

Calliope



California State University, Bakersfield
Department of English

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In Memoriam

Jason Quinn Kelly

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Guidelines for Contributors

Contributions in all areas of literary criticism are warmly welcomed. Essays must have the recommendations of a professor. Submission of a paper to this journal will be taken to imply that it represents original work. Essays should conform to the current MLA citation system. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions as needed for publication.

Submission instructions and guidelines can be found on the university website, English Department's homepage: <http://www.csub.edu/english/Calliope%201/index.html>

All correspondence concerning editorial matters – inquiries regarding suitable topics, length of manuscripts, reviews, etc. – should be sent directly to the editor:

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Introduction

This is the twelfth issue of *Calliope*, an annual publication that features some of the best work in literary theory and criticism by undergraduates and graduates in the Department of English at California State University, Bakersfield.

This issue includes thirteen original essays covering a wide range of literature from Shakespeare and Milton to Maya Angelou and Agha Shahid Ali. There are also two essays on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, three essays on Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, and two reviews.

The cover design incorporates a reproduction of Guiseppe Fagnani's handmade oil painting called *Calliope, Muse of Epic Poetry* (1869).

The issue is dedicated to the memory of Jason Quinn Kelly, Helen Louise Hawk Honors Program student and double major in English and Biology.

Jason Quinn Kelly

Environmentalism and Cultural Bias in “Postcard from Kashmir”

Agha Shahid Ali’s “Postcard from Kashmir” is a seemingly simple poem based on a simple premise: how one would react if one received a postcard with images often stylized and designed to promote tourism from one’s own home country. Kashmir, Ali’s home, is a geographic region containing the countries of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir is a territory split up amongst the three nations of China, India, and Pakistan. Constant fighting, poverty, and strife fill the nation with territorial disputes and a massive cultural and economic divide separates the territories (Kanth 35). Having left Kashmir in 1976, Ali presents an idealized perspective on his home that conflicts with the actuality of its geopolitical situation. The speaker of the poem allows his emotions and cultural bias—characterized by an inherent nostalgia tied to his roots in his native Kashmir—and presents an idealized environment, using imagery that mimics the stylization found in postcards.

In a masterful ekphrasis that mimics the visual stylization of an image in a postcard, Ali conveys an almost photographic perspective of home. With self-awareness, Ali presents a conflicting, almost ironic opposition. He utilizes an extended metaphor from photography to illustrate an idealized view of his home. But he knows that upon his return to Kashmir, his memory will be out of focus, the picture “undeveloped,” missing crucial detail, and fixated on the past, as opposed to the current truth of the country itself (l. 11-14).

Interestingly, Ali is aware that any idealization of Kashmir is missing something. Dazzled by the miniscule, four-by-six inch card, Ali acknowledges that he “always loved neatness” (l. 4), his home “a neat four by six inches” that “shrinks into [his] mailbox” (l. 1-2). In the line that follows, Ali expresses a tacit longing, knowing that the shrunken Himalayas in the picture are really

not what he remembers, yet he can remember nothing else (l. 3-4).

Ali's stylization and idealization of the Kashmir of his memory is no different from the stylization of the postcard in his mailbox. Both are designed to feature the natural beauty of the country, what it would be like, and once was, without war, strife, or pollution. Ali's poem, though undeniably free-form, bears many similarities to a love poem, from the length of lines to the almost confession-like declaration of love for his country. However, in a sharp deconstruction, Ali suddenly acknowledges his loss of connection with Kashmir, the country of his birth, and his idealization of a country he no longer remembers well, describing his whole perspective to the country as an "undeveloped" photo (l. 13-14).

Ali concludes that upon returning home, the water of the Jhelum River, will be but a poor imitation of what the postcard displays (l. 6-9). In contrast to reality, the Jhelum is and has been terribly polluted, stricken by agricultural waste and military debris (Shah 163), but the postcard presents it as clear, of an "ultramarine" color. Ali not only presents the concept of cultural bias that affects memory and distorts his perspective of Kashmir, but also admits to the idealized environment of the postcard, a crisp, clear image, designed to promote tourism, as being "the closest / [he'll] ever be to home" (l. 5-6). In this poem, Ali's bias toward his native culture has influenced him to keep an idealized image of Kashmir, free of warfare, famine, pollution, and territorial disputes, as a more accurate representation of reality than reality itself.

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Milton's Latent Queerness: A Theoretical Reading of the Paradise Cycle

John Milton, despite being a novelist and poet rather than a theologian, has influenced the Catholic Church's inward mythology regarding angels, demons, and even marriage. His text, focused on the Fall of both angels and humanity, draws on Catholic Tradition and deep Canon, as well as Jewish Talmudic concepts and, perhaps unintentionally, Muslim concepts of Satan . While his beliefs have not, unlike Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, influenced formal Catholic theology, he absolutely gave us the imagery of angels and demons that surround Catholic superstition and mysticism. Like Dante, Milton's religious writing lies outside the explicit canon but has certainly influenced our tradition, and in fact holds a valid argument for affirmation of queerness. Milton's beliefs are more than privately held beliefs. His prior work, *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, influenced personal belief about divorce within Christian communities, even as the act is still considered immoral and to be abhorred. Milton's address to the Westminster Assembly of Divines regarding divorce influenced their approval of divorce under certain circumstances. His argument, based in both Biblically and personally influenced theology, was outside of religious norm, yet impacted his own religious contemporaries and their decision. Thus, Milton's views can be seen as a valid, as well as controversial, interpretation of scripture and canon.

While Milton ascribes to a form of complementarianism, the idea that man and woman were created to perfectly complement each other, he does not weaponize such a theory against homosexuality. Rather, he presents a nuanced and theologically sound argument for homosexuality as not only a valid but even holy option. While the modern church still ignores theologically sound arguments for affirmation of homosexuality, Milton was subtly giving credence to these arguments as early as 1666. Queerness, while broadly meaning not-straight and/or not cisgender, refers to fluidity and a transgressive nature that centers experiences, attractions, and identities outside the binary. Milton, in fact, presents angels as inherently queer and queer humans as still

worthy of honor.

The first way Milton engages with queerness is by musing, through his mouthpiece Adam, as to why women were even created at all. Adam asks,

O why did God,
Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
With Spirits Masculine, create at last
This novelty on Earth, this fair defect
Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
With Men as Angels without Feminine
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? (Book X, 888-895)

He is, through Adam, musing as to why God created women. This “novelty” and “fair defect / Of Nature” rather than making humans all Masculine/between Men. This would of course necessitate some form of queer, man-on-man relationships on Earth that would be Divinely ordained. The idea of Heaven being populated with entirely Masculine beings—that is to say, all the angels are male--is also interesting in its implications. Is Milton here wishing for a biological reality with no women, one which reflects the apparent state of Heaven? As he was married three times to women and we're unsure of his orientation, this could just reflect the misogyny of the time, based on Eve-blaming for the Fall. However, the intimation that it was Adam's weak, human masculinity, “From Man's effeminate slackness [weakness] it begins” (XI.634), and not Eve's inherent flaws, that is, womanhood, that led to the fall is impossible to ignore. I would posit that this indicates androphilia in Milton's ideal--that manhood is the perfect form of being, that Angels choose to remain Masculine in Heaven to reflect the image of the Father-Male-God. This continuation of Aristotelian belief regarding manhood as perfection with womanhood being flawed inherently is cemented in the continuous gendering of God and Angels as masculine. Gender is where things get a little complicated, though, Milton refers to Angels as both Mascu-

line and androgynous. Gender and sex are, oddly enough considering the date of the text, not the same; they are separate, as Spirits (that is, Angels and Demons and the rest of the non-human humanoid concepts such as Night) can shift their Sex to reflect their “Essence,” a word which I believe contextually refers to internal gender:

For Spirits when they please
Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft
And uncompounded is their Essence pure
Not ti'd or manacl'd with joynt or limb (423-6, emphasis added).

Are we then to assume that Angels, as they are Spirits, can and do know their gender and choose their sexual being? That gender and sex are not inextricably locked together in a biological certainty that humans echo? This concept is a cornerstone of modern queer and transgender theory and it is perhaps shocking to see it in the context of angelic beings. However, we return to this again and again within the text. Spirits choose their shape--or sex--to “execute their aerie purposes/ And works of love or enmity fulfill” (430), and “when they please” (423). Thus, it can be posited that if angels are representing a particular gender, such as Male, it is because of their choice to do so. This is radical in its suggestion that angels are both not-inherently-gendered and choosing to be Masculine. This is not, it must be noted, an implication that angels can or do simply shift their bodies to conform to heteronormative standards; rather, it seems that this furthers the queerness of angelic identities, as the angels can choose other sexes, and are choosing to present as masculine/male. This is freeing: they can choose to be whichever sex they identify with (thus, presentation and identity are more important than physical form). It seems that the angels are intrinsically masculine and shift their appearance and form accordingly.

Perhaps this discussion of form and presentation is too hypothetical, as angels are not bodied beings, yet they absolutely engage in sexual activity. Adam tells Raphael, “Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how their Love / Express they” (VII.1253-4). Raphael blushes, which indicates something intimate that must occur between angels that Raphael himself has experienced.

This is a stunning revelation, that Raphael, second of all archangels, highest and purest, has had experiences that make him blush to speak of openly. Adam is asking for specifics: “do they [Angels] mix / Irradiance, virtual, or immediate touch?” (VII.1253-4). This context, while obviously referring to eroticism and sexuality, is perhaps what makes Raphael blush. However, rather than brushing it off with an easy “angels don’t do such things,” Raphael explains in detail that there is some form of erotic expression between angels, saying,

...we enjoy / In eminence, and obstacle find none
Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars;
Easier than air with Air, if Spirits embrace,
Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure
Desiring; nor restrain’d conveyance need
As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul (VII.1260-6, emphasis added).

Let us unpack this more in full: The angels “enjoy / in eminence,” or, indulge in pleasure in the highest plane, heaven, or the most perfect state of being. “Membrane” and “limb” are not obstacles to sexual expression, or, in modern language, sexuality is made of more than a hymen breaking and phallic penetration. This answers any questions as to how the Church’s view on sodomy fits here --because despite being sexual and androphilic, angel sexuality is perhaps too formless to be interpreted as sodomy. Sexual ecstasy occurs on a heavenly plane, between beings who, again, are masculine in expression and formless in body--no obstacle exists between their erotic experience, their subversive “Union.” Even the use of the word “union” must be addressed, as in a Biblical context the term consistently refers to the Christian conceptualization of marriage-man and wife, engaging in conjugal relations by which, to quote the Catechism, the “marriage bonds are sanctified.” Sexuality within marriage is seen as a holy good for the sole purpose of procreation. However, if angels are solely created by God, and thus do not need to procreate, why would they engage in sexual acts if not solely for pleasure? What does this say

about Milton's view of human sexuality, if we are merely emulating heaven? It seems impossible not to see sex for pleasure as blessed in this interpretation. Also important is the emphasis of "Pure with Pure," of angel with angel. Let us not forget that Angels are coded as Masculine, and that Raphael in particular reads as Masculine. Thus, we must read a queerness into this scene, an androphilic sexuality between angels that must by definition be ordained by God. If total union is considered pure within the guidelines of the church, then angels will be engaging in the "ultimate sexual union of complete and utter oneness of being" (Herath 2017).

It is important to briefly address the humans in Milton's world as well as the angels. Adam and Eve obviously have a tumultuous relationship. They are created for and from each other, and yet Adam is dissatisfied. This echoes the unfortunate ancient view of women being inferior beings, but doing so brings up echoes of male/male idealized relationships. Milton references Alexander the Great, a hero whose homosexuality was part of his humanity. His flaws were not based in his orientation—that is to say, his queerness did not make him inherently sinful. Satan is not revelling in their queerness as a path to having particular sinners, but rather comes off as annoyed that the standard sexual temptation of young women did not work (*Paradise Regained*, II.196-200). He is used as an example for temptation being rather difficult work for the demons to attempt. The temptation of Christ is also presented as gender-neutral. Satan's temptation of Christ is presented as a banquet not only of food but of all earthly temptations. Belial's suggestion to "Set woman in [Christ's] eye" (2.153) is disregarded, in favor of a genderless series of temptations, of androgynous nymphs, beautiful ladies, and "tall stripling youths rich clad, of fairer hue / Than Ganymede or Hylas" (2.352-53). Even more interesting is that Christ does not reject these delights and their ends as sinful by nature, but only because they come from Satan. He can get these delights himself, without taking fruit from the forbidden hand--an image which is itself erotic. Temptation is framed as leaning towards excess, not towards absolute immorality.

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Fabiola Madrigal

Reclaiming the Body: Stopping the Cycle of Self-Castration in

Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk*

Women's sexuality often is controlled and policed, restricting what little bodily autonomy a woman may have. Without control of the body, there can be no exploration of ability, sexuality, and potential. Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* explores this concept of separation from the body. She claims that a woman's speech is informed by her body; without her body she does not have a voice in the patriarchal sphere of writing. Moreover, most women abide by the concept of motherhood within her. She has the possibility of creation from a non-phallic source, and she possesses "at least a little of that good mother's milk" (Cixous 9). From that reclaiming of self a woman can break free from the restrictions placed upon her by the patriarchy. Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* builds upon these ideas. By interlacing the text with the myth of the Medusa, Levy explores how the blurring of boundaries of identity brought about by the reclaiming of one's body can combat the threat of castration and transform the disconnection stemming from self-hatred into self-love.

At the beginning of the book, Sofia is fractured, cut off from her body, life, and voice. She is castrated from the good in her own body. This is represented by her broken laptop. Sofia, notes that if her computer "is broken, so am I" (1). Her laptop is herself, and her laptop is her cosmos. In Cixous' *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous claims that a woman's "libido is cosmic, just as her unconsciousness is worldwide," indicating that a woman is not bound by the same conventions that confine men (17). A man may define his gender and sexuality by his closeness to masculinity, and the presence of a penis; however, a woman does not define herself by one single concept. She is able to occupy several concepts at once; as a woman, "if she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes," that is, always changing (Cixous 17). Sofia's comput-

er, into which she has poured herself, represents her cosmos, her multitudes, and her potential. Levy makes this clear by describing the screensaver as “a purple night sky crowded with stars, and constellations and the Milky Way,” which references the “good mother’s milk” about which Cixous speaks (Levy 1, Cixous 9). However, Sofia is disconnected from her body and from the ability to occupy several concepts at once, which include femininity and masculinity. When she looks at the screen saver, she describes the feeling it elicits as dissociation; she thinks how she “often float[s] out of time,” further cementing the sense of disconnection from her body (Levy 2). This disconnection is also shown after Sofia is stung by a poisonous jellyfish, the medusa, in that she does not realize “that the halter-neck strap of [her] bikini top had broken and [her] bare breasts were juddering up and down as [she] stamped about” in the injury hut (Levy 9). Although she crosses a crowded beach with her breasts free of her bikini top, she becomes aware of her nakedness only belatedly.

Through the sting of the medusa, Sofia begins to come back into her body and into her desire. Sofia can now feel the beginnings of shame over her circumstances in life. Sofia notes that after leaving the injury hut, she feels that her “face was burning up” with shame over her occupation, which she had to disclose in the form that the injury hut attendant gave her (Levy 9). She even states this directly, once more using her laptop as a metaphor for her life: “My laptop is my veil of shame. I hide in it all the time” (Levy 66). This indicates that the broken nature of her life shames her. Also as Sofia spends time with the man in the injury hut, she fixates on his “soft, pink lips,” which she states were “pulsing like a medusa in the middle of his beard” (Levy 3). She describes his lips in a sensual manner, indicating her reawakening sexual desire.

This does not change the fact that Sofia regards desire with trepidation, as the disconnection that separated her from her body and from her sexual desire is unfamiliar and frightening to her. Sofia claims that “the poison from the medusa sting had in turn released some venom that was lurking inside” of her (9). The poison in the medusa is to be feared, which is why people are told to avoid swimming when they are present. This echoes the feeling that arose when she disclosed her occupation, indicating that the feeling is something equally fearsome. Levy compares

the medusa in the ocean with the Medusa of Greek myth, who was beheaded for her desire, and whose desire destroys others. Sofia is then “nervous about jellyfish,” whose poison contains the libido that Sofia has been detached from (Levy 2). She is frightened of the desire that is present within her, the monstrous ability of a “powerful gaze” that “turned anyone who looked into her eyes to stone” (Levy 2). Sofia’s fear of this power also implies that Sofia fears her own power, not just her desire. Yet, she also questions whether or not the mythical Medusa feels “de-feminized” when she was turned into a monster (Levy 66). She associates monstrosity with the inability to embody a single sign, and she particularly associates masculinity with monstrosity because a woman is meant to be feminine, demure, and full of shame. Thus, her sexuality and lack of femininity are monstrous. According to Cixous, a woman in control of her body is able to occupy many identities (9). In this manner, Sophia can conclude that this “is probably why we are all lurking in each other’s sign”; everyone can be both masculine and feminine (Levy 159). In the beginning, Sophia fears both occupying space in the world and the power she may be able to wield once she reconnects with the cosmos within her body. When the sting begins to lessen, Sofia states that “it was a relief” (Levy 22). She fears blurring the boundaries despite the fact that these boundaries only serve to restrict her.

In essence, Sofia avoids responsibility for her life by hiding behind her relationship with her mother; however, this could be attributed to the self-hatred both women have for their own bodies. The two are connected. The self-hatred experienced by the mother bleeds into the daughter, which leads Sofia to claim that her legs and her mother’s legs are one in the same: “My legs are her legs” (Levy 14). Sophia’s boldness, her autonomy, and assertiveness are suppressed by her shame. Yet, Rose’s self-hatred paralyzes them both. Since they share a body, Rose’s self-hatred is present in Sophia’s perception of herself as well, manifesting as fear and shame. This then leads to Sophia’s fear of the medusa and the autonomy that it offers. Sophia uses her “mother like a shield to protect [her]self from making a life” and from the possibility of harm (Levy 111). However, as Sophia returns to her body, she becomes frightened of Rose’s self-hatred and realizes how it harms them both. This is illustrated by how Rose “has a lot of contempt for her body” (Levy 63). She wants to literally amputate parts of her body: “They should just cut off my toes”

(Levy 63). Sophia does not believe her mother to be serious at first. However, later when Rose asks for her legs to be amputated, Sophia panics, for Rose's body is Sophia's body as well. What harm Rose causes to herself will harm Sophia: "her pains are my pains" (181).

However, there are other aspects to their relationship that can be compared. Rose's contempt translates into Sofia's paralyzing guilt. This becomes paralyzing for Sofia. Sofia's life has stalled since she devoted herself to her mother's care. This is because Sofia has assumed her mother's occasional paralysis as her own, which harkens back to the mother within the daughter Cixous speaks about (9). Levy frames this as if Sophia's love for her mother were destructive; however, it is the self-hatred the two harbor for their own bodies that is destructive. Her love for her mother is destructive because she uses her attachment to Rose in order to excuse her disassociation from herself from her own body and her lack of autonomy, reflecting what Cixous says, "a woman without a body" cannot fight for what she desires (8). Sofia's powerlessness is then not her fault, and Sophia becomes "the servant of the militant made, his shadow" (Cixous 8). Here, the shadow is Sophia's mother, and the love that Sophia has for her "is like an axe. It cuts very deep," which is reflective of the punishing nature of their relationship (Levy 99).

It is similar to another relationship found in the myth of the Medusa. Sophia's relationship with her mother parallels the mother-daughter relationship that Athena and Medusa share. According to Silverman, Athena seemed to be "an androgynous figure representing male and female characteristics" (116). Although Rose is not an overtly masculine figure, the fact that she had to assume a masculine role to provide for her daughter frames her as masculine. Moreover, she occupied both the masculine and feminine by assuming both the roles of mother and father; she "was the head of her own small, broken family" (Levy 98). Thus, Rose perceived this as a failure to fully embody a feminine identity. Her failure then led to self-hatred, and she makes Sophia feel "guilty" for her success, "as if the things going right were responsible for the things that went wrong for [her] mother" (Levy 117). Rose punishes her, much as Athena punished Medusa for defiling her temple, or in Sophia and Rose's case, for defiling her sign. Sophia has destroyed her mother's life because she became her "mother's burden," supposedly destroying her feminin-

ity (Levy 25).

Rose's punishment of her daughter is also an attempt to maintain the societal norm of controlling women and diminishing their autonomy. Felson makes note of Athena's beheading of Medusa and using her power as a means of "maintaining cosmic order" (130). Likewise, Rose insults her daughter, calling her "plump" when she refuses to obey (Levy 65). She does this with herself as well. Her desire to cut off her feet is not only a punishment for Sophia, but a manner of punishing herself as well, reflecting the "self-restraint" of Athena by restraining herself from her body by denying her own autonomy. Rose "is not numb. She is acutely sensitive" (Levy 93).

Rose is not the only person that parallels certain aspects of the Medusa myth. Ingrid does as well, for she is representative of Perseus. However, her masculine self demands that Sophia be beheaded. This is indicated by Ingrid's "silver roman sandals," and Levy's description of Ingrid as a warrior, connecting her to masculinity and to Perseus (43, 120). Ingrid, like Sophia, occupies multiple spaces at once. They are reflections of the other. However, Ingrid is less willing to accept uncertainty than Sophia. At first, Sophia is intimidated by Ingrid and her masculine traits. She believes her to be "dangerous" (Levy 34). Sophia fears the blurring of boundaries, such as a man in the woman's bathroom. Yet, Ingrid fears the same, and in attempting to distance herself from monstrosity, she further cements Sophia's monstrosity, by "pushing [Sophia] to the edge in one way or another" (Levy 175). She recognizes Sophia's desire and the desire it elicits in herself; thus, "she made of [Sophia] the monster she felt herself to be" (Levy 176). Her love for Sophia is another factor in the uncertainty she feels over her identity. Loving men is a concrete role for women; therefore, in a similar manner to how Sophia uses her mother as a shield: "Leonardo has become [Ingrid's] new shield" (Levy 125). She wants to make her desire for Sophia smaller, yet Sophia recognizes this, and decides to love her nonetheless. It is a "risk" to love Ingrid, and it makes Sophia uncertain of her own sexuality—it "is an enigma to [her]" (Levy 121). However, Sophia's relationship with Ingrid is also indicative of Sophia's readiness to live a life because she opens herself to the pain of love. Ingrid bears the arrow that "enters [Sophia's] heart", and she becomes "wounded with desire" and "ready for the ordeal of love" (Levy 107). Thus, by the end

of the novel, denying her desire is to make herself “smaller” becomes less feasible as her “human body is getting bigger” (Levy 202). Unlike Ingrid, Sophia does not deny or obscure her desire. Sophia understands that to embrace uncertainty is to embrace her body, desire, and the cosmos of possibilities within her.

Deborah Levy’s *Hot Milk* explores the uncertainty of identity and sexuality by weaving the Medusa myth into the story. Her novel builds upon many of the ideas that Helene Cixous discusses in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Levy’s novel demonstrates how a woman reclaiming her body is an exercise in learning to accept how “*Identity is always difficult to guarantee*” (Levy 135, author’s emphasis). Once that is accepted, a woman can learn to move from self-castration into self-love.

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The Web of Femininity: Gender Construction in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

Manuel Puig's 1976 novel *Kiss of the Spider Woman* centrally deals with the ideas of gender, politics, and sexuality, all of which are deeply rooted in ideology and rigidly opposing binaries. Both of the main characters, Luis Molina and Valentin Paz, are in prison for crimes they committed: Molina was arrested for having sexual relations with a minor, and Valentin was arrested because he is a Marxist revolutionary. While in prison, the two become friends, which, in both cases, leads to their personal transformation. Through his characters' transformation, Puig makes the point that life cannot be reduced to dichotomies and ideologies because life is too complex; he deconstructs the established binaries of femininity/masculinity and homosexual/heterosexual through Molina and Valentin.

In order to deconstruct the dichotomies of gender and sexuality, Puig places Molina on the feminine half of the dichotomy to contrast with the hyper-masculine half that Valentin represents. Molina constructs her own idea of gender based on the films she watches and narrates to Valentin; however, Molina's view of gender is problematic in the sense that she successfully escapes the masculine half of the dichotomy only to get trapped in the feminine half. Puig's protagonists are meant to emphasize how problematic norms of masculinity and femininity can be. Once the dichotomies are presented as detrimental, Puig can work to dismantle them.

The dichotomy of gender is easily deconstructed once it is established as a social construction. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, philosopher Judith Butler complicates the notion of gender by emphasizing that gender is not a fixed identity tied to biological sex, with unvarying tenants as to what constitutes masculine and feminine behavior. Rather, gender is a social norm. In thinking about the separation of biological sex and gender, Butler says, "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body

as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (6, emphasis in original). Molina has a male body but identifies as female. Molina’s relationship to gender is possible because, as Butler says, biological sex does not equate to gender identity and because gender is not so restricted, as some people believe.

Butler also posits the idea that gender is a performative illusion based on “*fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (136, emphasis in original). She also describes gender as having an “*imitative structure*,” being a “*stylized repetition of acts*” (137 & 140, emphasis in original). In other words, gender has no true interior origin and is not a representation of who a person truly is. The illusion of gender arises from people growing up in a society that tells them how to speak, walk, and act based on agreed upon masculine and feminine characteristics. Essentially, gender is simply a cultural matrix that everyone is immersed in so entirely that they become convinced it is an expression of interiority. Butler quotes French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir as saying, “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (*Gender Trouble* 8). In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Molina has *become* a woman prior to the events of the novel, and has learned how to be one based on the films she watches. Learning how to be a woman from the films Molina has seen echoes Teresa de Lauretis’s argument in *Technologies of Gender*. Similar to Butler and Beauvoir, Lauretis argues that biological sex should not be equated with gender identity; she states that gender is “the product of various social technologies, such as cinema” (2). Gender is easy to mimic because the rules have been written in such great detail. Molina simply copies the way the women act in the films she has watched.

The six films presented throughout the novel are crucial to Molina’s understanding of womanhood. In “Telling Tales in Manuel Puig’s ‘El beso de la mujer araña,’” David H. Bost states that the films Molina decides to narrate to Valentin “reveal a hidden, perhaps unconscious intention to speak about his deepest and darkest inner self [...] a form of psychological introspection” (93). *Cat People*, which is the first film Molina recalls to Valentin, revolves around the main character, Irena, as she discovers her true self – a woman who turns into a panther when she becomes intimate with someone. Bost states that this movie is about the “search for identity” (95),

which Molina finds alluring and gravitates towards as she is also trying to discover her identity and role in society. *Cat People* highlights some of Molina's personal trepidations brought on by the society she lives in. The inability to "function adequately in a heterosexual relationship" (95) is a result of her being a biological male and, therefore, not the subject of a heterosexual man's desire. The connection between these two is even stronger because they are both on the "fringes of their society's conventions of sexual conduct" (96). For Molina, the consequence is being imprisoned for having sexual relations with a minor. The consequence of Irena kissing a man is her transformation into a dangerous animal and being killed. Both of these characters' journeys to self-discovery revolves around intimacy and passion, which unfortunately also leads to their demise.

Contrary to Molina identifying with Irena, Valentin identifies with the psychiatrist who analyzes Irena's behavior. Molina and Valentin frequently interpret the films differently because of the dichotomies they represent. Valentin thinks that her fear of becoming a panther is an allegory for her fear of sex. Irena is "frigid" and "afraid of men" (15) because she has been "brought up on the idea that sex is dirty"; her culture has "made her put up a kind of barrier" (31), according to Valentin. Valentin thinks ideologically, holding typical expectations of men and women. When Molina gets upset at Valentin for not appreciating her cooking dinner, Valentin says, "you're oversensitive," just like a woman, something that can "get in a man's way" (29). He is so wrapped up in his ideological thinking that he does not understand Molina or why she considers herself to be a woman.

The *Enchanted Cottage* is another film that Molina finds alluring because it centers on two characters whose physical appearance changes because of their love for each other. Molina desires to change her physical appearance so she can be with the man she is in love with or, perhaps, to transcend physical appearance because of love. The film's format matches its introspective nature: the prose is one long italicized interior monologue meant to represent Molina's thoughts about the film's plot, while also being interrupted by her own thoughts about her life. The *Enchanted Cottage* tells the love story between a World War II Air Force pilot and a simple maid. The once handsome pilot receives a terrible scar running down his entire face and has a

mental breakdown. Upon returning from war, he secludes himself from his ex-fiancée in a cottage in the forest which was originally rented for their honeymoon. Eventually the pilot and the maid at the cottage fall in love and their love transforms them into beautiful people, but only to one another. A blind man, who seems to live nearby, tells the couple, “you are beautiful to one another, because you love each other so and thus see nothing but your souls” (Puig 111). When this transformation initially occurs, Molina begins to think about a waiter, Gabriel, with whom she is in love. This shift in thought right after the couple stops seeing their physical bodies and just each other’s soul indicates that Molina wishes this could happen in her life. Molina wishes that Gabriel could love her without the physical limitation of her being biologically a man. According to Bost, this film represents “a utopic, romantic view of love, [and] stability” that Molina cannot have because Gabriel does not want to be with a man (100).

Nonetheless, Molina still cares for Gabriel and wants to help him in any way possible. Molina reveals to Valentin that she wants to help Gabriel because he works at a terrible job but “deserves much more” (57). She also explains that she was attracted to him because of the “sadness you see in him,” “it’s in his eyes” (64). The hope Molina holds is that Gabriel will come to live with her and her mother. She says she wants to get “everything all set for him, his clothes, buying all his books, registering for courses,” and make it so he never has to work again or “worry about anything at all, nothing except himself, until he got what he wanted and lost all that sadness of his for good” (69). Similarly, when Valentin is poisoned by the prison food, Molina goes out of her way to take care of him. She also persuades the warden into getting them food from outside the prison like roasted chicken, ham, guava pasta, fruit, and even cake. Once Valentin starts to feel better, however, he lashes out at Molina, who says, “can’t I just coddle you a little bit?” (193). Molina’s desire to help Gabriel and her behavior towards Valentin highlights the fact that she acts like a nurturing mother, which makes sense if she learned how to act like a mother/woman from her own mother.

One of the footnotes that Puig has interspersed throughout the novel explains that “the probability of a homosexual orientation increases the more the male child identifies with his mother” (137). Molina wonders in the interior monologue of *The Enchanted Cottage* if her moth-

er's heart is tired "from forgiving [...] a husband that never understood her" (105). If Molina's father was distant, then it is more likely that Molina identifies with her mother, especially if she felt that she was female since childhood. Another footnote mentions that "sexual roles [...] are learned during childhood" and "men feel that their masculinity depends upon a capacity to conquer woman, and women feel that fulfillment can only come through being coupled with a man" (196). Molina learned how to be a woman from her mother, but, most importantly, the idea of being linked with a man. But Molina's urge to take care of men, essentially sacrificing her own self to please him, is a negative connotation of the feminine dichotomy. In regards to these footnotes, Puig suggests not trusting them—that they are not reliable information. However, the unreliability of the footnotes is precisely why they should be analyzed: Molina seems to have internalized the negative viewpoints on femininity and masculinity that the footnotes propagate. The footnotes somewhat act as a sort of toxic source of information for the characters in this novel.

Molina has internalized stereotypically feminine attributes from her mother, and also from the films she watches. In "Fantasizing the Feminine," Jessica Burke states that Molina identifies with the women in movies from the 1940s: women who are "extraordinary [...] extremely feminine [...] alluring [...] strong and sexy and yet fragile" (292). However, this has negative consequences because "Molina's idealization of the heroines of films from the 1940s actually sets him back several decades in terms of sexual liberation [...] Puig's protagonist clings to an image of femininity that keeps him in a subservient position" (297). This image of the inferior woman is emphasized in Molina's narration of the movies. During the recalling of *Cat People*, Molina mentions that Irena's husband takes her into his arms to calm her down and Molina says, "she's just like a baby, because when he sees her that way, so defenseless, so lost, he feels all over again how he loves her with all his heart" (30). The inferior woman image is highlighted again in the narration of *I Walked with a Zombie* when Molina says, "[t]he captain puts his arm around [the main character] so she'll feel protected;" "The girl clings to the captain to try and stop trembling" (213). These descriptions of behavior represent the submissive nature of women that Molina has internalized.

Another negative attribute internalized by Molina is the idea of sacrificing oneself for

love. The second film Molina tells Valentin is a Nazi propaganda film, which, according to Bost, is not an actual movie, but one that Puig created and “modeled on the archetypal Nazi film” (98). Valentin calls this movie a “piece of Nazi junk” (56). He also believes that Molina does not realize this because she often fixates on the “glamour and beauty” of the main character, Leni La-maison, who is described by Molina as looking “like a goddess, and at the same time incredibly fragile” (55). Molina also constantly points out the “costumes, the set design, the exotic locations [...] the suggestion of romance” (98) and the attractiveness of the Nazi soldiers. In regards to Molina’s view of femininity, the predicament that Leni gets herself into as well as the political aspects of this film are extremely important. The plot of this film mirrors the narrative of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*: Molina becomes involved in a scheme with the warden to get information out of Valentin, and Leni becomes wrapped up in the National Socialism movement thanks to her boyfriend, Warner, a young German soldier. Also, despite France being her home, Leni agrees to spy on The French Resistance because she loves Warner. Ultimately, she is killed. Likewise, by the end of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Valentin has successfully dragged Molina into his political movement even though Molina originally did not want anything to do with it. Her reluctance from general lack of interest turned into a desire to protect Valentin from the warden as she fell in love with him. Because Molina has fallen in love, she tries to deliver a message to Valentin’s comrades even though she knows it could be dangerous. Unfortunately, the secret police come to arrest Molina as she tries to deliver the message, so Valentin’s comrades shoot and kill her.

Further evidence of Molina’s problematic view of femininity arises when Valentin tells Molina, “if you enjoy being a woman ... you shouldn’t feel any the less because of it [...] You don’t have to ... submit” (243). Whether or not Valentin realizes he was being misogynistic earlier in the novel is never made clear. Here, he seems to have changed his attitude. Or he could have always believed that women are equal and tried to hide it to be the stereotypical macho revolutionary. Molina replies, “But if a man is ... my husband, he has to give the orders, so he will feel right. That’s the *natural* thing, because that makes him the ... the man of the house” (243-44, emphasis added). Valentin tells Molina that her idea of a normal relationship is completely wrong: “you’ve been fed an old wives’ tale [...] To be a woman you don’t have to be [...]

a martyr” (244). This idea of being submissive to a man echoes what the footnotes have been saying throughout the novel, the way Molina’s mother acted, and the behavior of the heroines in the films. Now they are synonymous with Molina’s thoughts, stressing the fact that Molina represents the extreme feminine half of the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Throughout *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Molina seems to learn from Valentin that gender is not restricted to a physical identification. Steffany Drozdo argues that *Kiss of the Spider Woman* destroys the binary structure that it presents: “only the utter destruction of the system creates the opportunity for an authentic, open-minded acceptance of alternative lifestyles” (29). Once Molina and Valentin are joined sexually, all the dichotomies start to merge together, making it impossible to define either side. The dichotomies are destroyed through Molina and Valentin’s acceptance of each other and their “absorption of the other” (33). Molina tells Valentin, “[f]or just a second, it seemed like I wasn’t here [...] or like I wasn’t me anymore. As if now, somehow ... I ... were you” (219). This feeling might be Molina realizing that love and intimacy transcend physical representations or the ideas about gender. The tenants of gender that society propagates do not matter in Molina and Valentin’s cell. Being sequestered away from the scrutiny of society might be the only reason these two are able to look past the superficial and develop an intimate relationship.

Manuel Puig sets out to deconstruct the dichotomies of gender and sexuality in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. With the character of Molina constructing a problematic view of gender with films and her life, Puig is able to highlight how difficult it can be to stop thinking about life in binary terms; even a biologically male character who identifies as female can believe one must behave in accordance to institutionalized gender stereotypes to truly be that gender. However, throughout the course of the novel, the arbitrary division between “masculine” and “feminine” begins to blur, stressing how complicated life can be. The relationship that develops between Molina and Valentin showcases that it is possible to look past the ideologies of society and create a connection between two souls.

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Sarana McDaniel

Africa: A Phoenix Rising from the Ashes

The continent of Africa has a long, traumatic, and beautiful history which Maya Angelou details in her poem entitled “Africa.” From its humble beginnings and colonization by Europeans, to its restoration to strength and power through her countries’ dozens of battles for independence, the poem utilizes an extended metaphor to compare the continent’s complex history to the traumatic rape of a woman. From her beginnings until her colonization by the Europeans from 1870 until the early 1900s, Africa is represented as an innocent, attractive, young woman. Her invasion and exploitation by various European countries is compared, through metaphor, to a traumatic, humiliating assault. The concept of strength after trauma and oppression is expressed in the final stanza, in which Angelou compares Africa’s more than 50 fights for independence and the continent’s rise back to power and recognition to the cruel rape of a victim who overcomes her trauma and rises from the ashes of defeat. Maya Angelou, in her poem, “Africa”, achieves the comparison of the colonization of Africa by European forces to the traumatic sexual assault of a woman through the use of personification, diction, and voice.

The beginning of Africa’s history is compared to the state of an innocent, beautiful, young woman through the use of personification. In the first stanza of the poem, Angelou makes use of personification to describe the geography of Africa. She writes, “thus she had lain / sugarcane sweet / deserts her hair / golden her feet / mountains her breasts / two Niles her tears,” personifying Africa as a sweet, innocent, young woman (l.1-6). This is accurate with the reality of the African continent prior to European invasion. The British essayist Robert Boyce describes a continent full of “intelligent Muhammadan people with old traditions and an environment more like [our] own” (394). Africa was a pure, untouched continent with self-sufficient inhabitants. Prior to the European invasion, Africans had their own unique sets of traditions, languages, and forms of civilization. African scholars and explorers were also making important discoveries about life and nature long before the European invasion and intervention. This shocked European countries, and “European notions about the nature of the world were turned on their heads by

‘new knowledge’ gleaned about plants, animals, and peoples in places such as Africa, Asia, and the Americas” (Zuberi 5). These historical facts further strengthen Angelou’s comparison of the invasion and colonization of Africa to the sexual assault of a young woman. Africa was growing and thriving on her own before the arrival of her colonizers: England, France, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and Italy. Her growth and progress were impeded by the violent intervention and infiltration by the European political powers that did not realize her value. This is clear when Boyce writes, “Later, when we [the English] took possession of Egypt, we found ourselves in a country teeming with tradition, and with a highly intelligent people: we set to work to construct towns, to develop the land, and to establish banks. Health and climatic conditions were fairly favorable, environment and tradition certainly were” (394). The African continent was seen as plentiful and endowed, as she is described through personification in Angelou’s poem. As history makes clear, however, European political giants mistook Africa’s beauty, naivety, and prosperity as prizes to be won through brutal invasion and colonization.

In addition to personification, Maya Angelou utilizes strong, emphatic diction to further the metaphor of Africa’s colonization as the rape of a young woman. Angelou describes the arrival of the European invaders as ‘rime white and cold / brigands ungentled / icicle bold” (l. 10-12). Angelou makes use of the word ‘rime’ to describe how the invasion felt. A synonym for frost, the white and cold rime extends the metaphor of the sexual assault of Africa. Rapes are hardly described as warm, cozy, and soft; more commonly, they are portrayed by survivors as being chilling, cold, and terrifying. The antithesis of all things warm and comforting, the word ‘rime’ exudes to the reader the cold, desolate feeling of invasion by a foreign foe. In his essay, Boyce supports this sentiment when he claims, “Africa is not a white man’s world” (392). Both Boyce and Angelou fittingly racialize their depictions of the colonization with the use of the word ‘white’. While Angelou’s use of the word does not appear to be an implicit reference to race, but a reference to the color of the rime, there is an important connection to be made between the race of Africa’s colonizers and the color of the frost. Furthermore, Angelou employs the word ‘rime’ to express the effect of colonial rule on the African continent. Zuberi expands on the nature of colonial rule, describing it as “the initial response to the problem of administering

to non-European colonial subjects. European law was to rule the land, and both the colonized and the colonizers could ignore indigenous institutions” (7). Evinced by Angelou’s use of the word ‘rime’ in her poem, the European rule was cold, distant, and deadly for the African natives. This emphatic and effective diction ties back to Angelou’s overarching metaphor because victims of sexual assault feel cold, violated, and no longer in control of their own lives, afflicted with a cold frost that nothing can melt.

The use of the word ‘brigands’ to represent the colonizers is an additional example of emphatic diction in the second stanza of the poem. A brigand is defined as “one who lives by plunder usually as a member of a band” (Merriam-Webster). The Europeans entered Africa with intentions of plundering, scavenging, and overtaking their government. When the French colonized Africa, “they set to work to construct harbours, to remodel towns, make roads, and generally to open up the country just as Caesar had done in France” (Boyce 394). With no regard for African desires and needs, various European nations, like France, came in and began changing political, economic, and social structures that had been in place for centuries, doing as they pleased within the African continent. This was also evident in the system of colonial rule where, “all would be required to submit and conform to these laws, but only Europeanized (or ‘civilized’) natives would have access to European rights” (Zuberi 7). More than just being shut out and taken over by the cold, calculating Europeans, they were forced to conform in order to be granted basic human rights. This is depicted in the poem through Angelou’s use of the word ‘brigands’ to describe Africa’s conquerors. This reference makes Angelou’s extended metaphor of rape adequate and historically accurate.

Also within the second stanza, Angelou employs strong diction to further her overarching metaphor when she describes how the Europeans ‘churched her with Jesus / bled her with guns’ (l.15-16). The juxtaposition and parallel structure of the emphatic verb ‘bled’ immediately after the typically soft, loving verb ‘churched’ implies a sense of equal force and outcome of the two verbs. The choice to use these two words by Angelou holds a direct correlation to the use of the extended rape metaphor throughout the poem. The Europeans forced and coerced the African peoples into accepting their laws, customs, and religion. They ‘churched’ them into submission,

turning religion into a military tactic. Boyce supports this conclusion, stating that “the Church for centuries has tried to elevate the primitive intelligence; while the military men have attempted to drill and organize the black forces, and the doctors have endeavoured to direct the primitive practices of medicine into better paths” (396). While some European countries led with the ruse of spreading religion, it was only a means to a bloody, lethal end which required fire power. The Europeans ‘bled’ the country in the end, attacking and mutilating it to take the continent by force; “the superiority of their ships and cannons gave Europeans control” (Zuberi 8). Angelou’s choice of diction here gives the reader the mental image of a woman, wooed by a man’s words and then exploited by his actions.

The final example of emphatic diction used by Angelou in “Africa” is when the speaker laments, “Took her young daughters / sold her strong sons” (l.13-14). After Africa was attacked and invaded by the cold bandits of the European continent, she was stripped of her most valuable assets, leaving her to feel as a virgin victim of sexual assault. In the historical case of Africa’s colonization, her most valuable assets were her people, especially those young and strong enough to build her future. After invading Africa and pillaging her natural resources, European colonizers began to search for other means of income and revenue from their newfound colonies, and, “in the four centuries before colonial rule was dominant, the principal items of plunder were men and women” (Zuberi 7). Africa thus became the most violated of victims, her valuables stolen for the sole personal and financial gain of her attacker. The Europeans, shipped enslaved Africans to European-dominated markets for profit... In the beginning, these colonial and slave experiences were typical expansions, with religion, fame, and economic gain as the sole driving forces. The same justification for dominating the weaker parts of Europe drove the expansion to Asia and Africa. The ideological justification was simple profit (Zuberi 7).

To make matters even worse and more painful for the African continent, “the colonial authority dominated the market relationships in the political and civil life of the colonized. Indigenous customary law was used to regulate non-market relationships in the family and community of the dominated population” (Zuberi 8). The colonized people were dictated in every way, but allowed their family relationships. This would make the loss of their sons and daughters even

more painful, stripping Africa of the last of her dignity and will to survive.

The final rhetorical device Maya Angelou employs to support the extended rape metaphor for the colonization of the African continent is voice. The purposeful shift from passive to active voice midway through the poem is used to emphasize the internal plotline of Africa's traumatic, but triumphant history. In the first stanza, Africa is described using the passive voice; "thus she had lain / black through the years" (l.7-8). The use of past tense and passive voice, in the stanza describing the geography and innocent beginnings of the African continent, evinces that part of her history is over and cannot be changed. The same is true for the history portrayed in the second stanza, where the speaker describes Africa, saying, "Thus she has lain" (l.17). Here, from the passive voice and use of the word 'lain', it is clear that while Africa may not have enjoyed or been accepting of her invasion and exploitation, she did not feel as though there was anything she could do to stop it. The Europeans made sure of this, using their power and religion to crush those they believed to be inferior. This is confirmed when Boyce writes of the power that merchants wielded over the natives, "when the natives are very primitive, the merchant tends to take advantage of the ignorance of the natives" (396).

The speaker's voice shifts, however, when readers reach the third and final stanza of the poem. Unlike the first two, the voice is active: "now she is rising" (l.18). Africa's fight for independence and rise to her former glory was not easy, and continues even today. Upon the publication of the poem in 1975, the last of the African countries were gaining their independence from their colonizing nations.

In some areas, it was peaceful, and orderly. In many others, independence was achieved only after a protracted revolution. A few newly independent countries acquired stable governments almost immediately; others were ruled by dictators or military juntas for decades, or endured long civil wars. Some European governments welcomed a new relationship with their former colonies; others contested decolonized militarily (Decolonization of Asia and Africa...). Independence for each individual country, in the words of Apter, "was not an end in itself, but a stepping-stone to the larger goal of liberating Africa" (16). Angelou herself testifies to the truth of Africa's tumultuous rise from the ashes:

As I was working for a magazine owned by a foreigner (and no less a foreigner than a South African millionaire!) this perception of my character made me very vulnerable indeed. Every disagreement I had with them could always be misconstrued as coming from the warped mind of an “imperialist agent” or worse, a person who was taking the shilling of an ‘apartheid collaborator’ (Duodu 56).

Even during the 1960s, when Angelou and her son lived in Ghana, there was fear, friction, and conflict brewing that stemmed from the colonization and trauma that Africa had experienced. This is evident from Angelou’s anecdote about being accused of being an imperialist and sympathetic to the institution of racism in Africa. The active voice employed in the final stanza is representative of Africa’s ongoing rise from the trauma of her history.

A prime example of this was the fight for independence in Ghana during the 1950s: “Ghana’s achievement of independence, on March 6, 1957, was unique in African history... Ghana’s independence was marked less by the moment itself than by the periods before and after, the immediate run up to independence and the decade that followed” (Apter 6). The British took an active part in the campaign for independence in Ghana, which did not happen in many of the other African countries. The British, in conferring independence upon Ghana, the first Sub-Saharan African territory to be granted freedom from colonization, wanted Ghana to quietly acquiesce to full membership in the Commonwealth” (Apter 7). This was because there was “a general fear that delays might promote radicalization... The British were gambling that the country had become so entangled in parliamentary practices and so locked in competitive party politics prior to independence that democracy would be self-sustaining, even with a move to the left” (Apter 7). This, unfortunately for Great Britain, did not pan out as well as they had hoped, as Ghana did not choose to remain part of the British Commonwealth, creating their own government instead. This was paramount for the entire African continent since “Ghana’s independence was to serve as the beginning of the end of colonialism. And, in a little more than a decade and a half, the subcontinent was swept nearly clean of overt colonial powers” (Apter 8). Into the 1960s, when

Maya Angelou lived in Africa, the country had won their independence but remained unsettled politically: “[Ghana] was itself confused. On the one hand, it wanted to achieve socialism, with all the totalitarian features that such a system incorporates. On the other hand, Ghanaian society was brought up, traditionally, value freedom of thought: in our chiefs’ courts, for instance, we could say what we wanted to say and not be punished” (Duodu 56). The confusion and indecisiveness of the country’s political system was a residual effect of the trauma they had experienced, just as a victim of assault is cautious and careful in the future. Yet still, the African nation pressed on, through the pain and caution, to become completely independent and sovereign. Angelou’s portrayal of this ongoing fight for independence in all parts of the continent is evident in the speaker’s use of the active voice. Despite the fact that Africa was violated, stripped of her assets and dignity, and sold for profit, the use of active voice in the final stanza tells readers that the story was not, and is not, over for Africa, as it is not over for any other sovereign nation. She, like strong victims of the traumatic event that is a rape, underwent the unthinkable in her history, but continues to rise and give rise to others like her, just as Ghana did for other African territories for decades to come.

In the final lines of the poem, Angelou makes use of active voice one final time, to give Africa’s story the sense that the ‘end’ is really just the beginning. This is achieved when the speaker proclaims, “Now she is striding / although she has lain” (l.24-25). Africa’s tragic past is behind her and has made her stronger. After gaining independence, “the newly independent nations that emerged in the 1950s and the 1960s became an important factor in changing the balance of power within the United Nations” (“*Decolonization of Asia and Africa*”). Representatives from the newly established countries in Africa worked, and still are working today, to end the last vestiges of colonization and further the cause of independence to colonized territories around the world. They are vocal advocates of continuing decolonization, with the result that the UN Assembly [is] often ahead of the Security Council on issues of self-governance and decolonization. The new nations pushed the UN toward accepting resolutions for independence for colonial states and creating a special committee on colonialism, demonstrating that even though some nations continued to struggle for independence, in the eyes of the international community, the

colonial era was ending (“*Decolonization of Asia and Africa*”). In the eyes of these countries, and quickly the rest of the world as well, independence was seen as “not only a blow to colonialism, but also as something that would in time affect the nascent battle for civil rights [everywhere]” (Apter 11). Angelou makes use of the active voice in this final stanza to bring hope to her metaphor of Africa’s history. Not only did Africa survive her colonial ‘rape’, but she is thriving in spite of it.

Angelou’s metaphor of the history of the African continent is achieved through the use of personification, diction, and voice. The message is carefully developed, proving that it is possible not only to survive traumatic history, but to thrive in spite of it. Africa was a naive, innocent, pure woman before she was attacked brutally and relentlessly by the Europeans. She was churched, bled, exploited, and stripped of her most valuable assets and possessions. Nevertheless, she rises as a phoenix from the ashes, slowly and stronger than ever, gaining her voice and respect along the way.

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Drunkenness of Any Kind Leads to Bad Endings in *Macbeth*

“Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with Lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.”

The Porter (II, iii, l. 29-42)

Throughout *Macbeth*, we are given a tragic tale of what happens to men and women when they give up their humanity in search of power or as a means to their own personal end. While the topic itself seems extremely serious, Shakespeare had a way of bringing in some comedic light to explain such a concept, and he did so through the most unexpected of characters: the Porter. This character’s discussion of alcohol consumption in Act II, scene iii, is the perfect example of Shakespeare’s chosen method of explaining human morality and the lack thereof without explicitly telling the audience, as well as possibly re-creating a real-life event that occurred in his own time: The Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

The opening speech the Porter gives to MacDuff, at face value, seems to refer to the effects of alcohol on a man: urinating, sleeping, and a red nose from habitual drunkenness (II. iii. 1.29). More specifically, the Porter describes how alcohol gives a man sexual urges but takes away his chance at preforming in the end. He describes drink as being “an equivocator with Lechery (...) in conclusion, [drink] equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him” (II. iii. 1.32-42). This basically means that drink lies to you about dealing with your desires (lustfulness being one of them), then leaves you feeling stuck and unfulfilled. This is important due to the fact that an equivocator, within the context of the play, is defined as a deceiver, a prevaricator, “a person who speaks ambiguously or doesn’t tell the whole truth”(OED).

Not only is this true regarding the effects of alcohol (“makes him stand to, and not stand to,” or “it provokes the desire, but takes away the performance”) (II. iii, l. 30-31), but it is also true when one considers the witches’ talk to Macbeth regarding his future. In the first scene of Act IV, after Macbeth has faced the three apparitions, he begs the witches to know more about Banquo’s children: “Yet my heart throbs to know one thing: tell me, if your art Can tell so much: shall Banquo’s issue ever reign in this kingdom?” (IV.i. l. 98-101). At first, they simply tell him not to ask, but when he pushes them further, they reveal a group of kingly apparitions alongside Banquo, and a mirror revealing even more kings to come. This gives Macbeth the idea that, yes, Banquo’s children will take the crown from him, and all of their descendants will follow in line. But the ending of the tragedy shows MacDuff taking the crown; therefore this vision turns out to be a lie, or at the very least a half truth. His crown was taken from him, and it is assumed there will be more kings to come, but not Banquo’s descendants. Another “indirect truth” the witches give Macbeth is the prophecy that he could not be harmed by any man that was “born of a woman” (IV. i. l. 78-79). They never reminded him about C-sections (or the equivalent procedure for the time period), nor did they tell him of any specific character, allowing him to assume he would be safe, and that no one could ever harm him. Though that might be a bit of a stretch as far as half-truths go.

The term “equivocator” could also be a reference Shakespeare may have been making to a real-life event that had occurred the year prior to the first known performance of *Macbeth* in 1606. In 1605, a group of Catholics, led by Robert Catesby, plotted to kill King James, along with his council, and replace him with his own daughter, Elizabeth. They had collected gunpowder kegs and stored them in a nearby building across from the Parliament, meaning to blow the surrounding area to smithereens. They were caught before anything happened, and many were found guilty of treason, including a Jesuit clergyman of the Catholic Church by the name of Henry Garner. He is particularly important because of the treatise he had made for his followers, as he heavily advised them to “equivocate,” or be ambiguous, to prevaricate, when talking to Protestant inquisitors, in order to protect their religious beliefs. They were basically told to lie in order to protect themselves, which can be compared to the way Macbeth and Lady Macbeth lied

to everyone else since the very first murder had occurred in order to cover their own tracks or to dispel their own guilt. However, like the ending of the aptly named Gunpowder Plot of 1605, Macbeth and his wife do not complete their tasks, and are technically executed (Lady Macbeth does so by her own hand; Macbeth's is carried out by MacDuff).

It seems that a lot can be said of this seemingly short speech made by the Porter, and there is probably more than what I've covered here, but that's the beauty of it. Shakespeare takes his time with what he wants to say, and every line is written for a reason. People often assume that only the main characters speak kernels of truth, foreshadow the plot, or speak indirectly of the main themes. But this speech, made by a seemingly minor character – one who has no real pull within the plot – allows us to peek into the mind of Shakespeare and study his writing style. Now if only his tragedies (and some of his comedies) weren't so, well, tragic! You'd certainly want to get piss drunk too, if you dealt with some of the things Shakespeare forces his characters to go through!

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The Tapestry of *Hamlet*: Mythology and Archetypes

William Shakespeare revolutionized how English was written and spoken. His plays are quoted and referenced so often, they have become part of the English mythology, like the belief in the divine right to rule. Another reason Shakespeare's plays are so esteemed is because he used easily identified archetypes. One of his most famous tragedies, *Hamlet*, does just this. Hamlet uses character binaries to link the archetypes of the original sin and the murder of Abel by his brother Cain with the mythology of divine rule.

Hamlet connects to the archetypes of the original sin in several ways. The first connection is between Eve and Queen Gertrude: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (*Hamlet* 1.2.146). Hamlet's infamous pronouncement about his mother reveals the underlying connection to Eve from the Garden of Eden story. Eve has a moment of weakness and brings Adam down with her. Hamlet is ignorant of how his father had died. Extrapolating from this moment, Gertrude is the Eve bestowing an apple to Hamlet's father. The diction supports this reading when the Ghost tells Hamlet: I was "sleeping in my orchard, A serpent stung me; [...] The serpent that did sting thy father's life Now wears his crown" (1.5.35-40). The serpent/uncle is the connection to the Devil and the sly trickery he used to seduce Eve. Hamlet's lamentation in Act 1, scene 2 takes on a sinister meaning with the knowledge the Ghost imparts. The Ghost implies that his wife, his queen, helped Claudius kill him. Shakespeare showcases this with the Player Queen in Act 3, scene 2: "A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed" (*Hamlet* 3.2.170-171). Hamlet also accuses his mother of murdering her first husband later in Act 3 (*Hamlet* 3.4.28-29). This links to the original sin: the rejection of King Hamlet by Gertrude being paralleled to the rejection of God by Eve. Stephen Greenblatt in "Hamlet in Purgatory" links Hamlet's line "Hic et ubique?" (*Hamlet* 1.5.164) to the Ghost being God-like: "The words refer in jest to the divine power to violate the laws of physics, [...] If this resonance is present [...], the prince's jest is deepened by a disquieting association of his father's ghost with the omnipres-

ence of God” (303). This again links to the original sin due to the rejection of God by Eve in the rejection of King Hamlet by Gertrude. The binary of earthly and spiritual characters continues the parallelism between King Hamlet’s Ghost and the other mortal characters like Claudius.

The parallels between the biblical archetypes continue with the slaying of Abel by Cain and King Hamlet by Claudius; thus the original murder of a brother is enacted once more. Claudius’s rejection of his brother and God reenact Cain’s rejection of his brother and God: “Thus was [King Hamlet], sleeping, by a brother’s hand, / Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched” (Hamlet 1.5.74-75). Claudius’s jealousy of his brother rectified it in one act that marked him as villainous and successful in ending his brother’s life. Claudius, connecting it to the original murder, admits his crime and reasons, “It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t, / A brother’s murder. [...] for which I did the murder— / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (3.3.37-55). Much like Cain, Claudius commits fratricide to advance his position and gain what is his brother’s. Hamlet, the one entity that Claudius never claims to have control over, attempts to bring awareness to the rot within Claudius by telling his mother, “This was your husband. Look now what follows: / Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear / Blasting his wholesome brother” (Hamlet 3.4.64-66). The diction explicitly tells of the binary between the two brothers: one was decent, the other corrupt, one was king, the other is now king, one was never masked, and the other was unmasked by the play’s namesake: “Hamlet has unmasked Claudius, revealing the inward villain behind the exterior smile” (Levin 277). Hamlet reveals Cain within the Danish castle, disturbing the divine right that should have prevailed.

Shakespeare grew up under a divinely appointed ruler, having been baptized in 1564, six years after Elizabeth I took the throne in 1558 (Potter 1-2). Elizabeth I along with other Tudor monarchs were proponents of the myth of divine appointment. [They had] been divinely appointed to bring order and happiness out of civil strife but also any attempt to break this divine ordinance (for example by insurrection or assassination) would result in social, political and natural chaos, and where a deformed, corrupt, or weak monarch epitomizes a diseased political state (Guerin 235).

The ailing state of Denmark happens because of Gertrude’s rejection of her husband

and Claudius's fratricide. Their defiance of King Hamlet defies the will of God, further enhancing the Ghost's connection to God. According to the myth of divine appointment, "Denmark is a diseased and rotten state because [of] Claudius's 'foul and most unnatural murder' of his king-brother [which] has subverted the divinely ordained laws of nature and of kingly succession" (Guerin 235). Claudius falsely assumes he now has the divine blessing to rule Denmark and that that position would protect him (Hamlet 4.5.124). However, this is contrasted by Hamlet's line in the next act: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11). Hamlet is blessed with divine fortune by being spared by pirates and execution in England. This shows that Hamlet, according to Shakespeare and the English line of succession, is the true divine appointment to rule Denmark. The actions taken by Claudius and Gertrude regarding Hamlet invited the chaos represented by the living Hamlet and Ophelia throughout the play.

The binary of order and chaos can be represented as Shakespeare's England against his fictional Denmark. These binaries are supported by Guerin's proposition that "much of the play centers on doubleness" (107). This "doubleness" is seen with the juxtapositions of King Hamlet and Claudius, the spiritual and the earthly, Gertrude and Eve, and Claudius and Cain. Shakespeare's presentation of these dichotomies throughout the play shows "his profounder concern is with the recognition of underlying realities" (Levin 279). The core truths of Hamlet are the archetypal foundations of the story and their interweaving with the myth of divine appointment. The archetypes of the original sin and the first murder story destabilize Denmark because of the disruption of King Hamlet's true successor: his son. This destabilization is "intensified by the blood kinship between victim and murderer" (Guerin 235). The incestuous queen, Gertrude, was made one in her marriage to King Hamlet, and her participation in his death contributed to the "blood guilt" that "Denmark shares and suffers" with Claudius, who "bears the primal blood curse of Cain" (235). The treasonous nature of Claudius begets retribution; Hamlet has to kill him (Hamlet 5.2.296-301). Most evil acts are paid in return; thus, Claudius shedding his brother's blood requires blood to be paid in kind. Claudius's vile act infected those within his court: "all those die who have been infected by the evil contagion (Claudius, Gertrude, [...]), but [Ham-

let] must suffer [...] before Denmark can be purged and reborn under [...] Fortinbras” (Guerin 236). To restore Denmark, the evil infection must be lanced and cleaned. This links to the archetype of the original sin because God purged the Garden of Eden after the betrayal of Adam and Eve. It also joins the original murder archetype because Denmark, like the earth, is cursed for aiding and abetting a murderer.

The interwoven tapestry of archetypes and English mythology uses the binaries as the thread tying Hamlet and these conventions tightly together. The thread for the original sin has Gertrude standing in Eve’s place. A blood-colored thread ties Claudius to Cain. These two biblical characters forever altered how humanity was perceived by God. God displays his perception of them in the resultant chaos of the tapestry that personifies Denmark’s court. This woven chaos does not end until divine appointment is restored by severing the chaos-causing threads.

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Female Subversion in Lee Chang-dong's *Poetry*: A Study of the Film's Symbolism & Themes

In the 2010 film *Poetry*, director Lee Chang-dong tells the story of an elderly woman named Mija, a quaint lady living in the suburbs of South Korea, who develops an interest in poetry while also struggling with the moral quandary behind her grandson's transgressions. He is one of a group of boys who was involved in the ongoing sexual assault of a girl, which resulted in her horrendous suicide. An invisible, mistreated person, Mija's daily life is depicted in the film amidst the aftermath of his horrific crime. Thematically speaking, the crux of *Poetry* revolves around the subject of gender relations: it explores common issues like the subjugation of women, the male-dominant ethos of society, and the consequences of sexual assault. Lee reveals a society in decay, which is evocative of real-life events that occurred in the small South Korean town on which the story is based. Ironically, Lee parallels the tragic nature of the incident with the purity and beauty of poetry, which is representative of the central character. Metaphorically speaking, the paradox of poetry and sexual assault illustrates the difference between truth and fabrication. These oppositions are also evocative of Mija's personal growth and various shifts in perspective throughout the film. Above all else, *Poetry* serves as a rumination of the dangers of toxic masculinity and the harmful results that it yields.

The screenplay of *Poetry* was inspired by real life events. In an interview with Sarah Cronin, Lee revealed that the idea behind the film "stemmed from a sexual assault case that had actually happened in a small town in South Korea, which was committed by a group of juveniles" (Lee qtd in Cronin). While he knew that he wanted to make a film about this incident, he wasn't sure of how he would tell it until he created Mija's character. Finally, he explains that the peculiar reasoning behind the name of the film was inspired by a programming that he witnessed in a Japanese hotel room: "Watching the typical landscape visuals with meditation music-type sounds of peaceful rivers, flying birds, fishermen throwing their nets, it suddenly occurred to me that the title of the film dealing with this cruel case should be Poetry. The film character and plot came to

my mind at the same time, along with the title” (Lee qtd in Cronin). Ostensibly, it appears that this main character was positioned in the film to help illustrate a dynamic between art and tragedy. To expatiate, it is obvious that Mija reveals how art, and more specifically poetry, can be inspired by anything, regardless of how morbid or taboo the subject matter may be. This notion is validated when considering how Lee came up with the premise for his film. Most importantly, it should be noted that Lee created this film with the intention of asking the analytical question, “Is it morally right to create art in times of despair?” He insists that Mija’s situation is comparable to that of Theodor Adorno; she raises questions similar to the most famous of his queries: “Is it possible to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz?” (Lee qtd in Cronin). Simply put, Mija thoroughly ruminates about the validity of creating art in times of trauma. Throughout the film, she struggles to answer this question, yearning to find an artistic vision in a moment of tragedy. Nevertheless, her persistence and gravitation towards finding an artistic voice proves that art can be created in any context.

The symbol of poetry is predominant throughout the film. It is most closely associated with Mija, who attempts to find her voice through introspection. In general, the real strength in Lee’s films is not just the writing but also their “poetic” dramatization of unspoken thoughts and feelings. This squares with the film’s central symbol of seeing, and more specifically, of self-realization. To understand poetry is to see things for what they really are. Lee’s belief that “to see well is a fundamental aspect in writing poetry or making films” (Lee qtd in Cronin) is captured by Mija’s poetry teacher, who tells his students that “up till now, you haven’t seen an apple for real. To really know what an apple is, to be interested in it, to understand,” he insists, “that is really seeing it.” This sentiment later takes form when Mija confronts the mother of her grandson’s victim. Upon approaching her, Mija is at first concerned with the simple beauty of trivial objects in nature and around the house, but she experiences a shift in perspective en route to seeing the mother of Agnes, the girl who has killed herself (Sng 11). Coming across overripe apricots on the ground, she is fascinated and notes in her journal: “The apricot throws itself to the ground; it is crushed and trampled for its next life.” This is a revelatory moment for Mija, who is now focused on more substantial things. In this way, her pursuit towards finding a

poetic voice falls in line with the film's larger conflict. In other words, this connection between sight and understanding is essentially a moment of foreshadowing: at first, Mija sees poetry as an escape from her troubles and attempts to use it as a distraction from the ominous reality from which she hides. However, this poetic interest evolves into something greater, and eventually, serves as a means of transcendence. This is consistent with Mija's overall character progression: after keeping her grandson's secret throughout much of the film, she comes to realize that she must tell the truth, lest the burden of his actions fall upon her. Taking the professor's lesson to heart, she ends up being the only student in class to successfully write a poem because she insists on seeing what everyone else wants to ignore: the rape of a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl by a gang of classmates. To see well is, as Lee pointed out in his interview with Cronin, "crucial to both poetry and film." Suffice to say, poetry and seeing are central motifs because they are reflective of the protagonist's overall progression. Mija is able at last to write a poem because of her tenacious attitude towards uncovering and confronting injustice.

In terms of gender and sexuality, *Poetry* critically analyzes the subjection of women in patriarchal society, and more specifically, the issue of forced sexual assault. Clearly, this subject is not only essential to the film's premise, but it is also telling of Mija's personal narrative within the film. This notion is legitimized when considering the male characters that Mija associates with: her grandson is a sexual predator and outright ungrateful brat, his friends' parents are relentless bullies who will do whatever it takes to keep her silent, and the disabled "gentleman" that Mija takes care of sexually imposes on her in his selfish sexual gratification. When taken collectively, these male characters clearly embody these issues; they all attempt to assert their dominance over Mija. It goes without saying that virtually none of the men in the film has any regard for her feelings and beliefs. This is indicative of actual societal attitudes towards sexual violence. A solid majority of people, especially men, think that addressing the problem causes more trouble for those involved, including the victims. That is why the fathers of the gang rapists do not feel guilty for covering up the problem but rather see it as a necessary evil. Essentially, Lee reveals these issues within the film in order to create fraught situations and reveal where social, psychological, and sexual pressures intersect (Rayns 38). These issues surface altogether in

one pivotal moment, when Mija only momentarily refuses to have sex with her elderly boss before eventually submitting to him in a moment of weakness that also happens to speak to her humanity. This moment is noteworthy because it is Mija's clear attempt to identify with the victim. During sex, she sheds tears—but they seem to be as much for her as they are for the girl whom her grandson and his friends tormented. The sex, a rape of sorts, becomes an epiphany: blackmail may seem like Mija's agenda—after all, she does eventually ask her employer for money to pay for Agnes's reparations—but by submitting to her boss, she is also able to empathize with the dead girl. As a result, she learns that her true intentions are to bring justice to an overall immoral situation. Although she cares for and loves her grandson, she also values the truth, and realizes that she cannot consciously allow her grandson to evade the punishment he deserves.

Poetry is a film concerned with the transgressions that men commit against women and the lack of restraint that they show. As the film points out, this lack of restraint can tragically lead to sexual assault, as proven by the events in the film and the events in real life. As these transgressions occur, oftentimes the people involved try to ease the situation by covering it up, no matter how amoral that may be. On a much larger scale, this leads to the marginalization of women, as the patriarchal nature of society is perpetuated. As the story unfolds, its seemingly odd juxtaposition of poetry and sexual assault somehow coheres to form a haunting picture of a woman whose every behavior suggests a concession to—and, ultimately, an affront to—institutionalized male aggression. Over the course of the film, however, the audience witnesses a transformation in the character of Mija, as her concession turns to a dedication to the truth. Rather than allow the male characters to control her actions, she finally decides to report her grandson to the police. This happens only after she finally succeeds in writing a poem; metaphorically speaking, her ability to write a poem reflects her overall shift in perspective and overall development. In the beginning, Mija focuses on the superficial, but she eventually sees poetry for what it is: a means to express her internal thoughts. These internal thoughts surface in more ways than one, as by the end of the film, she realizes that the only way she can reach a catharsis is to rid herself of the burden of the awful truth.

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James Joyce's *Ulysses*: Conscious Artistry in "Aeolus"

The recurring thematic elements in James Joyce's *Ulysses* cycle around conceptions of impotence, usurpation, and general ineptitude in the completion of events. The Odysseus of the modern age, reborn in Leopold Bloom, is a man of myriad failure. His impotence in marriage, career, and fatherly aspirations leave the reader with a keen awareness of exactly what Bloom is not. However, the careful and conspicuous construction of the novel frees the reader from evaluating Bloom based on his meritorious achievements, and instead validates the character with an extraordinarily comprehensive examination of the minute details of his daily existence. Likewise, the construction of *Ulysses* as a novel fails to follow the reader's expectations of plot, structure, and resolution; Joyce consciously examines, refutes, and redefines the conventions of novelistic expectation and in doing so releases the reader from the constraints of those expectations. The episode "Aeolus" especially functions as a self-conscious and frequently ironic exploration into the limitations of the linguistic and literary process as a means of expressing the immense reality of human experience. In "Aeolus," Joyce makes a structural choice to break the flow of the narrative with various headings that both make a direct commentary on the sections of the episode below them and an indirect commentary on the artificiality of the writing process.

The content of "Aeolus" is sectioned by headings that range from the ironically hyperbolic, "IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS" (7.1-2), to the humorously reductive, "K.M.A" (7.980). This is the reader's first encounter with Joyce's self-referential style that will come to define the later episodes of *Ulysses*, and in "Aeolus" the self-reference is at its most explicitly obvious. In *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, Karen Lawrence asserts that the headings "participate in a game of emphasis and classification," with Joyce drawing on the elements of the sections below to make some form of commentary on what the reader should expect (55). Yet, as an element of organization and explication, the headings do more to obscure and confuse the reader than they do to organize and elucidate the content they caption. The headings are spatially

prominent— centered and capitalized, they aggressively confront the reader with their seemingly unavoidable significance. However, close reading of the content below them frequently underscores the “arbitrary and capricious” motivation of their creation (Lawrence 55). The metonymic regality of the title “THE WEARER OF THE CROWN” heads a section occupied with the quotidian, common occupations of shoeblacks and mailmen (7.14). The simplistic heading “SAD” describes a section dealing in detail with Bloom’s pensive contemplation of the financial ruin of an acquaintance (7.291). Just as Joyce playfully elevates the event of lighting a match by having Stephen regard it facetiously as an occurrence “that determined the whole aftercourse of both our lives,” so the subject choice of the headings form a discordance with the narrative matter they organize (7.765).

In “Aeolus” Joyce begins deconstructing the reader’s conceptions of what exactly is important in a novel by aggrandizing inconsequential elements to the status of section headings. Joyce’s primary concern in the creation of *Ulysses* is not to relate a series of events, as a news story might, nor is his goal to adhere to the constructed style of realist plot, heavily edited to conform to the tenets of dramatic development and satisfactory conclusion. Rather *Ulysses* is an effort to engage in artistic mimesis as interpreted through a modernist lens. In her essay “Inverted Commas, Unreality, and Chiasmus in ‘Aeolus’,” Susan Solomon makes a salient observation that “by evoking the avant-garde method of montage and the newspaper layout equally, the headings [...] summon the binary between modernist art and reportage” (619). The headings make the reader aware of the inherent dichotomy between these two methods of mediation by presenting first an arbitrary observation and second a nuanced stream of encompassing prose that calls into question or complicates the heading that introduced it. Lawrence contends that the compression of life into a logical sequence “falsifies life precisely because it overemphasizes certain events while failing to acknowledge that all life has meaning” (77). Life is too immense to ever be suitably reduced in fiction, and Joyce conveys that idea in his headings.

Joyce is self-conscious of this artistic limitation, but that does not stop him from making a best effort to engage in a truthful mimetic endeavor. The grand scale of minutiae in *Ulysses*, from the inclusion of inconsequential sensory input during Leopold’s wanderings around Dublin,

to the extensive exhibition and characterization of banal internal thought in the “Circe” episode, exhaust the reader with their encyclopedic detail and self-referential obscurity. However, like the headings in “Aeolus,” *Ulysses* fails completely to encapsulate the complexity of even one day in Dublin. Lawrence states that the exhaustive nature of *Ulysses* is “both a liberation from the constraints of the traditional novel form and a defensive strategy against the knowledge of the limitations of all writing” (79). Joyce is hyper-aware of the inherent dishonesty of other modes of writing—he “criticizes by imitation and parody all previous fictional techniques”—but it is his break from his own previous style of stream-of-consciousness that shows that Joyce knows his limitations as well (Loss 182). His genius lies in the originality of his attempt and its break from the conventions that limit the reader’s journey in the realist novel.

Intriguingly, it was with a reader’s eyes, and not a writer’s that Joyce introduced the headings into “Aeolus”. Joyce added them as he compiled the first edition of the published novel from the originally published serialized version (Lawrence 57). The new structure evokes the layout of a newspaper, a heavily-edited collection of events, mixed with external commentary. Joyce’s extension of the newsroom setting into the headline-like headings is a process of “self-emphasizing mediation,” where the “novel reflects on its own processes of production” (Solomon 619). Just as Bloom pauses to “watch a typesetter neatly distributing type,” the reader is forced to pause by the headings in “Aeolus,” and consider the process of mediation in the physical construction of the story (7.204). Joyce introduces this narrative discordance just as he is preparing to unify a story that had been published in a series of disjointed sections. This reflection and commentary by Joyce on his own reading both distances the readers from the progression of the story and makes them privy to the process of its creation. Joyce acts as “both maker and mocker,” showing “that art is both an imitation of reality and a transcendence of that imitation” (Loss 179). Joyce breaks the seamless mediation assumed in the classic process of narration and invites the reader to journey with him on an exploration of what exactly constitutes art.

The structure of mediation thus exposed, the reader is confronted with a drastic change in the flow of narration in *Ulysses*. For instance, there is a scene where a character goes to answer a

ringing telephone, but this simple action is interrupted by a line break and the heading “A DISTANT VOICE” (7.656). The reader is temporarily removed from the developing flow of the story and confronted with sensationally theatrical commentary on a mundane event: “Bloom is on the telephone” (7.671). Lawrence contends that this significant structural shift is Joyce’s warning to the reader that “the form of the novel was becoming obsolete” (57). Indeed, the reader must question their own method of reading, lulled into a certain expectation by the first six chapters and by the great mass of novels antecedent to *Ulysses*. The mythic parallel of the episode is of course the Homeric tale of Odysseus and the winds of King Aeolus. Just as the winds blew Odysseus and his crew off course, so too is Joyce’s “Aeolus” the catalyst for the changing winds of the novel. In this particular episode, the reader is disrupted from the narrative flow of the chapter by insistently interruptive headings, but more broadly, “Aeolus” introduces Joyce’s step up into a world of experimentation that is as difficult to chart as Odysseus’ long voyage to Ithaca.

“Aeolus” functions as both a middle ground and an introduction. Here the reader is confronted with the first taste of Joyce’s style-driven writing philosophy that will only expand and complicate as the novel moves forward. Likewise, the reader is given an in-depth examination of the writing process from the so aptly chosen location of a newsroom. This examination raises Joyce’s own concern with the ability of art to imitate life and confronts the artistic endeavor with a knowing and facetiously satirical eye. The reader cannot read “Aeolus” as one expects to; there is a physical disruption inserted on every page of the episode—Joyce’s own intrusion into his narrative. But it is the process of releasing those expectations that generates insight into why they were in place at all, allowing the reader to experiment along with Joyce in a more comprehensive and appreciative way through the remainder of the novel.

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A Vindication of the Rights of Women Inspires Dystopia in *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one of the most enduring gothic novels of all time. Critics today still debate the multiple issues the novel raises. One of the most contemplated features of the novel is its female author and what she may be trying to reveal. Not only was Shelley a feminist, but she was also the daughter of a famous feminist. Though many focus on her femininity to expose themes in the novel, some critics still insist on seeing the novel through the masculine lens. For example, in his influential work, "Frankenstein, The True Story," Lawrence Lipking claims that though Shelley's novel was written with many sources in mind, the one that can really be said to have had the most influence is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile; or Concerning Education* (*Émile*). That Rousseau may have influenced *Frankenstein* is probable; however, contrary to Lipking's opinion, the work that had the most influence on Shelley was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (*A Vindication*). Many of *Frankenstein*'s characters take on a new identity when seen through the lens of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*. Shelley applies her mother's ideas of how uneducated and non-autonomous women create a problem for society, in essence exploring how a male constructed society creates the type of dystopia revealed in *Frankenstein*.

Though Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* can be seen throughout the novel, Lipking claims it is Rousseau who has influenced Shelley more than any other author. Lipking begins his argument by producing two paragraphs from the first page of *Émile* and then claims those paragraphs have pre-produced the "essence both of Victor Frankenstein, the naturally good human being whose compulsion to improve on nature violates it... and of the outcast creature or monster, abandoned to himself at birth and warped like a shrub in the road" (Lipking 425). To make this quote representative, Lipking is overlooking vital information, much as he accuses other critics of doing. He is choosing to forget that Victor is not concerned with improving on nature but in gaining glory for himself. Victor is clear about his ambition: "A new species would bless me

as its creator...many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me; no father could claim the gratitude of his children so completely as I should deserve" (Shelley 33); Therefore, Victor is not a "naturally good human being." Rousseau also teaches that "a man abandoned to himself...from birth," and left in the midst of men, would have nature "stifled" in him, and nothing would replace it. He goes on to say that "Nature there [in the hands of that man] would be like a shrub" (37). The creature seems to fit the role that Lipking has put him into, except the creature truly appreciates nature, and it has not been "stifled" in him. The creature would be more fitting of a case of nature being damaged by man, but this is not what Rousseau is claiming in the quoted paragraphs. Furthermore, Lipking says earlier that "the creation is an unnatural botch of a man"; thus, he is not a natural man being damaged by men (420). Lipking's main evidence does not prove his point. Though Rousseau's ideas undoubtedly shape the characters, they only do so in light of Wollstonecraft's argument against Rousseau's teachings.

Wollstonecraft took offence with parts of *Émile*, and many of the pages of *A Vindication* are dedicated to an argument against Rousseau's teachings. Though Wollstonecraft generally admired Rousseau, in *A Vindication* she does show indignation toward his teachings on the education of women, and many of her remarks have been unmistakably demonstrated in Shelley's female characters. For instance, Victor's highest praise of Elizabeth is that she "shewed signs... of a gentle and affectionate disposition"; she is "docile and good tempered...her disposition uncommonly affectionate. No one could better enjoy liberty, yet...submit with more grace than she did to constraint and caprice." He goes on to say that her eyes "possessed an attractive softness" and "she appeared the most fragile creature in the world...[He] loved to tend on her, as [he] should on a favorite animal" (20). Many readers, even today, do not question this praise of Elizabeth; however, Wollstonecraft would not have seen these qualities as praise worthy. She appeals to women in her introduction to *A Vindication* as follows: "instead of flattering their fascinating graces...I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness." She goes on to ask women to "despise the weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, sup-

posed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel” (34). Elizabeth is not an example of an ideal partner for Victor, but instead, an example of how women who are raised in the ideal set by Rousseau are weak and ineffective in a masculine society. Elizabeth is only the first of many examples of characters that were modeled after Wollstonecraft’s essay that are more complex than they first appear.

Another distinct example can be seen in Madame Moritz, Justine’s mother. She is presented as what seems to be a subplot used to explain Justine’s character. Elizabeth reports that Justine’s mother “was a widow with four children...one by one her [children] died...perpetually fretting at length threw Madam Moritz in decline...she died on the first approach of cold weather” (Shelley 41-42). Wollstonecraft presents a similar situation when she discusses the problems with a woman whose husband has died and left her in a world where she has never had autonomy:

She [the widow] has never thought, much less acted for herself. She has only learned to please men, to depend gracefully on them; yet, encumbered with children, how is she to obtain another protector—a husband to supply the place of reason? ... [S]he pines under the anguish of unavailable impotent regret ... and the vices of licentious youth bring her with sorrow, if not poverty also to the grave. (88-89)

Madam Moritz’s decline is a result of not being able to care for herself or think clearly about how to care for her children. Rather than an insignificant character, Madam Moritz becomes another image of Shelley’s dystopian world that favors men and burdens women.

It is not only the women who are imitated utilizing examples from Wollstonecraft. Victor’s ambitious character also makes an appearance. Lipking cites what he considers a “lack of convictions” in Shelley’s writing (433). This is the inability of Victor to warn Walton away from ambition with his last words: “Farewell, Walton...avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (Shelley 157). Wollstonecraft

uses this specific example when she imagines what an eminent being would see while looking down on ambitious men:

How would they [the gods] be diverted to see ambitious man consuming himself by running after a phantom...for when consciousness is lost...should [the gods]... show him the thorny path which led to eminence...disappointing his hopes when almost within his grasp, would he not leave to others the honour of amusing them. (Wollstonecraft 171)

Lipking hints that Shelley is guilty of “tergiversation.” In light of Wollstonecraft’s writings, the statement Shelley makes, through the dying Victor in *Frankenstein* is in fact unwavering: masculinity without the guide of femininity will continue to overreach, and in so doing, undermine itself at every turn.

Throughout *Émile*, it is clear that Rousseau believes that parenting the perfect male citizen should be done with a mostly hands-off approach. Because Rousseau believes that everything that came from “the Author of all things,” is good, and it is man that destroys it (37), he also claims that the best way to educate is “to allow children more freedom and less authority” (59). He later urges that the child “should depend and not obey; he should demand not command” (71). Like the fictional child, *Émile*, Victor was raised to be a perfect citizen according to Rousseau, and he reports that as for Alphonse Frankenstein, “a more indulgent and less dictatorial parent did not exist upon the Earth” (Shelley 109). In this instance, unfortunately, the method of Rousseau idealized for raising a good citizen went completely wrong. Rather than staying good due to the light handed approach of Alphonse, Victor succumbed to the ambitious desires of men. Every decision Victor makes revolves around his own comfort, and as a result of one of his decisions, his creature is abandoned to nature. Regrettably, the creature also turns out differently than what Rousseau would have predicted a man completely raised in nature to be. Rousseau teaches that men learn “from nature itself, or from other men or from circumstances” (38). Of these, he claims that nature is the best teacher because it is the only teacher that does not involve men improving on it, and all other parts of education must be directed toward nature (38). The creature

learns in Rousseau's ideal way. He is not dictated right and wrong, he learns naturally through experience and observation. No one has to teach him to talk or to walk, and no part of learning is stifled in him. All of these attributes of the perfect education are revealed in book one of *Émile*. Had Shelley been as enamored with Rousseau's teaching on education, as Lipking insinuates, the creature would have to be a moral being, not a murderer. His education, like Victor's, did create genius (Although this is not a goal of Rousseau's ideal education. He only aims at perfect citizen and considers genius a problem for society), yet both are responsible for the destruction of Victor's family and friends. Both place their own desires before the welfare of others. Both have a form of Rousseauian education, and neither turn out to be the impeccable citizens Rousseau was hoping would be trained up in light of his instruction.

Anne K. Mellor in "Possessing Nature; The Female in *Frankenstein*" agrees that Wollstonecraft inspired Shelley. She says Shelley "specifically portrays the consequences of a social construction of gender" (356). Mellor also addresses the public and private spheres which are relegated to each gender. Part of her argument hinges on the fact that Victor's work on his creation takes place in the public sphere; therefore, he is unable to produce emotions that belong in the private sphere for his creation. These two spheres are reinforced by Rousseau, but Wollstonecraft and Shelley both see them as the root of the problems with society. Elizabeth is stuck in the home, or the private sphere, as are all of the female characters. She is unable to attend school with Victor and Clerval; she does not go to college. Victor goes on a sabbatical prior to his marriage, and she is left behind. She tells Victor that she "regretted that she had not the same opportunities of enlarging her experience and cultivating her understanding" as Victor (Shelley 110). She is unable to become an equal with Victor because Rousseau's separate spheres imposed private spaces for her. These spheres are designed to create the kind of women Wollstonecraft warned about in *A Vindication*. One of her biggest warnings against educating women to be brides, but not wives, as Rousseau taught, was that they would not be suitable companions for the men, because "The affection of husbands and wives cannot be pure when they have so few sentiments in common, and when so little confidence is established at home, as must be the case when their pursuits are so different" (Wollstonecraft 285). She replies to Rousseau's teachings

that “the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will...become the friend and not the humble dependent of her husband” (63). Educated women draw the men to them as friends and companions, but they do not exist in Shelley’s dystopia.

Men in *Frankenstein* do not look to women for the intellectual stimulation that is required of a true companion. Walton and Victor both looked to other men first to find true companionship. Walton begins the novel with the theme of a contentment in freedom from women by choosing to leave England and his sister in order to obtain glory among men. He then writes Mrs. Saville that he has “no friend...to participate in [his] joy...no one to endeavor to sustain [him] in [his] dejection,” but he does not wish for a wife; instead, he says, “I desire the company of a man who would sympathize with me” (10). His hopes are pinned on a man to fill the place that is usually reserved for a wife. Victor, like Walton, leaves his home and chooses to stay in Ingolstadt’s male environment even after his studies are complete. Victor also chooses male companionship over the female. He extols of Henry Clerval and his love of him “with a mixture of affection and reverence that knew no bounds” (44). His description of Elizabeth never goes that far. In answering his father upon the question of his intent to marry Elizabeth, he reveals, “I never saw any woman who *excited*, as Elizabeth does, my warmest admiration,” (108 italics are mine) and not until her death does he declare that he “had loved and cherished” her (141). As Wollstonecraft argues men are more interested in how a woman looks and less in her intellect.

Even though the creature has not been accepted by men, his values still reflect those of Victor and Walton. Victor has no sympathy for the situation he has placed his creature in until the creature reveals the tale of trying to gain companionship among men. The creature’s first hope for happiness was not in having a female like himself, but in having friends. When this hope is disappointed, he begins to dream of becoming “linked to the chain of existence and events, from which [he is] now excluded” (Shelley 104). He now needs to be married to be included; therefore, he does not imagine that this female creature will bring him the same happiness as he would have if he had been accepted into Victor’s world, but rather discloses that in the female he knows “the gratification is small, but it is all [he] can receive” (102). Like Victor, his first hope was in finding a companion among men; he only resorted to domestic bliss as a last resort.

For the creature's new ambitions to succeed, Victor must create a female, but Victor finds himself "unable to overcome [his] repugnance to the task" (107). He may understand the creation of a female will duplicate the system that exists between natural men and women. In her essay, "Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity," Bette London points out, "it is only when Frankenstein speculates on female monstrosity ('she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate') that he considers the threatening presence of the monster's male sexuality" (394). By considering the feminine, Victor becomes acutely aware of the problems with a female creature, and with this revelation also comes the realization that this woman may not be controlled. As the creature does not fit into either the private or the public sphere, the female creature may choose to disregard the male hierarchy and not maintain the private sphere the creature is hoping to create. Even for the creature, who does not belong to society, the masculine norms that Victor is subject to and Wollstonecraft writes against have dashed any hope he has of obtaining the minutest amount of gratification.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is, as many great works are, a conglomeration of many previous works, and Émile is undoubtedly an influence; however, the masculine lens Lipking has chosen to look through has managed to obscure the major feminine influence of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* on the novel. Shelley, like her mother, discerned the damage that masculine enforced spheres were inflicting on all of society. The examples above as well as numerous other attest to the fact that Wollstonecraft's ideas significantly shape the novel, and their role is to refute Rousseau's teachings on the proper education of women, and reveal that even the male character becomes flawed when women are excluded from becoming proper companions by being left in the private sphere.

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I Sing the Body Fragmented: The Biodegradation of Yeong-hye

“Thinking the ecological thought is difficult: it involves becoming open, radically open—open forever, without the possibility of closing again,” writes Timothy Morton, developer and advocator of the ecological thought, which refers to the ability to perceive the coexistence and interconnectedness of quite literally everything in nature (2626). In *The Vegetarian* Yeong-hye awakens to the ecological thought when she experiences her first nightmare, which results primarily in strict abstinence of meat products and culminates in bodily dissolution as she strives to become one with vegetation. Since her family is repelled by her transformation, they do not extend the crucial element of pathos required to bear witness, in Kelly Oliver’s terms, to her testimony. Her family merely recognizes her as “what” she is, rather than “who,” an important indicator of identity identified by Hannah Arendt. Arendt’s notions of meaning and truth also illuminate Yeong-hye’s unity with vegetal life, where meaning refers to the significance humans attach to things and truth as that which cannot be changed. Ironically, given her family’s inability to bear witness to her reality, their consequent viewing of her as “what” instead of “who,” the meaning of her identity, that of a plant, flourishes, whether factually or not. True to metaphor, her biodegradation from human to plant provides the fertile soil from which In-hye, when she alone bears witness to Yeong-hye, blossoms forth into an agent who absorbs Yeong-hye’s ecological thought into her own self, a process which sublimely testifies to Yeong-hye’s identity.

Yeong-hye’s move to veganism begins when she first experiences a disturbingly graphic dream of slaughter. Signaling her opening to the ecological thought, this dream and those subsequent reinforce Yeong-hye’s decision to reject animal products, which manifests in increasingly drastic behavior, most noticeably her extreme emaciation. When she reflects that the source of her recent chest pain is a lump “threaded together layer upon layer” of “lives of all the animals I ate,” it is clear that she harbors profound guilt for her consumption of animal meat, believing that “though the physical remnants were excreted, their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides”

(56). Per the ecological thought she feels a deep kinship with all living beings and devotes herself to harming them as little as possible, but her decision traverses beyond ethical veganism into an ardent identification with vegetal life. Since this astounds and shames her family, they disdain her. Without sympathy, her family cannot comprehend Yeong-hye's transformation, which diminishes their chances of bearing witness to the testimony of her ecological thought.

Kelly Oliver's account of agency and identity requires more than mere recognition of another; it demands one party bear witness to another's testimony, which can only follow from a consideration of the other's experience in totality, including their subject position (social status) and subjectivity (one's sense of self as an agent). To bear witness is not simply to recognize the other, as Hegel would have it, as the master/slave dialectic begins as and thus involves a relation between a superior and an inferior as opposed to putative equals (Oliver 2497). Yeong-hye fulfills the role of the "other" in every interaction; she is recognized as inferior due to her unpredictable, immoderate, and socially unsanctioned behavior. No one extends the critical element of pathos required to elevate her subject position to an equal and henceforth bear witness to the testimony of her trauma. They create their own identity for her instead of allowing her the agency to both address and respond, which Oliver claims is the "lynch-pin of subjectivity" (2498). Without subjectivity and with a devalued subject position, Yeong-hye's incremental identification with vegetal life, developed from the suffering and guilt evoked by her ecological thought, appears incomprehensible to her disaffected family.

Yeong-hye's family's inability to understand her experience resonates with Oliver's belief that the truth of Yeong-hye's testimony of her dreams, the catalysts of her suffering, is not compromised by any perceived inaccuracy in her reflections. Their impact is no less authentic. "[H]azy distinctions, boundaries wearing thin. Familiarity blends into strangeness, certainty becomes impossible. Only the violence is vivid enough to stick... Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed... Perhaps I'm only now coming face-to-face with the thing that has always been here," she recollects (35-36). Despite the fact that her dreams do not have any immediately apparent, objective explanation--certainly not one with which she could relate with perfect clarity--she perceives horrific sensations of repulsion and "intolerable loathing," which exist beyond recog-

nition, in the indescribable place of “psychoanalytic or phenomenological truth” (Oliver 2499). These impressions, and their diffuse implications, can only be grasped when bearing witness to her subject position (a demure, passive, deeply oppressed South Korean woman who earnestly identifies with vegetal life because of personal and consumerist guilt) and subjectivity. Since no one does this, they cannot, and do not, bear witness to her testimony until In-hye experiences an epiphany beset by her own dire reflections much later.

According to Oliver, “It is possible to develop a sense of agency in spite of, or in resistance to, an oppressive social situation,” which depends on an inner witness through which we dialogically think—or “talk to ourselves” (2500-2501). Yeong-hye expresses this sense of agency through sporadic recollections of her dreams and past, which, fittingly, are the only moments in the novel narrated from her perspective. This conversation with an inner witness recalls Oliver’s further point that, “To conceive of oneself as a subject is to have the ability to address oneself to another, real or imaginary, actual or potential” (2502). Yeong-hye’s internal first-person monologue, or experience of her own subjectivity, taps into a mode of thought, which, described by Oliver, curiously mirrors the ecological thought: “...in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical... [subjectivity and subject position] are always profoundly interconnected... [It] is the result of the productive tension between finite subject position and the infinite response-ability of the structure of subjectivity itself” (2500). Despite her and her family’s volatile, pitiless relations, she retains a sense of agency by abstaining from meat and pursuing unity with vegetation. Although her family observes the effects of her determination, they do not perceive the “who... [,] the unique and distinct identity of the agent,” Yeong-hye herself, beyond them (Arendt 1171). They define her solely in terms of how they react to her: her ecological dedication differs from their worldview, so “[She is] insane! [She has] completely lost it”; she holds unique beliefs, so they are “self-centered”; she acts according to these beliefs, which is nothing less than “sheer obstinacy”; she rejects her mother’s black goat dish, so she cannot truthfully “call [herself] [her mother’s] daughter” (19, 21, 22, 54). None come together in what Arendt refers to as sheer human togetherness, when people are “with others and neither for or against them,” when perception is not clouded with self-interest and agents are discerned

as “who” they are (Arendt 1170). Instead, each is preoccupied with his/her own issues and how Yeong-hye inconveniences each of them, or, in the case of her brother-in-law, how she can be an instrument for personal benefit. Human togetherness is impossible when discourse primarily serves as expression of disappointment, frustration, and condemnation heaped on one party by the other.

Over time, Yeong-hye’s family, save for In-hye, abandons her to the hospital, which removes her from the sphere of intercourse, what Arendt calls the public realm of human relations (1170). She cannot reenter this sphere on her own volition since it depends on In-hye’s presence, which she does not control. Without a space in which to act, she cannot effectively perform any action, as Arendt contends, “Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action... is only possible in the public realm” (1170). Without action, Yeong-hye cannot disclose “who” she is, which renders her “without self and preserve[s] complete anonymity” (1170). Although In-hye later frequents the hospital weekly, she initially only visits Yeong-hye in case of emergency, which allows Yeong-hye’s hospital bed to turn garden bed, a site of Yeong-hye’s biodegradation from human “who” subject into vegetal life—the “what” by which her family has regarded her through debasement of her subjectivity, her subject position, her realm of intercourse, her identity, her humanity.

In-hye herself is equally, yet oppositely, removed from this sphere. This fact harmonizes with Arendt’s notion that truth, understood as that which cannot be changed, and its pursuit, “require[s] non-commitment and impartiality, freedom from self-interest in thought and judgment... performed from outside the political realm” (1178). This ushers In-hye towards the apprehension that “truth” differs extraordinarily from “meaning,” though it does not crystallize until later. Truth and objectivity exist outside the realm of intercourse, whereas meaning composes the reality within it, which Arendt defines metaphorically as “the ‘web’ of human relationships” (1172). Despite its “intangibility,” she continues, “this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common” (1172). While not as comprehensive as the ecological thought, this understanding, like Oliver’s infinitely open experience of subjectivity, reflects the deep interconnectedness of human beings, wherein the “revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the

fore” (1170). Awareness of this intersubjective space and its grounds for action which discloses “who” people are, allows In-hye to shed her self-interest to truly bear witness to Yeong-hye’s ecological thought; and therefore open herself to her own experience of subjectivity, which results in a newfound perception of the intangible interconnectedness between all things, specifically herself and Yeong-hye, as well as the later reevaluation of meaning and truth in her own life.

This sea-change occurs in In-hye after the hospital phones to inform her that Yeong-hye had been found, having prior escaped, when she reflects, “the rain she had seen all day must have been pouring down on the mountain where Yeong-hye had been found too. An indiscriminate connection, their existences briefly aligned” (133). Immediately thereafter, she dreams Yeong-hye’s executing a handstand, so as to spread roots through the Earth. Subsequently, in the same dream, “blood was trickling from her left eye” as she faced a mirror, literally reflecting (134). The imagery recalls Yeong-hye’s nightmares and suggests that In-hye conclusively bears witness to these horrors beyond recognition.

The more Yeong-hye opens to the shared trauma of her sister’s past, including recurrent episodes of childhood abuse and marital rape, the deeper the connection with Yeong-hye. She remarkably describes the guilt she feels for having Yeong-hye “incarcerated,” as “a lump in her chest, weighing her down,” is a further indicator of their bond heretofore unacknowledged (183, 150). In consideration of Yeong-hye’s testimony, she now grasps Yeong-hye’s identity: the encapsulation of her subject position, sense of self, and the action through which she had been disclosing “who” she is. She perceives that the meaning Yeong-hye ascribed to herself as plant characterized her identity entirely, despite her literally still being human, and ultimately witnesses her transformation in panoramic detail. This unveils Arendt’s notions of meaning and truth and allows In-hye to incisively reevaluate her own life, which she now realizes, had hitherto been devoid of meaning: “It was a fact. She had never lived. Even as a child, as far back as she could remember, she had done nothing but endure... Her devotion to doing things the right away... would have gone on like that indefinitely” (167). With this knowledge, sprung forth from Yeong-hye’s dissolution to the vegetal life with which she had so meaningfully identified, In-

hye's subjectivity, or sense of self, awakens.

This propels her into unfettered, instinctual action when she bites the hospital staff to protect Yeong-hye in an expression of Arendt's sheer human togetherness. In-hye proceeds to re-establish her identity, "who" she is, through meaningful action, as Arendt writes, to "insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own" (1175). She makes the radical choice to leave behind Ji-woo and accompany Yeong-hye to her imminent death, awestruck by what it truly means to act, or exercise agency: "[s]he can't explain, not even to herself, how easy it had been to make the decision to abandon her child... The truth of the matter was something she simply felt" (186). She forges a new path, and, with the nourishment of Yeong-hye and her passion and conviction, comes to understand "what that cold moisture had been trying to say, as it drenched her battered body and spread through her dried-up veins. It had simply leached through into her flesh, down to her very bones" (187). In-hye embodies Yeong-hye's fulfillment of the ecological thought. As Yeong-hye withers, providing kindling for the "blazing green fire," In-hye blooms (188).

Although only In-hye bears witness to Yeong-hye, the transformation that occurs in Yeong-hye from "who" to "what" as she devotes herself entirely to vegetal life permits In-hye to ascertain her newfound identity, which, for the first time, grants her meaningful authority of her actions—the realization of which she would not have arrived without Yeong-hye's unwavering, martyrlike certitude. Kelly Oliver's ethical agenda of bearing witness to another's subjectivity, as well as Hannah Arendt's notions of meaning, truth, agency, and their place in the web of human relationships, tacitly underpin both the evolution and devolution of In-hye and Yeong-hye, respectively. Until In-hye meets Yeong-hye in the undefinable psychic space beyond recognition, the infinite openness of her subjectivity, the intangible locus of their interconnected relations, she does not grasp Yeong-hye's radical ecology. As she absorbs Yeong-hye's testimony, however, she finds herself on the same continuum, where she finally understands Yeong-hye's earlier, elegiac utterance: "Sister... all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters" (150).

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Gendered Social Spheres in *Frankenstein*

In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, Victor famously assumes the role of woman, thereby collapsing the gender construct. Further, in the Monster's inability to be seen in the public sphere, we see the further feminization and privatization of a masculine figure in the novel. However, as the novel unfolds, the Monster's inability to fit into spheres of society and adapt to a human identity becomes a threat to Victor's self-anointed identity as a creator of life. For his part, relatedly, the Monster realizes that the society he lives in demands the successful implementation and maintenance of gender roles. His ultimate destruction of himself and Victor points to Shelley's rejection of Victor's masculine presumption as well as her pessimistic realization that early-nineteenth century society will not tolerate mixed gender identities. While a number of critics to date have explored how Shelley addresses gendered social spheres—Anne K. Mellor, Mary Poovey, and Ellen Moers foremost among them—none have yet focused on how individuals react to ambiguous identities. More specifically, none have yet explored how Shelley uses Victor to remove gender from sexual reproduction and parent identities and mix the public sphere experience of domesticity through the Monster. Shelley's intention in deconstructing and reconstructing social spheres in *Frankenstein* is important to understanding the social separation and integration of the gender-ambiguous roles of Victor and the Monster.

In the essay "The Female in *Frankenstein*," author Anne K. Mellor explains the two spheres; the public and the private sphere. According to Mellor, women reside in the private sphere (which includes domesticity and childrearing), while men reside in the public sphere (which includes work and school) (356). Mellor argues that the spheres of cultural identity in *Frankenstein* show how the male and female experience depend on each other for continuation of life. The co-dependent experiences that define each social sphere include social consequences. For example, the three women characters are either wives or are being conditioned to be mothers and wives by being given social boundaries and responsibilities. Justine, Elizabeth, and Caroline

represent female gender identity sexuality. When they leave their designated social roles and locations where their obligations as women are not applied, they are removed from their new space through something tragic. Justine's crime conviction and execution happens because she was found in the same location as a dead child, even despite the lack of evidence supporting the accusation (Shelley 57). This shift in the private sphere is also lead by Victor's assimilation to female gender roles, which causes a change in who can exist in the private sphere. When Victor and the Monster assume the role of mother and child, Victor and the Monster are never discovered publicly and therefore can make their own decisions about their social performance and use of space without having any social consequence. Through death and shame, women are removed from their private spheres to accommodate Victor's new vision of society and ambiguous spheres because the spheres in which women and men function in *Frankenstein* are very forgiving and allow ample space for men's public mistakes but punish women for defying social boundaries. Victor's new role as the creator of life is a symbolic removal of power of the female identity and its incorporated social roles. What leads to this removal of power is arguably a cross between Victor's interest in destabilizing female authority and analyzing his own shame of self-immersion into the private sphere. Victor replaces the female-mother role with himself in the creation of the Monster (Shelley 35), places Justine in the public realm of court (Shelley 61), and removes Elizabeth and Caroline entirely from any sphere by repeatedly visualizing them dead (Shelley 36). The physical space that the Monster and Victor occupy is also distinguished by Victor's avoidance of the Monster and the Monster's need to hide. The change in social roles creates a new sphere where gender-ambiguous people reside with no social roles. The ambiguous identity creates a new sphere where work, birth, education, and home are unequally distributed. Victor's self-removal from the public sphere is important to the construction of the ambiguous identity sphere and the possible creation of a society without rigid gender roles.

In the essay "The Lady and the Monster," Mary Poovey explains Victor's consequential entrance into a new sphere:

Frankenstein's particular vision of immortality and the vanity that it embodies have

profound social consequences, both because Frankenstein would deny relationships (and women) any role in the conception of children and because he would reduce all domestic ties to those that center on and feed his selfish desires. (347)

The removal of women from their social roles is what prompts the power imbalance between Victor and the Monster. The identity crisis that the Monster and Victor try to avoid is because the removal of women in *Frankenstein* puts Victor in charge of reassigning the public and private spheres, but in his own experience as a life-giver to the Monster, he struggles with creating a social order for ambiguous identities. Outside of the public and private spheres, they both must determine how their identity is composed of social qualities. The removal of women from matriarchal social roles begins with Mary Shelley's personal life and generational struggle to occupy a domestic sphere. Ellen Moers' essay "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother" presents the argument that Frankenstein was inspired by the traumatic experience that childbirth was to Mary Shelley and the women that surrounded her (Moers 323). Growing up without a mother and experiencing the death of her own children over time contributes to the Monster's experience of entering a chaotic world that does not allow the assignment of the public or private sphere since there is not a gendered social order he can follow. Victor purposefully bringing the Monster into a vague existence allows Victor to absorb the female-mother identity for the sake of the Monster, which is when the spheres of gender ideology cross for Victor. When Victor assumes the role of the life-giver, Victor realizes he is responsible for caring for the Monster, which is something that he finds he cannot accomplish in his new sphere of identity and as an example of how he does not accurately fit a domestic quality of Mellor's private sphere.

Mellor argues that the division of space is important to gendered spaces and belonging in *Frankenstein*: "The division of public man from private woman also means that women cannot function effectively in the public realm" (357). The Monster attempts to exist in the private sphere to avoid being noticed, while the women who would be co-existing with the Monster in the private sphere are rejected by the public realm and as a result do not have a sphere that they are safe in. The immediate, morbid, and traumatic deaths of Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine

reflect the lack of space for them to coexist in a private sphere already occupied by the Monster and Victor. Victor's power to create a being that begins its life in the private sphere destabilizes the roles of the women in the private sphere.

Not only does Victor assume an ambiguous parent role, but the Monster's difficulty fitting in with society presents a power imbalance between two beings with abstract identities. Faced with no socially accepted family roles, they become two individuals using each other to comprehend their own social power and identity within the sphere of unidentifiable gender ideology. The strained social experience that Victor and the Monster encounter can be analyzed as two beings experiencing the same kind of identity crisis based on how they are socially outcast. Victor and the Monster's identity crises are inherently tied to each other because they both assume roles that do not exist until they can define themselves as male creator and non-human offspring. Their shared experience exposes a fallacy in the establishment of public and private spheres: as ambiguous beings without the ability to reproduce gendered organisms in public and private spheres, both will never expand an ambiguous-identity sphere to successfully create their own society without gender roles.

The Monster attempts to expand his spheres by restoring what Victor has removed from the society he created. Without having a nurturing parental connection to Victor that allows the Monster to mature and develop, the Monster wonders how leaving the social sphere might change his experience, much like Justine, who has wandered away from her house. This realization is what helps the Monster develop a longing for a female mate to correct the social order within his society. The Monster's own confession to killing William (Shelley 100) evokes the Monster's developing reasoning that he should have women in his life as mothers, sisters, children, and wives. The Monster's jealousy of William's family ties to women and the Monster's attraction to the private sphere is his attempt to re-establish the public and private spheres that Victor has derailed with his belief in the sphere of ambiguous identity.

The Monster's interest in forming a relation to the private and public spheres threatens Victor's own identity as well. The Monster's request to form a gendered social structure for the possibility of a race of Monsters questions Victor's creation philosophy because Victor's role as a

creator becomes irrelevant since the Monster is advocating for his own reproductive rights. They have decided that within their society of ingrained gender roles and the division of the public and private spheres, there is no successful option to removing oneself from a sphere or eliminating gender roles from a society except for death, as experienced by the women in their family. Their community cannot uphold the crossed social roles that Victor has envisioned.

Mellor agrees that the De Lacey family offers a solution to Victor's anti-identity model by arguing, "Mary Shelley underlines the mutual deprivation inherent in a family and social structure based on rigid and hierarchical gender divisions by portraying an alternative social organization in the novel: the De Lacey family" (357). The subtle expression of female sexuality is far from what will help Victor or the Monster continue their new society because there already exists people who will occupy and implement a future heteronormative community with enforced gender roles. Felix and Agatha De Lacey are a younger generation of people within Victor and the Monster's community who show interest in conforming to social roles. The De Lacey family are the antithesis to Victor's planned genderless social order because they will enter a public or private sphere by marrying people of the opposite sex, biologically giving birth to children, and raising their children to conform to social roles.

The ability for a future of sexual, gendered people depend on the ability for couples to produce children who live to adulthood. The Monster is created with old body parts and stands tall, not the size of a normal child (Shelley 35). Victor imagines a world where women are not needed and where men can exist in the private sphere, and yet the Monster is born only to ask for the order to be restored by asking for a society and identity that will benefit him as a male. The Monster's social development requires the rigidity of gendered social spheres to teach him how to conform to be a socially-accepted being and requires the return of women to their original private sphere. Returning women to private sphere roles will place the Monster in a sphere that will enable him to reproduce and uphold gender roles as a gendered, parental figure.

The removal of women from *Frankenstein* is not tested with the intention of removing women from society altogether as a form of discrimination against women, but to allow an experimental flexibility between men and women of the community who do not fit traditional

gender roles and family structures. The Monster's request for a mate is a response to Victor's creation of life philosophy that argues the Monster's existence would have been less harmful to society had he been able to conform to a singular sphere of identity. Shelley uses men with non-traditional identities and parental instincts to argue that the spheres of gender ideology are necessary for the raising of children, progression of society, and morality within a community. Victor's stress and anxiety towards the Monster is due to Victor's failed removal from the public sphere. The Monster's havoc on the community of Ingolstadt can be attributed to Victor's theories of gender identity ambiguity not becoming successfully implemented. The Monster is a projection of the possibility of a new future where men can be caretakers and women can exist anywhere outside of domesticity. The Monster tests the hypothesis only to show Victor that his vision will not come true in his lifetime.

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**Agency, Renunciation, Gender, and Transformative Destruction: Yeong-hye's Resistance in
*The Vegetarian***

Discussion of masculinist or patriarchal culture forcefully moving women from a state of calm, obedient rationality to one of affective madness is reductive, yet the literary narrative of female hysteria nonetheless persists. Such narratives, even when produced by ostensibly feminist writers, serve only to uphold systems of masculinist oppression because they remove the agency of their female subjects. Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*, however, flouts the typical female-hysteria narrative: Yeong-hye exhibits strategic deliberateness alongside the subconscious thought processes that lead to her affective and physical transformation. She commits an act of self-destruction but does so with intention and agency. That her transformation occurs within the bounds of an oppressive masculinist culture, the expectations of which Yeong-hye fails to adhere, does not negate its agentic nature. In fact, as Judith Butler posits in *Undoing Gender*,

There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends on escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. (3)

The primary purpose of Yeong-hye's transformation from human to plant, then, is survival. Yeong-hye feels she cannot endure in the culture surrounding her, which is violent and demands violence; furthermore, she does not desire to be recognized within those cultural expectations. Her non-violence is therefore what Butler might deem "culturally unintelligible," and to exist non-violently she must escape humanity; thus Yeong-hye determines to relinquish woman-ness and humanness—with all their attendant expectations—and become plant.

Two types of transformative change permeate the novel: physical and affective. They occur simultaneously, one indelibly intertwined with the other. Physical transformation occurs either by direct choice (i.e. self-harm via wrist slashing) or indirectly as the result of other choices (i.e. the wasting away of the body as a result of Yeong-hye's refusal to eat). Affective transformation is often subtler, taking the form of a subconscious shift in mood, and is caused by either interior or exterior stimuli (i.e. Yeong-hye's dreams or social interactions).

Yeong-hye's affect in the novel is closely tied to her physical state of being. In her article "Excess of Affect: In Translation," Sneja Gunew argues that "affect and emotions. . . are useful tools for embodiment—requiring embodiment and hence a kind of personalization" (Gunew 9). Indeed, the significance of *The Vegetarian* is rooted in Yeong-hye's body. The overarching affect of the novel is one of discomfort and suffering; suffering materializes from Yeong-hye's meta-physical internal world to manifest physically in her body. Gunew additionally addresses the Korean concept of "han," which she posits is an affect of thwarted desire marked by passivity, especially in women. She cites Asian-American literature critic Elaine Kim, who defines *han* as "'the sorrow and anger that grow from the accumulated experiences of oppression. . . when people die of han, it is called dying of hwabyong, a disease of frustration and rage following misfortune'" (Kim qtd. Gunew 14). Han, Gunew argues, is meant to personalize "a history of political and cultural oppression" (14). In other words, the concept of han is meant to connect larger occurrences of historical oppression or suffering with that of the individual, and *The Vegetarian* thus becomes a metaphor for female han, which is the suffering women collectively experience in masculinist and patriarchal cultures (16). As that suffering manifests in her actions and her body, Yeong-hye causes others to feel discomfort, in turn as they witness her resist the culture of violence which oppresses her at the cost of her own prolonged physical destruction.

However, her self-destruction does not mark a movement from rationality to madness but rather is the result of a deliberate choice in service of a particular end: Yeong-hye must punish her body with starvation for its participation in the violence inherent to human nature (meat-eating), and then relinquish that body, replacing it with a new identity (plant) which is utterly nonviolent. For Yeong-hye, this transformation portends the loss of life for her human body but a gain

in metaphysical well-being as she reclaims agency from the masculinist culture oppressing her and rebels against it by divorcing her metaphysical selfhood from her physical body. Her resistance is both active and passive: it is deliberate and radical, but it causes no violent harm except to herself. Yeong-hye emerges from her transition, but her body does not survive it. Still, she succeeds at multiple purposes: withdrawal from her violent and oppressed existence and a change in her essential being.

Agency is central to *The Vegetarian*, and Yeong-hye begins with little of it. Despite being the subject of the novel, she is not its protagonist. This choice on the part of Kang demonstrates the extent to which Yeong-hye is othered and marginalized and the extent to which she has been socialized to suffer in silence. The audience is privy to some of her thoughts, dreams, or memories, but never her direct narrative voice. From those thoughts, a transition begins which is a shift from subconscious to conscious: Yeong-hye moves from passively experiencing violent nightmares to the deliberate actions of first refusing to eat meat, then refusing to eat food altogether. Such a movement requires deliberation and the exercise of agency.

The transformation from human to plant begins in Yeong-hye's subconscious mind, changing her affective state from complacency to discomfort, finally resulting in decisive physical action based in her compulsive desire to become completely nonviolent. As Yeong-hye's brother-in-law wonders, reflecting on her inscrutable calm,

. . .perhaps it was simply that things were happening inside her, terrible things, which no one else could even guess at, and thus it was impossible for her to engage with everyday life at the same time. . .her eyes would seem to reflect a kind of violence that could not simply be dismissed as passivity of idiocy or indifference, and which she would appear to be struggling to suppress. (Kang 93)

The suppression of violence within one's person requires self-control, willpower, and agency. However, women reclaiming their agency within masculinist cultures are almost always met with resistance. The people around Yeong-hye—primarily her husband and family—try to police her

body and limit her agency because her actions cause them all to face truths about themselves that spread the affect of discomfort and suffering from her to them. As they try to make sense of her unusual actions, her husband is faced with his need to impress others and avoid public humiliation, her brother-in-law is faced with his dissatisfaction in his marriage and perverse sexual desires, and In-hye must face her displeasure with her life, unhappiness in marriage, and the fear that she, like her sister, will suffer what she believes to be a mental breakdown (Kang 186). As a result of their own unwillingness to endure discomfort, they each either deliberately employ or are willingly complicit in the use of physical and sexual violence to coerce Yeong-hye into behavior they deem culturally and socially acceptable. Because Yeong-hye does not conform to the gendered expectations of the dominant culture surrounding her, her family takes it upon themselves to either regulate or punish her behavior. Yeong-hye's choice to transform is thus an act of resistance. Her affective and physical transformation allow her to exercise agency within the framework of gendered cultural expectations to ultimately achieve a state of complete nonviolence.

The mental and physical suffering Yeong-hye experiences throughout the novel are profound because they are steeped in a culture of violence that she cannot escape. Susan Bordo writes in "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity" that ". . .the discipline and normalization of the female body. . .has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control" (Bordo 2241). Yeong-hye resists such control, but is often not strong enough to successfully overcome it. Her failure at active physical resistance is perhaps best captured in four instances throughout the novel. The first is as her husband discovers her, manic, removing all of the meat from the refrigerator. As he tries to take the bags of meat away from her to stop her from throwing them out, he is initially surprised by her resistance but quickly becomes angry at her defiance and resorts to physical violence (Kang 18). The second incident occurs once she begins to lose interest in sex; he rapes her and becomes notably sexually aroused by her struggling as he overpowers her. This functions both as an example of masculinist culture which grants men a sense of entitlement over the bodies of women, and an illustration of the use of sexual violence as a Foucauldian attempt to discipline Yeong-hye and coerce her into acting according to cultural

norms of female sexual submissiveness. Indeed, as Butler writes in *Undoing Gender*, “. . . persons are regulated by gender, and that this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person. To veer from the gender norm is to produce the aberrant example that regulatory powers. . . may quickly exploit to shore up the rationale for their own continuing regulatory zeal” (Butler 52). Yeong-hye’s family uses her transformation as justification to involuntarily commit her to a hospital, and the state uses it as rationale for restraining and force-feeding her. Because she adheres to neither familial nor cultural expectations of gender performance, she is in effect incarcerated, which justifies for her family and ex-husband that her behavior is aberrant while theirs is in service of a greater good. The third, and perhaps most obvious, incident of active resistance occurs just after her brother holds her down while her father forces meat into her mouth and strikes her when she will not eat it (Kang 46-49). Fundamentally opposed to causing harm to others, she chooses to act violently upon herself instead of retaliating against her father and slashes her wrists with a fruit knife. Yeong-hye’s final failed resistance is against the state: she struggles against paramedics who collect her nude, flower-painted body from her flat (Kang 143), screaming and biting, and toward the end of the novel does likewise as hospital employees attempt to force-feed and intubate her. As with her former husband and her father, she resists unsuccessfully against forces larger and more powerful than she. But in each instance, she performs violence only as a last, desperate resort, and primarily performs it against her own body. As Butler posits, “the bodies produced through such a regulatory enforcement of gender are bodies in pain, bearing the marks of violence and suffering” (53). Yeong-hye’s body certainly bears those marks: slashes on her wrists, blood on her face from her father’s strike, atrophy from refusal to eat, and internal damage from forced restraint and intubation. Kang has placed Yeong-hye in a position of resistance to cultural coding of the female body, but even as Yeong-hye struggles against those definitions, their power still overcomes her. Not only is the violence being committed against her an example of masculinist culture at large, but her intentional self-harm (wrist cutting, anorexia) is a manifestation of the violence inherent to humanity, particularly that stored in gendered cultural expectations.

Arguably, Yeong-hye finds more success in passive avenues of rebellion. She possesses

a compulsive and almost sacred need to be nonviolent, which for her means a need to no longer be human since humanity is intrinsically violent. In one of the reader's few windows into Yeong-hye's thoughts, she reflects, "Familiarity bleeds into strangeness, certainty becomes impossible. Only the violence is vivid enough to stick. . . Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I've always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off. . ." (Kang 35-6). Yeong-hye faces the violent nature inherent to humankind, recognizing it within herself; and her affect is consequently anxious, uncomfortable, and deeply troubled. She initially laments the ways in which it distresses her physical body. She feels a lump in her chest and experiences difficulty breathing because she imagines all of the animals she has eaten are trapped inside of her (Kang 56). And the influences the affect of discomfort has on her body are not only felt by her, but also transferred to those who observe her appearance and behavior. For instance, her brother-in-law

. . . saw that her expression was as serene as that of a Buddhist monk. Such uncanny serenity actually frightened him, making him think that perhaps this was a surface impression left behind after any amount of unspeakable viciousness had been digested, or else settled down inside her as a kind of sediment. (Kang 83-84)

The fear of facing the truth about humanity's innate violence drives the fear of Yeong-hye's serenity. From it stems each member of her family's, and ultimately the state's, desire to control her actions and her body. In juxtaposition, Yeong-hye's realization about human nature inspired her to slough off human-ness and become a plant. "What she had renounced," her brother-in-law eventually suspected, "was the very life that her body represented" (Kang 92). Renunciation is an apt descriptor for Yeong-hye's transformation from human to plant. Her self-destruction is calculated; it is the decisive act of "someone who had passed into a border area between states of being" (Kang 78). For Yeong-hye, renunciation is the movement from feeling to action, and the beginning of the physical transformation that accompanies her inner affective shift.

Yeong-hye's first act of renunciation is to cleanse her home of all animal products. Not

only does she rid the kitchen of meat, but she rids her home of animal products entirely, down to her leather shoes. Eliminating products which cause violence toward other living creatures seems to give her some relief, but the respite is only temporary. She continues to suffer from violent nightmares, and next stops wearing bras, eventually renouncing clothing altogether because she feels suffocated by it. The shedding of her clothing—in particular, the public baring of her breasts—symbolizes both her relinquishment of marital and societal constraints and the poignant combination of vulnerability and strength which necessarily accompanies radical nonviolence. Likewise, Yeong-hye's change in size as she first refuses meat and later begins to refuse food altogether is an act of profound gentleness that defies cultural norms. That she occupies less physical space functions as a metaphor for occupying less social space; occupying space is an inescapable act of violence, one which Yeong-hye rejects by diminishing the size of her body. Similarly, as Bordo writes, "the body is not only a text of culture. It is also. . . a direct locus of social control" (2240). As Yeong-hye's body grows smaller, the strength of the social control over her likewise diminishes.

At last, there is the poignant scene in the forest, the moment where her transformation is complete and irreversible: Yeong-hye is discovered ". . . in an isolated spot deep in the woods covering the mountain slope, standing there stock-still and soaked with rain as if she herself were one of the glistening trees" (Kang 131). In this moment, Yeong-hye is fully plant in her mind; her human self is gone and thus her human body will inevitably die. The question then arises: Is her death to be considered her success? The vulnerability of her nonviolent transition leads to multiple physical and sexual assaults meant to both police her female body and take advantage of her affective state for male sexual gratification. At last, having starved herself grotesquely, Yeong-hye reaches a condition where the men around her no longer sexually desire her, but she still has not escaped the cultural- and state-sanctioned violence of restraint and force-feeding. In her article "Vegetarian Ecofeminism," Greta Gaard cites Deane Curtin's theory of "contextual moral vegetarianism," which ultimately concludes that "it is not possible to eliminate violence and suffering from the world completely because 'to live is to commit violence'" (Gaard 134). Thus, for Yeong-hye, the only way to truly escape violence is to relinquish humanness altogether

and become a plant, which means death for her physical body.

This desire to renounce humanness is born from Yeong-hye's empathy and her need to both be harmless and escape inherent human harmfulness. Her transformation is an act of radical nonviolence because even as it fails to overcome the violent masculinist culture that oppresses her, it results in the destruction of an oppressive identity: her own. Gunew argues, "Yeong-hye. . . [represents] the possibilities of post-human subjectivity in which there is an abdication from or relinquishment of the Anthropocene. Becoming a tree represents an inversion, a perceptual vertigo" (19). Ultimately, the subjugation of women is similar to the subjugation of nature. The same conditions cause and perpetuate them: entitlement, violence, domination, and exploitation. Gaard mentions as integral insights of ecofeminism "the heterosexualization of the culture-nature relationship as a key to the domination of nature. . . the possibility, significance, and necessity of our erotic reconnection with other parts of nature. . . [and] the recognition of flesh-eating as a form of patriarchal domination" (Gaard 127). Yeong-hye's passive resistance successfully addresses these core insights, relating the experience of women to the experience of nature and allowing her to transition from one to the other.

Finally, the question must be posed: if Yeong-hye's successful transition into radical non-violence comes at the cost of her life and does not change the dominant culture of masculinist violence, does her resistance—which causes her extreme suffering and physical harm—have merit, or does it only serve to empower the values of the very culture which it claims to resist? Unlike what Bordo might opine had she been exposed to *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye's anorexia is not based on cultural conceptions of how the ideal female body ought to look, nor does it act "in collusion with forces that sustain her own oppression" (2242), except perhaps that her slenderness, her relinquishing of physical presence, leaves more space for culturally masculine aggression and violence to occupy. Neither is her anorexia a reach toward "an aesthetic of . . . power over others through the example of superior will and control" (2250). In fact, many of the qualities of Yeong-hye's anorexia directly conflict with Bordo's suppositions: most of all, perhaps, the notion that the anorectic woman begins to feel a sense of power as her diminishing body begins to look more like a masculine body. Indeed, Yeong-hye expressly communicates the opposite sentiment,

feeling as if her only safety lay in the feminine curves of her breasts and that the sharper, more masculine edges of her shrinking body only portended violence (Kang 41). Rather than some type of parody of femininity performed as a clueless protest, Yeong-hye's anorectic body is the side effect of her deliberate attempt to avoid any type of physical violence. That she will ultimately die does not corrupt the integrity of her resistance; she is still successful in her quest to reach a state of complete nonviolence. While it may not directly aid masculinism, her transition and death perhaps ultimately accomplish nothing larger than herself. But it was her self, not her society, that Yeong-hye felt compelled to transform; in that sense, she succeeds.

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Cry for Help: Trauma Theory in *The Vegetarian*

Exploring the gradual breakdown of Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian*, the reader encounters multiple levels of trauma in the main character's life, from childhood to marriage and beyond. Trauma is a constant theme in *The Vegetarian*, like a red thread woven throughout its fabric, touching Yeong-hye's entire family, causing wounds in young and old alike. Trauma, by its very nature, permeates to the bone, staying with the victim long after the event. When Cathy Caruth first began exploring trauma theory, she built a bridge between the pages of literature and the science behind psychoanalysis and psychological theories by culling the writings of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud to discover why trauma has such a profound, lasting effect on people, and how it is represented in literature. According to Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Freud describes trauma in terms of the poem, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, by Tasso as

a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals.

Perplexed by the terrifyingly literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events..., [Freud notices that] these repetitions... seem not to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate... entirely outside their wish or control. (1-2)

In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye does rally to exert control over her diet, but remains a victim in other ways, reenacting trauma with one person after another, continuously battling physical and verbal abuse, and even the betrayal of her own body as it wastes away. Her mind also betrays her, pushing her farther away from sanity until she has zero control over her life. As implied by Freud, Fate seems to be pulling the strings outside Yeong-hye's will.

While it is possible that some members of Yeong-hye's family suffered PTSD from military service of some kind, the focus of *The Vegetarian* is Yeong-hye, who suffers from PTSD that

is not battlefield related. In her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth explains that although PTSD is often associated with combat, it can also result from “rape, child abuse, and a number of other violent occurrences... [resulting in] hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event... (and [sometimes] avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (3-4). These symptoms are commonly found in literature. In the case of Yeong-hye, there is evidence of child abuse from her father (Han 135), including a bizarre scene where he forces her to participate in the torturous killing and eating of a dog (48-49), cold aloofness from her mother (34), rape from her husband (38), and a domestic climate where Yeong-hye is controlled in every way, including whom she will marry (163-164). As a result, she suffers the very PTSD symptoms Caruth speaks of, including repeated nightmares, odd behaviors, and a sudden abhorrent avoidance of meat.

The Vegetarian begins with Yeong-hye’s choice to throw away all meat and dairy products, jarring her husband, Mr. Cheong. It is a sudden, drastic change, but nothing in her decision explains Mr. Cheong’s angry reaction or her family’s outrage at the situation. Yeong-hye’s new diet not only causes familial strife, it also triggers her own gradual deterioration. Her PTSD symptoms are coming to a head, and the people around her don’t like it one bit, including her husband: “The very idea that there should be this other side to her, one where she selfishly did as she pleased, was astonishing. Who would have thought she could be so unreasonable?” (Han 21). Yeong-hye’s pattern of docile obedience, a trait her abusers count on, is no longer sustainable. Her inner dialogue reveals she can no longer maintain the status quo: “*Loathing I’ve always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off. That shuddering, sordid, gruesome, brutal feeling. Nothing else remains*” (36; italics in the original). A victim controlled by an abuser often wears a mask of dissociation in order to feign compliance, regardless of how she feels inside, granted she feels anything at all. This tendency to disassociate and shut down is explained in “Trauma Theory Abbreviated” by Sandra L. Bloom, M.D. as “emotional numbness” (8). She argues that the mask sometimes comes off when the abuse becomes intolerable and the victim feels there is no other option but to rebel.

Yeong-hye’s first rebellion is to suddenly control what she eats because she “had a

dream” (Han 18). Her dream doesn’t really explain much, other than the fact that meat is associated with blood and violence. Caruth discusses why abuse victims cannot explain PTSD-related dreams in her paper entitled “Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals.” She says, “The returning traumatic dream . . . cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (24). Even though Yeong-hye is bombarded on all fronts with demands for an explanation for her choice of a meatless diet, like most trauma victims, she cannot explain her behavior or her dreams because she simply does not understand them. Abuse victims often cry for help through odd behaviors, because their “nonverbal brain... has no words” (Bloom 13). Since she cannot explain anything, her veiled cries for help receive only scornful judgement.

At home, more trouble ensues when Yeong-hye refuses to have sex with her husband because his “body smells of meat” (Han 24). To combat this intolerable upset, Mr. Cheong shares his burden with the nuclear family. It is in their reaction that we begin to see the roots of Yeong-hye’s trauma and lifelong pain. First, her mother, who “never seemed to show much of an interest in her second daughter” (34), tells Mr. Cheong that he “must be ashamed of [Yeong-hye]!” (35). Older sister, In-hye, who has always been the independent rock of the family, apologizes for her sister’s behavior, as if Yeong-hye were her wayward child. Days later, her father hurls raging abuse at her through the phone. No one takes Yeong-hye’s side. No one stands up for her. Yeong-hye’s father instead reminds Mr. Cheong that a family dinner is coming up, in which Yeong-hye will receive “a dressing-down” (37). These traumatic recriminations add to the disturbing pattern of what life has probably always been like for Yeong-hye, and would likely be enough to trigger PTSD symptoms in adulthood, but when her husband gets tired of waiting and rapes her, she is further traumatized, increasing the likelihood of PTSD.

Yeong-hye’s initial response to the rape is to fight back with flailing arms and curses. But he is too strong, and when he finally succeeds in culminating the act, “she lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling, her face blank, as though she were a ‘comfort woman’ dragged in against her will” (Han 38). In other words, she gives up completely, another side to trauma behavior explained by Bloom: “We know that people can learn to be helpless... that if a person

is subjected to a sufficient number of experiences teaching him or her that nothing they do will affect the outcome, people give up trying,” (3). Yeong-hye has been conditioned all her life to understand that her abusers will win every time, and so even though she attempts valiantly to resist and rebel, she quickly gives up and lets the abuse happen. This first rape leads to exacerbated trauma. Like most victims, Yeong-hye is destined to repeat her victimization again and again with little hope of breaking the cycle without a total breakdown of some kind.

When the family does get together, the scene is set for Yeong-hye’s next rebellion. The dressing-down commences, with each member taking turns reprimanding her in an effort to shame her into eating meat on their account. Here Yeong-hye seems to disassociate from the situation, with “her blank gaze on her family, as if she couldn’t fathom the reason for all this fuss” (Han 44). Again, no one answers her cry for help, beyond urging her to eat meat for her own good and as a way to behave. When shame and coercion fail to make her taste meat, she is held down by her hot-tempered brother and hit twice by her father before he force-feeds her a bite of meat. These family members simply will not tolerate her disobedience. They must regain control of this woman, even if it requires a level of trauma-inducing brutality so severe that passive Yeong-hye finally reacts violently: “My wife growled and spat out the meat. An animal cry of distress burst from her lips” (48); then she grabs a knife and cuts her own wrists. Caruth explains how a sudden traumatic event can push someone over the edge: “... traumatic disorders reflect the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking-over... of the mind by an event that it cannot control.... The problem of trauma is... fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (Violence 24). In attacking her own body and nearly dying, Yeong-hye does what she must do to endure, and in a paradoxical way, survive a traumatic event she cannot control.

In the hospital, Yeong-hye deteriorates even more. “[H]er gaunt collarbones, emaciated breasts and brown nipples completely exposed . . . her lips stained with blood...Her eyes... staring fixedly” (Han 59) become unrecognizable to her family. Yet she does not see that there is a problem. She is too numb with trauma to see the truth. Instead of releasing her from the grip of her abusers, her self-imposed diet and self-injury make her a prisoner subject to invasive medical

intervention and reeking as her body edges closer to death.

In the last analysis, most of Yeong-hye's trauma seems to be chronic and relatively low key, rather than sudden and cataclysmic. This level of trauma can easily be dismissed by some as too low-grade to do much damage, like a low-level tropical storm can be compared to a hurricane. But I argue that research on trauma theory substantiates the fact that even a small series of traumas, considered cumulatively, can nonetheless have a devastating effect. For Yeong-hye, the long procession of traumas across the years poisons her existence and results in her final breakdown. Rob Nixon examines this form of insidious abuse in "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor." He states, "By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space . . . incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2356). Nixon refers primarily to environmental slow violence such as climate change. However, I argue that in her own tragic way, Yeong-hye is also experiencing the destruction of her environment (home, body, family) through the slow violence doled out by the nuclear family and her own husband, who sees her as nothing more than a means to serve his "carefully ordered existence... [by being] a completely ordinary wife who went about things without any distasteful frivolousness... [never kicking] up a fuss" (Han 12). From the beginning he rarely bothers to talk with her, or be in the same room with her, except for meals and the fulfillment of his own sexual needs. She is objectified and marginalized in every way in her marriage, even before the rape, and apparently has no friends. This too is a form of slow violence capable of causing human calamity.

In part two of the book, Yeong-hye is as an outpatient, making slow progress. But the climate of trauma is still there, so it isn't surprising that in the midst of her recovery, her brother-in-law lets his own obsession with her childlike Mongolian birthmark run amuck, throwing her afresh into a dream-like state that leads to a deeper collapse into mental illness. With little restraint, the previously non-descript, ineffective brother-in-law goes from pseudo rescuer to joining the ranks of an abuser who only wants her for sex, no matter how she feels. Likewise, Yeong-hye becomes a partner in her own abuse and a type of victimizer, another common response to trauma (Bloom 14). Thus, she uses her sexuality to push the unwitting artist J into a sexual

performance on-camera to satisfy her brother-in-law and her own arousal. When J flees before actual intercourse is achieved, Yeong-hye agrees to have sex with her brother-in-law if he paints flowers on his body too (Han 114), thus moving beyond the numb compliance exhibited during her rapes. Her only rebellion in this porn nightmare is near the end, when she “gnashed her teeth, screamed rough and shrill, spat out a panting ‘stop’ and then, at the end, she cried again,” only to ask moments later, “Will the dreams stop now?” (121-122). So why did Yeong-hye, free of her abusive husband and parents, succumb to this latest episode of abuse? Caruth explains, “the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation... It is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes... an endless testimony to the impossibility of living... Repetition [is] the very attempt to claim one’s own survival” (Violence, 25). For Yeong-hye life itself has become an impossible repeat and return to previous events with new faces, the trauma never resolved or expunged.

Finally, in part three, even with In-hye’s careful ministrations, Yeong-hye stops eating completely and surrenders her humanity in order to become a plant: “I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch, so I spread my legs; I spread them wide...I need to water my body. I don’t need this kind of food sister. I need water” (Han 154). Though she was apparently uninterested in sex with her husband, Yeong-hye continues behaving in the hyper-sexual manner common to many abuse victims, first with her brother-in-law when they were both painted to look like plants, and then believing herself to actually be a plant. She is thus ready to spread her legs and bring forth fruit. In a bizarre fashion, instead of healing, she tries her best to walk away from life, confirming Caruth’s theory that “[t]he postulation of a drive to death... would seem only to realize the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche” (Violence 25). The demons of Yeong-hye’s trauma are too many, and it seems she will likely die trying to flee from them.

While she cares for Yeong-hye, In-hye recalls that she and her little sister’s “young cheeks were frequently left throbbing by their heavy-handed father” (Han 135). She also remembers that when they were lost on a mountain, Yeong-hye didn’t want to go home because “[she was] the only victim to their father’s beatings,” whereas it was In-hye’s job to make “broth for

her father to wash the liquor down,” knowing that docile Yeong-hye “merely absorbed all her suffering inside her, deep into the marrow of her bones” (162-163). For In-hye, everyone’s sins are out on the table, leaving little doubt as to what caused Yeong-hye’s spiral into madness. Ultimately, Yeong-hye’s long trail of trauma ends with no clear resolution, neither with a glimpse of final destruction nor even with eventual healing. In fact, none of the novel’s characters seem to find peace; they simply go their own way like broken pieces tossed to the wind. The only minor exception seems to be In-hye, who gets rid of her no-account husband, attempts to make more time for her son, faces her own demons of trauma, regret, and perfectionism, and confronts the unexpected envy of her sister’s ability to just let it all go (Han 148). At least in literature, it seems this is one possible answer to the aftermath of trauma: to choose life, allow grief its day, and look for ways to end the pattern of repeated trauma in order to carve a fresh path, with sane eyes wide open to what is true.

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Shawn Chundagal

“Acceptance and Admittance.” Review of *Calling A Wolf A Wolf* by Kaveh Akbar.

Alice James Books, 2017. 89 pages.

Kaveh Akbar’s spiritual fragments appear word by word, image by image, within his poetry. This debut collection is a mirror into a life that brims with desire and pain but finds a way towards acceptance and eventual healing. Though *Calling a Wolf a Wolf* dwells with chaos, it finds beauty in recognizing the flaws that human beings gravitate towards and succumb to by addiction – whatever that may be. Akbar’s collection threads images of acceptance of the past, the admission that a breakup from it is needed, and a longing to search for healing. This healing is found within a spiritual journey through wonder and imagery that clings to and brings life to every experience. Spirituality is rooted in the mind and its coexistence with nature and all of its energy is lilting throughout Akbar’s poetry.

“Everyone wants to know what I saw on the long walk away from you”.

Akbar trudges into imagery with the trepidation of one who has been walking into a dark room. There is tension between each space and line, as in the poem “Portrait of the Alcoholic with Withdrawal,” in which Akbar utilizes space to paint the journey the speaker takes, admitting his mind was not his own when dealing with substance abuse. Additionally, symbolism slithers into this poem: “do you remember this / I introduced myself / by one of the names / I kept back then / the fox was so still / I could have called him anything.” The sly fox represents the emotional response that pulls to connection and relationship. The idea of having to be admitted is illustrated by the fox tripping up and over each word. The poem “Recovery” offers a swift and tangible image of acceptance; it cuts straight to the desire of getting better: “First setting down the glass. Then the knives ... Here, I am graceless. No. Worse than that.” There is a soft forgiveness echoing through these lines, as it helps create a universal mood of acceptance.

“I can’t even remember my name, I who remember so much—”.

In the poem “Stop me if you’ve heard this one before,” the speaker is longing for an identity that

is willing to accept his current state of being:

“Sometimes you just have to leave what’s real to you, you have to clomp through fields and kick the caps off all the toadstools. Sometimes you have to march all the way to Galilee or the literal foot of God himself before you realize you’ve already passed the place you were supposed to die.” The very foundation of imagination that helps in the process of healing hums through these lines. An imaginative approach to language is shown through the repetition of “sometimes.” “Sometimes” means “not always, but just enough to accept and move forward,” and this idea offers a sort of blessing and faith that would be denied if one didn’t have freedom in their mind. This spiritual offering admits that destruction is inevitable, but if one moves through life with the notion of creation in mind, then things will start to look better.

Assuming forgiveness is always available in the spiritual realm, that is to say in whatever religion one worships in, the God that one prays to will accept forgiveness upon repentance. These cycles and relationships of ebbing and flowing are often moments that become focal points in life. This central shift takes place in the poem called ‘Soot’. The poem deals with religion and how it can infuse one’s life, especially with the questions it brings forth. In ‘Soot’, the struggle between God (father & Islam) and the devil (addiction) is established. The speaker is distancing himself from his past, his memories. It is possible that the havoc caused by his addiction causes this separation. The speaker has suffered a loss, realizes that “blood from the belly tastes sweeter than the blood from anywhere else.” How does one talk about addiction and pain without drawing from one’s own experiences? Akbar illustrates how this sometimes feels like a dramatic performance so that others might feed off from the raw energy it generates. Being the opening poem, “Soot” in a way serves as a harbinger of tragic news, yet offers the sheer truth gracefully.

The body and the relationship one has with it are other elements of Akbar’s writing. The conversation between them allows him to reflect about his own body and religion. In “An Apology”, the speaker converses with God. Throughout each line, there is a shedding of intent and a vulnerable space emerges – where one can accept flaws and ask for forgiveness. “I charged into desire like a tiger sprinting off the edge of the world,” the poet says. Akbar’s relentless passion is displayed in this metaphor that defines his connection with God, since faith sets in one’s own

terms. Spirituality is portrayed as a center for recovering lost energy, a transfer of wonder from one thought to another that leads to the acceptance that leads to healing.

Akbar's work is multilayered; it demands several readings. A poem that still remains embedded in my mind is "Ways to Harm a Thing." This poem launches a pattern of harm, but focuses onto acceptance, as the speaker navigates through a portal, allowing the body and the mind a place to settle and submit to its failings. *Calling a Wolf a Wolf* urges readers to confront addiction, face the tireless journey of recovery that offers an opening towards spirituality. It's a fundamental piece of work that will haunt its readers.

A Review of Five Role-Playing Video Games: Is it Possible to be Altruistic in Games?

Altruism is the ethical system that claims that one ought to be fully concerned with the wellbeing of others with no concern for oneself. Many video games, especially role-playing games, have a tendency to allow for the protagonist of the story to be a heroic and self-sacrificing character if the player chooses for them to be. However, is the player actually behaving in an altruistic manner when they make these morally good decisions for their character? In order for a player's behavior in a video game to be truly altruistic, that is, not at all self-interested and entirely thoughtful of the benefit of others, three criteria must be met: 1. it must be the player's choice, that is to say, the game cannot coerce or choose this behavior for the player; 2. there must be no benefit to the player for making the choice (or, at the very least, it must be impossible to know that the choice might benefit them), so that the choice is a selfless one; and 3. there must be a notable benefit to others due to this choice. Meeting all three of these criteria is next to impossible for most video games, though there are rare and creative instances where it is possible.

While most role-playing games should have no problem meeting the first criterion, the very nature of morality systems in role-playing games makes meeting the second impossible. For example, in the *Mass Effect* trilogy (2007-2017), there is the paragon and renegade system. If the player makes morally good choices, then their paragon points go up and vice versa. When the player has enough paragon or renegade points, certain unique dialogue options (that more often than not lead to better outcomes than standard dialogue options) become available. In doing this, the game is inherently incentivizing the player to act morally and make "self-sacrificing" decisions, as they will unlock better outcomes because of these actions. A similar game by the same developer, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003), asks significantly more of the player when they make "Light Side" choices. If a player makes all morally good decisions, they'll miss out on a significant amount of money, face disapproval from certain companions, and surrender offensively powerful abilities. However, even with all these sacrifices, there is a reward for these

decisions. Other companions will become friendlier to the player character, and the player will gain access to other abilities that have their own set of benefits. With these morality systems in place, it becomes impossible for the player to act moral just because it's the right thing to do; they'll always have the added motivation of seeing those "good-guy points" go up. It seems that in an effort to quantify a player's morality, game developers have stripped morality from the game entirely.

Even games without a morality system have a tendency to reward morally good behavior unintentionally. While this isn't inherently bad, this does take away the potential for truly altruistic decisions on the part of the player. For instance, in *Octopath Traveler* (2018), one of the first side quests the player encounters is an injured traveler asking the player's character for a healing item. If the player decides to give this traveler the healing item, they are immediately rewarded with 1,500 of the game's currency. This sets a very clear precedent that is common throughout most games: helping people leads to rewards, usually in the form of currency, experience, and items.

The third criterion that says that the player's choice leads to a notable benefit to others is incredibly difficult to determine in single-player video games. It's questionable whether it's even possible to define what a notable benefit to non-player characters could possibly be, as the "benefit" to these characters seems decided by writers and developers. In *Mass Effect 1* (2007), the player is given the choice to save a whole race from genocide. If the player makes this choice, the race disappears for the rest of the game and doesn't reappear until the third game, where it has nearly the same fate whether the player saved it or not. In such a case, did the player really "benefit" the race? It seems like leaving the character's fate to the mercy of the writers and the developers takes away any real possibility of benefitting a non-player character. There's only a set amount of possibilities that could happen to the character, meaning, there is no possibility of actually improving the character's life; the player is merely choosing one of a set of preprogrammed outcomes for the character, even if it is a more pleasant outcome than the others.

This still allows for players to act towards the benefit of other players, if the game has any sort of multiplayer functionality. *Dark Souls* (2011) is a prime example. In *Dark Souls*, play-

ers can leave helpful messages--such as saying when there's a chest ahead or that they should beware of an ambush--that random players throughout the world who are also playing online can then see. This can help the other player find something they normally would not have or avoid an unnecessary death, both of which are clear and notable benefits. Though there is a rating system for the messages, the player leaving the message receives no benefit to having their message positively rated. While it is at no cost to the player writing the message and it is a relatively small part of the game, it seems that players can exhibit altruistic behavior in *Dark Souls* and games with similar mechanics in some small but notable capacity.

(WARNING: *Minor NieR: Automata* ending spoilers ahead) *NieR: Automata* (2017) has perhaps the most notable and self-sacrificing instances of allowing a player to make an altruistic choice of all video games. At the end of the game, the player is faced with a situation that is literally impossible to win: if one tries, one will just keep dying over and over. After a certain amount of deaths, the game asks the player if they want to call for help. If the player chooses to accept, they will find that they are no longer alone and that the once-impossible fight is no longer impossible. Any time the player takes damage, the message "[other player's name]'s data has been erased" will appear in small print at the bottom right of the screen. Once the player finishes this part of the game, they're asked if they want to help another player who wants to beat the game in the future just as other players had just done. But in order to do so, the game will erase all of the players' save data. If the player says yes to this message, the game will emphasize that there is no way of knowing who they will be helping get through this otherwise impossible section of the game, and that it may even be someone they hate.

This is the ultimate test of empathy and altruism in a game; the game is asking if the player wants to sacrifice everything, all the hours, all the passion, and all the suffering that the player has put into the game, in order to help some random person the player will never know. And should the player choose it, they are not rewarded with a fanfare or a special cutscene; they just watch as all their hard work is deleted and then they are thanked for playing the game, the same as if the player had said no to this option. There is no reward for choosing it, and there is no punishment for not choosing it. This is entirely the player's moral choice to make. It is perhaps

the most truly altruistic decision a player can make in a video game, and it serves as a powerful affirmation of humanity's capacity for empathy and altruistic behavior towards other human beings.

In conclusion, it is possible to make altruistic choices in video games, both large and small scale. It just requires a whole lot of creativity on the part of the game's developers and a whole lot more from the player than merely selecting the "good" dialogue option in a role-playing game. The ability to help others without self-interest is as exceedingly rare in video games as it is in real life and, as such, should be cherished whenever found in both cases.