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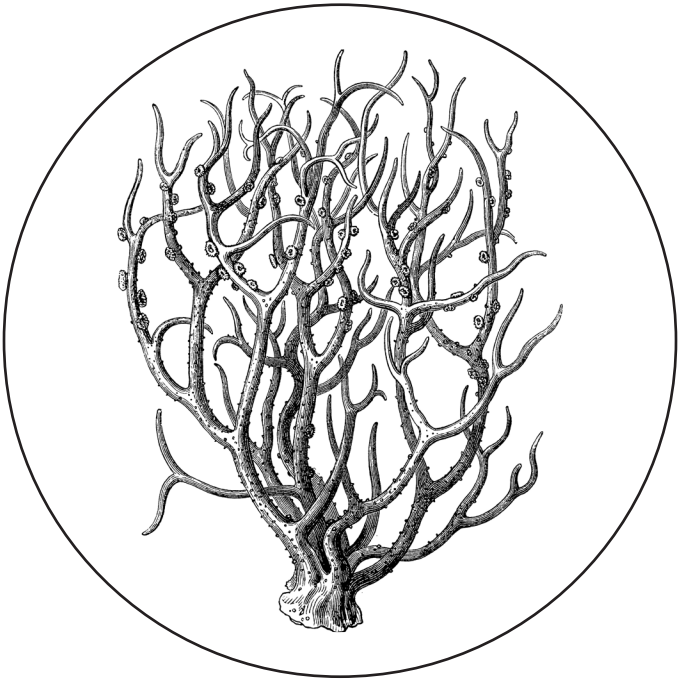


# EDITORIAL

# Editors' Note

Anne Hung & Maya Linsley

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

Volume 12 of *The Albatross* would not have been possible without the support of the UVic English community. We would like to thank everyone who submitted to the journal, all of our contributors, and the editorial staff, who have collaborated with authors virtually to produce the exceptional essays in this issue. We are grateful to Drs. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge for their editing workshop and ongoing support, and Robert Steele for his copy-editing workshop, which trained many of our copy editors.

We would like to recognize the 2021–22 executive members of the UVic English Students' Association, the organization that generously funds *The Albatross*: Nina Bradley, Ella Cuskelly, Jocelyn Diemer, John Fitzsimmons, Emily Frampton, Madison George-Berlet, Anne Hung, Errin Johnston-Watson, Kira Keir, Molly LeBlanc, Maya Linsley, Alicia Murray, Zoë Nilson, Nicole Paletta, Ekamjot Pooni, Mackenzie Stapleton, and Tiegan Suddaby. Furthermore, we would like to thank the University of Victoria Students' Society and the other UVic Humanities journals.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic created a multitude of challenges, and we would like to acknowledge the adaptability, resilience, and commitment of the editors and contributors who made the publication of this issue possible. We are proud to present eight undergraduate essays that exemplify the curiosity and insightfulness of the UVic English Department. It has been an honour to learn and grow with the *Albatross* team, and we hope that the journal continues to engage and inspire UVic students in the years to come.

# Introduction

Anne Hung

The twelfth issue of *The Albatross* features eight critical works that exemplify the diverse interests and insights of our contributors. Despite their disparate primary texts, each essay is in some way concerned with barriers to autonomy and forms of resistance. Emily Frampton examines horses as symbols of agency in Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* (ca. 1170–1215); Amogha Lakshmi Halepuram Sridhar explores justice alongside the rhetorical sightlines of Samuel Johnson's *The Idler* essay no. 22 (1758) and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); William Turcotte synthesizes the philosophies of Baruch Spinoza with the protagonist's failed pursuits in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857); Madison George-Berlet considers Victorian conceptions of purity as reflected in the maintenance of the period sex taboo in *The Romance of Lust* (1873–1876); Errin Johnston-Watson compares the fates of characters who seek familial versus transgressive love in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878); Maya Linsley illuminates the physical and metaphysical barriers to marginalized relationships in Howard Nemerov's "The Goose Fish" (1977); Joey Mauro tests Frederic Jameson's postmodernist theories against Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987); and Kiarra Burd suggests that gastronomic metaphors reflect the enslaved protagonist's process of self-actualization in *Washington Black* (2018). To emphasize the multiplicity of these barriers, as well as how their portrayals have evolved over time, the essays are arranged chronologically by primary text.

Analyzing works written over five hundred years apart, our first two authors are both interested in the function of symbolism in their respective texts. Emily Frampton examines the significance of horses in de France's *Lanval*. Frampton suggests that horses are metonyms for autonomy, facilitating an "inversion of traditional hyper-masculine knighthood … [and] elevating female power through representations of the Fairy Queen" (16). Thus, separation from one's horse in the lai represents not only a lack of mobility but also an absence of power. Amogha Lakshmi Halepuram Sridhar investigates the interplay of architectural sightlines, justice, and figurative language in Johnson's *The Idler* essay no. 22 and Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Halepuram Sridhar argues that "rhetoric constructs sightlines subterraneous to the architecture of justice within their works" (25). Ultimately, Johnson and Walpole respectively emphasize the role of the transgressor through the literal and figurative architecture of their texts.

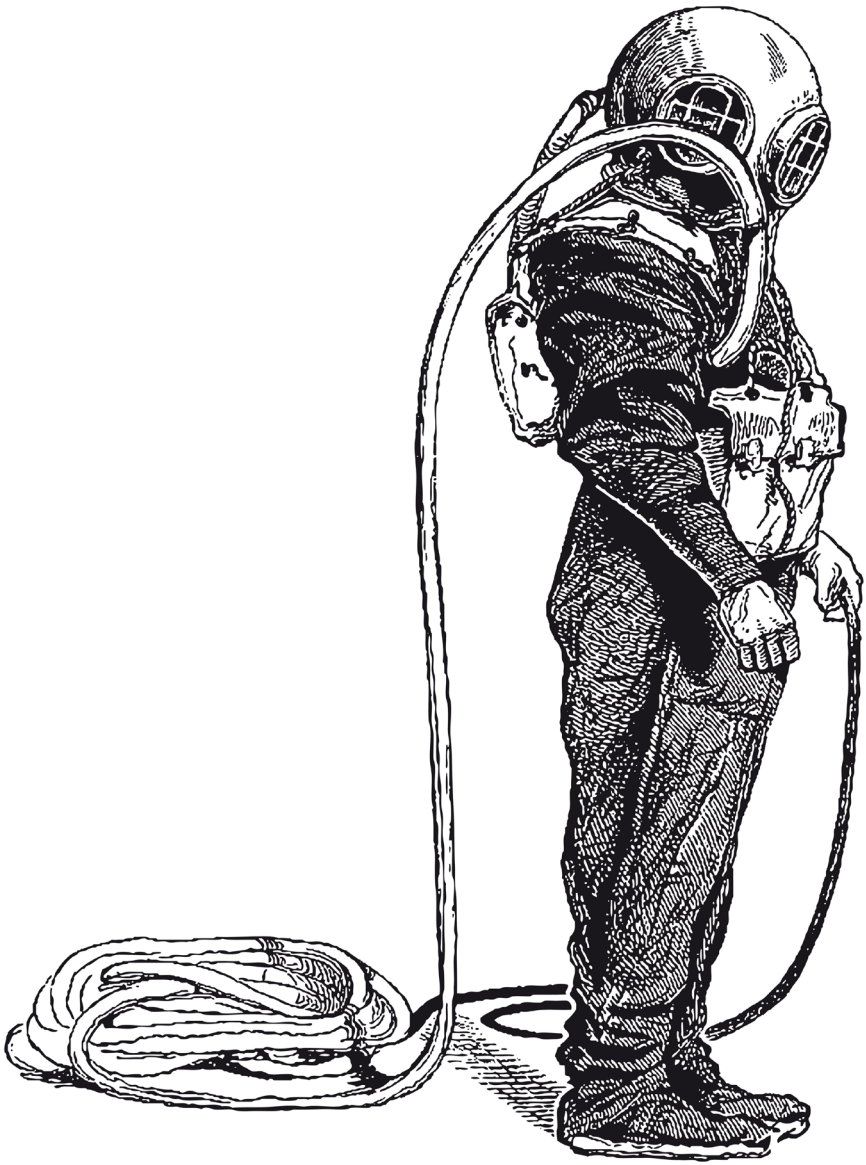
Our next three articles analyze works written in the nineteenth century. William Turcotte studies how Spinoza's philosophies of immanence present themselves in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Turcotte posits that "Spinozan elements are … apparent in Emma Bovary's failed attempts to attain an idealized state of ecstasy" (34). Emma indulges in vice—from expensive goods to extramarital affairs—to escape the mundanity of her provincial life. Her fulfillment is infinitely deferred, however, as such idealized ends are impossible in a Spinozan world view. Researching the medicalization and stigmatization of period sex in the nineteenth century, Madison George-Berlet engages with medical and cultural texts, as well as Victorian erotica. Specifically, George-Berlet uses

*The Romance of Lust* to demonstrate why the period sex taboo is maintained even in transgressive Victorian erotica: "to realign the female characters with Victorian values of delicacy, modesty, and purity" (43). Errin Johnston-Watson's essay considers the acceptability of different forms of love in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Examining the fates of the novel's three main families, Johnston-Watson maintains that the "greatest factor in determining happiness in *Anna Karenina* is loving 'correctly'"—that is, without passion and with a focus on one's family (53). Johnston-Watson also suggests that the novel's assessment of "correct" and "incorrect" love is reflected in the characters' respective ties to childlikeness or industrialization.

Moving into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, our last three papers investigate texts wherein marginalization is the primary barrier to autonomy. Maya Linsley suggests that the titular creature in Nemerov's "The Goose Fish" embodies the complex anxieties of the poem's couple as they engage in a midnight tryst. Linsley posits that the goose fish brings to light "the spectres of social shame, painful irony, and tragic predestiny in marginalized relationships—queer, class-divided, pre-marital, or otherwise" (62). Her examination of the poem's layered ironies invites further discussion of social barriers and their poetic representations. Taking a theoretical approach, Joey Mauro dissects Fredric Jameson's essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1988), which claims that postmodernism "signifies the breakdown of truth because it is beholden to the market rather than based in history" (70). Mauro opposes Jameson's argument, proposing that the layered narratives of Morrison's *Beloved* create a genuine contestation of truth that gives narrative

primacy to Black voices. Our final essay takes a psychoanalytic approach to the protagonist's food aversion in Edugyan's *Washington Black*. Kiarra Burd traces the barriers in Washington's life to instances of both violence and food insecurity, ultimately arguing that "food can be understood to mirror his traumatic early life experiences as a child born into slavery, his maturation, and finally, his reclamation of his freedom and his individual self-actualization" (78).

This collection of *Albatross* articles explores complex themes of autonomy and resistance. The presence of obstacles to freedom and fulfillment in each of these essays' source texts illuminates the role of literature in giving voice to the oppressed, while the diversity of their topics demonstrates how place, time, race, and gender come to bear on one's experience of social barriers.



# CRITICAL WORKS

# Off His High Horse: Equine Symbols of Agency in Marie de France's *Lanval*

Emily Frampton

**Abstract:** This essay examines the relationship between agency and horses in Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* (ca. 1170–1215). By exploring the link in medieval literature between horses and identity, one can begin to understand Lanval's loss of agency and the Fairy Queen's mastery both within and outside her queendom. In my essay, I argue that Marie de France's *Lanval* presents horses as metonyms for autonomy and demonstrates an inversion of traditional hyper-masculine knighthood while elevating female power through representations of the Fairy Queen.

On the surface, Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* (ca. 1170 –1215) follows the model of the medieval lai (a lyrical poem) by centralizing the romantic adventure of the archetypical masculine knight. However, *Lanval* subverts the expectations of the lai form by detailing the intricate relationship of Lanval's agency while under the influence of the demoiselle. To understand how individual identity and agency operate within the lai, one can study how the central characters (Lanval and the Fairy Queen) use their horses as demonstrations of individual power. Synthesizing the findings of both medieval and animal studies scholars, this essay seeks to investigate horses as an extension of Lanval and the Fairy Queen's agency and demonstrates Lanval's subjugation to the Fairy Queen's power.

Lanval is introduced at the beginning of the lai as a knight suffering due to the poor treatment he is receiving from Arthur's court, despite his extraordinary chivalric capabilities and potential social currency. Instead of receiving praise for his duties, Lanval is "envied by most

men" and ostracized by others in the court who wish for him to be "met with some mischance" (de France 23–25). Lanval does not receive the treatment he expects as a "king's son, of high lineage," exemplifying his social malaise (27). The lai demonstrates that Arthur's "courtly society is at risk of being destroyed by internal rifts, tensions, and conflicts" that threaten the ability of Lanval to succeed as a male archetypical hero (Classen 78). These internal rifts also sever Lanval's identity and connection to his horse, which is emblematic of his knightly power. While the reader is made aware of Lanval's illustrious lineage primarily through exposition, his possession of a *destrier* (a powerful warhorse) defines him as a knight. The *destrier* is described as an "integral component of the *chevalier*" akin to his sword or other heraldic vestiges (Rogers 630). Scholar Paul Rogers continues to emphasize that horses became "an indicator of social condition" and were "always associated with the knight," fundamentally linking the *chevalier* (knight) and *cheval* (horse) as a model to demonstrate the knight's power and social identity (638). Lanval's possession of a *destrier* indicates his identity as a knight but ironically emphasizes his lack of power within Arthur's court.

Medieval knights derived their power from their steeds, and thus horses represented a fundamental aspect of high status and hyper-masculine identity. The horse was a "fundamental symbol of virility" and reinforced the embodiments of "male power in medieval texts," thus a knight could not be "disassociated from his steed" (Rogers 629). The horse represents Lanval's knightly duties, as well as his ability to exert his own independence and freedom. Yet, due to Arthur's ineffectual court and kingship, both Lanval and his horse suffer poor treatment. The *destrier* is unable to support Lanval upon a light ride to the meadow and he "trembles terribly," unable to fulfill the journey (de France 46). Lanval's horse is unable to carry him, suggestive of the improper care the horse is receiving at court, much like his master. Upon arriving in the meadow, Lanval parallels his horse as they "roll in the field" and make "the field

[their] bed"—their desire to escape the confines of Arthur's court pushes them to succumb to the potential dangers of the space (de France 48–50). Contemporary readers are aware that spaces containing beautiful meadows, abundant flowers, and swift streams operate as gateways to spaces controlled by Otherworldly beings as "the lovely [meadow]" becomes one of many characteristic markers of the Otherworld (Patch 619). Both horse and rider are unable to perform the duties that are required of them and crave escape to the magical realm of the Fairy Queen.

The relationship between Lanval and his horse throughout the lai can be used to uncover the changes to Lanval's identity and subjugation to the Fairy Queen. Lanval desires to establish a firm identity within a community that supports him; yet the lai makes it clear that to do so, Lanval must abandon his previous identity and commitment to Arthur's court. This transfer can best be investigated through Lanval's treatment of his horse throughout the lai. If the *destrier* is indicative of Lanval's identity as a knight within Arthur's court, then Lanval's abandonment of his horse can be read as Lanval's symbolic rejection of Arthur's court as "horse and rider are a reflection of one another, and their identity is intertwined" (Miller 966). When the young damsels invite him into the Fairy Queen's tent, Lanval promptly leaves his horse behind. This separation is significant as it represents Lanval's departure from the mortal realm, Arthur's court life, and his typical identity. Lanval's abandonment of his horse is a significant indicator of societal upset and a complete departure from his traditional identity. As described by Rogers, a knight would hardly ever travel dismounted, and the "loss of one's steed is always extremely disruptive" to the narrative, indicating that the loss of Lanval's steed is important to both the narrative and Lanval's character (631). As Lanval follows the women and leaves his horse it is clear that Lanval is abandoning his own identity in order to be placed within the world of the Fairy Queen.

Lanval is transported into the Fairy Queen's court and is instantly transfixed by its glory, as well as the lavish

treatment he receives. The Fairy Queen provides for Lanval, unlike Arthur, and she gives Lanval appropriate social treatment in exchange for being "lavished" by him (de France 141). While Lanval is doting on the Fairy Queen and brought within her queendom, his horse is completely forgotten, and he is unconcerned with its care. Lanval's disregard for his steed indicates that he desires to abandon his typical knightly identity to become an agent of the Fairy Queen. When Lanval is with the Fairy Queen he becomes indifferent about leaving Arthur's court, as she alienates Lanval from his identity, as well as the mortal world, by providing for him "all [he] requires" (127). The Fairy Queen is in complete control of her own identity and sways Lanval away from his own: Lanval lingers willingly in the fairy realm, having forgotten his previous responsibilities, and must be commanded to leave by the Fairy Queen, who does not permit him to stay. The Fairy Queen guides Lanval back to his previous identity (embodied by his horse), where he finds that the Fairy Queen's damsels have cared for his horse and have "saddled it up expeditiously" (191). The maintenance of Lanval's horse by the fairy realm represents a spiritual and individual refreshment indicative of the Otherworld's capabilities and the Fairy Queen's power over Lanval (Patch 621). Once reunited with his horse, Lanval is brought out of his trance and becomes "disturbed" about the validity of his encounter (de France 198–199). Thus, Lanval's horse remains a symbol of his ties to the mortal world and his courtly responsibilities to Arthur. Although Lanval longs to be within the effective queendom of the Fairy Queen, he is initially unsure if he should abandon his identity and allegiance to Arthur that is represented by his horse.

Once Lanval has returned to Arthur's court, he is villainized by Arthur's queen and subsequently Arthur. To prove his innocence, Lanval must break his promise to the Fairy Queen by revealing her identity to Arthur's queen. Dejected, Lanval is separated from both communities that he desired to be a part of—Arthur's court and the court of the Fairy Queen. Alienated from his initial sense of identity

and fearing the Fairy Queen will be "lost to [him] for ever," Lanval succumbs to deep misery (148). While Lanval awaits trial for the perceived abuses against Arthur's queen, there are no references to his horse, symbolizing Lanval's position as a societal outcast without hope of advancement or escape. Lanval becomes dependent upon outside aid and is no longer in control of his fate. As is corroborated by Classen, "even the most extensive efforts by his friends and other knights" do not have the ability to "support him against the queen's accusations" (68). Thus, Lanval's agency is transferred to the power of the Fairy Queen, the only one capable of saving him. As Lanval awaits his trial, two of the Fairy Queen's agents arrive riding palfreys (a type of horse traditionally associated with women). As I have explored, horses become symbols of power and individual agency, making it apparent that the Fairy Queen (and her female agents) have control while the men are at the will of these women.

The power that these Otherworldly women command within the lai is expressed through their mastery of horses. As they arrive at Arthur's court, damsels do not dismount until they are "just before the dias," taking up physical space and commanding power (de France 487). Arthur, like Lanval, is at the mercy of the women who not only occupy a physically higher position by arriving on horses but they make demands of the king. The connection between palfreys and powerful female identity is further supported by the Fairy Queen's entrance at the court of Arthur, as she rides astride a "pure white palfrey" both "gentle and elegant" (551–552). The Fairy Queen controls her identity and her court, providing for her courtiers, unlike her male foil, King Arthur. She is described as more wealthy and powerful than any mortal king or queen—Semiramis and Octavian specifically—and the inclusion of the description of her horse only emphasizes her power (82, 85). The lai's emphasis on "the horse [as an] important element worthy of description" conveys a link between the hero's prowess and their horse, placing the Fairy Queen as a heroic figure (Rogers 632). Thus, the lai elevates the Fairy Queen by

providing her with powerful equine symbols that convey her strength in comparison to the men around her.

The Fairy Queen is described in great detail compared to the sparsity of what is known about Lanval. There is extreme detail given to the descriptions of her "bliauts of dark silk with [laces]" (de France 59) and "[mantles] of dark silk" (571), while there is no description of Lanval's own armour, clothing, or features. Additionally, the Fairy Queen's own horse is given an elegant descriptive passage: "a pure white palfrey was her mount; / gentle it was and elegant / … on earth was no such animal," while Lanval's steed is given no literary detail (551–554). As expressed by Rogers, it would be important to describe the knight and his horse as if they were connected—"the more formidable the knight, the more deadly and powerful his steed"—however, it is the Fairy Queen's horse that receives this treatment (Rogers 638). Thus, it is intriguing to explore why Lanval's own horse receives so little attention, while the Fairy Queen's is given an extended passage. One can assume that due to this treatment of the Fairy Queen's horse and vestments, she is the central role and main indicator of agency within the lai. The descriptions of the women's clothing, and their horses, only embolden the aspects of their individual agency in comparison to Lanval's. Marie de France forms a narrative of female agency and empowerment within the lai through descriptions of female characters' horses and clothing, highlighting Lanval's lack of individual identity within the lai by contrast.

While Lanval struggles to find an identity, the Fairy Queen's power and eminence is emphasized, elevating her above Lanval. Marie de France allows the women in the lai to fulfill active and powerful roles demonstrated primarily through the poetic descriptions of their garments and animal companions. The Fairy Queen, with her mastery of her horse and descriptions of her hunting garments, is clearly portrayed as a woman in control. The detailing of the Fairy Queen and her damsels is reminiscent of the mythic cataloguing of armour that a male hero would typically undergo in medieval literature. The emphasis on the Fairy

Queen's vestiges is corroborated by Rogers, as male heroes are often the subject of lengthy descriptive passages, wherein "elements worthy of description," such as their horses and armour, would be highlighted to the reader (Rogers 632). Additionally, the Fairy Queen controls a "sparrowhawk," a common symbol of a king's (or a man's) authority (de France 573). As medieval scholar Miller describes, a male knight or hero is often depicted with a "falcon at his wrist" (962). This inversion of gendered description emphasizes how the women take on more focal roles than the men within the lai. Marie de France characterizes the women in Lanval with more detail than the men, seeming to attribute more narrative focus to their actions and agency.

Lanval is dependent on the Fairy Queen to rescue him, as she is completely in control of her own identity and power, in contrast to Lanval relies on the identity he garners from his role within his community. The Fairy Queen operates separate from the confines of this mortal community, and "not even Arthur [can] retain" her (de France 631). The Fairy Queen takes Lanval away from Arthur's court by placing him upon her own steed, rather than providing him a horse to ride alongside her. She "[carries] off this fine young man" on the back of her palfrey, transplanting him within her community at Avalon (644). Lanval's agency is transferred to the Fairy Queen, and he rides off with her as a dependent, not as an equal. As she carries away Lanval, he leaves behind his own horse, abandoning his previous identity and ties to Arthur's community. Additionally, without a horse Lanval is left without a method of transportation and becomes entirely dependent on the Fairy Queen. Lanval's happiness derives from his perceived identity and his ability to function within an effective community. To achieve his desired community, Lanval rejects the identity affiliated with Arthur's corrupt court by leaving behind his horse and becoming a full subject of his new queen. Furthermore, he achieves this happiness by becoming dependent upon a woman to rescue him rather than using his own power.

Horses in Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* represent the identity and agency of their owners. Examining horses

as multifaceted symbols of the individual within medieval literature can provide an analysis of how the characters operate both within the lai and medieval courtly structure. Marie de France's *Lanval* focuses closely on the individual power of the Fairy Queen and the transfer of Lanval's agency to her control. Investigating the deep connection between *chevalier* and *cheval*, this paper demonstrates Lanval's subjugation to the Fairy Queen. The lai's traditionally chivalric equine symbols elevate the Fairy Queen's agency and subvert expectations of gendered power.

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# Architectures of Justice: Sightlines of the Johnsonian Isocolon and the Walpolean Hypallage

Amogha Lakshmi Halepuram Sridhar

**Abstract:** Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole are near cadences to the societal association of architecture and human faculty in the eighteenth century, often concerned with the same question that haunts narratives within texts: what is the place of a transgressor? By examining two highly stylized writers who ground their arguments in setting, I argue that rhetoric constructs sightlines subterraneous to the architecture of justice within their works: Johnson's isocolon challenges the imbalance of the debtors' prison as an institution in *The Idler* essay no. 22 (1758), Walpole's hypallage restlessly shifts the agency of human actors and punitive instruments in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

The eighteenth-century interest in architecture as an instrument of justice is chronologically suspended between the ritual symbolism of Julius Caesar's Capitol in early modern theatre and the utter practicality of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon in modern utilitarian philosophy. A discussion that had commenced with Vitruvian ideas of the ideal body and the influence of the space it inhabits (and therein prizing perfection within parameters of strength, utility and beauty) had, in this sliver of time, been expanded by John Locke and Joseph Addison into the associationist aesthetics of "conceptualizing architecture, the imagination, and the relationship between them" (Townshend 45). England witnessed developments and revivals of architectural forms that gained political and social meaning built upon the values these forms were historically associated with. A society following such ties between architecture and human faculties is often concerned with the same questions that haunt a narrative of retribution: how is justice sustainably enforced

and what is the place of a transgressor? The literature of this period echoes the changing conceptions of habitation and architectural identity in its sprawling castles and disquieting prisons.

Samuel Johnson's essay on debtors' prisons in *The Idler* and Horace Walpole's story *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1758 and 1764 respectively, are both texts that ground their arguments for justice in their settings. Johnson investigates the debtors' prison as a synecdoche for a society that "exposes the liberty of one to the passions of another" and engages in logical argument (Johnson 69). Walpole deals in fiction and goes so far as to embody retributive justice in the eponymous *Castle of Otranto*. Engaging with two highly stylized works, I aim to offer a rhetorical analysis of the construction of justice within their respective narratives. I argue that the architecture of justice in both works is exercised subterraneous to the narrative: while Johnson's isocolon challenges the imbalance of the debtors' prison as an institution in *The Idler* essay no. 22, Walpole's hypallage restlessly shifts the agency of human actors and punitive instruments in *The Castle of Otranto*.

The Johnsonian isocolon is a figure of parallelism: it is a rhetorical device in which "similarly structured elements hav[e] the same length" ("isocolon"). In Johnson's works, arguments of contrasting nature gain rhetorical pitch and the isocolon manifests as balanced clauses. The pattern of isocolon also seeps into smaller divisions of the clause, wherein a second transitive object is parallel to the first. For instance, Johnson states that confinement in a prison is "a loss to the nation" and "no gain to the creditor" (Johnson 69). Here, both objects attributed to "confinement" as a noun and the irregular transitive verb "to be" are parallel in their number of words and word choice. The comparable tool in Walpole's rhetoric, the hypallage, is rooted in transference. Discussed by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* circa 95 CE and by George Puttenham in his lexicon of rhetoric *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), hypallage has come to be defined as "[s]hifting the application of words" and "[m]ixing the order of which words correspond with which others" ("hypallage").

In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the hypallage is a figure of deflection. It appears most often in episodes of confusion and heightened emotional states such as when Hippolita assumes that her husband Manfred, introduced as the prince of Otranto, "dreads the shock of [her] grief" (Walpole 23). The verb "dreads" that ought to apply to the noun indicating her grief, in common parlance, is transferred to "the shock" of her grief, changing an interpersonal causal relationship to one that emphasizes and animates mood. Thus, Johnson and Walpole wield rhetoric to determine the evidence presented before an audience, to direct the reader's gaze. Here, rhetoric is sightline.

Architectural vocabulary lends itself to discussions of justice and governance in the eighteenth century, as was the case in public and press debates. Reflecting the poet Samuel Daniel's use of architectural elements in clear allegory to the immaterial English constitution in 1602, writers in the eighteenth century press persistently associated a nostalgia for old institutions with old halls and pillars, disdainful of the tumults in contemporaneous architecture (Buchanan 43). The societal concern for a nexus of architectural sites that delivered and enforced justice was keen and lasting. Almost a century after Johnson's essay no. 22 appeared in *The Idler*, the historian William Hepworth Dixon provided an account of London's prisons with meticulous detail and emotional prompts. The particulars of Dixon's historical account render Johnson's architecture of premises and arguments in his essay in striking relief. Dixon describes Newgate prison as "massive, dark, and solemn" (Dixon 191), records that the gaoler of Newgate received "a salary of 200l. a-year" circa 1774 and that the fees for debtors was "11s. 4d.," and he recounts also the contagious disease in "[Newgate's] yards and cells" that had threatened the entire city (206). Alongside such harrowing circumstances of the prison, Dixon's account describes the architecture, from the "imposing aspect" of Newgate (191) to its "granite walls, strong enough to resist artillery, unbroken by door or casement" (192).

Johnson, however, does not exchange disquieting visual conditions in a prison for the humanity of his readers. A writ-

er who demonstrates great architectural detail in works like *Rasselas* and *The Vision of Theodore*, Johnson here chooses to resist visual detail. In fact, Johnson's argument begins in the absence of a sightline: "As I was passing lately under one of the gates of this city, I was struck with horror by a rueful cry, which summoned me 'to remember the poor debtors'" (Johnson 69). Johnson's vision being barred at the gates becomes an indictment of this carceral institution within the essay; the cry becomes a cue for reflection. Beyond this, the poor debtor never once enters Johnson's field of vision or that of the reader. This chilling mimesis leads to the central isocolon of the argument against the disproportionality of debtors' prisons: it exposes "the liberty of one" to "the passions of another" (69). Johnson withdraws the debtor from his text as his immediate society does its transgressors from its privileges.

The isocolon is the vehicle of Johnson's demand for justice. As Johnson assumes more than one voice and considers more than one rebuttal over the course of the essay, the isocolon identifies the opposing concepts and counters injustice with symmetry. Particularly in the recognition that civil regulation ought to secure "private happiness" from "private malignity," the isocolon functions as a proto-idealistic dialectic (70). Thus Johnson's sightline extends in both directions. Johnson recognizes that injustice does not originate from the granite-walled architecture of a debtors' prison but from the machinations of such an institution, and hence, constructs his text in remedial symmetry. Johnson criticizes the society where "the distinction between guilt and unhappiness, between casualty and design, is intrusted to eyes blind with interest" (70), and the reference to blind eyes recalls the archetype of personified and impartial Justice, portrayed as a woman with her eyes covered and bearing scales in balance. Yet, Johnson's allusion is also a gesture towards that which is permissible only in the absence of attention and contemplation, in the absence of affected sightlines. The Johnsonian isocolon, then, operates with a sense of justice that a society has not extended to its debtors.

Johnson presents the carceral institution of the debtors' prison as an architecture of visibility, one that removes its victims from public view and necessitates a cry emerging from the cells calling upon passersby "to remember the poor debtors" (69). In a short text of three pages, Johnson persuasively argues that this institution as it exists is ineffectual. Yet Johnson provides a nuanced model of treating debt, or rather the poverty that drives debt, "with the same lenity as other crimes," considering what must happen if a debtor owns property and what must happen if the debtor is experiencing poverty and so on (70). Johnson imitates impartial justice himself, binding his argument to economics of state expense and public policy.

Johnson's closing remark in this essay, however, is an isocolon. This isocolon opens a rigid form to possibility: "We have now learned, that rashness and imprudence will not be deterred from taking credit; let us try whether fraud and avarice may be more easily restrained from giving it" (71). The isocolon is built upon the plain contradiction of taking credit and giving it, and the statement following the semicolon is meant to remedy the statement preceding it. The remedy pivots on a dialectic of failed method and experiment; the remedy is learning. The sightline of this isocolon extends farther than those of others, because Johnson places his challenge upon history and time yet to come. The essay is bound by a second incomplete isocolon: Johnson does not return to the opening image of the individual transgressor. The subtle balance of the argument is skilfully disturbed to indicate that the position of the transgressor as determined by the system of debt is not one that can be resolved at the level of an individual transgressor.

Justice and other resolutions at an individual level demand an imagination of larger and more potent figures. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* identifies itself in the title page as a "Gothic" story that is concerned with lineage and usurpation, and therefore, justice. Manfred has usurped the eponymous castle and styled himself a prince of Otranto. Following the death of his son Conrad in the opening epi-

sode, Manfred is left without an heir, and with a threat of deposition and justice looming over his reign. *The Castle of Otranto* establishes itself as a prophecy narrative, and like any prophecy narrative, risks revealing its climactic turn. The architecture of the text operates with the aim of preventing the fate Manfred dreads for himself, the dread of being identified as a transgressor. Walpole's hypallage repeatedly shifts the agency and animation of the actors internal to the narrative. The promise of justice made explicit by the narrative is fulfilled only at the very end, after the rhetoric has exposed the reader to multiple points of vantage.

The hypallage is often likened to the transferred epithet or an adjective that ought to apply to a noun transferring to another. Walpole overwhelms this expectation with extensive use of noun clauses and compound nouns that change the object, or the subject, of the transitive verb. Following the opening spectacle in the story—the death of Conrad—the narrative description says of Manfred, "the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened … took away the prince's speech" (Walpole 18). Manfred's speechlessness may be attributed to the misfortune of Conrad's death, because this brings doom to his claim over the Castle, yet it is not. Instead, his speechlessness is attributed to the ignorance surrounding the cause, which is expressed as a noun clause. The action of taking speech away is expressed as a transitive verb that applies to the contorted noun clause of the subject. Here, Manfred's confusion is emphasized over his malice, thus offering a glimpse of Manfred's vulnerability that might commute the reader's judgement of his usurpation, his betrayal of his wife Hippolita, his pursuit of the princess Isabella entrusted to his care, and the deaths that occur in the wake of these events.

Walpole constructs the manipulative hypallage alongside the architecture of the Castle with great care. The physical distance and separation of Manfred's chamber from that of Hippolita gives rise to montages of dramatic irony: Manfred's cruel designs to secure an heir, his pursuit of the young princess Isabella who is entrusted to his care, and his schemes to abandon his wife Hippolita are followed

closely by Hippolita's naïve concern for Manfred. The previously discussed hypallage of Hippolita's conjecture that Manfred "dreads the shock of [her] grief" is a striking textual juxtaposition to the dramatic irony (23). The Castle is foregrounded as an active participant in the enforcement of justice in the text. Gothic architecture may then be associated with "a transgressive or oppositional status" (Buchanan 42). As architectural historians have suggested, the Gothic form as an architectural style stands for "chaos" when Classical forms, associated with Greek and Roman artistic exemplars, stand to "express legitimacy" but retains its oppositional nature; when Classical form is defined as "foreign" in this period, the Gothic is its "converse" (43). *The Castle of Otranto*, as a Gothic edifice, is therefore oppositional in the narrative. With Manfred the usurper in its midst, the Castle enforces its own justice and complicates the position of the transgressor. So long as the transgressor is present within its walls, the Castle foils his attempts to secure a claim over the rule of Otranto.

Studies of construction and historical accounts note that the Gothic, the aesthetic that is associated with the inaccessible depth of human experience, is codified by "interlocuters" and their "mediations," far outweighing the form of the Gothic, to conclude that the Gothic is also a "rhetoric" (Murray 1). The scene in the secret passage, where princess Isabella flees Manfred's violation of her person, is an exemplum of Walpolean hypallage operating alongside the Castle. In this scene, Isabella's lamp is extinguished by the wind and a ray of moonshine guides her to the lock of the trapdoor in careful play on visibility and architecture (Walpole 28). Following the darkness of an extinguished lamp, the narrative offers the sightline of hypallage: "Words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation" (27). The object of the inexpressibility of words, or that which words "cannot paint," is the horror of the situation. The situation is material, brought about by chance and architecture. The aesthetic emphasis is on horror, thus providing a swift sightline that meets interiority. Having laid its morality before its audience, *The Castle of Otranto* is an imaginative exercise

with very few stakes. The only justice this architecture inclines towards is a retributive one. Thus, glimpses of emotional interiority make the subtle case that the sympathies of the text lie also with the depth of human experience that is beyond the accessible or moral.

Where, then, do these texts place the transgressor? Johnson and Walpole differ in the way they approach this question. Johnson's attempt at justice is based on inclusion: for Johnson, "[t]he prosperity of a people is proportionate to the number of hands and minds usefully employed" (Johnson 69). Thus, Johnson proposes a change in who is determined as a transgressor, with the aim of lenity and including the largest possible workforce, or energy as currency, within society. Walpole's themes concerning lineage and tradition, on the other hand, provide a simpler answer: the transgressor ought to be expelled from the position usurped. However, both texts arrive at a nexus that emphasizes visibility. The sightlines of rhetoric determine that the transgressor must not be removed from societal sight and concern. Alongside the poignant societal instruction, the rhetorical sightlines bring to light an important literary argument: the story of the transgressor is also a story worth relating.

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# "An Ecstasy of Heroism": Spinozan Immanence and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

William Turcotte

**Abstract:** Gustave Flaubert has commonly stated his respect for seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Contemporary critic Roger Huss picks up on Spinozan influences—like Spinoza's anti-teleological metaphysics of immanence—in Flaubert's novels. While Huss focuses largely on these influences in Flaubert's authorial style and in particular scenes from *Madame Bovary* (1857), like the scene involving Hippolyte's foot operation, I argue that these Spinozan elements are also apparent in Emma Bovary's failed attempts to attain an idealized state of ecstasy. Emma turns towards affair as a means of attaining her desired end in order to transcend beyond a mundane and determined existence—however, within a Spinozan world view of immanence, such transcendence is, for her, a tragic impossibility.

> *Je tombe avec voracité sur mon vieux et trois fois grand Spinoza. Quel génie, quelle œuvre que l'Ethique!*
>
> —Gustave Flaubert, "CCXIX," *Correspondance*

Emma Bovary, the tragic, adulterous, and hysterical heroine of Gustave Flaubert's 1857 novel, *Madame Bovary*, is in some ways a character of her bourgeois time and place. Emma is a young, middle-class woman, passively married to a mediocre older man, Charles Bovary. Under the constraining social conventions of her time, she longs to transcend her barriers to attain a more ideal end. Flaubert's character develops through a battle between active and passive passions—she grows to take on a more active role in a desper-

ate struggle to overcome the mundane determinism of living under such conditions. The seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza describes human nature as a balance between active and passive capacities (a balance which determines a level of freedom, but not complete freedom). Emma's active desires will increase as she turns to an affair as a key means of breaking out of her constraints. The tragedy of Emma Bovary is that she can never completely transcend her barriers to attain the object of her desire; the essence of her desire is always continually out of reach. She is after a teleological end—a sense of absolute freedom, happiness, and passion. This desired end is a form of eternal and absolute ecstasy; it is an ideal and is sought to give deeper meaning and purpose to her life. However, the paradox of treating such a state as a teleological end is that it is ultimately unattainable, or at least always fleeting. Her human passions are limited, even though she continually wants more. The constraints imparted on her through social conventions merely operate under the deterministic cycles of nature. Emma's affairs (and eventually her death), rather than freeing her, only continue the eternal determinism of these natural cycles.

Emma's passivity and her desire to escape it is apparent early in the novel as she starts to attain glimpses of excitement from external causes. After gaining an interest in romantic and chivalric literature, she attains a strong desire for an indescribable notion of love and passion. Such literature, however, only conveys the female character as passive; there needs to be a "white-plumed knight" to bring passion to these female characters. Charles, far from containing such knightly and passionate characteristics, fails to bring this passion to Emma (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 33). She is, in her bourgeois marriage, restrained to a life of repetition and monotony. This existence for her consists of mundane, predictable progressions (marriage, procreation, and death) and repetitive daily cycles (Charles goes to work, Charles comes home, and they both go to sleep). While miraculous *événements* do occasionally give Emma glimpses of romanticized passions (as in the spectacle of the

Vaubyessard ball to which she and Charles were invited), such occasions always end at the mere glimpse of what she wants. These passions would no longer enter her life from such external causes, just as "God had willed" (54). Instead, it seems, her fate would go on to keep her from attaining further "adventure[s] ... [and their] infinite consequences" that she so desperately longs for (54). Given their low to middle-class social standing, the Bovarys' invitation to the Vaubyessard ball proves to be a one-time coincidence. Instead, Emma remains confined to the monotony of the repetitive "series of identical days" and seasons; while her inner longing for passion grows, her constraints keep her from moving beyond her mediocre marriage and existence (54). She waits for more passion-filled events and for romantic saviours like Léon to free her as she constantly idealizes a break from her pre-determined and quiet life of which she has little freedom or control over. However, with each glimpse of ecstasy that entices her (but always ends in disappointment), Emma's activity increases—she slowly begins to seek a more active role in attaining her idealized experiences rather than waiting for the ideal to come to her.

Emma's longing continues to grow, but she ultimately remains limited from transcending to her desired end. Her object of desire becomes focused on an indefinable feeling of "ecstasies she had not yet experienced" (57)—she is, as Baudelaire describes, "in pursuit of the ideal!" (Baudelaire 409). In setting up such an ideal, Emma is guided towards it as a sort of teleological end; the very essence of her being relies on the attainment of this end. Without it, existence is meaningless and amounts to nothing but mundane repetitions. There is a strong Spinozan element in Flaubert's novels that Roger Huss describes in his article "Nature, Final Causality and Anthropocentrism in Flaubert": Flaubert's works are in some ways an "attack on final causes" (291) and "teleological views of nature" (288). This is a fitting statement for Flaubert's self-described "book about nothing" ("Letters" 300). Flaubert goes on to echo these anti-teleological views further in an 1854 letter to Louise Colet: "What is the goal of nature? Well, I think the goal of man-

kind exactly the same. Things exist because they exist, and you can't do anything about it ... We are always turning in the same circle, always rolling the same stone" (Flaubert, "Letters" 310). Flaubert suggests here that there is no teleological end to life—there is no transcendent realm or goal that exists beyond the worldly life that we experience and can work towards. Instead, we are condemned to this singular and embodied realm of existence and daily cycles. Emma's drive becomes a futile one towards unattainable ends, towards an imagined realm that exists beyond her cyclic and worldly existence. While a similar anti-teleological concept makes up a part of the metaphysical world view of the *Ethics*, Spinoza still recognizes that "men *act* always with an end in view ... [and are] always looking only for the final causes … [I]f they fail to discover them from some external source, they have no recourse but to turn to themselves" (*Ethics* I Appendix, emphasis added). Spinoza suggests that we aim towards such ends even though they are nothing but fictitious ideas. In treating her idealized state of ecstasy as an end, Emma will have to turn inward to pursue her passions more actively after failing to receive such an end from external causes—the failure of further invitations to balls and the initial departure of Léon initiates this turn for Emma. Emma sets out to attain a state "where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium" (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 131). This state is what she pursues as her ideal end, and she is starting to realize that she must progress from passivity to greater activity to attain it. However, that same circle, with its repetitive cycles of the seasons, daily life, mundanity and mediocrity, along with the limits of human freedom, always inhibits Emma—in a Spinozan fashion— from reaching any end.

Emma begins to realize a need for active pursuit after her initial flirtations with Léon. She attains a mere glimpse of passion with Léon, but after he soon leaves for Paris, the narrator's free indirect discourse offers Emma's realization to the reader: "Why did she not keep him from leaving, beg him on her knees, when he was about to flee from her? And she cursed herself for not having loved Léon" (101). When

Rodolphe enters the picture, she is hesitant, but continues moving towards greater agency. She is encouraged by Rodolphe to embrace the passions rather than "cry out against them" (117). Her passions for Rodolphe grow in this scene in correlation with the events of the Yonville agricultural fair. The fair is an event that celebrates the harvest and offers symbols of natural cycles, rebirth, spring, and fertility. Agriculture does not represent humanity's complete domination of nature, rather it suggests a level of cooperation between human activity and the forces and cycles of the natural world. Ultimately, human existence functions within the necessary cycles of nature. Her growing passion for Rodolphe in this scene may symbolize a rebirth for Emma as she attains further glimpses of her ideal ecstasy and starts to actively move closer towards it. However, the very theme of spring and the fair itself continues to ground her reality in cyclic determinism—spring always turns to winter eventually, as it does figuratively for Emma. After starting their affair, Emma attempts to prevent this figurative changing of the seasons to prolong the state of passion with Rodolphe and break from a life of passivity and determinism by meeting him unexpectedly (135). Rodolphe, however, soon becomes bored of Emma (just as she had become bored of her husband), and the inevitable cycle of mundane existence returns to her.

When Léon returns from Paris (following her affair with Rodolphe), Emma increases her active desires further through her pursuit of adultery, which she uses to overcome the mundane passivity of her existence and to attain her ideal end. As Georges Bataille opines, human "[e]roticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children" (Bataille 11). Bataille discusses human eroticism as transgressing the seasonal and habitual sexuality of animals to express a more subjective and active "innerness of the desire ... We fail to realize this because man is everlastingly in search of an object *outside* himself but this object answers the *innerness* of his desire" (29). In Spinozan terms, this form of human eroticism is a higher expression of the

active capacities, raising humanity to a level of freedom under which we are less constrained by passive, deterministic forces and cycles of nature. Emma's affairs are an attempt at gaining more freedom and become necessary to guide her beyond the determinism of passivity towards her ideal end of ecstasy.

Emma's active pursuits become more evident in her affair with Léon; while both feel immense passion for one another initially, Emma continues towards becoming the pursuer in the relationship. Her desperation for attaining her end, which often seems so close, guides her towards such activity: "And she took full and free advantage... Whenever she was seized with the desire to see Léon, she would set out upon any pretext whatever" (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 218). Through such actions, Léon is "becoming her mistress rather than she his" (219). While passions flourish for the two of them initially, the season eventually changes to autumn (227) as Léon starts to get bored of Emma, and Emma becomes "sick of him as he was weary of her. Emma found again in adultery all the platitudes of marriage" (231). By actively pursuing her end goal she gets further glimpses of her ideal ecstasy, but she remains limited. Her freedom only goes so far in her affairs—ultimately, she cannot control either Léon's or Rodolphe's passions for her. As if by a force of nature, she is inevitably constrained by cycles that always bring back moments of despair and mundanity.

The unattainability of Emma's teleological end is epitomized by the human limitations of arriving at a state of eternal flourishing. This limit coincides with Spinoza's description of humanity as in balance between the completely active (God, Nature) and the completely passive (inanimate objects). Humanity seems free to an extent but is ultimately unable to express complete freedom: "Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way... [Human] will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary cause" (Spinoza, *Ethics* Ip29, Ip32). As Gilles Deleuze describes it in his 1970 book on Spinoza, we have "capacities for affecting and being affected on this plane of imma-

nence" (Spinoza 125). The plane is the range between these capacities, but we are limited from transcending completely beyond it towards complete freedom—there is no teleological, transcendent end beyond this plane, even though, as Spinoza states (and as Emma tragically expresses), we act as if there is (Spinoza, *Ethics* I Appendix). Emma longs to break from her mundane cycles, but her imagined teleological end is only ever glimpsed at through her affairs—like an orgasm, these glimpses are only ever fleeting, or not quite the everlasting ecstasy hoped for. Instead, there is always longing for more. The constant crashing back to mundanity after *la petite mort* presents an aspect of the cyclic nature of an immanent (non-transcendent) existence. Nevertheless, Emma increases in desperation, even though she is never ultimately able to reach her end. After her failed attempts to actively pursue her end through her affairs, the only end she can conceive of to remove herself from the confining and seemingly determined cycles of existence is death.

After her affairs have failed and her financial debts become insurmountable, she directs herself towards the end of death. Feeling abandoned by her lovers and now under growing pressures from her creditor, Monsieur Lheureux, Emma's anxiety reaches its climax as she rushes in a flurry towards her suicidal end:

> Now her plight, like an abyss, loomed before her. She was panting as if her heart would burst. Then in an ecstasy of heroism, which made her almost joyous, she ran down the hill, crossed the cow-plank, the footpath, the alley, the market, and reached the pharmacy. (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 248)

Emma's failure to reach an end beyond her life of mundanity has left her in a seemingly abysmal plight. Her last chance for escape, like "an ecstasy of heroism" (248), comes to her at this moment. Always associating a sense of ecstasy with her ends, she directs herself towards this final solution (via the pharmacy's arsenic). Her suicide is more than just an attempt to avoid the pain of failed love and material repossession; it is as if death is the only way to transcend the inevi-

table determinism of the mundane cycles of her existence. However, even her death is not an end. Emma's death is still strongly situated within the inescapable cycle of nature, and the continuation of these cycles will persist through those who continue living, like her own biological extension, her child, Berthe. Death cannot give Emma her ideal ecstasy nor an escape from the cosmic cycles of nature. Emma comes to realize this fate with "an atrocious, frantic, desperate laugh" (257) while she overhears the blind man singing in the background. The re-emergence of the blind man at this moment hints at his eerily prophetic abilities. At the moment of Emma's death, the blind man continues the song he had begun earlier when Emma and Léon were enflamed in their affair. The song, being about the seasons ("summer"), passion ("dream her heart away") and fertility (the song's agricultural references), is a warning about the inevitability of the cycles of nature (210, 257–258). The blind man reminds Emma at her deathbed that the cycle is inescapable and will only continue after her within those she had loved and given life to.

Rather than merely portray Emma Bovary as a character who is unable to arrive at satisfaction because of mental hysteria, Flaubert uses his adulteress to tragically depict the limits of the human passions. He enforces these limits in a manner that invokes the Spinozan-Deleuzian plane of immanence, and highlights the dangers in striving towards unattainable ideal ends. The objects of Emma's desire are always something existing outside the self. No matter how much freedom and pursuit one practices in attaining such objects, it is impossible to exhibit complete control to attain the desired outcome of the absolute ideal. Constraint on absolute freedom exists at the sociological level (the institution of marriage, the *mœurs de Provence*), the natural level (the cycles of the seasons), and the individual level (the psychological struggle between varying levels of active capacities and different subjective, inner passions). As Emma tragically realizes, greater active pursuit towards a teleological end like infinite pleasure cannot allow one to tran-

scend these obstacles—we are instead merely condemned to continue to "exist..., [always] turning in the same circle" (Flaubert, "Letters" 310).

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# "Useful to Hygiene and Favourable to Morals": Maintaining the Period Sex Taboo in *The Romance of Lust*

Madison George-Berlet

**Abstract:** In this essay, I use medical texts from the Victorian era and secondary criticism to argue that the period sex taboo in the Victorian pornographic text *The Romance of Lust* (1873–1876) functions to protect the female characters' gentility. I argue that the pornographic text shifts the rules of acceptable behaviors to include illicit acts such as extramarital, premarital, and incestuous sex, but introduces the period sex taboo to realign the female characters with Victorian values of delicacy, modesty, and purity.

In *The Romance of Lust* (1873–1876), Charles and his lovers perform sexual acts considered taboo in the Victorian era including incest, anal sex, and same-sex sex acts, and yet one taboo remains unbroken: the period sex taboo. From his sexual introduction with Mrs. Benson through his affairs with Miss Evelyn and his two sisters Mary and Eliza, all routinely abstain from having sex while the women are menstruating, citing health risks and general ill feeling. While menstruation is used as a narrative technique to allow Charles to sexually initiate his younger sisters, the inclusion of periods (which are typically ignored) in the pornographic text signals that the maintenance of the period sex taboo serves a distinct rhetorical purpose. In this essay I will consider the history of period mythology and Victorian ideas about menstruation to argue that the maintenance of the period taboo in *The Romance of Lust* secures the respectability, modesty, and purity of the female characters by allowing them periods of rest and providing a method of falsifying virginity for marriage.

The erotic appeal of vaginal blood in pornography is inconsistent. Sarah Read analyzes the eighteenth-century fascination and fetishization of excessively bloody defloration that provides a precedent for bloody sex in print pornography as an erotic stimulant. Read argues that part of the "defloration mania" of the eighteenth century was dependent on eroticizing female bleeding, including menstrual blood. Fanny Hill, the protagonist of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), experiences multiple partial or figurative deflorations including a faked defloration achieved by having sex while on her period. Martha Vicinus in her book *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, however, argues that overall, the appearance of periods in Victorian pornography is rare. In *My Secret Life*, one of the most popular pornographic texts of the era, the narrator makes a point of stating that he did not enjoy having sex with menstruating women, "although he managed to overcome his distaste on several occasions" (Vicinus 40). While these examples provide a precedent for bleeding, periods, and period sex in pornography, they treat menstruation as either erotic or disgusting, neither of which apply to *The Romance of Lust*. The infrequency of menstruation in pornography, coupled with the unusual treatment of it within the narrative, discussed below, implies that the inclusion of the period sex taboo is deliberate.

Victorian attitudes towards menstruation and menstrual sex were primarily influenced by the Western Judeo–Christian interpretations of the menstruation taboo, which are predominantly negative. The Bible denounces menstruation, women who menstruate, and men who touch women who menstruate as unclean, and prohibits men having sex with women who are menstruating: "If any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days" (Lev. 15.24). Menstruation and menstrual blood are conceptualized by the Bible as contaminating and polluting, and thus verbal and spatial separation is mandated (Gottlieb 147). In an 1874 medical text, Augustus Kinsley Gardner advises Victorian readers that sex during menstruation is harmful for both parties. He cites Moses as the

first authority on the matter and identifies the purification practices described in the Bible as "useful to hygiene and favorable to morals," demonstrating the Bible's continued influence on Victorian understandings of menstruation (Gardner 134, 139). While Mrs. Benson states that "all connection between men and women must cease at this time," imitating the directions of Moses in Leviticus, *The Romance of Lust* goes against the traditional Biblical edict, as the text does not treat women themselves as pollutive during their periods (I: 53). Although they do not engage in vaginal or anal sex during menstruation, Mrs. Benson and Miss Evelyn sometimes perform oral sex on Charles during their periods in response to his begging for intercourse, an action which pollutes neither party. Charles does not see women on their periods as disgusting or refrain from asking to engage in sex acts with them, suggesting that it is not religious prohibition which prevents the characters from engaging in sex during menstruation.

Instead of the dominant religious, and thus negatively morally skewed, perception of menstruation, *The Romance of Lust* engages in the medical discourse regarding period sex and poses it as a potential health risk to all involved. This rationale is also questioned within the text as the characters suffer no physical harm from the few times the taboo is broken. Gardner, if taken as an average example of the Victorian medical attitude towards menstruation, advises his patients that "reason and experience both show that sexual relations at the menstrual period are very dangerous for both man and woman" (143). Gardner disapproves of women engaging in any strenuous activity during menstruation as "all undue excitement is injurious at this period" (143). He additionally characterizes periods as debilitating to women and warns against menstrual sex potentially causing nervous disorders and hemorrhaging (Gardner 143–144). Mrs. Benson, in her first sex lesson to Charles, warns that sex during a woman's period can be dangerous for both parties. She additionally states that they must not have sex for twenty-four hours after bleeding has stopped as "in some cases a virulent white discharge occasionally followed for some

hours, sufficiently acrid to affect [his] local health" (I: 65). Miss Evelyn, too, warns that it will bring them both "very great harm" (I: 128). For men, Gardner warns against menstrual blood causing "superficial excoriations which resemble chancres" and "blenorrhagias which resemble specific strains of gonorrhoeas" (146). However, when Charles has sex with Mary during her first period, without either of their knowledge that it was coming on, he suffers no ill effects (I: 128). Miss Evelyn additionally intends to use her period to mimic defloration, suggesting that she is not concerned with ill effects to her husband or herself (II: 24). Despite warnings, the narrative disproves the characters' own claim that having sex during menstruation is physically damaging. Having proven that Charles wants to engage in sexual intercourse with the menstruating women and that there is no tangible religious or physical punishment for doing so, Charles's respect of the period taboo instead identifies him as capable of exercising restraint for the sake of his lovers and contributes to his respectability as a future gentleman.

The maintenance of the period taboo most significantly identifies the women of *The Romance of Lust* as gentlewomen by identifying them as delicate and preserving their modesty and purity. In the text, Mrs. Benson, Miss Evelyn, and Mary are repeatedly described as unwell during menstruation. This characterization of the menstruating women identifies them as delicate and thus separated from working women and racialized conceptions of women of colour. The women refer to their menstruation as them being "unwell," and Mary repeatedly complains of severe headaches (I: 125). Charles's mother is also described as "feeling poorly" when the other women are menstruating, intimating that she too is synced and experiencing poor health as a result. The idealized Victorian woman was imagined as delicate, weak, and gentle, and this ideal is shaped by the implication that these characteristics apply to white women only (Stone and Sanders 29). This identification separated white women from non-white bodies which were coded as stronger but less evolutionarily advanced and thus better for labour, aiding the goals of British imperialism to subjugate and

enslave non-white bodies as a source of free labour (Stone and Sanders 29). Stone and Sanders argue that "erroneous assessments embedded in Victorian conceptions of gender and race led to the purportedly normal, universal female body being labeled as child-like, weak, fragile, and white" (30). Mary and the other women's repeated identification of weakness while on their period reinforces their whiteness and thus their status as gentlewomen.

Mrs. Benson, Miss Evelyn, and Mary are granted the privilege to abstain from most or all sex acts and enjoy a period of rest during menstruation, which is in itself a show of their gentility. While only the governesses are discussed as having employment and sex is generally conceptualized as fun in *The Romance of Lust*, it is still the primary labour performed by women in the text. In her analysis of Victorian attitudes towards menstruation, Vicinus examines *My Secret Life* to look at the treatment of period sex and notices that "at no point, significantly, does he mention working-class women or prostitutes, the classes with which he had most sexual contact, being incapacitated by menstruation, maids seem not to have excused themselves from any part of their arduous routine" (40–41). Charles's lovers, while they still occasionally perform oral sex, are not required to engage either in sexual labour or labour of any kind (besides the governesses who continue to give lessons), reinforcing their elevated position in a society where "women of all but the most wealthy classes worked" and few were in a secure enough position to avoid labouring during menstruation (Stone and Sanders 36).

Maintaining the period sex taboo also preserves the respectability of Charles's sex partners by contradicting popular conceptions of women as especially licentious, lustful, and unable to control themselves when on their periods. Maria Parsons writes that "from the 1840s on, menstrual bleeding became the sign of swelling and explosion whose corresponding behavioural manifestations were aligned with sexual excitement and animals in heat" (67). Comparisons with women to animals contributed to menstruating women being "rendered as 'out of control' and in need of

containment" (Parsons 67). Parsons also traces the connection between women, vampires, and menstrual blood as reflecting "notions of female sexuality as lascivious and licentious" (Parsons 67). The girls and women in *The Romance of Lust* are given similar descriptors for their sexual appetite, such as Eliza who is described by Charles as "a rare example of a truly salacious and voluptuous nature" (I: 131). However, this description is applied to Eliza before menarche and this language never appears regarding a woman who is actively menstruating. Menstruating women are instead depicted as actively uninterested in sex and potentially physically incapable of enjoying it. When Charles engages in sexual intercourse with Mary during her first period, he notices that he had intercourse with her "without apparently exciting her in the usual way," implying that her period is decreasing her enjoyment of sex rather than increasing it, despite Mary not being aware either that she is on her period nor that she is not supposed to be engaging in sex at that time (I: 128). Mary has "an instinctive reluctance" to engage in sex with Charles during her period (I: 128). The use of "instinctive" is in direct contrast with the dominant thought which attributed women's increased sexual appetite during their periods to an animalistic and thus innate instinct. Therefore, the maintenance of the period sex taboo allows the women to remain respectable by separating them from lower classes of women as well as divorcing them from popular animalistic depictions of women who menstruate, identifying them as gentlewomen and protecting their alleged respectability.

The mythologies surrounding periods themselves, including the women's cycles lining up with the full moon and Charles's ability to sense their periods by the smell of their breath, protects the women's modesty by sparing them having to repeatedly reveal their physical state to Charles. The narrative instead establishes Charles's ability to detect periods through various culturally popular and text-specific myths. In Parsons's analysis of menstrual pathologies, she discusses the moon-bound vampires as relating back to the

common cultural connection between women, snakes, and the moon: "The sexually undulant wall of the womb renews its wall after one wave-peak of the menstrual cycle: the woman renews her sexual self after shedding blood as the snake sheds its skin" (qtd. in Parsons 69). In *The Romance of Lust*, the connection between women's menstrual cycles and the moon is consistent, as all of the women menstruate exactly with the moon cycle. Mrs. Benson explains to Charles that menstruation "happened at the full or the new moon, generally the former," which is supported by Miss Evelyn and Mary's periods falling on the full moon later in the text (I: 53). The women's periods lining up exactly with the full moon each month allow Charles to intimate when they will be menstruating. This method of detection is evidenced with Miss Evelyn's wedding, when Charles notes that with "Miss Evelyn's choice of the marriage day on the full moon, [he] could not help imagining that she intended to help her deception with the advent of her menstruation" (II: 4). Charles can also tell that a woman is on her period based on the smell of her breath, a period myth which seems to be unique to the text, but provides an additional method for identifying menstruation. It is first noted with Mrs. Benson and then applied to Miss Evelyn as his way of "discovering that Miss Evelyn was exactly in the same state" (I: 54). Openly discussing their periods with Charles, after the initial educational experiences, would suggest immodesty on behalf of the women as witnessed in this passage from Gardner:

> The woman when she has her periods takes the greatest care to conceal it from all eyes.... She considers her condition as a blot or an infirmity; and although her modesty … has been spared by the omnipotence of her husband, she blushes to herself at the tribute which she is compelled to pay to nature. (147)

The use of period myths allows Charles to know when the women are menstruating and erases the need for them to immodestly disclose their condition. Charles can tell when

women are menstruating and give them time to abstain from sex without their having to tell him each month, and thus preserve their modesty.

The women of *The Romance of Lust* who refuse to engage in period sex ensure their purity within the realm of the pornographic text by forming a defensible moral boundary and engaging in a time of purification. As the girls and women repeatedly participate and enjoy premarital, extramarital and incestuous sex, all of which would be ruinous in Victorian England, the period sex taboo functions as a moral boundary that the women are able to maintain and defend. Refusing Charles when he wishes to have sex with them during menstruation functions similarly to a woman refusing sex in a non-pornographic text. The women protect their bodies during menstruation as women in a non-pornographic text would protect their virginity. Though they refuse few acts in the narrative, the period sex taboo shows that the women have inhibitions and restraint, aligning them with Victorian conceptions of moral womanly behaviour. In popular discourse, mainstream medical writers claimed that it was "dishonourable for a woman to allow her husband to have sex with her during her period" (Read 168). As Read argues, Fanny Hill's willingness to have sex during her period "points to Hill's lack of inhibition" and paints her as morally compromised (173). Additionally, in Galenic and humoral-based medicine, periods were considered as a way for the female body to flush itself of impurities—similar to bloodletting, which Mrs. Benson intimates when she calls menstruation a "relief to the system" (I: 53). By refusing to have sex during menstruation, the women maintain the purifying act of menstruation and defend their purity within the text.

Menstrual sex also allows the women to maintain a physical appearance of purity by providing a methodology for the women to appear "intact" on their wedding nights and thus secure marriage. This strategy is explicitly employed by Miss Evelyn who times her wedding night to coincide with the full moon. She explains to Charles that she intended for her period to provide the bleeding associated

with loss of virginity; however, she was already pregnant with Charles's child (II: 24). Although unsuccessful, Miss Evelyn's plan regarding her wedding night provides a strategy for Mary, Eliza, and Charles's other lovers to appear pure for their future husbands and thus secure good marriages in the later volumes.

In *The Romance of Lust*, the period sex taboo is enforced by both the female and male characters to preserve Victorian values within the alternative norms of the pornographic text. The narrative departs from the traditional treatments of menstruation that ignore it, eroticize it, or condemn it as sinful. The text additionally contradicts its own claims that period sex is physically dangerous for both men and women. Instead, through the maintenance of the period sex taboo, the women are identified as gentile through their separation from lower class and racialized women, and by maintaining both their modesty and purity. Thus, the period sex taboo in *The Romance of Lust* functions to provide a way for women who engage in illicit sex to maintain their respectability in the pornographic text.

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# "The Other Love Satisfied Me": Passionate and Familial Love in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

Errin Johnston-Watson

**Abstract:** This essay examines relationships in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878), with a detailed examination of the differences between familial and passionate love. Through an analysis of the three main families in the story (the Karenins, Oblonksys, and Levins), familial love is proven to be the "correct" form of love. With references to Tolstoy's own life, as well as the major economic and societal developments in Russia during the period, I argue that *Anna Karenina* establishes familial love as the only "correct" form of love and the only one that results in a fulfilling life.

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) deals directly with families and love. The novel is introduced with the famous lines "all happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy 1). These lines go on to represent the unique struggles felt by the Levins, Karenins, and Oblonskys as they navigate family life and explore how passion and modernity affect the family unit. The greatest factor in determining happiness in *Anna Karenina* is loving "correctly," which is demonstrated through these three families. Familial love, love experienced within the traditional family structure and centred on the continuation of the family, is the "correct" form of love, while passionate love only results in destruction. Linked with passionate love is the idea of modernization, whereas familial love is linked to nature, spirituality, and childhood. The characters within *Anna Karenina* have their choices reflected in both the settings they live in and their attributes; while Kitty Shcherbatskaya is full of "childlike brightness" and lives in the country, Anna Karenina is at the height of fashion and living

in the city, never able to fully settle down with Alexei Vronsky elsewhere (26). Modernity is linked to the unhappiness felt by Anna and her affair—"she cannot be calm and dignified" while an illegitimate wife and modern woman living apart from her true husband Alexei Karenin—and nature and childlikeness are linked to the "correct" form of love experienced by Kitty and Constantine Levin (168). Through this essay, I will show how there is ultimately only one form of "correct" love in *Anna Karenina*, that being familial love. This essay will also display that familial love itself must be grounded in the natural world and children; if not, the family will cease to be a happy one and join the many unique unhappy families.

The traditional family structure, consisting of a father, mother, and children, is an ideal for Tolstoy, which ultimately stems from his own upbringing. Tolstoy's own parents both died when he was a young child, and he craved the familial upbringing he had known so briefly (Simmons 4). Traces of his lived experiences can be found throughout the novel: news accounts of Anna Stepanova Pirogova's suicide by train, mirroring Anna's own death at the end of the novel, undoubtedly link the two together (Tula Provincial News 1872). Stepanova's suicide quickly followed the end of her affair with Tolstoy's friend, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Bibikov (Blaisdell). Further embodying Tolstoy's own experiences is Levin: as Levin gives to Kitty, Tolstoy gave his wife a diary he had written in his youth, containing a number of sexual acts that would go on to greatly disturb her throughout their marriage. Tolstoy's wife, Sophia, further confirms that many things from *Anna Karenina* are directly linked to their own lives, including how Kitty reflects herself: "The whole of my husband's past is so dreadful that I don't think I will [sic] ever be able to accept it" (S. Tolstoy). *Anna Karenina* is grounded in Tolstoy's lived experiences and what he deems to be "correct" and "incorrect." Levin stands in for Tolstoy as a moralistic family man with Kitty by his side, while Anna Stepanova Pirogova and Anna Karenina are forever linked by their adulterous relationships and suicides.

The survival of the family is necessary for characters in the novel to find fulfillment in life—and whether the family is happy one does not matter as much as the fact that it is still a family. While Stiva Oblonsky repeatedly cheats on his wife Dolly throughout the novel, he manages to reconcile his familial relations with her. They may not necessarily be a happy family, but they still remain one. Stiva's cheating, however, is not his main offence against the family: it is the fact that his affair leads Anna to Moscow and to meet Count Vronsky. As well-known literary critic George Steiner writes, "the Oblonsky episode is more than a prelude in which the principal motifs are stated with consummate artistry; it is the wheel which sets multitudinous wheels of the narrative in effortless motion" (802). Essentially, the restoration of one unhappy family is what creates another. Stiva's infidelity sets the stage for the adultery that occurs in the rest of the book; within the first three sentences, readers are made aware of his affair. However, Stiva is presented as a likeable character, and Anna as an irritating and oftentimes vicious one, making Stiva's affair "appropriate." Stiva's infidelity is tolerable because it serves as a cure for his boredom and nothing more; he is "married and [loves his] wife, but had been fascinated by another woman," which prompted his cheating (Tolstoy 37). Stiva's lust for passionate encounters, rather than simply being able to enjoy his family and his home, never goes beyond the scope of lust, allowing for him to maintain his family (albeit poorly). Stiva ends the novel as a "Member of the Committee of a Commission of something or other," a position seemingly made up to ensure that he can take care of his family (732). Stiva's affair is permissible because he remains strongly bound to his family—something that Anna does not do.

The Karenins are yet another family facing discontentment. While readers are not given an in-depth look into what their family life is like prior to Anna meeting Count Vronsky, both Karenin and Anna seem discontent with one another upon Anna's return to St. Petersburg. When they meet at the train station, Anna is unhappy with Karenin's

"gristly ears" (95), and while Karenin is seemingly happy to see Anna and greets her with kind words, his tone reveals him to be "[ridiculing] those who would use such words in earnest" (95). The varying shades of dissatisfaction shown within the families early on introduce readers to the notion of unhappy families being unique. Unlike Stiva, Anna does not go on to have a harmless extramarital affair but gives in to the forbidden and falls in love with Vronsky, breaking up her family and resulting in total unhappiness and dissatisfaction. As Anna mimics Stiva's behaviour, Karenin and Dolly follow suit and parallel each other in their dedication to their work, Dolly's being raising her children and Karenin's being politics. With Anna's affair far surpassing the likes of Stiva's, she will fall from society and be set upon the path to her eventual death.

The Levins are ultimately the only family that have true happiness in *Anna Karenina*. While Levin grapples with his faith throughout the novel, he ends up happy and with the beginnings of a family. Kitty, too, learns the joys of motherhood and seems perfectly fit to start her own family. The success of their family is dependent on Levin's feelings for Kitty, which seem to go beyond love and are almost spiritual. When discussing these feelings with Stiva, Levin tells him "this is not love … It is not [a] feeling but some external power that has seized [him]" (35). Levin's love for Kitty goes beyond an ordinary lustful relationship, which is why his becomes the happiest family. Levin pushes aside passionate love before he starts a relationship with Kitty; he "could not imagine the love of a woman without marriage, and even pictured to himself a family first and then the woman who would give him the family" (87). Levin's idealization of the family, and his greater desire for a family than for a wife, allows him to fill his own life with familial love and happiness. Their family also proves a happy one due to their link with childlikeness; when Levin thinks of Kitty, he quickly thinks of her "childlike brightness and kindness" (26). This, in turn, reminds him of his own childhood: "her smile … carried him into a fairyland [that] softened and filled [him] with tenderness—as he remembered feeling on

rare occasions in his early childhood" (26). The association of Kitty with childlikeness ultimately shows her goodness and compatibility for family-man Levin. Childlikeness in *Anna Karenina* is associated with natural goodness, and this is reflected in those who adhere to "correct" familial standards of love.

In contrast, Vronsky and Anna are shown forcing unnatural youthfulness and beauty upon themselves. Vronsky is "prematurely [balding]" and "[draws] his cap over the bald patch" to hide it (164), while Anna is always conscious of looking alluring for Vronsky, believing "she could hold him only by means of her love and attractiveness" (603). Claudia Moscovici writes in her essay "The Unifying Role of Tolstoy's Conception of Childhood" that "children assume a privileged role in Tolstoy's works … because the author believes that they offer the clearest vision of our spiritual continuity" (504). Children are a representation of the natural goodness of the world, and Tolstoy reflects childlikeness in characters that also harken back to this natural state; children's "personalities harmoniously combine socialised influences and natural tendencies, such that they provide a sharp contrast to the artificial behaviour of most of the aristocratic adults around them" (Moscovici 504). Children lack the falsity that makes up many of the adulterous characters—Stiva's seemingly made-up job, Vronsky's attempt to hide his balding—and have a link to nature and innocence, as is easily seen in Kitty. Children represent something natural in a world that is becoming more artificial and modern, which places an even greater importance these characters and their childlikeness.

The association of family and social structure with modernity allows for a clear reading of the rapidly occurring modernization of Russia within *Anna Karenina* to be associated with the loss of the traditional structure of a family. While familial and "good" characters like Levin are associated with farming and the natural world, adulterous characters like Anna and Stiva are associated with the railway and modernity. Anne Hruska details Tolstoy's use of serfdom as

a representation of the family and discusses how modernization affects both the peasantry and family: "*Anna Karenina* is the novel in which Tolstoy examines most explicitly the relationship between social change and family structure" (637). Anna's first and last scenes in the novel are both at the train station; as a symbol of modernity, the railroad represents both a changing Russia and annihilation of the family unit. Characters often seen visiting the train station—Vronsky, Anna, and Stiva—are all characters who openly participate in passionate and romantic love, with two of the characters openly rebuking their families in the process. The characters who are not often seen at the railway—Dolly, Levin, and Kitty—all end up being characters who recognize the "correct" way of living, which is to honour one's family and to live a natural life in the country. Therefore, the modernization of Russia, being associated with the downfall of families, is inextricably linked to the "incorrect" passionate love and adultery that Tolstoy condemns in *Anna Karenina*.

While there are many scenes that predict Anna's downfall, nothing fully seals her fate until she abandons her children and betrays the duties of motherhood. While Anna has a bond with her son Serezha, it is ultimately one she gives up for Vronsky: "I live without [Serezha] and exchanged his love for another's and did not complain of the change as long as the other love satisfied me" (Tolstoy 691). This "other love" discussed by Anna is passionate love, and it is what directly tears her away from her motherly duties and her son. Anna's affair with Vronsky removes her from her most vital duty, which is what condemns her in this novel. Anna's second child is another demonstration of how this "incorrect" love does not satisfy her, as she feels no real love for her daughter: "at the sight of this child, she realized still more clearly that what she felt for her could not even be called love in comparison with her feeling for Serezha" (489). Anna's lack of love for her daughter draws on the fact that her relationship with the father, Vronsky, is one only of passion and not of any kind of familial attachment. Anna abandons her duties as a mother, both in neglecting her daughter and leaving Serezha behind for passionate love, and has no ties

to family to hold onto when she needs them. Unlike Anna, Dolly is the perfect example of a woman who must rely on familial love; Dolly may not have Stiva's romantic love anymore, but she has her children and therefore keeps her family somewhat intact. Anna's betrayal of her children is the greatest crime that she can commit, and she becomes an enemy to motherhood. Anna's actions against her children lead to the complete breakdown of her family life with both Karenin and Vronsky, and she is unable to be a mother.

The final condemning factor in Anna's life is her devotion to the "other love." Throughout the novel, readers see predictions of Anna's death several times, which are all linked to her passionate relationship with Vronsky. In "Tolstoy's Physical Descriptions," D. S. Merezhkovsky discusses the similarities between Anna and Vronsky's horse Frou Frou, asking, "did fate not send [Vronsky] a warning in the death of Frou Frou?" (776). The depiction of the animalistic passionate love of Anna and Vronsky allows for an easy comparison of Anna with Frou Frou; like the horse, Anna gives herself up to Vronsky completely, and Vronsky "without knowing it" allows for something terrible to happen (Tolstoy 182). Frou Frou, Vronsky's prized racehorse, is killed during a competition while Vronsky is riding her due to a fatal misjudgment Vronsky makes. Upon Frou Frou's crash, "[Vronsky's] face distorted with passion, pale and with quivering jaw" (182). This scene, so easily linked with Anna herself, reveals Vronsky's carelessness with passion. Furthering the foreshadowing of Anna's death and her comparison to Frou Frou is the depiction of Vronsky and Anna consummating their love for the first time. Not only does this scene describe their love as an act of murder and shame but it shows another picture of Vronsky's passion: "Pale, with trembling lower jaw, he stood over her, entreating her to be calm, himself not knowing why or how" (135). This direct comparison and parallel language, and the death of both Anna and Frou Frou linked to Vronsky, emphasizes how dangerous passionate love ends up being for those involved.

As they have no familial bonds, Anna and Vronsky's romantic love becomes their defining characteristic and

consumes their entire relationship with one another. D. S. Merezhkovsky stresses that Anna "never speaks with [Vronsky] about anything except love" (772). The passion they feel throughout the novel is impulsive and all-consuming; the novel never discusses what they have in common, nor what they talk about during most of their meetings. Their love leaves them with nothing else, and when their passion ceases to satisfy them, Anna can no longer stand to live. Anna's death is so violent and vindictive that Vronsky cannot recover from it and ultimately loses his love for her: "[Vronsky] tried to recall his best moments with her, but they were for ever poisoned … He could think of her only as triumphant, having carried out the threat of inflicting on him totally useless but irrevocable remorse" (707). Passionate love fails them, and as Anna has no love for her daughter, she has no familial tie to Vronsky. This final scene with a grief-stricken Vronsky exemplifies the destruction that passionate love brings upon people and how passionate love affairs are not sustainable.

*Anna Karenina* is the tragic story of a passionate love affair that ended in death. Anna's actions and death at the end of the novel demonstrate how important familial love is and that it must be the one thing that people accept and follow. Anna may have been dissatisfied with her life before Vronsky, but she had a family, a child, and good standing in society. Her betrayal of familial love, in favour of the artificial and modern passionate love, causes her ruin. Dolly, while no longer holding Stiva's lust, comes out relatively unscathed, with her children and family there to support her, and as Stiva's affair was lacking in emotion, he is also allowed to keep his family. Finally, Levin and Kitty go on to be a shining example of how important familial love is to a happy and prosperous life. The key to living a fulfilling life is to have a family, whether it be happy or not, as passionate love ultimately gives way to ruin.

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# Moonlit Irony: Excavating the Metaphysics of Marginalized Relationships in "The Goose Fish"

Maya Linsley

**Abstract:** Howard Nemerov's 1977 poem "The Goose Fish" is lauded by critics as a staple of poetic irony. With a close reading of the poem's several intertwining layers of consciousness and social narrative, and engagement with relevant scholarship on the life and works of Nemerov, I argue that this irony is twofold: while it is undoubtedly an ironic manipulation of a sexual encounter, it is also a more serious commentary on the condition of shame and sexuality in marginalized relationships.

Rife with dark irony, Howard Nemerov's "The Goose Fish" (1977) meditates on sex and secrecy as contextualized through the relationship between two lovers. Both a symbol of shame and destiny, the figurative goose fish overshadows the lovers' sensuality. It evokes a sense of foreboding within the context of their relationship while illustrating a broader social landscape that is as ugly as it is alluring. Building metaphorical layers onto the scene of an intimate exchange between individuals, the goose fish symbolically excavates the spectres of social shame, painful irony, and tragic predestiny in marginalized relationships—queer, class-divided, pre-marital, or otherwise.

The specific circumstances of the lovers' relationship are ambiguous; we know only that its nature is somehow forbidden. The situation could be manifesting in several ways; it may be a simple matter of a love that has yet to be officially consummated—the lovers are young and thus open to a number of social roadblocks in their pursuit of a union. The issue could be one of class, with the lovers being restricted to nighttime trysts beyond the expectations of

their "real" lives. There is room as well for a queer reading of the poem. The lovers are "conspiring hand in hand" (Nemerov 14), suggesting a unity of motivation and, therefore, of a shared social shame in the action. In every possibility, the strong allusions towards a typified state of marginalization make the poem applicable to a variety of specific social concerns, and the poem's mechanics lay the groundwork for analysis of marginalization as an emotional, as well as social, state of being.

The appearance of the goose fish following an act of sexual intercourse positions the fish as a conduit for shame, and the presence of shame is underscored by the implication that the lovers are committing a social transgression. Thinking themselves alone, they "suddenly embraced" (3), but the implied progression of action is interrupted by the advent of the goose fish "turning up, though dead, / His hugely grinning head" (17–18). It appears "As though the world had found them out" (16), shattering the illusion of the private sphere created by the lovers' merging shadows and physical closeness. The interruption is both literal and metaphysical, as the lovers are evidently more than capable of conjuring their own shame and being "Embarrassed in each other's sight" (13). James Kiehl observes Nemerov's fixation with "the idea that our mode of observation significantly determines what we see" (238). The lovers exist within a moment in time wherein sight itself is determined by the appearance of the moon; their intimacy is disruptively illuminated by what they see, moonlight being the only mode of observation available to them in the surrounding darkness. The evocation of shame at the sight of the goose fish is therefore a symptom of the presence and effect of previous shame on their relationship, cutting intimate moments short and tainting their experience of each other.

At the same time, the fish embodies the lovers' potential as a couple. In a manner that chips at, if not hacks down, the poem's fourth wall, the goose fish is recognizable to the lovers as both a symbol and a prophetic vessel. Although "They knew not what he would express" (Nemerov 30), the lovers "took it for an emblem of / Their sudden, new and

guilty love" (34). Their choice is a calculated and conscious one, despite its emotional urgency. Examining Nemerov's image- and symbol-based poems, Kiehl questions if "we see things because we are there in nature, or [if] things exist [...] because we see them?" (Kiehl 257). This question is highly relevant to the lovers' decision to adopt the goose fish as a talisman to ward off future potential harm, anticipated as an inevitable outcome of their union. The fish seems to exist in a liminal plane between the real and imagined, anchored to the physical only because it has been seen by the lovers and made real by their anxieties. The two go on to adopt the goose fish as "their patriarch" (Nemerov 37), entrusting their fate as a couple to a symbol that is both ambiguous and enigmatic. In a sense, then, their shared sexual guilt is self-affirming. Once again, there is a clash between real strife and laughable naivety.

The contrast between the fish's omen-like presence and the lovers' choice to adopt it as a symbol of their love reveals the forbidden nature of their relationship. They attempt to "make a world their own" (27) but cannot escape the eyes of society, as transmitted through the goose fish's unblinking and darkly comical watchfulness. The fish's associations with comedy and amusement strike an ironic chord under the ongoing development of a moonlit tryst. Sensuality, comedy, and irony clash jarringly. The result is an image of a relationship that, despite its situation outside of public knowledge, is entirely bound up within the expectations of a society that compels and rejects it simultaneously. In this manner, the poem introduces moral undercurrents that are left open for readerly interpretation. Dale Smith identifies poetry as "a system of moral inquiry" whose "force of relation, of acknowledgement, exposes conditions of thought and feeling" (113). Smith speaks here of the expression of human relationships in poetry, and "The Goose Fish" is certainly focused around this expression. In this case, though, the "conditions" exposed by the poem are both externally and internally sourced. The lovers' shared ruminations on shame imply a level of self-awareness that is nevertheless dependent on the symbolic goose fish to predict the future.

This symbol identification also signifies the couple's awareness of the social frameworks they are transgressing. In keeping with the characters' adoption of the goose fish as a symbol for the future, they question their belonging in society but are still able to invest their trust in the fish, "That rigid optimist" (Nemerov 36), to epitomize their potential.

In another ironic discordance with the lovers' emotional investment in the future, the ugliness of the goose fish forebodes the potential ugliness of the relationship. Its grin is described as "peaceful and obscene" (29), a direct tie to the sexual encounter between the lovers. Being as clandestine as it is, the relationship is unlikely to survive "the hard moon's bony light" (11) or rather, the judgment of society, as transmitted by the goose fish and illuminated by the moon. The lovers are faced with two options, both painful; they may continue to love in secret or end the relationship altogether. The poem alludes to a potential for strain and tarnish on the union, but the commentary on ugliness as it relates to romance is twofold, criticizing a society that would exclude marginal love as much as it criticizes those who subject themselves to love on the margins. There is a dark irony embedded in this criticism and a sense of hopelessness accentuated by the goose fish's death-induced stasis. The resulting effect is a kind of shadowy tongue-in-cheek humour quite typical of Nemerov, who "considered puns to be like Freudian slips—the sentinels of the unconscious … [which allow] us to glimpse the deep associations hidden under logic and rationality" (Pettingell 707). For the lovers, the "logic" of consummating their mutual love is overridden by socially imposed shame, with the goose fish acting metonymically as a "deep association" to their awareness of marginality. In this case, the goose fish as a prediction of misfortune unearths a deeper association with marginalization.

On a darker level, the goose fish tarnishes the sensuality between the lovers in a way that suggests that sex itself is fundamentally ugly. While the poem's themes are not anti-sexual, the personification of the goose fish digs at an underlying conception of sex as an animalistic urge, messy and

unattractive, as opposed to its glamourization in popular culture. The poem invites an examination of these concepts, their roots and their manifestations. The stigmatization of sex frequently feeds into to the social rejection of marginalized groups—most notably, LGBTQ+ individuals. Deborah Lupton points to how "[n]egative emotions such as blame, fear and disgust have been evident [in public] responses to people with HIV/AIDS," diseases associated most commonly with gay men (Lupton 2013). The social declaiming of sex on the margins, alongside its association with animalism, casts the poem's sexual context in a complicated cultural light. When seen through this lens, however, sex is also an undeniable drive, which harkens back to the speaker's commentary on marginalized relationships. If the union is as inescapable as it is forbidden, then the ugliness is unavoidable. The goose fish's horrendous appearance and situation within the poem work together to come to this conclusion, with shame standing in as both a literal emotion and a symbolic aspect of the goose fish. For the lovers, socially constructed sexual guilt is a self-affirming prophecy, part of the cycle of secrecy and marginalization they are trapped in.

Nemerov's use of prophetic language and concluding allusion to the zodiac foreshadow the lovers' future together in a negative light. The disappearance of the moon leaves the poem somewhat open-ended, as all prior action is illuminated and contextualized by the presence of the moon. Shortly after the lovers' encounter with the fish, the moon disappears "Along the still and tilted track / That bears the zodiac" (Nemerov 44–45), concluding with an invocation of predestiny that links the zodiac's symbolism to that of the goose fish. The goose fish's ominous symbolism builds to this final assertion of the lovers' lack of control over their future together and serves to recall the notion of inescapable ugliness and pain resulting from their union. While the lovers are willing to attempt to build their own future and are more or less reconciled to the uncertainty of it, this final line seals their fate in the stars. The implication of unavoidable tragedy in love has ties to romantic-tragic fictional tropes, and the concept of sealed fate enhances the dark irony of

the poem as a whole. The accents of these tropes further underscore the poem's ironic subtext, as they clash with the fact that there is something truly, unironically pitiable about these lovers. Like fated protagonists from a heroic ballad, the lovers' chief concerns are their need to be together and the social barriers preventing them from accomplishing this union publically. Nevertheless, they bend themselves unswervingly on the mission of transgressing those barriers, physically and symbolically.

Through a blending of the physical and metaphysical, "The Goose Fish" is both intimate and socially provocative. It is quintessential of Nemerov's distinctions as a poet, viciously humorous, and steeped in symbolism, while being simultaneously grounded in a concrete scenario with strong physical and sexual associations. Secret love overlaid with shame and guilt builds an emotional framework that becomes increasingly cosmic as the poem progresses, reaching beyond the circumstances of two human beings to scrape at the barnacled underbelly of a social ugliness embodied by the corpse of a fish. The hapless lovers are caught between the compulsion of love and its tragic implications: they are trapped by the future yet enthralled with the present, and over everything presides the goose fish, grinning gill-to-gill at the irony of it all.

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# Black Historiography Versus the "Nostalgia Mode": Exploring the Limits of Fredric Jameson's Postmodern Critique Through Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Joey Mauro

**Abstract:** This essay explores the limits of Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodernist cultural production by testing it against Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). In his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1988), Jameson argues that postmodern cultural products are beholden to the consumer market. He continues to posit the claim that this condition reveals a crisis in historicity that has emerged in late capitalism, a condition called the "nostalgia mode." While revealing much about the relationship between capital and postmodernity, Jameson's theory fails to address the productive capacity of postmodern texts. Finally, this essay considers the productive capacity of Black historiography in Morrison's *Beloved*.

Over the last fifty years, Western liberal democracies have faced increased internal pressure as a sense of shared truth lapses and unity deteriorates. It is difficult to identify what unifies nations without a sense of agreed-upon truth, without an agreed-upon history—a lack of which is only exacerbated by the rise of conspiracy theories, climate change denial, fake news, and the alt-right. This essay explores the relationship between this truth crisis and postmodernism, where postmodernism is taken to mean the cultural manifestation of late capitalism, also known as the era of postmodernity. In his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1988), Fredric Jameson argues that postmodern cultural products or texts (he uses the terms interchange-

ably) reveal the crisis in historicity that emerged in late capitalism. For Jameson, postmodernism signifies the breakdown of truth because it is beholden to the market rather than based in history. Jameson's argument, while revealing much about the relationship between capital and postmodernity, restricts the aims of postmodernism to resisting high modernism and developing mass culture. In fact, postmodernist texts also have the productive capacity to challenge the universalist singularity produced by what Jean-François Lyotard calls "master narratives." To explore this contradiction within postmodernism, I turn to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). In it, Morrison renders a complex relationship between literature created in the era of postmodernity, historiography, and truth by presenting the same narrative differently in multiple scenes, reinscribing the scene each time. In the process of reinscription, Morrison presents the possibility for both epistemological and ontological variance within a given narrative, and thus challenges a singular, dominant truth. In placing Jameson's theory in conversation with Morrison's novel, it becomes clear that postmodern cultural products can simultaneously foster the breakdown of truth and historiographic consciousness.

Central to Jameson's argument is the notion that postmodernism (as a cultural logic in aesthetics) expresses the distinct ideology of the social order in the age of postmodernity, the era of late capitalism. Specifically, Jameson refers to postmodernity as the "postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism" that emerged from the postwar economic growth in the United States and Western Europe, as well as in the new international order of neo-colonialism (1759). From Jameson's perspective, then, cultural products derive from a given historical context, and so an analysis of the social function of a cultural product or text is an analysis of the ideology of a given historical period. That is, the rise of consumer capitalism becomes the causal condition of postmodern art; postmodernity (the period of late capitalism)

begets postmodernism (the cultural manifestation of late capitalism).

Jameson's analysis outlines two necessary conditions of postmodern cultural production: firstly, cultural products occur as a reaction specifically to high modernism; and secondly, postmodern cultural products do not filter into categories of low or high art. Modernism reflected the universalizing aims of modernity, which was to create totalizing systems of unity that grew as premodern institutions retracted (religious institutions, for example). Modernism was the growth of a new social order, and the projects of high modernism "conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network, and the foundations" by mid-century (Jameson 1758). Jameson's formulation of a postmodern project of refusal is similar to Lyotard's formulation. Lyotard's postmodernism—stumbling out from the wreckage of the Second World War, the mass death at Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the carnage of Auschwitz and the Soviet gulags—rejects the "master narratives" of progress that came from modernity (Lyotard 1386). For Lyotard, postmodernism refuses the singular universal standards of modernity because these standards can only be achieved through hostility towards difference and, ultimately, atrocity (1387). If modernism is the pursuit of absolutes, then postmodernism is the pursuit of variance.

However, in Jameson's view, the rejection of modernism is not replaced by a new project of progress or unity in postmodernism; rather, postmoderninsm offers only a rejection or, more accurately, a plurality of rejections. Jameson suggests there are two imbricated consequences of this project. The first consequence is that the rejection of modernism is a highly atomized rejection because postmodernism offers no singular mode or logic. Postmodernism only offers what Jameson calls "a host of distinct, private styles … that foreshadow social life as a whole in late capitalism" (1761). Simply put, if the project is based on the rejection of modernism—in the rejection of universal and new forms of social unity—then there are going to be many different

arrows pointing at a grand target. The plurality of grievances with the projects of modernism means that there will be many versions of postmodernism (Jameson 1759). In other words, the postmodern rejection of modernism becomes the project(s) of postmodernism. This leads to the second layer of consequence: the postmodern project never moves beyond subversion toward a new political project (1759). As implied above, the cohesive factor of postmodernism is the perpetual cycles of subverting modernist "master narratives." As Jameson puts it, "the unity of [postmodernism]—if it has one—is given not in itself but in the very modernism it seeks to displace" (1759). If modernity offered a political and historical project, then postmodernity offered an apolitical and ahistorical consumer society (1760).

Together, the consequences of the postmodern project (or the lack of one) create the second necessary condition of postmodernity: the "erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" in service of consumer society (Jameson 1771). Jameson's formulation of cultural products in postmodernity, like that of Barth, expresses a sort of formal exhaustion: "writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds … [as] only a limited number of combinations are possible; the most unique ones have been thought of already" (1762). In the context of consumer capitalism, art need not discriminate between high and mass culture because the project has no goal related to progress and operates in service of capital. Jameson never makes a claim about a determinant link between capitalism and cultural production, but he does make a useful historical comparison to demonstrate the relationship—in modernity, cultural products were oppositional, created friction, and were offensive to the middle class, whereas in postmodernity, "there is very little in either the forms or the content of contemporary art that contemporary society finds intolerable or scandalous" (1770). Basically, with the advent of mass consumerism, cultural production serves the market rather than challenging the status quo.

Jameson's argument presents a model for understanding the strained relationship between literature and truth in an era of consumer capital. For Jameson, postmodern cultural texts reflect how a late capitalist society is stuck in a perpetual present that it has lost the capacity to historicize. The cultural text does not so much render history but rather an idea of history, a simulation of history, or what Jameson calls "the nostalgia mode" (1762). Jameson explains this by distinguishing between parody and pastiche. Parody takes up a past style to mock it or an established norm to incite political change, and pastiche, while still adopting a past style, does so as "a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic" (1761). The postmodern text, preoccupied with the rejection of high modernism, fails to locate truth in the present, which is a factor that once served as a point of separation between high art and mass culture. For Jameson, the cultural text reflects and maintains the aims of consumer society by robbing the citizens of any notion of historical truth and confining them to a dislocated perpetual present.

While revealing much about historical truth in postmodernity, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism does not go beyond the confines of capitalism and mass culture to explore the productive potential of postmodern texts. Rather than explore their productive capacity, Jameson asserts that there is no distinction between high art and pop culture in postmodernity. This assertion establishes the limit of his analysis: Jameson never considers how postmodern products might differ in merit because he essentializes the link between cultural products and capitalism. Surely, there are differences between postmodern cultural products that make some more productive than others in the pursuit of a common truth.

In her novel *Beloved*, for example, Toni Morrison reinscribes African-American subjecthood—what Henry Louis

Gates calls "the black presence" in a white-canonized history by destabilizing the dominant white narrative presence (2251). In a novel that is ghost story, slave narrative, and historical fiction, Morrison has enough narrative latitude to navigate epistemological and ontological questions that complicate any notion of a single or dominant truth. In other words, with the narrative modes available to her, Morrison creates a political discourse around issues of historiographical truth. For example, the novel features several narrative threads that recount the same incident through different lenses, which creates a contestation of truth, as some accounts feature a dominant white presence and a Black absence, and others centralize the Black presence and destabilize the white presence.

A notable example of this contestation comes in the differing accounts of how Sethe—while running away from the bounty hunter trying to re-enslave her—gave birth to Denver with the help of a white girl called Amy. Morrison marks the different accounts by changing narrative styles: some tellings are third-person narration and others are through dialogue. In the white-dominated account of the birth, the narrative thread opens in the third person with Sethe exhausted and collapsed on the side of a riverbank, lying half-obscured by "blades of wild onions" (Morrison 33). Amy, as the focal point of the narrator, watches Sethe from a distance. Sethe no longer bothers to wave off the bugs, and she is numb to the baby in her womb who is described as "a little antelope ... with impatient hooves" (33). Amy's gaze in this opening scene dehumanizes Sethe's presence, something Morrison makes clear by emphasizing the blending of Sethe's appearance and the natural world (she is one with the bugs and the wild onions, unbothered by them or the figurative antelope in her belly). In fact, Sethe is basically one with the diegesis. In proximity to the white presence, Sethe's humanity is absent. This absence becomes clearer once Amy makes her presence known and the two exchange dialogue. In fact, it is hardly an exchange because Amy dominates the conversation. As the narrator puts it, Amy "talked so much it wasn't clear how she breathed at the same

time" (33). Furthermore, Amy's use of a racial slur in reference to Sethe solidifies Amy's dominance in this version of the scene, with her violent language marking the absence of Black subjecthood and the invasion of the white master narrative. Throughout this iteration of Denver's birth, Amy speaks 1,200 words of direct dialogue compared to Sethe's 150—for every word Sethe speaks, Amy speaks ten. In the white-dominated history of Denver's birth, Morrison produces what Gates Jr. calls the literary faculty "that delimits the humanity of all black people in western cultures" (2247).

However, Morrison reinscribes this incident with an active Black presence at several points in the novel. One such reinscription comes through Sethe's memory of the birth. Unlike the version above, Sethe narrates her version herself as she speaks to Paul D. Through this speech act (through narrative dialogue), Morrison positions Sethe as the authority of the memory. The retelling comes after Paul D expresses concern about Denver's mental state and Sethe reassures him that Denver will be okay because "she's a charmed child. From the beginning" (Morrison 41). Denver's origin story is her source of strength. Sethe goes on:

> Uh huh. Nothing bad can happen to her. Look at it. Everybody I knew dead or gone or dead and gone. Not her. Not my Denver. Even when I was carrying her, when it got clear that I wasn't going to make it—which meant she wasn't going to make it either—she pulled a white girl out of the hill. The last thing you'd expect to help. (42)

With Sethe's account, we get a Black presence that challenges the authority of the white-dominant narrative. In Sethe's account, Denver is not compared to an animal and Sethe does not see herself in the landscape. In fact, Denver is the hero. From Sethe's perspective, Amy came from the natural world; Denver summoned her own help from the hill. Amy is a utility of Denver's survival, she is a "thing" that helps the Black women. Compared to the previous telling, the roles are switched: Amy's presence is minor and Denver's is dominant. Morrison, by having Sethe speak the memory,

reinscribes the moment with an active Black presence. The compilation of accounts told through a pastiche of narrative voices does not so much override or negate one another or dehistoricize the incident. Rather, through variation and reinscription, Morrison gives primacy to a historiographic mode (not a "nostalgia mode" like in Jameson's formulation). This historiographic mode complicates narratives of white dominance in both the novel and American nationalist discourse by challenging any shared truth that requires a Black absence.

Unlike Jameson's formulation, the use of narrative pastiche in *Beloved* does not render a text ahistorical; rather, it creates a deeply historiographic text concerned with the ramification of "master narratives" for Black presence, and for Black life. Postmodern texts can challenge the universalist singularity produced by what Jean-François Lyotard calls "master narratives." In fact, postmodern texts have the capacity to render both epistemological and ontological differences, thus challenging a singular truth. Jameson's skepticism of consumer capitalism only allows him to work with one half of what postmodernism has to offer, one half of the postmodern contradiction. In other words, Jameson's critique only looks at the negative side of postmodernity (the rise of consumer culture and the erasure of truth). However, might there also be postmodern texts that contest the dominant culture in the pursuit of truth? Historiographic commentary in art is different from simulating a false historical narrative. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a postmodern text, functions in service of historical truth by refusing a version of history that occludes Black presence.

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# "Terror Cut Through Me; I Swallowed It Down": Dreadful Dining in Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black*

Kiarra Burd

**Abstract:** This essay analyzes food-related passages in Esi Edugyan's 2018 novel *Washington Black* through the lens of multiple scholarly sources that approach food and its prevalence beyond satiety in human societies, primarily through psychoanalytic research, as well as folkloric and socio-cultural studies. By doing so, the unique relationship between the titular character and food can be understood to mirror his traumatic early life experiences as a child born into slavery, his maturation, and finally, his reclamation of his freedom and his individual self-actualization.

As an enslaved person on a plantation that produces sugar, a lucrative ingredient intended for consumption, *Washington Black*'s titular character grows up in an environment heavily dependent on food and its production. Esi Edugyan refuses to let the reader forget the importance of food in Washington's life, often employing culinary metaphors to describe various locations, atmospheres, and objects. However, gastronomic references often accompany a sense of terror and discomfort for Washington and result in his avoidance of consuming food at an early age. To his mother, Big Kit, this behaviour is reprehensible, and she scolds him by telling him: "Don't you never not take what yours…. You was promised that food. So you take it" (Edugyan 28). Washington rejects this advice and instead internalizes his food-related trauma: his subconscious fasting appears to correlate with multiple harrowing experiences from his life, whereby a variety of unpleasant, often violent events coincide with shared meals or even the mere presence of food. Spilled

claret resembles "blood, seeping outwards" (23); his visit to Bridge Town "stink[s] of overripe fruit … and of immense slabs of tuna starting to turn in the heat" (73); Philip's demand for sandwiches results in Wash's facial disfigurement, which in its healing process "felt like meat … [and had] a strange white patch marbled with pink, like a fatty cut of mutton … [and] clots pale as boiled oatmeal" (88). Thus, using theories on various gastronomic attitudes to examine episodes of food and disgust in *Washington Black* allows us to understand the potential origins of Washington's disdain for eating as it relates to his identity, interpersonal relationships, and self-actualization.

Few scholars deny the prevalence of food in constructing social boundaries, its common association with the perception of the self, and its ability to transgress its material form. For instance, in paraphrasing Roland Barthes, Edwin characterizes gastronomic practices as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" (40). Additionally, those who study the social aspects of food related experiences often adhere to the idea that our ability to endow them with metaphorical and moral qualifications is one of the main aspects that sets humans apart from less sophisticated animals and "leads to the attainment of self-consciousness" (Christou 67). As Moraru suggests when analyzing the role of hunger and satiation in identity formation, eating acts "as a staging area of the cogito, as bodily protocol of self-perception, self-evaluation, and self-identification … an affective space where we come to terms with ourselves" (12). Subconsciously or otherwise, characters in *Washington Black* similarly use the gastronomic stage to communicate social boundaries and, especially in the case of Washington, to process personal identity and values through both food-related rejection and acceptance.

Many of Washington's early eating experiences demonstrate food's intimate role in power dynamics. Notably, Big Kit, Washington's mother, dominates the enslaved persons' food-sphere by "forcibly t[aking] food from a strong smith's apprentice each morning and night … [eating] it in front of

him, scooping with her fingers from his bowl, until some understanding was reached between them" (Edugyan 7). Later, she uses those same fingers to "hold out the last scoop of her breakfast to [Washington] … [who] would eat it from her hand, like a tamed creature" (53). By using food as a tool to garner respect from the other enslaved persons, Big Kit cements her status as their female figurehead and forces them to recognize the extent of power she can claim in that position. Incidentally, however, her intimidating demeanour seems to intertwine with the concept of satiation in Washington's subconscious adolescent mind and thus subjugates him to another subordinate position alongside the lack of selfhood imposed on him as a boy born into slavery. When Washington eventually escapes from Faith Plantation, he sees this as an act that frees him from the supremacy of white enslavers who influenced his negative relationship with food during his formative years; yet, his escape from the plantation means that, by way of physical distance, he also becomes divorced from Big Kit's maternal authority, which she used to manipulate his childhood eating practices—though through a notably different and familial degree of power, as opposed to an enslaver's violently oppressive one. Interestingly, Washington eventually realizes with horror in his adult life that he had abandoned Big Kit at the plantation "in favour of Titch" (345). Although his attachment to Titch could suggest that he simply replaced one enslaver's oppressive gastronomic influence for another's, it is worth noting that Titch stands out as a white figure of authority who perpetuates the correlation between food-avoidance and morality. For instance, he instructs Washington to use liberal amounts of the "many spices from [his] journeys into the East" (40) with "one restriction ... that is, [he is] never to use sugar" (41). Since Titch's refusal of sugar, a product "which shifted [Barbados] from a population that was predominantly European in origin and free to one that was predominantly African in origin and enslaved," stems from his desire to dissociate from the inhumane use of slavery on plantations, Titch and Washington's imbalanced yet affectionate relationship does not necessarily correspond with

Washington's anxieties around food and control (Smith and Watson 64).

Notably, Washington's repudiation of food bears some resemblance to manifestations of the eating disorder anorexia nervosa, which often stem from the lack of autonomy generally associated with childhood, especially a traumatic one. Moreover, the tension between the "lived self" and the "ideal self" caused by a young person's unfulfilling environment can provoke their desire to "re-establish close control over a part of their existence: food, body appearance and ultimately "one[s]-self" (Scodellaro 22–23). In Washington's case, his adolescent eating experiences are informed by his reliance on what his enslavers decided to provide for him, Big Kit's assertions of authority, and the conflation of gastronomy with morality through Titch. Thus, the subjugation and oppression that the experiences in childhood seems to instigate his development of avoidant food behaviours as a means to establish self-reliance, autonomy, and even physical safety. For instance, when Washington first learns that the slave catcher Willard, employed by Erasmus Wilde to find him and abduct him "Dead or Alive" (162), has come to Nova Scotia in search of him, Washington "star[es] nervously out the window" and dejectedly "eat[s] a quick meal of boiled eggs," (251) before "[he] r[uns] out of food and stay[s] the next two days together in bed, fasting" until "[his] head beg[ins] to spin and [his] muscles to shiver" (252). Only once his body suffers immediate and unbearable pain that outweighs the potential for external danger does he force himself to leave his home in search of food. Washington's food-avoidance may also relate to his transition from slavery to freedom, as requiring less food could allow him to feel like a more self-sufficient person—that is, less reliant on racialized power structures like those on the plantation. In fact, Titch states that he chose Washington to aid in his scientific work when Washington was only twelve because "[he was] precisely the size for [his] Cloud-cutter" (44), an experimental gas-powered air balloon of Titch's design. In this case, Washington's body becomes valued specifically for being unimposing and leads to his ability to access

the airborne vehicle that he uses to escape from slavery. This event further establishes a correlation between food, power, and autonomy that informs Washington's attempt to create a life for himself outside of Faith Plantation while adhering to certain behaviours of food-avoidance in individuals with eating disorders.

Keeping in mind the dynamic interplay between power structures and food in Washington's life, food-avoidance allows him to silently oppose the power others hold over him by rejecting their control over his satiety. Additionally, it enables him to establish an independent sense of self on his own terms by exercising judgement over which aspects of the material world he allows into his internal, psychological being. Notably, Rozin emphasizes the complex and intimate act of eating, since it requires "taking matter from outside the self and putting it inside," a practice that Washington could see as hindering his ability to detach himself from the inequality and danger of the world (Rozin, "Why We Eat" 28). Washington mediates the oppression and violence that he comes to associate with eating-focused experiences through food avoidance, but he also seems to adopt a mindset similar to Rozin's theory of contamination, which refers to the perception that an edible material becomes distasteful once "an item we consider disgusting … touches a piece of food" (39). By refusing the second-hand food of Erasmus and adopting morally charged eating practices as informed by Titch, he "protect[s] the 'psychological' body from harm" (Davey 3454) and sends products of "moral offense … from out of mouth to out of mind" (Rozin, "Food is Fundamental" 26–27).

Additionally, the fact that many of Washington's most memorable instances of culinary repulsion relate to death or near-death may insinuate that food-avoidance functions not only as a rejection of oppressive structures and communication of his moral code but also as a way to remain vigilant against the ever-present threats to his life. Just as Davey notes how food-based disgust has been associated with the desire to "protect the 'psychological' body from harm by providing reminders of our own mortality" (3454), Wash-

ington's interpretation of food as unsettling tends to present itself in instances when he experiences distress or anxiety about his safety. His meal with Edgar Farrow, for example, is fraught with anxious undertones since it takes place alongside the unsettling knowledge that pickled corpses litter the man's home (Edugyan 171). When Washington "picture[s him]self being cut down by the master's hands … a taste like unripe apples filled [his] throat" (126). Titch, however, rejects the association between death and food by communicating his distaste towards the gastronomic preferences of his mother and brother who support the institution of slavery, which suggests the possibility of moral expression through food avoidance. As Titch's protégé, Washington absorbs Titch's belief that selective consumption communicates moral values, especially considering he had already begun to consider the connection between moral contamination and ethical consumption during Erasmus Wilde's violence towards Big Kit at a dinner. After Erasmus brutalizes Big Kit for attempting to clear a blood-like wine stain out of a tablecloth, Washington "lose[s his] enthusiasm" for the scraps of "half-eaten food" (27) leftover from the Wildes' dinner even though he had earlier reflected on "lick[ing] the plates … in wonder" (19).

Just as these instances demonstrate the relationship between violence and dining, food and gastronomic metaphors continue to find their place alongside certain characters' attempts to display their dominance over or distaste with Washington, be it through physical abuse or psychological oppression. For instance, during his voyage to Nova Scotia "a wrinkled-faced sailor … hefted [him] up with his thick, bread-like hands … [and] danced, taunting [him], until [he] agreed to stand treat a quart of rum" (228). Later, when Willard viciously attacks Washington, he does so in a dark alley and Washington notes "his milk stink of sweet unwashed skin and whisky" (298). In a more psychological act of violence, Titch's mother refuses Washington and Tanna, the mixed-race daughter of Mister Goff, a meal by claiming that she "would have offered a lunch, but [she] did not know if [they] enjoyed English food" (332). While the for-

mer two incidents indicate a threat to Wash's physical body and thus mortality, Mrs. Wilde perpetuates Wash's social exclusion by reinforcing staunch cultural boundaries between her 'civilized' English background and his perceived lack of civility, since "[d]ifferences in food culture are … seen by the antagonists … as indicators of moral difference" (Ojwang 80).

All these experiences result in damage both to Washington's material and psychological being and further cement the connection he makes between food and oppression. Arguably the most horrific and symbolic evidence of food and terror occurs during Titch and Washington's visit to Mister Edgar Farrow at St. John's parish. Farrow's interest as a "necropsocist," or a "scholar of human decay" (Edugyan 161) blurs the distinction between the human body and commonly employed gastronomic terms in a way that reads as cannibalistic. For instance, the body Washington finds in Farrow's home appears "very white and bulbous, the flesh swelling" and is bathed in a liquid with a "strange pickled smell" (170), summoning the image of a jar of fermented meat. Shortly after Washington contains his horror at the corpse and the three men dine, Farrow violently "cut[s] at his pork with great energy, then stab[s] the meat and start[s] to chew" (172). The jarring proximity between the description of the corpse and Farrow's voracious appetite for the ham allows images of animal meat and human flesh to combine with one another, making the boundary between the two nearly indistinguishable. If Washington's rejection of food and meal-sharing stems partly from a desperate attempt to separate himself from the lack of bodily autonomy he experienced through Erasmus' treatment of enslaved persons, his non-consensual inclusion in the sexton's grotesque blurring of animal and human flesh ravishes his newly acquired degree of agency. This incident could be partly responsible for his terror and anxiety during his stay at Farrow's, especially considering that his interest in studying the body after death (a stark reminder of Washington's own mortality). Interestingly, Titch partakes in a type of fleshly consumption when he later "star[es] at his father's letter with grimness

about his mouth, [and] chew[s] at the inside of his cheek" (175). While Washington's bodily autonomy requires constant consolidation, the privileged white characters do not recognize the symbolic unity of flesh-types, representing their relative security (their bodies do not exist under the threat of violence).

Although Washington's revulsion often results from hateful or harmful characters and their culinary practices, the gluttonous Philip prompts him to more complex ruminations over the relationship between morality and material consumption. At their first meeting, Washington reacts to Philip's appearance with confusion, for "All [Titch and Erasmus'] talk of eating had given [him] to think he'd be gargantuan. He was not even half of Big Kit's girth. His arms, awkwardly thin, folded oddly out from his body" (75). As Washington comes to know him, he discovers that Philip "had little hunger but much appetite" (79). Philip rarely seems to enjoy his food and instead complains about its insufficient preparation and unpleasant flavours. For instance, after a enslaved person prepares his food, Philip "sp[its] out the first dish she had made" (95), pushes his food from the plate onto the table in disgust during another meal, and complains that the "Mussels were a tad overdone" while at dinner with Erasmus and Titch (95); yet, he never fails to continuously gorge himself. He excessively consumes products of slave labour and mistreats enslaved people, yet he appears to suffer no physical nor psychological ramifications. Thus, Philip becomes a symbol for the complacency and needless excess of the white gentry, who were responsible in part for Washington's violent childhood.

Yet, Washington finds Philip a fascinating study for drawing: "he'd lie, his mouth slackening back to reveal a dark-pink gullet, wheezing out the smell of sweet milk" and this gluttony-induced incapacitation produced "some of the softest [sketches Washington] ever drew … strangely vivid, underlit with a tenderness [he] did not understand" (Edugyan 81). Just as his distaste for the Wilde brothers transforms after he bonds with Titch, Washington's strange appreciation for Philip seems a step towards "reversing an

innate aversion" (Rozin, "Why We Eat" 35), a phenomenon wherein the disavowal of certain foodstuffs or food practices that were once deplorable become palatable and even enjoyable. Consequently, Washington's fixation with Philip may mark the beginning of his transition from a preoccupation with self-preservation to a more direct and concrete desire for self-enhancement, emphasizing the empirical and involving "positive self-evaluation … [and] achieving tangible success" (Sedikides and Gregg 102). It is helpful to understand that self-enhancement also only tends to occur when the subject begins to transition from prioritizing their basic needs for survival to focusing on more introspective practices (103), which Titch's interest in Washington initially instigates but which begins to take its final form when Washington separates from Titch and independently establishes interpersonal and professional relationships.

Thus, even though Philip engages in thoughtless and harmful excessive behaviours, Washington's strange fixation with him may indicate that Washington's self-enhancement stems from the idea that "identity matters in itself whether or not it is positive or realistic, because having a coherent self-view affords a satisfying sense of prediction and control in the interpersonal sphere" (Sedikides and Gregg 109). In other words, though Philip's actions undeniably perpetuate aggression towards enslaved people, Washington's dynamic perception of Philip is prompted by disgust and delight on his own terms. Unlike Kit's opinions on food-scraps and Titch's beliefs regarding the consumption of sugar, Washington's fascination with Philip is unmediated by an external authority. His drawings of Philip are a form of self-expression focused on individual betterment that suggest a process of self-discovery beyond his childhood experiences of subordination at the Faith Plantation. While Washington's tolerance of Philip does not necessarily indicate a shift towards 'positive' growth since Philip contributes to white domination through a mixture of apathy and aggression and therefore places Washington in a perilous position by overlooking his privilege, it nonetheless reflects how Washington's perspective on food-related subjects continuously

evolves with many of his life experiences. Whether these experiences are individual or interpersonal ones, they mark how his aversion to commensality and common gastronomic practices relates to his desire for the 'ideal-self' and increased opportunities for self-enhancement.

Another occasion when Washington begins to process his trauma in a more positive way surfaces through his choice of occupation after having fled the Barbados plantation, first becoming a member of a small-scale fishery and then a prep cook. His position at the fishery symbolizes a transition from enslaved boy to working man and thus represents a step closer to self-actualization. However, this position still makes him feel "everywhere uneasy in [his] skin … [as] kidnappers generally roamed the coast" (Edugyan 229), and therefore continues to make Washington feel physically vulnerable. His later job as a prep cook reveals that "[he] had a gift for [cooking]" (230) and advances the consolidation of his autonomy through skill building, but this experience unfortunately preserves his social exclusion as "[he] cooked always behind a curtain, unseen, [his] scarred face being, the owner feared, repugnant" (230). Though these culinary experiences ultimately come to perpetuate racially motivated prejudice and complicate Washington's ability to ensure his physical security, they nonetheless allow him to establish himself as an increasingly independent and self-sufficient member of society and represent positive growth in how Washington experiences food-related environments.

Moreover, his ability to reverse the innate aversion he feels in food-related situations secures the sanctuary he finds in the company of the Goffs: to exercise his passionate love of marine life and to reclaim the attention of Tanna, Washington accepts their invitation to an afternoon of "a rowboat and a good lunch" (257) and regularly takes part in their picnics and home-cooked meals. While Washington continues to form a bond with the Goffs that often includes their engagement in shared meals, his apprehension towards commensality still occasionally evokes grotesque imagery or feelings of discomfort. For instance, during a win-

ter picnic organized by Mister Goff, Washington "taste[s] nothing, feeling [him]self entirely elsewhere, absent" (357) until finally his anxiety dwindles as the end of the meal arrives and "Goff smile[s] all about, chewing his food, happy" (359). Although characters like Erasmus or Philip with their unabashed appetites usually unsettle Washington and denote their apathy towards the moral implications of consumption, when Washington gazes at Mister Goff's "bright chewing face, [he] realize[s] how profoundly [he] likes him" (262) in spite of the striking and violent way he "gobble[s] up his fish in quick, rabbit-like bites … [with] the flesh of the mackerel flashing in his small, bright teeth" (280). On these occasions, "Context … determines content; that is, circumstances affect whether or not meaning emerges … and which messages are conveyed or inferred" and thus does not confer the same categorization of terror that was present during the earlier experiences in his life since he now exercises an increased degree of agency (Jones 138). Despite his sporadically recurring associations of food with terror, Washington's ability to engage in pleasant meal-sharing with the Goffs with increasing frequency indicates positive progress towards a relationship mostly devoid of inequality (an impossible feat during his friendship with Titch) and secures an environment where he can convert his initial rejection of food during adolescence into wholesome and mutual satiation. Additionally, these conflicting experiences highlight Washington's transition from discomfort to security as a non-linear and complicated process that runs parallel to his burgeoning individual freedom.

Alongside the research of scholars like Rozin, Scodellaro, Sedikides, and Gregg, who offer insight into food-avoidance, disgust, and other problematized eating behaviours, we can recognize that the relationship that Washington has with food is integral to his understanding of violence, power, and oppression, informing the cultivation of his identity and interpersonal bonds. By analyzing the relationship between food-related passages and gastronomic metaphors in *Washington Black* and their ability to evoke various dynamic emotions from fear to familiarity, one can see Washing-

ton's development as reflective of the dynamic intervention between food, terror, and the human experience. Furthermore, Washington's progression through life alongside his treatment of food demonstrates a constantly evolving perception of his environment—one that reflects back onto his psyche and often prompts avoidance and anxiety, but eventually allows him to progress towards self-actualization. Ultimately, Washington's increasing involvement in positive dining opportunities comes to represent just one of the many ways he achieves agency on his own terms in spite of the prior food-related experiences that perpetuated his subjugation.

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# EDITORS & CONTRIBUTORS

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