CALLIOPE

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CALLIOPE

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Guidelines for Contributors

Essays should be emailed to *Calliope* from the professor for whom you wrote the essay; most often, a professor will contact you about submitting work on your behalf, but do not hesitate to remind a professor of an essay for which you received high praise and a high grade. Book reviews of recent publications are also accepted and can be submitted by the student directly, without the intermediary of a professor. Submission of a paper or book review to this journal will be taken to imply that it represents original work. Essays should conform to the current APA, MLA, or Chicago style. The editors reserve the right to edit submissions as needed for publication.

1. All submissions must be sent to the email address calliope@csub.edu

2. Essays should be a maximum of 15 double-spaced pages: 1″ margins; 12-point Times New Roman font.

3. Book reviews should be a minimum of 2 double-spaced pages, maximum 5 pages: 1″ margins; 12-point Times New Roman font (in your heading, include book title, author, publisher, year of publication, number of pages, number of illustrations).

4. All submissions should be carefully proofread.

If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Mónica Ayuso at mayuso@csub.edu, Dr. Carol Dell'Amico at cdellmico@csub.edu, or email calliope@csub.edu

Introduction

It was the greatest of pleasures working with Brianna Fay and Sarah Mendez-Jimenez, *Calliope* 15's editors. I was consistently impressed by their attention to detail and collaborative spirit as they took charge of the process of bringing the issue to publication. They did it all: created calls for submissions, fielded and edited submissions, designed and laid out the beautiful issue.

As we were searching for cover images, we thought that an image of a reader or writer would be attractive, something to acknowledge our contributors, students who love to read and who write on literature. However, we were also on the lookout for images of Calliope, the ancient Greek muse of epic poetry, inspired by covers of *Calliope* past. So, when we happened upon this serene Camille Corot painting, known both as "The Reader Wreathed with Flowers" and "Virgil's Muse," we knew it was our perfect choice. We dedicate this issue of *Calliope* to the English majors of California State University, Bakersfield.

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to bring about *Calliope* 15 and wish to thank our contributors and those who helped us along the way, especially Analía Rodriguez, Melanie Ascione, Andrea Weikel, and Dean Frakes.

Carol Dell'Amico

Faculty Advisor

Lischa Mears

In examining the "cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality," feminist criticism aims to reveal male-dominated aspects of culture and misogyny in literary works concerning women (Barry 124). This form of evaluation applies principles from the feminist theory to highlight the social construction of gender. Next, queer theory is a perspective to criticism that studies the representations of identity categories in literary works, such as sexuality and gender, to counter the standards that contribute to the creation of the binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality that are deemed as either acceptable or unacceptable sexualities. Through the lens of feminist criticism, William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* can be said to present Simone de Beauvoir's assertion of the universal judgment of women through the systematic dependency of Ophelia. When analyzing *Hamlet* through the perspective of queer theory, the tragedy can also be said to display Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's explication of the erotic triangle, and the potentiality of homosexuality, through the erotic triangular relationship between Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir contends that women are oppressed by men due to the characterization that is imposed upon them as the "other" or insufficient opposition to men (Barry 132). Despite the comparison of the "feminine world" with the "masculine world," Beauvoir explains that "women have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position" (Beauvoir 724). In making this statement, Beauvoir highlights the oppression of women that is evident by the distinction between a man and a woman's place in the world. According to Beauvoir, the world for men is a place that they have shaped, ruled, and currently dominate (724). Although, women alternatively reside within this same male world "and to a sphere in which this world is challenged; enclosed in this sphere, involved in the male world, they cannot peacefully establish themselves anywhere" (Beauvoir 724). Due to the inherently patriarchal nature of the world, Beauvoir asserts that women are deprived of the means necessary to independently express themselves and are consequentially subjected to negative judgments of their character. Based on Beauvoir's argument, these universal judgments of dependency and insufficiency to men are reproduced over time and are constructed by the woman's situation in a patriarchal world.

When studying *Hamlet* through the perspective of feminist criticism, Beauvoir's assertion of the ubiquitous judgment of women can be represented by the systematic dependency of Ophelia. In the introduction of Ophelia's character in Act 1, Scene 3, Ophelia is immediately associated with a fragile image when Polonius presents her with a violet and, in response to Laertes's caution against falling in love with Hamlet, Ophelia agrees with the input of her brother and says, "I shall th'effect of this good lesson keep / As watchman to my heart" (Shakespeare 1.3.44-45). This fragile image is further exemplified when Polonius reiterates Laertes's advice and urges Ophelia to sever contact with Hamlet. In response to this echo of advice, Ophelia says, "I shall obey, my lord" (Shakespeare 1.3.135). By associating Ophelia with flower imagery at the start of the play, Ophelia's delicate nature is established before the play's central events. As opposed to Polonius's advice to Laertes, in which he encourages his son to be true to himself and says, "Thou canst not then be false to any man," Polonius's advice to Ophelia encourages her to refrain from expressing herself by silencing her affections for Hamlet (Shakespeare 1.3.79). In correspondence to Beauvoir's assertion of the universal judgment of women, Ophelia resides within a male-dominated world as she submissively obeys her father and brother and is deprived of the free will to be true to herself. In addition, Act 4, Scene 5 can be

said to present Beauvoir's assertion of this omnipresent judgment as Ophelia's loss of the men in her life, following Polonius's death and Hamlet's consequential exile, results in her madness and eventual death. Due to Ophelia's subservience to the men in her life, Ophelia lacks the agency and sufficiency to independently pursue her own path. As a result, Ophelia meets Beauvoir's assertion of the universal discernment of women as Ophelia suffers from methodical dependency driven by the extrinsic pressures of a patriarchal world.

In her significant work *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick opposingly centers on the erotic triangle that provides greater insight into the representation of amorous relations in literary works. After introducing the work of Rene Girard, Sedgwick describes Girard's study to the particular love triangle and his insistence "that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (Sedgwick 12). Following this description of the erotic triangle, Sedgwick clarifies that "the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Sedgwick 12). According to Sedgwick, this embodiment of a love triangle exhibits a strong relationship that is not limited to gender. Whether consisting of relationships between men, women, or both, amatory triangles

present varying experiences that similarly equate to a bond that is ultimately stronger "between rivals in an erotic triangle" (Sedgwick 12). Therefore, Sedgwick's explication of this amatory triangle spotlights the potentiality of homosexuality that can be signified by an erotic triangle.

Through the lens of queer theory, Sedgwick's explication of the amorous triangle, and the potentiality of homosexuality, can be exemplified by the sexual triangular relationship between Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia. During the play within the play, in Act 3, Scene 2, Hamlet afflicts Ophelia with a continuation of lewd puns when he tells her, "It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge" (Shakespeare 3.2.234). By relentlessly subjecting Ophelia to misogynistic sexual innuendos, one might say that Hamlet projects his anger of his mother's marriage to Claudius onto Ophelia because she is similarly a woman. In correlation to Sedgwick's explication of the erotic triangle, however, Hamlet's extreme misogyny can also denote his attempt to conceal his oppressed homosexual desires. After Hamlet makes the request to rest his head on Ophelia's lap and asks her if she believed he was referring to sexual intercourse, Ophelia replies and says, "I think nothing, my lord" (Shakespeare 3.2.108). In response to Ophelia, Hamlet references her word choice of "nothing" and says, "That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs" (Shakespeare

3.2.109). In making this particular comment, Hamlet communicates that he is not interested in sexual intercourse with Ophelia and, as a result, indicates his concealed lack of interest in women. Hamlet's repressed homosexual desire is further elucidated by the fight between Laertes and Hamlet in Act 5, Scene 1. After Laertes jumps into his sister's grave to hold her for the final time, Hamlet leaps into the grave and declares that he loves Ophelia more when he says, "Forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum" (Shakespeare 5.1.249-251). In accordance with Sedgwick's explication of the erotic triangle, Hamlet and Laertes share a strong bond as rivals with the connection to Ophelia as the beloved. By depicting two men who fight for a beloved woman, sexual tension is illustrated between Hamlet and Laertes. In adhering to this representation of a love triangle, Hamlet's repressed homosexual desire is presented in a socially acceptable way in Shakespeare's time through his rivalry with Laertes.

When examining Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* through the critical approaches of feminist criticism and queer theory, components of each framework are revealed to illuminate the plights of characters, such as Ophelia and Hamlet, in greater depth. Through the lens of feminist criticism, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion of the universal discernment of women represents the systematic subservi-

ence of Ophelia. Due to Ophelia's perceived fragility and lack of free will in a male-dominated world, Ophelia consequently suffers from a methodical dependency that is constructed by the external pressures of a patriarchal world. Moreover, a queer theorist reading of the play utilizing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's explication of the erotic triangle, and the potentiality of homosexuality, reveals Hamlet's oppressed homosexual desire through the amorous triangular relationship between Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia. By excessively objectifying Ophelia and engaging in a rivalry with Laertes for Ophelia, as the beloved, Hamlet grapples with his repressed homosexual desire in a socially acceptable manner. Overall, the different critiques of Beauvoir and Sedgwick reveal hidden facets of both Shakespeare's characters and the plights of the human condition.

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Animal Instinct and Journeys into the Primordial World: Atavism and Evolution in *The Call of the Wild* and "To Build a Fire"

Kayla Rogers

Jack London published *The Call of the Wild* in 1903. Just a year before, he had written an early version of the short story, "To Build a Fire." Six years later, in 1908, London would revise "To Build a Fire" with the notable addition of a gray-coated "wolf-dog" as a significant character in the story. The addition of the dog was the most noticeable change that London made to his story, and it is particularly interesting for its similarity to the character of Buck in *The Call of the Wild.* In both stories, London chooses to use a third-person omniscient point of view that allows the reader to understand the thoughts and actions of the characters, but, particularly, those of Buck and the wolf-dog. These stories explore the evolutionary relationship between man and dog, but they also reflect a conflict between evolutionary Darwinism and Atavism. Furthermore, London emphasizes the regression into the primordial and how these traits are a response to a brutally harsh environment. All these elements revolve around the animal characters' evolutionary biology. London uses similar characterizations for Buck in *The Call of the Wild* and the "gray coated" wolf-dog from "To Build a Fire" to explore the

themes of Atavism and evolutionary Darwinism and to contrast human and animal survival against the harsh Artic environment.

Atavism can be defined as the regression to the ancestral. This process can take the form of the reappearance of lost knowledge, primitive instinct, or genetic traits that were once lost to evolution. This is echoed in the way London characterizes both the wolf-dog and Buck. Both characters are Doppelgangers, or mirror images of each other who are both alike and different. Both animals are shaped by their primitive instincts; however, London embodies the principles of Atavism into Buck and the wolf-dog in slightly different ways. While Buck possesses the same ancestral instincts as the wolf-dog in "To Build a Fire," he must first learn to reawaken these instincts by watching the other dogs and learning from his environment. This is especially apparent when "[h]e learned to bite the ice out with his teeth when it collected between his toes" (364). In contrast, the wolf-dog simply and unconsciously acts upon those instincts: "To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being" (London 140). The wolf-dog represents everything that Buck strives to become in *The Call of the Wild.* John Bruni ascribes that "[f]or London, Atavism becomes instrumental in this process of stripping away, in which the stages of civilization are removed to

reveal a natural essence" (34). For Buck, the wolf-dog is symbolic of this essence of instincts and becomes a mirror into his future.

In order to gain these lost ancestral traits, Buck must first lose all of his acquired notions of morality and civilization. According to John Bruni, London's principles of Atavism go deeper than a simple longing for an idealized past. Instead, they represent an abandonment of the hierarchal class system and the class-constructed perceptions of morality (30). Bruni argues that: "[i]initially Buck appears as a product of the class system" (30), and this is reinforced in the beginning of *The Call of the Wild.* Here, Buck is repeatedly referred to as a "king" ruling over his "realm" in a "royal fashion" as a "sated aristocrat" (London 350). The setting of the Santa Clara Valley reflects this hierarchal class-based society that London believed was responsible for dulling man's primitive instincts. After Buck is "suddenly jerked from the heart of civilization and flung into the heart of things primordial" (London 357), he undergoes a rapid process of regression that represents the abandonment of the civilized codes of morality that are designed to justify the subservience of the lower classes (Bruni 31). The result of Buck's "rapid regression" is symbolized as the wolf-dog in "To Build a Fire" who is not only ruled by his instincts but is detached from human morality as well: "It was not concerned in the welfare of the man; it was for its own sake that

it yearned back toward the fire" (142).

Bruni points out that London did not equate Darwin's theories of evolution to a straight line of progress (32). Instead, Buck and the wolf-dog's regression into the primitive is a response to the harsh, uncivilized environment of the Arctic north in which they find themselves. In other words, they adapt to their surroundings, and, as a result, they develop the ancient traits that were once lost to their evolutionary past. They lose the human-constructed ideals of morality because, in the harshness of the north, these traits have become useless to them. In both stories, the human characters struggle to rid themselves of these traits of civilization that eventually result in their deaths. In *The Call of the Wild,* the materialism of Hal, Charles, and Mercedes hinders their ability to travel across the ice-covered trails, and their class-based arrogance prevents them from following the advice of the local men in the area. The man in "To Build a Fire displays a similar arrogance by refusing to adhere by the advice of the old-timer at Sulphur Creek, and he dismisses the old man's advice as "womanish" when he refuses to wear a nose strap, thereby falsely equating precaution with a lack of masculinity (London 142-143). Clearly, the humans in each story lack the ability to adapt to their new environments. It is no coincidence that the "imagination" (London 375) which allows Buck to adapt and survive in the inhos-

pitable North is the exact quality that the man in “To Build a Fire” lacks: “The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only the things, and not the significances” (London 137). The man refuses to acknowledge the limits of his own mortality and ignores the seriousness of the Arctic environment. Like Hal, Charles, and Mercedes, who force the dogs to travel over the rotten ice, the man’s only concern is to reach his destination in the search for gold. The character’s relentless desire for this strange “yellow metal” (London 349) symbolizes their capitalistic greed that causes them to ignore the dangers of the environment. The capitalistic traits these characters have acquired in the southland becomes useless to them in the north. Bruini summarizes this point when he explains that “The tragic outcome of these three drives home London’s point that a process of over-civilization, which leads to a culture of consumption, depletes the reserves of masculine vitality needed to meet the demands of the natural environment” (34).

Given that the human characters are disposed to traits that hinder their survival, it is interesting that the dogs still attach themselves to people. According to the theories of Darwinism, for this relationship between man and dog to develop, there would have to be a mutual benefit for both dogs and humans. Indeed, despite their

callous disregard for the environment, the humans do provide the dogs with a steady source of food and warmth. In return, the dogs work for the humans, not out of subservience, but out of a symbiotic need for survival. London's interpretation of Darwinism reflects his belief that humans and animals evolved from the same primal source, and it is the dulling effects of civilization that separates the instinctual abilities of humans and animals (Bruni 35). Bruni calls the coevolution of humans and animals biological kinship. This relationship is responsible for the cultural tendency for humans to separate themselves from other animal species and is also responsible for dog's evolution into a "companion species" to man (Bruni 36). These "patterns of evolutionary change" are represented in Buck dreams of his evolutionary ancestors (Bruini 39). In these dreams, Buck gains understanding into the relationship between ancient man and ancient wolf. For ancient man, dogs provided protection from the darkness, and for the ancient dogs, man represented food and warmth (London 379-380). This symbiotic relationship is present in the wolf-dog in "To Build a Fire" who only remains loyal to the man when it is in his best interest to so: "[s]omething was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger—it knew not what danger, but somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of man" (147). For Buck, this relationship must be learned, as he goes from

the subservient relationship to Judge Miller, the working relationship with the mail carrier, the violent relationship of Hal and Charles, and, finally, the loving relationship to John Thornton. In each case, Buck must learn to negotiate his civilized nature with the primordial laws of the Arctic.

The most significant contrast between Buck and the wolf-dog takes place at the end of each story. After John Thornton's death in *The Call of the Wild,* Buck no longer is tied to civilization, and so he returns to the wild, presumably never to be seen again. Yet, in "To Build a Fire," the death of the man causes the wolf-dog to *return to civilization* implying that the pull of evolutionary Darwinism towards the ideals of civilization wins out over the wolf-dog's primal nature. The contradiction lies in whether or not evolution works in a straight line pointing toward civilization and domestication, or whether Atavism will continue to pull evolution back into a more primal state of consciousness such as with Buck who is unable to ignore the call of his ancient instincts. Both man and dog represent the dueling forces of Darwinism and Atavism in a way that reflects the progress of civilization, while at the same time, reflecting that primal instinct that is necessary for survival.

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The End of the Class: A Shakespearean Tier Pun

Ian Tash

William Shakespeare's plays are perhaps most notable for their ability to touch the hearts of each spectator of his shows. The works are fantastic at balancing the different types of power in the world, from the lowly peasants on the floor to the aristocrats of the balcony, a blend of high art and popular culture that embraces the conflicts within and between the classes. Perhaps no play is more recognizable than *Hamlet*, the play where a man holds a skull and proclaims, "To be or not to be!" While this image is an amalgamation of two different scenes within the play, it shows that something about this particular play has stuck itself within the chain of cultural memory in the English-speaking world in a way that *Much Ado About Nothing* has not done. As the play is about a multitude of Danish aristocrats squabbling over morality and power, class serves as a relevant theme of the work. Two critical approaches to understanding the work are New Historicism and Marxism. New Historicism is the critical method that juxtaposes literary and nonliterary co-texts to bring historical background to the foreground, while Marxist critical theory brings the nature of social class and economics to the forefront of the reading. By examining the scene in which Hamlet murders Polonius with the New Historicism of Michel Foucault and the

scene in which Hamlet observes Ophelia's funeral with the Marxism of Raymond Williams, Shakespeare offers a look at the power that the ruling elites have on the discourse and art of their time.

When using a New Historicist approach and comparing the co-texts of Act 3, Scene 4 of *Hamlet* with court transcripts drafted during the time of *Hamlet*'s composition, the political turmoil of power dynamics in Shakespeare's Elizabethan England manifests themselves in this Danish queen's bedchamber. One of New Historicism's greatest influences, Michel Foucault, introduces the idea of the panoptic schema, based off the prison concept of the Panopticon. On a literal level, this Panopticon is a prison with a tower in the middle of a ring of cells where any person in the tower can always see the people in the cells but the people in the cells can never tell if they are being watched. However, Foucault brings this dynamic to a philosophical level, pointing to the power to organize people around certain expected behaviors through the existence of the power structures and ideological norms through discursive practices. Foucault explains the function and spread of ideas throughout society in "Panopticism":

> although it [the Panopticon] arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective, it does

> so not for power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society: its aim is to strengthen the social forces—to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply. (11)

Thus, Foucault and other New Historians expect that the things that take place in power and discourse of the time of a work's creation will find themselves in the work itself. *Hamlet* is no exception, as it could not escape the panoptic schema of England's monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, and her struggles with Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex. During the time of *Hamlet*'s composition, between 1599 and 1601, Devereux was a figure of great controversy. While much can be said to provide historical background, the transcript of his trial for treason shall be brought into the foreground to compare with Act 3, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's play in accord with New Historicism.

This scene in Shakespeare takes place in Queen Gertrude's private room and begins with a discussion about how the Queen must "Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with," (3.4.2), while the transcript takes place in the courtroom where Devereux is on trial for attempting a coup. He had grievances with the queen and sought to dispose of the government that wronged him and set himself in

charge, not unlike Hamlet's attempts to kill Claudius, an act against the crown of Denmark. A parallel set of figures is that of Polonius, the Shakespeare character who attends to King Claudius, and Robert Cecil, the Lord Privy Seal for Queen Elizabeth I. They are both agents of the state who serve the monarch with which the central figures, Hamlet and Devereux, struggle against. Both Polonius and Cecil hide away as the proceedings take place, only to be revealed by the central figure's treachery and fear of their Queen's murder. Polonius is stabbed after he reacts to Gertrude's calls for help, while Cecil steps out to reveal himself after an accusation that he himself is a traitor who thinks Elizabeth should be deposed. Polonius, who had originally wished for Hamlet to join his daughter in marriage, dies from Hamlet's blade, causing Hamlet to reflect, "heaven hath pleased it so / To punish me with this" (Shakespeare 3.4.176-177) while Cecil, after reflecting upon how he had implored Queen Elizabeth I to give Devereux his power, reflects, "For my part, I vow to God, I wish my soul was in heaven, and my body at rest, so this had never been" (Howell 1351). The political discourse appears to have influenced *Hamlet*, not only in the act of revolution and resistance, but also in what figures represent. Character assassination becomes literal assassination in the literary text, but the themes are strong. Hamlet has such strong hatred for his queen, just as Devereux has for

his own. Hamlet accuses her of a plot to "kill a king and marry with his brother," (3.4.29), while Devereux gathers a militia to depose her. However, the sentiment that rebukes both characters is that the queen is sacred. Hamlet is chastised by the Ghost of his father for speaking so illy to Gertrude, just as the attitude permeates the courtroom: none can speak ill of the queen: "he would not hear him abuse the queen's name" (Howell 1348). The queen is the ultimate source of authority, a mother to the British people, and thus the ghosts of England's kings, the panoptic authority of the past, rests upon all its subjects, even Shakespeare. It is no surprise that, just as Devereux is executed for his treason, Hamlet also meets his end at the end of the play. However, his sins are not just towards his own mother or Laertes' father, but towards a woman they both love.

When reading Act 5, Scene 1 through a Marxist lens, the suicide of Ophelia helps unveil the problems with class in Shakespeare's time. In Marxist thought, there are two ways to control a populace. The first is by rule, in which the state exercises tangible force in the form of legal systems of violence. The second, however, is the subtle power of hegemony. Hegemony is a complex form of oppression that justifies the economic, political, and cultural outlooks of a culture. This is not a straightforward case of analyzing one aspect of life, but many interlocking pieces of thought. Marxist Raymond Williams

dissects this idea throughout his work:

> Only when they are not seen as sectors can the effect of the important cultural arguments come through: that there is none of these sectors that does not immediately involve the others; that a lot of the major economic and industrial disputes are about cultural institutions; that culture is involved in politics in quite a new way, especially in the involvement of the media. (215)

This hegemony is an internalized control, which can be seen in the gravediggers, otherwise known as Clowns. The two of them discuss the nature of the world, the way that things are, which show how in control the aristocratic class of the day are. The two clowns talk about the death of Ophelia and how she is still being buried in a churchyard despite the appearance that her death was a suicide. One of them even realizes that "If this had not been a / gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian / burial" (Shakespeare 5.1.21-23). They clearly see the ridiculousness of the situation, that higher class women can commit suicide and be given a pass, but if it was even suspected that a poor girl did the same thing there would be no chance at consideration. The other gravedigger even realizes that the notion of class as it stands, with an aristocracy over the

peasants, makes no sense, saying, “There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditch-/ers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam’s profession” (Shakespeare 5.1.27-28). They know that class is non-sense, but there is something within them that prevents them from doing anything. They merely accept their lot in life and keep digging. Even when Hamlet approaches, the best resistance they have is to mock him with puns, but they do not dare to transgress any further. The power of a state organized religion seems to have instilled this hegemony within them. They are children of Adam, the first man and the original sinner. They take up his work of a classless society, and thus they model the lowly sinner. Likewise, the whole notion of suicide burial practices in the first place has nothing to do with materialistic ideals, but idealistic ones. There is no material reason why this patch of dirt is anymore sacred than any other patch of dirt, and only the notion of class seems to indicate anything. There is perhaps no stronger image of this disconnect than the image of a gravedigger singing songs as he works to throw away the bones of supposedly good, lower-class Christians to make room for a girl who made supposedly unforgivable sins being forgiven because of who her parents were. Shakespeare does well to fill the scene with clowns, because by doing so he reveals the lunacy of the powers that bind the lower classes. This cultural conflict of religious contradiction highlights the

political power differences between the two classes, which in turn highlights the economic roles each class plays. After all, as Hamlet himself even admits, "The hand of little employment hath the / daintier sense" (Shakespeare 5.1.61-62). The employment of and burial status of these hardworking men all depends upon their lineage and wealth.

Shakespeare's plays are meant to appeal to all audiences of his time, but they have a bit more bite in them towards the aristocracy of his time and place rather than just this fictional, Danish aristocracy. His work exposes the political rumblings against the monarchy, the chaos of aristocratic squabbling, the use of religion as a shield for the wealthy and a weapon against the poor, and yet still issues some restraint. Hamlet may chastise the queen, but he is still chastised for doing so, as all subjects under Queen Elizabeth are, including Shakespeare, because of that internalized sense of duty to protect her honor. Likewise, Hamlet may recognize his distinction in class, and the Clowns certainly recognize the unjust jest of it all, but neither commit to any meaningful action of transgression against such systems, lest the idealistic order governed by God and King, Church and State, be sullied. Even when the entire system is overthrown, all claims to power dead because of their own faults and follies, the people do not take control of the powers at be, create their own Panopticon based

on beliefs friendly to the lower class. Instead, someone else marches in and takes over as king. Order is restored, and religious and governmental authorities can joyfully discuss the Bard's newest work. However, Shakespeare may be just as Adamic as the gravedigging clowns, for while he is a playwright and not a farmer, in his work one can find the seeds of something rotten in the state of Denmark, seeds now planted in the minds of his readers and viewers.

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Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est": The Realities Versus the Deceptions of War

Ana Dominguez

After the outbreak of World War I, the British government needed soldiers to defend its territory. Clearly, there was too little time to train common men into experienced soldiers. However, one way to recruit British men to join the British army was through propaganda and appealing to their pride to defend their country and people. Men from different backgrounds became soldiers for several reasons, such as love of country, a sense of honor, or even fear of being shunned if they refused to fight. Those seeking glory and honor soon learned that WWI gave them neither; instead, WW1 was a squabble between Europe's ruling elites, and that they, the soldiers, were expendable in tragically large numbers. In an excerpt from *Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War*, David Englande remarks on how the experienced, betrayed WWI soldier came to viewed as a "problem" in British society, "there was a good deal of writing on the physical, productive and moral deterioration of soldiers; on their alienation and unsettlement, their rejection of bourgeois normality and expectations of a moral regeneration based on new forms of social solidarity" (300). These soldiers included Wilfred Owen, who

participated and fought in the war, and witnessed the deaths of fellow soldiers. Owen wrote the poem *Dulce Et Decorum Est*, whose title is an allusion to a line from one of Horace's odes, which, translated, means, "it is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland." Owen's poem renders his title ironic by illustrating the brutal reality of the everyday struggle of the soldier from the point of view of a participant in the cruel war. Owen's *Dulce Et Decorum Est* poem uses strong imagery and word choices, amongst other devices, to expose the cruel reality of the war.

Dulce et Decorum Est is an anti-war poem, with Owen's imagery telling the truth of war. In the first line of his poem, Owens sets the tone, describing soldiers as "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks" (line 1). Comparing soldiers to "old beggars," Owens reveals a broken, defeated, unfortunate, and pitiable soldier so that the reader can compare this miserable image to their idea of the same soldier before he enrolled. Owen goes on to write that "Men Marched asleep" (line 5) and were "blood-shod," "lame" (line 6), "drunk," and "deaf" (line 7). All of these images and choices of words point to a pitiful, gloomy scenario and the shattered state of mind of the soldiers. In Owen's poem, war clearly does not nobility, but rather terror, desperation, and hopelessness.

Dulce Et Decorum Est also reveals how reality is tainted and corrupted by the propaganda of those who did not fight in WWI. Many writers and religious and political figures promoted recruitment as a heroic act, so much so that Marc D. Cyr asserts that "'Dulce et Decorum Est' was originally conceived as an attack on Jessie Pope, a writer of children's books who, during the war, took up the cudgel and beat out three volumes worth of jingoist verse" (65). Pope, a poet and journalist, was famous for her patriotic, motivational poems published during World War I to encourage enlistment. The "you" in Owen's poem is undoubtedly those who have read these poems: "If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood/Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,/Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud/Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues" (ll. 21-24). In these lines, Owen discloses a raw truth about the callousness of war with an illustration of a soldier dying in a dreadful manner; there is no glory dying in such a horrifying way. In the last stanza, further, Owen states, "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest/To children ardent for some desperate glory,/The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est/Pro patria mori (ll. 25-28). Here his poem shows his standing point against deceiving propaganda, begging the reader not to incite young men to face such horrors. Owen wrote this poem in response to the deceiving heroic propaganda that people with influence, such

as Pope spread, and to counter their influence. Undoubtedly, Owen uncovers the inhuman life of a soldier and their suffering during war "like a devil's sick of sin" (line 20) to counteract the false call of duty in the propaganda of the time.

In his poem Owen is also trying to undo centuries of war lore. Even before Horace was writing, already in the Homeric tradition, as Martin M. Winkler states, "The Homeric hero [was] anxious for glory" (178). Yet, as Winkler also says, WWI "brought about the end of traditional heroism, for personal bravery against industrial weaponry such as tanks, submarines, machine guns, poison gas, or flame throwers was almost always futile. Survival was rarely a result of gallantry" (182). War had a new connotation of mass destruction and the unimaginable killing potential of weapons, where chivalry, honor, pride, and blind obedience did not have the same meaning. Owen focuses on the unfair and inhumane aspects of the battle in his poem to force people to face the new realities of modern warfare.

In *Dulce Et Decorum Est*, Wilfred Owen's purpose was to present the horrifying and realistic experience of war to open the eyes of the world to the reality of warfare in the modern age. He describes traumatizing events and describes the ferocity of mass killing, the suffering of soldiers, and the butchering of men in a strange land in order to contest the mindless patriotism and stereotypical her-

oism that propaganda exhibited. Effectively, Owen shows how the perspectives of civilians differ from that of soldiers and insists that glorifying combat, exhorting men to fight, and generally romanticizing war are deceitful means used to enlist naive men. The discrepancy between the vivid images in the content and the final lines of the poem, "*Dulce et decorum est/Pro patria mori*," emphasizes the absurdity of finding glory or honor during and after the First World War. *Dulce et Decorum Est* remains one of the most powerful anti-war poems in the English language.

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Multifaceted Women in Zadie Smith's "The Waiter's Wife"

Jocelyne Ordonez

Twentieth-century Britain experienced cultural, industrial, and social changes that are reflected in the literature of that time. For example, the efforts of second wave feminists brought about great social changes that shifted gender roles and how women contributed to society. However, many British writers centered on the white experience and lacked cultural diversity in their writings. Twenty-first-century novelist Zadie Smith challenges the definition of an English novelist as she was born into a non-European immigrant family. Her cultural background allows her to centralize the experiences of immigrants of color living in London, specifically the female experience of adapting to everchanging gender roles and traditions. Smith's short story "The Waiter's Wife" narrates the experiences of a young immigrant woman named Alsana, who tries to adapt to her new marriage and a new lifestyle in London. Through the characterization of Alsana, her niece Neena, and her friend Clara, Smith illustrates how cultural and generational backgrounds affect how women adjust to social change.

Smith mostly limits the characterization of Alsana to her dialogue and other characters' perceptions of her, to mirror how in

society, people's impressions of others follow from how a person presents themself. Through Alsana, Smith also highlights the female experience in a male-dominated world—as the title suggests, Alsana's identity is in danger of being limited to that of a waiter's wife. The narrator introduces Samad, Alsana's husband, and Alsana, who is much younger than he, as a couple who moved from Bangladesh to live in White Chapel, London, and explains how Samad has an English friend named Archie, whose wife, Clara, is also young. Smith frames the relationship between Alsana and Clara through their husbands' friendship to demonstrate how women are often limited to male narratives despite being a story's main characters. Even the narrator seems to take on this male perspective when Alsana's physical appearance is compared to Clara's. Alsana is "small and rotund" while Clara is "tall, striking, a black girl with a winning smile" (Smith). Following this, the initiation of their relationship continues as a kind of competition in which the reader decides who is the better woman. Alsana's character loses the competition because Clara is consistently outgoing and friendly while Alsana disapproves of Clara's revealing wardrobe and makes racist comments about Clara being the exception to her belief that black people are not friendly. As Alsana's opinion on Clara's dress sense suggests, the short story highlights Alsana's struggle between traditional and liberal ideas

about gender roles. The more liberal Clara serves as a foil character for Alsana that reveals to readers what type of person Alsana is.

The story emphasizes the role of identity and how people are multifaceted. For example, Smith utilizes Samad's inner thoughts about identity to lead the reader to empathize with his character and also with Alsana. Samad wishes he had a sign that announced to people that he is more than a waiter and that his wife Alsana has a name and is not just a waiter's wife: "I AM A WAITER BUT NOT JUST A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER. MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA" (Smith). Samad is a flawed character, like Alsana, but the narrator's presentation seems only to highlight her flaws. Although Samad states Alsana's name in his inner thoughts, his actions towards her demonstrate his inability to see that Alsana does not live just to serve as his wife: "He thought of his wife, Alsana, who was not as meek as he had assumed when they married" (Smith). To Samad, Alsana is a bratty young wife who does not value the same traditions as his mother. The narrator tells the reader that Samad assumed a young wife would be easy but that Alsana throws fits of rage (Smith). Compared to Clara, Alsana is quite traditional; but from Samad's perspective, Alsana isn't traditional enough. We learn that Samad's family sympathizes with him and wonders if Alsana had a family history of mental health issues.

Through all of this, Smith highlights how others in the story emphasize the negative aspects of Alsana's character much like patriarchal societies emphasize the negative traits of women.

Alsana and her niece Neena share a similar background, but they share opposing views on gender roles and marriage. Neena has adjusted to social change and accepts that marriage should not confine women to a life of servitude. Alsana judges Neena for choosing a liberal lifestyle and calls her "Niece-of-Shame" (Smith), and, as Alsana speaks to Neena, she reminds her niece of her marriage to Samad, who prays. The narrator, however, ironically, states that while Alsana is very traditional and religious, Alsana lacks religious "faith" (Smith). Alsana's lack of faith demonstrates that her traditions and beliefs are superficial, and that she lacks a sense of true identity. She lives her life based on traditions but has not experienced a spiritual awakening. Smith illustrates how Alsana is not traditional enough for Samad, who compares her to his mother and not sufficiently liberal to relate to Neena, who has fully transitioned into a carefree single woman. The dynamic between Neena and Alsana displays the idea that patriarchal beliefs and traditions divide women. Alsana feels that she is more honorable and respectable than Neena because she has a husband and tries to live a moral life. However, she is unhappy and does not live up to her husband's expectations of a traditional wife.

Smith strategically involves Neena, Alsana, and Clara in a casual conversation about marriage and motherhood to display their various perspectives based on their social and cultural backgrounds. Clara and Alsana are both pregnant, but Clara is expecting a girl and Alsana is expecting two boys. Clara and Alsana physically look the same as they are both pregnant, and they mirror each other's body language. For example, "both lay their hands on their bulges" at one point (Smith). However, Alsana's twin male pregnancy symbolizes the overpowering male-dominated society. Alsana, the traditionalist, expects sons who will no doubt believe that a wife should be meek and serve their husband. Neena comments on Alsana's twin pregnancy and wonders what Samad's reaction is, but Alsana, who believes that "what is not said, is the very best recipe for family life," has not told Samad that she is expecting twin boys. Neena, the liberal, is shocked by the lack of openness and communication in Alsana's marriage. Alsana's inability to see that a silent marriage is a repressive marriage exemplifies how her cultural and social background has influenced her marriage beliefs. Neena's character confronts Clara and Alsana about their oppressive marriages, but Alsana is reluctant to change while Clara secretly listens to Neena. The women of the story, in short, demonstrate the importance of learning how to navigate and survive in a male-dominated world.

In Zadie Smith's "The Waiter's Wife," Smith's characterization of Alsana reflects the negative attitudes towards women and how the male perspective dictates female storylines. Additionally, the story explores the meaning of identity and how social and cultural backgrounds help shape a person's beliefs. What's refreshing about the writing of Zadie Smith is its centralization of immigrant stories that reflect real people and women like Alsana.

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Lady Catherine de Bourgh: Jane Austen's Critique of English Nobility - Melinda Quach

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel filled with unforgettable characters who either seek to obtain the most ideal marriage for themselves or for their families. Among these characters is Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the aunt of the novel's male lead, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Despite her role as a minor character, Lady Catherine occupies a powerful position as Mr. Darcy's elder, therefore her importance to the novel is irrefutable. However, this is merely the surface of Lady Catherine's true value. As a character, she is indispensable in what she represents. Through Lady Catherine, Austen creates an alternate version of Mr. Darcy, who serves as a foil for his current self. In addition to this, Lady Catherine represents Austen's stance on the consequences of an upper-class abuse of power.

One of Lady Catherine de Bourgh's main purposes in *Pride and Prejudice* is to provide contrast to Mr. Darcy. To bridge the parallels between the two characters, Austen describes both in a similar manner. For example, when Mr. Darcy is first introduced, his personality is described along the lines of how proud he appears to be: "His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again" (Austen 17). This description mirrors that of Lady Catherine's

introduction, in which she "was reckoned proud by many people [that Mr. Collins] knew" (46). With both these similarities and their bloodline connecting the two of them, the way they represent the arrogant nature of the upper classes can clearly be seen. However, as the story continues, the paths of both Lady Catherine and Mr. Darcy begin to diverge, and Lady Catherine eventually becomes a foil for her nephew. This divergence is set into motion by a single factor, which is the existence of Elizabeth Bennet.

Without Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy would have never realized how harmful his pride is to his friends and subjects. Instead, he would have remained trapped in his self-centered universe, as Lady Catherine is. In fact, unlike Mr. Darcy, who is thoroughly humiliated by Elizabeth's scathing rejection in the middle of the novel (108-109), Lady Catherine has never truly been contradicted or rebuked by anyone until the novel's end, when Elizabeth takes her to task. Instead, she is often flattered by her subordinates, and even seems to take the words of flattery as truth. This is exemplified in the text by Mr. Collins' speech, in which he states that he has "more than once observed to Lady Catherine, that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess . . . [and he would often say these] kind of little things which please[d] her ladyship" (47). The fact that Lady Catherine feels pleased by the flattery and even seems to encourage it shows

that she does believe it to a certain extent. Thus, Lady Catherine, as the representation of Mr. Darcy's past self, appears in the novel in direct contrast to his new self, thereby allowing readers to see the resulting ends of both a changed and unchanged version of Mr. Darcy. Nonetheless, although the altered version of Mr. Darcy at the ending of the novel is considered the "true" one due to his triumph over the orthodox version that Lady Catherine represents, her continued existence remains as a warning for both Mr. Darcy and the readers. If it were not for Elizabeth's rejection, the single factor that shattered Mr. Darcy's long-standing beliefs in his superiority, he would have likely ended up as Lady Catherine had: unenlightened to the cruelty of his actions, and painfully ignorant of the weight of the responsibility that comes with having authority.

Nevertheless, Jane Austen not only set Lady Catherine up as a foil for Mr. Darcy, she also made use of the prideful lady to portray her own stance on the upper-class oppression of the general masses. In the novel, Lady Catherine has one of the highest statuses among the various characters, being second only to Mr. Darcy. As such, she is used to holding power and authority over the lesser nobles and the common people. When events do not go her way, she does not hesitate to try to wrest back control by any means, whether through coercion or manipulation. This is demonstrated by when she tries to

threaten Elizabeth into compliance after Elizabeth refuses to refute the rumors of her engagement to Mr. Darcy. As depicted in the text,

> "And this is your [Elizabeth's] real opinion! This is your final resolve! Very well, I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Miss Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry my point." (192)

Lady Catherine implies that she intends to present this ugly side of Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy to manipulate his feelings and impression of her. Through this extreme display of power, Austen depicts how unrestrained and decadent the upper classes are, as they appear to have no qualms about twisting the truth in their favor. To negate this power, the lower classes must fight for their rights rather than submit, as depicted by Elizabeth's refusal to submit to Lady Catherine's threats:

> "And I certainly *never* shall give it [the assurance to never enter in an engagement with Mr. Darcy]. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter, but would my giving you the wished-for promise make their marriage at all more probable? . . . Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary

application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged." (191)

Through this example, Austen indicates that those in power cannot always control the masses, as there will come a day when the ones being suppressed will rise, regardless of the threat to their futures, in revolt against their oppressors.

Despite being a minor character, Lady Catherine de Bourgh represents a lofty statement regarding the power and corruption of the English nobility. As a failed version of Mr. Darcy, she symbolizes the ever-perpetuating cycle of greed and arrogance of the upper classes. After all, she ends up passing on her prideful nature to her daughter, who exhibits it through her belief that it would be a show of her greatest favor to even deign to enter Mr. Collins' and his wife's house for a chat (92). This example particularly showcases how the corrupted values of aristocrats are passed down from one generation to the next. Meanwhile, as a representation of the noble classes, Lady Catherine's defeat at Elizabeth's hands symbolizes the consequences of upper class oppression. Particularly, her loss embodies the idea that when an authoritative power does not fulfill its duties and responsibilities to the people, the people have the right to rebel against that body of authority.

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Enlisting in the Grave of World War 1

Alondra Roman

Nations go to war for a variety of reasons, not all necessarily valid, and most often the ones who initiate a war are not the ones on the front line. World War 1 was one of history's invalid, most gruesome wars that led to the needless deaths of millions. Young men were sent to fight a war of greed under the pretenses of glory, only to return with the blood of innocent men on their hands and an internal destruction taking root within. In his poem "Glory of Women," Siegfried Sassoon renders the true horrors of the war and counters the propaganda that lured young men into their graves with bitter irony.

Men were deceived into believing that those who fought in the war were heroes, and that they would die a hero's death. Women were encouraged to fawn over soldiers, pushed the men in their lives to enlist, and those men who did not contribute to the war were deemed cowards. Men were persuaded by the allure of beautiful women praising them for their brave sacrifice. They believed it would make them more attractive because that is what the propaganda painted: "You love us when we're heroes" (l. 1). Civilians at home are unaware of the horrific deeds soldiers were forced to commit. Instead, they blindly "worship[ed] decorations" (l. 3), idealizing a

war of avarice, and soldiers were given these medals as if the pins could "redeem the war's disgrace" (l. 4). Families could not imagine their sons and husbands as murderers, yet those that returned from war returned damaged, physically or mentally.

Those with permanent internal scars were often ignored or misunderstood. Only those "wounded in a mentionable place" (l. 2), as Sassoon says sarcastically, were honored. In the early 1900's, mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression were unheard of or brushed aside. Even in present times people refuse to believe these are actual illnesses. While people tended to veterans' physical wounds in the aftermath of WW1, they failed to provide adequate support for their emotional and mental well-being. A soldier who lost a limb was honored for their sacrifice, yet those that lost themselves in the war were ignored.

It is easy for one to hear war stories when one has not lived through the experiences oneself. People crowded soldiers and eagerly awaited their tales of war; they "listen[ed] with delight" (l. 5). Stories of young men valiantly fighting for their nation were released. Young boys envied the men at war and craved to participate, to prove they too were brave men. In the propagandistic climate, people learned to expect enthusiastic retellings of war from the soldiers. Yet only the

tales of the winners were told; the stories of those that had lost were forgotten. Had civilians been told about the real grotesque reality in which men were used as cannon fodder, they may not have been as eager to listen to the “tales of dirt and danger” (l. 6). The returning soldiers were not seen as individuals with scars and pain, rather they were figurines to worship and admire from afar.

Civilians and leaders during WWI often failed to realize that the young men sent to war had human emotions and reactions to the macabre reality they faced. When these men realized they were fighting a meaningless war and being massacred for the satisfaction of men safely at home surrounded by their wealth, many wished to flee. Yet people could not “believe that British troops ‘retire.’” (l. 9), as Sassoon bitterly says. Abandoning the war was seen as a shameful crime. Because of the propaganda being released, many failed to empathize with those that chose to flee the battlefield. Sassoon deconstructs the propaganda glorifying the war when explaining the cause leading men to flee. The men were, very simply, broken by “hell’s last horror” (l. 10), where, for example, “blind with blood” (l. 11), they would run frantically, “trampling the terrible corpses” (l. 11) underfoot as they went. As if to provoke his readers, Sassoon ends his poem by bringing in an “enemy” mother, a German mother, who, no doubt in a similar propagandistic climate in Germany, is unaware

of the true horrible fate of her child: “O German Mother dreaming by the fire,/While you are knitting socks to send to your son/His face is trodden deeper in the mud” (ll.12-13). These lines encapsulate the purpose of the poem in contrasting the oblivious civilian with the terrible field of battle.

Siegfried Sassoon’s “Glory of Women” shows how easy it is to support a war, even a tragically wasteful one, when one is not a fighter and falls for the propaganda. The only ones who truly saw behind the mask of propaganda were those who went to war. Sassoon’s use of “you” throughout the poem reflects the inner bitterness that festered within soldiers. From the point of view of the soldiers, the civilian “you” is one of the enemy: “you worship decorations… you make us shells… you listen with delight” (ll. 1-5). The soldiers are not the ones rejoicing in the face of war because they were able to see through the lies and experienced the trauma.

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Adichie's "Checking Out" and Immigrant Identity

Monica Williams

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is well known for her commentary on African culture, specifically Nigerian culture. Explorations of issues surrounding immigration, politics, gender, and coming of age are incorporated into many of her works because she tells stories of cultural conflicts and human struggle. In her short story "Checking Out," Adichie explores a young man's desire to leave Nigeria and make it to America. However, the more profound message found in this simple tale is that people tend to "check out" in many ways. In this story, readers encounter many characters who are *checking out* or have *checked out* of their authentic core selves, eager to find a new identity or become someone different under the happenstance of life's struggles.

Adichie's young man, Obinze, a Nigerian, makes his way to London to pursue a new life and the possibility of making it to America. After several failed attempts to attain a work visa, his mother finagles an opportunity by falsifying facts on a visa application for him, and he achieves one for six months. Obinze's mother "was a woman who asked no favors, who would not lie, [yet] she had lied for him" (Adichie). Although a seemingly minor detail, it seems in

fact that Obinze's mother gives the first display of *checking out* in the story when she abandons her moral compass to lie to get her son to the U. K. Obinze's mother is willing to set aside her beliefs to help him see the world and become who he wants to be. He is well educated, comes from a good home with a successful mother, and so is not desperate, yet she dons blinders so that her son could explore the world and realize a dream. She removes herself from her authentic beliefs to elevate her son's experiences.

Obinze's desire to see America becomes an obsession, in a way a means by which he can check out of his unpleasant present in London as an often unemployed pereson and forget about his homeland. A phrase from his favorite childhood television show, to *check out* is to remove oneself from the intermittent Nigerian chaos of "no good roads, no light, no water…[times when] you can't even get a common bottle of soft drink" (Adichie). Civil unrest was sometimes happening right outside his doors in Nigeria, but he prefers to suppress the past and dwell in his dreams of America. Obinze would *check out* in his mind, daydream when he would read stories or watch movies: "…he saw himself walking the streets of Harlem, discussing the merits of Mark Twain with his American friends" (Adichie). He is aware of his consuming desire and contemplates this need when struggling to find work, asking himself if potential

“employers could smell his America-pining on his breath” (Adichie). Obinze knows that his eagerness to remove himself from Nigeria and escape London is becoming something others can see, a physical manifestation of the desire to check out, be somewhere else, and become someone else.

Interestingly, the notion of being someone else first arises when Obinze begins a short-lived cleaning job in London. The Ghanaian cleaning woman that Obinze works with keeps her distance, and Obinze senses that she “came from a similar background [of a] childhood cushioned by family, regular meals, and dreams in which there was no conception of cleaning toilets” (Adichie). Adichie is making a point to exemplify that not all immigrants are poor, uneducated, or even desperate to run away from home. The dream of America is an opportunity, but it is not a rescue for every immigrant. Sometimes it is just the genuine desire to see and smell a mystical land that feels like a world away. However, the two Africans, Obinze and the cleaning woman, are cleaning toilets, even though they have an affluent, academic background in their home countries. Obinze notices that the Ghanaian woman is friendlier to a Polish woman, also a cleaner, than him. He decides that “he was too close to what [the Ghanaian woman] was; he knew her nuances, while with the Polish woman she was free to reinvent herself, to be whomever she

wanted to be" (Adichie). The Ghanaian woman avoids Obinze because he is too close to home and resembles what she is checking out of. However, because they are determined to remove themselves from home and become something new, they must remove themselves from what they know, the life they were used to, and clean toilets. Obinze is reminded that he has limits and options when he walks into a stall, and he "discovers a mound of shit on the toilet lid, solid, tapering… carefully arranged. [He] stared at that mound of shit for a long time, feeling smaller and smaller… until it became… a punch to his jaw. And all for three quid an hour. He took off his gloves, placed them next to the mound of shit, and left the building" (Adichie). At this point in Obinze's journey, he realizes that another way must be found, he is not going to suffer cleaning up after people, but he will need to, again, become someone else to accomplish his goal, to pay for a sham marriage to get to America.

Vincent Obi, a Nigerian man who will lend Obinze his National Insurance number to work, proves to struggle with identity and *checks out* of his obligation to help a fellow countryman. Obi greedily charges Obinze 40% of whatever Obinze makes for the use of his insurance number. Even After Obinze tells Obi that he cannot afford the high percentage, Obi does not budge on his price. Obinze ponders "Vincent's Nigerian life: a community secondary school full

of barefoot children; … a family of many children; and a crowd of dependents in his hometown who, whenever he visited, would expect large loaves of bread and pocket money carefully distributed to each of them" (Adichie). In a bid to fit into British society, Obi uses "a British accent and says 'innit' too much," that is until he begins to get pushy about the money, at which point his Nigerian English accent comes to the fore (Adichie). There is a sense that Obi resents Obinze's higher class and past opportunities, and this envy no doubt explains why, when Obinze finds work, Obi asks for an even bigger cut of his paycheck. Obinze cannot afford it, however, so Obi reports him, and Obinze ends up deported. Obi could or should have been more inclined to support and help out Obinze, but he single-handedly causes his demise. Vincent Obi has thoroughly *checked out* ethically, letting his jealousy shape his treatment of Obinze and causing Obinze to be caught for his lack of papers and sent back home.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Checking Out" is a story centered on the experiences of the immigrant, but more so, it addresses all the different identities that come along with the attempt to live in another country or begin a new life. During a speech at INBOUND, Adichie says that she first experienced being black in America, since her skin tone is not an identifier in Africa. She says, "identity becomes what you choose depending on your environment and what

society has chosen you to be. Identity is about everyone. Every human writes about identity. Identity shapes the way the world interacts with us and how we interact with the world" (*YouTube* 15:46). Obinze reflects this idea at the end of the story when the narrator describes how his identity became that of "thing" once he was deported, or "removed": "Removed: the word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing" (Adichie). The title of Adichie's story is significant as it speaks to many layers of immigration stories, stories of humanity. Each character's identity was altered, especially Obinze's, who became the thing to be removed.

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