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Editors' Note

Sonja Pinto & Robert Steele

We would like to acknowledge with respect the Lkwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory UVic stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Volume 9 of *The Albatross* would not have been possible without the support and contributions of the UVic English community. We would like to thank everyone who submitted to the journal, all of our contributors, and this issue's editorial staff, who dedicated their time to curate content and collaborate with authors to produce the outstanding essays in this issue. Many thanks as well to two UVic English alumni: Emma Fanning for her wonderful design of this issue and Michael Carelse, a previous managing editor of *The Albatross*, whose editorial structure and generous advice laid the groundwork for this year's journal. We would also like to thank Drs. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa SurrIDGE for their editing workshop and ongoing support and Susan Doyle for her copy-editing course, which trained many of our copy editors.

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As managing editors of *The Albatross*, we are proud to present nine essays in this year's journal that embody the scholarly excellence achieved by the UVic English community. Working on this issue has been a privilege, and we could not have done it without the dedication of everyone involved. We wish the best to future editors—may they find editing the journal to be a joy (as we did) and not an albatross around their necks.

Introduction

Sonja Pinto & Robert Steele

We are proud to present nine essays in this year's issue that embody the diverse scholarly pursuits of the UVic English community. While diverse—covering a range of texts from Chaucer to Childish Gambino—the essays in this issue are all interested in the influence of form on knowledge.

Kathryn LeBere shows how formal biblical allusions underpin the arboreal in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and suggest polyvalent readings of knowledge in the tales. Amanda Scherr and Esther Callo use formal analysis to reveal the social preoccupations with femininity in canonical Western literature—the works of Mary Wollstonecraft for Scherr and criticism of *The Odyssey* and the Bible for Callo. Lily Maase explores the forms of texture and how they inform perceptions and expressions of gender in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. Ryann Anderson juxtaposes the Western and Latin American literary allusions in Cherríe L. Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*, revealing their effect on gender dynamics in the play. Christopher Horne provides a narratological analysis of Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, arguing that diegetic gaps in the text fracture readers' assumed chronology. Erin Chewter examines André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*, showing how the violent behaviour of dogs in the novel functions as an allegory for human ideologies of fascism and violence. Drew Marie Beard argues that feminist oral forms in Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* perpetuate historical and cultural knowledge despite dystopic environmental devastation. Kate Wallace Fry explores how Childish Gambino's "This Is America" exploits absurdism to both subvert conventional musical forms and critique the culture industry in America. All of these essays show how their respective source texts address epistemological problems through form. Accordingly, we have ordered the essays by their source text's year of publication to emphasize the development of this concern from Chaucer's tales to

contemporary pop culture. Thus, we begin with Chaucer's Edenic allusions (LeBere) and end with Childish Gambino's hip-hop music video (Fry). In the intervening essays, we encounter the late-eighteenth-century proto-feminist enlightenment (Scherr), assumptions of male authorship in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticisms of canonical Western literature (Callo), second-wave feminist critiques of gender roles (Maase and Anderson), concerns that emerged from 9/11 (Horne), and recent Canadian dystopic novels (Chewter and Beard).

In our first essay, Kathryn LeBere analyzes formal allusions to the tree of knowledge in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), arguing that “the arboreal is imbued with symbolic and allegorical meaning” (16). Examining how Chaucer exploits biblical allegories of the Garden of Eden in “The Merchant's Tale” and “The Pardoner's Tale,” she reveals how Chaucer “complicat[es] the idea of knowledge in both tales” (16).

Our next four essays all engage with cultural understandings of femininity. Amanda Scherr problematizes Mary Wollstonecraft's proto-feminism, lauding her advancement of women's rights in the eighteenth century but critiquing her idealization of motherhood. Examining Wollstonecraft's body of work alongside both eighteenth-century contexts and contemporary criticism, Scherr argues that, despite her then-radical feminism, Wollstonecraft remains “burdened by the patriarchal constructs she seeks to escape” (32). While Scherr critiques eighteenth-century proto-feminism, Esther Callo critiques late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarly assumptions of male authorship. Explaining how Samuel Butler and Harold Bloom presume male authorship of anonymous canonical texts, Callo reveals how “the long-standing default use of the pronoun ‘he’ when authorship is unknown... eclips[es] the possibility of female authorship” (34). Equally concerned with constructions of gender, Lily Maase identifies how the textures of both art and clothing are gendered in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) and argues that the novel's narrator uses subversive textures in her own art to reclaim her unique gender expres-

sion. Ryann Anderson, examining Cherríe L. Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* (1995), argues that the play "juxtapose[es] ... Western allusions and Latin American mythology" to challenge patriarchal binaries and imagine new futures for the Chicano movement (49).

Our next three essays delve into the twenty-first-century ideological concerns that underpin three contemporary novels. Analyzing the narratological preoccupations of Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), Christopher Horne identifies diegetic gaps in the novel's narration, which break the chronological plot and promote "associative narrative building" (65). While Horne investigates narrative, our next essay examines allegory. Erin Chewter grapples with the "human-like violence" (66) of the dogs in André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), arguing that it functions as an allegory of fascism and coins the term "dogism" to emphasize that connection. In the next essay, Drew Marie Beard argues that, in spite of the bleak environmental contexts of Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018), the novel provides hope for cultural continuance through feminist oral history.

Our last essay leaves behind the written word to analyze a distinctly modern form: the music video. Kate Wallace Fry combines early twentieth-century critical and literary theory with an analysis of musical form to argue that Childish Gambino's "This Is America" (2018) exploits the "devices and approaches popularized by absurdist art movements" to critique the normalization of racism and gun violence in America (84).

Whether analyzing texts from the Middle Ages or the contemporary moment, all of these essays address the influence of form on our understanding of knowledge, thereby positioning literature as a forum for epistemological questioning. While you're reading the following essays, we therefore invite you to consider how we come to know what we know.



CRITICAL WORKS

Branching Out: Trees and Knowledge in Chaucer's "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Pardoner's Tale"

Kathryn LeBere

Abstract: In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), the arboreal is imbued with symbolic and allegorical meaning. Used by Chaucer as rhetorical devices, the trees in "The Merchant's Tale" symbolize fertility, while the tree in "The Pardoner's Tale" symbolizes death. In both tales, the arboreal functions allegorically, representing the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. By using nature in this manner, Chaucer creates ambiguity in his work, complicating the idea of knowledge in both tales.

In *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), Geoffrey Chaucer uses trees to make the common complex. Through exploration of the arboreal in "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Pardoner's Tale," it becomes clear that the trees hardly function as actual trees, as they are imbued with symbolic and allegorical meaning. In "The Merchant's Tale," trees are symbolic of fertility, while in "The Pardoner's Tale," trees are symbolic of death. The arboreal also functions allegorically in both tales, representing the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. This essay argues that trees are rhetorical devices employed by Chaucer to complicate notions of knowledge in the tales by subverting the traditional allegory of the biblical Fall and leaving the tales' characters in ambiguous situations.

The first appearance of the arboreal in "The Merchant's Tale" is found in Januarie's description of himself, which reveals the symbolic meaning of trees as representations of fertility:

“Thogh I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blometh er that fruit ywoxen bee;
And blosmy tree nis neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowher hoor but on min heed;
Min herte and alle my limes been as grene

As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.” (1461–66)

In this passage, Januarye evokes the image of a tree to prove his virility and reproductive ability. He goes further than a simple comparison, becoming a tree himself: his “hoor” becomes the blossoms, and his “limes” become the branches of a laurel (1461, 1465). In this case, trees become symbolic of fertility. By transforming himself into an object of the natural world, Januarye appropriates nature to prove his virility. Becoming the tree, Januarye uses the “grene” of the laurel—connoting freshness and rebirth—to suggest his health and sexual productivity (1465). This idea is even reflected in the characters’ names: “Januarye” is a month associated with winter and decay, whereas “May”—the name of his young wife—is a month associated with spring and new growth. Januarye’s appropriation of nature makes his name ironic, as it reveals his concerns about his age and possible impotency. For Januarye, the main criteria he has for his future wife are her youth and her ability to “engendren him an heir” (1272). In the passage, “fruit” represents the child that Januarye has not yet had (1462). Therefore, it becomes apparent in “The Merchant’s Tale” that trees are symbolic of fertility, used by Januarye as a means of conceptualizing his reproductive abilities.

Januarye’s desire for an offspring is explored by Alcuin Blamires, who suggests that Januarye’s obsession with fertility shows his desire to “develop his genealogical tree” (Blamires 113). Considering Januarye’s view that “levelful procreacioun” is the reason for taking a wife, and his explicit worry that his “heritage sholde falle” if he does not have a child, Blamires’s argument has merit (Chaucer, “Merchant’s Tale” 1448, 1439). In addition, the fruit produced by the trees has a multitude of meanings. When Januarye contemplates taking a wife, he claims that a wife would be the “fruit of his tresor” (1270). In this case, “fruit” means the

most important part, since Januarye believes a young wife is a “glorious thing” for a man to have in old age (1270, 1268). However, later in the tale, when Januarye describes himself as a tree, “fruit” refers to a potential offspring (1462). If we consider the latter, the ending of the tale becomes more complicated.

May claims that she has an “appetit” for the pears, which could be read as May’s yearning for a child (2336). Blamires suggests that May might want to conceive with Damian so that she can prove her agency by defiling Januarye’s lineage (115). However, the inclusion of “womman in my plit” implies the possibility that May could already be with child—her cravings being the result of pregnancy (Chaucer, “Merchant’s Tale” 2335). Carol Falvo Heffernan contributes to this debate, revealing the possibility that May might regard the pears as a form of contraception, since they were used by early doctors as a form of birth control (Heffernan 31). If we consider the contraceptive quality of the pears, then May’s desire for the pears is not because she is pregnant or wants a child but because she wants to prevent conception with Januarye and Damian. In addition, Heffernan adds that Chaucer may have chosen the pear tree because pears “resemble female breasts” and “male genitalia” (31). Therefore, May’s desire for the fruit would be her lust for Damian’s physical body. With the tale ending with Januarye stroking May’s “wombe,” the question of whether May is pregnant arises, and if so, who the father may be (2414). The ambiguity of the fruit’s meaning leaves the ending up for interpretation and increases the gravity of the scandalous climax.

While trees in “The Merchant’s Tale” are symbolic of fertility, the oak tree in “The Pardoner’s Tale” is symbolic of death. When the rioters decide to find and kill Death, an “olde man” (Chaucer, “Pardoner’s Tale” 714) gives them Death’s location:

To finde deeth, turn up this croked wey,
For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,
Under a tree, and ther he wole abide;
Nat for youre boost he wole him nothing hide.

Se ye that ook? Right ther ye shal him finde. (761-65)

Carolyn P. Collette argues that Chaucer's attention to the exact location of the tree suggests that he "intends his audience to recall ... that the oak tree evokes quite particular Biblical and exegetical connotations" (39). To support her argument, Collette cites examples from the Old Testament, revealing the connection between oak trees and sites of death and burial: Deborah, Saul, and Saul's son are all buried under oak trees (40). Collette's argument works with the plot of the tale as the rioters all end up dying beneath the oak tree. While I agree with her interpretation, I also believe that the meaning of the oak tree can be taken a step further—the oak tree not only being a place of death but also symbolizing death itself. Death in "The Pardoner's Tale" is personified. The rioters regard death as a "privee thief" who killed their friend with a "spere" (675, 677); therefore, the rioters believe that "Deeth" has the ability to be "sleen" (699). When the old man says, "se ye that ook? Right ther ye shal him finde," the expectation of the reader is that Death will be a person, waiting for the rioters under the tree (765). However, when the rioters arrive at their destination, the oak tree is the only living entity the rioters encounter. Thus, the oak tree in "The Pardoner's Tale" is Death's closest representative on Earth.

When we consider the moral of "The Pardoner's Tale," the symbolic nature of trees in Chaucer's text becomes even more apparent. The Pardoner declares that the theme of his story is "*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*," meaning "greed is the root of all evil" (426). Taking this theme into account, the actual "roots" of the oak tree become greed, making the tree itself "evil." This idea becomes increasingly important when we consider "The Merchant's Tale." When debating the pros and cons of marriage, Januarie consults Justinus and Placebo. In his musings, Januarie wonders about the inability to have "parfite blisses" (1638) both on earth and in heaven and includes the following thought: "For thogh he kepe him fro the sinnes sevene, / And eek from every branche of thilke tree" (1640-41). The inclusion of these lines adds an-

other layer to the arboreal in “The Merchant’s Tale,” as trees now become associated with sin. When we consider the fact that the pear tree ends up being the site of May’s adultery, it becomes clear that trees in Chaucer’s tales hardly function as actual trees and are imbued with symbolism.

In addition to their symbolic use, Chaucer also employs the arboreal in his tales allegorically. The trees in the “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Pardoner’s Tale” are representative of the Tree of Knowledge from the Garden of Eden. In “The Merchant’s Tale,” the allegory of the Fall is quite evident: the final interaction between Januarye, May, and Damian occurs in an actual “gardin, walled al with stoon” (2029). If read allegorically, Damian becomes the serpent, luring May towards the “pirie” (2217); May becomes Eve, as she “longeth” for the tree’s fruit; and Januarye becomes Adam, whose spiritual fall is the result of his wife’s temptation (2332). In addition, there are multiple allusions to Eden throughout the tale: wedlock, wifehood, and May herself are all compared to “paradis” (1265, 1332, 1822).

Although it is less explicit than in “The Merchant’s Tale,” the oak tree in “The Pardoner’s Tale” also represents the Tree of Knowledge. The Pardoner alludes to the fall of Adam in his tale’s prologue and describes how Adam is “out cast to wo and peine” after eating from the tree (511). Adam’s plight is comparable to the rioters’ situation, as their encounter with the oak tree also brings them “wo and peine”: the youngest rioter is “slain” by the other two rioters, who are poisoned (881). Furthermore, it should also be noted that when Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge, one of their punishments is the loss of their immortality (*Holy Bible*, Gen. 2). In “The Pardoner’s Tale,” the rioters are immediately punished with death, a fulfillment of the biblical promise of human mortality.

Ultimately, the result of Chaucer’s use of trees in “The Merchant’s Tale” and “The Pardoner’s Tale” is the complication of knowledge. Since the trees allegorically represent the Tree of Knowledge, the characters who encounter the trees should gain insight they did not already have. However, in both tales, the allegory of the Fall is subverted. In Genesis

3, the serpent claims that by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam's and Eve's "eyes will be opened" and they will "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3.4). Januarye, who has gone blind, is given the gift of sight from Pluto. His eyes are "opened," yet he does not end up believing what he sees. Even though Januarye watches May commit adultery in a tree, she is able to convince him that he "han som glimsinge, and no parfit sighte" (2383). Unlike Adam, Januarye disregards the knowledge he gained by having his eyes opened in order to preserve the sanctity of his marriage. If we consider the symbolism of the trees in "The Merchant's Tale," the knowledge that is complicated is not only that of good and evil but is also the characters' knowledge of the future. The symbolism of the tree and its fruit puts the characters in an ambiguous situation: it is unclear whether May is pregnant, and if she is, the father could be either Januarye or Damian.

Similarly to "The Merchant's Tale," the concept of knowledge is also complicated in "The Pardoner's Tale." The rioters go to the oak tree so that they can find and kill Death; however, as soon as they arrive at their destination, they become distracted by "florins fine of gold" (770). The rioters, already sinners at the beginning of the tale, immediately forget their purpose and become murderous. Like Januarye, they do not learn a lesson. The death of the rioters is similar to Januarye's spiritual undoing: the characters do not acquire the knowledge of good and evil. What should be noted about "The Pardoner's Tale" is that this lack of knowledge does not only apply to the characters within the tale but also can be applied to the tale-teller himself. The Pardoner preaches "nothing but for coveitise," and his tale is overtly moralistic, warning against the corrupting nature of greed (424). However, even though greed is the focus of his teachings, the Pardoner is one of the most prolific sinners in the group of pilgrims. Selling false relics in order to make a living, the Pardoner admits to the pilgrims the truth about his occupation. It becomes clear that the Pardoner is aware of his spiritual shortcomings, yet he has no intention of changing his ways. Like Januarye, the Pardoner chooses a

path of self-deceit. He deliberately remains ignorant so that he can continue his profession, which is similar to Januar-ye's acceptance of May's lies so that he can continue to regard her as the "fruit of his tresor" (1270).

Trees in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are charged with symbolic and allegorical meaning; they are not treated as actual trees but are used as rhetorical devices, complicating the tales' morals and plot. In "The Merchant's Tale," trees symbolize fertility, and in "The Pardoner's Tale," trees symbolize death. The arboreal also functions allegorically in both tales, representing the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. By employing nature in this manner, Chaucer subverts the allegory of the Fall, creating ambiguity and dimension within the tales. In "The Merchant's Tale," Januar-ye disregards the information he learns by having his eyes opened in order to remain ignorant of May's adultery. When we consider the symbolic nature of the trees, the characters' understanding of the future is complicated by May's potential pregnancy. In "The Pardoner's Tale," the rioters fail to learn the knowledge of good and evil—a short-coming that extends to the Pardoner himself.

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Feminine Essentialism and Compulsory Maternity in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft

Amanda Scherr

Abstract: Mary Wollstonecraft is often credited as the “aesthetic foremother of feminist expository prose” (Gubar 454), but her status as a feminist icon is problematized by her essentialist ideology regarding gender and motherhood. While her work presents a radical imperative for the civic equality of the sexes rooted in a fundamentally genderless capacity for reason, this imperative is nevertheless constructed around traditional notions of motherhood as the essential role of the female. This essay seeks to explore the dissonance between her clear feminist imperative for change and her tendency to err towards feminine essentialism.

In considering the proto-feminist merit of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria* (1798), it is difficult to reconcile the novel’s clear feminist “imperative for change” (Gay 6) with its representation of motherhood as fundamentally linked to feminine identity and self-authority. Current feminist discourses take issue with cultural notions of the relationship between womanhood and motherhood; while Wollstonecraft argues for the importance of women’s biological “duty” as mothers, present-day feminist theorists assert that such notions are based on heteronormative and androcentric constructs which further serve to relegate women to the domestic sphere (Ford 189). Second-wave feminists have identified Wollstonecraft’s attitudes towards the institution of motherhood as indicative of her essentialist ideology. Wollstonecraft’s imperative for both partners to take equal share in the process of child-rearing was informed by eighteenth-century debates over the displacement of parenting

duties onto hired help, and she undoubtedly views the act of nursing as one of female empowerment; yet her conception of men's and women's respective duties is predicated wholly on biological difference and portrays women as inherently predisposed to motherhood. By positioning women's social value as citizens in conjunction with the act of mothering, Wollstonecraft perpetuates patriarchal associations of feminine power and agency along with traditional modes of heterosexual domesticity.

While the significance of Wollstonecraft's work to the feminist movement should not be understated, her writings on the subject of motherhood suggest that, when it comes to maternity, she agrees with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assessment that men and women are not "constituted alike in temperament and character" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 158). It is therefore valuable to explore the extent to which her views on motherhood as an essential role of the female are the result of internalized notions of gender determinism. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft repeatedly comments on motherhood's relationship to femininity, stating that "the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature" (223). As Sandrine Berges identifies, this philosophy conflicts with her "often repeated claim that there [are] no moral differences between men and women, merely physical ones," thus conflating biological sex with a sense of "character and duty" (269). In keeping with Berges' assertion, Mary Poovey describes Wollstonecraft as "a prisoner of the category she most vehemently tried to reject" (81). Mitzi Myers echoes this sentiment, stating that "the core of her manifesto remains middle-class motherhood, a feminist, republicanized adaptation of the female role normative in late eighteenth-century bourgeois notions of the family" (206). Joan Landes extends Myers' argument to address Wollstonecraft's claim that the "first duty [of women] is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that which includes so many, of a mother" (*Rights of Woman*, 226); Landes points out that "[Wollstonecraft's] own rhetoric implies that the home and

women's role within it can be given a civic purpose ... and, consequently, that women may come to be satisfied with a domestic rather than a public existence" (129).

While contemporary feminists acknowledge the woman-centred experience of birth as a powerful aspect of feminine identity, critics such as Simone De Beauvoir question the status of motherhood as a compulsory occupation of all women. De Beauvoir argues that women are conditioned from a young age to accept that they are "made for child-bearing" and to look forward to the "splendors of maternity"; meanwhile, the negative aspects of the feminine condition, including the medical risks of giving birth and the boredom of domesticity, "are all justified by this marvelous privilege ... of bringing children into the world" (491). Wollstonecraft's work reflects these ingrained moral values: she argues that while virtue and the capacity for reason are genderless traits belonging to human nature, there exists a distinct feminine essence rooted in the biological capabilities of women to birth and breastfeed children; thus, she concludes, they have "a naturally derived duty to do so" (Berges 269). Throughout *Maria*, she portrays these maternal duties as inherent to all women and emphasizes the instinctually nurturing qualities that bond women to one another. It is this maternal instinct that initially incites a sense of pity in Jemima; upon learning of Maria's tragic separation from her child, "the woman [awakens] in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions," and she becomes determined to help ease the sufferings of a "wretched mother" (167). These "feminine emotions" are apparently directly tied to the biological status of women as caregivers and a sense of comradeship rooted in the act of mothering, thereby reinforcing the notion that "maternal practice [is] at the heart of real femininity" (Brace 446). Wollstonecraft does not, however, fail to address the duties which fall to men as fathers. Maria repeatedly laments the fact that George Venables is incapable of being a respectable father to her baby (221); this sentiment is in keeping with those expressed in *Rights of Woman*, in which Wollstonecraft describes the "chastened dignity with which a mother returns the caresses that she

and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his station" (232). Such statements emphasize the mutuality of the burden of child-rearing, yet as Laura Brace identifies, this "call for men and women to fulfill their respective duties rel[ies] on fixed and static notions of what those duties are, attaching them firmly to biological difference" (446). Venables's failings as a father are chiefly rooted in his failure to fulfill the fatherly duty of adequately providing for his family, thus reinforcing established gender roles which cast men as breadwinners in the public sphere and women as caregivers in the domestic.

Wollstonecraft's essentialist ideology surrounding the naturally derived duties of mothers informs her belief in the importance of breastfeeding and hand-rearing one's children. In *Rights of Woman*, she criticizes the prevalent use of wet nurses in eighteenth-century England, calling breastfeeding "the grand end of [a woman's] being" and "the first duty of a mother" (228). She expands on the subject in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), warning against the "negligence [and] ignorance" of wet nurses and calling for women to adopt "a regular mode of suckling" on the grounds that "[a mother's] milk is their proper nutriment" (3). Wollstonecraft revisits this pointed concern over the displacement of maternal duties onto nurses in *Maria* through Maria's lamentations over the loss of her child. She wonders if her baby is "pining in vain" for the "nutriment" of her breastmilk, and she is pained by the thought of another woman dispensing these duties without "a mother's tenderness" (162). Furthermore, Jemima's story of her mother's death seems to confirm Maria's fears regarding the damaging effect of wet nurses on a child's constitution. Jemima relates being "consigned to the care of the cheapest nurse [her] father could find" in whom "the office of a mother did not awaken the tenderness of a woman" (190). Having been denied the "feminine caresses" of genuine motherly affection, she states that she inevitably became "a weak and rickety babe" (190). These exchanges communicate the crux of Wollstonecraft's criticism of institutionalized motherhood as prescribed by patriarchal eighteenth-century social

structures; she associates women's loss of reason under patriarchal oppression with the compulsion to "cast off" one's child and argues that women who spurn their natural duties have not earned the title of "mother" (*Rights of Woman* 228). Conversely, she asserts that by embracing the virtue and reason inherent to maternal duties, women can access a sense of purpose and self-authority that is "neither brutish nor masculine" (Brace 450). As Brace points out, Wollstonecraft connects a mother's harnessing of self-authority to the execution of "her virtuous and dutiful relationships with other people, and in particular through her maternal duties towards her children" (450); for Wollstonecraft, a mother may "learn to respect [herself]" primarily through her "true affection" for her children (240). By suggesting that motherhood is the fulcrum upon which women should construct their sense of self-worth, Wollstonecraft sophistically conflates a sense of feminine self-realization with the fulfillment of normative gender roles.

While the implications of such associations are problematic, it is crucial to consider Wollstonecraft's line of reasoning within the context of eighteenth-century debates over childcare methods. For middle- to upper-class mothers, sending newborns to a wet nurse was common practice—it was considered vulgar to breastfeed one's own children—and they would often remain in the nurse's care until around age three (Berges 273). Once weaned, children were typically cared for by servants until they were old enough to be sent to school; parents were at best tangentially involved in the child-rearing process, and this practice undoubtedly did not foster close bonds between them and their children. The choice to send one's child to a wet nurse thereby represented an unwillingness to afford them proper care and affection. The potential for breastfeeding to be a profound bonding experience was not lost on Wollstonecraft: "The suckling of a child also excites the warmed glow of tenderness—Its dependent, helpless state produces an affection, which may properly be termed maternal.... It is necessary, therefore, for a mother to perform the office of one, in order to produce in herself a rational affection for her offspring"

(*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* 4). Here, Wollstonecraft anticipates an important element of modern feminist discourse: the unique nature of a mother's relationship to her child, particularly if that child is a girl. Adrienne Rich comments on the conflicting qualities of the bond between mother and daughter: "the materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (226). *Maria* confronts this struggle to navigate the intergenerational nature of feminine oppression primarily through Maria's reveries on her relationship to her child; she repeatedly "lament[s] she [is] a daughter" (162) and worries that her child won't have her mother to confide in regarding "the oppressed state of women" (206). This aspect of Wollstonecraft's narrative is especially poignant given the autobiographical nature of Maria's concern; Wollstonecraft had been working on her own instructional manuscript for her daughter(s) prior to her death. Published by Godwin in 1798 under the title *Lessons*, the fragmentary manuscript is speculated to have been written either as a legacy for her first daughter before one of her suicide attempts, or while she was pregnant with Mary (Berges 283). Concurrently, *Maria* suggests that the loss of positive maternal relationships coincides with the enactment of gender-based oppression. Jemima is driven to vice by her stepmother's lack of maternal affection towards her, and the domineering presence of Maria's stepmother following her mother's death ultimately drives her out of her home and into an ill-fated marriage to George Venables. Furthermore, while four out of five of *Maria's* fragmentary endings suggest tragic resolutions, the fifth sees Maria resurrected from a suicide attempt by the return of her daughter (Ford 192), thus implicating the power of what Rich terms "the flow of energy between two biologically-alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other; one of which has labored to give birth to the other" (226). Although the gravity she ascribes to motherhood is partially rooted in essentialist theories, Wollstonecraft is singular among her contemporaries in her representation of mothers as complex individuals and compelling subjects, and she anticipates the interest in matrilineal narratives within modern feminist scholarship.

The importance that Wollstonecraft places on motherhood does not occur in a vacuum; as Sara Ruddick points out, “in most cultures the womanly and the maternal are conceptually and politically linked,” and such rigid constructions of gender roles are difficult to transcend given the formative forces they constitute in “shap[ing] our minds and lives” (Ruddick 45). In the case of Wollstonecraft, the works of Rousseau arguably constitute the primary cultural inspiration for her ideology; having read *Emile* (1762) while working as a governess in Ireland, she wrote to her sister expostulating how she “love[s] his paradoxes” (Reuter 1145), and she cites his novel *Julie* (1761) in the epigraph of *Mary: A Fiction* (1788). She revered Rousseau in many respects, even writing to Imlay in 1794 that she had “always been half in love with [Rousseau]” (*Works* 145), but she was nevertheless alive to his most glaring faults. In *Rights of Woman*, she states that while she “admire[s] the genius of that able writer, whose opinions [she] shall often have occasion to cite, indignation always take place of admiration ... when [she] read[s] his voluptuous reveries” (Reuter 1146). While *Rights of Woman* directly attacks Rousseau’s argument that boys and girls “should not be educated in the same manner” (158), much of Wollstonecraft’s rhetoric involving the natural duties of motherhood directly reflect Rousseau’s child-rearing philosophies. Like Wollstonecraft, Rousseau was deeply concerned with the importance of the maternal role in raising healthy children. He criticizes women who have “despised their first duty and refused to nurse their own children” and warns against the negligence of wet nurses who don’t share with the child the maternal “ties of nature” (*Emile* 12). Moreover, Rousseau draws a connection between maternal duties and bonded relationships in a manner reminiscent of Wollstonecraft’s ideology; he questions whether a woman should be “prepared to divide her mother’s rights, or rather to abdicate them in favour of a stranger; to see her child loving another more than herself; to feel that the affection he retains for his own mother is a favour, while his love for his foster-mother is a duty; for is not some affection due where there has been a mother’s

care?" (12). Wollstonecraft's sentiments on maternal duty are concurrent with those of Rousseau, and her own writings are rife with intimations of his philosophies. Although she opposes his belief that the biological differences between men and women extend to moral traits like virtue and reason, her writings on the subject suggest she likely agrees with Rousseau that gender differences ultimately rooted in biology and sexual dimorphism dictate the natural and civic duties of the sexes in terms of raising children.

It is therefore arguable that Wollstonecraft's essentialism is colored both by her relationship to Rousseau's work and by the context of eighteenth-century attitudes towards maternity. As Cora Kaplan identifies, Wollstonecraft exemplifies the fundamental paradox of feminist discourse, whereby "all feminisms give some ideological hostage to femininities and are constructed through the gender sexuality of their day as well as standing in opposition to them" (49). Despite her failure to transcend internalized cultural notions of maternal duty, Wollstonecraft's status as the mother of feminism is nevertheless well-deserved. By focusing her writings on the lives of women after marriage and respecting mothers as valuable novelistic subjects, she subverts years of literary tradition, which mandate that female protagonists be invariably portrayed as young, beautiful, virtuous, and sentimental. Her serious treatment of the trials faced by women in *Maria* represents an unprecedented subversion of conventional norms, and her tendency to err towards feminine essentialism does not diminish its value as a feminist work. On the contrary, the issue of motherhood's relationship to womanhood continues to represent a contentious issue among feminist literary critics. Thomas Ford expands on this tension between woman-centered experiences of maternity and patriarchal notions of compulsory femininity, stating that while "the rhetoric of motherhood has been a central target in the feminist project of exposing and repudiating the cultural logics that perpetuate the oppression of women" (189), feminist movements often deploy similar rhetoric in ascribing a sense of feminine power to the maternal experience. Modern feminist

discourse continues to debate whether feminist interpretations of motherhood are empowering or simply reductionist theories that define women by their fertility, thus excluding transgender and infertile women from the feminist imperative. Moreover, even the most vocal feminist critics of Wollstonecraft's work acknowledge her significance as a proto-feminist; Susan Gubar, for example, at once deems Wollstonecraft's essentialism a brand of "feminist misogyny" and simultaneously describes her as "the aesthetic foremother of feminist expository prose" (454). It is therefore necessary to consider Wollstonecraft's work ultimately as burdened by the patriarchal constructs she seeks to escape, while acknowledging the singularity of her bold confrontation of women's issues and her profound influence on the feminist movement.

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The Paradox of Female Authorship in Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey* and Harold Bloom's *The Book of J*

Esther Callo

Abstract: Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey* and Harold Bloom's *The Book of J* both refute long-held assumptions of male authorship with respect to two of the most foundational texts to Western culture: *The Odyssey* and the book of Genesis. This essay discusses the evidence for these claims and addresses how such claims might affect the reception of these foundational works.

Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1922) and Harold Bloom's *The Book of J* (1990) both refute long-held assumptions of male authorship with respect to two of the most foundational texts to Western culture: *The Odyssey* and the book of Genesis. While Butler's and Bloom's theories are the subject of biting criticism, none of the critics noted in this essay (with the exception of Mary Ebbott) have addressed the question of how the establishment of female authorship might affect the reception of these foundational works. Part of the problem lies in the long-standing default use of the pronoun "he" when authorship is unknown. Male authorship is reified by the consistent use of "he," eclipsing the possibility of female authorship. Hence, male authorship is established without substantial evidence while the suggestion of female authorship demands proof. This need for evidence suggests an underlying apprehension that the establishment of female authorship would not only subvert male authorship but also alienate male audiences. Thus, I propose that much of the debate regarding female authorship of *The Odyssey* and *The Book of J* hovers around the assumption that, while male authors write for universal au-

diences, female authors write for women—an assumption that implies that the underlying resistance to the suggestion of female authorship of ancient and sacred texts stems from unconscious beliefs that such claims threaten the universality of the texts, dissolving their foundational and sacred status.

Both Butler and Bloom rely on notions of “feminine” writing to substantiate their claims of female authorship, noting that the style of writing, as well as favourable references to women, set the two texts apart from *The Iliad* and *The Book of P* (another authorial voice in the book of Genesis). After interrogating *The Odyssey* and *The Book of J* for examples of style and content in support of their theories, Butler and Bloom each claim to have amassed enough evidence of female authorship to present their findings publicly. Yet their claims are ultimately impossible to prove, given the absence of historical fact. Thus, the merit of their theories is easily dismissed as fanciful. However, the arguments against the possibility of female authorship are equally unsubstantiated: in the absence of historical facts, scholars default to assumptions of male authorship without meeting the burden of proof. As Margaret Atwood explains, “[t]he assumption is that women are by nature soft, weak and not very good, and that if a woman writer happens to be good, she should be deprived of her identity as a female and provided with a higher (male) status” (197–98). In other words, theorizing about female authorship is unnecessary, since male pronouns not only supposedly encompass both male and female authors but also convey honorary male status (the “ultimate goal”) to any misrepresented female authors, rendering the revelation of their gender unnecessary. While Atwood’s discourse is reminiscent of second-wave feminism and may seem overdrawn from our perspective, she offers a useful linguistic approach to such problems. She suggests that “there is no critical vocabulary for expressing the concept ‘good/female’” (198). I offer another consideration with special attention not only to female authorship but also to female authorship of foundational and sacred works: Western culture lacks critical vocabulary for expressing the

concept “epic/female/author” and especially for expressing the concept “sacred/female/author.”

This absence of vocabulary to discuss the possibility of female authorship in *The Odyssey* and *The Book of J* is apparent in the critical response to Butler and Bloom, as few—if any—of their critics express curiosity about how such a discovery might affect the reception of these texts. Instead, their critiques focus on weaknesses in research methods, indicating that Butler and Bloom lack the necessary credentials for making their claims. Alison Booth, a literary critic writing in the 1980s, especially scorns Butler’s apparently casual approach to the translation of *The Odyssey*: “For Butler, translation was interpretive, not exact” (874). Yet, although Booth mocks Butler as one who “wears the livery of scientific investigation while serving the imagination” and who “persists in taking the absurd seriously and mocking the sacred” (866), she admits that while she is exasperated by Butler’s methods, she is unable to contradict his theories with opposing evidence (867). Bloom receives similar criticism from Robert T. Anderson in his essay “*The Book of J Speaks for Harold Bloom*.” Anderson notes that criticism of Bloom’s work is rare, perhaps because “few of us feel comfortable to comment for fear that we speak out of our ignorance of one or another dimension of his topic” (187)—such is the strength of Bloom’s reputation as a literary critic. Regardless, Anderson concludes that Bloom “doesn’t really want to do a scholarly work in either biblical studies or literary criticism and he should free himself from that task” (194). His low regard for Bloom’s analysis stems, in part, from Bloom’s study of J as a literary figure. Anderson concludes that Bloom’s comparisons of J with other literary figures such as Kafka and Shakespeare “don’t do much to illuminate either J or the cited author” (190). Moreover, of Bloom’s references to biblical scholars, Anderson remarks that “he cites the wrong scholars on the wrong issues” (191). In addition to these unflattering critiques of Bloom’s work, Anderson claims that Bloom fails to give credit to Richard Elliott Friedman, who Anderson says first suggested the possibility that J is female (188). Ultimately, Anderson ac-

knowledges Bloom's examples of the "strong affirmation" of women that substantiate much of Bloom's argument (189). However, he shows little interest in pursuing the issue of J's gender, as he believes that J is a composite of authors (194).

Despite these withering criticisms of research methods and scholastic integrity, neither Booth nor Anderson fully dispute the possibility of female authorship, the crux of Butler and Bloom's claims. Butler insists that "in *The Odyssey* things were looked at from a female point of view" and substantiates this claim by pointing out numerous occasions in which women are given preferential treatment (4). Such a moment occurs when Nausicaa tells Odysseus to "[n]ever mind my father, but go up to my mother and embrace her knees" (Homer qtd. in Butler 108). This instruction suggests that women are resourceful while men are merely figureheads. In addition to these examples, he draws attention to a concern for domestic order and "thrift," as when Penelope regrets the loss of "good meat and wine" when the tables are overturned during the slaughter of the suitors (Butler 154). In a similar vein, Bloom illuminates what he describes as the "misreading" of J that has led to misogynistic interpretations of Eve. Referring to David Rosenberg's translation of *The Book of J* (included in Bloom's book), Bloom decries the King James translation of the Hebrew "equal to him" into the English "helpmate," which portrays Eve as subordinate to Adam (179). Moreover, Bloom is adamant that J's Eve is intelligent and curious rather than sinful when she picks the forbidden fruit: "J's Hebrew implies that Adam is present, hears what the woman hears ... She is the active child ... while Adam's role is that of the child who imitates" (183). He describes the misinterpretation of this passage in Genesis as "an enormous challenge," asking with almost audible frustration, "How did the charming serpent of J ever become Satan?" (181).

Satan aside, are positive portrayals of women enough to sway the argument? According to Mary Ebbott, "Feminist criticism cannot ... continue to define women authors or readers as essentially different (in a superior way), because we can see in Butler's work how that definition easily works

the other way" (n.p.). Booth echoes Ebbott's observations, contending that Butler undermines his argument by mocking the "authoress" and thus implying that supposed flaws in *The Odyssey* are the inevitable consequence of female authorship: "[s]he loves flimsy disguises and mystifications that ... mystify nobody" (875). Similarly, in an attempt to express admiration, when Bloom describes J as "uncanny" and "tricky," he exposes her to the bitter irony of being victimized by the long-standing misreading of her own work in which Eve is blamed for the Fall (13). Thus, "uncanny" and "tricky" may connote "mysterious" and "clever" with regard to J's "essence" as a writer; however, they may also suggest "strange" and "untrustworthy" in reference to her "essence" as a woman, thereby devaluing her work. Atwood identifies this critical conundrum as a paradox in which "woman and writer are separate categories; but in any individual writer, they are inseparable" (195). In contrast, recalling the criticisms of Butler and Bloom earlier in this essay, they were never described as an inevitable consequence of being male. Rather, they were seen as a consequence of actions under specific circumstances. Thus, when male authorship is established or assumed in comparative works, differences in content and style can be discussed in literary terms. *The Book of P*, for example, can be said to have a tone of "cosmic orderliness" while *The Book of J* is "unruly" (Alter 179). However, if *The Book of J* is attributed to a female author, discussion is transposed into a socio-political inquiry; style and content (including positive references to women) can no longer be considered without deconstructing assumptions about female authorship, and indeed, about women. Hence, adjectives such as "orderly" as compared to "unruly" destabilize under not literary but socio-political divides. In this light, how might the establishment of female authorship of *The Odyssey* affect academia? Likewise, if *The Book of J* is proven to be the work of a woman, how might it be received by the Abrahamic faiths?

Ebbott imagines a cold reception. In her essay, she wonders "how the *Odyssey* would be interpreted today if Butler had succeeded in convincing the professional scholars that

it was composed by a young, unmarried woman. Would it have been subsequently neglected...? Would it define a new genre, 'women's epic'?" (n.p.). Perhaps a clue lies in the odd title of Anderson's essay, "*The Book of J Speaks for Harold Bloom*": Why does Anderson state that *The Book of J* speaks for Bloom? Is Anderson implying that Bloom has emasculated himself by suggesting that a woman, J, is the authorial voice of a sacred text? If so, his impressive rebuttal of Bloom's assertion would appear to mask an underlying resistance to this assertion that is founded on sexism rather than academic standards. Perhaps such a fear is derived from a belief that, while a male voice is universal and may speak for women, a woman's voice, a voice that speaks for women only, is inherently subversive and marginalizes male audiences to the role of onlooker or bystander. Hence, Anderson's sarcasm does implicate the way in which the establishment of female authorship would affect the reception of *The Book of J*: through suspicion. Thus, the paradox of female authorship is revealed; a female author of such texts can only sustain the admiration that she deserves if her gender remains unknown, overshadowed by the pronoun "he."

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The Gendered Texture of Clothing and Art in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

Lily Maase

Abstract: Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* (1988) is focused on the distinct differences between boys and girls and how they must present themselves. Texture, in both clothing and art, plays a central role in how the protagonist, Elaine, perceives these gender expectations. She is focused on the textures that differentiate boys and girls clothing and how they reflect her discomfort with this binary. As an adult, Elaine continues to focus on gender and texture through her paintings made with egg tempera. Her chosen medium is free of texture and the gendered connotations of the harsh and soft clothing of her childhood, providing her control over her desired gender expression.

Throughout Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* (1988), the texture of clothing and art informs the protagonist Elaine's understanding of gender roles. After an early childhood focused on science and exploration, Elaine's sudden interest in clothing and "girl friends" at age eight marks her shift in priorities and her introduction to the performance of femininity (Atwood 30). At the same time, Elaine's perceptions of texture are introduced through her descriptions of the discomfort she feels while wearing feminine clothing. She transitions from a "genderless" upbringing in which her and her brother share clothing and she is physically comfortable to suddenly learning the distinct differences between boys and girls and how they must present themselves. The social expectations of femininity, and their associated textures, are represented as a "formative trauma" throughout the novel as Elaine is repeatedly tormented by her friends Grace, Carol, and Cordelia because of their "constant dissatisfaction with ... her clothes, family, behaviour, and body language"

(Bouson 164, Vickroy 131). As an adult, Elaine is haunted by these childhood memories, and paints them using textures that mirror her desire for, and ultimate rejection of, feminine softness. Elaine paints with egg tempera, a technique that was introduced in the Middle Ages and “reflects how modern techniques like those adopted by” her fellow artists “do not hold expressive potential for her” (Vickroy 139). By choosing a medium that is removed from the gendered textures of the harsh and soft clothing of her childhood, Elaine is able to achieve control despite her constant sense of being out of place.

Elaine’s early childhood is spent living a nomadic life with her parents and brother in the wilderness of Ontario. They spend the majority of this time living free from any gender expectations, which Atwood communicates through their shared clothing: her father wears “windbreakers, battered gray felt hats, flannel shirts ... heavy pants tucked into the tops of woolen work socks,” while her mother, with the exception of the felt hats, wears essentially the same clothing (Atwood 37). Like her mother, Elaine wears “pants, baggy at the knees, and a jacket too short in the sleeves” with “a hand-me-down brown and yellow striped jersey of [her] brother’s” underneath (29). In fact, “many of [Elaine’s] clothes were once his” (29)—clothes that indicate “a childhood filled with the pleasure of movement” (Brown 287). The clothing that Elaine wears during these rootless years is described as comfortable, with limited emphasis on its texture. Furthermore, Elaine’s parents encourage play rather than focusing on performances of femininity and masculinity from their children. As Elaine gets older and is introduced to the world of “girls ... with their customs,” she still holds on to the safe clothing of her younger self that “seem a part of [her], even the ones [she’s] outgrown” until she finally gives them away to “thin-looking children in scruffy clothes” (Atwood 52, 87).

Elaine’s rejection of the soft, sturdy clothing of her childhood signals the beginning of her attempt to follow traditional gender roles when her family moves to a suburb of Toronto after years of living in “so many places it [is] hard

to remember them” (Atwood 22). In the city, Elaine is introduced to a proper school and “begins her lessons in a different kind of girlhood than she has known” (Brown 288). She immediately learns that “you can’t wear pants to school, you have to wear skirts” (Atwood 50) and notices that there are “two grandiose entranceways” to the school, “inscribed in curvy, solemn lettering” with the words “GIRLS and BOYS” (51). After spending her entire life being considered equal to her brother, Elaine wonders how “going in through a door [is] different if you’re a boy” (51). These differences become apparent as Elaine spends more time in Toronto with other children and discovers that “boys are not the same” as they used to be: “they smell of grubby flesh, of scalp, but also of leather, from the knee patches on their breeches, and wool, from the breeches themselves” (111). Atwood uses intense sensory images to show how traditional notions of masculinity are solidified in Elaine’s memory. She doesn’t just remember the enforced segregation between girls and boys—she remembers the smells and textures of boyhood and how different they are from the images of “little girls, ‘always clean,’ living life differently, dressed in ‘pretty dresses and patent-leather shoes with straps’” (Brown 288). By relating clothing directly with these gendered differences through texture, Atwood creates subtle “symbols” whose power “we tend not to notice ... because it is so familiar” (Kuhn 2). The boys are always described to be wearing rough clothing in “khaki, or navy-blue or gray, or forest green, colors that don’t show the dirt much,” which allows them to “work at acting like boys” without restraint (Atwood 111). As a young child, Elaine learns that “dress illuminates body and gender within a cultural context” (Kuhn 2) and that she must dress herself accordingly.

While Elaine has learned to associate girls clothing with femininity, she finds herself constantly uncomfortable wearing it. As with the boys clothing, she observes the distinct textures of Carol and her sister’s “matching outfits for Sundays” with “velvet collars” and “round brown velvet hats with an elastic under the chin to hold them on,” as well as Carol’s “dressing gown, with fuzzy slippers to match”

(Atwood 53). The girls' clothing feature soft elements like velvet that tie directly into their expected feminine traits. The girls are expected to be still and docile and to occupy themselves with activities like "spoolwork," and the delicate clothes they wear limit them to these kinds of activities (110). As Elaine spends more time with Grace and Carol, she notices that she "[begins] to want things [she's] never wanted before: braids, a dressing gown, a purse of [her] own ... that there's a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to [her]" (59). She begins to change her ways of thinking and "as time passes, Elaine spends less and less energy arguing with her brother or playing with the microscope in her father's lab and more time with Carol and Grace practicing how to be the right kind of girl" (Brown 289). As she spends more time in the city, Elaine continues to internalize normative notions of gender, especially femininity. However, as much as Elaine "attempts to meet visual cultural standards of 'femininity,'" she also subtly attaches negative connotations to her new way of life (Kuhn 2). Despite her descriptions of the other girls' clothes, Elaine constantly mentions the discomfort her "girl" clothes give her; she describes the textures of her "sleeves [that] bunch up under [her] arms ... the white stockings [that] are ... even itchier than the brown ones [she wears] to school" (Atwood 104). Her physical discomfort, expressed through the harsh textures of her clothing, matches her emotional discomfort around the other girls who use "aggressive attempts to indoctrinate her into conventional gender and religious practices" (Vickroy 131). Elaine's discomfort indicates that, by "[styling herself] in response to divisive cultural codes," she is performing a "survivalist act" since she is tormented by her peers whenever she strays from traditional gender performances (Kuhn 3).

Elaine's childhood memories from her time in the city stay with her as she ages and come to greatly influence her art. Although the subject matter of her paintings is often symbolic of her childhood distress, "her artistic discipline and culturally inflected imagery mediate trauma and help her decipher defensive fantasies that have perpetuated her

emotional stasis" (Vickroy 130). Thus, the texture and medium of her art are equally important. Egg tempera allows her to create works of art that are quite different from her fellow artists and removed from the textural connotations of the gendered clothing of her childhood. She begins using egg tempera after she rejects oil paints and "their thickness ... their look of licked lips, the way they call attention to the brushstrokes of the painter" (Atwood 354). Elaine wants to paint "pictures that seem to exist of their own accord ... objects that breathe out light; a luminous flatness," paintings that are free from texture and thus free from the marks of the artist (354). Egg tempera is a method that is "difficult and messy, painstaking, and, at first, heartbreaking" and "consists of dry pigments, water and egg (usually the yolk)" that are combined to create a medium that is notable for its luminosity (Atwood 355, Vickrey 15). Egg tempera is both beautiful and delicate, and takes an enormous amount of energy to render, exactly like the femininity that Elaine is forced to perform as a child with her peers dissecting her every move. She recreates the lengthy practices of her childhood by carefully cooking egg yolks in the same way that she carefully cut out "the small colored figures" from the *Eaton's Catalogues* with Grace and Carol (Atwood 59). However, her use of the medium deemphasizes texture as she attempts to reject the softness expected from feminine clothing and art in order to distance herself from these gender expectations.

While Elaine deemphasizes texture in her art, the three other women in Elaine's first group show, Carolyn, Jody, and Zillah, create works of art that are primarily tactile. Carolyn and Jody's works are meant to shock; much like the artists of the new realism art movement, they believe "that because the world is harsh and ugly, art should reflect its harshness and ugliness" (Vickrey 22). Carolyn exhibits this approach in her use of odd and outrageous (for the time) objects like "condoms stuffed with tampons (un-used)" and provocative messaging (Atwood 378). Jody takes this approach one step further. Her art consists of "store mannequins, sawn apart, the pieces glued back together in disturbing poses" with rough textures added in with elements like "steel wool

stuck on at appropriate places” (379). Zillah’s artwork is quite different from Carolyn and Jody’s; she creates “*Lintscapes* ... from the wads of feltlike fuzz that accumulate on drier filters and can be peeled off in sheets” (379; emphasis in original). These lintscapes are the works of art that Elaine gravitates towards most, because of “their texture, their soft colors” (379). The softness of the lintscapes is juxtaposed with the harshness of Carolyn and Jody’s works in the same way that the gendered clothing is in Elaine’s memories. Elaine is jealous of Zillah’s method, wishing she “had thought of [it] first,” a remark that is very similar to her desire to have been raised as a “proper” little girl like Grace and Carol (379). Elaine is once again caught in the middle—not quite soft and feminine but not harsh and masculine either.

Even though Elaine’s works of art are not centred on texture like her partners’, her paintings are still able to reflect “a strong indictment of society ... by using a subtle approach” (Vickrey 22). The effectiveness of Elaine’s subtle works of rebellion is proven when the show opens and Elaine is targeted by “some religious nutcase” who first resembles Mrs. Smeath, then Grace (Atwood 386). “The woman who is not Grace hurls [ink], bottle and all, straight at” Elaine’s painting *White Gift*, an action that is not repeated on any of the other, considerably more provocative, works in the show (385). Despite the shock of the attack, Elaine and *White Gift* remain relatively untouched; the ink can wash off since the painting “is varnished, and painted on wood” (385). Elaine is pleased with the “spectacle,” thinking “at last ... [she is] in control” of her gender since she can now survive the rage of female figures like those from her childhood unscathed (385). She continues to ponder how her career will be advanced because “paintings that can get bottles of ink thrown at them, that can inspire such outraged violence, such uproar and display, must have an odd revolutionary power” (386). Although Elaine’s paintings are deeply influenced by her childhood trauma and the expectations of performing femininity, “painting offsets her own helplessness, giving her a form of control even if she recreates difficult subject matter” (Vickroy 134).

Texture is subtly mentioned throughout *Cat's Eye* as a reinforcement of the gender roles that are imposed on Elaine. Soft textures are associated with femininity and are viewed in both girls clothing and "'introverted' and 'flimsy'" artwork, while harsh textures are seen in boys clothing and "'abrasive,' 'aggressive,' and 'shrill'" works of art (Atwood 386). Elaine constantly removes herself from these dichotomies, never feeling like she belongs in one or the other. She attempts to present herself like her friends but finds that their dress causes her discomfort. At the same time, she finds that she is becoming less and less "tolerated" by her brother and other boys; alone, she is permitted to read with them, but "as part of a group of girls [she] would not be" (111). The result of this combination is a childhood filled with distress caused by girls who constantly pick apart her every move and ignorance from the boys. Despite the persistence of Elaine's associate of gendered clothing texture with her childhood trauma well into her adulthood, she finds a place for herself somewhere in the middle of the gender expectations she has been forced into. As a result, she harnesses these memories and produces an impressive body of work by subverting the very textures that defined her childhood, filling her art with women who, like herself, are not "the same as everyone else's women" (97).

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“A Mexican Medea”: Challenging Western Literary Tropes in Cherríe L. Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman*

Ryann Anderson

Abstract: In her 1995 play *The Hungry Woman*, Cherríe L. Moraga imagines a new future for the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s. In her dystopia, national borders are strict and Medea is exiled (along with her lesbian partner and son) for engaging in a homosexual relationship; however, Moraga juxtaposes this Latin American movement against the backdrop of Euripides’s *Medea* and alludes to the Gothic trope of the mad ex-wife. This juxtaposition of Western allusions and Latin American mythology reflects the play’s overarching themes of patriarchal resistance and the fight to keep culture alive. In this essay, I argue that the play uses Euripides and the Gothic to challenge Western literary traditions and subsequently mirror the patriarchal binaries imposed on Moraga’s characters.

In their 1979 book, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, theorists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar emphasize the effects of the patriarchy on the feminine literary canon. Just as women are often ostracized for rejecting domestic roles, so too is the female writer torn between writing domestic angels or rebellious monsters: “If the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster ... are major images literary tradition offers women, how does such imagery influence the ways in which women attempt the pen?” (Gilbert and Gubar 1842). The trope of the “mad” ex-wife is a classic embodiment of this polarity, particularly present in the Gothic tradition. Gothic writing combines horror and death, often introducing romance and characters suffer-

ing from some form of mental illness. Its roots as a literary genre trace back as early as the eighteenth century. In her 1995 play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Cherríe L. Moraga challenges the conventional use of the mad ex-wife. *The Hungry Woman* imagines an alternative future for the 1960s Chicano movement, a civil rights movement wherein Mexican Americans fought to increase their social rights. This play blends together allusions to the Western literary canon—particularly Euripides’s *Medea* (431 BCE) and canonical Gothic texts such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847)—with Latin American mythology, creating a new form of Gothic mythology that subverts Western conventions. *Medea* represents the Greek foundation on which the English canon is built, and the Gothic allusions represent the patriarchal binaries forced upon women that turn them into monsters. In the original story, Jason leaves Medea for the daughter of King Creon of Corinth. In retaliation, Medea murders Creon, his daughter, and her own two sons by Jason. Moraga’s Medea, however, is in the midst of a divorce and custody battle with her husband, Jasón (who wants to marry a younger woman), over their son, Chac-Mool. In her dystopian play, Moraga evokes this well-known Western myth within a Latin American context to challenge the preconceived notion that any woman who rejects domestic complacency is inherently evil.

Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a foundational text in the English and Gothic literary canons, embodies the same themes as *The Hungry Woman* through one of the most famous portraits of the “mad” ex-wife in the Western canon: Bertha Mason. Bertha is isolated in Mr. Rochester’s attic, and her existence is hidden from the rest of the residents of Thornfield Hall, though she often escapes from her confines during the night to torment Jane and the other residents. Bertha’s madness ultimately culminates in her suicide and the arson of Mr. Rochester’s home, which leaves him blind. Since Mr. Rochester and Bertha are still married (though estranged), her death allows the novel to fulfil the conventional marriage plot and enables Jane’s transition into a domestic, wifely role. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), however, imag-

ines the factors leading to Bertha's instability, implying that her mental condition can be attributed to childhood trauma, thus encouraging the reader to sympathize with Bertha and challenging the Western convention of the madwoman. Moraga's play echoes this tradition by reimagining a fictional future for the Chicano movement. While Medea's murder of Chac-Mool could arguably be seen as an act of spite (akin to Bertha's attempt to murder Jane), I argue that the murder is an act of both patriarchal acceptance and simultaneous rejection. By evoking the Gothic image of the "mad" ex-wife, Moraga challenges the convention that a woman scorned is necessarily unfeminine and evil.

Evoking Gothic conventions is uncommon in a play of *The Hungry Woman's* genre. In her 2007 article, Tanya González elaborates on this genre blending:

[R]eading Chicana/o and Latina/o writing in the context of a Gothic or American Gothic tradition is not a common practice. In most cases, when ghosts or supernatural occurrences appear in these texts, the first association made is with Latin American magical realism. Nevertheless, there is a connection.... (46)

González calls the Gothic an "aesthetic space where authors could comment on the socially and culturally aberrant" (47). Indeed, the entire history of the Gothic is based on that which is "radically excluded" (Savoy as cited in González 46). Moraga's Medea is radically excluded from Aztlán and torn between her desperation to return and her refusal to adhere to their values. Moraga, by blending this Gothic trope with a Latin American character, challenges the assumption of the non-domestic woman as evil, presenting instead a complex portrait of a woman exiled by the dominant socio-political world. Should Medea choose to abandon her partner, Luna, she and her son can return home; however, Medea chooses to stay despite her unhappiness, ultimately preventing Chac-Mool from returning as well. Indeed, she struggles to keep him from adhering to the Aztlán values.

Heteronormativity and patriarchy dominate Aztlán: "A woman is nothing in Aztlán without a husband" (Moraga

68). Aztlán society villainizes women who do not conform to their standards. In keeping with Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that writers must challenge the feminine images present in Western literature, Moraga writes women who are "deprived of the feminine colonial passivity imbued by the dominant male discourse" (Ráez-Padilla 205). Indeed, though all the characters seem trapped within this male discourse, they recognize the flaws within the system and actively strive to rectify them. In the play, Mama Sal states, "When you're a girl, hija, and a Mexican, you learn purty quick that you only got one shot at being a woman and that's being a mother" (50). By killing Chac-Mool, then, Medea gives up that which makes her feminine in this patriarchal discourse, instead becoming a monster in both her own eyes and the eyes of society. Moraga showcases the desire to escape this male discourse. Her characters struggle against it, even if their actions seem fruitless to them during the play. Medea tries to keep Chac-Mool from learning and embodying patriarchal values by keeping him from Jasón. She is horrified at the idea of him adhering to what she sees as the cultural norms for men, as she makes clear when addressing Jasón:

[M]y son needs no taste of that weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and you will not make him one in your likeness! The man I wish my son to be does not exist, must be invented. He will invent himself if he must, but he will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example. (69)

Jasón embodies the idealized masculinity prized by Aztlán; however, Medea's exile based on her sexual orientation allows her (and subsequently the audience) to realize the oppressive nature of a society that values this form of hypermasculinity. While Medea tries to keep Chac-Mool from adopting Jasón's values, she is continually thwarted. When discussing Chac-Mool's living situation, Jasón says, "you're the slave, Medea, not me. You will always be my woman because of our son. Whether you rot in this wasteland of counter-revolutionary degenerates or take up residence in my second bed" (Moraga 69). This declaration forces Me-

dea to confront the truth about Aztlán's patriarchal values, understanding the implied ownership that men feel toward women. It is when Medea realizes the inevitability of Chac-Mool's maturation and assimilation into this patriarchy that she chooses to kill him. While the allusions to the Greek *Medea* and Gothic "mad" ex-wife would suggest that she murders Chac-Mool to spite Jasón, Medea's explicit acknowledgement of the social, patriarchal binaries suggests that the infanticide is both an act of acceptance and resistance of the lifestyle being forced upon her.

While *The Hungry Woman* is riddled with allusions to classic Western literary images, the introduction of Mexican mythology allows Moraga to challenge the assumptions of said Western conventions. In the same 2017 article, González recognizes the interaction between the figures to which Moraga alludes:

Moraga wanted to bring into focus the abject figures of Medea, La Llorona (the wailing woman who violently kills her children), and the pre-Colombian creation myth of the Hungry Woman by creating a drama that forced the reader and the audience to come to terms with Medea's violence as something other than jealous rage. Indeed, Moraga allows her play to speak back to the many versions of the tale that only replicate false notions that a woman would sacrifice a child to simply spite a partner. (48)

The introduction of La Llorona during a conversation between Chac-Mool and Mama Sal allows Moraga to juxtapose the image of the killer mother and "mad" ex-wife within the two cultures: "This hybrid approach is inherent to the Aztec mythology on which Moraga relies in order to transcend Manichaeistic resolutions and probe the social, political, and gender reasons leading a hungry mother to commit infanticide" (Ráez-Padilla 205). While La Llorona as a killer woman is typically a frightening image, Chac-Mool admits in act 1, scene 6 that he has never been afraid of her. Even when Mama Sal asks, "Not even when you was a little esquincle?" Chac-Mool replies, "No, I felt sorry for her, not scared" (Mor-

aga 37–38). Certainly, introducing La Llorona, a mother who kills her children, foreshadows Medea’s murder. Moreover, it foreshadows Moraga’s sympathy for Medea. Chac-Mool’s reaction transcends the conventional reaction to the wailing woman by suggesting that the reader should not fear the women in the Western Gothic canon who are portrayed as monsters; rather, they should sympathize with them and the factors that drove them to infanticide. Indeed, the allusions to these tropes force the reader to reflect on the binaries forced on women in Aztlán’s heteronormative society, as La Llorona is a “paradoxical [figure] that symbolize[s] both maternal betrayal and maternal resistance” (de Oliveira as cited in Ráez-Padilla 207).

Ultimately, *The Hungry Woman* is a play wherein Moraga explores the binaries forced upon both women in society and women as writers. Moraga’s new rendition of the classical *Medea* myth alludes to the very real stereotypes thrust on woman in both literature and reality: “It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 1848). Indeed, by alluding to the foundations of Greek and Gothic literary tropes that often present women (particularly “scorned” ex-wives) as unfeminine and evil, Moraga successfully transposes the idea with Latin American imagery and merges the two ideologies. By blending the mythologies of the two cultures, Moraga creates “an alternative mythology in order to work out a potentially more liberatory space for women” (González 48). Indeed, in this play, Moraga proposes an alternative way to view the binaries forced on women, suggesting that readers should feel sympathy rather than fear.

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Closing the Gap: Narrative Control and Temporal Instability in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

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Christopher Horne

Abstract: In both conventional fiction and national meta-narratives, such as that of the modern surveillance state, narrative progression is linear. Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) subverts this expectation by progressing non-chronologically, thus prompting its reader to restore the narrative's chronological order. However, the reader's reconstruction of the novel, an attempt at narrative control, is disrupted by the presence of diegetic gaps—gaps that the novel suggests are incompatible with narrative control. By observing how the novel's characters resist and reenact this control, I assert that Egan posits associative narrative building as an alternative to surveillance-dependent linear metanarratives.

On 11 September 2017, the *New York Post* published an article to commemorate the sixteenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. One attendee of the Ground Zero memorial, questioned by an interviewer, said that through this annual act of remembrance, “we can put away our disagreements and become one country again” (Trefethen and Eustachewich). Intended as an affirmation of American solidarity, her statement implies the power that traumatic events such as the 9/11 attacks have as a tool for constructing national narrative. In the wake of those attacks, there has been an unprecedented shift in US foreign and domestic policy, most evident in the intensification of surveillance practices at home and abroad. These changes reflect the US government's desire to establish international control over individual and communal narratives adverse to its own metanarrative under the pretense of providing national security.

Equally concerned with narrative control and how surveillance maintains it, Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) pivots around not the events of 9/11 but their absence. Tracing the personal and professional ties that bind together a group of people loosely connected by the music industry, Egan's novel chronicles events separated by both time and place—ranging from the 1970s Bay Area punk scene to an imagined 2020s New York City and to Rome, the Middle East, and Africa through the intervening years. Incorporating multiple narrative styles, including first-, third-, and second-person perspective, as well as a chapter styled as a magazine article and even one rendered entirely in PowerPoint slides, the chapters do not progress in chronological order. At the chronological centre of the novel's combined narrative, Sasha (the troubled young assistant of washed-up record producer Bennie Salazar) remarks of the now-empty site that once housed the World Trade Center's Twin Towers that "It's incredible, how there's just nothing there.... [T]here should be something, you know?" (*Goon Squad* 36). For her, the Towers' absence presents a logical gap in narration. Her observation correlates with *Goon Squad's* thematic focus on how such gaps are incompatible with narrative control and thus provide the impetus for increased surveillance.

In a 2011 interview on the *Art Works* podcast, Egan said regarding *Goon Squad*, "when people talk about a collection of linked stories, they tend to assume there will be a continuity of tone and voice" (Interview). Her novel, composed of thirteen interconnected vignettes, subverts this assumption and all other expectations of narrative continuity. Because the novel's progression operates on the basis not of chronological time but rather of character association, readers are prompted to restore its missing temporal order. Any chronological reconstruction of the novel's narrative, however, is prone to diegetic gaps that preclude absolute knowledge of its events. By analyzing the characters' preoccupations with narrative fidelity (inherently linked to their anxieties about the passage of time) and observing how Egan's shifting narration engages readers in multiple levels

of narrative presence, I will argue that *A Visit from the Goon Squad* withholds conventional narrative control—from its characters, who strive to build stable narratives of self, and its readers, who are drawn to reconstructing the novel's narrative chronologically—to challenge metanarratives of control, such as the rhetoric that maintains the necessity of the American surveillance state.

In this essay, I draw upon the definition of metanarrative as “a theory of history that is said to move in a specific direction and, on the strength of which, confident predictions about the future can be made” (Cooke). This definition suggests that metanarratives provide stability and a degree of control over historical progression. For the surveillance state, the ostensible need for such control is sustained by a metanarrative that posits increased national safety, resulting from progressive improvement in surveillance methods. Grounding my analysis of *Goon Squad* in previous criticism of the novel, I posit a parallel between Egan's characters' attempts at narrative control and the reader's position in the narrative. Our reading is constantly informed by characters' methods of exerting that control, but Egan's use of formal variation forces us to reconcile our changing position with each new chapter. Some critics have sought to explain the effects of this narrative instability: Katherine D. Johnston discusses the connection through metafiction between surveillance and reading, concluding that the novel “resists the mythology of coherent, knowable identities” (181), and David Cowart lauds Egan's blending of narrative conventions as a way of dismantling the “supreme fictions” of her literary predecessors and opening new avenues of artistic expression (252). Egan's use of character association to drive narrative progression, however, suggests another conclusion: while her novel's metanarrative of control creates pervasive distrust of knowable identities and results in destructive limitations of the self and others, it shows that collaborative and community-forming narrative building conversely stabilizes individual narratives. The formal techniques of each chapter cue us to this stability's fluctuation.

In “Found Objects,” the opening chapter of *Goon Squad*, Sasha recounts her past date with a younger man, Alex, to her therapist, Coz. The focus of her account is not the events of the date itself but her more pertinent admission of guilt in stealing a woman’s handbag. Describing her relationship to the therapist, Sasha asserts that “She and Coz were collaborators, writing a story whose end had already been determined” (*Goon Squad* 6). Implicit in this idea of her “story” is the assumption that her overcoming kleptomania is pre-determined and therefore inevitable—an assertion of control. Her observation also suggests that her path to recovery from the illness is a narrative created in concert with Coz. This co-constructed, progressive narrative recalls the spirit of solidarity exhibited by the *Post*’s Ground Zero interviewee; unlike the interviewee, however, Sasha recognizes the World Trade Center’s absence as a negative influence: “she hated the neighbourhood at night without the World Trade Center, whose blazing freeways of light had always filled her with hope” (12). The loss of this pervasive symbol of national pride shattered the American narrative of security and necessitated a reevaluation of national identity. As if to affirm the resultant instability, Alex admits to a lack of trust for others, saying, “You have no fucking idea what people are like. They’re not even two-faced—they’re, like, multiple personalities” (12). By associating mental illness with unpredictability, he dismantles Sasha’s assertion of control over her and Coz’s ideal narrative of recovery.

Present in both Sasha’s expectations of her recovery and Alex’s mistrust of others is the undercurrent of a necessity for control; despite this apparent necessity, Sasha’s progression in her story proves impossible until she relinquishes her grip on one of her stolen objects, which through her keeping them paradoxically allow her to entertain the possibility that she will one day return them. She thus cultivates a fantasy that she is in control of her illness and not vice versa. When she allows Alex to use the bath salts she stole from a past roommate, Sasha becomes “aware of having made a move in the story she and Coz were writing,

taken a symbolic step" (*Goon Squad* 17). But, as Cowart observes, there is no "meaningful resolution" to Sasha's constructed story, and "its aimless unspooling mocks any larger metanarrative" (249). This deliberate lack of resolution precludes any certainty that Sasha's narrative will progress toward her recovery—toward control—but "Found Objects" prompts us to resign our expectations of such certainty at the level of form: Sasha's analeptic narration of these events to Coz, which not only places us in a temporally undefined (and thus unknowable) present but also highlights the events' constructedness, forces us as readers to cede our control over the narrative and trust her account. Sasha's use of narratological analepsis identifies us with Coz, whose knowledge of the events she narrates is restricted to what she tells him.

Readers are subject to similar narrative restriction in "Out of Body," the novel's tenth chapter, in which the familiar third-person narration of earlier chapters gives way to unsettlingly direct second-person narration. Here, we are absorbed into the person of Rob, Sasha's university friend, so that his self-addressed narration is simultaneously addressed to us. From this perspective, we are privy to Rob's internality but entirely cut off from the thoughts of others. We are thus aligned with his project of ensuring the fidelity of others' narratives: "Your friends are pretending to be all kinds of stuff, and your job is to call them on it" (*Goon Squad* 186). Unexpectedly, Rob reveals that he has also engaged in the construction of a false narrative meant to deny surveillance not unlike his own. Recounting his first meeting with Sasha, he recalls how she recruited him as a counterfeit boyfriend to convince her stepfather's hired detective of her trustworthiness (192–93). Her anxiety surrounding this implied surveillance ("Someone could be watching me right now ... I feel like someone is" [193]) indicates the novel's project of undermining the necessity of narrative control maintained through such surveillance.

Rob's apology to Lizzie earlier in the chapter engages readers in a metafictional consideration of our own role in his narration: "which one is really 'you,' the one say-

ing and doing whatever it is, or the one watching?" (*Goon Squad* 191). As evidenced by its title, "Out of Body" is centrally concerned with Rob's watching himself in moments of detachment. This theme, coupled with the chapter's second-person narration, places the reader in the curious position of watching oneself watch. Johnston intimates that these layers of watching are inherent to metafiction, which, she says, "is a form of surveillance itself" (99). Thus, Rob's narration of events that defy his control constitutes restrictive self-surveillance. He treats events that do not fit into his conception of self as distinct from his narrative, and his dissociation from reality facilitates this treatment: recalling his first homosexual experience, he says, "It wasn't you in the car with James. You were somewhere else, looking down, thinking, That fag is rolling around with another guy" (*Goon Squad* 195). Rob's disavowal of his involvement in this experience is an attempt to displace it from his narrative of self. He positions heterosexual normalcy as the keystone of his constructed identity, as evidenced by his self-admonishment that "[he] might have held on to Sasha and become normal at the same time, but [he] didn't even try" (196). Here, his narrative's fidelity is contingent upon his ability to control Sasha.

Sasha's providing information to Rob to thwart her stepfather's surveillance has its own negative repercussions in Rob's narrated present. Fearing that Sasha is "starting to forget [her troubled past], begin over again as the person she is to Drew [Sasha's boyfriend]" (*Goon Squad* 197), Rob attempts to exercise the power afforded to him by his knowledge of Sasha's past: "You don't really know her," he says to Drew, and he proceeds to convey the sordid details of that past (204). Rob recognizes that to begin anew, Sasha will have to jettison her past, thus removing what little control he has over her. When Drew responds by threatening to tell his girlfriend of Rob's attempted manipulation, Rob is "seized by a wild conviction that containing Drew will seal off the damage [he's] done," believing that "as long as Drew is in sight, she doesn't know" (205). This response indicates the logic inherent to metanarratives of control: maintaining

control over narratives adverse to one's own necessitates unbroken surveillance.

In the previous chapter, "Forty Minute Lunch," the narrator, Jules Jones, recalls Rob's narrative tampering in his use of metafictional constructedness to project objectivity. Jules narrates the events that led up to his (at the time of writing, current) incarceration as if it will be published. As such, he is committed to the accuracy of his account, right down to his thoughts, which are recorded in a series of footnotes throughout the chapter: one reads, "Here, carefully teased apart and restored to chronological order, is a reconstruction of the brew of thoughts and impulses that I believe coursed through my mind at that time" (*Goon Squad* 173). This excerpt indicates Jules's commitment to narrative fidelity, which requires that a correct order of events be established. His obsession with establishing stable narrative dovetails nicely with his role as a celebrity profiler and leads him to admit, as he sexually assaults his current interviewee, that "it's her life—the inner life of Kitty Jackson—that I so long to reach" (182). This admission reveals his distrust of Kitty's external depiction of herself, a distrust that likely influences his later appeal (in a letter to the editor of an unnamed newspaper) that Mayor Giuliani "erect checkpoints at the entrances to Central Park" to profile its visitors (185). Jules's solution to a lack of public safety, which he attributes to insufficient control over the actions of people whose character and allegiances are obscure, is to establish a microcosm of the larger surveillance state within the park. As Johnston asserts, this solution is reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze's "Society of Control," which, she notes, "undermin[es] notions of coherent identity and linear and totalizing life narratives" (180). Thus, the system of surveillance proposed by Jules contradicts his desire to establish stable narratives for himself and others, as it would contradict individuals' attempts at narrative building. Likewise, the literary register that he employs throughout the chapter highlights the lack of narrative control that we possess as readers but fails to convince us of the necessity for such control.

In contrast to Jules's profiling of himself and others, the concluding chapter of *Goon Squad* narrates the staging of an event that defies metafictional control. As "Pure Language" opens, an aging Bennie Salazar is engaged in persuading Alex to join him on a business venture that involves falsifying a narrative. Despite Alex's apprehension—a product of the public's suspicion regarding the authenticity of people's opinions after "the Bloggescandals," undefined past events that amplified the questionable veracity of online personas (315)—Bennie is convinced that they "have some history together that hasn't happened yet" (311). His prophetic assertion of certainty undermines the common understanding of time as historical progression, a chain of events in chronological order, by narrating a future event as if it has already happened. Alex accepts Bennie's offer (to find and recruit "parrots" tasked with disseminating favourable "word of mouth for Scotty Hausmann's first concert" in a month's time [315]) on the strength of their mutual desire to make such an event possible and thus defy the temporally locked narrative that restricts them both: Bennie to an existence in which he is now only referred to "in the past tense" (312), and Alex to identifying himself with the "people like him, who had stopped being themselves without realizing it" (317). Indeed, Cowart, drawing on Bennie's assistant Lulu's statement that (in the novel's proleptic present) information "travels faster than the speed of light" (317), asserts that "such acceleration ... would reverse time's arrow" (248). Through their collaboration, Alex, Bennie, and Lulu find a way to undermine the restrictions on narrative progression that are inherent to the quality control of their profiled society.

The product of their collaboration, the intense success of their advertising campaign for Scotty's concert, predicated on an idealized version of the aging rocker, leads Alex to assume that the narrative he has helped create is real. Upon seeing him, however, "Alex understood that Scotty Hausmann did not exist. He was a word casing in human form" (*Goon Squad* 332). Following this chapter's concern with the increasing redundancy of spoken language in an

age when digital communication (the “Pure Language” of the chapter’s title) has surpassed its efficiency, Alex intuits that Scotty’s public persona is a signifier without a signified. Nevertheless, his and Lulu’s efforts to promote the concert yield an unprecedented result, elevating Scotty to the level of myth. In a moment of prolepsis, Alex muses on how Scotty’s falsified narrative has now, some time after the event, become public property: “Now that Scotty has entered the realm of myth, everyone wants to own him.... Doesn’t a myth belong to everyone?” (336). His query parallels Paul Ricoeur’s assertion that “as soon as a story is well known—and such is the case ... with the national chronicles of the founding events of a given community—retelling takes the place of telling” (179). Scotty’s “myth” qualifies under this description, given that myths are employed as the traditional foundation for communal narratives and are retold from one generation to the next. The communal narrative that Scotty’s concert creates opposes the “two generations of war and surveillance” experienced by his audience (336), who see in his resistance to profiling the authenticity that surveillance precludes. Situated at the “Footprint,” Ground Zero renamed, this event reclaims the community-by-association that Egan’s future metanarrative of control has replaced with a strict linear narrative of progression.

In the final pages of the novel, Alex engages in a retelling like that of the concert when, while looking for Sasha’s apartment with Bennie in the hopes that he might recapture some moment of his past, he describes Bennie and himself as “co-conspirators” (338–39). This description recalls Sasha’s assertion that she and Coz were “collaborators” in their construction of her own narrative. Alex, too, hears the same “hum” as Sasha, which she associates with “minutes of Coz’s time” (18) and he intuits as “the sound of time passing” (340). For both characters, this temporal awareness comes after they have relinquished their need for control over their narratives. Each character’s collaborative act provides an escape from their fear of time’s passing and thus dispels the illusion of control’s necessity. “Pure Language” is a return to a form (and theme) that mirrors the first chap-

ter's temporal displacement of narrated events, this time removing our readerly control by projecting a future that has not yet occurred. Each chapter of *Goon Squad* acts similarly upon the reader to gradually undermine our own need for narrative control. The novel's conclusion fittingly refigures narrative as a tool for communal constructions of identity, thus affirming Egan's associative narrative building as an ideal alternative to the unbroken linear narratives necessitated by metanarratives of control.

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“Dogism”: Fascism and the Philosophy of Violence in André Alexis’s *Fifteen Dogs*

Erin Chewter

Abstract: With *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), André Alexis presents the riddle of what it means to be human without prescribing his own solution. The task of deciding which of the hybrid dogs’ behaviours arise from which of their constituent elements—human or dog—is left up to the reader. This essay presents a theoretical exploration of the human-like violence found within *Fifteen Dogs*. I argue that the violence exhibited by the hybrid dogs is of a distinctly human quality and is fuelled by a fascistic ideology, which I call dogism. Attention is given to two particular manifestations of such violence: the sacrificial culling of the pack and the Garden of Death.

Greek gods making bets over drinks at a Toronto bar? Dogs capable of abstract thought? With *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), André Alexis clearly sets out to defamiliarize the familiar. Throughout the novel, Alexis invokes a number of traditional dialectics only to intentionally subvert and confuse them: freedom and bondage, the individual and the pack, human and animal, and so on. In refusing the expected resolution of these dialectics, Alexis presents his readers with the riddle of what it means to be human without prescribing any solution. The task of deciding which of the hybrid dogs’ behaviours stem from which of their constituent elements—human or dog—is left up to the reader. This essay explores the theme of violence within *Fifteen Dogs*, with particular attention to two manifestations of violence in the text: the culling of the pack and the Garden of Death. I will argue that the violence exhibited by the hybrid dogs when culling the pack is ideologically fuelled and, therefore, of a distinctly

human quality. Furthermore, I propose that the dog Benjy, with his penchant for authority and violence, embodies the figure of the totalitarian revolutionary by tactically exploiting the cruelty of humans to achieve liberation via the Garden of Death. These instances of violence suggest that the dogs' "gift" of human consciousness brings with it a new-found capacity for calculated cruelty.

A survey of several theories of violence and a cursory exploration of dog psychology allows us to begin isolating the human quality of the hybrid dogs' violence. Dogs are undeniably hierarchical creatures and can exhibit aggression in order to maintain that hierarchy and to secure the basics for life and security. Nevertheless, aggression is a phenomenon distinct from violence. Researchers in behavioural neuroscience have outlined the distinction between violence and adaptive aggression. One article from the field defines violence as "an exaggerated/escalated form of aggression leading to extreme harm in humans and animals alike. Aggression, on the other hand, has been defined primarily as a form of social communication, which is pro-inhibitory and aimed at functional endpoints such as the acquisition of food, shelter, mates and status" (Natarajan and Caramaschi 2). According to this definition, the actions of the pack in *Fifteen Dogs* would certainly qualify as violence. In its attacks against other dogs, the pack goes beyond what is necessary to ensure survival; it becomes malicious, calculating, and ideologically motivated. A UNESCO study exploring the causes of violence also reinforces the distinction between animal aggression and human violence. The study concludes that animals deploy a range of tactics to avoid violence and ensure survival of the species as a whole. It concludes that "[o]nly the human race is capable of destroying itself, precisely because it has lost its capacity for self-regulation" (Domenach 30). In gaining human-level consciousness, Alexis's dogs have lost their capacity for instinctual self-regulation through adaptive aggression. Their loss inevitably leads to an increased reliance on violence to reconcile tensions of identity and belonging. Like humans, the dogs become capable of destroying themselves; by the

end of the novel, Atticus and his followers succumb to an immanent and totalizing annihilation.

There are two occasions in which the dogs Majnoun and Atticus openly admit that their acts of violence are a departure from canine sensibilities. For Majnoun, this recognition comes after deciding that he must kill Benjy to prevent further disruption to the dynamic within Majnoun's home with the human couple Nira and Miguel. He reflects that "it would mean annihilating a part of himself, taking a final turn away from what had been his life: pack, canidity, coppice" (Alexis 87). Majnoun's thoughts reveal that this turn towards violence is far from natural for canines. On the contrary, the dogs' new state of consciousness—and the isolation leading to individualism that it inspires—is to blame. Atticus also admits that the excessively violent and rash way in which the pack kills Bobbie after offering her the illusion of exile is "not in keeping with the canine. They had killed [Bobbie] in a frenzy of which he was, in retrospect, ashamed" (Alexis 94). The perversity of the murder exposes the strangeness of the dogs: the attack is driven by their passion to pursue a retrospectively ideological cleansing of the pack, through which they might return to the Eden of pure caninity.

In closely examining the behaviours of Atticus and his followers throughout the novel, it becomes clear that the culling of the pack is fueled by an emergent ideology reminiscent of fascism. Henceforth, I will refer to this ideology, as it operates in the novel, as dogism. Dogism is a set of beliefs guided by a complete rejection of the hybrid dogs' new human-like abilities. The doggists (followers of dogism) long for a return to their former state of purely dog-like behaviour, which I will call dogliness. The pursuit of dogliness (the *ÜberHund*, if you will) becomes the doggists' normative grounding, their ethical foundation. Over time, the pack's dogism inspires a new culture and spirituality according to which the murder of dissenting or nonconforming dogs takes on a sacrificial quality.

Atticus and his followers, the doggists, come to view their new gift of consciousness as an immoral contagion that must be suppressed or, ideally, exorcised. Ironically,

the existence of dogism itself hinges upon the capacities of a conscious mind to moralize and envision an ideal way of being. Furthermore, the violence invoked in the name of this morality is of a very conscious and human nature: calculating, sacrificial, and punitive. The twentieth-century French philosopher Georges Bataille argues that “there is no fundamental distinction between society and violence, or between civilization and violence” (Pawlett 30). Violence becomes enshrined in the very fabric of the pack’s new culture. The pack must find ways to channel this by-product of consciousness:

Human cultures have long sought to control violence by measures taken under sacred auspices, in two ways: first, by legitimizing certain forms of violence (holy wars, justice rendered in the name of God, and so on); secondly, by religious rites whereby violence is purified through the selection and sacrifice of a victim. (Domenach 37)

The pack cannot rid itself of its new consciousness, so it suppresses that consciousness until the pressure builds to a point of necessary release through sacrifice. The sacrificial dog becomes the temporary embodiment of all that is excessive and frightening in the pack’s new consciousness—a representative of Bataille’s “accursed share,” which must be culled to “save the rest from the mortal danger of contagion” (Pawlett 23). Through the dog’s death, the pack feels momentarily cleansed and able to continue its performance of dogliness a while longer with renewed conviction. Through sacrifice, the pack is ostensibly united and made stronger. Rosie expresses this impression of having achieved a higher state of unified dogliness when recounting the murder of Max to Benjy: “In killing him, the dogs had behaved according to nature. They had been true dogs: blameless and faithful to the canine” (Alexis 75). But this sense of renewed caninity is an illusion. Having developed out of their capacity for abstract thought, the doggists’ reliance on sacrificial violence and their conceptions of dogly propriety only serve to further alienate the pack from the canine. The doggists indulge Bataille’s romanticization of sacrificial violence as a

pure and uncalculated release. In fact, their ritualization of violence constitutes the apex of formulaic calculation. Benjy senses this paradoxical situation upon his return to the pack, remarking that he found the dogs evermore strange—indeed, “all had become ritual” (Alexis 74).

The doggists interpret poetry as a repugnant exaltation of human language’s most corrupting qualities. For this reason, they select Prince—the poet dog—as the inaugural sacrificial victim. Much to the chagrin of the doggists, however, the gods interfere to foil their plans: Prince is saved via *deus ex machina* when Hermes magically transports him to safety in the moment before his impending murder by the pack. Having been denied the satisfaction of Prince’s sacrifice, the conspirators are driven into a frenzy. Their need for the kill is doubled and projected onto their next victim: “Frustrated by Prince’s mysterious disappearance, Max, Frick and Frack now wanted nothing more than to bite the black dog [Majnoun] to death” (Alexis 38). The pack’s desperation provides the first indication of its dependence upon sacrifices for stability. Later, the novel exposes this dependency once again when the pack ruthlessly kills Dougie immediately upon his return with Benjy. It is revealed that the pack had been left without a scapegoat after having killed the omega dog, Max. The resulting disruption to the pack’s hierarchy had caused it to become increasingly unstable; by the time Benjy and Dougie returned, the pack was long overdue for a sacrifice and desperate for the superficial cleansing and unifying effects of the kill. In this light, it becomes clear why the pack falls upon Dougie with such immediate, vicious, and united intent despite his act of submission. The doggists are caught in a vicious cycle: “the accursed share cannot be negated, transcended or resolved: sacrifices must continue” (Pawlett 23). With growing awareness of his fate as the next inevitable sacrifice, Benjy begins preparations for his gruesome escape from the pack.

In the novel, Alexis uses the term “Gardens of Death” to allude to poison-laced composts and kibbles left out by humans to eradicate stray dogs. In the real world, such Gardens of Death are a poignant example of human cruel-

ty and violence: the indiscriminate luring and poisoning of animals out of an irrational and extreme species-based hatred and disregard for non-human life. Between 2008 and 2016, animal lovers in Toronto were devastated by a series of malicious dog poisonings that made headlines in the local papers (D'Andrea; Kyonka; Miller; "Four Sick Dogs"). Alexis seems to have taken inspiration from disturbing incidents such as these, borrowing the expression "the Garden of Death" from the title of an 1896 painting by Finnish painter Hugo Simberg. The Garden of Death signals the point in the novel where the violence of the hybrid dogs and the violence of humans coalesce with the greatest clarity: while the Garden is a human creation, Benjy strategically uses it to annihilate the pack.

Benjy's appropriation of human creations warrants an investigation into his motivations. After having been empowered by an epiphany reminiscent of Hegel's master-slave dialectic (Hegel 111–19), Benjy ostensibly kills the pack to achieve personal liberation from his oppression under its hierarchy. This interpretation appeals to Frantz Fanon's notions of revolutionary violence and raises pertinent philosophical questions surrounding the legitimate uses of violence to overthrow oppressive regimes. Indeed, Fanon argues that violence is justifiable and even necessary under such circumstances (1–62). However, Benjy's innermost thoughts suggest that—far from being against oppression—he is *obsessed* with authority and power. Channelling the sentiments of a modern-day Stalinist apologist, Benjy reflects, "The truth was, though, that he had felt admiration for the conspirators.... They had been swift and clear, and one had to admit that clarity, however terrifying it might be, was at least admirable. It was perhaps even beautiful" (Alexis 61). Benjy's revolutionary sentiments seek only to invert rather than subvert the structures of domination. Upon his death, Benji's last vision is of a world where "the echelon was clear to all" and "the weak gave their respect without being coerced" (90). He longs for an ideal form of power resembling Hannah Arendt's notion of true authority as "unquestioned recognition by those who freely choose

to obey governmental rule” (Fry 65). But if, as Max Weber attests, state power rests in a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence (33), can citizens ever truly consent to that authority? Can consent truly exist in the hierarchy of a pack sustained through violent coercion? Benjy’s violent revolution, like so many before him, can succeed only in replacing one totalizing regime with another, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The only thing preventing Benjy from becoming a full-blown autocrat is his physical stature. Benjy is acutely aware of his own lack of physical power in the pack and feels shame, an emotion which only further entrenches his feelings of powerlessness. Shortly after his return to the pack, “it occurred to Benjy that being mounted was a humiliation.... [T]his new feeling, this shame, changed him” (Alexis 74). The gods’ “gift” of higher consciousness is a Trojan horse, it would seem, bringing with it the capacity to feel alienation and shame. In an article on the relationship between shame and violence, Krista Thomason describes shame as an emotion that arises from the conflict between an idealized self-image and those elements of our identity over which we have little control (Thomason 13). According to Thomason, this sense of powerlessness is what contributes to violent outbursts in individuals who feel shame. Violence, she explains, is a means of reasserting agency: “Violence turns the tables in shame: in the moment of shame I am made to feel powerless, and now as a violent agent others are powerless before me” (Thomason 19). This echoes Jean Paul Sartre’s assertion that violence presents a distorted method by which individuals seek meaning and autonomy in the wake of the alienation at the root of human consciousness (Stagliano 52). Benjy feels defined by his lowered status and thus becomes desperate to reclaim a degree of agency.

Unfortunately, Benjy is confused as to how power may best be achieved. According to Arendt, true power cannot be attained through violence: “Though violence is meant to generate power ... the use of violence signals the impotence of the rulers who cannot convince the people through reg-

ular means of their cause.... [T]he emergence of violence indicates that power is in jeopardy" (Fry 65). Benjy recognizes the violence of the doggists as indicative of the pack's instability: "Atticus and the others mounted him, it seemed, in order to prove that there was order and hierarchy. That is, to prove it to themselves" (Alexis 73). It is this lack of legitimacy, or "true power," that causes Benjy to become disillusioned with the pack's hierarchy. Benjy, ever obsessed with his ideal notions of power and authority, takes it upon himself to put an end to the pack and its charade. By appropriating the Garden of Death to achieve his goal, Benjy fails to extend his limited insight regarding the futility of using violence for power to include his own actions. Through this reading, Benjy can be seen to represent the misguided totalitarian revolutionary, who only perpetuates the cycle of violence in his quest for security and freedom. If we accept Arendt's philosophy of violence—that violence cannot create power or stability and is only destructive (Ayyash 344)—it is unsurprising that the pack descends into violent obliteration. The Garden of Death punctuates the irony of the doggists' sacrificial violence and serves as a warning: what appears to be the means for salvation might in truth sow the seeds of destruction.

In interviews, Alexis has expressed that his decision to explore the nature of humanity through dogs was intended to circumvent the discomfort and rejection reflex invoked by the topic of violence in humans ("André Alexis Unleashes"; "Fifteen Dogs"). By displacing the violent behaviour of humans onto another species, *Fifteen Dogs* allows us to withhold judgment and consider the complexity of violence. Our assumption that animals are irrational creatures inspires a sympathy for the hybrid dogs of the novel. We do not judge them as harshly for the violence they exhibit, seeing it instead as a symptom of something imposed upon them. From the tragic outcomes for many of the novel's dogs, one could even arrive at the conclusion that the gods' imposition of consciousness on living creatures is a violent act in and of itself. Bataille proposed that violence is inherent to the human condition, and—while never explicitly stating so—the

sheer violence exhibited by the human-dog hybrids of *Fifteen Dogs* appears to reinforce such a position. Nevertheless, the novel also highlights the senselessness of violence: while violence may be a uniquely human phenomenon, it is in no way a useful or necessary feature of human behaviour; indeed, it can only lead to mutual destruction. Despite the proliferation of alienation and violence within *Fifteen Dogs*, there remains a message of hope nestled amongst the tragedy: Majnoun and Prince remind us that consciousness may bring alienation and suffering, but it also brings the capacity to approach beauty through love, empathy, and art.

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Oral History and Cultural Preservation in Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*

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Abstract: Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018) explores a potential future of environmental devastation and biologically innovative magical realism. This essay focuses on Lai's preoccupation with forms of cultural preservation and the ways in which the changeable nature of language in oral histories ensures the dissemination and preservation of the most important parts of culture. By examining how Lai contrasts female-dominated oral history with corporate monopoly, rampant militarism, and questionable biological experimentation, this essay will navigate the ways in which Lai proposes that our current attempts toward cultural preservation are lacking.

The Tiger Flu (2018) is a futuristic, dystopic sci-fi novel that is based heavily on themes of corporate entitlement, environmental destruction, and feminist community-building. In this novel, set 127 years into the future, those in power have discontinued the use of oil, and the world has become rife with conflict, pseudo-magical biological experimentation, and slightly-skewed pop-culture phenomena. Lai's main characters, Kora Ko and Kirilow "Kiri" Groundsel, are examples of the two most extreme ways in which a woman can exist within this world. Kora represents life in the city, where militaristic corporate monopoly and diseased desperation dictate life and well-being, while Kiri represents the isolated and insular land-based experience of the Grist Sisters. Though the combination of these two disparate narratives does not follow a traditional dystopic narrative structure of "chosen ones" coming together and creating a moment that saves the world, it is Kora and Kiri's shared

heritage that binds them together and eventually saves them from that dystopia. Though there is no resolution for the larger outer world, Kora and Kiri survive. The fact that they survive gives the reader a sense of far-flung hope: the world may fall prey to a horrible and debilitating sickness, the military state might abduct and repurpose your entire culture, or a personal vendetta may spark the launch of several nuclear bombs, but somehow, somewhere, someone will probably survive to pass on the culture we have spent so long creating.

Thus, it is the intention of this paper to examine the female voices of cultural continuance that are so prevalent in *The Tiger Flu*. By considering how Larissa Lai has integrated pop-culture and current environmental concerns into a distinctly matriarchal and eco-feminist voice, this paper will examine the ways in which Lai views oral histories—and the women that disseminate them—as the continuers of culture. An examination of the ways in which Kiri and the Grist Sisters, Kora and the Cordova Dancing School for Girls, and various corporate entities navigate the end of the world will demonstrate a particular attention to the preservation of culture. Overall, this paper will prove that, in Lai's version of the apocalypse, it does not matter how humanity physically survives, so long as the right parts of our culture survive. Eventually our world will morph into something that is completely irreconcilable with the culture we inhabit today, but if culture persists, we can survive everything up to and including environmental devastation.

The various factions in *The Tiger Flu* all have different ideas about the best way to preserve and continue culture. Those associated with the creation of the tiger flu (a sickness that comes from ingesting tiger-bone wine that disproportionately affects men, who have thus been almost entirely wiped out) are representative of the forms of culture that, in the interim of our present and Lai's "Time After Oil," have either been corrupted or simply no longer function to preserve the past (Lai 11). These cultural forms represent current social structures: specifically, corporate monopoly over environmental and consumer structures. Lai shows us that

corporatization does not facilitate effective preservation of culture through a close look at Jemini, one of three companies that has ironclad control over the Saltwater City area. Their biological experiments created the Grist Sisters and revived the Caspian tigers from a “tiger-skin rug,” allowing them to mass-produce and harvest both the Grist Sisters and the tigers for their various body parts. While the Grist Sisters became living donors for those wealthy enough to pay for their organs, the tigers were slaughtered for their bones and made into wine so addictive that it caused four waves of a sickness so intense that most of the world’s men died out, and four separate quarantine rings were built to hold back the worst of the sick (9–10; 210–11). While the “revellers [drank] from crystal glasses, then later, mouth to spigot as addiction deepen[ed]” (210), outside the walls of Saltwater City the entire world fell into a chaos of “vast cliffs and towers of polar ice calv[ing] into the warming sea” and “oceans swell[ing] and ris[ing] to engulf whole cities” (210–11). The novel is unclear whether the tiger-bone wine was a way for society to collectively ignore the environmental devastation happening around it or if widespread and acute addiction and death was the cause of a breakdown of civilization that resulted in huge environmental backlash. Regardless, everyone in the narrative has been affected by the Jemini-made tiger flu and its various effects. Men are affected by the disease the most and are thus mostly dead, with the few survivors hiding isolated in the Pacific Pearl Parkade, where they can stay safe as contagious but non-symptomatic survivors. Women are also affected, to a lesser degree, and function as caretakers and breadwinners, but by the time Kora and Kiri are functioning members of the world, most everyone is dead and everything except for the highest echelons of society has collapsed into borderline anarchy. Still, Jemini continues to produce tiger-bone wine in “factories, hidden all through Saltwater City and the quarantine rings,” and even plans to export to the United Middle Kingdom (226).

This action of hiding factories in plain sight is reminiscent of current practices of disguising oil rigs as buildings.

Los Angeles is the most famous for this practice, with its rigs disguised on islands, near high schools, and even among office buildings (Taylor n.p.). Yet the biological experimentation that started this entire mess may, in its very beginning stages, have begun as a way to preserve humanity's past and present. Though creating people for the express purpose of using their organs for transplants with no thought to their autonomy or consent is morally reprehensible, creating the parthenogenic women makes theoretical sense in terms of increasing the longevity of true humans. Because this method allows women to regenerate their body parts, the transplantation process does not endanger them. These women, dubbed "starfish," are able to regrow their lost body parts within days; Kiri's starfish and wife, Peristrophe Halliana, regrows her eyes in approximately a week (33). The only true health concerns are the risk of a mistake or infection introduced in the surgery itself; taking too much from a starfish while they are still healing from a previous procedure; or any pre-existing immuno-compromising sickness, such as the tiger flu (22; 35; 73). Moreover, cloning the extinct Caspian tigers could have been a way to preserve or re-introduce that species to Earth's environments, suggesting the possibility of saving every extinct animal of which there are extant samples. Unfortunately, this idealistic way of thinking is all too corruptible, and that is exactly what happened: at some point in the process, ethics were pushed aside to make room for growth and capital.

Similar conclusions can be drawn about current corporate monopolies over resources and institutional reluctance to change policies and plans, even in the face of widespread ethical violations and environmental disasters. Water and oil, while occupying "starkly divergent political economies," have the potential for misuse that will spur—and has spurred—violent outbursts over access and irreversible environmental damage (Selby 200). No public action—including but not limited to academic and literary criticism, grassroots efforts, organized protests, and direct action—seems to be enough to hamper this government-sanctioned corporate insistence on infringing on traditional and occu-

ped lands and irreversibly damaging the world's climate and environment. This, as Lai suggests through her own examinations of cultural and corporate catastrophe, is not the way to ensure our survival. If we continue to feed these social structures and allow them to dictate the ways in which we are allowed to interact with each other and the environment, eventually there will be nothing left.

That said, Lai does not leave us with a sense of overwhelming despair. Even while she shows us the wrong ways to go about preserving humanity, she shows us alternatives that function both in our reality and in that of Saltwater City, 127 years after oil. Namely, she demonstrates how the Grist Sisters use an oral history that is based heavily on the personal cultural experiences of Grandma Chan Ling (the founder and late matriarch of Grist Village and an escapee of Jemini's labs) and how the Cordova Dancing School for Girls (a disguised contingent of Grist Sisters who never escaped Saltwater City) have used a similar oral history that has since been influenced by their Saltwater City experiences. These histories continue to support the women's cultures because they are not dependent on overarching corporate or governmental structures that will eventually degrade. Oral histories, unlike business models, adapt and change over time, molding morals from the past to the present, and providing a context for the past and the future.

For instance, the Grist Sisters have built their culture around the oral histories they received from Grandma Chan Ling, and they use the past as it was told to them to help them remember lessons about the present. Their pop-culture references are three steps removed from their original contexts but are still recognizable: "don't you know that diamonds are a girl's best friend" helps Kiri to remember that her whetstone is made from diamonds stolen off the fingers of dead married women while remembering to double-disinfect her scalpels so that they "shimmer clean, a lean mean clean ... like the lemon muscle man from time before" (19; 22). Kiri's mother-double, Glorybind Groundsel, taught Kiri everything she knew about "where we came from [and] what we're here for" in the form of chants, using mnemon-

ics to ensure that Kiri knew that they “hold all that remains of the old world’s knowledge in our raw brains” (19–20). It was paramount that Glorybind, the guardian of a dying culture, should explicitly teach Kiri as much as she could about “the time before” (22). A similar kind of cultural dissemination is happening in the present almost without our knowledge. Phrases such as “hanging up the phone” or “rolling up the car window” are etymological holdovers from the nineties and before, which tend to confuse younger generations, who have no proper context for the expressions. It is entirely possible—even likely—that these phrases will continue to move further and further from their original contexts, but will retain their original meaning, just like Kiri’s “lemon muscle man” (22).

In contrast to the heavily linguistic cultural transmission we see with the Grist Sisters that have been isolated in Grist Village, the Cordova Dancing School for Girls conveys a much more physical type of cultural transmission. The Cordova Girls, taught by Madame Dearborne, are what is left of the Grist Sister Commune that was trapped in Saltwater City. To escape their reputation as Grist Sisters they needed to edit their oral histories, forcibly forgetting their Grist heritage, and take in orphans off the street to feed their numbers. When Kora Ko joins their ranks, only a scant few know about their Grist heritage, but all of them know the lessons of the Grist Sisters. Instead of specialized mnemonics from almost-200-year-old pop culture, the Cordova Girls’ factual knowledge comes from hardware called “scales,” which can be bought by anyone who has the money. Scales connect the user via an implant to a specific piece of information from Chang and Eng—two satellites that orbit the Earth, containing the entirety of Earth’s information on any given subject. Kora’s Uncle Wai frames the scales in much the same way as Glorybind framed oral history, saying “[Kora] needs memory scales to understand the world that was” (29). While these memory scales are eventually corrupted in much the same way that the Grist Sisters and the Caspian tigers were, this formal and factual education is supplemented by the Cordova Girls’ version of the Grist Sisters’ mnemonics.

Kora refers to them as “all the old dances, mambo, tango, cha-cha-cha,” and they teach her how to thief and become invisible just as well as her cat-coat does (217). She uses the dances when she has to steal and fight in the Second Quarantine Ring and then again when she makes the deal with Isabelle in the Pacific Pearl Parkade (138–40; 217).

We see another evolution of oral history in the Cordova Girls’ preferred style of dress. They prefer “clothes from the time before: jeans and t-shirts, miniskirts with fishnet stockings, hoodies and jeans” that are overlaid with clothes from their contemporary experiences, such as jackets from the recently disbanded and militaristic “Arm-A-Gideon” movement (52). These girls, however unconsciously, seem to recognize that preservation of the past and past culture is important, and try to do so however possible. In considering the differences between the Grist Sisters’ clear ties to the language of the past and the Cordova Girls’ clear preference towards more physical reminders, we can see the ways in which oral histories mould themselves to the ways a culture might evolve. Unlike physically creating something that will hold your past and preserve it perfectly for the future—such as a time capsule or, conveniently, a clone—oral histories allow growth and connection without ever having to fear being irreparably isolated from your past. So long as there is more than one person on the earth, even widespread environmental disaster could not stop the dissemination of oral histories.

Lai’s world supports this thesis, even in the final chapters of the novel. Isabelle sends an atom bomb up to Chang, destroying the massive satellite, murdering everyone whose consciousness had been uploaded to it, and endangering everyone in its crash zone. It is then that Kiri draws upon her traditional and memory scale-given knowledge of surgery to save Kora by somehow combining her with a nearby batterkite—a genetically modified flying squid whose primary purpose is as a military abduction and destruction unit—allowing them to escape and create New Grist Village. This New Grist Village is entirely separated from the corporate corruption of Saltwater City as well as

from the time in which Grandmother Chan Ling grew up. Kora Ko has become the Kora Tree at the heart of the Starfish Orchard: hearts, lungs, and limbs grow on her branches, ready to be plucked by the citizens of her New Grist Village. The history she gives is one that remembers when “the possibility of doublers, starfish, and grooms did not even touch [her] consciousness,” where there were “men and women” that could only have one child at a time, rather than litters (326). There are no more mnemonics and no more dances, and there doesn’t have to be, because this is no longer a time of “information blackout” (328). Still, the oral history must adapt to the circumstances and account for the fallibilities of memory and an unwillingness to relive the traumas of the past (327–28).

In light of this, we must decide—how will we try to preserve our culture? Will we follow a path of governmentally sanctioned, corporatized attempts at creating time-capsules out of the past so that we may bring them to the future, even if they become nonsensical with their lack of cultural context? Or will we fall back on a tried-and-true tradition of oral history that, while fallible, allows for adaptation as a culture waxes and wanes and is receptive to an emphasis on keeping established morals and experiences close at hand? The feminine, feminist oral histories of Grist Village and the Cordova Dancing School for Girls show us that only such tried-and-true traditions of oral history will allow us to not only survive but thrive in the face of catastrophe.

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“Dance and Shake the Frame”: Culture Industry and Absurdity in Childish Gambino’s “This Is America”

Kate Wallace Fry

Abstract: This essay uses early twentieth-century critical and literary theory to examine the ways in which Childish Gambino’s “This Is America” critiques the violence and racism of American culture. While “This Is America” does not present an overtly Marxist critique of America, the song and video complement Horkheimer and Adorno’s Marxist criticisms of the culture industry. Furthermore, Gambino adopts devices and approaches popularized by absurdist art movements that critique the ideological mainstream. This essay concludes that, by applying absurdist approaches to his art, Gambino exposes the ways in which the American culture industry normalizes racism and gun violence.

On 5 May 2018, Donald Glover released a music video entitled “This Is America” under his popular music moniker Childish Gambino. Despite little promotion prior to release, the video gained massive attention from fans and critics alike. For a piece of commercial art, “This Is America” was unprecedented in the manner of its reception. Audiences did not just enjoy the video but *en masse* took to social media to discuss its depictions of racism and gun violence. “This Is America” does not present its audience with an explicit critique of American culture; rather, the release regurgitates that culture in such an absurd manner that the audience is horrified by their recognition of it. Both the song and the video make use of artistic devices associated with early twentieth-century absurdist art movements. These modes of absurdity allow Gambino to defamiliarize his audience with not only the violence of American culture but also with

the culture industry that normalizes that violence.

In their 1944 publication *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno characterize the culture industry as a force of consistent homogeneity, perpetually refining the style of their artistic products until all culture “infect[s] everything with sameness” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1033). The culture industry is incapable of “struggle[ing] with tradition,” a requirement of genuine style and criticism (1038). Horkheimer and Adorno do not consider the possibility of an art piece that could both be a product of mass media and resist it, as the production of self-criticism would not only be outside the industry’s interests but also its capabilities. “This Is America” is undeniably a product of the culture industry and a successful one at that. Gambino is the definition of a pop culture superstar: he is not only a musician but an actor, comedian, writer, director, and DJ as well. “This Is America” dropped while Gambino was hosting an episode of *Saturday Night Live*, and it debuted at number one on the US Billboard Hot 100, one of only thirty-two songs ever to do so (“Here are the 32 Hits” n.p.). Thus, the video cannot be read as a work of “genuine art” in Horkheimer and Adorno’s traditional Marxist perspective (1036).

That being said, Gambino appears to share Horkheimer and Adorno’s suspicion towards the overwhelming sameness of the culture industry. The celebrity toyed with retiring from music after the release of his third album, *Awaken, My Love!* (2017). “There’s nothing worse than like a third sequel, like a third movie and we’re like, ‘again?’” the artist told Huffington Post (Britton n.p.). “This Is America” was Gambino’s return to music following *Awaken, My Love!*, and the song has a notably complex relationship to sameness. Underlying much of the musical styling and imagery of the video is a representation of how the culture industry appropriates black art and homogenizes it to ideological ends.

“This Is America” has two main melodies that each follow a popular aesthetic in mainstream hip hop. The melody that begins the song, and serves as intro and refrain, is sung by a gospel choir and accompanied by acoustic guitar (Gam-

bino 0:04). It follows a style of hip hop that blends with gospel, popularized by artists like Kanye West and Chance the Rapper (“Kanye deconstructed” 6:48–8:03). The second melody, which serves as both verse and chorus, uses a throbbing bass line and a triplet-flow (Gambino 0:52). Triplet rhythms are present in virtually every genre of music and have existed in a variety of rap sub-genres since the early eighties. This second melody replicates a hip hop sub-genre called trap music (“How the triplet flow took over rap” 0:00–2:47). However, both of the melodies in “This Is America” are highly simplified replicants of the genres they invoke. They are only “gospel” or “trap” enough to evoke the style. Sterile and simplistic yet unmistakably stylish, they perfectly capture Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of style as overproduced and repetitive. Neither of these recreations critique the genres themselves but rather the culture industry’s involvement with and consumption of them.

The polished aesthetic of these melodies demands a passive listening. They are so ubiquitous, and Gambino brings so little that is new to them, the audience cannot actively engage with the melodies. However, it is this very passivity that Gambino appropriates in “This Is America.” While in isolation, the melodies are pleasant and easy to listen to, together they begin to create a resemblance of the autonomous modernist art works so admired by Horkheimer and Adorno for their resistance to the culture industry (Leitch et. al, 1032). The juxtaposition between the two melodies is jarring and absurd. Gambino furthers this disharmony by using a fast, dramatic pivot whenever the gospel refrain gives way to the verse. In the video, this pivot is where the gunshots occur (Gambino 0:52, 1:56). Even in the radio version, wherein the gunshots are edited out, the pivot remains violent and uncomfortable to the listener.

In this way, “This Is America” is the sonic equivalent of a Dadaist collage. Like Dada, one of the seminal absurdist European art movements of the early twentieth century, the song recreates aesthetic only to grate at the aesthetic sensibilities of its audience. “At its core, Dadaism is an art movement that throws into the face of art consumers—an

apt description, since this was the era when mass-produced consumer products were beginning to flood Western culture—provocative questions,” writes art critic Peter Letzelter-Smith; “These queries are delivered via the juxtaposition of iconic works of art or everyday consumer items with absurd additions or deconstructions” (Letzelter-Smith n.p.). The absurd pivots in “This Is America” repurpose the everyday aesthetics of mainstream rap, making its audience uncomfortably aware of the consumerist nature of the culture industry’s art.

The music video for “This Is America” is even more explicit in using the absurd. Visually, “This Is America” is awash with violence of the American contemporary: shootings, police cars, a church massacre, frantic crowds, and cellphone filming. All of these images carry heavy material and symbolic meaning for America, particularly for black America, in 2018. Yet, alongside the recognizable is the cryptic: a hooded figure on a white horse, abandoned vintage cars, several stray chickens, and a generally unclear sense of narration. If the song itself is in the spirit of Dada, the video is Theatre of the Absurd. The video certainly fits Martin Esslin’s description of absurd theatrics as “a bewildering experience, a veritable barrage of wildly irrational, often nonsensical goings-on” (3). Gambino’s character in “This Is America” has a certain likeness to Clov from Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, with his staggering movements, changing moods, and constant lighting and discarding of cigarettes. The manner in which he switches from dancing to violence confuses the audience. Are we meant to condone his murder or empathize with his joy? Gambino’s character fits Esslin’s definition of all absurd protagonists as a “living riddle” (13). While “This Is America” certainly engages with a political reality, the video channels the unreality of the absurd in that it “[puts the audience] into suspense as to what the [text] may mean” (12).

In this way, while “This Is America” is in a film medium, it disrupts the ideological function of the film industry, defined by Adorno and Horkheimer as “den[ying] its audience any dimension which might roam free in imagination”

(1037). Unlike the films described in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, our reality is not “a seamless extension” of the world portrayed in “This Is America” (1036). If the video were to stylize itself using realism, it would not have been anywhere near as effective a representation of American culture. Realist depictions of suffering risk perpetuating a glorification of endurance, a kind of defeatism distilled within ideology (1044). Instead, the absurdism of the video alienates the viewer enough that they can begin to examine the ties between Gambino’s video and mass culture without having to “identify the film directly with reality” (1036). Theatre of the Absurd performs a similar function, according to Esslin: “while the happenings on the stage are absurd, they yet remain recognizable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity, so that eventually the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence” (5). Where absurd plays are sometimes referred to as “anti-plays,” “This Is America” can be seen as an “anti-music video.”

However, unlike the absurd playwrights, Gambino works to unveil irrationality hidden within existence under a racist mass culture. While he adopts the modes of the absurd, they are in the pursuit of exposing the paradoxical quality of American culture’s violence and racism. The chaotic universe of “This Is America” is an unreality; and yet, as unmistakable as its title, it is a portrait of American mass culture. The excruciating tension between the dancing and the violence of the video demonstrates the tense existence of blackness within the American culture industry: the ways in which black bodies are simultaneously fetishized and feared, the ways in which black culture is venerated while black people become the subjects of violence, and the paradoxical fascination and distrust on the part of white consumers when presented with images of the racialized other.

There is a moment of silence in the music video that is edited out of the song’s radio edit. In the middle of dancing, Gambino raises his arm as if to shoot—not a gun but his fingers in the shape of a gun (Gambino 2:40–2:43). The music stops and the children, dancing just moments before, run from him (2:43–2:45). He is motionless for a mo-

ment, arms outstretched, body limp with some emotion we can recognize but not name (2:45–2:55). Then he lights a cigarette (2:55–3:00). Absurdist artworks “neither ... directly represent the catastrophe, nor ... remain silent about it, but ... prob[e] the intervals between silence and speech, between thought and incomprehensibility” (Huebert 6). Amidst the horror of the shootings and the joy of the dancing, which are blended together almost seamlessly in the video, Gambino’s silence appears less a moment of reflection and more an expression of exhaustion. In a culture in which acts of violence and racism have become a normalized component of its media consumption, and in which the culture industry produces these medias to be ever more passive and encompassing, exhaustion is possibly the most human response. Not unlike Adorno’s famously misunderstood quote, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” Gambino’s silence represents a moment in which art has become impossible.

The power of absurdity is its ability to render meaning from actions that should, under normal circumstances, be read as nonsense. “This Is America” does not depict a logical, composed reality but a distortion of it. However, as Esslin notes, “The onslaught of unconventional logic and unilinear conceptual thinking in the Theatre of the Absurd ... constitutes an earnest endeavor to penetrate to deeper layers of meaning and to give a truer, ... more complex, picture of reality in avoiding the simplification which results from leaving out all the undertones, overtones, and inherent absurdities and contradictions of any human situation” (10–11). Thus, the absurdity in “This Is America” does the double work of not only exposing the absurd normalization of a violent mass culture but also the culture industry which made that normalization possible.

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THE ALBATROSS^o



From left to right: Sydney Thieneman, Megan Hands, Makayla Helen Scharf, Esther Callo, Julie Schoch, Erin Chan, Robert Steele, Sonja Pinto, Christopher Horne, Veronika R. Larsen, Drew Marie Beard, Anne Hung. Photo by Errin Johnston-Watson.

Not pictured: Emma Bishop and Amogha Lakshmi Halepuram Sridhar.

