



# **THE ALBATROSS<sup>o</sup>**

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## Editor's Introduction

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B.R. Reid

“Why an albatross, and why does it look so angry?” Looking back at previous editions of the journal, several of these editors’ introductions begin by rationalizing why we are who we are. The usual response, that our choice of name alludes to Coleridge and maybe Baudelaire and McKay, has perhaps grown tired. One of my editors let me know earlier this year that an albatross shows up in Chapter 52 of *Moby Dick*, and being that Melville’s work lies in the public domain, we jokingly considered publishing that work in full if nobody submitted to us. Thankfully, our name and reputation survives amongst the crowd of other great Victoria journals, since we have happily returned again. *The Albatross* evolves year to year, but the name stays the same (is it a coincidence that we publish around the renewing month of April?).

The extreme diversity of submissions makes this volume unique. One essay discusses Chaucer, while others tackle classic science fiction and a recent award-winning play. An essay about Homer fits right alongside an essay about a film adaptation of Thomas Hardy starring Carrie Mulligan. Poetry and poetry criticism get a larger focus this year. Gertrude Stein features in both criticism and pastiche. Thing theory sees use in an essay

about a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. Creativity and hard work can be found on every page.

The privilege of working on this journal would not have been possible for me without the incredible people that make up the University of Victoria's English faculty. Thanks to every author that graces this volume. Special thanks to the members of the English Students' Association that help support us in applying for funds and organizing our launch. Additionally, the assembly of our editorial team would not have been possible without Dr. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and her important English 310 class that brought many of us together back in 2015. My *Albatross* team members make me smile every day with their perfect balance of intelligence and goofiness. No amount of compliments would do justice to their help and efforts. I wish them all the absolute best.

While many of this journal's authors and editors near their final year or graduation, others make their first leaps to take flight into the wide world of literature and criticism. We are all in these pages together: new friends and old. Finally, thank you for reading!







**CREATIVE WORKS**

# eucharist (or, what is it like to taste a jew?)

---

David Johnstone

to be a morsel  
in that pale gullet  
of yours  
is a consummation  
devoutly  
to be dished

and so i find my self  
pressing rosemary  
to my broken back and swollen belly  
(the flesh  
damped with saline  
so the fragrance  
might stain)  
and i lay saffron  
in my pant legs  
so that my thighs  
(i cannot rely on fat for their flavour)  
might wet your mouth  
on scent  
my dandruff is paprika now  
will you suckle at my scalp?  
collect my crumbs in your lap?

oh and my eyes  
i douse with cayenne  
so you ll taste fire  
where i once saw it

and i baste my body nightly  
though i fear it is still  
too dry  
i. let your saliva melt  
as butter is wont to do  
on my crispened breast  
ii. and pair with me a full  
-bodied wine

now  
my love  
do i still taste  
dirty

# Eve

---

Celina Silva

*Italicized text from "Marriage" by Marianne Moore.*

*Below the incandescent stars  
below the incandescent fruit,*

hunt, witch, hunt. Nighttime and the air tastes burnt, moony,  
of coffee, thick  
energy. Hunt, hunt. The earth is grapefruit, juicy, orbiting,  
witchy

woman spits out past lives of pleasing wife like pumpkin  
seeds, make a wish woman,  
"I should like to be alone with the moon; so personal, so  
flesh and blood peeling

oranges," at midnight, cara cara navel oranges, her scent of  
chakras- cherry, rose petal, peppermint, blackberry. Weep  
woman,

moo, moo at the moon. The Milky Way frothing, a milkshake  
of  
luminescent sorrow, woman's mouth sucking through the  
straw

for solitude. More handsome than handsome, and Adam  
a mythological man, ladies man, some man is pregnant

with power, some woman obligated to birth him. She is  
such a

witch, hunt, hunt. This loneliness, enterprise of the  
universe, a women

must exist, more than a blush  
along the lakeside. Carve the sky. Slabs

of shadow and star, stew of blue, sky of savage women,  
*the strange experience of beauty; its existence is too much;*

# Gertrude Stein Does Our Horoscopes

---

Celina Silva

## HORROR

I scope, and black cat cross, cross. The hour is positioned in an O. The howl is a horror and cope by licking the moon. Warm is smaller than a blue, chew on the dust and warm is not a one but a hue blue and two. This is a sugar sign, Stein orders two scoops of sweet sweet.

## SCORPIO

A Scorpio is a hurt blush and it is a water mixed with salt it is inside it is beside Cancer and Pisces. Cope a scorch and the day will fill up and so not ow but how he is leaving he is leaving. The willow is a room, come.

## AQUARIUS

Blue and air and syntax a pause and so on. Stein is that. Stein says a ha a ha a ha. Tide and all, please a merry made, sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet as pie. Stein tit for titters, pour and pour and stomp. Sweet is soft it is not likely.

## THE MOON IS A WOMAN

The phase, a change of eight and likely. A rub is an inequality on ground. So if air is Aquarius I want to be full and so do you. A woman is not an order and is not a half. Kiss in full and above and so on.

# In the Ballroom

---

Celina Silva

*A poem in conversation with "In the Waiting Room",  
by Elizabeth Bishop.*

In Vancouver, British Columbia  
I went with my bestest friend, Joshua, and his mom  
to McDonalds, on Commercial, hip,  
hip-hooray. Joshua and I bounce  
around the ballroom, waiting  
for our chicken McNuggets and fries,  
the plastic balls bobbing  
redred yellow blue greengreen  
under our wet leafed sneakers.  
It was fall. It got wet  
and early. Soggy sloshing to  
swimming a rainbow backstroke,  
plastic paradise,  
sunshine in the ballroom,  
there where no grown-ups,  
only soft leaps, salt wafts,  
moms and four walls,  
a net. Of safety I thought  
of hurrah, a well timed shyness, of  
warmth. It seemed like an always,  
today. You are almost six years old  
I thought to myself, and suddenly  
I was a Celina. I am almost six I said

to Joshua, and his mom  
called us to eat. Do you know we die  
Joshua declared, between fries, excited. I felt  
it cannot be true, assaulted, terrified, and I  
couldn't stop holding my breath, not breathing, staring  
into the ballroom. It was real,  
red and blueblue yellowyellow green  
bouncy. The thought was roll and roll, slip  
-ping away, another fry, fry, redred  
*Then I was back in it.* Inside  
the ballroom, hopping  
I am an I am I am I am an I, and the day was  
early, wet, leaves and leaves.









**CRITICAL WORKS**

# **Revisioning the Gethenians: Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the Ethnocentric Perspective**

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Teddie Brock

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* relies on the first-person perspective to articulate how Genly Ai's narrative understands and relates to the Gethenians as a means of questioning the patriarchal assumptions of ethnocentrism. Initially, the text engages with these concerns through the limitation of Genly's narrative voice. It is not until we are given access to Estraven's perspective that Le Guin attempts to balance the solipsism of Genly's masculine position to bridge the differences between himself and the effeminate Estravan. With this gesture, Genly becomes capable of re-constituting himself as merely part of a greater whole in which femininity and masculinity are reconciled within Le Guin's humanistic vision. Genly's perspective, however, remains the dominant point of focalization as both a first-person narrator and protagonist central to the novel's development despite his attempts to assure us that "the story is not all mine, nor told by me alone" (1). The expedition to Gethen is fuelled by Genly's project as an Envoy to incorporate its citizens into the Ekumenical coalition; in turn, the alien world becomes subject to Genly's judgment and scrutiny as a Terran

despite his status as an outsider. Therefore, Le Guin's use of the first-person perspective to privilege her protagonist with narrative authorship is a challenge to Genly's assertion that it is in fact "all one story" (1).

My intervention complicates this narrative authorship in Le Guin's text by dissolving Genly's first-person perspective into the third-person in the moment he fully acknowledges Estravan's femininity:

"And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man... what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality" (LeGuin, 248)

Instead, I have rewritten the passage as follows:

"And Genly thought to himself that perhaps he had seen what he had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in Estravan: that he was a woman as well as a man... Genly felt that he had been left with, at last, an acceptance of him as he was. Until then he had wondered whether he had rejected him, refused him his own reality" (248).

In general, without Genly's confessional mode of narration, Estravan's and Genly's voyage across the Gobrai ice sheet back to Karhide is reduced to the

particulars of their journey with less regard for the internal “bridging” of Genly’s relationship with Estravan. More specifically, Genly’s eventual recognition that he has refused Estravan’s “own reality,” also becomes radically less significant as a fundamental turning point in Genly’s understanding of his own ethnocentric position in relation to that of the Gethenians as “others” (248). When Genly speaks from the first-person perspective, there is an assumption of narrative authority, which includes the potential to either deny or accept a version of reality separate from his own. Therefore, this authority disintegrates through an omniscient retelling. With the third-person point of view, both Genly’s and Estravan’s narrative autonomy—and difference—is eliminated; their respective voices, the vehicle through which *Left Hand* deals with thematic concerns of overcoming the perceived differences between a dominant culture and the alien “other,” are no longer available to us for comparison and reconciliation.

My speculative re-visioning of Le Guin’s text provides space for omniscient commentary on both characters’ internal states during their time on the ice sheet; however, Estravan’s own conclusion that he and Genly have become “equals at last, equal, alien, alone” would be given little narrative weight without first-person insight into the progressive diminishment of Genly’s patriarchal feelings towards him (232). The moment in which *Left Hand* assumes that Genly and

Estravan have reached a mutual recognition of one another depends on the contrast between their two distinct voices, which have mostly been “spoken” within the confines of their private written accounts.

This is not to say, however, that Le Guin’s first-person epistolary mode does not pose narrative constraints in terms of how Genly’s or Estravan’s interiority can be accessed. In the first chapter, Genly informs his readers that he has been tasked with assembling a report for the Ekumen, although he has decided to write his report as if he “told a story” instead (1). This instance marks a paradigm shift from a purely documentary account to a subjective first-person perspective that Genly himself has consciously constructed. Although Genly proclaims that his story is more fully representative of various perspectives because it “alters with an altered voice,” his first-person point of view as Envoy to the Ekumen in charge of authoring not only his journals, but also the entire arrangement of documents that constitute “the story,” gives him the privilege of both author and curator of events.

To critique the privileging of Genly’s patriarchal voice in Le Guin’s use of the first-person, the third-person perspective also functions at the level of stream-of-consciousness. Stylistically, this level of narration would enable deeper access to Genly’s interiority to override the assumption of power in his first-person

narration by melding Genly's consciousness with Estravan's during a moment when the framework of the Ekumenical documentary report working on the assumptions of ethnocentric control could be suspended. From the vantage point of this narration, the perspectives of Genly and Estravan could be given equal attention through the very elimination of their independent voices. This approach would, however, trouble the text's emphasis on the paradox of a utopic vision of humanity in which individual ethnological differences must be recognized, but that a united understanding can, in fact, be achieved.

Further, Genly's knowledge of mindspeech—a skill the Gethenians do not possess—as well as his desire to teach Estravan, can be understood more symbolically from a closed narrative vantage point as opposed to one that is all-knowing. For both parties to use mindspeech represents the ideal of possible mutual understanding between Genly and Estravan. Thus, mindspeech serves as the ultimate interlocutor between two minds alien to one another, despite the caveat that Genly and Estravan would become participants in a process of reverse enculturation. However, because we may only identify with one narrator at any given time, mindspeech also presents the text with the possibility of enabling the two narrative voices to speak simultaneously rather than intermittently. Similarly, through the use of stream-of-consciousness third-person narration, such differences



in narrative voice could potentially be liberated from the assumptions of power made from first-person storytelling. The solipsism of individual minds, as well as their tendency to set forth paradigms of object-subject relationships, remains, however, the keystone for which Le Guin has chosen Genly's patriarchal perspective as a structure for overcoming prejudiced understanding—and for the alien “other” to be, at last, “named, known, recognized” (111).

My speculative intervention in Genly's perceptual shift also questions the role that archival documents occupy within the narrative understanding of Genly in Le Guin's text. The various mythological texts are presented simultaneously as giving subjective voice to the Gethenians within the context of Genly's story, while objectively documenting the ethnographic details that characterize their culture. Yet, even the presentation of these various documents contain ambiguities that render their narrative unstable. The Orgota Creation Myth, for example, has been “recorded in many forms;” meanwhile, the sound-tape collection of the North Karhidish “Hearth Tales” is told by an “unknown narrator” (237, 21). In the third-person perspective, Genly's voice is absorbed by the multivocality of mythological and historical retellings. Alongside the rest of these documents, Genly and Estravan's radical subjectivity, from which *Left Hand* explores the political interplay between the two cultures at the immediately

personal level, is omitted; thus, the redemption from a patriarchal worldview has no point of origin from which to instill this movement away from theories of ethnocentrism to embrace all-encompassing humanism. Ironically, Genly's narrative privilege through the first-person perspective prepares the conditions for his relationship with Estravan to become an essential part of the story with the incorporation of Estravan's recovered diary entries.

The re-visioning of Genly's narrative to accommodate the omniscient perspective rather than the first-person point of view therefore draws attention to the ways in which Genly's cultural power in relation to the Gethenians is enhanced and diminished through narrative framing. Evidently, this shift also reveals the ways in which Estravan's reality as both a man and a woman can be either refused or denied by Genly, a Terran, whose biologically and culturally limited imagination makes it "almost impossible... to accept" (94). For Le Guin, voices are the vessels through which ideological perspectives are carried; it is, therefore, through the voice of patriarchy and ethnocentrism that *The Left Hand of Darkness* seeks to recover histories of exploitation in which we have mistaken not only strangers, but our own neighbors, for our enemies.

## **Works Cited**

Le Guin, Ursula K., *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Penguin Books Ltd., 1976.

# **Vanity, Gender Politics, and Fate: Origins of Suffering in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and its Film Adaptations**

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Michael Carelse

In the first chapter of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Gabriel Oak looks out from behind a hedge and sees a beautiful young woman riding through the country on a wagon. Unaware that she is being observed, the woman, Bathsheba Everdene, chooses that same moment to take out a looking glass and admire her reflection in the sunlight. Smiling into the glass, she blushes "at herself, and seeing her reflection blush, blushed the more" (12). After Bathsheba puts the glass away and drives off, Gabriel remarks that "she has her faults ... and the greatest of them is—well, what it is always .... Vanity" (13). So begins Hardy's pastoral tale. Over the course of the novel, Bathsheba inherits a farm and attracts three suitors: Gabriel, whom she rejects at the beginning of the novel and later hires as a shepherd; William Boldwood, a neighbouring gentleman farmer who becomes smitten with her after she jokingly sends him a valentine card; and Francis Troy, a dashing young cavalry officer whose charm she is unable to resist. Determined to maintain agency in this contest for her hand, but too vain to act

wisely, Bathsheba makes a series of ill-advised decisions for which she and her suitors suffer. However, the novel is not merely a cautionary tale about the destructive consequences of human vanity; in addition to facing the repercussions of their actions, the characters must also grapple with Victorian gender ideologies and Hardian twists of fate that ultimately have deadly consequences. These external forces distort Bathsheba's moral trajectory into an interesting thematic paradox: she becomes increasingly less vain as she learns how little agency she has in the face of the gender politics and twists of fate that shape her life, yet her vanity is what gives her agency in the first place. This paradox allows Hardy to hold Bathsheba accountable for her acts of vanity while still advancing a fatalist perspective and a critique of Victorian gender ideologies.

Since *Far from the Madding Crowd* was published serially in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1874, it has been adapted into two major films: the first in 1967, directed by John Schlesinger and starring Julie Christie as Bathsheba; the second in 2015, directed by Thomas Vinterberg and starring Carey Mulligan. Both adaptations attempt to untangle this thematic paradox in the source material by simplifying the nuances of Bathsheba's agency in order to locate the origins of her suffering more decisively. Schlesinger gives her more agency, making his film primarily a cautionary tale about vanity that largely sidesteps

issues of gender politics and fatalism. By contrast, Vinterberg gives Bathsheba less agency, making his film less about Bathsheba's active contributions to her own suffering through acts of vanity and more about her as an innocent victim of gender politics and fate. As a result, Schlesinger's film envisions vanity as the origin of its characters' suffering, whereas Vinterberg's film envisions gender politics and fate as the origins of that same suffering. This essay will not, however, argue that one film is more thematically loyal to the source material than the other. Rather, I will demonstrate that because the novel itself ambivalently attributes Bathsheba's suffering to a combination of gender politics, fate, and her own vanity, both films seem comparably justified in their opposing interpretations.

In the novel, Hardy holds Bathsheba accountable for her actions by giving her enough agency to make bad decisions that have negative consequences for her. She "idly and unreflectingly" (98) sends an anonymous valentine to Boldwood as a kind of prank to get back at him for not admiring her beauty. Boldwood then traces the valentine back to Bathsheba, falls madly in love with her, and relentlessly courts her throughout the rest of the novel, much to her distress. She marries Troy to secure his affection (a vain attempt in both senses of the word) after he tells her that he loves someone even more beautiful than she. Troy then gambles away all her money, fakes his own death, disappears, and then

reappears a year later to demand more money from her. Thus, at the beginning of these relationships, Bathsheba commits an act of vanity against her better judgement and ultimately suffers for it, complicating our ability to assign blame—or, if not blame, at least agency—entirely to the men who mistreat her.

This issue of whether to blame Bathsheba for her own unhappiness is perhaps the most divisive question that the novel poses. Hardy even plays out this debate in a conversation between two of Boldwood's farmhands. The first farmhand says, "What a fool she must have been ever to have had anything to do with [Troy]! She is so self-willed and independent too, that one is more minded to say it serves her right than pity her." The second replies, "No, no. I don't hold with 'ee there. She was no otherwise than a girl mind, and how could she tell what the man was made of? .... 'Tis too hard a punishment, and more than she ought to hae [*sic*]" (358). In representing this debate within the novel, Hardy anticipates the same divided criticism that the novel received. On one hand, the initial reviewers of the 1870s tended to side with the first farmhand, one going so far as to call Bathsheba an "incorrigible hussy" whom "Gabriel Oak was not sufficiently manly to refuse" (*Observer* 35). On the other hand, the feminist critics of the 1980s tended to side with the second farmhand, viewing Bathsheba, as Linda M. Shires points out, as a "passive" and "trapped" victim of male desire (Shires 163).

Indeed, while Bathsheba causes much of her own suffering, Hardy nevertheless subjects her to undeserved suffering at the hands of Troy as part of a wider effort to criticize Victorian gender politics. Hardy effects this criticism by presenting Troy as a man who thoughtlessly ruins and abandons the women around him simply because his culture's laws and sexual ideologies allow him to do so. As a sexually experienced bachelor, Troy can court Bathsheba aggressively and skillfully, winning her over despite her initial attempts to resist him. As a man, he can walk away from his romantic indiscretions unscathed, marry Bathsheba, and leave his former lover, Fanny Robin, to die delivering his child in a workhouse. And as Bathsheba's husband, he gains complete jurisdiction over her farm, which he nearly bankrupts, abandons for a year, and then comes back to claim. Importantly, Troy does all this entirely within the bounds of the law. Hardy's criticism, then, is leveled not only at Troy but also at the legal system that condones his behaviour. However, Hardy does not content himself with merely *criticizing* an unjust society, as he does in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891); he doles out his own artistic justice by killing Troy, freeing Bathsheba from the gendered oppression that she experiences as his wife and punishing him for his moral transgressions.

In addition to holding Bathsheba accountable for her actions and criticizing the society in which



she lives for its gender inequalities, Hardy uses his narrative to advance a fatalist perspective by subjecting Bathsheba and other characters to accidents and twists of fate that function as commentary not on specific social conventions but rather on the unpredictable nature of life itself. Bathsheba inherits her uncle's farm unexpectedly; Gabriel's sheepdog then runs his flock off a cliff, leading Gabriel to seek work on that same farm. Bathsheba tosses a hymn book to decide whom to send her valentine to—fate chooses Boldwood. She seals the letter with a seal that she cannot read until it is affixed—it happens to read "MARRY ME" (98). Fanny goes to the wrong church to marry Troy and never gets a second chance. Troy's spur gets caught in Bathsheba's skirt, and they meet and fall in love instead of walking past each other in the dark. Troy is swept out to sea and rescued by sailors but presumed dead on land. Finally, when Troy reappears, Boldwood shoots him to death and is sent to prison, freeing Bathsheba to marry Gabriel and live a modest and wholesome life. These twists of fate direct the characters' lives as much as—if not more than—human agency or social convention, and Hardy uses them to tutor his characters, particularly Bathsheba, in what seems to be, for Hardy, the greatest human virtue: humility.

In Schlesinger's film, however, this interest in fatalism and gender politics takes a back seat; with the glamorous Julie Christie as its star, this adaptation is all

about Bathsheba. In order to be all about Bathsheba, the film magnifies her vanity to the point of hubris and gives her more agency to act on it than she has in the novel. When Gabriel initially proposes, Schlesinger's Bathsheba laughs at him, blithely proclaiming that "I don't love you a bit!" (a line that appears in the novel, but without an indication of how she says it). When she tells Liddy about the proposal, she narcissistically giggles that "he wasn't good enough for me." In Hardy's text, the line is, "He wasn't quite good enough for me" (77), and, as the line is untagged in the novel, Hardy once again does not allow readers access to Bathsheba's interiority at the time or tell us how she says it. Later, when Schlesinger's Bathsheba finds the valentine, she decides on her own to send it to Boldwood instead of tossing a hymn book as she does in the novel. When Troy arrives, she encourages his advances by flirting back instead of resisting him. Then, as events progress and she begins to suffer the consequences of her actions, she loses her vanity but never gains anything from her newfound humility. She simply withers away. By the time Troy dies and she marries Gabriel, she has become a hollowed-out version of her former self, resigned to living a quiet life with Gabriel but showing no sign of her former vitality. By focusing on Bathsheba's moral trajectory and characterizing her as excessively vain for the first three quarters of the film and excessively subdued for the fourth quarter, the film both celebrates and condemns

Bathsheba's vanity: celebrates, because while her vanity gives her joy and satisfaction, her learned humility apparently gives her neither; condemns, because the film nevertheless presents her vanity as the primary origin of her suffering.

By emphasizing Bathsheba's vanity as the primary cause of her own unhappiness, Schlesinger's film engages less than the novel does with Victorian gender politics and loses the sense of fatalism that runs through the novel. To be sure, the film retains the same plot points as the novel. However, because Schlesinger's Bathsheba resists Troy less, Troy simply seems less predatory. Rather than envisioning him as a man who ruins her, the film presents him as an opportunity for Bathsheba to ruin herself, which she does with minimal encouragement. This 1967 depiction of Bathsheba is perhaps not surprising, since it predates the feminist critical attention that the novel received in the 1980s. Conversely, Vinterberg's 2015 film, which depicts Bathsheba as a victim of Victorian gender politics, is a testament to the legacy of that same feminist scholarship.

Schlesinger's film also, as Graham Fuller notes, makes "little attempt to render cinematically Hardy's psychological use of landscape," though Fuller argues that Schlesinger captures "much of human complexity and Hardy's irony and fatalism" by including more of Hardy's plot than Vinterberg's film does (14). I would

argue, however, that in altering Hardy's psychological use of landscape, Schlesinger actually de-emphasizes the fatalist qualities of the novel by instead suggesting through cinematography that Bathsheba and the other characters have the agency to dominate the natural environment. Schlesinger styles his film's rural landscape as sparse and empty, giving it the effect of a blank stage upon which characters perform their lives rather than of a complex natural world that is indifferent to human suffering. It is as if when the characters are not there to experience their individual struggles, nothing happens in the world.

By contrast, Vinterberg's film portrays Bathsheba as having very little agency or vanity. Rather than laughing at Gabriel when he proposes, as Schlesinger's Bathsheba does, Vinterberg's Bathsheba deprecates herself to make him feel better, joking that "you would grow to despise me." When Liddy laughs about the incident later, imagining that Bathsheba had thought something to the effect of "kiss my foot, sir; my face is for mouths of consequence," Vinterberg's Bathsheba quickly responds that "it wasn't like that." Liddy's line appears in the novel—Bathsheba's assertion does not. As in the novel, Bathsheba tosses to decide whom to send the valentine to, allowing fate to guide her. Then, when Troy arrives, she evidently wishes to resist him. Finally, when she learns humility at the end of the film, she seems the better for it. She and Gabriel even

kiss in the final scene, a cinematic assertion of their mutual compatibility that notably does not occur in Schlesinger's film. Of course, the novel does not end in a kiss, which is perhaps why Schlesinger's film does not either, since that film is strenuously faithful to the original plot. However, the absence of a kiss is more significant in the visual medium of film than in the written medium of fiction. Thus Vinterberg's *addition* of a final kiss between Gabriel (the moral compass of the novel and both films) and Bathsheba reinforces that film's vision of Bathsheba as an ultimately moral and humble character.

Because Vinterberg's film portrays Bathsheba as a moral character who lacks agency, it emphasizes the issues of gender politics and fatalism that the novel raises. Like the novel, the film criticizes Troy's predatory treatment of Bathsheba and the Victorian gender politics that empower him. In the film, however, Troy becomes even more predatory than he is in the novel because Vinterberg's Bathsheba unambiguously tries to resist him and is clearly an inherently virtuous character. Vinterberg's film also reflects Hardy's fatalist perspective by emphasizing Bathsheba's lack of agency and by using its cinematography to achieve the reverse effect of Schlesinger's film. Unlike in Schlesinger's film, the landscape in Vinterberg's film is lush and complex, and characters often look out at it in long shots and extreme long shots that remind the audience of the

characters' powerlessness and physical smallness in relation to the natural world. In this way, Vinterberg's film aligns itself, through its wild and seemingly boundless *mise en scène*, with Hardy's insistence on the virtue of humility, since Hardy often contemplates his characters' insignificance in relation to their natural surroundings in order to tutor both his readers and his characters in humility.

Despite these stark differences between the two film adaptations, neither film stands in particularly stark opposition to the source material. Rather, Hardy's novel lends itself to both interpretations by holding Bathsheba accountable for her actions while still insisting that she exists at the mercy of an imperfect society and of fate itself. Like the novel, both films attempt to pin down the origins of human suffering: Schlesinger traces suffering back to an internal human vice—vanity; Vinterberg traces it to external circumstances—society and fate. Hardy, however, leaves the question open to his readers, suggesting that suffering stems from a combination of both internal and external forces and allowing his text to be adapted and interpreted in two radically different ways.

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# **Just Crusoe Things: Understanding the Lyric Self Through a Subject-Object Dialectic**

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Karine Hack

Elizabeth Bishop's poem, "Crusoe in England," is an elegiac lyric poem which meditates on loss, isolation, and the concept of home. Integral to the poem is Bishop's creation of a persona. The poem invites the reader to interpret and diagnose the emotional state of this persona, Crusoe, who is presented in the speaker's dramatic monologue. Bishop constructs the lyric self in relation to "things," both geographic and material. I will explore how thing theory can shed light on Bishop's poem. In the poem, Crusoe transfers meaning and significance onto objects and geographic sites to assuage loneliness and to explore his feelings indirectly, with less pain. Bishop thus comments on the nature of grief: Crusoe is incapable of divulging his grief literally because it is too overwhelming, but his narration of events allows him to manifest it symbolically. Crusoe is removed from the primary site of his anguish and instead presents a narrative of secondary emotion. The reader must engage in an analytical process of diagnosing Crusoe's turmoil through his animation of the inanimate and his reimagining of places and things. Bishop employs several strategies to create the



persona of Crusoe in her poem. Bishop connects past and present time. This strategy leads to what Helen Vendler calls “a whole temporal self available to be inhabited” (179). From England, Crusoe writes of the past: “Well, I had fifty-two / miserable, small volcanoes I could climb” (ll. 11-12), of the present: “Now I live here, another island, / that doesn’t seem like one, but who decides?” (ll. 154-155), and of future events: “The local museum’s asked me to / leave everything to them” (ll. 171-172). Crusoe does not exist only in the present; he extends into the past, and can be projected into the future as well (even if the future will be the site of his death). Bishop employs other important poetic strategies like the use of rhetorical questions and tone. Subsequently, “the personality of the speaker seems to have more than one facet” (Vendler 182). Crusoe questions and queries: he engages in a dialogue with himself, and thus becomes a very real presence in the poem. At times Crusoe is despairing, asking “How many years did I / beg it, implore it, not to break?” (ll. 163-164). At times he is simple and child-like: “Friday was nice. / Friday was nice, and we were friends” (ll. 145-146). Finally, throughout the poem, he is often frustrated: “None of the books has ever got it right” (l. 10). These key shifts in tone, alongside the use of discourse, show that Crusoe is a complex character.

Bishop also characterizes Crusoe by showing his relationship to things material and geographic,

British and island. Thing theory is the study of human interactions with objects in literature, and things hold great significance for Bishop's *Crusoe*. In "Thing Theory," Bill Brown writes that "the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (4). Bishop presents us with a lyric self that can only be understood in relation to objects: *Crusoe* is an obscured subject who is understood through his animation of inanimate things. The relationship between *Crusoe* and his objects is imbued with loss, loneliness, and isolation. Bishop's indirect creation of persona accomplishes various things. One, it suggests that *Crusoe* is incapable of understanding his loss in a direct and literal manner; instead he must understand his emotional turmoil through the lens of objects. Two, it implies that *Crusoe* is not fully self-aware, and that *Crusoe's* grief or loss is too monumental to be spoken of directly.

*Crusoe's* relationship with objects changes throughout the poem, and we can map these changes to emotional or epistemological crises of home and love. The first "thing" in the poem is "my poor old island" (l. 8). *Crusoe* personifies the geography of the island: the volcanoes have "their heads blown off" (l. 17), the craters have "parched throats" (l. 32), and the "whole placed hissed" (l. 35). These descriptions emphasize

Crusoe's loneliness and illustrate his attempt to view things from another perspective or epistemology in which volcanoes could be friends. However, the violent language suggests that Crusoe is unable to find companionship in geographic things. He writes, "Beautiful, yes, but not much company" (l. 54). Thus, the image of Crusoe on the island is one of isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, while he is on the island, Crusoe attempts to imagine or make British things. He dreams of teakettles for which he would "have given years, or taken a few" (ll. 38-39), and he makes a home-brew and plays his "home-made flute" (l. 82); these actions are all symbols of the cultured English life. Crusoe thus performs English identity in exile through his relationships with things. However, he has no teakettle and the brew is "awful, fizzy, stinging stuff" (l. 80). Here is not England. Crusoe writes of his books: "Why didn't I know enough of something? / Greek drama or astronomy? The books / I'd read were full of blanks" (ll. 91-93). Here, Bishop shows how the relationship between subject and object can change dramatically in a different context. Crusoe learns nothing from his books because his framework for understanding the world has been shattered by his relocation outside of England. Things that once held meaning, such as Greek poetry and Shakespeare, do so no longer. The books, the imagined teakettle, the fizzy brew, and the flute are symbolic of his epistemological

crisis. In exile, Crusoe clings to the idea of England. However, he is thwarted: his English things no longer make sense outside the homeland.

Yet, as the poem progresses, the speaker implies that home is not a geographic location—home is Friday. The poem’s diction changes when it first introduces Friday. It becomes simple and child-like: “Friday was nice. / Friday was nice, and we were friends” (ll. 145-146). This shift in tone does two things. It suggests that Crusoe’s sentiments defy language; since he cannot articulate the depths of his emotions, he must express himself with the simplest of words. Additionally, it implies that Crusoe does not understand the full significance of his relationship with Friday. The speaker creates dramatic irony, thus allowing the reader to understand Crusoe’s relationship with Friday better than Crusoe does himself. Crusoe says “just when I thought I couldn’t stand it / another minute longer, Friday came” (l. 142-143) and describes Friday as “pretty to watch; he had a pretty body” (l. 152). These lines imply an intimate, deep, and likely erotic connection between the two. Crusoe never discloses his actual feelings for Friday. However, it is Crusoe’s inability to articulate the nature of his relationship that reveals his love for Friday.

In England, Crusoe must confront the loss of Friday, and his relationship with objects exposes his loneliness and isolation. Crusoe fixates on objects

because it is too painful to write of “[his] dear Friday” (l. 181). Just as his things lose their “living soul” (l. 169), Crusoe loses his will to live. He writes, “Now I live here, another island, / that doesn’t seem like one, but who decides?” (ll. 154-155). Once, Crusoe longed for teakettles and Shakespeare, now England is just another island. Dislocated from the homeland, Crusoe was forced to imagine home, yet now that he is home, he is completely isolated and alone. He drinks his “real tea, / surrounded by uninteresting lumber” (ll. 159-160). In England tea may be real, but real tea is no longer what Crusoe needs or desires. The knife that was once vital for survival fills no purpose here, for “It reeked of meaning, like a crucifix. / It lived. / ... / Now it won’t look at me at all” (ll. 162-163, 168). The knife represents Crusoe’s own sense of loss. Just as the knife is meaningless in English society, Crusoe’s life is meaningless without Friday; he has no framework through which to understand himself or his role in the world. He has no geographic home: “that archipelago / has petered out” (ll. 157-158).

In the final stanza of the poem, Crusoe focuses on a series of objects, and then concludes with news of Friday’s death. As I have suggested, objects are representative of epistemological or emotional crises concerning the nature of home and love. Crusoe’s island objects (“the flute, the knife, the shrivelled shoes” (l. 173)) are meaningless in England. Crusoe’s relationship

to them has changed; now, they represent his lost life with Friday. Crusoe fixates on objects as representative of lost meaning, lost love, lost joy (the knife has died, the parasol looks like “a plucked and skinny fowl” (l. 179)), to explore his own deep sense of loss. In the end, his things will live on in the museum, they “still will work” (l. 178), but they no longer matter because “Friday, [his] dear Friday, died of measles / seventeen years ago come March” (ll. 181-182). At the end of the poem, Crusoe’s things are empty shells, the last vestiges of meaning and joy have dissipated, and “the living soul has dribbled away” (l. 169) because Friday is gone. Crusoe explores his own anguish through the lens of things; he imbues things with significance to mourn the one person who lent meaning to his life.

Crusoe is a lyric self-constructed in relation to objects; he animates objects with his own spirit and, in doing so, divulges the nature of his person (his wants, hopes, and sorrows). Bishop meditates on concepts of home, isolation, and loss throughout the poem. She reimagines what it would mean to be Crusoe in England, Crusoe returned, and in doing so, she presents a sad tale of mourning and grief.

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# Swimming in Stein's Poetic Waters: An Analysis of Sexual Tragedy in "Preciosilla"

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David Johnstone

In "Preciosilla," a poem about feminine sexuality and death, Gertrude Stein employs multiple perspectives and voices to construct a cubist narrative, that is, one that exists simultaneously without clear order. While "Preciosilla" has been discussed in relation to a dancer of the same name, I would assert that other female figures in both history and drama, specifically St. Clare of Assisi and *Hamlet's* Ophelia, are significant in helping to understanding the poem. Building on Stein's allusion to Ophelia, I will refer to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to demonstrate the poem's tragic nature. I will show how Stein's poem exists as a sexual tragedy that compares female purity to life and female sexuality to death and dying through several devices including imagery and symbolism.

In the poem's first line, the speaker tells us that Preciosilla, our titular character, is "[c]ousin to Clare washing" and in doing so sets up her first allusion. "Clare" here resembles the word 'clear,' which emphasizes the cleanliness that comes from washing. The line alludes to St. Clare of Assisi, who is known for her washing. Specifically, she washed the feet of her



disciples (as Christ did) and even ventured to kiss their feet on occasion. St. Clare's kissing and washing of feet was an act of subservience, but it is also homoerotic (which emphasizes the reading of "sin" in "cousin"). The proximity of this homoeroticism and the word cousin also implies an incestuous relationship. The water in this image is a cleansing tool, but it is "dirty" in its sexuality. There is a relationship between women and water here as the speaker reveals how each can be pure, sexual, and, as apparent later in the poem, deadly.

The second stanza establishes the slightly ambiguous mourning narrative and tone of the poem. "[T]he band beagles," or bugles, and the celebration is revealed to be that of a "weeding match." Each of these words, "weeding" and "match," can have both positive and negative connotations. "[W]eeding" implies the removal of something, usually a plant (perhaps a lily), while also resembling the word "wedding" (which would render the fact that it is "arrange[d]" more problematic). On the other hand, "match" can be read as a fight or, as with "weeding," a unison. Weeds can also denote the mourning of a widow and the fact that "grief" and its "strange black" are mentioned later reinforces this meaning. The "arrange[ment]" of the "weeding match," as the speaker observes it, is the societal practice of dressing in black in order "to presume a certain point." That it is a "match" implies that the clothing is similar, but also that there is a competition

in the “sign[ing],” or signifying, of grief. Stein repeats “to exstate,” a fictional English infinitive of the Latin verb *exstare* which means to exist or be visible. In this repetition, Stein calls to mind the contrast between the living and the dead, the existing and the non-existing, as well as reemphasizes the fixation on having one’s grief be visible. There is a subtle allusion to *Hamlet* here as that prince is always seen in his “inky cloak [and] customary suits of solemn black” (1.2.77-78), while his uncle and mother have not grieved long enough and instead celebrate a wedding (a “weeding”). Additionally, when the speaker announces the drowning of Ophelia to Laertes, she notes how Ophelia’s “crownet weeds / [were] Clamb’ring to hang” on a branch (4.4.171-72). Those “weedy trophies” then fall with Ophelia into the “weeping brook” and drown with her (4.4.173-74). Returning to Stein, “[L]o and shut” provides the image of one looking and then closing their eyes. Shut is repeated with “shut is life”, and life comes to a close: death. This is also a declaration that death *is* life and, as is the case with binary opposites, they define each other.

The third stanza is the depiction of an assault as a seduction becomes a kind of physical forcing. Preciosilla is “bait[ed]” and teased by a “bait tore” (i.e., a baiter; or, perhaps, a masturbator). Violently, she is “tor[n]” like a fish on a hook. The baiter “tore her clothes,” which reads as a kind of sexual assault, and, nearly homophonically, tore her close, “toward it, toward a bit, toward a sit.” “[B]

it" implies a private bit (genitals) as well as being torn to bits, while "sit" implies a downward motion as well as Preciosilla's backside. Preciosilla is commanded to "sit down in, in vacant surely lots." The repetition of "in" as well as the second syllable of "vacant" (i.e., "cunt") further renders the image sexual and penetrative. The second "in" can also be read in conjunction with the word that follows it, so that the area is, in fact, "in-vacant", as Preciosilla occupies the empty space with her body. "[L]ots" connotes the abundance of vacancy, as well as lots as pieces ("bit[s]") of land. Furthermore, the context implies grave "[p]lots" as well as the ideas of fate and luck that come from drawing lots. The image is sadomasochistic in its combination of violence and sexuality.

This image of sexual violence contrasts with the beauty and purity of the lily, which renders the image even more disturbing. The rhyming "single mingle" connotes unison, as well as masturbation, as there is an intermingling of the "bait and wet" and they are one "single establishment." From this a "l i l y lily grow[s]." The spacing of "l i l y" and then "lily" exemplifies a cubist device, allowing the reader to see multiple perspectives simultaneously. The effect is that we see the lily literally grow, but we also see it open and close (as lilies do at day and night, respectively). This binary opposition (i.e., opened and closed) echoes the assertion that "shut is life" as the lily lives in both instances while going

through a cycle of quasi-rebirth. The lily represents purity and the female genitalia; classically, it symbolizes the virgin Mary. St. Clare, too, is traditionally depicted with the lily in her hand. However, this purity is corrupted by the water and “Clare’s washing” is undone. Preciosilla “come[s]” (i.e., orgasms) as she enters the “water.” While water traditionally purifies and cleans, here it taints in the same way that sexuality taints the suggested virginity of Preciosilla.

The poem begins to depict sexuality in a seemingly more positive and safe light, setting up for a contrast with the fifth stanza’s images of death and dying. The “lily” is “wet” and is therefore possibly a water lily on a lily pad. Its wetness also signifies the aroused genitalia, which “is so pink so pink in stammer.” The pinkness is fleshly and vaginal, as “so pink” describes how wet it is: “so pink” / sopping wet. The “single curly shady” is reminiscent of a pubic hair, but it also renders the scene of sexuality slightly ominous with its dark isolation. The next stanza continues with this tone. The speaker says “have can whither,” which implies that the act of possession, of having, can be fleeting. Additionally, “can” (i.e., agency and ability) is also that which “whither[s].” With “sleep sleeps knot,” Stein suggests the image of a “sl[i]ps knot” (which is a tool of both suicide and execution), while also suggesting that sleep does not sleep, as death does not die, and is therefore unavoidable. Stein calls the noose a “lily scarf”

and in doing so romanticizes it as a tool of death, but also rebirth. This is also to say that the scarf is *meant* for the lily, the virginal Preciosilla.

The poem continues to develop images of death and dying, but its subject seems to switch from Preciosilla to nobles. However, this is only partially the case. The line “nobles are bleeding bleeding” hyperbolizes that loss of blood while also suggesting that the nobles are losing, or “bleeding,” the very ability to “bleed.” With nobles bleeding, there is the implication of revolution, but with them “bleeding bleeding,” they seem to lose the ability to die and there becomes a kind of infinite rule, a truly total totalitarianism. The syntax also leaves the possibility that the nobles are “bleeding two seats,” two thrones. Notably, the Spanish *precio* means ‘value’ while *silla* means ‘seat’. This is the simultaneous death of a woman and what she symbolizes, the throne. The speaker asks “[w]hy is grief,” but ends the question with a period as if it were a statement. This is to say that asking “why” is the essence of grief and to not ask questions is to accept and therefore be done with grieving.

The poem concludes with the promise of death. When the speaker says that “[w]e will not swim,” she implies the drowning of Preciosilla in the water. The personal pronoun is used by the speaker, and it characterizes her as vulnerable and mortal, whereas she has been detached and seemed (and still seems) to be

Preciosilla's baiter (perhaps this is an instance of misery loving company?). This device also implicates the reader as vulnerable and mortal (although, perhaps it is a royal "we," given that "nobles are bleeding"). The drowning here calls back to mind the image of Preciosilla being "bait[ed]" towards the water and being told to "come in". This renders Preciosilla suggestive of the drowned Ophelia. Although there is a distinction here to be made between murder and suicide, the poem blurs that line. The baiter is malicious, pulling her to the water to drown. Alternatively, the situation may be that of a "single mingle," a conversation that Preciosilla is having with herself. Ophelia's gravediggers questioned whether her death was suicide, "willy-nilly," or not, for "if the / water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself" (5.1.16-17). The speaker further complicates this relationship by alternating between "bait[ing]" and asking Preciosilla to come to the water. It is as if she can only pull her to the water, and entering it must be done of her own volition (e.g., "please get wet").

Stein's poem complicates traditional notions of sadomasochism by queering them. The tragic poem pits the female body against the female body (Preciosilla is against both herself as well as the likely female baiter). Preciosilla's purity is implicitly tied to her life, and with the awakening of her sexuality comes her death (and her orgasm: *la petite mort*). For Stein, death itself is a sexual exploration. Tying sexuality to the tragic narrative

results in the problematic, though traditional, notion that sexual exploration is, especially for women, sinful and damnable. However, the poem still complicates the nature of patriarchy by largely excluding men. Stein leaves room in certain places for interpretation and in doing so baits us into the vacant water. Will we swim?

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# **Bards, Self-Awareness, and the Effect of the Outsider Within Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey***

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Sarah Kahale

Homer's time-honoured epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, represent a foundational moment in literature of bardic performances being brought to text. They also provide us with a glimpse into what roles, and what influence, bards held in ancient society. While actual bard characters appear in both stories, I will argue that non-bard characters appropriate the roles of the storyteller for their own purposes. The characters Odysseus, Achilles, and Helen all embody the bardic role at some point in the narratives. Odysseus uses bardic performance as a method of manipulating the memory of his past actions, and thereby carving out an image of himself that he wishes to be remembered by. Achilles, while too heavily influenced by his own story to tell it himself, uses his understanding of bard-songs and their effect on glory (κλέος in Ancient Greek) to come to terms with his inability to affect his role within the narrative. Lastly, Helen shows similar dissatisfaction with her position within the narrative but has little ability to influence events. Helen is peripheral at this point in the Trojan War; however, she assumes the mantle of the bard not only by being an observer of



Priam and the citizens of Troy, but also by weaving her tapestry. These characters all strive to overcome their fear of mortality by taking control of their own renown. All three are outsiders to the central action within the stories at different points, thus giving them an objective knowledge of the reality of their own stories.

Discussing bardic performances, Ruth Scodel writes “song is the most powerful form of memory” (183). This concept echoes throughout both epics; the strongest form of honour comes from remembrance, and remembrance is achieved by having one’s story told. In the case of Odysseus, it is not whether he will be remembered, but *how* he will be remembered that affects much of his story. Odysseus is the character that most replicates the qualities of a bard in these two epic poems. Multiple times within the text, Odysseus is compared to a bard:

Like an expert singer skilled at lyre and  
song—  
Who strains a string to a new peg with ease,  
Making the pliant sheep-gut fast at either  
end—  
So with his virtuoso ease Odysseus strung  
his mighty bow.  
Quickly his right hand plucked the string to  
test its pitch (21.408)

He spends much of his own epic, *The Odyssey*, telling the story of his journey with little concern for truth.

Odysseus, on his journey home, his nostos (νόστος), relies on the generosity of others for both gifts and help; therefore, he has a reasonable excuse to embellish his story. Roger J. Porter discusses the autobiographical leanings of *The Odyssey* in a convocation speech written in 1999. Though flawed, his interpretation makes the point that Odysseus is writing his own biography within *The Odyssey*. The quality of his glory (κλέος) lies within his ability to effectively tell a story.

Though Odysseus possesses bard-like abilities, he has too many ulterior motivations to be a traditional bard. While Scodel claims that Odysseus is bard-like because “his tale is arranged artistically rather than with a view to persuasion” (182), within her boundaries of what makes and does not make a bard, Odysseus is too intimately connected to the stories he tells to be considered a bard. His personal stakes are too high for him to maintain objectivity. While Alcinous does ask him to perform (8.570), which in Scodel’s view eliminates his chances of having concealed intentions, Odysseus’s desire for gifts and help from the Phaeacians gives him motivation to entertain his audience. Additionally, Odysseus gets the opportunity to shape what story the future audiences will hear and make himself the infallible hero.

By Scodel’s standard, a bard should be disconnected from their tale, and therefore the performance should not be used to influence the

opinions of the audience (171). Clearly, this is not the case with any of Odysseus' stories. As in the case with his Cretan Tales, he often embellishes and distorts the truth to fit the narrative of who he wishes to become. Theodor Adorno, who is quoted by Porter in his speech, once said, "for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (87). Odysseus' constant search for home is intensified by his ever-changing identities. Odysseus exists within a paradox: he is both Odysseus and nobody. He searches for home while trapped in nostalgia (νοσταλγία).

The idea of song and its power over memory also greatly influences the actions of Achilles. Achilles' plot, after his disagreement with Agamemnon, is driven by his struggle with mortality and his search for assured glory (κλέος). Achilles consistently attempts to stall the inevitable, since he knows he will not return home from Troy. This knowledge, and his understanding of who he is within the narrative of *The Iliad*, brands Achilles a pseudo-bard within the story. He is a driving force of the plot, but also a keen observer. Achilles is not a fully willing participant in the siege of Troy; therefore, his bardic intentions are different from Odysseus. In book 9 of *The Iliad*, we see Achilles singing songs of other heroes who already earned their glory (κλέος):

And they came to the huts and the ships of  
the Myrmidons, and found him delighting his  
soul with a clear-toned lyre, fair and richly

wrought, whereon was a bridge of silver;  
this had he taken from the spoil when he  
laid waste the city of Eëtion. Therewith was  
he delighting his soul, and he sang of the  
glorious deeds of warriors. (9.180)

Later in book 9, Achilles threatens to go home, thus establishing his desire not to play his part within the war or the resulting story. Achilles explains the prophecy in which his fate is decided, although he does not return to battle to earn his honour:

‘For my mother the goddess, silver-footed  
Thetis, telleth me that twofold fates are  
bearing me toward the doom of death: if  
I abide here and war about the city of the  
Trojans, then lost is my home-return, but my  
renown shall be imperishable; but if I return  
home to my dear native land, lost then is  
my glorious renown, yet shall my life long  
endure, neither shall the doom of death come  
soon upon me.’ (*Iliad* 9.414-9.415)

This line of verse demonstrates Achilles’s struggle between his desire to be immortal and the reality in which he will die. While Odysseus seeks to take control of his narrative, Achilles strives to receive the acknowledgment of a story. If he is not the great hero that *The Iliad* positions him to be, he will not be immortal in the only way mortal men can be. Achilles’ narrative arc throughout *The Iliad* pre-empts his

inevitable death and, despite not actually being depicted in the poem, this certitude weighs heavily on the text.

Unlike her male counterparts, Helen plays both an active and inactive role in *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*. To say she is simply an observer does injustice to her role as the catalyst of the Trojan War and the agency she exudes during the story; however, to say she is active eliminates her role as an outside spectator. In this sense, Helen is a paradoxical character, like Odysseus. While Helen takes full responsibility for the actions that spur the events of *The Iliad*, the rest of the characters refuse to blame her and point blame elsewhere. Ruby Blondell notes that Helen is often the target of objectification, but “she is almost never a mere object. She is an agent as well as a victim, a viewer as well as viewed, active as well as passive, a generator of signs as well as a sign herself” (1-2). Helen is both inside and outside the narrative because she is both a character within the tale and a narrator of events. This paradox is evident in her introduction in book two of *The Iliad* when she sews a tapestry depicting the events of the story that are taking place around her. This sewing establishes Helen’s position as a bard within the story who weaves together the plot as she weaves together a tapestry. The tapestry itself is an ekphrasis, a rhetorical device formed into a physical object within the text. Andrew Becker writes that “[the tapestry’s] history cannot be narrated, since it is a work that we experience as it is being made, as the

Shield of Achilles or a performance of epic song itself” (55). This framing of Helen is a crucial set up for how the audience will view her character. Directly following this scene, she mounts the walls of Troy and describes to King Priam who each fighter is on the Achaean side:

‘Howbeit this will I tell thee, whereof thou dost ask and enquire. Yon man is the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon, that is both a noble king and a valiant spearman. And he was husband’s brother to shameless me, as sure as ever such a one there was.’ (3.179-3.180)

While this scene may seem out of place in the story, especially nine years into the siege of Troy, it once again depicts Helen in a narrative role disclosing the characters’ names and stories. It also plays an eerily similar role to the Catalogue of Ships in *The Iliad*.

Without Helen telling him, Priam would not know who the Achaean soldiers were. Similarly, without the Catalogue’s recitation, the audience would not know which cities and heroes took up arms against Troy. Ultimately, Helen’s storytelling remains relegated to weaving. In both *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Helen is seen either weaving or having woven something that, according to Melissa Mueller, is a way for women to attain honour: “Helen’s peplos attests to the potential for handcrafted objects to immortalize those who have made them” (1). Therefore, Helen’s weaving is also an

action through which she can immortalize herself and her story, much like Odysseus and Achilles both strive to do. Helen's tapestry also memorializes those who fought in the war, much like the actual epic does.

At different points of the story, Odysseus, Helen, and Achilles each operate as outsiders to the action of their narratives. Achilles removes himself from the war and is left to question the validity of the Achaean war against Troy. He asks “but why must the Argives wage war against the Trojans? Why hath he gathered and led hither his host, this son of Atreus? Was it not for fair-haired Helen's sake?” (9.335). Achilles' questioning of the war develops from his slight at the hands of Agamemnon, but it is still an example of his ability to see the full scope, consequences, and magnitude of the siege of Troy. Throughout the entirety of *The Iliad*, Helen is separated from her family, friends, and the main action. She sits and watches as her decisions influence many lives from the sidelines. This is most clearly depicted near the beginning of book 3, when Helen is seated above and apart from the battle describing each warrior Priam points to. Helen is not only an outsider from the Greeks, but also the Trojans. Like Odysseus, her sense of self-identity seems fluid. She is a queen, but she is alone and without purpose.

‘...If so be any other spake reproachfully of  
me in the halls, a brother of thine or a sister,  
or brother's fair-robed wife, or thy mother—

but thy father was ever gentle as he had been  
mine own—yet wouldst thou turn them with  
speech and restrain them by the gentleness  
of thy spirit and thy gentle words.’ (24.768)

The Trojan women ostracize Helen despite her residence in Troy for nearly 20 years. However, she has a charm over the men of Troy because she can sweet-talk them and allure them into pitying her. Blondell notes that this ability is another way in which Helen grasps the narrative position because “the speeches with which she disarms the men around her also serve, in collaboration with the poet’s narrative voice, to disarm the epic’s notionally male external audience” (13). Helen uses performance to instil in the audience a lasting memory of the pains of the war bride and, by extension, the suffering of non-combatants on all sides.

Finally, it is Odysseus who fully embodies the role of the outsider. For most of his journey, Odysseus is forced to perform as a different person for everyone he meets and he can therefore never fully be himself. Even in his homecoming, Odysseus must remain in disguise until he recognizes the right time for him to reclaim his own identity. His position as the outsider ties in heavily with his bardic tendencies. Particularly notable is his time with the Phaeacians since he comes in as a stranger and, until he can take control of the narrative, he remains that way. Porter notes that “[t]he autobiographer himself is a kind of exile, enraptured by



the past which is like the unreachable place to which he may not return" ("Convocation"). While the comparison to an autobiographer is a tenuous one, the association with an exile is apropos. Odysseus is driven from place to place, seeking home as well as a worthy story. Just because Odysseus says he faced all these trials does not necessarily make it true. The stories, especially those told to the Phaeacians, might just be another guise in which Odysseus can change his past.

Bards and the bardic tradition play a central role in the narrative of Homer's epics. Both *The Iliad* and *Odyssey* rely not only on their external storyteller, but also on narrative drivers within the plot. Helen, Achilles, and Odysseus play keystone roles within the tale while also serving as important representations of the bard. In his speech, Porter says, "forgetting is a form of death ever present within life" (2). All three characters must struggle with the anxiety around death and the desire to live forever. Immortality and lasting honour are the highest achievable goals for a Homeric hero or heroine. To have songs written about oneself is to transcend one's mortal limits. Ancient Greeks understood that only gods could be truly immortal, and they traditionalized another way for their heroes to live on.

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# **A “Gemme of Chastitee”: Death as Medium for Holy Communication in Chaucer’s *Physician’s Tale* and *Prioress’s Tale***

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Rachel Smith

In Chaucer’s *Physician’s Tale*, Virginia accepts her death at the hands of her father, asking that he “yif [her] deeth, ere that [she] have shame / Dooth [his] child [his] wil, in Goddes name” (250-51). In this statement, Virginia showcases that the father-daughter relationship depends wholly on God’s will rather than on the survival of the virgin daughter herself. Virginius sees his daughter Virginia only as an extension of himself and his needs, and he attempts to obliterate her subjectivity through violence, justifying his actions under “Goddes name” (*Physician’s Tale* 251). He minimizes his physical participation in his daughter’s bloodshed through synecdoche, blaming his “piteous hand” for her murder (226). However, in the *Physician’s* narration, we come to see Virginius as “the wolf” that rips apart the sheep while the shepherd is not paying attention, which subsequently reveals the family as the ultimate institution of violence (102). The thread of familial bonds continues into the *Prioress’s Tale*, where the Prioress allies herself with the young boy and his mother. The Prioress makes no attempt to create a

realistic setting in her tale. The setting, the Jews, and the characters are shadowy but not real. This ambiguity allows the prioress to focus in on her relationship to the young boy and thus the Virgin Mary. Like Virginia's body, the body of the Prioress's young boy is violated and used as a tool to reach the divine. Both characters are "[gemmes] of chastitee," or religious abstractions that distance the brutal realities of their deaths from their individualities (223), while the control taken over their bodies acts as a medium for communication with God.

Building on the discussion started by various researchers, this essay aims to explain Chaucer's graphic representation of violence in *The Canterbury Tales* as I propose that Chaucer both assimilates and rejects the idea of theologically rationalized murder, interrogating received notions about martyrdom, and exploring their contradictions. In 1980, Carolyn P. Collette published an article entitled "Death and Dying in the Canterbury Tales" where she stated that "the sensible world, and an immediate response to it, rather than any abstract philosophy, seems to form the basis of faith" in the *Physician's Tale* (141). Over 20 years later, John A. Pitcher contradicted Collette, asserting that "the testimony of the actual tale contradicts the Physician's original diagnosis regarding the social origin of religion" (15). An immense array of scholarship borders these two arguments. Scholars such as Daniel T. Kline, Angus Fletcher, and Anne Lancashire collectively argue that

death in the *The Canterbury Tales* does more than comment on the abuse of authority, but suggests that Virginia and the young child become “casualties of the defensive regime advocated by faith” (Fletcher 142). Complementing the research of these scholars, this essay engages the *Physician’s Tale* and the *Prioress’s Tale* as grounds to expose death’s significance as the triumph of the divine over nature, consequently revealing how we seek to understand the divine through actions of violence and death that foster a relationship to God through the breaching of the human body. More specifically, I analyze both the child in the *Prioress’s Tale* and Virginia in the *Physician’s Tale* and their symbolic roles as means to understand the divine through the human body.

In the *Physician’s Tale*, subjectivity orders the relationship between Virginia and her father Virginius. Virginius sees Virginia only in relation to himself— she is a man-made object of desire who Virginius lays claim to through his paternal line. Even the similarity in their names signifies that Virginia exists only as an extension of her father. When Apius overrides Virginius’s paternity with claims that Virginia is his stolen servant, Virginius gives his daughter two choices: “death or shame” (*Physician’s Tale* 214). Virginia succumbs to her father’s rhetoric and validates her subsequent murder under “Goddes name” (251). While Virginius kills his daughter so that she “shal die a maide,” Virginia’s

words and actions show that her father's sacrificial gesture is just a "socially convenient murder" (248; Kline 78). Virginius kills his daughter for fear that Apius's claims will blemish the purity of his paternity instead of fear that she will be sexually violated by Apius. Virginius's superficial reasoning for killing his daughter before her maidenhood is violated is ironic because, like Apius, Virginius gazes violently upon his daughter and seeks control over her body. Instead of considering how he might use his power to counteract Apius's claim on Virginia, he focuses on the person most easily controlled: his daughter. To Virginius, Virginia is an object and not even a person. Even when she is the subject of his sentence, she is the sufferer of the action at the hands of a man. In Virginius's murder of Virginia, he imitates Apius's forceful demeanor by violating Virginia's body to free his conscience under the will of God.

Using synecdoche to minimize his physical participation in Virginia's death, Virginius suggests that her death minimizes his shame in the eyes of God. After Virginius murders his daughter, he relents his actions and curses his "piteous hand" for carrying out the murder (*Physician's Tale* 226). In this way, Virginius commits a self-serving murder. Virginius's execution of Virginia takes place as an extension of his language. Before he beheads her, Virginius pleads for Virginia to accept her death in place of shame, calling her his "deere

doghter, endere of [his] life" (218). In this statement, Virginius indirectly blames Virginia for his fate. Her death ends his life; she is his final source of grief. As Anne Lancashire suggests, "like Abraham and Isaac, Virginius and Virginia talk together in private about the necessary killing, the dialogue between them is both emotional and religious, with their mutual love being stressed" (141). Although Virginius does not murder Virginia under order from a deity, his actions follow a religious narrative and he excuses his actions as necessary through God's eyes.

Before the "necessary" killing of Virginia is carried out, the Physician suggests Virginia's rape is theologically justified by referring to a wolf's slaughtering of a lamb under the negligent watch of a shepherd. The allusion to the careless shepherd at the beginning of the tale foreshadows Virginius's violation of Virginia's body. The image of the lamb's body torn apart in voracious feeding equates sexuality and purity with violence and death. In the *Physician's Tale*, Virginius becomes the wolf mutilating the lamb-like Virginia. In many senses, this illusion signifies an image of rape. Although sexually intact, Virginia's body is cleaved open by her father under the watchful eyes of God. Only after she is violated "and to the juge [Virginius] gan [her head] to presente" does her father feel shame at the hands of God (256). A "consentant of this cursedness," Virginius is finally

confounded with a “ful sorweful herte and will” (276, 254). In her death, Virginia is allied with the Virgin Mary because both Mary and Virginia are violated by their fathers in situations they cannot control. In this way, the *Physician’s Tale* elucidates the family as the ultimate institution of violence that is justified by God’s teachings.

Like Virginia, the little boy in the *Prioress’s Tale* is a “gemme of chastitee,” in that his death will become an example for the reader of true love and devotion (223). The Prioress sets her tale in a small, nameless town in Asia many years in the past. The vague setting of the tale makes the narrative appear illusory. Although it is a tale of affective piety, it appears as a fable, or a romance with “no effort [made by the Prioress] to create a realistic setting, no attention to the possibilities and inevitabilities of life in such a place” (Colette 142). Perpetuating the vague nature of the tale, the Prioress fails to describe the Jews in the Jewish quarter. This lack of description makes the Jews appear as inhuman creatures, “a convenient backdrop, a catalyst for the necessary action” of the tale (146). Even the boy’s school and what he is taught is ambiguous. Similarly, the widowed mother remains a shadowy figure in the background until the end of the tale. The Prioress’s elusive style ignores the backdrop of the tale, which allows her to focus on the center of the narrative that holds her reality: the widow’s son that becomes the



martyred child. For the Prioress, what is real is the child's "natural affinity for religious beauty" (142). Through the death of the child, the Prioress comes to realize that the soul seeks what nourishes it and that true innocent faith is to outwardly learn "by rote," not to gain a full understanding (*Prioress's Tale* 522).

In the child's death, the Prioress's tale depicts liturgy's triumph over the human soul and natural body. Through divine grace, God gives the young boy the will to perform prayer "al by rote" (522). By enabling the boy to pray, God indirectly praises himself through the boy's body. The boy's song seems all the more miraculous when he is murdered and cannot sing naturally. In order for the boy's corpse to sing his body must be violated by an exterior source. The boy's prayer recalls the Virgin Mary, whose body was also pierced by divine penetration. In her prologue, the Prioress compares Mary to the bush of Exodus, which is burned but not consumed: "O bussh unbrent, brenninge in Moises sighte / That ravisedest doun fro the deitee / Thurgh thin humbles" (468-70). This allusion signifies the paradox of both the Virgin and the young boy. While both are sexually intact, a divine force violates their bodies. Thus, the *Prioress's Tale* shows how we come to know the sacred through violence. More specifically, the divine is revealed through the way bodies are breached. In this way, the boy's murder sets the miracle of God's grace into motion. While the cut obstructs both voice

and breath, the gash itself is overcome by divine grace that allows the boy to continue singing his song. The disturbing image of the child's murder suggests that divinity has the power to override nature, showcasing that God's use of the boy's body as a medium for communication is the true miracle of the *Prioress's Tale*.

Throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer allows readers to discover the divine in the space between life and death. The necessity of death to experience God, as implied by both the *Physician's Tale* and the *Prioress's Tale*, shifts attention away from the somber reading of these two tales and encourages readers to focus on the necessity of death in understanding the divine. The distinction between body as physical and body as vehicle for divine communication fosters a deeper understanding of Chaucer's brutal representation of violence in the *Tales*. Death is a mediator between God and humanity. As Virginia and the child are murdered, God develops a relationship with those around them: Virginius and the widowed mother taking comfort in the purity of their relationship to God. As bodies are violated in the *Tales*, they become a medium of communication for God to work through. In effect, death is a mode through which Chaucer allows readers to develop a relationship with God.

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# Space, Stigma, and Sexuality in Annie Baker's *The Flick*

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Emma Stens

Halfway through Annie Baker's 2013 stage drama, *The Flick*, two of its protagonists, Rose and Avery, have a sexual encounter that shines a spotlight on both characters' complicated relationships with sex and sexuality. Avery is uncomfortably reminded of his lack of attraction to women, and Rose berates herself for her promiscuity and her reckless sex drive concerning both men and women. However, when Rose asks Avery if he considers her to be a stereotype of "what I am" (Baker 100), she never specifies what exactly she is referring to, and certain words are left unsaid. Avery, too, never voices his own identity. Both Rose and Avery hover around potential identities without actually assigning themselves one, while simultaneously fulfilling certain stereotypes about the identities they seem to fear. The two characters' unwillingness to label themselves sexually can be attributed to the stigma and shame attached to their respective identities, particularly the negative stereotypes that have developed around these labels. In this essay I will confront the outside forces that could account for their respective behaviours and the ways in which the text itself is a manifestation of these behaviours. Baker uses space—physical space, pauses

and gaps in dialogue—to reflect the ways in which both Rose and Avery struggle with both their conformity to sexual stereotypes and their attempts to distance themselves from said stereotypes.

Rose knows the ways that her behaviour aligns with several bisexual stereotypes, and therefore avoids describing herself this way as often as possible. When Rose asks Avery, “Do you think I’m a stereotype?” (Baker 100), Avery prompts her to clarify her question, not quite understanding what she is alluding to. All Avery receives in response, however, is “Of like—whatever” (Baker 100). On its own, the statement is withholding and distant; when paired with the knowledge provided about Rose over the course of the play, however, the audience should have little trouble inferring what stereotypes she is concerned with. After Rose casually mentions an ex-boyfriend, she reveals to a confused Avery—who had been under the impression that she was a lesbian—that she has “been with girls a couple times” (Baker 87). Later, Rose confesses that she “can’t stay attracted to anyone for longer than four months” (Baker 94) and finds monogamy impossible. In Paula C. Rust’s article “Monogamy and Polyamory: Relationship Issues for Bisexuals,” she investigates the prevalent “stereotypes of bisexuals and promiscuous and nonmonogamous” people (477), and how this stereotype arises out of the belief that a bisexual person will “alternate male and female lovers in an effort to

satisfy both sides of her desire” (476). Rose, in a way, falls victim to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hyper-aware of how her sexual experiences embody certain stereotypes, she tries to distance herself from any sort of label; this hyper-awareness, however, results in a fixation that leaves her unable to move past the stereotypes. Rose ends up completely embodying certain negative bisexual stereotypes regardless of whether or not she chooses to align her sexuality with that word at all. She distances herself from her identity in one aspect, while completely inhabiting it in others.

Rose’s difficulty with asserting her sexual identity in her own space becomes increasingly complicated when her discomfort is deepened by the behaviour of the play’s sole heterosexual male character. Before Avery even has a chance to properly introduce himself to Rose, Sam (the only presumed heterosexual character onstage) incorrectly informs Avery “she’s a lesbian” (Baker 27). Rose knows that others have called her a lesbian; Avery admits to her that “someone told me that you were gay” and she is forced to clarify otherwise (Baker 87). The way she does so is so ambiguous and casual, prefaced with an “I mean, whatever” that her manner seems to suggest a sort of tiredness in having to explain herself again, an indication that the question exhausts or disinterests her (Baker 87). Sam’s choice to label Rose as a lesbian without her consent can be attributed to a number

of reasons. His behaviour could be an attempt to either get Avery to back off, or to discourage himself from pursuing Rose or allowing his romantic feelings towards her to develop further. Due to his later attempt to pursue a relationship with her, however, the more likely reason is that he is fetishizing Rose's relations with women. When Sam mislabels Rose, another bisexual stereotype emerges, one that Paula Rust says views bisexuality as "a phase or a temporary form of sexuality adopted by people who are coming out as lesbian or gay or returning to heterosexuality" (Rust 476). Sam's behaviour demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding regarding Rose's sexuality. He buys into the stereotype of the bisexual identity being something temporary and transitional—perhaps in hopes that she will 'return' to heterosexuality, and by extension to him. In a later confrontation between the two, Sam cuts Rose off before she has a chance to finish explaining herself, thereby verbally occupying the space that *should* belong to her (Baker 148). His actions continually deny Rose the space to label herself and be comfortable in her identity; as a result, the atmosphere she finds herself in is stifling.

Like Rose, Avery is ill at ease with his own identity, but unlike Rose, he does not divulge many details at all about his own sexuality—but what he withholds from the characters and the audience is just as telling as what he does reveal. In "Emotional

Distress Among LGBT Youth: The Influence Of Perceived Discrimination Based On Sexual Orientation”, Joanna Almeida found that “girls were significantly more likely than boys to report a minority sexual orientation” (1001). Rose blatantly discusses her sexual endeavours and is hardly taken seriously by her heterosexual peers; Avery keeps quiet on specific matters. What he does talk about includes his ongoing history of depression, wherein Avery decides to tell Rose about the “one-year anniversary of the day [he] tried to kill [him]self” (Baker 96). Then, as he attempts to explain his experience with mental illness to Rose, Avery’s thoughts unintentionally drift to memories of his “one friend, at Clark, this guy from Bangladesh” who transferred away and left Avery lonely, and presumably, more depressed (Baker 100). David J. Allen and Terry Oleson’s article “Shame and Internalized Homophobia in Gay Men” reveals that gay men often experience an increased amount of “psychological distress: demoralization, guilt, suicide” in comparison to their heterosexual peers, as a result of the shame they have associated with their own sexuality (35). Avery has a history of depression and suicidal tendencies, and mourns the loss of his one male friend. The combination of what Avery is willing to share and what he seems too ashamed to divulge potentially speaks volumes, especially in juxtaposition to Rose, her experiences, and her navigation of the space onstage. In the same conversation, Rose asks Avery two blunt



questions: “What do you think about when you, like, fantasize?” and “Do you ever think about / guys?” (Baker 93). The forward slash in the latter question is a textual indication for Avery to cut Rose off, which he does by interjecting with “I really don’t want to answer these questions” (Baker 93). Though this response is a non-answer, it is also a denial of a certain discussion he can already see coming. As a result of the breach of privacy on Rose’s part, Avery must turn the situation on its head and invade her space—the space she has in which to speak her lines—and cut her off before she comes any closer to matters Avery is unwilling to discuss. Lastly, the higher rate of depression and psychological distress among the LGBT community unfortunately contributes to the stereotype of a depressed, gay individual who is doomed to loneliness and unhappiness. When Avery laments that everyone he knows is “always faking it” and “acting out like some stereotype of like... of like... exactly... who you’d think they’d be,” he includes himself in this society of ‘fakers’ and stereotypes (Baker 100). The stereotype of the sad gay individual lingers in the back of his mind; like Rose, Avery is another self-fulfilling prophecy. Whereas Rose is willing to ask others to consider whether or not she fulfills any stereotypes, Avery alternatively refuses to allow any sort of similar conversation about himself into his own space.

The way Baker presents the dialogue in the text, with all its specificities and staging, reflects the ways

in which her characters navigate both their personal issues and their inter-personal relationships. The frequency of pauses, interruptions made by other characters, and overlapping dialogue mimic the uneven, non-linear journeys that the characters embark on. Rose's confession of being "fucked up too" with regards to her relationship with sex features some sort of pause, hesitation, or filler word after nearly every one of her lines (Baker 94). Avery awkwardly provides no more than intermittent "...Huh"s and "Whoa"s, and Rose takes a "long pause" in order to work up the courage to admit that when she fantasizes, she thinks "about *myself*," which is arguably the most unusual and unconventional confession of the entire scene (Baker 94-95). The pause that occurs right before Avery reveals his past suicide attempt is described as a "much more comfortable silence" than any of the pauses that occurred earlier; Avery grows comfortable in the space, and finally finds himself willing to disclose personal information (Baker 96). However, the reveal does not prove a particularly fruitful one for Avery and the bond between him and Rose remains shaky, as her primary responses to this incredibly difficult and private revelation are "Oh my god" and "I just like don't get it. I don't get suicide," demonstrating a remarkable lack of empathy on her part (Baker 96-97). The brief exchange of dialogue between the two of them that directly follows is now marked by no less than six pauses, which provide

an uneasy, awkward element to the conversation as opposed to a safe, secure feeling. The two return to ambiguities and filler words, with Avery providing a brief “yeah” to all of Rose’s questions and Rose expressing her physical discomfort with the silence by going “uch” (Baker 100-101). As the characters make progress in understanding one another, the direction in the text adjusts to reflect this growth; when the characters regress, the text becomes increasingly halting and choppy.

As Rose and Avery enter one another’s physical space, the careful staging that both characters rely on is abandoned, and their modes of closeting oneself no longer hold up. Rose and Avery’s sexual encounter, which features the most physical contact in the entire play, is the source of the bulk of the personal information both characters choose to reveal, and the entire encounter is brutally uncomfortable, awkward, even disturbing at times. Their attempt to consummate their relationship—if you could call it that, since they are acquaintances at best—is highly traumatic and embarrassing for the both of them; it is no coincidence, then, that Baker directly follows that moment with their ambiguous, stilted half-confessions of sexual preferences and personal traumas. The entire scene has a looseness that is not found as strongly in any other scenes—for the majority of the play, the dialogue plays out while the characters are cleaning, with the choreographed

mopping and sweeping becoming a predictable routine for both audience and characters. Rose throws Avery, and the carefully organized monotony of their work environment, out of balance, declaring an impromptu “Dance Party!” that leaves Avery feeling awkward and slightly anxious (Baker 81). Rose’s dancing is described as “wild and weird and uninhibited” (Baker 81). For a moment, she does not concern herself with other people’s opinions, perceptions, or misconceptions of her, and she channels this newfound energy into her attempt to seduce Avery. As with their willingness to divulge information about their sexual histories, however, Rose is far more eager to move the conversation or the act forward than Avery, who sits “frozen” (Baker 90). When Rose finally realizes that “something is clearly off” and she stops what she later fears is an attack on Avery (“I feel like I molested you,” she laments), shame permeates the entire situation (Baker 90, 92). Here, in this too-close-for-comfort scene, they are both forced to confront the aspects of their sexuality they tend to distance themselves from. Rose once again acts rashly and promiscuously, and Avery is reminded of the fact that women have never seemed to turn him on. The uncomfortable confessions finally arise as a way for both Rose and Avery to give themselves more breathing room. Perhaps if they finally voice their thoughts, those thoughts will take up less space in their mind. Sharing sorrow typically lessens the burden, but

as demonstrated by all that follows, Rose and Avery appear to have no such luck in this situation.

As the play comes to a close, little to no progress has been made, and both Rose and Avery seem resigned to continue on as they always have. As Avery leaves the theatre for the last time, he remarks, “Do you remember the end of the movie Manhattan?... “You gotta have a little faith in people” and the music swells up?... This is like the opposite of that ending” (Baker 174). Avery continues to distance himself from his own life, by choosing to compare it to a work of fiction rather than explain his feelings and thought processes directly. Furthermore, he imagines placing even more physical space than before between himself and those around him, leaving the theatre for good and imagining a future where he’ll be “living in Paris” while Sam stays in Massachusetts, “sweeping up popcorn” (Baker 173). Towards the end of the play, Sam describes Avery’s choice of words as “a little gay” and mimics his speech in “a British accent” (Baker 138). Avery bristles and responds with “That’s a British accent. Do you mean it sounds British?” in an attempt to move the conversation away from potential revelations about his sexuality, signifying that sexuality is a topic he still is not willing to discuss (Baker 138). Rose, meanwhile, remains at the movie theatre, with Sam, a man whose feelings she does not reciprocate, and her fears of intimacy and monogamy are left unresolved. The only character

who seems at peace with his current position is the only person not implied to be anything other than heterosexual: Sam, who is “still smiling” as he exits the stage at the conclusion of the play (Baker 177).

Both Avery’s firmly closeted nature and Rose’s discomfort and nebulous relationship with her identity are stripped and laid bare on the stage. In a setting that revolves around consumers observing a performance, in front of real-life consumers observing the actions of the characters onstage, Rose and Avery ironically refuse to embrace the performative aspects of identity—a performance that begins with identifying oneself in the first place. By the end of the play, neither Rose nor Avery have grown any closer to reconciling with their identities or seeking healthier relationships with space and with those around them. The dialogue remains awkward, the pauses overly long, and the identities unaddressed.

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