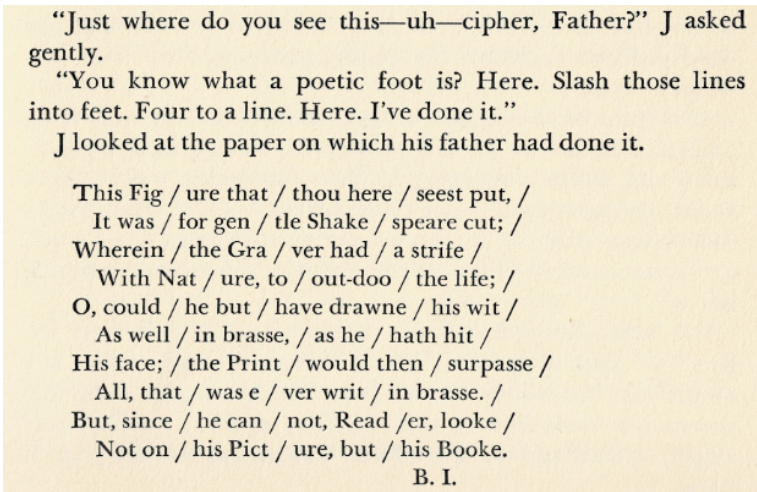


Fig. 10

Excerpt from *Seven Seats to the Moon*, p. 295. J's father introduces him to Jonson's First Folio epigram.

The first step, J's father says, is to mark out the feet. There are forty of them, a number with weighty symbolic history, being the number of days during which Moses, Elias, and Jesus all fasted. To Augustine the number is fit to express "the greatest circle of all, to wit Eternity, and so induce us to 'condemn temporal things and desire the eternal'" (qtd. in Røstvig 7).

Armstrong's approach is not only profoundly intuitive but actually employs the ancient poetic practice of poetic makers of "counting feet." As Marc Shell notes in *Talking the Walk and Walking the Talk*, the OED editors report "scan" as meaning "to indicate the structure or test the correctness of (a verse) by reciting it with metrical emphasis and pauses, or by counting on the fingers the feet as they occur in recitation" (10). An encipherment measured out by the marking of poetic

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feet thus illustrates Jonson's well-documented reputation as the "great soul of numbers" (Cartwright qtd. in Duppa 39), a poet whose "numerous feet, / Laden with genuine words do always meet," who had systematically pursued "proportion'd decency" (Cartwright qtd. in Duppa 35), discovering an art in which "his productions far exceed his notes" (Falkland qtd. in Duppa 4). "Thy thoughts," concluded Thomas Cartwright "were thine owne Laurel, and did win / That best applause of being crowned *within*" (qtd. in Duppa 39; my emphasis).

Jonson's own poetic principles and practices, as documented by members of his "Tribe of Ben," thus support and lend credibility to Charlotte Armstrong's solution to the enigma of Ben Jonson's true relationship with Shakespeare. In fact, it could be argued that the skill embodied in the Armstrong decryption is the logical expression of decades of Jonson's experimentation with principles of hermetic numeration in poetry. A key tool in Jonson's encryption kit was Gematria, the theory of the correspondence between letters and numbers as practiced in Kabbalah, the science of "reception."²⁷ Porta's cipher wheel (fig. 11) illustrates this concept, a *modus* common to the encryption schemes of spiritual gematria as well as diplomatic encryptions of statecraft.



Fig. 11

Cipher wheel in Della Porta showing the gematria equivalences B=2, I=9.

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While the wheels can turn against one another, assigning various numbers to any letter, in the default position, the wheels identify A=1 . . . Z=26, establishing the equivalencies B=2 and I/J=9.

J, himself an iconic signifier in the novel's solution, is otherwise a conscientious skeptic of his father's dabbling in Shakespearean mysteries, but here he admits to being "impressed" by his father's ingenuity (fig. 12). Despite being published over fifty-five years ago in a widely distributed popular work of fiction by a major American publisher and written by an accomplished and successful novelist, to this day, Armstrong's solution has yet to be measured against the Friedman strictures or even reviewed or noticed in a scholarly journal.

SEVEN SEATS TO THE MOON

"Now," said his father, pointing to the signature, "B is the second letter in the alphabet. I and J (in those times interchangeable) make the ninth letter. Nine and two add up to eleven, you will agree?"

"So count to the eleventh foot. Extract it. From that, count to the ninth foot following. Extract it. Count eleven more. Then nine. It is not," his father mourned, "to be attacked as an improper cipher. Reason tells me so."

J did what he had been told to do and read off the result. "*Ver had his wit, Ver writ his Booke.* Well, well," J was impressed.

Fig. 12

Excerpt from *Seven Seats to the Moon*, p. 296. J's father explains the method of the decryption.

The first Friedman test requires the alleged encryption to occur in a context that supports an inference of encryption (280).²⁸ The Armstrong solution fulfills this first condition to a T. The larger historical context, Jonson's well-documented practices and ideas, the provocative form and tone of the epigram, and even the paper trail left by his earliest followers, all support the plausibility of a First Folio encryption. The expectation of a concealed message, moreover, is confirmed by the entire design of the Folio's prefatory materials, including both textual and iconographic features. As demonstrated already, these are in fact designed on the first two leaves to "set the reader off on a treasure hunt" for the real author (Marcus 19).

A second Friedman rule is that "the cipher system and the specific key also have to obey certain rules" (20), that is, the system must be "rational and consistent, the keys really keys" (21). Armstrong's solution

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employs a single, unambiguous key that makes use of known principles and practices of gematria and logic. With the numerical basis provided as an autokey in Jonson's initials, only one mathematical operation, addition ($2+9=11$), is required to adapt the two initials of Jonson's name into the correct 11-9-11-9 schema of the design. Most persuasively, the purposeful character of this arrangement is supported and confirmed by the design of paratexts as a whole in a design that seems implausible to regard as the result of coincidence (fig. 13).

	Lines	Meter	Total Feet
Jonson (total feet)	90	Tetrameter 10 Pentameter 80	440
Holland	22	Pentameter 22	110
Digges/Mabbe	22	Pentameter 22	110
Totals	134	Tetrameter 10 Pentameter 124	660

Fig. 13

Elvish feet in the First Folio Paratext Poems. Two of the line counts and all of the feet counts are multiples of 11.

Arranged in a coordinated scheme, all five of the First Folio poems implemented a design constructed on multiples of eleven. To ensure further confirmation of Jonson's "Elvish" structure, the key is given—as the acrostic TWO confirms—in two ways. It may not only be derived from Jonson's initials, as Armstrong showed, but also by counting the number of letters used in the superscription "To the Reader" (11) coupled with those in Jonson's unabbreviated popular name "Ben Jonson," as spelled out in Jonson's subscription to his ten-times longer "triumph" (9).

Having been "rigorously applied," the key must "produce a plain text which is really a text . . . The plain-text solution must make sense . . . it must be grammatical, and it must mean something"; it must have "rhyme and reason" (Friedman 20-21). Jonson's "poem within a poem," the two-sentence decryption that "Ver had his wit" and "Ver writ his book" again meets this criterion; it has, quite literally, both the "rhyme" and the "reason" required by the Friedmans. It forms two complete, grammatical, picaresque, sentences with internal rhyme on two thematically relevant keywords, *wit* and *writ*.²⁹ This plaintext, moreover, directly answers the question posed in Jonson's covering text, "Where is the real Shakespeare to be found?" (Marcus 19). Jonson's witty answer is, "right here!" Yes, he can be found in the plays ("look not on his pic-

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ture but his book”), but he can also be found, named, in Jonson’s own poem. Armstrong’s protagonist J was so impressed, in fact, that he continued to muse on his father’s decryption:

J felt an astonished relief. No thought of Win or the bonds
was in his father’s mind. J began to feel touched and fond. The
old-fashioned code, he thought, the delicate conscience, the
fine point, lost in the shuffle of modern mores, yet existing.
Yet handed down to haunt the young, although they knew not
whence it came. (296)

The “young” might not know “whence it came,” but Jonson is careful in his *Discoveries* to describe his method of contriving a “form within a form” for honorific purposes. The twin perils of idolatry and envy are both evaded by Jonson’s “witty numbers.” In his *Grammar*, Jonson quotes Gower to define an envious person as one who,

Though he a man see virtuous
And full of good condition,
Thereof maketh he no mention. (VIII:552; ll.76-78)

But in *Discoveries*, he defends and explains his “noble lie” that *seems* to neglect honoring the man he “loved . . . and doe honour his memory (this side Idolatry)” (VIII:583) in the First Folio:

Injuries do not extinguish courtesies: they only suffer them
not to appear fair. For a man that doth me an injury after a
courtesy, takes not away that courtesy but defaces it: as he that
writes other verses upon my verses, takes not away the first
letters, but hides them. (VIII:577)

Jonson’s allusion to the technique of writing verses “over” other verses to “hide them” not only recalls Plutarch’s account of the Delphic poets who wove verses “like containers” around the oracles; more prosaically, in the history of diplomatic encryptions, it invites comparison to the well-known (and often misapplied) Cardano grille, discussed in della Porta, which facilitates concealment of a plaintext within a surface-text or “container” by use of a pair of duplicate grids with cutouts of the same sizes, shapes, and locations, one held by the sender and the other the recipient. The encryptor first wrote out the message in the spaces in the grid before removing it and embedding the concealed plaintext in a longer, innocuous surface text. It would be possible to construct Jonson’s encryption using such a grid (fig. 14). Jonson appar-

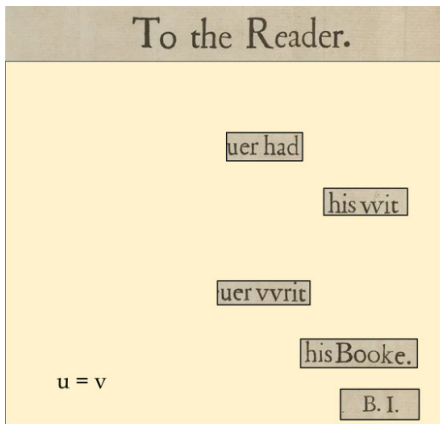


Fig. 14

Jonson's "To the Reader" encryption as if revealed by a Cardano Grille. In early modern English, the pairs u/v and I/J are interchangeable.

ently dispensed with the need for a physical grid by basing his key on the numeric structures of poetry. By distributing the plaintext at predictable numeric intervals, the universal properties of numeration would eventually reveal Jonson's solution even in the absence of a grid.

The solution also employs Della Porta's invention, now considered an essential tool in the decryptor's kit, of the probable word. After over a hundred years of already-telling research in thousands of publications, *Ver* is, after all, a highly probable word in any

decryption of the name of the real Shakespeare.³⁰

The purposeful character of the design involving an abbreviation used as a key is illustrated by Jonson's contrasting subscription to the two First Folio poems. Following the abbreviated subscription to the last words of his epigram (fig. 15a), Jonson in his eighty-line, ten times longer encomium supplies a more "ample" representation of his identity (fig. 15b). The calculated effect of the claim of amplitude ("Am I this ample..."), combined with Jonson's full name subscribed to the base of the encomium redirects the reader to the puzzle of why Jonson was so "un-ample" as to subscribe only his initials to the epigram. In the scientific worldview of Friedman and Friedman, a decryption must not only be "unbiased, systematic and logically sound," but also "free from appeals to insight" (21). But in Jonson's own classical value structure, the Oracle of the Bottle is associated not only with truth-telling, but also intellectual freedom and self-knowledge, aka "insight."

The inclusion of the key within the visible text makes Jonson's encryption an example of another Della Porta innovation, the autokey. While autokey systems are "flawed and consequently unusable" for diplomatic encryption (Kahn 143), which is designed to escape all detection, the politically prophetic literary encryption's double purpose is to both evade casual detection *and* emerge in distinct relief on closer inspection. Jonson's use of his own abbreviated initials as the autokey paid symbolic dividends by expressing a moral alignment between Jonson's "character" and his encryption.

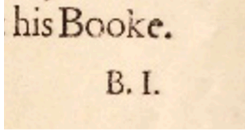
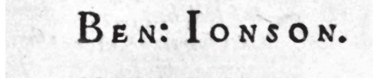
Epigram: Initials Only	Encomium: Full Name
 <p>The abbreviation is glanced at in Jonson's "Epistle Answering to One who Asked to be Sealed to the Tribe of Ben" (c. 1623): "So <i>short</i> you read my <i>character</i>, and theirs I would call mine" (VIII:220; ll. 73-74)</p>	 <p>The re-amplification of the name under the encomium has been alluded to in the poem's first two lines (c. 1623): "To draw no envy on thy name, Am I thus <i>ample</i> to thy book and fame" (ll. 1-2).</p>

Fig. 15

Comparison of two Jonson subscriptions in First Folio with corresponding textual evidence from Jonson's First Folio Encomium and the contemporaneous "Epistle Answering to One who Asked to be Sealed to the Tribe of Ben."

Thus, as useful as the Friedman strictures are for establishing a truly scientific methodology for determining the existence of an encryption, their premise that appeals to insight should be feared or avoided may be anachronistic when applied to the early modern literary encryption of this type, where the insight is a bonus that *comes from* application of the method, not a *precondition* for it.

Number and Secret Wit

To the early modern poet, the practical emphasis of the spymaster or conspirator was subordinate to the religious mandate to recapitulate God's creation in art, to use numbers to "make everything prophetic, even the form" (Røstvig 51). Prophetic wit involved "that quality of speech or writing which consists in the apt association of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness" ("Wit"). Walther Hermann Ryff's 1547 engraving (fig. 16) attests to the prevailing early modern belief that number was an integral aspect of "wit."

In large letters at the top is the familiar *memento mori*, known most readily from Andreas Vesalius's 1543 *Fabrica*, "Vivitur ingenio, Caetera mortis erunt" ("He lives by wit (*ingenio*): all else dies"). In the Ryff engraving, this famous line is joined to another, less-known proverb, printed in much smaller letters at the bottom, completing a heroic couplet that connects "wit" to numeration: "Aurum probatur igni, Ingenium vero mathematicis" ("as gold is proved by fire, wit, in truth, is



Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

Fig. 16

“He lives by wit; all else is mortal / as gold is tried by fire, so wit is proved by mathematics.” Image courtesy of commons.wikimedia.org.

proved by math”).³¹ Such concepts were, surely, accessible to Ben Jonson and his “tribe” in England. Indeed, the association between wit and math, or mathematical design, is a pronounced feature of Jacobean arts praxis. In their study of early English wit, Stanwood and Johnson even call attention to “that uncommon ability of so many 17th century poets,” guided by ideals of proportion and measurement, “to transmute metaphysical wit into proportioned and habitable dwellings” (41). Both Herbert’s “witty architecture” and Milton’s “structural wit,” they observe, characteristically call on formal design as an essential feature of their effects. In this highly formal trend, wit may be “induced through structural mediation,” or discovered through “rhetorical forms that surprise for their unexpected ingenuity” (22).

The Oracle of the Bottle in Jonson’s Work

The long paper trail of Jonson’s pre-1623 literary production and his immediately post-Folio masques shows that Jonson’s First Folio gambit in his “Oracle of the Bottle” was long-premeditated and widely hinted at in Jonson’s own work, especially in his court Masques c. 1616-1624. It was also widely celebrated among the first generation of his knowing literary apostles. The theoretical basis for Jonson’s Oracle is already present in *Hymenai* (1605) and is overheard in *Pleasure Reconciled Virtue* (1617).³² It is confirmed in Jonson’s verses over the door of his Apollo room Clubhouse at the Devil Tavern on Fleet Street, as we have seen. With the Folio now in print, Jonson’s *Neptune’s Triumph* (1624) celebrates the return to England of Prince Charles and Buckingham home from their 1623 search for a Catholic bride for the prince. The masque features another of Jonson’s overt nods to the oracle, this

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time in the masque's enigmatic and poorly understood scene in which Jonson's "Cook" and his "Poet" debate the origins of poetry:

Cook. . . . There [in the kitchen], the Art of Poetry was learned, and found out, or nowhere: and the same day, with the Art of Cookery.

The Poet, however, gives the origin of poetry to wine:

Poet. I should have giv'n it rather to the Cellar if my suffrage had bin askt.

The Cook then refers to the Oracle of the Bottle as the poet's "Pegasus":

Cook. O, you are for the *Oracle of the Bottle*, I see; Hogshead Trismegistus: He is your Pegasus . . . (VII:684; ll. 74-77)

Pegasus—the winged horse of Greek myth—is an ancient emblem of poetic inspiration. The poet's insistence that imagination takes wing from wine and song, is answered by the Cook's allusions to the Oracle of the Bottle and Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, whom Joseph Lowenstein describes as "the mythical Egyptian Magus . . . held by many early modern intellectuals to be the source of a primal body of esoteric knowledge" (112). This source contextualizes Jonson's word, "hogshead"³³ within the discourse of metaphysics. While literally a fifty-gallon barrel of wine or beer, to Trismegistus, the hogshead became a prime symbol for the philosophical and aesthetic topos of the container and the thing contained:

Hermes. But that *which is* could not be if it were not *full of existence*; for that which is in being or existence, can never be made *empty*.

Asclepius. Are there not therefore some things that are empty, O *Trismegistus*, as an empty Barrel, an empty Hogshead, an empty Will, an empty Winepress, and many such like?

Hermes. O the grossness of thy error, O *Asclepius*; those things that are *most full* and replenished, dost thou account them *void* and *empty*? ("The Divine Pymander" 48-49, italics original)

In his 1626 rewriting and expansion of *Neptune's Triumph* for the public stage, *Staple of News*, Jonson now gives the poet the name of "Madrigal," and the Cook "Lickfinger," and this time more explicit-

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ly framing the debate as one between the “quick cellar” and the “fat kitchen”:

Mad. . . . I affirm

The perfect, and true straine of poetry,
is rather to be given the *quicke Cellar*
than *the fat Kitchen*.

Lick. Heretique, I see

Thou art for the vain Oracle of the Bottle.

The hogshead Trismegistus is thy *Pegasus*. (VI:347, 4.2.4-9;
my emphasis)

In this much longer play, Jonson omits reference to Rabelais as his source for the Oracle of the Bottle, instead supplying this synoptic sidenote: “Lickfinger is challeng’d by Madrigal of an argument.” This substitution is unlikely to be coincidental given everything known about Jonson. Madrigal and the Poet of the masque both function, as it would seem, as each work’s *raisonneur*—a character who delivers the author’s own choric message in dialogue with one or more other characters—who or what is the inspiration for the cook?³⁴ While Lickfinger is sometimes said to represent Jonson’s onetime collaborator but later despised rival Inigo Jones,³⁵ the contradiction between the “quick cellar” and the “fat kitchen,” as introduced in *Staple of News*, cannot be explained by this analogy. Nor is the character sufficiently unflattering to justify the comparison with Jones given Jonson’s evident animus toward him as expressed in other sources. Goldsworthy helpfully identifies the Cook (“Lickfinger” in the play version) as “another opportunity to Ben Jonson for making fun of the author of ‘Shakespeare’s’ plays under the character of Lickfinger” (20). The debate between the cellar and the kitchen indeed recalls traditions of the “wit combats” between Shakespeare and Jonson³⁶ over competing literary values. Shakespeare’s method emphasizes figures and strategies of amplification (the “fat kitchen”), while Jonson’s poet, like Jonson himself, prefers laconic brevity (the “quick cellar”). In the masque, the exchange between the cook and the poet is punctuated by the poet’s affirmation that a good triumph should not lack a comic epiphany:

Cook. . . . And, brother poet, though the serious part

Be yours, *yet envy not* the Cooke his art. (VIII:692; ll. 326-27)

As if recalling the prominent First Folio focus on the problem of envy (see Stritmatter, “Through A Glass Darkly”), the cook urges the poet to “*envy not* the cook his art.” In reply, the poet’s Latin inscription,

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doubled for emphasis in English translation, attests to the importance of the idea that every triumph should contain a joke:

Poet. Not I. *Nam lusus ipse Triumphans amat.*
For the Triumph himself loves a joke. (VIII:692; ll.328-29)

Jonson's epigram, printed across from the droll mask of the Droeshout engraving, contains a dazzling *jeux d'esprit* and comic triumph. The poet's honorific joke about Jonson's triumph is followed by an Antimaske "daunc'd by the persons describ'd, coming out of the pot" (VII:692), further emblems of the emergence of "things contained"—in this case dancers on graceful feet—from their containers.³⁷

Jonson as Literary Provocateur

Jonson's poet and his cook in *Staple of News* may be rivals, but they aren't enemies. On the contrary, their exchange prefigures those overheard a half century later in accounts of the "wit combats" between Jonson and Shakespeare. Lickfinger concedes that the poet has the "serious part," but together they both love a joke as part of the triumph. "Language as articulated through arithmetic," explains Katherine Ellison, "provides attractive textual solutions to eavesdropping because it can circulate freely in the public yet hide thoughts that at least two people want to keep between themselves" (par. 24).

In Armstrong's analysis, Jonson's epigram, when coupled with his mock encomium, employs measured numbers to transmit covert wit, designed to accompany a satirical engraving by Martin Droeshout.³⁸ Her solution not only fulfills Jonson's own avowed theoretical precepts but also confirms Gerald Rendall's 1939 description of Jonson as the "skilled and most effective agent of [Shakespeare's] anonymity" (7). In her own twist, Armstrong portrays Jonson less as an "agent of anonymity" than as a literary provocateur, one who conceals but also reveals through his mastery of poetic form.

By 1623 Jonson had much experience with such devices. Throughout his encomia, writes Peterson, "if we look closely, such noble inner forms of virtue are to be found, either *shining through outer bodily shapes* or standing exposed to view and emulation like the colossus of virtue in the epistle to Sacvile" (82; my emphasis). In their ambiguous outer forms, Jonson's First Folio poems stand exposed to the view like two Colossi of Memnon, but in their intricate internal design, they illumine the same kind of "noble inner forms" characteristic of Jonson's other poems of praise. Depositing the name of his 1623 Shakespeare First

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Folio dedicatee beneath the cover of his ambiguous epigram, Jonson's design diffracts the name, "like a ray of light in poetry," and the identity of his "star of poets" leaps forth as an oracle from B.I.'s subtle bottle:

Ver had his wit.
Ver writ his book.³⁹

Notes

1. "Through a Glass Darkly: Elvish Numbers in Ben Jonson's First Folio Poems," *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 89, no. 2, June 2024, pp. 116-41. Material included in this article was previously presented at the May 11-12, 2022, NSA Cryptologic History Symposium under the title "Witty Numbers: Counting the Feet in Ben Jonson's First Folio Cryptogram." The research for this article was supported by the libraries of Coppin State University, The University of Maryland System, and Virginia Tech.

2. Ogburn (222) cites a telling garland of commentators on the image: to Ivor Brown the Droeshout is a "Puddin-headed William who could never have written anything except a note of hand to buy malt"; John Dover Wilson finds it "so obviously false" that "that the world turns from [it] in disgust and thinks it is turning from Shakespeare himself"; the English artist Gainsborough declared: "Damn the original portrait. I never saw a stupider face. It is impossible that such a mind and such a rare talent should shine with such a face and such a pair of eyes."

3. See Stritmatter, "Census."

4. Except where otherwise indicated, all Jonson references are to the Oxford University Press Herford, Simpson, and Simpson edition (HS&S).

5. "Isis and Osiris," "The E. at Delphi," "The Oracles at Delphi," and "The Obsolescence of Oracles" are parts of vol. 16 of Plutarch's *Moralia*. See Babbitt.

6. See Stewart 120-22.

7. See, e.g., Stanger or Johnson and Jajodia.

8. "Si quis rerum vim ac naturam penitus introspicient, reperiet nullos a vera sapientia longius abesse quam istos, qui magnificis titulis, qui sapientibus pileis qui splendidis cingulis, qui gemmatis anulis absolutum profitentur sapientium."

9. Jonson's aggressive use of this emblem is a sign of his imaginative powers of creative assimilation. An EEBO search for the phrase "Oracle of the Bottle" returns only nine records, all to advertisements for a 1693 translation of Rabelais in books printed between 1694 and 1696 by the publisher, Richard Baldwin. "Oracle" near "bottle" returns only two additional hits, to Jonson's *Staple of News* (1640), and a 1677 book on witchcraft by John Webster.

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10. See, for example, Yates 1-10 et seq.
11. Beyond the few instances cited here, the "Epistle Answering" contains a wealth of materials relevant to gaining a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of Jonson's literary activities during the early 1620s. The poem illustrates how Jonson's insider status with the Shakespeare secret was already becoming a binding force among his followers that contributed to the mystique of his Apollo Tavern club, the "Sons of Ben," as testified in the poems preserved in *Jonsonius Virbius* and other mid-seventeenth century documents.
12. On the history of the "Leges Convivales," first mentioned in a surviving document in 1624 and later published in 1638 in a book of Latin memorials to Jacob Fry by Daniel Tossano, see Simpson (1939).
13. Ithymbies is defined in two notes by Smith as a "Bacchanalian dance" and a "vintage song" (II:444).
14. See Dolid 52.
15. Frequency analysis involves studying the relative frequency of letters or groups of letters in a ciphertext to determine an enciphered plaintext. Since the relative frequencies of letters can be calculated for any alphabet of a particular language, it works well for monoalphabetic substitution ciphers where a 1-1 correspondence exists between the plain and ciphered texts, but it can readily be foiled by polyalphabetic systems.
16. Katherine Ellison shows that *cipher* is associated with a mathematical placeholder: "In the late fourteenth century *The Testament of Love*, allegedly written by Thomas Usk but not printed until 1532 by William Thynne, a cipher, or 'sipher' was any character without meaning or value on its own, yet "he giveth power in signification to other" (14).
17. Places, writes Thomas Wilson in his *The Rule of Reason* (1552), are the resting corners of an argument, "unto the whiche if wee conferre the matier which we intende to prove, there will appere diverse argumentes to confirme the cause" (qtd. in Trousdale 9-10).
18. Engel et al. provocatively report that Jonson "associates Colonna with the general concept of memory training" in *The Case is Altered* (1-2).
19. On this useful term, see Røstvig, *Configurations*.
20. On Cynewulf's c. 8-10th century acrostic encryption of his authorship in several Anglo-Saxon poems, see Graham Holderness.
21. Stanwood and Johnson 24-28.
22. "1.III. Concerning Nota Employed by Those Who Wish to Write with the Utmost Brevity" (4-8). The chapter examines the practice of using abbreviated "notations" for both abbreviation and encryption. In early modern literary discourse, the word notes carries a distinct cryptographic implication, per the Latin, nota, "B. secret characters, secret writing, cipher" (Lockwood 467).
23. "Quare colligendum est, omnes scientias proprios characteres asciiisse, quibus occultius, breviusque scientiarum traderentur" (8). My translation.

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24. A 1606 English translation of Artemidorus's *Interpretation of Dreames*—a work that Jonson mentions in *Epicoene* (1609)—records that “Writing with the left hand is to make some secret circumvention, to cunny-catch, deceive, or defame anyone” (121). The OED defines “cunny catch” as to “trick, cheat, dupe or gull.”

25. The two prefatory décimas of *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) are both put to satiric uses, one praising the Don's loyal sidekick Sancho Panza and another his horse, Rocinante, “Nag of Nags” (Ready 61). Elsewhere Jonson only uses the form twice, both times in *Poetaster* 2.2.162-72 and 2.2.179-89. The first song begins, “If I freely may discover, / What would please me in my lover.”

26. Ready suggests that Jonson's epigram “transform[s] the First Folio into an epithalamium, an ode to a bride and bridegroom. The [Spanish] Infanta would thus join a long list of Jonson's preferred addressees” (67). If so, the allusion may spoof the much-bruited courtship of Charles and the Infanta. Despite Jonson's c. 1619-22 dalliance with the Stuart Court, including sending Charles and Buckingham off on their romantic escapade with *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), his alliances had shifted back again toward Pembroke and the anti-Match faction in ways that lost him support at Court in the aftermath of the Folio. In his c. 1623 “An Epistle Answering” Jonson declares his readiness to “draw the sword” to “force back that, which will not be restor'd,” i.e., to defend English religious independence against any threat of counter-reformation (HS&S VIII:219, ll. 38-39).

27. Yehudah Mirsky further defines Kabbalah as the practice of “seeking to obtain direct knowledge and intimate communion with divinity itself from within our own deeply conflicted and imperfect world.”

28. “Before we start looking for ciphers, we need to be assured that there is some likelihood of there being one. There is some onus of proof, or at any rate of suspicion, which anti-Stratfordians need to meet” (Friedman and Friedman 280).

29. The *wit-writ* rhyme becomes a familiar topos in the paper trails of Shakespeare, and even more so, Jonson. It occurs, for example, in the inscription on the Stratford monument (credibly attributed to Jonson by Nina Green): “sieh all that he hath writ, / leaves living art, but page, / to serve his wit.” The rhyme also appears in several suggestive passages from Jonson's 1638 posthumous festschrift, *Jonsonus Virbius* (Duppa): Cartwright declares that Jonson “has writ / Not for dispatch but fame, no market wit” (37); Richard West clarifies that when Jonson's critics “see thy name thus plainly writ” (i.e., abbreviated) they will learn to “Admire the solemn measures of thy wit” (55; my emphasis).

30. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *Vere* was sometimes spelled *Ver*, e.g., by Hardyng, Stow, Dugdale, Selden, Brady, and others. Latin for “Spring,” *ver* was also de Vere's sobriquet as the impecunious nobleman in Tom Nashe's topical pastoral *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (c. 1574) (Detobel). Jonson's First Folio design thus uses both of Porta's great innovations, the autokey and the “probable word.” For some highlights of the larger case for de Vere's authorship of the plays, see, e.g., Looney, Ogburn, Anderson.

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Warren's 2023 fifth edition of *An Index to Oxfordian Publications* identifies over 12,000 publications supporting (and sometimes disputing) the attribution of the plays to "Vere."

31. In its more familiar shortform, the epigram remained popular in Elizabethan England, being reproduced on the title pages of both Francis Meres's 1598 *Palladis Tamia* and Henry Peacham's 1612 *Minerva Britannia*.

32. In the antimasque of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, the bowl-bearer explains that "bottles and tuns . . . are but living *measures of drink*, and can transform themselves . . . And *there is a piece in the Cellar* that can hold more than all they: this will I make good, if it please our new god but give it a nod" (75-81; HS&S VIII:482; my emphasis).

33. See "The Divine Pymander." In the ninth book, in a dialogue on being and nothingness between Hermes Trismegistus and Asclepius, the "Hogshead" to which Jonson refers is mentioned. "The Divine Pymander" is the first book in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a work available to Jonson via the fifteenth-century translation from Greek to Latin by the Italian humanist scholars Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500).

34. Raisonneur: literally, "one who reasons or argues" (Wordreference), sometimes "a person in a play or book embodying an author's viewpoint" (Wiktionary). Jonson's poet sardonically identifies himself as the "most unprofitable" of all the King's Servants: "I, Sir, the Poet. A kind of Christmas Ingine; one, that is used, at least once a year, for a trifling instrument of wit" (HS&S VIII:683).

35. For example, influentially, by HS&S XI:588.

36. Stritmatter, "Triumphal Numbers."

37. Jonson's final allusion to the Oracle of the Bottle appears in his very last play, *The New Inn*, (c. 1629), as published in his 1692 Third Folio a mere four pages before his "Leges Convivales" and its celebration of the Oracle as the presiding genius of Jonson's club. In the detailed exposition of *The New Inn* a young nobleman Lord Frampul had twenty years ago as a young husband run away from his wife and two daughters to join a travelling theater. He is now disguised as the "Merry Host of the New Inn, Goodstock of Barnet." His abandoned wife, Lady Frampul, is now disguised as Sheleenien Thomas, a drunken Irish servant in the Inn. In the fourth act, Thomas finally presses the Host about the resolution of the lost identities. He replies: "Go ask th' Oracle / O' the Bottle, at your Girdle, there you lost it" (4.4.343-45). In this play, the bottle represents the symbolic resolution of the confusion sown by Lord Frampul's youthful infatuation with the traveling theatre. The "girdle" was a customary place to keep either bottle, or a bunch of keys, characteristically worn on a ring attached to the belt: "As Pope Paschall 2. when he rode in Pompe, had his seven Keys hanging at his girdle" (Burton 329).

38. For example, George Greenwood: "I can never understand how any unprejudiced person, with a sense of humor, can look upon it without being tempted

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to irreverent laughter. . . it looks at one with a peculiar expression of sheepish oafishness which is irresistibly comic” (395).

39. Jonson’s decrypted message pointedly echoes his own Shakespeare anecdote from *Discoveries* when he compares Shakespeare to Haterius: “His wit was in his own power, would that the rule of it had been so too” (VIII:584, ll. 660-661, Disc.). It is as if Jonson, in his encryption, is returning Ver’s potent wit to his own power, restoring a “Shakespeare,” who, having been subject to authority, had suffered the alienation of his name and worldly labors. Jonson, it seems, loved Shakespeare “t’other side” of both idolatry and envy.

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Asian American Fiction After 1965: Transnational Fantasies of Economic Mobility, by Christopher T. Fan, Columbia University Press, 2024, 320 pp. \$34.21 (paper).

Alluding to the widely quoted proclamation by Virginia Woolf that “on or about December 1910 human character changed,” Christopher T. Fan in his excellent study describes another epochal transformation: “on or about October 3, 1965, the character of Asian America changed” (21). This juxtaposition highlights a dialectical relationship between broad historical shifts and specific cultural transformations. Both claims contribute as examples of how society has transformed in two very different historical periods, both of which influence concepts of identity: early twentieth-century England and the post-1965 United States. These assertions add to the larger global socio-historical landscape by unveiling the complex interactions between modern national identities and the political, economic, and cultural elements that shape historical trajectories.

Woolf’s line roughly alludes to the socio-political changes afoot in modernist England that reflected shifting patterns of respect and evolving class and gender dynamics evident in, for example, the status of a Victorian cook after Edward VII’s death in May 1910, or suffragist activities, or a postimpressionist art exhibition. Fan refers more directly to the effects of the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the 1965 Immigration Act, that marked the radical break from restrictive nationality-based immigration quotas that had prevailed since the 1924 US immigration policy. The new immigration policy was driven by the desire for family reunifications as well as to meet the need for skilled labor. This employment-based system facilitated the entry of skilled workers, particularly those specializing in STEM fields. A great number of Northeast Asian emigrants consequently contributed their expertise in the tech industries, thereby enhancing the American workforce and fostering innovation. In a brief interview Fan, as co-founder of *Hyphen*, a Northern Californian Asian American news and culture magazine, clarifies the dominant racial narrative concerning labor and its beneficiaries in Silicon Valley (“Christopher Fan”). He declares that this perspective prompted him to explore the intersections of activism, class, and race, especially considering the role of occupational concentration in perpetuating the phenomenon of model minority status.

Examining Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* and Ken Liu’s *The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary*, Fan establishes the historical connections between modernization theory and Asian America in

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the first chapter. As both Ozeki and Liu directly address the legacies of modernization and the continuities of combining Japanese and U.S. imperialisms, Fan discusses how Northeast Asian economic development has been influenced by midcentury modernization theory aligned with scientific positivism, which induced the creation of excess STEM human capital and propagated the notion of economic integration. The second chapter of Fan's book reflects on Northeast Asia's modernization and post-65 Taiwanese American perspectives, analyzing Ted Chiang's narratives in *Stories of Your Life and Others* and *Exhalation*. Fan delineates the parallel emergence of the transnational turn with modernity, explicating how engineers navigate the dynamic interplay between race and modernity. This chapter also contrasts developments in science fiction with the seemingly out-of-place appearance of techno-orientalist aesthetics in Asian American literature. In the third chapter, leaning on Chang-rae Lee's style and technique as used in *Native Speaker*, Fan shows how the apparent personal/biographical factor brings the post-65 Asian American author into the profession of authorship. Essentially, such a phenomenon is influenced by class anxiety and professional structures foregrounded during Northeast Asian modernization. Fan explores the topic of gender dynamics in the fourth chapter. While examining how feminine, parental professional biographies and occupational identities intertwine within the narratives, he offers a close reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Meng Jin's *Little God*, and Ling Ma's *Severance*. In the penultimate section, he examines Taiwanese-American novels such as Tao Lin's *Taipei* and *Leave Society*, and Elysha Chang's *A Quitter's Paradise* to reflect upon the U.S.-Taiwan-Chinese relations from the position of Taiwanese-American subjects.

Asian American Fiction After 1965 investigates the portrayal of a group of Asian American novelists (exclusively authors with Northeast Asia backgrounds such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China) whose works represent characters with heightened Asian American introspection. Fan proposes the phrase "science fictionality" to characterize the STEM-fueled, techno-rationalist viewpoint of the Northeast Asian American authors after 1965 as they explore Asian themes and invent a literary environment that brings elite literary respectability to more subcultural science fictional genres and tropes. As a result, he interprets the demographics of Asian American literature through economic dynamics and expounds on the distinct contours of the capital historically aligned with racial and literary expressions. He aims to "scrutinize interactions between the [visible] domain of discourse that [Asian Americans] occupy and the hidden abode of material relations" (15). Further, he explores how their racialized class formation fits

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into the global professional managerial class (PMC) framework, revealing fundamental dynamics during the period of deindustrialization in the United States. Hence, during post-war economic transformation, largely based on economic mobility, Asian Americans identified with the “success frame” (3). Integrating economic ideas into literary studies, Fan centers his argument on the exposure of Northeast Asian human capital to modern techno-solutionist scientific values within the context of global power dynamics, implying a position that is both postcolonial and sub-imperial. In addition to analyzing class dynamics, the author scrutinizes other multiple perspectives influenced by factors such as race, sexuality, gender, dis/ability, that shape the authors’ perception and depiction of Asia in their work.

One of Fan’s main points is that Asian Americans are known by a dual and equally significant identification encompassing race as well as class. In the journey from the period of industrialization to deindustrialization in the US, Asian Americans played a pivotal role. The first identity of “coolie” has been replaced by STEM professionals, expanding the “locus to encompass the supra-sensory dimensions of capital itself” (220). The deindustrialization phase has equally demanded Asian labor, marking the shift in social formation. Fan’s authors and characters provide heuristics that “help us to track the sensuous: a whole depth of history and material relations in which the economic, cultural, and ideological routes that trans-imperial modernization established are traced and retracted” (220). By the same token, by examining the dynamic relationship between historical context, cultural transformation, and individual identity as experienced within the Asian American community, he engages the readers with a deeper ethos of modernist identity critique, exemplified by Woolf above. Fan reflects on the subjective manifestation of the characters’ experience, which resonates with the modernist preoccupation with subjectivity and the impact of societal changes on individual consciousness, aesthetics, and affect. He astutely tracks the modernist routes uncovering “the confidence to interpret reality as science fiction” (6). Like many other critics of modernity, Fan successfully embodies the dialectical relationship between broad historical shifts and specific cultural transformations by reflecting upon “the mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass-mediated events and migratory audiences [defining] globalization and modern” (Appadurai 4). Likewise, the multidimensional analysis concerning the themes of societal change, individual consciousness, and the interplay between past and present reveals the features of modernist identity critique.

In this context, I would like to bring attention to the immigration/human mobility cases, especially concerning the consequences of the

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immigration acts implemented by many developed nations, such as the Federal Skilled Worker Program in Canada, Skilled Migration Program in Australia, Skilled Worker Visa in the UK, Danish Green Card Scheme, etc. On the one hand, Fan's book opens avenues for future research regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and class on the portrayal of certain immigrant identities among knowledge workers based on their geography of origin. On the other, it makes us aware of the consequences of the global labor migration phenomenon, with human capital exports from developing nations, whether in the form of domestic helpers or farm workers, graduate and post-doctoral students, or technical human resources to the non-English speaking world such as South Korea, the Middle East, and Japan.

Moreover, another alarming case of human mobility for capital gain is oriented toward the Gulf nations, particularly from the South Asian countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and India. Unlike the pre-1965 Asian workers who received American citizenship and made their fortune in the US, these human minds-and-bodies-as-commodities flow to the Gulf countries yet remain unrecognized and exploited. Fan's argument resonates with a discussion of human transnational capital flow concerning "diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair, as Arjun Appadurai puts it, prompt[ing] us to think further about the recent phenomenon of human commodity flow within the context of second modernity and globalism (6). The human flow, driven by aspirations for financial gain and working opportunities, accentuates the transnational interconnectedness of diverse cultures and economies. Nevertheless, despite some contributions to economic growth in the form of remittance in their host countries, these workers face exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization. Examining a reverse case of the South Asian labor migration to countries that do not ensure permanent residency compared with North America, Appadurai juxtaposes "Silicon Valley in California, where intense specialization in a single technological sector (computers) and particular flows of capital may well profoundly determine the shape that ethnoscaples, ideoscaples, and mediascaples may take" (47). This factor requires a broader discussion on the intersectionality of class, race, and citizenship in shaping individual experiences within the globalized world.

Fan's contribution makes readers ponder the future landscape of the aforementioned developed countries, where an influx of STEM workers such as nurses and doctors from low per capita GDP countries, alongside their families, migrate in hope of better prospects. Additionally, the story of bringing people to the US through an Electronic Diversity Visa, also known as the green card lottery, is another narrative that

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intersects with this landscape. The aspirations and struggles of immigrant communities are a perpetuating phenomenon of the parents who dream of their children's better future. That hope is somehow possible, despite a host of contradictions and hardships, for Asians who make their way to and in countries like the US, as witnessed by the fact that Asian Americans occupy the highest income generator group in the demographic graph of the census of the USA (US Census Bureau). Despite inequalities, the various paradoxes of tokenism such as the bind of model minorityship, and new ideologies of the yellow peril during the Covid pandemic, Asians in the US experience opportunities for educational advancement and personal reflexivity of the sort celebrated by *Hyphen* and exemplified in the writers whom Fan is helping to critically elucidate (Fan 14). Other than its almost willful avoidance of the secret of Asian American success, literary or otherwise, this book has a lot to offer. It reignites an essential discussion of the complexities of human capital flow out of Asia and its impact on global modernity through deft literary-critical analysis. However, it might be a limited perspective to interpret the Asian American experience solely through the lens of exploitation and Asian Americans' delusional dreams of a better future. Moreover, it is crucial to understand that Southeast Asians are Asians too, and their identities should be recognized as integral to the wider Asian American network. Regardless, *Asian American Fiction After 1965* is a nuanced exploration of how neoliberal, network society shapes individual experiences and identity formation. Fan's hermeneutics through a sociopsychological lens attempts to address the intricate layers of identity formation and societal divisions as perpetuated by Eurocentric continuities.

Fan digs into the ways network society constructs and negotiates human experiences largely based on divisions within humanity as explained by concepts such as settler, native, and alien. With this awareness, I would like to conclude by highlighting Ulrich Beck's proposition: "separate worlds and identities that dominated the first modernity of separate nationally organized societies can be completely overcome only when one contrasts exclusive differentiations with the inclusive differentiation that has been investigated and developed in the sociology of the second modernity" (6). Without inhibition, this book draws our attention to the interwoven destiny of people and nations in a world where the ratio of transnational dependency is higher than before.

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Caribbean American Narratives of Belonging, by Vivian Nun Halloran, The Ohio State UP, 2023, 210 pp. \$29.95 (paper).

Light and Legacies: Stories of Black Girlhood and Liberation, by Janaka Bowman Lewis, U of South Carolina P, 2023, 174 pp. \$32.99 (paper).

The demographics of the African American and Caribbean American populations in the United States have experienced significant changes over the past couple of decades, so the increased scholarship on diaspora studies and transnationalism within and beyond the field of literary studies is not surprising. Scholars such as Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez, Yogita Goyal, Monika Gosin, Daniel Widener, Erik S. McDuffie, Shana L. Redmond, Kamille Gentles-Peart, Camilla Hawthorne, Christina M. Greer, and Candis Watts Smith have explored the various diasporic communities in the US and address changing realities—including the perspectives African American and Caribbean American groups have of themselves as well as other people’s perspectives of them. In their examinations of literary and cultural depictions of the triumphs and tribulations of African American and Caribbean American people, Vivian

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Nun Halloran and Janaka Bowman Lewis, through their recent books *Caribbean American Narratives of Belonging* and *Light and Legacies: Stories of Black Girlhood and Liberation*, respectively, join such existing conversations about these groups and particularly focus on their sense of belonging within the US. More analyses of creative projects highlighting the experiences of African American and Caribbean American communities present an opportunity to continue filling gaps about these communities' circumstances, contributions, and impacts during a time in which these groups are increasingly influencing the wider US.

Both Halloran and Lewis chose an eclectic selection of texts. Halloran undeniably expresses her bias toward having several Puerto Rican primary sources due to her heartfelt pride for her Puerto Rican heritage; still, she analyzes several memoirs, picture books, young adult novels, TV shows, comics, musicals, and live televised performances featuring authors and performers with family backgrounds from across the Caribbean. She also moves beyond solely professional creative writers to include work by public figures such as Sonia Sotomayor, Roxane Gay, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, for example. While Lewis concentrates mainly on traditional African American writers from the eighteenth through the twenty-first century, including Phyllis Wheatley, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Zora Neale Hurston, Jacqueline Woodson, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Tayari Jones, she examines a diverse genre set as well. Memoirs, anthologies, images, visual albums, and even paintings are also key features of *Light and Legacies*. No matter the type of text under exploration, Halloran's and Lewis's literary and cultural criticism publications can be placed in conversation with one another about both the successes and continued fights for full liberation among African Americans and Caribbean Americans and their rights to belong and have safe, meaningful lived experiences in the US.

Through various modes of storytelling, Halloran and Lewis strategically interweave a political dimension throughout their work to explore how some African Americans and Caribbean Americans are keenly aware of elusive promises of freedom and equal access to opportunities. This should not be surprising given the adversarial history of the status of African Americans and Caribbean Americans with the US political system. Halloran opens her book with a chapter on what she calls political campaign books and civic memoirs (also known as political memoirs). Life writing, the umbrella under which these texts fall, has been growing over the past couple of decades. Memoirs by public intellectuals and prominent figures associated with the political arena regularly appear on national best seller lists. Halloran analyzes some of these books, notably self-penned writings by five public servants who have Caribbean ancestry: Vice President Kamala Harris (Jamaica),

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Ted Cruz (Cuba), Marco Rubio (Cuba), Sotomayor (Puerto Rico), and Karine Jean-Pierre (Haiti). Long before these books appeared, some of the earliest political memoirs were published for consumption by general audiences who were eager to gain insight into behind-the-scenes accounts, and past US presidents and cabinet members were the authors providing the fodder. Scholars such as Anthea Taylor continue to write about this category of memoirs while scholars such as Julie Rak, Shanna Greene Benjamin, Ina C. Seethaler, and Tanja Reiffenrath write on memoirs more broadly.

Using autotopography as a critical lens and underscoring the performative aspects of the memoirs, Halloran emphasizes connections between the writers' journeys of higher education and their personal and political sense of belonging in the US. While tales of their college experiences and the establishment of their careers "cast their adult lives as all-American" (39), their accounts of their formative years describe "the hybrid immigrant child" (39), leading readers and constituents to glimpse into their upbringing and their family's role in their choice to pursue higher education. Even as Halloran critiques these political works to different extents, the focus in her book ranges from discussing former presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump to lesser-known figures associated with presidential administrations. At the book's close, Halloran discusses the self-sabotaging behavior of some Americans with Caribbean heritage and their participation in excluding or helping to exclude marginalized groups.

Contesting such people and aspects of our political system that have facilitated or continue to facilitate limiting the freedom of marginalized people, particularly those of African descent, Lewis's *Light and Legacies* ambitiously undertakes to explain US-historical moments of Black girlhood and Black communities in general. The inclusion of names of political figures and renowned writers such as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nina Simone help forward Lewis's overarching narrative of the fervent push for equality across time periods and the relentlessness of Black trailblazers. The theoretical foundation for the book centers on the three principles of "Live," "Shine," and "Play" (26), and Lewis pays homage to several scholars whose texts are in dialogue with hers, including Bettina Love, Ruth Nicole Brown, Aria Halliday, Kyra Gaunt, and Aimee Meredith Cox. Lewis's text references an overabundance of names, sources, and events. Though it is not the case for every reference, some references lend a strong hand to the steering of the book's various discussions. Commonplace hashtags such as #SayHerName, #BlackGirlsMatter, and #BlackGirlMagic, for instance, serve as guideposts that help attune readers' focus to the text's larger narrative as it simultaneously takes

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readers on explorations of a range of topics related to Black women's and girls' oftentimes vexed positionality.

As in Halloran's argument, Vice President Harris makes an important appearance in Lewis's study where she emerges as the culmination of centuries-long battles over the place of Black women and girls in this nation. One of Lewis's early chapters, "Move: Girlhood and Social Protest" presents a significant and very interesting part of US history concerning children's roles in movements against discrimination and second-class citizenship. The chapter opens with analysis of the art piece "That Little Girl Was Me" by Bria Goeller that recreates Norman Rockwell's "The Problem We All Live With" and that positions Harris's image across from a shadow of Ruby Bridges as a little girl desegregating her Louisiana elementary school. Considering works that reference or respond to popular historical events of which many Americans are aware, such as Black children integrating their schools (e.g., the Little Rock Nine), boldly refusing to give up their seats to whites (Claudette Colvin), and participating in organized protests, including the Children's March in 1963 among other activities, Lewis analyzes non-fiction literary texts by Elaine Brown, Shakur, and Jo Ann Allen Boyce as well as fiction and poetry by Nikki Giovanni, Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Ntozake Shange. She focuses on the coming-of-age aspects of the writings, and she explains that some writers and activists "return to their stages of girlhood to think about who they were and who taught them to stand in the strength of their identities" (75). Lewis articulates the importance of these women being taught as young girls inside of their homes and communities that they belong, despite society—backed by laws—telling them otherwise.

In fulfilling their goals to uplift African American and Caribbean American communities and advocating for their fair inclusion in US society, Halloran and Lewis dedicate sections of their books to intimate details about young children and how they navigate their worlds. There are few books more childlike than picture books, and Halloran spends an entire chapter on this subject. She delineates general similarities between the books that include having a bicultural, and usually bilingual, child protagonist and elements about the protagonist's (or the family of the protagonist's) immigration story. Opening with information about how this genre of writing seeks to capture the attention of the child and the adult who reads the book to the child helps lay the foundation of her critique of the picture books' written and visual narratives. Representing the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Jamaica, the picture books by Junot Díaz, Sotomayor, Edwidge Danticat, Sandra L. Richards, and Monica Gunning share a theme of education with the political books Halloran analyzes at the outset of

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her argument. Here education is key to exploring “how schools’ and universities’ credentialing function serves as a vetting mechanism through which children and young adults are socialized into the complex public world of American society” (69). Through schooling experiences, young children in elementary school-age ranges “integrate their familial and academic lives into a larger narrative of national belonging” (69) in a way that is different from older school age children who have a level of independence concerning their choices. Halloran’s close reading of the picture books and their images reveal that the authors do not shy away from hard subjects such as bullying, serious illness, difficulties navigating dual cultures, family separation, and even death; instead, they lean into such topics and open avenues for a diversity of audiences to relate to the protagonists’ determination to find “a place and way to belong within the United States” (81).

Headlines about the deaths of Black children—who clearly are not able to choose how to shape their own destinies—and the increased attention to these deaths as a result of the Movement for Black Lives (also known as the Black Lives Matter Movement) are a part of a long, troubled legacy stemming from the lack of protection, safety, respect, and recognition of Black children within the US. Literature about Black children’s behavior and the unspoken rules by which they must abide to survive receives crucial attention in Lewis’s *Light and Legacies*. Early in her study, Lewis observes that the “conduct narrative” is “one of the earliest and most persistent tropes about Black children, including girls, and [it] is not new but is a consistent narrative of survival” (8). The conduct narrative exists to make Black children behave in a publicly acceptable manner that tries to keep them, literally, from endangering their lives, a source of protection that is often also a source of trauma, as Lewis explains. In the context of Lewis’s study, the “disciplinary narrative” is about the behavior of Black children as well, and it delivers a more overtly punitive lesson as a result of unacceptable behavior. Other scholars such as Nazera Sadiq Wright also discuss black girlhood and narrate various practices designed to protect Black children even as such practices also cause harm. Moreover, Lewis interrogates words such as “play” and “make-believe” in her discussion of behavior manuals because of the high stakes when it comes to Black children playing and make-believing (pretending). She skillfully examines these matters when considering the institution of slavery and the slave narrative genre. In Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), play and make-believe prepared Jacobs to survive seven years in an attic as an enslaved person and eventually gain her freedom in the North. Hence, play and make-believe became a part of a survival skillset.

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Ultimately, Halloran and Lewis illuminate contemporary experiences of belonging for African Americans and Caribbean Americans and expose the reality that the journey and its accompanying workload is still ongoing. They ask readers to contemplate how the readers themselves feel they belong (or what they believe is their place) in US society and what can be done to expand other people's thoughts of belonging.

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Digitizing Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha in the Twenty-First Century, edited by Teresa M. Towner, University of Virginia Press, 2022, 230 pp. \$35.00 (paper).

In a certain sense, few authors are less digital than William Faulkner: the baroque prose, the plantation houses decaying into dust, the characters obsessed with a haunting, and sometimes fetid, oldness. And yet this milieu is nevertheless the subject of one of the most ambitious and useful digital humanities projects on American Literature, the University of Virginia's Digital Yoknapatawpha project (hereafter DY; www.faulkner.iath.virginia.edu). Virginia was a pioneer in the early days of digital humanities, and some will remember the oodles of wonderful material once accessible through its online E-Text project, which ran from 1992 to 2007. Creator Stephen Railton had experimented with online resources dedicated to Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe before the challenges of teaching Faulkner led him to undertake a digital chronology for *Absalom, Absalom!* This evolved into a full-fledged Faulkner site now thirteen years in the making, involving dozens of collaborators. It is an invaluable and still growing resource, useful for students, researchers, teachers, and lay readers alike. In the spirit of full disclosure, I am listed as a collaborating teacher for DY, and I use it the classroom. I love to show my students its maps, timelines, manuscript pages, and even videos to help with students' own discoveries of Faulkner. My favorite part, however, is playing them audio clips of him discussing his own work, which prove just as fascinating, frustrating,

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and amusing as you might expect. DY stands as an exemplar of what digital humanities can do, and *Digitizing Faulkner* is a compelling collection of essays reflecting on the project's growth and potential.

Part of this potential is pedagogical. Today the challenge of teaching Faulkner has doubled. Undergraduates have always been flummoxed at first, but this generation are digital readers and so possess a special frustration with the patience and endurance Faulkner requires. So many of them now believe that meaning should be accessible and straightforward as a matter of course, and so *As I Lay Dying* can seem almost an outrage. Teaching Faulkner today, then, means making his writing accessible to digital readers, and the work described in *Digitizing Faulkner* represents a priceless contribution to that arguably existential errand for Faulkner studies. Railton notes that “twenty-first-century students have a lot more practice with electronic technology than with modern literature” and argues that digital humanities involves “the opportunity to meet students where they already are” (212). The challenge, of course, is to avoid the trap of creating a “substitute for reading Faulkner” (212). In her introduction, editor Teresa Towner insists that DY is “not a sort of high-tech CliffsNotes” (7) but instead a supplement and aid to reading—and one students really do need. Ren Denton’s chapter takes up this call, discussing how digital tools can help bring Faulkner to life, especially through active, activity-based learning, and even offers a handy sample assignment on “Barn Burning” using DY (187).

Digitizing Faulkner also maps out what could prove a new avenue—or interstate—for Faulkner research. Towner notes that “[e]ach of the contributors has found new ways of seeing Yoknapatawpha by virtue of looking digitally” (7), and it is rare to see in one place such a propitious set of new approaches to an established author. Johannes Burgers contributes an eye-opening Franco Moretti-style distant reading of Yoknapatawpha: “[b]y spatializing an entire corpus, patterns are revealed that in a strict chronological reading of an oeuvre are hidden,” giving us a chance to move beyond a teleological vision of Faulkner’s career. “DY has given users a publication date,” Burgers suggests provocatively, “not so that they remember it, but that they might forget it” (29). Ben Robbins offers an important account of how trauma is represented (and *not* represented) in *Sanctuary*, by “mapping . . . each narrative mode” (84) in order to explore the way DY “speculatively visualizes modernist narratives” (101); one result is that the novel’s settings are not so much the background against which trauma occurs but a narrative geography shaped by trauma itself. And John Michael Corrigan’s reading of *The Hamlet* through complex systems theory might be the collection’s most audacious attempt at a data-driven ap-

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proach to Faulkner; his suggestion that it is a novel about the “social body” (as opposed to traditional protagonists and antagonists) “allows us to recognize the ways in which Faulkner anticipated our own information age with its sprawling networks and hyper-connectivity” (148).

Indeed, a short review could never account for the breadth of insights discoverable in this volume or the larger project it describes, so a few further representative tidbits will have to suffice as evidence of their fascinating utility:

- Christopher Reiger notes that, all told, Faulkner created some 3,725 unique characters (62). If you count recurring characters and real-world individuals mentioned in the corpus, such as the Harvard Crew Team or Babe Ruth, the figure is 4,983 (53).
- At press time, the DY team had recorded 8,433 particular events in all of Faulkner’s written work (30). As Burgers notes, the most common type of location for a plot event in Faulkner is a mansion (1,083 distinct events), whereas cabins (usually inhabited by black characters) appear 369 times. 602 events take place in the Courthouse Square of Oxford, while 307 take place on farms. Just 5 places (.2 percent of the total) are marked as exclusively indigenous (17-18).
- According to Rieger, “220 characters die in the narrative events of a Faulkner text (*Absalom* has the most deaths). However, only twenty characters are born across all the Yoknapatawpha short stories and novels” (60)—a stark reminder that the county is very much a place returning to dust.
- There is no consistent geographical course for the flooded river the Bundrens must cross in *As I Lay Dying*, especially in relation to Faulkner’s own 1936 map of Yoknapatawpha. I once discovered this live, so to speak, while teaching the novel, much to the amusement of my students. They did not, however, buy my subsequent pivot to the idea that Faulkner wants *us* to be as lost as his characters, although I wish I could have shown them Jennie Joiner’s deft account of how Darl and Cash’s reading of the landscape connects them to us as readers of the novel (46).
- One translation of Yoknapatawpha (in Chickasaw “*yaaki* (land or earth) and *pataffi/patafa* (to cut open or disembowel)”) might be “disemboweled land,” as Melanie Benson Taylor points out in her judicious exploration of the ten-

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sions between DY's cartographic and empiricist impulses, Faulkner's fiction itself, and indigenous conceptions of identity, time, and place (151).

Finally, the book and the project it documents pose fascinating questions for further research into the idea of setting itself. Owing to surging interest in speculative fiction, scholars are increasingly exploring "worldbuilding" as a narrative form, and just where Yoknapatawpha fits into this pattern is worth pondering. At one level, this is a technical question, even a technicality: *did* Faulkner consider the county a consistent and intercompatible shared world between all of his stories, a sort of cinematic universe with lore (to use the terms our students might) *avant la lettre*? The contributors to *Digitizing Faulkner* sometimes think so—Reiger calls Yoknapatawpha "Faulkner's fictional universe" (52)—and sometimes do not: Erin Penner contends that "DY is perhaps most useful as a check on readers' impulses to create their own consistent view of Yoknapatawpha at great cost to the particularities of individual Faulkner works" (106). But this just brings further questions: how does Yoknapatawpha compare to other shared settings—from Thomas Hardy's Middlesex to Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg to J.R.R. Tolkien's fascinatingly contemporaneous Middle Earth—meta-settings that we might call, following Jay Watson following Gerard Genette, "paranarratives" (115)? That is: could this work lead to the recognition that in Faulkner (or in anyone?) the text includes "data" that is in some sense outside of or beside what is narrated—a rhizomatic hermeneutics in which the map both precedes and exceeds the story whose settings it documents? Indeed, one effect of DY and *Digitizing Faulkner* might ultimately lie in the big, surprisingly non-digital questions they bring forth about intertextuality, intention, and narrative. Faulkner, of course, was fond of claiming the status of an authorial master of sorts, "sole owner and proprietor"—the planter-patriarch recreated in and through fiction, albeit often ironically. But perhaps the data tell different stories.

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Inclusive College Classrooms: Teaching Methods for Diverse Learners, by Lauren S. Cardon and Anne-Marie Womack, Routledge, 2023, xiv + 240 pp. \$39.95 (paper).

Although many instructors have struggled toward the goal of inclusive classrooms for quite some time, the advent of COVID-19 forced them to push forward pedagogically, to reconsider their efforts, and to make changes that allowed different types of learning for a diverse group of students. That is why *Inclusive College Classrooms: Teaching Methods for Diverse Learners* is a timely and exigent read. In this book, Lauren S. Cardon and Anne-Marie Womack create an interactive artifact that offers concrete ways to improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in the classroom in a unique way that sometimes strays from the normal narrative of best practices. They break the book into seven sections or pedagogical moves: Lecture, Flipped, Seminar, Group Work, Inquiry-Based Learning, Experiential Learning, and Inclusive Assessment. Each author takes one of these issues and provides definitions, pros and cons, as well as their personal experiences to help any instructor develop a pedagogy that works for both them and their students. The book differs from others in the organization of each chapter. Specifically, the chapters are arranged as a guide for instructors: they begin by defining the concept and offering a chart of pros and cons; they then speak to how this concept can create a more inclusive experience while troubleshooting potential problems and providing real-life examples; scattered throughout, they provide “Academic Continuity Tips,” which help explain methods to complete the concept if the class must move online; they then offer sample lesson plans from a variety of fields before ending with a list of faculty questions to encourage self-reflection and discussion among instructors and departments. This is not your typical read: it encourages thought, engagement, and a re-thinking of the ways instructors are running their classrooms.

The book arose from a series of conversations and collaborations with other faculty members, which is part of the reason why the faculty questions at the end of each chapter are so important as they encourage instructors to recreate this type of knowledge by engaging with

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themselves and others. The authors also warn of potential challenges, including the lack of training, resources, and often support for more inclusive teaching; the additional labor/emotional labor that this type of teaching requires; and instructor and student hesitancy to implement these new ideas. They attempt to overcome this by offering almost 200 sample lessons; however, they admit themselves that “our project does not focus on how *institutions* can promote inclusion” despite the fact that “exclusion is a systemic problem” (5). In addition, they acknowledge that their work “has been predominantly at PWIs [Predominately White Institutions]” and that their ideas “may not apply to the work being done at MSIs [Minority Serving Institutions]. Thus, they acknowledge that “there is no single checklist to follow” and “inclusive teaching is contextual” (5).

The chapters examine Cardon and Womack’s pedagogical moves and explore how to make them more inclusive, beginning with “Lecture” (chapter 2), written by Cardon. Arguably the most problematic inclusive pedagogy, lecture, defined by Cardon, is “an instructor verbally communicating knowledge to a group of students” (17). This type of teaching fails to meet the authors’ definition of inclusive teaching as something that provides access, agency, and community for a vast array of students: neurodiverse learners, people with hearing impairment, visual learners, and people from different communities or cultures, to name a few. It also takes away student agency, situating them as passive learners rather than active participants in their own education. Therefore, Cardon advises against the lecture format and encourages lecture as a method, meaning that continuous lectures should be stopped, and other types of pedagogical learning (e.g., group work or experiential learning) should be added to the lecture format. Although perhaps difficult for some instructors, courses, or institutions, these ideas bring to the forefront the importance of keeping students’ attention, allowing them agency, and opening up opportunities for community and representation through diverse voices, readings, and research.

In chapter 3, Womack explores the idea of a flipped classroom, which “moves the direct instruction to homework, and active work to the classroom” (45). The benefits of this type of pedagogy include allowing students to begin critically thinking on their own and offering the opportunity for active work in the classroom. Students often remain more engaged because they have access to instructor support, and the instructor can individualize the class, focusing on areas in which students are having difficulties. This type of classroom increases inclusivity by allowing the students to each have a voice as the instructor works around the class, and by allowing agency, collaboration, and

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community. Womack creates a strong argument for this type of class; however, it might be difficult for very complicated or content-heavy subjects, and it completely relies on the students watching/reading/engaging in the content before class.

Cardon then focuses in chapter 4 on the seminar, a discussion-based class. Seminars are often difficult because they depend on students completing the pre-work and being willing to discuss it in class. This can lead to a lack of representation as some students may be more comfortable speaking. Cardon offers several workarounds for this, including providing access by allowing different types of participation (writing down thoughts, for example), assigning diverse types of readings or pre-work, giving students agency to control a discussion, and creating community as the students work together to decipher material.

Cardon next moves on to chapter 5, “Group Work,” focusing on how to keep students engaged, challenged, and represented. In order to successfully implement group work, Cardon recommends improving access by allowing students to participate in different ways, such as by writing down ideas. She also suggests having students assign roles in each group (e.g., scribe, speaker, etc) further allowing agency and engagement for students. By encouraging group work, Cardon believes instructors can enhance the classroom experience and inclusion by fostering critical thinking, allowing students to teach each other, offering agency and choice in how to participate, and providing instructor support for each of the groups.

Chapter 6, “Inquiry-Based Learning” by Womack encourages instructors to engage in “a learner-centered active learning pedagogy in which students first work on problems to figure out principles instead of learning principles that they then apply to problems” (139). Relying on ideas founded in constructivism, Womack believes that students use prior knowledge to construct new knowledge, resulting in a deeper learning and understanding of the subject (140). In this chapter, the sample lessons really help to explain the process. For example, one lesson plan is about a geology class that offers rock samples and has students characterize them before they learn about different types of rocks (146). By encouraging students to critically think, this method helps students become more receptive to the terms and factual content of the lesson. Inclusion occurs because no one feels that they know less than other people—and they have access, agency, and the expectation that mistakes will be made without judgement. This type of learning, while perhaps not ideal for every class situation, encourages student analysis, and allows the instructor to then implement other pedagogical moves such as a short lecture or group work all while increasing student retention of knowledge.

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Chapter 7, “Experiential Learning,” has many similarities to inquiry-based learning: students actively work to discover something. In this chapter, Cardon describes experiential learning as learning by doing and offers the example of a food writing class in which students completed many formats of food writing (blogs, yelp, etc) while engaging with restaurants, chefs, and food. As Cardon taught the class, she points out that she learned more about accessibility—did a restaurant have wheelchair access? What about food allergies? In other words, this class pushed her to consider DEI in experiential learning. To increase DEI in the classroom, she argues for thinking about accessibility while planning the experience (and being ready to pivot if other accommodations are needed), having a basic understanding of what students already know, and providing diverse activities or readings. Not only do students learn through this pedagogical tool, but they also see practical applications and have more opportunities for inclusion.

Finally, Cardon focuses the last chapter on every instructor’s favorite topic—assessment. In this chapter, she first differentiates assessment as “the means by which students demonstrate their learning” from grading as “the instructor’s evaluation of student’s work according to class standards such as a grading rubric or scale of 0-100 and A-F” (193). Emphasizing that assessment focuses on learning while grading focuses on “standards and conventions (193), Cardon encourages many different forms of assessment rather than a focus on grading. For example, she suggests using the Universal Design for Learning “with the key principle of multiple means of expression” (196), allowing students to choose mediums and topics and different ways to participate, increasing inclusion. In addition, she suggests low-stakes assignments to measure student learning and provide feedback without the stress of the conventional grading system. Throughout, she underscores that constructive feedback is crucial, suggesting some teachers might use revision assignments or portfolios to truly see student progression and measure learning while encouraging student reflection assignments. Another possibility for inclusive assessment is contract grading, which takes into account the work done by students rather than the final product (e.g., someone who went to a fancy high school might write a grammatically correct paper quickly, while someone without that knowledge may spend twenty hours, writing, revising, and going to the writing center). Typically, contract grading gives students a certain grade just for completing (e.g., a B) and then a higher grade for exceptional work. Finally, she mentions specifications grading, which includes using a pass/fail type system, and ungrading in which students assign themselves final grades. Each of these options allows students to bypass standard conventions and the stress of an A and offers more

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inclusion; however, these are not all institutionally possible, and many instructors and even students may be uncomfortable with them.

While different from other research books I have read about inclusivity in the classroom, this book stands out because of its practical suggestions, lesson plans, and faculty discussions. In addition, the authors provide appendices with ways to make videos accessible, a team charter for group work, an annotated grading policy, potential class itineraries, a bullet-pointed summary of lesson planning strategies, and a bullet-pointed list of inclusive strategies. The book has a strong foundation with a considerable number of scholarly articles/books to back up ideas, information from student feedback, research from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and principles from the Universal Design for Learning. The limitations or critiques of the book are addressed by the authors in the introduction: they do not offer ways to implement systemic change to institutions, and not all methods will work for all courses or institutions. Rather, they pose their chapters as suggestions, as mix and match options, giving sample lesson plans to illustrate a variety of possibilities. While Cardon and Womack's text serves as an extraordinary resource, my only critique would be a need for more examples of how to deal with large lecture halls or particularly content-heavy classes that potentially don't have time for these learning activities. In the future, a book or discussion about ways to implement some of these ideas in institutions that offer little to no flexibility will be crucial for more instructors to create inclusive classrooms. In the meantime, instructors can take ideas from the book, the lesson plans, and the faculty discussions to have meaningful discussions and enact the changes they are able to make within each classroom. In effect, I come full circle to the authors' statement that "inclusive teaching is contextual. There is no single checklist to follow" because "instructors continually face new conditions, new students, and new knowledge" (5). Cardon and Womack offer hope while acknowledging the limitations, naming "Inclusive teaching as both a process and a practice" (5).

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