



THE ALBATROSS^o

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
ENGLISH UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL
VOLUME 16 | 2026

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The Albatross is published annually in the spring for the University of Victoria English Students' Association, with the financial support of the University of Victoria Students' Society.

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EDITORIAL

Editors' Note

Ava Ugolini & Evan Duffy

Welcome to Volume 16 of *The Albatross*. Run by students, for students, functioning on pure volunteer power (and thieved drip coffee from the *Bibliocafé*), we are indebted to every member of the community who contributed to our precious bird book's existence.

To begin, we would like to specifically acknowledge the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱wsep̓əm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. As students from many backgrounds and walks of life, we are humbled by the privilege to work, play, and live on this beautiful land.

Special thanks to the UVic English Students' Association whose generous support, both financial and emotional, allow this bird to fly. To the 2025-26 executive members, we are especially appreciative: Carly Goodman, Elizabeth Duchesne, Kilian Strubel, Luca Pashkewicz, Lindsay Jackshaw, Zoe Winn, Becky Turner, Katharine Galloway, Jacqueline Vanden Berg, Izzy Tobias, Sam Capps, Kayci Caskey-Olsen, Alex Jónsson, Anna Johnston, Lisa Loewen, Soren Kim, Hans, Sydney Sterling, Kristian Hovdebo, William Hatch, and Cameron Sterling.

A heartfelt thank you to the University of Victoria Student Society for their financial support; the amazing Drs. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge for conducting our substantive editing workshop; the generous Dr. Kim McLean-Fiander who hosted our copyediting workshop through illness; Carly Goodman for her help with InDesign; Ekam Pooni for her managerial expertise; Soren Kim for his help in running all things *Albatross*; Zoe Winn for planning our beloved launch party; Katie Croudy for all of her administrative help; and finally, to dear friends of the journal, Saroya Manoharan and Dylan Rickerby, who provided our front, back, and interior illustrations: it is an honour to feature your artwork here.

Lastly, thank you, dear reader. We hope you enjoy your flight.

Introduction

Ava Ugolini

Every day
we make our idle progress
among tripwire. You have no idea
of the pressure we're under.

—Karen Solie, "[University of Victoria] Bomb
Threat Checklist," *Modern and Normal* (2005)

Each time we talk
about poems written
before any of us
was born, that some of us
love, and that none of us,
I worry, understands.

—Nicholas Bradley, "On Being Archaic," *Before
Combustion* (2023)

If criticism could ever be conceived as a coherent and
systematic study, the elementary principles of which could
be explained to any intelligent nineteen-year-old, then,
from the point of view of such a conception, no critic now
knows the first thing about criticism.

—Northrop Frye, "Polemical Introduction," *An
Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)

This is why so many epigraphs appear undigested and
attention-begging.

—Carmine Starnino, "A Notebook," *Lazy
Bastardism: Essays & Reviews on Contemporary
Poetry* (2012)

I wish I could present you, reader, with a pink ribbon-
wrapped throughline encompassing all analyses to come.
If possible, I'd platter-present the papers; lifting a silver
cloche to reveal one conclusive tray of literary criticism. But I

can't. Volume 16 features a whopping ten papers, two more than *The Albatross* has ever published in a single issue. In total, our team this year spanned thirty-five dedicated editors and contributors, each with their own unique blend of research interests. Thus, I present you with the following: a mélange of essays listed by author last name, united most in their finesse of criticism and literary illumination.

Let us begin with the singular Alexandria Brooks and her paper on D.H. Lawrence's "Monkey Nuts." Brooks argues that Lawrence's story genre-bends, being read first as a romantic comedy and then as psychological horror. Unlike many papers published now or in previous editions of the bird book, Brooks tackles a larger question of genre in an atmosphere post-WWI, presenting the basis of Lawrence's text in an entirely new light. Maraya Cooper, thereafter, sets us off in a new direction, one of environmental stewardship in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Cooper examines how Milton's Adam and Eve's care for nature acts as a Socratic teaching method of God. In arguing so, Cooper highlights Milton's ideas upon eco-transcendence and reminds us of the importance of such in our own nearly postlapsarian world that is also "in constant need of tending" (25).

Next, Kristian Hovdebo begins the short yet fascinating path of film analysis within Volume 16. He contends that Mati Diop's film *Atlantics* is distinct in its ability to allow viewers to sit with unresolved discomfort. Drawing on Jacques Derrida and Mark Fisher, Hovdebo analyzes the film through a hauntological lens, arguing that Senegal's colonial past haunts the film by use of symbols such as the Atlantic Ocean and fictional Muejiza Tower; the spectre of colonialism persists. Jessica Jay, also confronting colonial memory, dissects sound in Claire Denis's *Chocolat* and *White Material*, using Leela Gandhi's ideas upon postcolonial "re-membering" (41). By examining the use of speech, silence, and music, Jay provides a fresh take on the role of white women's in Denis's films, arguing, against current critical analysis, that the films expose an instability of white colonial perception.

Soren Kim, our brave Shakespearean, here presents an analysis of the child characters within *King John*. In response to the critical status quo, Kim reads the play as a contemplation of the agency that Arthur and Henry III do possess, rather than that which they do not. By doing so, Kim disrupts the common analysis of Shakespeare's child characters as helpless, and thus invites us to look at the play's ending in a novel way. Switching from Elizabethan to Evangelical, Jude Lovell presents potentially the most topical paper in Volume 16; one that contrasts ancient apocalypticism with present-day televangelism. Lovell argues that Frank Peretti's novel *This Present Darkness* commandeers conventions from the Book of Daniel—a text written to comfort a violently persecuted Jewish readership—in order to soothe white American Evangelicals, a demographic who eagerly fabricated their own oppression in the face of declining popularity. In his conclusion, Lovell interestingly analyzes the spurious persecution of American Evangelicals presently, of which fuels an attempt to reassert white Christian supremacy.

Cella Pop invites a return to post-colonial theory with her paper on Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an unofficial prologue to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* published nearly a hundred years prior. By referencing Margot Lauwers, a key figure in the ecofeminist movement, Pop maintains that Rhys's characters, Antoinette and Rochester, symbolically enact a dynamic of colonial domination within their marriage, specifically one of ecofeminist conjecture. Rochester ultimately sees Antoinette, later Bertha Mason in Brontë's novel, as an object to colonially conquer. Not entirely in contrast, Erin Slater presents a paper on persisting portrayals of women as "devoted, desirable, and unknowable figures" in both Alfred Tennyson's *Moxon Tennyson* and Arctic Monkeys' album *AM* (78). With a presentist lens, Slater states that despite a difference of 160 years, and a wealth of cultural difference, the two's lyrics both feature a focus upon feminine mystique, arguing that such analysis is "mutually illuminating" (84). Indeed, Tennyson's work becomes more tangible to audiences

today, and Arctic Monkeys are revealed to exist within a long-standing tradition, allowing for "richer understanding of both historical and contemporary artistic works" (84–85).

Penultimately, Becky Turner presents Volume 16 with a fascinating analysis of Victorian gift-giving culture, specifically within Christina Rossetti's oeuvre. With Rossetti having dedicated "nearly the entirety of her body of work to her mother," Turner illuminates a much-ignored phenomena: book dedications, and moreover, the archival research involved in such studies (87). Last but certainly not least, Amy Vitkauskas examines Heloise of *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* and Melaz of Orderic Vitalis's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in their rebellion against medieval Catholic Christianity, analyzing whether or not the women could assert meaningful agency within said religious framework. Vitkauskas concludes Volume 16 powerfully, noting that "the female body cannot, in fact, be conquered" (105).

I rest easy now, sending our bird baby to the printers at Island Blue, knowing that each paper in this journal demonstrates a commitment to write. *Yeah*. Write, edit, and read in a world where the choice to artificially summarize is a mere click away. The pride I feel in seeing my peers trudge up this hill alongside me—even as university-funded pro-A.I. talks are held and Humanities professors all but recreate *Ex Machina*—gives me a twinkle in my eye and a spring in my step. I can happily say that this cohort, like the albatross, will spend most of their lives wondering. Or is it wandering that it does? Well, I guess both apply. As Charles Baudelaire wrote in *Les Fleurs du Mal*'s "L'Albatros":

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

And indeed, our wings stop us from lowly step.

Here's to another issue of published authors and loving mothers, the latter being our most dedicated (as Rossetti knows) readership. Alright, here's *The Albatross* Volume 16. Fly safe!



CRITICAL WORKS

D.H. Lawrence's "Monkey Nuts": Romantic Comedy or Psychological Horror?

Alexandria Brooks

Abstract: D.H. Lawrence's "Monkey Nuts" (1922–1924) operates as an ambigram of genre—a text that is first read “right side up” (romantic comedy) and then “upside down” (psychological horror). The perceived genre affects how the audience interprets the text’s emotional register and its moral and psychological implications. I analyze Lawrence’s word choice and sentence rhythm to determine that the language deliberately signals two opposed perspectives. Despite the opposing intentions of romantic comedy and psychological horror, I argue that the postwar atmosphere, which looms over the narrative, distorts both genres enough to create a hybrid genre.

D.H. Lawrence's "Monkey Nuts" (1922) operates as what I call an ambigram of genre—it is a text that is first read “right side up” as romantic comedy and then “upside down” as psychological horror. The perceived genre affects how the audience interprets the text’s emotional register and its moral and psychological implications. The story’s tone and language toe the line between lighthearted and unsettling, which influences how the reader perceives its genre. The genre then changes how the reader perceives the main characters’ interactions. I will analyze Lawrence’s word choice and sentence rhythm to demonstrate how his language deliberately signals two opposing perspectives. The first part of the essay will analyze “Monkey Nuts” as romantic comedy, and the second part will analyze it as a work of psychological horror. The last section of the essay will combine the two genre readings to explicate its hybrid genre. Despite the opposing intentions of the two genres—romantic comedy evokes joy and inspiration while

psychological horror evokes fear and paranoia—I argue that the postwar atmosphere, which looms over the narrative, distorts both genres enough to create a bridge between the two. The hybrid genre synthesizes the joy and paranoia, the romance and repulsion, and challenges the reader to question heteroromantic gender norms, especially during Lawrence’s depiction of surreal world-wide trauma.

Romantic Comedy: “heaven itself”

Lawrence introduces the story using positive language to depict a vibrant, rural setting and a carefree, routine lifestyle, which is observed by the locals and embodied by Albert and Joe, a corporal and a soldier respectively. They are not locals, and they room together while they work in the village loading and unloading trucks. After “the horrors of trench warfare,” they seem to be shielded from the “unprecedented ... numbers of psychological casualties” that arose after World War I (Ragachewskaya 1, 3). Such protection is a convention of the “space of the romantic comedy” in which “the lovers [and other characters] are protected from the strictures of social conventions and psychological inhibition” (Deleyto 18). Aspects of the village are described as “little,” “tiny,” “dotted,” and “pleasant” (Lawrence 101). The smallness of the setting prepares the reader for a lighthearted, even inconsequential, series of events. The following passage employs a regular sentence rhythm, long vowels, partially alliterated consonants, which, if not voiced, are soft: “The two men were pleasantly billeted in a cottage not far from the station” and “The great boat-shaped wagons came up from Playcross with the hay” (101, 102). The village is safe and pure: “after Flanders, it [is] heaven itself” (101). Albert and Joe not only welcome but come to embody this blissfully pastoral setting: Albert’s “one aim in life [is] to be full of fun and nonsense,” and Joe is young, “pleasant looking,” and “personable” (101). Both the space and characters are described with similarly serene language. Within the framework of romantic comedy, the space not only allows

Albert and Joe to participate in society but it encourages the men to assimilate with their surroundings.

The narrative establishes the “comic, protective, erotically-charged space ... of romantic comedy” by introducing Miss Stokes, the female love interest, in a flirtatious and joking conversation between her and Albert, himself functioning as the funny friend—a “good pal to Joe” (Lawrence 101; Deleyto 18). The humour is light and sarcastic, and the dialogue is balanced and lively; none of the characters deviate into monologue. When Joe or Miss Stokes become low-spirited, Albert softens the tension with a mutual “lurking grin” or a quick-witted social reinterpretation (Lawrence 105):

“Certainly. Give us the pleasure of escorting you.”

“No, thanks.”

“That’s what I call a flat refusal - what, Joe? You don’t mean that you have no liking for our company, Miss Stokes?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Miss Stokes. “How many are there of you?”

“Only me and Joe.”

“Oh, is that all?” she said, satirically.

Albert was a little nonplussed. “Isn’t that enough for you?” he asked.

“Too many by half,” blurted out Joe, jeeringly, in a sudden fit of uncouth rudeness that made both the others stare.

“Oh, I’ll stand out of the way, boy, if that’s it,” said Albert to Joe. (107)

Miss Stokes and Joe are quite brazen towards one another, which may be unexpected and seem inconsistent to the narrative, but the peppy rhythm and humour maintain the space of romantic comedy.

Romantic comedy is not designed exclusively for inconsequential entertainment, and to dismiss it as such “homogeni[z]es the genre and impoverish[es] individual

texts" (Deleyto 25). The predictable framework—the perfect setting, the awkward lovers, the comic relief, and the happy ending—can function as a consistent, recognizable baseline for more uncomfortable social commentary, such as the exchange of gender roles. In "Monkey Nuts," Joe is effeminized as a "quiet youth" and a "shy bird" who "[looks] modestly aside" (Lawrence 101, 104, 102). Conversely, Miss Stokes is a "strong," outspoken, "ruddy face[d]" land-girl (103). Miss Stokes, instead of Joe, is the one who takes charge and asks him out on a date. Although the story is generally told through Joe's perspective, Miss Stokes's attraction to Joe overrides the narrative voice and eroticizes Joe. Attention is drawn to how his clothes are worn on his body while he works: his "sleeves [are] rolled up to the elbow," exposing his forearms, and his "shirt [is] open at the breast" (102). Miss Stokes's body is not eroticized to the same degree as Joe's. Albert does potentially allude to her appearance once in a lighthearted, joking manner:

She was a buxom girl, young, in linen overalls and gaiters. Her face was ruddy, she had large blue eyes. "Now that's the waggoner for us, boys," said the corporal loudly. "Whoa!" she said to her horses; and then to the corporal: "Which boys do you mean?" "We are the pick of the bunch. That's Joe, my pal." (102)

Yet, between Miss Stokes's physical description and the subsequent dialogue, it is unclear what, if anything, Albert finds attractive in her—other than that she is a young woman, and his friend, Joe, is a young man. All these inversions can serve as a form of female empowerment within the narrative. In romantic comedy, "the central couple [is] characterised by paradox" until they are united (Mortimer 6), so despite the undertone of postwar feminism that challenges heteroromantic gender norms, the reader still expects the predictable framework of romantic comedy.

Converse to the framework of the romantic comedy, Joe never felt any attraction to Miss Stokes. By the end, he musters up the courage to reject her advances. Indeed, for Miss Stokes, there is “something in [Joe’s] quiet, tender-looking form, young and fresh—which attract[s] her eye” (Lawrence 103). She is undeniably attracted to Joe, but Miss Stokes is never depicted as an “object of desire” for Joe (Mortimer 6). Throughout the story, he is unable to speak up for himself and becomes overpowered by Miss Stokes’s vigorous interest in him. After he rejects her, however, “Joe [feels] more relieved even than he had felt when he heard the firing cease, after the news had come that the armistice was signed” (Lawrence 20). Lawrence’s happy ending does not conclude in a union, but rather a separation—and he may be ahead of his time in this respect. Since the early 2000s, “the final separation of the lovers [has become] more and more usual as part of the happy ending” (Deleyto 25). This is as inspirational as a postwar love story can get—for the lovers to feel the same sense of relief that they felt when the war ended. However, Miss Stokes does not get her happy ending: her female empowerment is dismissed, and she fails to “get the boy.” Perhaps she would move on from Joe to fulfill that traditional romantic comedy ending, since “a ‘wrong’ partner may be an obstacle in the path to true love” (Mortimer 6). Regardless, Lawrence does not provide such a perspective, and the elliptic conclusion disturbingly subverts the reader’s initial expectations.

Psychological Horror: “After Flanders”

A second, more skeptical reading reveals how the setting psychologically reflects Albert and Joe’s war trauma. As the space of romantic comedy falls away, and the flowery language, smooth rhythm, and upbeat tone become more eerie than authentic, a new generic space is introduced: the psychological horror. What stands out most in the beginning are the “woods,” as opposed to more whimsical alternatives like “forest” or “woodland” (Lawrence 101–102). Moreover, Albert is described as “withered, old,” and “grave”; Joe maintains uncomfortable silence when around

Miss Stokes; and “the black coal seems to make the place sleeper, hotter” (101). The language is less direct and more metaphorical, suggesting perhaps that Albert and Joe are in a dream, or that they are dead and truly in “heaven itself” (101). The initially serene scene of “a green smooth field” with “red houses ... dotted among flowering apple trees” also resembles the red poppies in the fields of “Flanders” (101). The romanticized setting veils the battlefield of death that neither Joe nor Albert want to remember, but after fighting on the front, such stark tonal contrast in setting and lifestyle becomes uncanny. The dark, metaphorical language contributes to the space of psychological horror, which in turn provides insight into Joe and Albert’s mental states. The genre rationalizes Albert’s reactions to Joe’s character, as well as how Joe reacts to Miss Stokes’s advances.

Albert and Joe’s embodiment of their flowery surroundings is a reflection of how they psychologically cope with their war trauma in conjunction with the pressure to reassimilate into the socially encouraged, pre-war normalcy. Albert’s pursuit of “fun and nonsense” acts as a buffer for Joe’s brashness, which is an uncharacteristic outburst in reaction to being placed in an undesired social situation by his superior—that is, Albert encouraging Joe to carry on with Miss Stokes, however inadvertent and lighthearted (76). Joe seems to be “a sort of mindless servant, capable of functioning only within a disciplinary and hierarchical order” (Ragachewskaya 38). Even though Albert is not explicitly giving Joe orders, Joe follows his corporal’s lead: he does the work, enjoys the rustic scenery, and goes to the circus with other soldiers lodging in the village. Miss Stokes disrupts this routine and order: she pressures Joe into a relationship and forces him outside of “the male communities, dedicated to military notions of leadership and obedience,” that he is comfortable with (Cole qtd. in Ragachewskaya 38). Despite how Joe and Albert present themselves to other characters, it is unlikely that either one came out of the war untraumatized. Joe fits the archetype of a silent soldier who no longer knows how to interact with society: “whoever comes home from the front is silent. He

steps from a region ruled by the deed into a region where the word is everything” (Wussow qtd. in Ragachewskaya 6). Joe is in an environment where he is supposed to be able to speak, and where he needs to speak. Without his direct consent, Miss Stokes thrusts him into a relationship with her, and he becomes even more silent, as well as “sullen,” even around Albert (Lawrence 112). In the trenches, Joe’s voice was stolen and replaced with a gun, whereas, in the village, his voice must be his weapon, but the war has not given that back yet. With Miss Stokes, Joe is on a battlefield with no weapon.

The depiction of Miss Stokes’s advances become more unsettling, and despite Joe vocalizing his disinterest in her, no one listens to him—“I made no appointment,” “I didn’t want to,” “too many by half,” “I don’t want her,” “I don’t want ‘er,” and “she bain’t my choice [sic]” (106, 108, 115, 111). While walking home after the circus, “Joe [looks] frequently to see if he [is] safe from Miss Stokes” (109). Suddenly, Albert and Joe see a “dark figure ahead” and “Joe’s heart [sinks] with pure fear” (109). The figure is Miss Stokes, but “reality and hallucination interchange with one another” (Ragachewskaya 40). Joe is genuinely terrified and experiences multiple symptoms of psychological distress. Joe sees monsters in the dark; he does not feel safe, as if Miss Stokes is always lurking; his personality changes, which Albert notices. The psychological horror genre provides an insight into Joe’s post-traumatic experience of re-entering society. In the end, after Albert helps him reject Miss Stokes, Joe falls back into his position of comfortable subordination to Albert, and Miss Stokes mysteriously “vanishes into oblivion” (Lawrence 119). Given that Joe compares his relief to Miss Stokes’s absence with his relief when “the armistice was signed” demonstrates that, just as the war will always return to haunt him, so will Miss Stokes—or at least what she represents, which is the post-war society’s dynamic will to both move towards a new feminist future and simultaneously reassimilate psychologically altered soldiers (119).

Hybrid Genre: Social Feminism, War Trauma, and “moral scheme”

In a third and doubtfully final reading, the reader can begin to appreciate the hybridity of Lawrence’s language. To Lawrence, genre may be a form of enforcing a “moral scheme into which all the characters fit”; he objects to this “certain moral scheme” not only in his letters but in the language of his literature (Lawrence qtd. in Ingram 97). Read as either romantic comedy or a psychological horror, the language constantly signals opposing perspectives. For example, during a scene where Miss Stokes and Joe are alone, her physical romantic advances symbolize bombs and gunfire on a battlefield:

Miss Stokes put a light pressure on Joe’s waist, and drew him down the road. They walked in silence. The night was full of scent—wild cherry, the first bluebells. Still they walked in silence. A nightingale was singing. They approached nearer and nearer, till they stood close by his dark bush. The powerful notes sounded from the cover, almost like flashes of light then the interval of silence—then the moaning notes, almost like a dog faintly howling, followed by the long, rich trill, and flashing notes. Then a short silence again. (Lawrence 111)

Joe identifies artillery fire in the romantic scenes of flowery scents and nightingale songs, and he anxiously anticipates more attacks during the silences. This dual interpretation emerges from Lawrence’s diction, which is neither wholly romantic nor wholly horrific. The sentence rhythm is steady, but the variety in sentence lengths creates suspense, a key component in both genres. In this scene, Joe retreats from a romantic relationship with Miss Stokes, who represents his chance to re-assimilate into society. Meanwhile, Miss Stokes pushes the boundaries of their relationship to assert her newfound autonomy as per her participation in the mode of postwar feminism. Romantic comedy allows characters to test oppressive boundaries and challenge systemic values

within society, while psychological horror allows the reader to sympathize with the male victim of “war trauma” who is trying to assimilate into society and assert his own autonomy by rejecting a woman’s advances (Ragachewskaya 1). When synthesized, the genres become hostile. Psychological horror satirizes romantic comedy by dismantling both the picture-perfect setting and the normative premise which upholds female empowerment under heteronormative romance. On the other hand, romantic comedy provides opportunity for new beginnings and societal comforts—in contrast to the traumatic return of the past—which in turn enables a “resistance to memories” of the war (8). Since one generic perspective invalidates the other, these two readings seem incompatible even if the language overlaps and signals the opposing genre.

Alternatively, it is only when the genres are analyzed in isolation that they are incompatible. If the genres are used to contextualize each other, they may prove to overlap just as cleverly as the language does. “If the war has created new feminists, it has also formed a totally inassimilable breed of men,” meaning that the seemingly isolated issues, which arose independently within their respective genres, are indeed compatible in the postwar atmosphere (Cole qtd. in Ragachewskaya 38). The common causes of these two issues include war, which Lawrence “hate[s] and detest[s],” and society’s response to war (Lawrence qtd. in Ragachewskaya 9). Curiously, Miss Stokes only enjoys brief empowerment through the gender role reversal and does not get her happy ending, which seems to incite an anti-feminist narrative. Moreover, if Joe “is partly composite of returned soldiers,” perhaps “his fate suggests that society will never become whole again” (Ragachewskaya 40). Fortunately, Lawrence was never concerned with society becoming “whole again” (40). Assimilation and order are not in Lawrence’s vocabulary, and social constructs like feminism, gender norms, and heteronormative romance mean little in his worldview. The hybrid genre of “Monkey Nuts” forces the reader to question the reality established by either individual genre or perspective, rather than how

the characters function within a constructed society in general.

The story encourages the reader to consider each character as “a force of living that is ‘greater’ than the human as it is apprehended by other humans” and demonstrates how two people with opposing perspectives and experiences can draw misguided conclusions based on unconscious stereotypes (Ingram 97). Lawrence’s characters “[involve] a sense of the infinite capacity for being that would otherwise pass unnoticed,” and the narrative emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and the ability to question one’s assumptions of others (97). Perhaps, if the characters could step outside of their own perspectives, they might begin to see the beautiful complexity of humanity. During a time of global trauma, it is difficult to understand each other’s experiences, let alone to understand their own, but empathy is a necessary factor in rebuilding connection and healing.

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Transformational Qualities of Agricultural Labour in Milton's Paradise Lost

—
Maraya Cooper

Abstract: This essay explores the connection between Eden's ecological evolution and Adam and Eve's stewardship of paradise as a necessary function of the pair's spiritual journey in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). In this world, Eden is an ever-growing garden that requires diligent care, rather than a perfected and stable utopia. Considering agricultural labour as one of God's Socratic teaching methods alongside the metaphorical dimensions of ecological regeneration in a postlapsarian world, the essay reveals how Adam and Eve strengthen their relationship with God through nature. Milton reminds readers about the importance of environmental stewardship as he spotlights the transcendental link between humans and the natural world.

According to John Milton, Eden is not a static paradise but a garden in constant need of tending. To begin with, the epic poet draws on the Book of Genesis, emphasizing Adam and Eve's "dominion over ... the earth" as stewardship (Gen. 1.26). Given Milton's focus on the dynamic utopian landscape, ecocriticism remains prevalent in the discourse engaging with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Some scholars, such as Sarah Smith, view Milton's use of the georgic poetic mode as the presence of seventeenth-century revolutionary environmentalism. Others position Milton's ecocritical approach within a historical context—Mary Fenton notes the connection between the degradation of Eden and deforestation during the English Civil War. With consideration to the analysis of various eco-Milton scholars, this paper will further explore how Milton's portrayal of Adam and Eve, as the farmers of Eden, emphasizes his theodicy, wherein God's inherently virtuous authority

coincides with His bestowing of sufficient free will to humans. Using Fenton's term "sylvan pastoral" as both an epistemological and theological tool that links agricultural labour with psychological development (243), Milton encapsulates the spiritual journey of Adam and Eve within an environmental framework. With this in mind, I argue that Adam and Eve's agricultural labour within Eden reveals paradise not as a stagnant place of repose but as a space in a constant state of process and progress. *Paradise Lost* can be read as a symbolic evolutionary poem in which Adam and Eve deal directly with the consequences of moral degradation, and then embrace transformational qualities associated with repentance.

For Milton, the postlapsarian world should be understood simply as another stage in the evolution of spiritual elevation. The existence of all things can be explained through *ex deo*: creation out of God. For this reason, God is also present in ecological processes, such as "death, destruction, and decomposition" (Ott 11). Examining the creation of "chaos and suffering" serves as a suitable spiritual lesson for humanity, especially in association with the evolutionary dimension of ecology (Ott 15). Eco-scholar Taylor J. Ott taps into a central theological debate about the fabrication of sorrow, presenting "chaos and suffering" as "intrinsic to creation" and positioning *Paradise Lost* within the Calvinist framework, wherein God predestines the salvation of a select few and ordains the rest of humanity to damnation. I disagree, however, that Milton's depiction of death indicates the predisposition of suffering. To view suffering as predetermined suggests that God's authority emanates from His will rather than His reason, and thus undermines the authorial theodicy concerning free will. With God's benevolence in mind, the postlapsarian world certainly has the possibility for goodness. The fall, which unleashes death, does not dissolve the capacity for spiritual elevation. Instead, just as environmental regeneration is the direct result of death, the fall provides a means of rebirth. At the end of Book 12, Milton underscores a new beginning for human beings: "the world [is] all before them" (Milton

12.645). By creating a direct link between the pre- and postlapsarian world, Milton offers a sense of theological coherence when considering the presence of free will and God's relationship to humans.

Adam and Eve's agricultural education is at the heart of their "spiritual reformation" (Fenton 261). Milton's intersection at both the realism of agricultural labour in the georgic poetic mode and the idyllic countryside leisure in the pastoral poetic mode leads to Fenton's notion of the sylvan pastoral. Sylvan pastoralism reflects the "symbiotic relationship" between humans and nature (261), frames nature in "the foreground" of the spiritual journey (262), and "[illuminates] ... questions of agency" (263). Milton uses the sylvan pastoral to forge Adam and Eve's moral characteristics "through the process of ... engaging [with] the natural world" (243-4). By positioning this labour as a means to "[facilitate] intellectual and emotional growth," Adam and Eve each cultivate their subconscious and explore notions of free will (268). Milton's focus on environmental ethics, through the lens of sylvan pastoralism, becomes a vehicle to "advance his own theology" (244). In paradise, Adam and Eve's education stems from a place of nurture rather than punishment, thereby revealing their God-given freedom to distinguish good from evil for themselves.

The garden is a transformative space that lends itself to a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, acting as an educational environment for Adam and Eve's spiritual subconscious. From its conception in the prelapsarian world, Eden "is a liminal transformative place" in which the pair are entrusted with environmental stewardship as a means to explore and develop their identity (Fenton 266). The meditative act of gardening works similarly to practicing faith as a "daily work of body and mind" (Milton 4.618); indeed, gardening requires a significant amount of repetition, patience to manage the slow growth process, and in most cases, an increasingly intuitive sense of nature. Moreover, God's Socratic teaching methods—such as His discussions of the value of "fellowship" with Adam (Milton 8.442) and His warnings against Eve's "vain desire"

for her own reflection (4.466)—extend to agricultural labour within Eden. Just as God presents pointed questions to foster moral education, Adam and Eve’s work within the garden allows them to practice their own decision-making within the boundaries set by Him. Through a metaphorical lens, Adam and Eve’s assignment as caretakers within Eden represents how the “pastoral conjoins inseparably the material and the spiritual” as agricultural labour cultivates moral education, thereby shaping the pair’s understanding of right reason—the moral conscience instilled by God that emphasizes free will (Fenton 244). Instead of positioning Eden as a permanently idyllic setting, Milton illustrates paradise, like faith, as undergoing a continuous process of transformation.

Milton portrays the couple’s own unruliness as a symbolic transition in their spiritual journey within Eden. Like Adam and Eve, the “overgrown” and “wild” transformative setting is unrefined (Milton 4.136). The couple’s spiritual ignorance is underscored by Adam, who lets his “passion sway / [his] judgment” (8.635–6), and Eve, who childishly elevates beauty as the ultimate virtue (4.93). The pair’s divine task to “prune [the] growing plants” is a metaphor for the cultivation of Adam and Eve’s own moral maturation (4.438). As the “work [outgrows] / the hands’ dispatch of two” and the transformative setting surpasses the stewards’ level of maturity, Milton signals the evolution of their spiritual journey (9.202–3). This mismanagement of the symbiotic relationship between Adam and Eve and their environment spotlights the pair’s spiritual ignorance. The garden’s unswerving growth, even after “loping,” “pruning,” or “binding,” indicates the couple’s initial lesson in the process of regeneration (9.209–11). In other words, the rigorous ecological maintenance of Eden reflects the pair’s challenging path towards metaphysical transformations and reveals their unwillingness to connect with nature.

Adam and Eve’s dismissal of tending the garden, a necessary condition of the spiritual process, can be understood as the cause of separation between the pre- and postlapsarian worlds. The couple’s imminent downfall

lingers between the lines of Eve's vernacular in Book 9, in which she describes the once "delightful" (4.436) assignment of "[tending to] plant, herb and flow'r" (9.205) as now an "irksome toil" (9.242). Her language of efficiency, as per her suggestion to "divide [their] labors" to maximize the couple's garden maintenance, threatens the process of paradise by overpowering the environment rather than unifying humans and nature (9.214). Indeed, her motion towards individualism reflects Satan's own moral degradation—his devilish ambition prevents his participation in fellowship and renders him an outsider within paradise (4.60). Eve's ignorance about the garden's requirements establishes that there is no way to circumvent the journey to spiritual maturation. Moreover, her disconnection from the environment subverts her "intellectual and emotional growth" and leaves her defenseless to the devil's temptation (Fenton 286). Thus, Satan's promise of expedient elevation ignores the process of spiritual growth and exposes moral degradation as a direct consequence of disregarding the ecological dimension of the spiritual journey.

Unlike Virgil's fallen perspective in the *Georgics*, in which the georgic mode symbolizes the darker side of humanity, Milton initially fashions the evolution of agriculture as adaptable, paralleling the shift in the spiritual journey of Adam and Eve. In Book 10, Milton shifts from seventeenth-century idyllic sylvan poetry to Virgil's symbolic use of the georgic in relation to Classical Roman wartime revolutionary politics; this reframing of nature transports Adam and Eve to the postlapsarian world. Rural landscapes that once signified the peace and simplicity of untainted life are portrayed with "growing miseries" and "fierce antipathy" (10.709–15). Eden, now a hostile environment with animals intent on devouring each other, resembles the "violent realm of war" within Virgil's *Georgics* (Nelson et. al 367). Once the couple consume the forbidden fruit, the earth and the couple come to "share the same wound" (Smith 51); after all, Adam and Eve are rooted in their environment. Therefore, these debased ecological alterations to the postlapsarian world are "a

reflection of humanity's fallen state" (Smith 51). Moreover, considering the use of sylvan pastoralism, as it illustrates the educational purposes of agriculture, the hostile environment should be understood as a modified assignment for spiritual enlightenment.

Considering the evolution of labour in the postlapsarian world, sylvan pastoralism within *Paradise Lost* harmonizes moral education and regeneration to mend Adam and Eve's spiritual deterioration. The gloomy postlapsarian world, filled with antipathy and the mourning of paradise, is reborn through hope and the spirit of prayer:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying for from mercy-seat above
Prevenient grace descending had removed
The stony from their hearts and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead that sighs now breathed
(Milton 11.1-5)

First, the passage draws a parallel between "repentant" and "regenerate." Through a theological lens, regeneration is both an ecological and spiritual process. Beyond the prelapsarian training of moral values and attitudes, God bestows the pair with a subconscious understanding about repentance through the process of ecological regeneration. Ultimately, their prior cultivation of right reason leads Adam and Eve to the idea of repentance on their own. Their prelapsarian moral training works like a preparatory stage in the ecological evolution of their spiritual journey. Moreover, their agricultural training, through which they understand the process of renewal after death, reminds Adam and Eve of their ability to "strengthen themselves from within by thinking of their links to God through nature" (Fenton 264). In other words, sylvan pastoralism enlightens not only the process by which untainted human beings develop moral maturation, but it also refines spiritual lessons deriving from Adam and Eve's transgressions. Through repentance, like the ecological process of regeneration, Adam and Eve discover they can restore their relationship with God. The ecological dimension of *Paradise Lost* demonstrates the

logic of the fall in accordance with God's Socratic teaching methods, positioning the interconnection between humans and the environment as essential for the rediscovery of paradise.

This exploration of Adam and Eve's agricultural labour within Eden argues that by situating paradise as an evolutionary process that is in a constant state of regeneration, readers can better understand Milton's use of the georgic mode in exploring Adam and Eve's journey of spiritual maturation. Indeed, Milton's poetry continues to remind us of the ethereal connection between humans and ecological systems. Adam and Eve's consequential moral decline, followed by transformational repentance, signals the evolutionary symbolism throughout the text. Milton positions his vision of Eden within the bounds of his theodicy, which reveals a direct link between the fall and Adam and Eve's God-given free will. The fall, while a result of their ignorance of the forthcoming turmoil following the consumption of the forbidden fruit, becomes both a symbol of free will and a stage in the couple's spiritual maturation. After all, God gives them the choice to consume the forbidden fruit. But more importantly, their georgic labour acts as a preparation for the fall in the prelapsarian world, cultivating their moral conscience through their agricultural duties. Adam and Eve's experience as farmers is what leads them to discover repentance, or redemption, through their understanding of environmental regeneration. By tapping into their sense of right reason, a function of God's Socratic teachings, the couple are equipped to handle the consequences of the postlapsarian world. Milton reveals then, that by denying the interconnection of humans and nature, humans risk becoming entirely unrooted from a plethora of theological knowledge—leaving us to fend for ourselves within a postlapsarian world.

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The Memory of Futures Past in the Postcolonial Imagination: A Hauntological Reading of Mati Diop's *Atlantics*

Kristian Hovdebo

Abstract: This paper analyzes Mati Diop's 2019 film *Atlantics* through the lens of hauntology, primarily drawing on the works of Jacques Derrida and Mark Fisher. Diop identifies the ways in which the spectral presence of Senegal's colonial past continues to haunt the present through the diametric symbols of the Muejiza Tower and the Ocean, motifs of modern digital pervasiveness, and the anxiety of inherited cinematic traditions. The argument concludes by stating that the film's final scene—in which Ada, the film's protagonist, smiles at the camera—resists ironic or sincere readings but instead settles comfortably within its unresolved tension.

There is a spectre haunting Dakar—the spectre of colonialism. Mati Diop's 2019 Grand Prix winning film, *Atlantics*, demands reformulation of the oft-cited opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 73), for a litany of hauntings beset the film. Diop makes some of these hauntings explicit while others remain latent. These include the false promises of failed development projects powered by offshore capital, the revenants of migrants lost at sea, an inherited legacy of New African Cinema, and the quotidian aftereffects of colonial history manifesting in modern Senegal. Through a hauntological lens—constructed from Jacques Derrida's original formulation in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) with later expansions by cultural critic Mark Fisher—I argue that *Atlantics's* hauntings express Fisher's idea of “lost futures” shaped by the omnipresent “spectre of a world in which all the marvels of communicative

technology could be combined with a sense of solidarity much stronger than anything social democracy could muster" (*Ghosts*). Within this framework, Diop constructs a localized hauntology, examining the unsettling spectral remnants of colonialism and global capitalism that continue to shape the postcolonial-Senegalese experience. This concept is exemplified through *Atlantics's* dialectical symbology between the Atlantic Ocean and the unfinished, fictionalized Muejiza Tower megastructure, an exploration of the concerning implications of a hyper-digitalized world, and the complicated film history and production methods undergirding *Atlantics*. The following analysis focuses on the film's central question: is Ada's closing smile sincere or ironic? This essay asserts that the question remains unresolved, mirroring *Atlantics's* political ethos of describing hauntological realities rather than prescribing resolutions.

The titular Atlantic Ocean provides the film's rhythmic undercurrent, whose undulating waves articulate equal measures of hope and despair. Diop employs a sonic motif of waves crashing upon the shores of Dakar, often heard in the background of key scenes. The sound of waves represents what Laura U. Marks calls "haptic visuality," or images which "engage the viewer tactilely" to explore "how the sense of touch may embody memories that are unavailable to vision" (22). Diop explains in an interview which "memories" the Atlantic Ocean is meant to recall: "it was both confusing and terrifying to me, the fact that the coasts for which these young people were leaving were also the starting points for the slave trade their ancestors took part in hundreds of years before" (qtd. in Walsh 8). Diop turns this feeling into metaphor through her protagonist, Ada, who frequently walks along the beach and gazes at the vast expanse that swallowed her former lover, Souleiman. Diop tempers this memory of loss by observing the tide's paradoxical state of constant return, manufacturing an enticing image of hope while producing opposing results. This natural oscillation echoes the reappearance of

Souleiman's animated corpse as a *revenant*, a French title for a folkloric spirit meaning "one who returns."

Equally important in providing the structural framework of the film is the ominous husk of the Muejiza Tower—a monument to suspended futures in contrast to the ocean's recursive past. The film opens with a scene of disgruntled labourers demanding overdue pay, serving as the catalyst for Souleiman's attempted migration and the subsequent possession of the women left behind by their dead lovers (*Atlantics* 00:02:52). John Walsh's article, "The Spectral Climates of 'Emerging Senegal' in Mati Diop's *Atlantics*," is useful for analyzing this symbol, which describes Souleiman as he "stares, dejected, at the tower, receding yet still forbidding, as if driving him away from the prosperous future it is meant to symbolize" (Walsh 7). One may imagine the Muejiza Tower as a lighthouse whose torch extinguishes when boats approach the shore, insofar as it shares the same outwardly hopeful image of the tide while obscuring colonial memories. But for all their similarities, the ocean and tower differ in the tone of their presentation. Diop's "confusing and terrifying" depiction of the Atlantic Ocean hints towards the sublimity of its natural wonder, meanwhile, she goes to lengths to make the tower seem asynchronous, alien, and artificial against the backdrop of Dakar. As Walsh observes, the tower on-screen is a CGI recreation of the unfinished Gaddafi Tower, a real project proposed in 2006 (5), thus affirming Diop's constructed world is pervaded by cancelled futures. The opening line of the film infers this relationship: "every time it's 'just a bit longer'" (*Atlantics* 00:02:52). Though the words refer to the unpaid wages, it also evokes the film's hauntological present in which "time is out of joint" (Derrida 20).

The digital afterlife of the Muejiza Tower links with one of the film's major themes: the encroaching of technology into daily life. Here, Diop clarifies that digital recreation does not equate neutral representation; rather, this tool is often wielded to project false realities. For example, later in the film there is a brief shot of a television displaying a 3D model of the finished Muejiza Tower against a perfect

blue sky (*Atlantics* 00:30:42). Juxtaposed with the film's introduction—where we witness the tower hollowed out and barren, filled only with dejected labourers staring at a thick layer of oppressive red dust (*Atlantics* 00:01:39)—the viewer now sees the tower in its idealized state. The sinister nature of this image lies in its ability to reanimate a dead project and forcibly project it into the realm of possibility, thereby becoming a sort of digital zombie. Furthermore, this contrast manifests as the “material and virtual power of global capital in postcolonial Africa” (Walsh 5), revealing how technological spectacle can mask the exploitation underpinning the promises of neoliberal development projects.

Additionally, *Atlantics* shows that digital zombification can also apply to human lives, beyond even the literal act of “ghosting” via Souleiman’s abrupt abandonment of Ada. In an early scene, Ada’s arranged fiancé, Omar, gifts her an iPhone, telling her, “it will change your life” (*Atlantics* 00:29:29). But one may suggest the smartphone does not merely change one’s life, rather, it multiplies the self by creating a new plane of existence. Fisher writes, “now, with cyberspace available on every smartphone handset, we are never outside it” (*Ghosts*) and this permanent state of online availability allows the self to interact with others without being physically present. This is accomplished through the spectral semiotics of a social media post that allow for remote interpretations of character. Taken to its extreme, contemporary technology questions whether online subjects have the right to die, or does the digital footprint ensure that, like Souleiman, one can always return in spectral form. Diop visualizes this with Souleiman, who continues to exist for Ada within text messages and mysterious calls received long after his death (*Atlantics* 1:03:00). Souleiman’s digital zombification, alongside the weaponization of the Muejiza Tower, serve to advance Diop’s hauntological survey of a world unable to escape its unresolved pasts, a condition perpetuated by modern technologies.

There is an additional sort of haunting in the film's production process, as Diop reanimates dead aesthetics inherited from the history of Senegalese filmmaking. In *Atlantics*, Diop acknowledges the influence of her uncle Djibril Diop Mambéty's work within New African Cinema, specifically in films such as *Touki Bouki* (1973). This connection is noticeable from the beginning of *Atlantics*, in which a herd of cattle trot down the street (*Atlantics* 00:01:54). This alludes to the opening shot of *Touki Bouki*, showing the herdsman protagonist, Mory, as a child driving cows through the countryside (*Touki Bouki* 00:00:54). Through this contrast between the dense urbanity of *Atlantics* and Mambéty's rural setting, Diop evokes an intergenerational pastoralism for Senegal before neoliberal industrialization as symbolized by the tower. Both also feature a young romance, with *Atlantics* following Ada and Souleiman, while *Touki Bouki* has Anta and Mory, however, the filmmakers differ massively in tone and sincerity. Mambéty, drawing inspiration from the French New Wave, especially the work of Jean-Luc Godard, employs ironic humour in *Touki Bouki* to stage a critique of neocolonial conditions. Comparatively, *Atlantics* rarely breaks from its mournful register. Contrasting the films' somewhat inverted narratives reveals the necessity of such tonal distinctions. In *Touki Bouki*, Anta leaves Senegal on a boat for France while Mory stays behind (*Touki Bouki* 1:14:00), but in *Atlantics*, it is Ada who stays behind and Souleiman who leaves, leading to his death. Through a hauntological lens, Diop's lack of irony signals that the "ship has already sailed"—the hopeful future once satirized by Mambéty is no longer believable enough to mock. *Touki Bouki's* haunting presence nevertheless exemplifies Fisher's claim that contemporary art struggles to formally innovate due to neoliberalism depriving "artists of the resources necessary to produce the new" (*Ghosts*). A postcolonial context doubly emphasizes this struggle, such that it often requires bending one's vision to secure funding and fit Western standards.

Global distribution, or being understood by the West, is not always the goal for directors outside the

dominant arthouse circuit—as Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène has said, “Europe is not my centre” (*Caméra d’Afrique* 1:01:01)—however, Diop clearly sets her aim on a more comprehensive audience. This inevitably leads to a morally complex production process, as achieving a global audience often requires collaborating with Western corporations. For example, *Atlantics* was financed exclusively by French production companies and distributed in North America by streaming giant Netflix. In an interview with *Screen Daily*, Diop articulates an ambivalence towards this dynamic: “[o]n one side, we want our films to be seen by as many people as possible. On the other, I sometimes worry it’s all moving too fast and that maybe I’ve betrayed cinema but on the whole, it has been positive” (Diop). She recognizes the value of global accessibility, especially for the Senegalese diaspora, but there is an inherent sacrifice in doing so. Fisher writes, “[a]s public service broadcasting became ‘marketised’, there was an increased tendency to turn out cultural productions that resembled what was already successful” (*Ghosts*), implying there exists a financial necessity to reappropriate forms shaped by the dominant Western culture, similar to how Mambéty’s work is deeply influenced by European arthouse.

These production complexities converge with the rest of the film’s symbolic and digital hauntings upon a crucial question pertaining to *Atlantics*’s conclusive scene. Here, we find Ada, “to whom the future belongs,” (*Atlantics* 1:41:10) smiling at the camera. Does this gesture truly point towards an emancipatory politics in which “what was previously deemed to be impossible seem[s] attainable” (*Capitalist Realism* 17)? Or does she simply recognize that “every move was a cliché scripted in advance, [knowing] that even realising it is a cliché” (*Capitalist Realism* 9), thus making her hopeful gaze a strictly cinematic gesture, unable to transcend systemic realism? On a personal level, her smile exemplifies a radical happiness that betrays external conditions, yet it leaves the audience guessing at its profundity. By the end of *Atlantics*, Ada has cut off her arranged engagement, made peace with Souleiman, and is no longer under investigation by the obsessive detective, Issa. Therefore, at least for the moment, Ada achieves mental

liberation from the patriarchal structures surrounding her. She thus becomes—like the oceanic imagery backdropping the scene—a site of pure potential one can never be sure is heading towards tragedy or transcendence.

It is this very connection with the Atlantic Ocean which provides a convincing counterargument to an optimistic reading. Diop layers the closing scene with the sound of waves crashing, returning to her former motif, and signalling to the audience—alongside her protagonist—that, after the film closes, Ada will return to the same patriarchal constraints as before. It is a reminder of the ocean's untrustworthy facade, inviting hopeful aspirations while washing up eternal repetitions of postcolonial hauntings. Nonetheless, it would be strange to call this moment overtly ironic, considering that it would betray Diop's filmmaking style, yet sincerity appears equally incompatible with the film's hauntological politics. Consider the following allegory: *Atlantics* won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2019—Diop being the first Black woman to even compete at the festival—suggesting, perhaps, the film taps into a social shift towards a postcolonial consciousness in the West. However, one must question, as contemporary thinkers often have, whether there exists an economy of concern for the Other, where empathic viewers exchange guilt for reputational credit.

Ada's smile does not easily fit into binary categories of sincerity versus irony. It is neither a naive promise of liberatory utopianism nor a cynical wallowing in the bleak aftermath of the colonial project. Rather, the smile crystallizes the hauntological condition Diop evokes throughout *Atlantics* and thereby demonstrates the impossibility of symbolizing the Real, alternatively expressed as a future continually disrupted by recapitulations of a colonial past. Diop also allows room for a radical imaginary in which the subject *feels* the future even while lacking the power to externalize it. *Atlantics* is therefore a slightly tragic, yet lucid, exploration and reappraisal of a world in which one must “learn to live with ghosts,” constituting “a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (Derrida xvii–xviii)—an essential mental step for navigating

a postcolonial modernity beset by unresolved pasts and illusory futures.

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Can The Subaltern Speak?: Silence and Sound in Claire Denis's *Chocolat* and *White Material*

Jessica Jay

Abstract: This paper examines how sound and silence structure the representation of colonial memory in Claire Denis' films *Chocolat* (1988) and *White Material* (2009). Drawing on Leela Gandhi's concept of postcolonial "remembering," I argue that Claire Denis uses auditory forms—silence, overheard speech, radio broadcasts, and music—to register colonial tensions that persist beneath the surface of everyday life. Although critics such as Laura Ceia suggest that Denis's focus on white women risks reproducing colonial hierarchies, this paper contends that the films instead expose the instability of white colonial perception. Across both films, sound is a medium through which suppressed histories surface and escape colonial control.

For Claire Denis, filmmaking begins not with an idea but with a deep conviction that gradually takes form. In a 2010 interview with *Filmmaker Magazine*, Denis describes her creative process as a vague "illumination" that "crystallizes" into a question she must answer through cinema (Denis qtd. in Wigon). In both *Chocolat* (1988) and *White Material* (2009), that question concerns the racial and colonial structures that shaped French presence in Africa. Set during late colonial rule and its violent postcolonial aftermath, these films examine the intimate sphere of settler life through applications of silence, overheard speech, and music. In *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Gandhi describes a colonial system of violence whose residues persist psychologically after independence is gained. Drawing on Gandhi's theoretical framework, I argue

that Denis uses sound and silence to articulate repressed structures of desire and violence that shape relations between white and Black people both during and after colonial occupation.

In *Chocolat*, the protagonist, fittingly named France, returns to Cameroon and recalls the unresolved racial dynamics of her childhood. The film is structured as a frame narrative, in which the majority of the plot takes place in the 1950s, during the height of French occupation in Cameroon. France's childhood is heavily shaped by the tender relationship she had with one of her parents' servants, a Black Cameroonian man named Protée. In *White Material* (set in an unnamed postcolonial African nation), the protagonist, Maria, stays on her coffee plantation despite advice to leave amid rising political violence between African rebel groups and their government.

Both films center on white women living in French Africa—a choice that has drawn criticism. Laura Ceia contends that Denis's aesthetic strategies “tacitly endorse structures of inequality” by privileging white interiority while rendering Black characters voiceless and peripheral (286). Pointing to Denis's visual framing and unequal distribution of dialogue, Ceia argues that the films reproduce the colonial trope of the white woman who claims Africa as her own, while Black women are marginalized (284). Ceia further suggests that Denis romanticizes Africa as a homogeneous Edenic landscape or, alternatively, pathologizes it as a space of chaos and death. However, I contend that Denis mobilizes these aesthetics precisely to destabilize them and reveal the extent to which white supremacy structures the behaviours of those white woman settlers. My position aligns more closely with Laurie Edson's claim that *Chocolat* “deliberately stages its own insufficiency as authoritative representation” (118). Edson suggests that the film does not pretend to offer a transparent account of colonial Africa; instead, it uses the limits and distortions of its white protagonists to demonstrate the hypocrisies and harms of colonial beliefs. What is at stake in

this debate is not simply the visual representation of racial dynamics but also Denis's commentary on the insidious persistence of colonialism. Denis's choice to centre white women's roles within colonial stories does not amount to a moral alignment with their choices and perspectives on race and colonialism.

Gandhi's concept of postcolonial memory offers a compelling lens for understanding Denis's use of white women's gazes. According to Gandhi, newly independent nations often attempt to erase painful memories of colonial subordination, even though "the mere repression of colonial memories is never, in itself, tantamount to a surpassing" (4). To counter this "amnesia," postcolonial thought should perform a "re-membering" that actively confronts and processes the trauma of the past (9). The hyphen emphasizes that this remembering is not a passive act, but rather an active choice to reassemble fractured histories. Gandhi states that any encounter with the colonial past reveals "the seductive narrative of power" alongside "the counter-narrative of the colonized," and that it is necessary "to re-member both" (22, 4).

In both films, Denis locates this uneasy act of remembering in the fractured perception of white women. Their limited vantage points are continually disrupted by what they cannot interpret or refuse to acknowledge. Colonial memory in these films often surfaces in forms that the white characters cannot fully control, such as in silent interpersonal tensions, radio broadcasts, and music. These films repeatedly highlight what young France, her mother Aimée, and Maria, the plantation owner in *White Material*, cannot understand, albeit with the subtlety and ambiguity of Denis's filmmaking style. Anne McClintock's analysis of colonial gender structures helps illuminate why Denis's white female characters simultaneously appear privileged and profoundly limited. McClintock argues that colonial systems rely on a gendered hierarchy in which white women occupy a paradoxical position: they are elevated as symbols of racial purity and imperial stability, yet denied real agency within the structures they symbolically uphold

(61). In her words, white women function as “boundary markers of empire,” tasked with embodying imperial order while remaining excluded from the domains of political and economic control (22).

Denis also uses white women’s perspectives to explore what Gandhi calls the “relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire” that exists between the colonizer and the colonized (4). This dynamic plays out in *Chocolat* between Aimée and Protée, where Protée is often the object of ambivalent intimacy within the colonial household. Protée is central to the household because he labours and cares for the daughter of the colonial family—yet the family also keeps him at the margins. This in-betweenness constitutes a liminal position, which is demonstrated when Aimée’s husband, Marc, arrives home a day early and Protée greets him. Protée stands in the foreground of the shot with his gaze fixed on Aimée and Marc as they kiss (*Chocolat* 45:13). In this scene, both male characters express desire and power. Marc’s authority is evident in the ease with which he moves through the domestic space, openly displays affection for his wife before Protée, and addresses Protée only for practical, servile purposes. Protée, by contrast, occupies a position of enforced yet partial proximity to power through his ability to overhear intimate speech between his white employers.

Protée’s presence within the household also unsettles the colonial fantasy of stable social hierarchy, as he is forced to hover on the boundary between dehumanization and real human intimacy. The colonial domestic space, defined by proximity, dependence, and surveillance, embodies what Gandhi calls the “ambivalent and symbiotic relationship” that characterizes the relationship of underlying colonial violence (11). Colonial power operates through the enforced closeness of shared spaces that blur the line between the private and the political. Aimée, as Protée’s employer, has the power to create intimate moments between herself and Protée. These moments reinforce a mutual dependence: Aimée relies on Protée for household labour and childcare, while Protée relies on Aimée for money and basic respect within

the colonial sphere. When Aimée asks Protée to help her button her dress, they share an extended moment of silent intimacy (*Chocolat* 35:09). The long silence, accompanied by ambient sounds of the household, creates the sense that any speech in such an intimate setting would be unprofessional, thereby upsetting the unspoken rules of the colonial household. Yet the lack of speech also increases a sense of sexual tension: the sound of Protée’s hands on the fabric of Aimée’s dress draws audible attention to the physical and social barrier that lies almost broken between them. Aimée’s attraction to Protée exemplifies what McClintock calls the “porno-tropics” of empire—a European trope of projecting forbidden sexual fantasies and anxieties onto African bodies and landscapes (22). In this context, Protée’s silence in the household unsettles the desire that Aimée projects onto him. He does not actively contribute to this sexual tension between himself and Aimée, yet he does not actively resist it either, at least until later, when Aimée attempts to express her desire more explicitly. This desire, from both characters, operates within the coercive structure of colonialism. The relationship between these two is not consensually chosen, and so any genuine respect and reciprocity that might emerge is curtailed on both ends by the fraught power dynamic that enabled their intimacy in the first place. Violence and intimacy are closely connected in this film, and Protée cannot reject the former without also rejecting the latter.

Protée’s relationships with white men are less tender than his relationships with white women. In Protée’s interactions with the traveller Luc, his silence becomes a form of resistance. When Luc visits the family and speaks to Protée with open rudeness, Denis shows how silence can register as a form of strength rather than submission. Protée never verbally engages with Luc; even at the culmination of their antagonism, when Luc attacks Protée and the two men wrestle, Protée remains silent. Luc initiates the encounter when Protée is working quietly outside, and Luc demands, “Beat it. Leave me alone” (*Chocolat* 1:23:30). Protée simply continues working until Luc begins to push

him. In the end, Protée throws Luc off the veranda just as he had done to the rug he was in the midst of cleaning. This repeated action of throwing casts Luc as just another aspect of the physical and emotional labour Protée is forced to perform to maintain order in the household. The contrast between Protée's placidity and Luc's loud and aggravated speech during the encounter makes Luc appear childish and Protée mature and composed. Directly afterward, Aimée, who has overheard the fight, reaches out to touch Protée who sits exhausted in the dark on the threshold of the doorway. He stands up abruptly and shakes her off. His continued silence is a more forceful rejection of her desire and of his own than any verbal refusal could be—a spoken response would grant recognition to the colonial fantasy of the erotic other, whereas silence is a low-stakes rejection of colonial intimacy. Protée expresses a form of autonomy that Aimée, Luc, and the broader colonial household cannot fully interpret or control. In this sense, Denis's portrayal of Protée's silence visualizes the struggle Gandhi describes, turning the absence of speech into a form of resistance within an unequal colonial soundscape.

In *White Material*, silence between characters represents the repression of complex tensions on the part of the white colonizers and resistance on the part of the colonized peoples. One of these significant silences occurs between the protagonist Maria, a landowning white settler, and an unnamed Black woman she encounters in town when seeking replacement workers for her coffee plantation (*White Material* 38:37). A shot-reverse-shot shows Maria's strained smile while the other woman meets it with a level, unreadable gaze. No words are exchanged, and Maria looks away, ignoring the silence. The Black woman, while helping Maria find employees for her plantation, does not grant her the illusion of a pleasant interaction. The woman does not engage with Maria beyond the economic exchange she facilitates for her community. Marcus Dominick argues that white subjects in *White Material* exist in an "affective borderland that results when white Europeans' sense of or

desire for belonging comes up against rejection” (3). This glance is one instance of that “borderland”: Maria depends on Black labour but refuses to confront the colonial violence that shapes her interactions with Black people, no matter how “civil” or economically just she assumes these interactions to be. She fails to comprehend that her position as a proprietor precludes the possibility of being accepted by the Black people in her community. This gulf between the two women, evidenced by a wordless tension, is what Dominick calls “alienation resolvable into intimacy only in violent encounters” (4). The distance produced by racial hierarchy cannot be reconciled through ordinary social exchange, as Maria attempts to enact with a smile. Any illusion of closeness depends upon force. In other words, even “civil” postcolonial relationships—such as the labour exchange between Maria and her Black workers—are shaped by unresolved colonial violence. The repression of this reality, represented by Maria’s glance away, does nothing to repair or disavow such violence.

Throughout the film, reggae music and rebel announcements anticipate the violence that Maria refuses to acknowledge, voicing the uprising before it physically reaches the plantation. The recurring motif of reggae and political speech articulates the revolutionary energy that Maria refuses to take seriously. This constant intrusion of sound embodies what Gandhi describes as the unavoidable return of repressed colonial histories (4) and what Dominick frames as the “postcolonial unconscious” resurfacing through “unwanted intimacy” (5). The radio collapses public and private space: rebel announcements move freely into domestic interiors, businesses, and vehicles. Maria first encounters radio sound in the pharmacy, where she stands at the counter as the pharmacist quietly splits her bills (*White Material* 32:14). In the background, a reggae song plays over the radio. The radio announcer is a rebel, who says “as for the white material, the party’s over. No more cocktails on shaded verandas while we sweat water and blood” (*White Material* 32:20). The juxtaposition

of “cocktails” with “water and blood” stages a material asymmetry: leisure and coolness on one side, bodily exhaustion, heat, and injury on the other. Maria lightly touches the radio with her fingertips as the broadcast plays, a gesture that suggests an attempt to regulate or contain the sound invading her space. Yet sound is beyond her grasp because it does not operate within the spatial boundaries that her authority encompasses. Maria’s desire to maintain her harvest schedule is rendered politically insignificant by the collective momentum of anti-colonial resistance. In a climactic sequence where government authorities confront the rebel group, the reggae song “Any Which Way... Freedom” by Mutabaruka begins to play on the radio as Maria looks out of her window. It also plays in the next shot as soldiers drag the original rebel announcer out of his house (1:24:13). The camera then cuts to Maria’s workers gathered around a fire listening to the same radio broadcast. This song connects a sequence of various scenes and social groups. The song binds these characters together across physical space while also making the ideological distance between them clear. During these scenes, the radio asserts that “There must be a solution / a revolution / any which way freedom must come” (Mutabaruka). These lyrics convey a political sentiment that mirrors the rebels’ call for change to their country’s system. This music plays while Maria’s individual fantasies of ownership and endurance are dwarfed by the complexity of broader historical forces surrounding her. The unnamed African country that Maria resides in is undergoing its own civil dispute, and she does not land meaningfully on either side. Mutabaruka’s song, playing in public spaces throughout the area, renders audible the desires to destabilize the colonial order. The sound dwarfs Maria’s story within a larger, shared narrative of resistance that refuses to be silenced.

Music also plays a major role in the ambiguous final scenes of *Chocolat*. The film concludes at an airport where three Black airport workers have just finished loading African cultural objects onto a plane. Much like the unfairly compensated labour performed by Black bodies

in both films, this scene is a reminder of how colonial economies historically rendered Black workers peripheral to the artistic and cultural value they produce, which was shipped out of the country for appreciation at colonial art galleries. As the workers finish loading, they step off the tarmac towards a field of grass. They begin to talk with one another, but their voices are completely inaudible beneath the music by South African composer Abdullah Ibrahim. However, as it begins to rain, the tone of the scene shifts. The workers pull yellow rain jackets over their clothes and venture beyond a concrete overhead covering, into the field beyond. Their laughter suggests that they accept the change of weather with ease. This laughter, withheld from the viewer's auditory access, becomes a private joy beyond the viewer's sensory access. By overlaying speech with music, Denis isolates her audience of Western viewers from the workers' intimate speech, thereby indicating the unfinished struggle for audibility within postcolonial contexts.

In *Chocolat* and *White Material*, Denis uses silence and sound to reveal forms of colonial consciousness that remain sublimated. Denis's cinema insists that these histories cannot be neatly divided into oppressor and oppressed narratives, nor can they be forgotten through what Gandhi calls a national "will-to-forget" (4). Instead, her films illustrate the psychic residue of colonialism and how it continues to structure desire, belonging, and exclusion long after the French empire's formal end. Formal ambiguity matters beyond the screen: it models how contemporary societies must confront the unresolved, often unconsciously reproduced legacies of colonialism. By displaying the white subject's perceptual limitation, Denis shows that what remains unheard or repressed can still be profoundly resonant.

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The Cygnet and the Shepherd: Children's Agency in Shakespeare's *King John*

Soren Kim

Abstract: Scholarship on the child characters in Shakespeare's *King John* has generally emphasized their helplessness in the face of the political ambitions and dominant emotions of the play's adult characters. Arthur, especially, is often described as being entirely absent of agency, despite his vital importance to the plot. In response to this critical consensus, my essay explores an alternative reading of the play which instead centres the sparse agency the children do possess, and thus explicates Arthur and Henry III's ephemeral, subversive visions of the future that unsettle the play's ordered ending.

Shakespeare's *King John* is foremostly a play about sons—bastard sons, youngest sons, and especially dead sons. Prince Arthur's infanticide marks a turning point in the action; John's lords temporarily turn against him, and in the ensuing chaos, John nearly takes English sovereignty to the grave with him. Arthur's death also facilitates the sudden appearance of Prince Henry: his cousin, his political double, and the royal family's last surviving legitimate heir. Throughout the play, the two princes find themselves the unwitting foci of political violence; regardless of their personal wishes, their families see them as pawns in the conflict for the English throne. The notion of the narratively imprisoned and politically puppeted child character has been explored in contemporary scholarship, which has focused primarily on the ways in which the play's adult characters come to overpower the identities of their children, whether by casting them as vortexes of affective and sexual energy or as vessels for fantasies of childhood (Campana 19; Miller 222). In this essay, I will reevaluate the agency of the child characters in *King John* and explore their

characterizations beyond the desires and fantasies of their parental figures. I argue that by strategically taking control of the play's language and imagery, the princes consciously break from the influence of the adults and define themselves as individual agents.

Scholarship on childhood in *King John* has mostly revolved around Arthur—the more significant of the two princes—and the disjunction between his “embodied reality” and the adult characters’ objectifying interpretations of him (Miller 225). According to Joseph Campana, “Arthur emerges as an irresistible principle of seduction”: his presence unsettles John and Hubert, who must reckon the political necessity of his murder with the ethical expectation of familial love (28, 27). Campana concludes that “[t]he child does not exist to embody or perform vulnerability. This is, rather, the fantasy of adults” (29). Thus, this essay is interested in what the child does for themselves, beyond Arthur’s mere penchant for empathy (28–29). Gemma Miller similarly recognizes the distinction between the reality of Arthur’s life and the aestheticization of his body, and furthers Campana’s argument that “Constance’s ideal consummation with her child requires his death” (31). Miller casts her as a “frustrated Petrarchan lover . . . irresistibly drawn to, while being repulsed by, the macabre object of her desire”—that is, Arthur’s corpse, whom she mourns before he actually dies (222). Moreover, Constance’s agency comes at the cost of the child’s: “in asserting her own voice, she silences that of her son, relegating him to an aestheticized fantasy of childhood” (Miller 224). Charlotte Scott summarizes his character as “everything and nothing: the centre of the play-world and yet small, silent, and apart from it” (62). The following close readings will attempt to uncover not how Arthur and Henry can come to rejoin the “play-world,” but how they might break its social confines and conceive of other futures beyond the boundaries of the dramatized action.

Campana argues that Arthur, “by virtue of an influence accorded him by powerful adult fantasies about childhood . . . threatens not merely genealogical order but

the structures that determine how power and agency are constituted” (26). However, Campana overlooks the presence of Arthur’s personal, independent desires when discussing his influence upon the order of the play. Indeed, he directly contests and exploits these “adult fantasies,” particularly during the execution sequence with Hubert (Shakespeare 4.1.33–120). The prince carefully navigates their conversation, exploiting at various points Hubert’s pity, revulsion, and sovereign loyalty. While the effect superficially amounts to a desperate, disorganized search for mercy from his would-be torturer, Arthur—evidently capable of manipulation himself—never lets an opportunity for rhetorical dominance go to waste. Moreover, he establishes his own vision for the future in this scene, one that is opposite to those belonging to the other, more dominating male characters. Arthur’s first speech in Act 4, Scene 1 establishes the rhetorical imagery he will later revisit once he gains full knowledge of Hubert’s intention to torture him. The core idea is radical: Arthur feels exhausted by the political scheming and powerless to escape his uncle, so he dreams of being “taken away from the world that surrounds him” to become a pastoral shepherd (Scott 59; Shakespeare 4.1.17). The prince nests his dream in religious language, casting himself as a kind of Christ figure; he stakes the veracity of his wish on his own “Christendom,” and swears to “God” when he tells Hubert, “I were your son, so you would love me” (Shakespeare 4.1.16, 24). The sheep imagery reappears when Arthur offers to “sit as quiet as a lamb” in exchange for Hubert dismissing the executioners (4.1.79). Arthur acknowledges his role as a sacrifice to John, the divine ruler, but for him the role is mere facade: he refuses his “promise” of silent lambhood and restarts his rhetoric at line 96. Arthur rejects not only John’s will, as executed by Hubert, but also his own narrative function as a pathetic instrument of the English succession system—he is a flawed lamb, unwilling to accept his own Christlike martyrdom (Blake 304).

Arthur and Hubert vie for emotional control, but the prince ultimately achieves rhetorical superiority on line

103, when he notices that the iron poker has cooled over the course of their conversation: “the instrument is cold / And would not harm me” (Shakespeare 4.1.104). The last phrase is an evenly split half-line which Hubert completes with, “I can heat it, boy” (4.1.104). The perfect meter indicates neither interruption nor extended silence, and so contrasts with an earlier half-line wherein Arthur attempts to establish a distinction between Hubert’s identities as murderer and father-figure:

ARTHUR. Let him come back, that his compassion
may / Give life to yours.

HUBERT. Come, boy, prepare yourself. (4.1.88–89)

In this case, the fleeting hexameter implies an interruption which furthers Hubert’s ultimately unsuccessful attempt to avoid being persuaded; their words overlap, and Hubert refuses to respond to Arthur’s argument. In the later half-line, however, Hubert allows him to both finish constructing his argument and define the terms of engagement. The pronoun “it” points to the word “instrument”—Hubert has adopted the prince’s language. Thus, the full phrase, “I can heat it,” reads less like an order from a dominant paternal figure and more like a question or suggestion—and indeed, Arthur answers with a concise “[n]o, in good sooth” (4.1.105). Arthur gains further ground when Hubert unconsciously pits his own “breath” against the “breath of heaven,” which has blown out the fire (4.1.109–111). Though Arthur admits he is an imperfect martyr, Hubert, by comparison, is ungodly. This implied invocation of heresy aligns with Scott’s argument that, in Act 4, Scene 1, Shakespeare underscores “infanticide as the greatest of human crimes” (65). However, the directionality here is key—Arthur establishes the language first, and Hubert falls into his rhetorical trap.

Further proof of Arthur’s ambivalence to his own birthright comes during act 3, when Salisbury informs him and Constance of the truce between John and Philip. Constance laments not merely the loss of potential political power but, nihilistically, the very purpose of her family: “O, boy, then where art thou? / . . . What becomes of me?”

(Shakespeare 3.1.34–35). Morriss Henry Partee identifies Arthur's "maturity and emotional stability" when the prince implores Constance to "be content" with the consolation prize of his titles, "Duke of Britain / And Earl of Richmond," and lordship of Angiers, which John had promised to him during the wedding (Partee 69; Shakespeare 3.1.42, 2.1.551–53). Like his dream of becoming a French shepherd, Arthur alludes to yet another alternate future: political exile in the city which once sought "peace and fair-faced league," free from the political machinations surrounding him (2.1.417). Unlike his blood cousin Philip Faulconbridge, Arthur views his royal inheritance as a nuisance. He is acutely aware of his youth, and consistently prioritizes his own life above any political ambitions. When he welcomes King Philip to Angiers, he asks him to deliver not the throne but simply his own survival (2.1.13). With the specific elements of Arthur's desires established, his cousin's motivations can come into clearer focus.

Campana describes Henry as "Arthur's substitute: the new heir and the play's representative royal child" who "speaks for the dominant temporal clichés" that inform the traditional power structure of succession by primogeniture (36). However, Henry inherits—alongside Arthur's claim to the throne—his interest in the subversive pastoral. Henry charges Pembroke to bring the dying John into "the orchard here," thereby coaxing Arthur's dream of countryside sheep fields into reality (Shakespeare 5.7.10; 4.1.17). As John's condition deteriorates, Henry becomes his caretaker, just as Arthur becomes a caretaker for his surrogate father, Hubert (4.1.41–53). Throughout Act 5, Scene 7, the play draws attention to the reversal of filial responsibilities: poison renders the king a child who babbles "idle comments" (5.7.4), while his son must prematurely take on sovereign power in order to control what remains of his father's court. By recognizing and confronting the sudden and unnatural inversion of his own boyhood, Henry's subsequent speeches take on a hesitant, fatalistic tone, thereby unsettling his own sovereign destiny.

Henry goes on to physically juxtapose himself with John, describing himself as “the cygnet to this pale faint swan, / Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death” (Shakespeare 5.7.21–22). The image obviously puns on “swansong” and John’s mad ramblings (“Swansong”), but also both establishes a cyclical sense of time and alludes to Arthur’s peaceful pastoral world. Henry foresees himself repeating John’s death when he matures—the pronoun “who” briefly and proleptically applies to both father and son. Moreover, Salisbury claims that Henry was “born” to “set a form upon that indigest”—in other words, to restore John’s body and mind (5.7.25–26). However, Henry takes a subtly different perspective. Rather than attempting to rise to Salisbury’s expectations as a miraculous healer or otherwise rush to call upon a doctor, Henry takes the opportunity to lament his *lack* of ability: “O that there were some virtue in my tears / That might relieve you” (5.7.44–45). Among the retinue present, Henry alone understands the futility of trying to save his father’s life. His inability to help may emerge from his youthful naivety rather than a pragmatic calculation—thus lies yet another example of the ambiguity intrinsic to the play’s royal children.

According to Ann Blake, Arthur’s “gentle, loving nature ... provide[s] the antithesis to the play’s violent world of betrayal, conflict, and self-assertion” (303). If this “nature” rests in Arthur’s vision of the pastoral, then Henry, by inheriting the pastoral, becomes at least partially associated with his predecessor’s desire to break from the sociopolitical expectations assigned to them as heirs. How, then, does this diametric reading reckon with the textual reality of Henry’s ascension to the throne? One possible solution lies in a reinterpretation of the following lines:

E’en so must I run on and e’en so stop.
What surety of the world, what hope, what stay,
When this was now a king, and now is clay?
(Shakespeare 5.7.67–69)

Campana interprets this passage as Henry “[transforming] the play’s troubled sovereignty into moral exemplarity ... the wild principle of uncertainty comes to refer exclusively

to the inevitability of death, which bolsters Henry III's temporal and political claims" (36). However, with hints of the alternative pastoral future in mind, the "inevitability of death" encoded in the cycle of succession weighs heavy on Henry's own reign and this brief speech. The "clay" that composes John's body was, mere moments ago, an animate man suffering prolonged death throes; his last gift to his son is an image of a future involving not divine glory and wartime victory, but suffering and madness (Shakespeare 4.7.69). This image informs the hesitancy in Henry's question, itself self-reflexively and fatalistically alluding to the historical reality of the young king's future reign, which was mired by political infighting ("Henry III"). Henry's skepticism towards the "surety of the world" takes on a prophetic, dramatically ironic tone: far from a "prop" signifying restored political order (Campana 36). Henry is a reluctant boy-king whose filial and sovereign loyalty is clouded by Arthur's ghostly dreams of escape and haunted by the trauma of his father's undignified death. Throughout Act 5, Scene 7, Henry simultaneously holds three competing futures: Arthur's impossible, unrealized pastoral, the apparent textual restoration of order, and the historical reality of Henry III's rule. These futures carry forth the princes' complicated, yet-unrealized desires, placing pressure on the ordered ending of the play.

Despite Arthur and Henry's best efforts to define themselves as agents beyond the reach of their parental figures, they inevitably succumb to their promised fates—kingship in Henry's case, and death in Arthur's. The children are bound by the limits of the historical record which ensures their alternative futures will not come to pass. However, the very presence of these futures indicates a vast multiplicity of worldviews beyond the cursory French-versus-English binary. As this essay has shown, the child characters use their respective rhetorical talents to construct an undeniable vision of a comedic dream that undermines the play's militant, nationalistic overtones.

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Patrons, Prayers, and Persecution: How *This Present Darkness* Appropriates Ancient Apocalyptic Traditions to Comfort White Evangelical Americans

Jude Lovell

Abstract: This essay argues that Frank Peretti’s Evangelical novel, *This Present Darkness* (1986), appropriates ancient apocalyptic conventions from the Book of Daniel, a text written to comfort a violently persecuted Jewish readership. This appropriation functions to comfort a white Evangelical American audience, a demographic eager to imagine their own oppression in the face of diminishing privilege at the end of the twentieth century. Drawing on critical Bible scholarship, this essay describes four continuities between *This Present Darkness* and the Book of Daniel: the alternative cosmology, patron deities, determinism, and praxes of resistance. This work analyzes the fabricated persecution of Evangelicals that drives their attempt to reassert white Christian supremacy today.

Scholarship on Frank Peretti’s Evangelical bestseller, *This Present Darkness* (1986), explains how the novel encapsulates the ideology of the New Christian Right in its portrayal of secular enemies united in a demonic conspiracy, as well as how the cosmology that the novel presents has been embraced by many Christians (Connolly 60, 64; Gardella and McDannell 330; Howard 194). However, there is little scholarship on the continuity of *This Present Darkness* with ancient apocalyptic texts. Literature and religion scholar Christopher Douglas argues that “the beginnings of apocalypse in Biblical and parabiblical literature” can aid in understanding “the phenomenological qualities the [Evangelical] *Left Behind* series is renewing” (2). Drawing

on Douglas's methodology of understanding contemporary apocalyptic texts through ancient generic predecessors, this essay will argue that *This Present Darkness* comforts Evangelicals in the face of diminishing Christian hegemony towards the end of the twentieth century by appropriating motifs from the Book of Daniel that were originally intended to comfort a persecuted Judean audience. Critical Bible scholarship will serve as a reference point to illustrate how *This Present Darkness* employs four apocalyptic conventions from the Book of Daniel, including the alternative cosmology, patron deities, determinism, and praxes of resistance, in order to comfort an Evangelical readership experiencing a cultural crisis.

The Book of Daniel was written in the context of the Seleucid Empire's violent persecution of Jews living in Judea in the second century BCE (Portier-Young, "Daniel" 806). In 167 BCE, King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire "outlawed the practice and confession of Jewish religion and instituted new religious practices" in an attempt to "assert the empire as sole power, reality, and ground of being" (Portier-Young, "Jewish Apocalyptic" 150). Anthea Portier-Young argues that the Book of Daniel functioned to comfort the persecuted Jewish community by offering an alternative cosmology that assured readers of the legitimacy of their God and identity by denying the "ultimacy of imperial power" (151, 150). Daniel has a divinely-inspired dream in which empires are depicted as monstrous beasts that will only rule for a short time before God destroys them, thereby undermining the purported ideological and religious supremacy of the Seleucid Empire (Portier-Young, "Daniel" 814; Dan. 7.3–8). This revelation of an alternative cosmology in which enemies are unveiled as spiritually monstrous is also portrayed within *This Present Darkness*.

This Present Darkness was published in the context of a "late twentieth century [American cultural] revolution that swept away many values and laws derived from the Bible" (Gardella and McDannell 332). The practices of "premarital sex, cohabitation, and abortion" became

normalized in “law and public discourse” throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which was followed by a rise in religious pluralism and New Age spiritualism throughout the 1980s and 1990s (332). Some Evangelical Christians perceived this loss of power through the secularization of American laws and culture as marginalization or oppression (332). *This Present Darkness* employs the apocalyptic convention of the alternative cosmology to comfort an Evangelical audience experiencing this loss of privilege. For example, the novel depicts non-Christian faiths as a means for demons to manipulate people. Juleen Langstrat, the antagonist of the novel, believes she is convening with “the ascended Masters, the Spirit Guides from higher planes” through the “lotus position of Eastern meditation,” in actuality, she is communicating with a demonic “filthy black nightmare of a creature” (Peretti 293, 293, 294). This equivalence between non-Christian faith practices with demonic influences exists as a response to an increasing societal interest in “Eastern religions, yoga, and other forms of meditations” (Gardella and McDannell 332). Peretti’s depictions of New Age religion functioned to comfort Evangelicals: it asserted that their continuing loss of cultural hegemony to religious pluralism was not benign, but rather an insidious plot. Similar to how the Book of Daniel portrays a cosmology in which Seleucid oppressors are monstrous in order to affirm the righteousness of its Jewish audience, *This Present Darkness* portrays a cosmology in which New Age faiths are demonic in order to affirm the legitimacy of Evangelical beliefs during the erosion of Christian cultural dominance. Furthermore, the novel also reveals that Oliver Young, a liberal pastor who “endorses religious tolerance,” belongs to the demonic conspiracy (Peretti 17, 321). Similarly, when protagonist Marshall Hogan’s daughter embraces ecumenical beliefs at college, a demon “[stands] behind [her], stroking her red hair and speaking sweet words of comfort to her mind” (157). These portrayals of Christian tolerance and ecumenicalism as demonic further affirm the righteousness of fundamentalist Christians in the face of religious pluralism: the novel unveils an alternative

cosmology in which Evangelicals are lauded by angels in the spiritual realm, while those who follow any other faith are unknowingly backed by demons (6, 157).

Another apocalyptic motif in the Book of Daniel are patron deities, which are supernatural beings that sponsor national communities. John Collins explains that the Book of Daniel suggests to its audience that “behind the human conflicts of the Hellenistic age there is an ongoing battle in heaven between Michael, the patron angel of [Judea] and the [supernatural] ‘princes’ that sponsor Persia and Greece” (108). Judean readers of the Book Daniel would be reassured by the revelation that they were not resisting Seleucid persecution alone, but angelic entities were advocating for them in the spiritual realm. The angel Gabriel informing Daniel that “Michael, [Judea’s] prince” is contending against “these Princes [of Persia and Greece]” on his behalf functioned to comfort ancient Jewish readers suffering under the Seleucid Empire in the corporeal realm (Dan. 10.21). Furthermore, the Princes of Persia and Greece seem to be enemies of God, as evident in their attempt to impede Gabriel on his divine quest to respond to Daniel’s prayers, and in their sponsorship of empires that oppress the God-worshipping Judeans (Dan. 10.13, 10.20). This notion would have provided Judean readers assurance about their Jewish identity: Seleucid assimilationist edicts and practices are worth resisting, because the Seleucid Empire is sponsored by the enemies of God.

This Present Darkness appropriates this ancient motif of patron deities to comfort Evangelicals and affirm their feelings of righteousness. The novel begins with fundamentalist pastor Hank Busche praying in his church while two angels have a conversation behind him: “‘He’s going to get hurt, you know that,’ one says; the other replies, ‘And so will we’” (Peretti 6). Evangelical readers of *This Present Darkness* could glean comfort from the notion that angels are advocating for and suffering alongside Christians in turmoil. The angels “[ministering] peace” to Hank when he feels forlorn, causing “his many tears ... to subside,” and their feelings of severe pain when they see Marshall, who

is getting attacked by demons provide comfort through the concept that unseen angelic warriors are sympathizing with the hardships of Christians (7, 72). Like how the Book of Daniel assuages Judean feelings of helplessness under the oppression of a powerful empire by suggesting that patron deities are advocating for them; the vision of angels aiding Christians in *This Present Darkness* functioned to soothe fundamentalists who were losing cultural dominance in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, the motif of patron deities ascribes supreme importance to Evangelical identity by magnifying their struggles to a cosmic scale. The Ashton Community Church's vote on whether to keep fundamentalist Hank or replace him with a more liberal pastor becomes a paramount concern of both angels and demons, with both sides trying to influence the vote in their favour (133). Gardella and McDannell suggest that these portrayals of "the cosmos [centering] on [white] Christian families nestled in small-town America" function to affirm a sense of importance for Evangelical readers—thereby comforting them in the context of diminishing cultural supremacy (334). Lastly, the novel's depiction of patron deities constructs mundane earthly affairs into Manichean struggles between the forces of good and evil. For instance, Ba-al Rafar, the demonic patron deity of the novel's antagonists who is attempting to rule as the "prince of Ashton," once ruled as the "prince of Babylon" in "ancient times" (Peretti 52). Therefore, New Age religion and liberal Christianity are sponsored by the same demonic being that sponsored Babylon, an epitome of wickedness in the Evangelical imagination ("Babylon"). Like how the Book of Daniel affirms Jewish identity by revealing that the Seleucid Empire is not simply a human polity but sponsored by the enemies of God, *This Present Darkness* affirms the righteousness of Evangelical identity by demonstrating that religious plurality is a heinous scheme orchestrated by demonic patrons.

Another motif the Book of Daniel employs to comfort its Judean readership is determinism. In the apocalyptic genre, determinism is the notion that God

preordained the course of history at the beginning of time (Popovic 258). Rabbi Wayne Allen explains that the emergence of determinism in ancient Judaism was a response to the theodicy of suffering: some Second Temple biblical writers proposed that God is an omnipotent being whose ultimate intent is to deliver justice, but since only he has “full knowledge and can see the complete picture” of the universe, he is gradually implementing justice through a mysterious plan that “is beyond human comprehension” (44, 45). Before God’s plan can be fully executed, some good people will suffer and some wicked people will prevail, but the eschatological event at the fixed end of history will rectify this injustice. This is the solution that the writers of the Book of Daniel apply to the theodicy of pious Judeans being persecuted by the Seleucid Empire: God, as the omnipotent ruler of the universe, allows a series of oppressive empires sponsored by his cosmic enemies to prevail for reasons that are not explainable by human logic. Since God is also benevolent, he must be unfolding some plan in which the righteous will ultimately be vindicated and oppressors punished (49). For instance, Daniel’s prophetic dream reveals that the four monstrous beasts, symbolic of empire, will reign supreme for an ephemeral period. Ultimately, however, God—depicted as “enthroned as supreme ruler in the divine council”—will kill the beasts and strip their power, thereby liberating the Judeans at the fixed end of history (Seow 233; Dan. 7.3–18). In Daniel’s prophecy, God’s absolute rule from the heavenly court and his plan to vindicate the Judeans are affirmed. In all, the text assured Judean readers that their unjust condition under Seleucid rule was part of God’s plan and was necessary to achieve the destruction of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous.

This Present Darkness similarly employs determinism to comfort Evangelical readers. For example, both Hank and Marshall are sent to Ashton as part of God’s plan to defeat the demonic conspiracy. The angels discuss how they orchestrated Marshall’s move to Ashton because God wants him to “[wake] up” to the conspiracy (Peretti

55). Similarly, Hank is mysteriously voted in as minister of the Ashton Community Church, despite the fact that the parishioners—who “went to such great lengths to get rid of the [fundamentalist minister] they had” before—had intended on voting in “some guy who had a wide and liberal enough philosophy to suit them” that was “all picked out and ready to move in,” implying divine interference in Hank’s move to Ashton (85). Furthermore, Edith Duster, the “wise old matron of the church,” assures Hank that “[his] being [in Ashton] is *not* a mistake” because God is “forcing a revival upon the church” (145). After God arranges Hank and Marshall’s move to Ashton, two angels on a divine “appointment” compel journalist Bernice Krueger to take a photo behind “one particular booth” at the Ashton Summer Festival, causing her to discover a clandestine meeting of the demonic Universal Consciousness Society (2). Immediately after, Bernice is suspiciously detained by the chief of police on false charges, which leads her and Marshall to investigate and uncover the demonic conspiracy in Ashton (18). Therefore, *This Present Darkness* has a deterministic plot: everything is put into motion by God and his divine intermediaries. Like how the Book of Daniel reassures its audience that God is in control, the novel’s depiction of God implementing a plan for an Evangelical victory functions to comfort fundamentalist Christian readers. Furthermore, the angels reiterate throughout the novel that “Hogan as well as Busche *must* fall” and suffer for God’s plan to come to fruition (269, 375, 383). Like how the Judeans in the Book of Daniel must suffer at the hands of the Seleucid empire, the protagonists of *This Present Darkness* must also undergo suffering in order for God’s plan to defeat the enemies of the New Christian Right to be executed. Hank realizes this when he and Marshall have both been jailed for investigating the demonic conspiracy: he exclaims “This is of God! Our being here is no accident. Our enemies meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. He’s brought the two of us together just so we could meet, just so we could put the whole thing together!” (409). This revelation that incredible suffering and persecution has been a part of God’s plan provides hope

for an Evangelical readership. It suggests that enemies may be allowed to prevail for a time while Evangelicals undergo persecution, but this persecution is all a part of his plan to vindicate true Christians and restore Christian hegemony in the United States. As Hank says, “I have a very strong feeling that [the Lord] got us into this, and that He also has a plan to get us out” (420).

Portier-Young argues that ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature often functioned to offer persecuted audiences praxes of resistance against imperial oppression (Portier-Young, “Jewish Apocalyptic” 160). In the Book of Daniel, the prescribed praxis is nonviolent resistance: Judeans should remain faithful to Jewish religious practices instead of assimilating to Seleucid culture and religion, even if that means undergoing martyrdom (151). For example, “the wise among the people” who instruct others about Jewish practices “shall fall by sword and flame, and suffer captivity and plunder,” but they will awaken “to everlasting life” during the resurrection, as opposed to those who forsake Jewish practices, who will awaken to “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 11.33, 11.33, 12.2). Furthermore, Portier-Young suggests that the heroes of ancient apocalyptic narrative “model further forms of resistance for the audience to emulate” (Portier-Young, “Jewish Apocalyptic” 146). The heroic Daniel exhibits “faithfulness to Jewish religious practices” through prayer, penance, and confession, which encourages the Judean audience to do the same (151).

Like the Book of Daniel, *This Present Darkness* offers praxes to its readers: prayer and proselytization. The novel suggests that prayer is the primary weakness of demons. This is evident when Ba-al Rafar asks if his fellow demon Lucius is afraid of prayer and he replies, “Yes of course, more than anything” (Peretti 64). In a deviation from its generally deterministic cosmology, the novel suggests that angels need “prayer cover” in order to win battles against demons (199). God sets the plan in motion by sending Marshall and Hank to Ashton, but it is up to devout Christians to become “praying saints” in order for the plan to be fully

executed (230). By prescribing a praxis of prayer, Peretti provides Evangelical readers with a comforting sense of agency during their continuing loss of cultural hegemony: *This Present Darkness* assures its audience of the efficacy of prayer in defeating their enemies (401). Furthermore, like how Daniel is a hero that demonstrates forms of resistance for Judean audiences to imitate, Hank similarly models how a heroic Christian can combat the enemies of the New Christian Right: he “walks the streets of Ashton interceding for it” constantly, and doesn’t “turn [his] back on what [he believes] the Word of God teaches” despite vehement demands to preach a more liberal theology (50, 129). In addition to prayer, the novel prescribes proselytization to its audience. Edith tells Hank that “we need to get other people praying. That’s what the angels keep telling me,” which suggests to readers that proselytization is a means of restoring Christian hegemony (147). Hank, stirred by the way his parishioners are “deluded” by the want for a more liberal theology, informs them that “there may be times when [they’ll] feel [his] shepherd’s crook around [their necks] ... to help [them] move in the right direction, to protect [them], to heal [them]” (128, 129). This portrayal of the novel’s hero as corrective of those who stray to non-fundamentalist theology functions to encourage Evangelical readers to adopt the praxis of proselytization.

The Book of Daniel employs the apocalyptic motifs of the alternative cosmology, patron deities, determinism, and praxes of resistance to comfort persecuted Judeans by affirming their Jewish identity and encouraging them to reject imperial assimilation. Peretti’s *This Present Darkness* is a gross misappropriation of these ancient apocalyptic motifs—a novel written to comfort white Evangelical Americans by instilling them with the perception that they are entitled to political and cultural supremacy, and that any attempt to compel them to share their power is persecution. Understanding this Evangelical apocalyptic worldview is more important than ever, as contemporary American Evangelicals continue to appropriate ancient apocalyptic motifs in appeals for the reassertion of white

Christian supremacy under President Donald Trump. In between speaking in tongues on 4 November, 2020, televangelist Paula White-Cain exclaimed that “angels [were] being dispatched” to assist in securing the reelection of Donald Trump for the sake of Evangelicals—thereby drawing on the tradition of patron deities (Right Wing Watch). On 2 November, 2024, Evangelical social media personality Gabe Poirot posted a video on Instagram claiming that “a demonic creature ... manifest[ed] at one of [then-Presidential candidate] Kamala Harris’s rallies, exposing the truth behind who she really is”—unveiling the alternative cosmology to his fifty-four thousand followers (Poirot). Considering apocalyptic Evangelical media through the context of ancient generic predecessors like the Book of Daniel can aid in understanding one’s worldview and imagined experience of spiritual persecution that currently drives white Evangelical Christians to reassert their hegemony in the United States today.

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“He didn’t come to the West Indies to dance – he came to make money as they all do”: Ecofeminism and Conquest in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Cella Pop

Abstract: This essay examines Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) through an ecofeminist and post-colonial lens, arguing that Antoinette and Rochester’s marriage symbolically enacts a dynamic of colonial domination. Through reference to ecofeminist theory as outlined by Margot Lauwers and historical analyses of Caribbean colonialism, this paper contends that Antoinette’s alignment with the natural world represents the shared exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal power. In contrast, Rochester embodies the ecofeminist “logic of domination” as demonstrated through his economic extraction and imposition over Antoinette’s identity, establishing their relationship as a metaphor for violent colonial conquest.

Madness and marriage intertwine in the colonial Caribbean as Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) gives voice to the story of Bertha Mason, the madwoman in Rochester’s attic from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). In Rhys’s unofficial prequel, Bertha becomes Antoinette Cosway while Mr. Rochester retains the same name, an obvious allusion to Brontë’s original novel. The tumultuous marriage between Antoinette and Rochester is tested and ultimately shattered by their contrasting cultural backgrounds. Ecofeminism was first coined by Francois d’Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Feminism or Death*. At the core of ecofeminist theory, understanding the simultaneous oppression of women and nature under patriarchal culture is key (Lauwers 106). Throughout the text, Antoinette is frequently aligned

with the natural landscape of the Caribbean Windward Islands. In contrast, Rochester represents the domineering colonial force that opposes the feminine and environmental connection. Seeing as the novel is set shortly after the British Emancipation Act of 1833, the Windward Islands are still very much in the throes of colonialism. Thus, by using an ecofeminist lens, and considering the colonialist contexts of their relationship, the following analysis demonstrates how Antoinette and Rochester symbolically enact the dynamics of colonialism.

In *Rethinking Nature*, scholar Margot Lauwers frames ecofeminist theory as the “domination of women by men and the exploitation of nature by humanity,” which is the same “logic of domination” found within patriarchal culture (Lauwers 106). Before Lauwers’s work, during the 1970s and 1980s, initial research into the concept of ecofeminism was published, situating the theory into academic canon. As ecofeminist theory has become more widely accepted into scholarly fields, a dual understanding of the movement has formed: conceptual and empirical.

Firstly, the relationship between women and the natural world can be understood on a theoretical level. The core of this connection “lies in the hierarchical mode and binary thinking applied in Western societies or societies under Western influence,” which divides the world into implicit dualistic categories (108). Ecofeminist theory asserts that this compartmentalization aligns the feminine gender with the earth, sexuality, emotion, carnality, and the body. Contrastingly, masculinity is identified with the sky, power, mind, reason, culture, and intellect. This thought structure clearly divides men and women, and most importantly, highlights how women and femininity are aligned with nature. However, it is important to note that the ecofeminist movement has faced backlash alongside support in academia. Critics have argued that the movement promotes Eurocentrism and divisiveness. Lauwers addresses these concerns, stating that while ecofeminism does highlight an implicit duality within Western society, ecofeminist theory “can [still] help to broaden our critical

minds in order to move away from the dualisms upholding these ideas” (111). Despite these criticisms, ecofeminism continues to be included in academic discourse.

Lauwers argues that women suffer more from environmental degradation because of the gendered division of labour within patriarchal societies (108). Empirical evidence of ecofeminism has highlighted the increased health risks for women and children from radiation poisoning, pesticides, and toxic waste (108). Women, typically placed in charge of collecting food, water, and wood, are required to travel further to find resources because of degrading environmental conditions (108). Lauwers discusses the empirical link between the oppression of women and the environment, stating that “the economic and postcolonial behavior of industrialized countries ... might directly affect the economic difficulties experienced mostly by women in developing countries” (108). Following the link that Lauwers identifies, Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* belongs within the ecofeminist canon.

Alongside ecofeminist theory, an understanding of the novel’s colonial context is required to fully comprehend the colonial implications of Antoinette and Rochester’s marriage. In her book, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Margaret Atwood offers a partial definition of a colony: “it is a place from which a profit is made, but not by the people who live there ... That’s what colonies are for, to make money for the ‘mother country’” (35). Social anthropologist Harry Sanabria discusses the colonial economy of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in his book *The Anthropology of Latin America and the Caribbean*, examining how rural landed estates, plantations, and mines were central to colonial wealth (80–81). LAC colonies suffered greatly under colonial rule; the land and people were subjugated to intense exploitation (Delle 22–25). The natural landscape of LAC was exploited for the benefit of foreigners, and the use of African and Indigenous-American forced labour fueled the production of these sites for colonial profit (Sanabria 80–81). The disturbance and ecological abuse that LAC suffered under colonial rule led

local and imported slave populations to attempt resistance and rebellion; violence and uprisings were common and threatened the European dominion over LAC (82–83). Paired with Cuba's reign over the sugar industry and newly gained independence, other countries, particularly those within the Windward Islands, faced economic decline. Additionally, as a result of the British Emancipation Act of 1833, which marked the end of slavery under the British Empire, the political landscape of LAC was further forced into a period of upheaval and change (Gibson 200–201).

Furthermore, Sanabria explains how sexual relations before marriage were encouraged and accepted among Indigenous populations. Embracing sexuality was considered a sign of maturity and sometimes viewed as a first step before a formal marriage in some LAC cultures. Christian and Catholic ideals brought by European colonists emphasized chastity and monogamy in relationships. These imported religious ideals shifted the cultural landscape of LAC to one centering masculinity and heterosexuality (Sanabria 88–90). Gendered colonialism can also be found in the context of Antoinette and Rochester's relationship. Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, while written in a post-colonial context, does not take place within one. Antoinette and Rochester's relationship mirrors the colonial landscape in which their marriage and narrative are situated. Before her marriage to Rochester, Antoinette is alluded to having had a dalliance with another young man: her half-nephew, Sandi. Rochester, hailing from Victorian England, brings with him a colonial perspective toward marriage and chastity. Antoinette's potentially sexual relationship with Sandi may not have mattered to the local inhabitants of the Windward Islands, but it becomes a point of tension in her marriage to Rochester.

By considering the novel's colonial post-emancipation landscape alongside ecofeminist theory, Rochester and Antoinette's marriage is further emphasized as metaphorically representative of colonial conquest. As a white English male, Rochester represents the dominating colonial power within his marriage. Throughout the novel,

Rochester expresses disdain for the natives of the Windward Islands, regarding them and their practices as savage and unusual. Rochester does not view Antoinette as his English equal and compares her to an “alien,” saying, “I watched [Antoinette] critically ... At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting ... Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 44). As the narrative progresses, so does Rochester’s growing dislike of the Caribbean landscape and his apprehension toward Antoinette, seeing both as “[n]ot only wild but menacing” (47). Upon arriving at Grandbois, Antoinette makes an initially charming observation about Rochester: “You look like a king, an emperor” (50). Antoinette’s remark aligns Rochester with the image of a conqueror, foreshadowing his domination over her. Rochester also claims that he was “bought” by Antoinette and her stepbrother, Richard (47). From Rochester’s perspective, his marriage is a burden, but as his father’s youngest son, he is left with few other options to attain wealth. While he believes he is the one suffering in the arrangement, Rochester has become thirty thousand pounds richer, now owning a collection of Caribbean estates, a young bride, and household staff. In contrast, Antoinette loses her freedom, and eventually, her home. When Antoinette observes her stepfather, Mr. Mason, at a celebration early in the novel, she thinks, “[h]e didn’t come to the West Indies to dance – he came to make money as they all do” (13–14). Antoinette’s observation heralds her own fate: despite her love for Rochester, she was always destined to be colonized and used as a source of income. Rochester went to the Windward Islands and made a profit through his marriage to Antoinette; he acted as a colonizing country, reaping the resources of the conquered territory and taking his profits back to England.

Later, Rochester slowly warms to Antoinette despite his initial struggles. When Rochester and Antoinette visit a secluded bathing pool, Rochester notes that “[it] was a beautiful place – wild untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness” (62). Here,

Rochester emphasizes the “untouched” quality of the land, seemingly echoing and emphasizing chasteness (62). The adjective “untouched” is closely followed by “alien,” a clear reference to Rochester’s earlier observation of Antoinette, further aligning her with the landscape (62). Rochester’s opinion of Antoinette shifts after he is given a letter by Antoinette’s half-brother detailing Antoinette’s scandalous past. Recalling Sanabria’s discussion on gendered colonialism, Rochester’s views on marriage and fidelity corrupt his ability to reason with this newfound information. Rochester seeks to lay claim and establish dominance over Antoinette much like how a colonist would upon arriving in new “untouched” lands (62). While strolling through the Grandbois estate, Rochester comes across a flower:

I pass an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for [Antoinette] one day. “They are like you,” I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud. (72)

Rochester equates Antoinette with an orchid, an element of nature, which he then “tramples,” seemingly foreshadowing their relationship (72).

Later, Antoinette begs her former maid, Christophine, to help her persuade Rochester into loving her again. Christophine suggests that Antoinette should leave Rochester, but Antoinette explains to Christophine why she cannot, saying, “you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him ... That is English law” (81). These rules are foreign to Christophine, highlighting a difference in cultural marital practices. Rochester’s enforcement of English marriage law is a form of gendered colonialism. When Antoinette returns to Grandbois and speaks with Rochester about her past, he again states his displeasure for the West Indies, saying they are a “damned place,” and later to Antoinette, “I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side” (95, 97). Rochester’s statements articulate his discomfort in the West Indies and reaffirm that Antoinette

and the Windward Islands are deeply connected. In this section of the novel, Rochester has also shifted to calling Antoinette “Bertha” (83). Antoinette expresses discomfort at being called Bertha and asks Rochester why he does this. Rochester replies, “Because it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (101). Antoinette has been claimed by Rochester, the symbolic colonist, and renamed “Bertha,” echoing the colonial practice of retitling Indigenous places. Even after Antoinette asks him multiple times not to call her Bertha, Rochester does not respect her, saying, “Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha” (102). When the pair fight over the use of Caribbean black magic, obeah, Antoinette seemingly identifies Rochester’s implicit act of domination, exclaiming, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeah too” (111).

After the couple’s fight, Christophine attempts to barter with Rochester for Antoinette’s freedom. Christophine addresses the dominative and colonial attitude with which Rochester treated Antoinette: “Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all. And then you want to break her up” (116). Christophine highlights how Rochester has extracted resources from Antoinette and broken her in the process, explicitly drawing a parallel to colonialism. Christophine continues to expose Rochester’s wrongdoings by pointing out to him, and subsequent readers, that “[Antoinette] don’t come to your house in this place England they tell me about, she don’t come to your beautiful house to beg you to marry with her. No, it’s you come all the long way to her house – it’s you beg her to marry” (121). When Rochester orders Christophine to leave Grandbois, she tells him that the estate belongs to Antoinette, but Rochester replies, “I assure you that [Grandbois] belongs to me now” (122). Rochester has claimed the estate from Antoinette, effectively taking her home. After deciding to leave Grandbois and travel to England, Rochester observes Antoinette as they prepare to depart, thinking to himself, “I was tired of these people ... And I hate the place. I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain ... Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness” (132). Rochester articulates his hatred for the Caribbean alongside his disdain

for Antoinette, thus placing both in similar implicit categories; to him, Antoinette and the West Indies are the same terrible entity.

In England, Antoinette is confined to the attic of Rochester's estate, where she is left to descend into madness by her ill-matched husband. Antoinette is disoriented but occasionally recalls snippets of her past: "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass" (139). Antoinette's memories highlight how Rochester's dominion has contributed to the loss of her sense of self. Rochester has claimed not only Antoinette's wealth, but also her identity, further mimicking colonial consequences.

Through the lens of ecofeminism, understanding the novel's colonial context, and evidence from the text, Rochester and Antoinette's marriage stands as a metaphor for colonial domination. Lauwers outlines ecofeminist thought, highlighting how the movement has identified an implicit connection between women and the natural world and their shared oppression within patriarchal society. As the novel progresses, Rochester's disdain towards the landscape parallels his growing hate for Antoinette, seeing both as barbaric. The period in which the novel is set further highlights the colonial dynamic within Rochester and Antoinette's relationship. In his book, Sanabria outlines the destructive consequences of plantations, mines, and landed estates, and outlines how gendered colonialism functions as another form of conquest and assimilation (80–83). Antoinette's previous relationship with Sandi is a point of tension in her marriage to Rochester, and Christophine expresses confusion about English marriage laws when speaking with Antoinette. These cultural misunderstandings demonstrate how Rochester has enacted gender-based conquest over Antoinette. Furthermore, the novel offers sufficient evidence that Rochester came to the Caribbean to profit from his relationship with Antoinette. His extraction of Antoinette's home, assets, and love all contribute to the decline of her wellbeing. Rhys's novel not only grants Antoinette her own perspective in the context of *Jane Eyre* and its surrounding literary discourse, but also draws

attention to the debated theory of ecofeminism through its examination of a metaphorically colonial relationship.

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The Unknowable Woman: Depictions of Women in Alfred Tennyson's *Moxon Tennyson* and the Arctic Monkeys' *AM*

Erin Slater

Abstract: This essay compares Alfred Tennyson's *Moxon Tennyson* (1857) and Arctic Monkeys' 2013 album *AM*, examining their enduring representations of women as devoted, desirable, and unknowable figures. Both artists use repetition, vivid imagery, and intermedial elements to develop a lasting depiction of enigmatic women. Using a presentist lens, this essay explores how historical resonances in Arctic Monkeys' songs and modern parallels in Tennyson's poetry make both works more alluring for a contemporary audience. In doing so, this essay illustrates that portrayals of women are neither confined to the past nor isolated in the present; rather, they persist across time.

Poetic verse and rock-music riffs alongside fascination with desire, devotion, and alluring enigmatic figures remains a timeless artistic obsession. Alfred Tennyson, a major Victorian poet, explored these themes in his influential intermedial poetry collection published in 1857, the *Moxon Tennyson*. Over 150 years later, the English indie rock band Arctic Monkeys, with lead vocalist and lyricist Alex Turner, address similar concepts in their 2013 album *AM*. While Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys may seem like an unexpected comparison, viewing them together reveals how certain literary strategies and themes persist over time. This analysis centres around the Arctic Monkeys as their focus on elusive and idealized women closely mirrors Tennyson's fascination with devoted and desirable figures, making the comparison meaningful and resonant. Through a presentist lens, an approach that interprets historical work in relation

to contemporary perspectives, this essay will demonstrate how Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys both position women as the focus of male fascination. Although they are separated by time and genre, both artists frequently centre their work around women, and through visual accompaniments, vivid sensory imagery, and repetition, they are able to effectively depict women as devoted, desirable, and mysterious figures. Such a comparative approach exposes the persistence of popular Victorian themes in contemporary music and makes Tennyson's poetry more approachable for modern readers, increasing the work's contemporary appeal and encouraging a deeper understanding of both historical and contemporary artistic works.

The *Moxon Tennyson*, an influential volume of illustrated poems by Tennyson, was published in 1857 by Edward Moxon. Victorian studies scholar June Hagen explains that Tennyson was reluctant to agree to this volume's publication, as he "generally disliked illustrations to his own poems," but eventually agreed upon realizing he would not have to write any new poems for this gift book (Hagen 22). The book is particularly renowned for its inclusion of several "lady" poems that controversially respond to Victorian gender separation, exploring a "pressing Victorian concern with the social roles" of women (Peterson 26).

While Tennyson enjoyed considerable popularity in Victorian culture before the *Moxon Tennyson* was released, the UK indie rock band Arctic Monkeys only achieved sustained global success with the release of *AM* in 2013. The album is the band's most digitally downloaded and streamed release to date, with its single, "Do I Wanna Know," earning over 3.8 million chart sales. This success cemented AM's place as "one of the defining pieces of rock music of the second decade of the 21st century" (Official Charts 2025). Despite the distance of time between them, Victorian and modern representations similarly position women as the focus of male desire rather than as independent figures.

Context

The significance of the *Moxon Tennyson* extends beyond its interesting publication history to the way the collection engages with contemporary Victorian attitudes toward gender. The Victorian culture that Tennyson was situated in featured firmly separate spheres for men and women. As Kathryn Hughes explored in her article, “Gender Roles in the 19th Century,” men dominated the public sphere of commerce and academics, while women were “best suited to the domestic sphere” (Hughes). Although Tennyson’s “lady” poems do not outright state the unfairly restrictive nature of the separate spheres, he “does not allow his [female] ‘characters of passion and imagination’ to be limited” (Peterson 37). He depicts women as desirable and devoted, which aligns with the Victorian societal norms, but also presents them as mysterious, multifaceted characters, indicating that these poems do not wholly participate in Victorian gender expectations.

Just as Tennyson’s poetry responded to Victorian cultural perceptions of women, Arctic Monkeys reflect modern cultural shifts towards casual relationships in what Justin R. Garcia and colleagues describe as an “openness and acceptance of uncommitted sex” (Garcia et al.). Written and sung by vocalist Turner, many of Arctic Monkeys’ songs centre on desirable but unattainable women, aligning with cultural anxieties about finding and securing reciprocated love. Additionally, despite the distance of time between them, both Victorian and modern representations similarly position women as the focus of male desire rather than independent figures. Comparing poems from the *Moxon Tennyson* with songs from *AM* not only reveals how both Tennyson and Turner consistently present women as devoted, alluring, and enigmatic, but how viewing Tennyson alongside contemporary media like *AM* makes his work relevant today.

Devotion

Tennyson’s poetry and Arctic Monkeys’ music both depict women as devoted figures, and effectively accomplish this portrayal by presenting the women’s passive

devotion through an external voice. This parallel becomes particularly apparent when comparing Tennyson's lyric poem "Mariana" and Arctic Monkeys' song "Snap Out of It." Both works centre around a woman whose life is defined by her devoted longing for men, yet she remains passive in her sorrow. Mariana decays while waiting for a lover that never arrives, miserably repeating that her "life is dreary" (line 9) and that "[h]e cometh not" (line 10). Although Mariana's devotion to her lover is portrayed as "insatiable" (Peterson 36), Tennyson ensures she is characterized as resigned and unassertive in her longing, as aspects of femininity such as "passivity, submission, [and] dependence" were inherent in Victorian society (Chakraborty 295).

"Snap Out of It" involves a woman absorbed by her unreciprocated devotion while the singer pleads with her to break away from such a futile commitment: "Under a spell, you're hypnotized (Ooh) / Darling, how could you be so blind?" (lines 25–26). Rather than providing the woman's inner thoughts, Turner presents her devotion through the singer's cheekily annoyed perspective, questioning whether she was even built for such devotion, as "[f]orever isn't for everyone" (line 13). Both "Mariana" and "Snap Out of It" present the women's devotion through an external voice, reinforcing their passive commitment. The intermedial accompaniments of each work intensify this depiction of passive devotion: the *Moxon Tennyson's* illustration of "Mariana" shows her as an isolated weeping woman, while the official music video for "Snap Out of It" shows a woman watching a man on television perpetually, held captive by her own fixation. These visual components reinforce the excessive longing of the women and the suffering that such passive devotion can produce. Together, Tennyson and the Arctic Monkeys demonstrate how narratives of female devotion persist across centuries, portraying women as emotionally devoted and yet ultimately passive within their own longing.

Desire

The second notable parallel between Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys' depiction is in their portrayal of women as intensely desirable figures, achieved through vivid detail. Both artists' work revolves around an idealized woman, whose magnetic allure captivates the speaker. The speaker in Tennyson's "Lilian" adoringly describes the enchanting appeal of "fairy Lilian" (line 1), and in Arctic Monkeys' song "Arabella," Turner similarly describes a magical and mesmerizing woman. In both cases, women's beauty and the fascination they inspire are richly illustrated through sensory details. For example, Tennyson's description of Lilian's "crimson-threaded lips" (line 23) and "black bearded eyes" (line 15) establishes her as a visually striking and attractive figure. Likewise, Turner claims Arabella is "made of outer space" (line 17) with "lips ... like the galaxy's edge" (line 18); she is presented as something otherworldly and mysteriously enticing. In both of these examples, the lips become a focal point of the artist's fascination, illustrating the connection between the woman's desirability and her erotic allure. Despite their desirability, both Lilian and Arabella remain frustratingly unattainable. Lilian dances around and withholds her love, and similarly, Arabella only takes a "dip in [his] daydreams" (line 6) when seeking "shelter from reality" (line 5), reinforcing their unattainable nature. In both works, women are portrayed as extremely desirable yet unattainable objects of male fascination, highlighting the enduring cultural narrative of bewitching yet elusive women.

Mystery

Through repetition, Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys both depict women as unknowable and mysterious creatures. Tennyson's poem "Eleänore" centres around the inaccessible Eleänore, whose "dark eyes open'd not, / Nor first reveal'd themselves to English air" (lines 1-2). Though her enigmatic presence ignites a "languid fire [that] creeps / Thro' my veins to all my frame" (lines 129-130), the speaker is left wondering about Eleänore's inner feelings. He repeatedly questions who will love and care for her,

although his query receives no answer. His anxiety is echoed throughout the poem, emphasizing the impossibility of ever understanding her, despite his strong love.

Arctic Monkeys' "Do I Wanna Know" follows a similar pattern, as the singer wonders if his affections are reciprocated. Amidst his "wonderin' if [her] heart's still open" (line 26), he continues to anxiously ask "(Do I wanna know?) If this feelin' flows both ways?" (line 11), mirroring the repeated questioning in "Eleänore." He spends the song describing his repetitive thoughts of her, continually asking if she shares his romantic feelings. The repeated questions in both works convey the endless waiting and confusion provoked by these mysterious women. Moreover, Turner's refrain, wherein he is "crawlin' back to" the woman, displays the singer's strong attachment to her, even though he is unsure if his desire is reciprocated (line 15). Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys' respective portrayals reveal that the narrative of desire for enigmatic women is pertinent to both historical and contemporary audiences.

Significance

Comparing culturally impactful intermedial works such as Tennyson's *Moxon Tennyson* and the Arctic Monkeys' *AM* reveals the persistence of popular Victorian themes in contemporary music. Although Tennyson's work cannot be interpreted exactly as it was by contemporary Victorians, modern comparisons between these works can illustrate that Tennyson's poetic themes and focuses were not static historical trends but dynamic topics that continue to resonate today. Analyzing Tennyson's and Arctic Monkeys' similar depictions of desirable, devoted, and mysterious women fashions the former's poetic strategies as freshly engaging for new audiences—those of whom may be unfamiliar with Victorian poetry, but well-versed in modern indie rock music. At the same time, this comparison enriches the interpretation of Arctic Monkeys' songs, as it reveals how their focus on enigmatic women and melancholic themes is not an isolated interest but reflective of persistent patterns in lyrical art. Therefore, this

presentist attitude towards Tennyson and Arctic Monkeys can be mutually illuminating: Tennyson's work becomes contemporarily relatable, and Arctic Monkeys are shown to be historically rooted, allowing for a richer understanding of both historical and contemporary artistic works.

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Christina Rossetti in Print: Dedications in Victorian Gift-Giving Culture

Becky Turner

Abstract: Christina Rossetti dedicated nearly the entirety of her body of work to her mother. Through close textual analysis and engagement with the material works, this essay examines Rossetti's involvement in Victorian publishing and gift-giving economies using a historical and theoretical framework. Giftbooks, literary annuals, and gift inscriptions are some of the forms used to explore public and private depictions of sisterly love and motherhood. Dedications connect these forms to the feminine gift economy and the role of women's work in a patriarchal literary marketplace—and demonstrate the loving admiration that persists in Rossetti's writing throughout her life.

*Time to eternity has descended,
Timeless eternity has begun.*

—Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*

When working with primary print books, the historical weight of the writing presses into your hands through the peeling bindings, time-stained pages, and the thick, dusty smell of paper. As one of the first poets to have such a beautiful, illustrated volume of her original poetry published during Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901, Christina Rossetti would appreciate the value of preserving these primary materials. Rossetti published her first book, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, in 1862, dedicating it to her mother and beginning a long legacy of dedications to her. Her commitment to her mother was first observed in the small booklet, *Verses*, that her grandfather printed privately. Rossetti included a verse from an Italian poet that referred to the little booklet as "a filial offering to mother and grandfather," even as the volume marked her "formal literary debut" (Marsh 74–75). Gift-giving pervaded the Victorian literary scene in kind gestures such as printing a book of a grandchild's poems or in

one's work to a loved one. Examination of Rossetti's primary print material exemplifies her involvement in creating a female community in a predominantly male-dominated literary world, and leads to an exploration of the role of her dedications in Victorian gift-giving culture.

Originating from the English literary annuals of the 1820s, Victorian giftbooks brought together the public and private spheres in a representation of a feminine gift economy. *A Round of Days Described in Original Poems by Some of Our Most Celebrated Poets* by the Dalziel brothers is one example of a fine art book, initially published in 1866, which helped to renew the standard for the expensive, luxurious, and outdated giftbook tradition. Rossetti published some of her poems in *A Round of Days* alongside many other popular authors. Giftbooks were intended to be kept and shown off with their lavish, colourful bindings and gold embellishments, and *Round of Days* was no exception. Inside *A Round of Days*, each illustration and poem is framed with ample space, emphasizing the artistic value of both the illustrations and the poetry. The poems inside focused on short, domestic scenes, complimenting the pastoral illustrations of everyday life; the treatment of a book as an elaborate gift through binding, illustration, size, paper, and typography posits the book itself as a work of art. Giftbooks were exchanged as part of the Christmas and New Year gift market, and the *Forget-Me-Not* (1822–1847) was one of the first literary annuals to include gift inscription illustrations. Ornate designs framed blank spaces where the buyer could inscribe a message to the recipient; these inscription illustrations merged the public and private sectors of the gift economy by allowing buyers to dedicate the book to their own loved one. In *Feminine Economies: Thinking Against the Market in the Enlightenment and the Late Twentieth Century*, Judith Still discusses Marcel Mauss's concept of "Giving [as] at once economic behaviour and legal, moral, social, religious [sic] and aesthetic behaviour" (14). Still asserts that both production and circulation are important in a gift economy, as the actions exist "alongside market exchange" (13). Similarly, purchasing a fine art book as a gift

for someone contributes to both the economic and the gift market. A gift economy requires abundance, and feminine economies (a term that Hélène Cixous coined) emphasize a model of abounding love (Still 15), excess supply, and interpersonal domains (97). Still asserts that women traditionally perform unpaid labour in several roles, where the products of their work are tied to self-sacrifice (25). Feminine gifts of labour often operate as domestic labour or acts of service, such as through writing. Gifts, as a form of this feminine labour, provided opportunities through dedications and giftbooks for women to enter the literary world and engage both with economic and sentimental values, further exemplifying the feminine nature of a gift economy.

“A lifelong song to this dear Saint of mine,” reads the last line of a Valentine’s Day sonnet that Rossetti wrote to her mother, Frances, following the thread of adoration that runs throughout Rossetti’s personal literary canon in the form of dedication (Crump 3:317). Rossetti wrote her first poem at 11 years old as a birthday gift to her mother (Marsh 33). Rossetti’s lifelong legacy of dedications to her mother began with these small gifts in her childhood and persisted through her whole academic career. Rossetti explained this conviction to her own niece years later, saying that poetic talent’s “brightest point is that it kindles a light of pleasure in your Mother’s eyes” (33). Private gifts of valentines and birthday poems to her mother represented and strengthened their close bond, especially as “interpersonal relationships determine and are determined by the values and meanings of gifts,” which Jill Rappoport explains in *Giving Women: Alliance and Exchange in Victorian Culture* (8). Still also discusses gift exchange as a form of connection between women, arguing that “[t]he connection established between women and production which is not for exchange on the market can be seen as fostering the tradition of female self-sacrifice which has long characterized motherhood—but also daughterhood” (24–25). Rossetti’s gifts to her mother were private and did not contribute to the economic market, but they did offer value in the sense of a gift market. The self-sacrificial labour of creating something as a gift conveys a close emotional bond that subverts patriarchal expectations of exchange. Domestic exchanges, such as those between Rossetti and her mother, “establish female community as an alternative

or supplement to the patriarchal family” and lead to new structures that welcome women into the literary world by creating subversive, private spaces for them beyond the traditional market (Rappoport 10).

Rossetti, motivated by her love for her mother, proliferated poetry that she continued to dedicate to her. In *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, her first volume to be published, the dedication reads:

To
My Mother,
in all reverence and love,
I inscribe this book. (Rossetti, *GM*)

This exact dedication is replicated in Rossetti’s *The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems*, which was published four years later (*PP*). In the original print copies of both books, these dedications are identical. “My mother,” set aside on its own line, is printed in the largest font (*GM* and *PP*). The dedications are large, centered on the page, and surrounded by blank space—unlike the often discreet dedications of modern novels. In this way, the simple dedications feature prominently in the front contents of the books, which are otherwise busy with full pages and large illustrations. Just like the space given to the illustrations and poems in *A Round of Days*, these dedications are presented as something of value, conveying their importance as works of art.

Rossetti’s unusually deep sense of love and respect for her mother is honoured for the last time in her final book, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*. The 1892 book is dedicated as follows:

To my mother,
for the first time
to her
beloved, revered, cherished memory. (Rossetti,
Face of the Deep)

Believed to have been written shortly after her mother's death in 1886, this prose and poetry book reflects on Rossetti's own spiritual journey in older age through the Book of Revelation (Marsh 549–56). The spiritual element of the book, as well as the repeated mention of her "reverence" of her mother in her dedications (*GM* and *PP*), contribute to Rossetti's saintly image. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines "reverence" as "[d]eep respect, veneration, or admiration for someone or something, [especially] a person or thing regarded as sacred or holy" ("Reverence, n1.b."). Rossetti's repeated use of this word indicates the intensely intimate relationship she had with her mother. Critic Virginia Sickbert wrote about the Rossetti women's "deep and life-long attachment to each other" (386). She details how the women were even said to write for one another when the other could not due to illness (386), exemplifying the gifts of labour that Still described as "some of the most valuable gifts" (Still 25). In a book that uses the same modality and appearance—down to the colour binding and elegant embossing design—as *Goblin Market and Other Poems* despite being published nearly 20 years later, the dedication of *A Pageant and Other Poems* acts as a gift that illustrates Rossetti's faithful commitment to her mother. Almost all of her creative output was dedicated to Frances Rossetti, both publicly and privately (Sickbert 386); Rossetti's work fostered an image of a "reciprocal and equal bond between mother and daughter" that was uncommon and even radical for a time period that "emphasized the parents' supreme authority and the children's unquestioning obedience" (392), and Sickbert claims that Rossetti found "her work and love shaping and shaped by [her] mother's subjectivity" (405). Rossetti's connection to her mother was undeniable and contributed to her subversion of patriarchal roles in all areas of life.

Rossetti challenges the traditional expectations for a sonnet by writing them for her mother, claiming that sonnets are "full of love" (*Pageant*). Upon opening *A Pageant and Other Poems*, the very first thing a reader is faced with is a dedicatory sonnet committing the collection to her mother.

Petrarchan sonnets, often described as a neat and organized art form, are conventionally written from the perspective of a male speaker addressing a passive and idealized female love interest. During Rossetti's time, sonnet-writing burst onto the literary scene, leading to experiments with the sonnet form, explorations of conventional love ideals, and discussions of feminist rights. By beginning her collection with a sonnet to her mother, Rossetti joined the literary trend of challenging sonnet conventions and rejected the typical gender presumptions. Taking on the role of the speaker and addressing her mother in "[Sonnets are full of love and this my tome]," Rossetti subverts the gendered expectation of a male speaker addressing a lover. She establishes her own feminine autonomy within a traditionally masculine tradition. Furthermore, with the lines "[a]nd so because you love me, and because / I love you, Mother," Rossetti confirms that the love is reciprocated, breaking tradition once again (*Pageant* lines 9–10). Although the sonnet does adhere to typical Petrarchan structure, Rossetti does not follow the traditional rhyme scheme for the poem's entirety. In breaking the traditional rhyme scheme and the conventions of the sonnet, Rossetti embraces the sonnet as her own finely crafted gift to her mother. She makes maternal love her "loadstar" as she navigates both life and this volume's "wreath / Of rhymes" (lines 6, 10–11). The *OED* defines loadstar as "[a] 'guiding star;' that on which one's attention or hopes are fixed" ("Lodestar, n2"). Rossetti shows her gratitude to her mother for being a "quiet home," her "first Love" (*Pageant* lines 4–6), and a teacher by "devoting herself to [her mother's] comfort and never regretting the fact that her own social life was thereby restricted" (Marsh 437). Manuscript evidence shows that the sonnet was first presented to Rossetti's mother for her eightieth birthday, with an inscription saying:

To
my Mother
I offer
love

reverence
and this little volume. (Crump 2:364).

This once-private gift transitioned to the public sector as the dedication to the volume, mimicking the “[s]imultaneously private and public, generous and competitive nineteenth-century sisterhood” that Rappoport discusses (10). Feminine gift exchanges allowed for Victorian women “to claim the role of the giver,” and assert autonomy in a society that strictly constrained women and their rights (12). Rappoport says that “[p]opular writing reflected, enacted, and shaped women’s giving,” summarizing how the sonnet—a conventionally constrained form—was used to break boundaries in both a literary and feminist sense (12).

To revisit the idea of female self-sacrifice, Still argues that it is risky to associate the gift with the feminine (181). She warns against confusing men’s exploitation of women with women’s generosity, as “women give more than [men] give; women ‘work’ without getting paid” (24–25), and presents how “society is based upon the exchange of women” as a function of the economy (17). Women’s labour recalls the feminine model of the gift market. Rappoport writes that “we should understand Victorian women’s gifting as a subversive way to direct social networks and establish civic authority that otherwise remained beyond their reach” and explored how gifts and gift markets “can sustain a whole community of single women” (6). Furthering this concept of womanly sacrifice by connecting it to Rossetti’s spirituality, Rappoport theorizes that spiritual salvation can “alter the terms of [a] gift and the kind of community it creates” (89). Salvation is represented in Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” permeated with themes of sisterhood, rescue, and female solidarity.

Goblin Market and Other Poems contains two beautiful frontispiece illustrations that depict scenes from the titular poem, representing the volume’s themes of sacrifice and sisterhood through the two sisters. Analysis of “Goblin Market” reveals that Lizzie rejects Victorian patriarchal commercial practices to save Laura by using her

silver penny as a “a symbol of domestic and religious duty” (Rossetti 97), or as a gift, and Lizzie saves her sister through participation in the gift-giving tradition of female sacrifice. The frontispiece illustration of two sisters clasped in each other’s arms mirrors the close relationship of the Rossetti women. The illustrations are followed by a dedication to her mother; as records show that Rossetti was very involved with the process of organizing and editing her publications, we can assume the arrangement was recognized, if not intentional (Marsh 278). The closeness in print of the illustration to the dedication may act as evidence for a connection between sisterly love as an association with the sisterhood created by a feminine gift market. The title, albeit not the original one, also reflects the idea of a market. Rappoport argues that “as ‘Goblin Market’ suggests, the financial transactions associated with market capitalism were frequently risky business for women” (105). The publication of a volume of original work by one female author was likewise a risky business venture, but Rossetti’s *Goblin Market and Other Poems* proved a success and gave validity to other women working in literary publishing at the time.

Rossetti’s dedications collate one sentiment that is shared by all her sonnets, valentines, and other publications: her undying love for her mother. Victorian society did not favour women, but the fame and talent of the Rossetti family provided Christina Rossetti with an entry in the often-commercial world of art, poetry, and publication. Rossetti’s publications convey values of womanly love, self-sacrifice, and spirituality through her organization of the physical material in the books. Her work was frequently gifted to loved ones in manuscript form: to provide some examples, “Goblin Market” was written for her sister Maria (Crump 1:234), and the dedicatory sonnet “[Sonnets are full of love and this my tome]” was a birthday gift for her mother (Marsh 437). The culmination of the Victorian gift economy may be observed through highly stylized and expensive giftbooks—these giftbooks are analogous to modern gifts, with their binding like wrapping paper, gold embellishments

like ribbons, and elaborate inscription illustrations like gift tags on which you write a note to your intended recipient. Although once in private gifts bequeathed onto a valued mother or sister and circulated among a self-sufficient female community, Rossetti's influence continues to circulate in public discussions of "Goblin Market" and her devotional legacy. Just as *A Pageant and Other Poems* and its dedicatory sonnet to Rossetti's mother live on in treasured, tattered editions saved by university archives, so too does Rossetti's renown.

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The Religious Conquest of the Feminine Body: A Case Study of Heloise and Princess Melaz

Amy Vitkauskas

Abstract: Female bodies and sexualities are inseparable from medieval Catholic Christianity. Female bodies function as contested sites of sanctity, temptation, and morality, through which religious values are negotiated and enforced. This paper examines two women from medieval Christian literature and their respective forms of rebellion against this constricting system—Heloise of *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* and Melaz of Orderic Vitalis's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Heloise and Melaz are separated by time, fate, and culture, yet are similarly shaped by the Christian structures around them. Both women are figuratively “conquered” by Christianity through expectations surrounding marriage, sexuality, and purity. By analyzing their experiences within Christendom, this study questions whether these women assert meaningful agency within the religious frameworks that define them, or whether these frameworks ultimately strip them of autonomy altogether.

The female body has been intertwined with Christianity since the beginning of secular time. A site of sanctity, temptation, or power, femininity is never neutral territory in medieval religious literature—it is the medium through which purity, power, and piety is negotiated. Transformed from a mere body into an instrument of the Christian faith, the female form becomes a moral guide and teacher to Christians, exemplifying the dualities of “sinner” and “saint.” The sex of women is simplified into Mary versus Eve, virgin versus temptress. Limited to this binary, a medieval Christian woman's being is bound to her sexualized body, and the success of her spiritual life is determined by,

and equated to, her bodily control over her own sexual desires. Despite coming from vastly different cultures and circumstances, Heloise—the female half of the famed couple from *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*—and Melaz, the apocryphal Muslim Princess in Orderic Vitalis’s retelling of Bohemond of Antioch’s Middle Eastern crusade, are both symbolically conquered by Christianity, and, by extension, the patriarchy. Sexuality, purity, and marriage shape central conflicts in both women’s narratives, but these struggles become obscured beneath layers of romanticized storytelling that overshadows their historical realities. Although medieval Christendom places femininity in a position of subordination, Heloise and Melaz negotiate their own complex forms of agency within these confines. This paper argues that although Christian ideologies may shape and restrict women, Heloise and Melaz continue to manipulate, redefine, and resist these structures in their own distinctive way, thus achieving agency over their sexualities and bodies.

In medieval Christian doctrine, the female body is a site of spiritual battle. As a source of temptation for men to conquer and shame for women to bear, femininity is turned into something to be ashamed of rather than celebrated. This idea is best exemplified by the Eve versus Mary dichotomy—Eve, the sinner, is “responsible for man’s fall ... the original cause of all evil” (Kraus 80), and Mary the saint, mother of Christ and “Woman-Without-Sin, the non-woman Woman” (Kraus 84). Common women of the twelfth century were associated with the latter and they were held steadfast to these standards. While a comparison to the Virgin Mary was certainly deemed better than being an accomplice of sinful Eve, women’s elevation into sainthood was dependent upon the complete rejection of their sexual identity. Virginal expectations were further complicated by the Vice of Unchastity (Kraus 81); *Luxuria*, or Lust (Uebersax 1), was regarded as a predominantly female failing (Kraus 81). Women may have been likened to Mary, but they were still daughters of Eve, whose shortcomings gave the female sex a predisposed “fondness for foul things” (Kraus 81).

The association between unchastity and femininity was especially popularized during the twelfth century through church facades that illustrated the Vice of Unchastity as a woman (Kraus 81). Depicted in compromising positions and often in the nude, she is accompanied either by Eve's serpents or the Devil himself in his numerous forms. In these portrayals, she embodies temptation, and her beauty is no longer a characteristic of femininity, but a seductress from Hell. In some cases, the woman is depicted as Eve, bringing further shame to her Christian daughters who view the image as a reminder of their shared Original Sin: desire. Per contra, the masculine sins Vice of Avarice, or *Avaritia*, and Vice of Vainglory, or *Vana Gloria* (Uebersax 1), were far less damning, with the emphasis on *Vana Gloria* shifting to *Avaritia* as Christian interests changed throughout the century (Uebersax 1; Kraus 81). The female Vice was not given the same opportunity to change. The Vice of Unchastity plagued narratives on women for the entirety of the twelfth century. No matter what status or piety a woman achieved, her Original Sin, and thus her corruption, would remain the same (Kraus 82).

Heloise's love story with her teacher-turned-husband, Peter Abelard, is regarded culturally as an epic romance, yet the power imbalance that existed between them is far from desirable. Their relationship has been reimagined across cultures and time periods in the form of novels, plays, films, and music, and has been subjected to romanticization in each genre. While their story has inspired the popular yet problematic amorous trope of the teacher and the student, such interpretations fail to recognize the predatory nature of Peter Abelard. The pair met in 1115 when Abelard was in his mid-thirties, Heloise a mere fifteen to seventeen. Their initial meeting was preordained by Abelard out of his romantic interest for Heloise, which he admits in his *Historia Calamitatum*, "History of My Calamities." Hearing of her academic prowess as an acclaimed scholar, or *nominatissimam* (Edwards 64), he deemed her a match for his own brilliance, thus, a suitable love match (Edwards 64; Abelard 10). Heloise

stood no chance against Abelard's advances, him being a famed philosopher and logician across France, her a young academic who would have aspired to learn from him. Abelard's advantage over Heloise in age, gender, and status would be deepened further when Canon Fulbert, Heloise's uncle, appointed him to be her tutor in exchange for free residence at Notre-Dame (Abelard 10). Abelard alludes to this power imbalance within *Historia Calamitatum*, likening himself to a "ravening wolf" entrusted with "a tender lamb" (10). He takes Fulbert's "handing over" of Heloise as consent to do as he pleases to her: "what else was he doing but giving me complete freedom to realize my desires ... for me to bend her to my will by threats and blows if persuasion failed?" (11). Once lessons began, Heloise and Abelard's relationship did not remain of an academic nature for long; their "obscene pleasures" (81) propelled them into parenthood, marriage, and subsequent demise (Abelard 81). Though Heloise is undoubtedly a victim of Abelard's exploitative "desires"—from the relationship he initiates to the marriage and cloistering he imposes—she is anything but powerless (Abelard 10).

Heloise is a rarity amongst medieval women in her maintenance of agency within, against, and beyond the patriarchal structures of her time. While her "ill-starred marriage" may invite pity, Heloise makes it clear that she exercised her power during the duration of their sexual escapades, even going so far as to label herself a "concubine or whore," stating that she preferred such labels over being subordinated to his "wife" (Abelard 51). She is unapologetically sensual, securing a sense of bodily autonomy and agency through her sexuality. Despite her role as abbess, she openly admits to having "lewd visions" of her and Abelard together, experiencing "longings of desire" which distract her from prayer, even at Mass (Abelard 68). Her emotional discourse over the matter is a calculated form of agency—Heloise uses her feelings of desire, grief, and resentment openly to confront the moral and relational failures she perceives in Abelard. She holds him responsible for their entry into ecclesiastical life and the confines of

church, citing the decision as his alone (Abelard 53). Within the same letter, she demands his acknowledgement, stating “[w]hy ... have I been so neglected and forgotten by you that I have neither a word from you when you are here to give me strength, nor the consolation of a letter in absence?” (Abelard 53). Heloise may seek comfort or acknowledgment from Abelard in her letters, but she is certainly not asking him for permission to address her thoughts or emotions. In writing to him about her “torments of the flesh,” she torments him too, insisting on the validity of her emotional truth and forcing him to consider the philosophical implications of said truths; sexuality and *amor*, “love,” are natural desires, only through a pious or patriarchal view could they be sins (Mews 60, 69; Abelard 54). Rather than being overwhelmed with guilt for indulging in *Luxuria*, she believes love and sexuality can coexist with virtue, and that coerced virtue is no virtue at all (Uebersax 1).

Heloise’s beliefs contrast Abelard’s perception of sexual desire as “the fruit of an uncontrolled will,” despite having once claimed to share similar ideals to Heloise on the nature of love (Mews 73, 78). He does acknowledge his sexual relationship with Heloise positively in his following letters when he refers to her as his *inseparabilis comes*, meaning “inseparable companion” (Abelard 81). His use of this term suggests he has become susceptible to Heloise’s philosophies on love as a positive venture, as he uses the same phrase in pious contexts to “define the relation of body and soul” (Edwards 72). It becomes apparent now that the roles of teacher and student have reversed—Heloise has begun to teach Abelard. She asserts her agency intellectually by continually presenting herself as her former teacher’s equal in rhetorical skill and reason. Rather than passively accepting Abelard’s authority over her as her former teacher and husband, Heloise reclaims interpretive power through defining their shared past to her own liking, demanding that he acknowledge their lived realities that his pious reasonings often attempt to obscure (Abelard 53). Abelard is receptive to this change of power, going so far as to put her name before his in the greeting which

heads Letter 3, which Heloise acknowledges with pleasant surprise in Letter 4 (Abelard 56, 63). She slyly reaffirms herself as his equal in pointing out his improper greeting, stating that “those who write to their superiors or equals ... put their names before their own” (63).

Heloise’s willingness to articulate emotion and be honest with her sexuality grants her freedom even within the confines of the Paraclete—the convent Abelard founded and placed under Heloise’s authority as Abbess. Abelard may have forced her to “take the veil” (Abelard, 54) and follow him into monastic life, but Heloise is the one who truly benefits under Christendom, as she actively reconfigures the religious life imposed upon her. Despite initial resistance to vocation, Heloise strategically embraces her leadership as abbess and negotiates the terms of monastic practice to better serve the women of her Paraclete (94). External obligation becomes internal purpose, allowing Heloise to reclaim control and achieve further agency within her spiritual and secular life. Whether in marriage to Abelard or cloistered life as a nun, Heloise seeks and reclaims control through sexuality and feminine power. Her letters to Abelard are not the writings of a victim, but of a victor, and are a true testament to female self-determination within extreme confines. Ultimately, Heloise’s agency arises from her refusal to allow societal constraints determine the terms of her identity.

Melaz of Antioch, the mysterious Muslim princess of Orderic Vitalis’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, “Ecclesiastical History,” is best recognized as a symbol of religious and cultural conquest, but she is far from a passive one. The brief lover of famed crusader Bohemond I and daughter of his sworn enemy, the Dānishmend, Melaz is the archetypal exotic princess—beautiful, wise, rich, and most crucially, a willing convert to Western society (Vitalis 359). Such romanticization has long invited scrutiny over the authenticity of Melaz’s story and very existence. Apart from Orderic’s account of the *saracen*, or pagan, princess, Melaz ceases to exist from Christian accounts of Bohemond’s crusade (Yarrow 140). It is worthwhile to note

that accredited Muslim historian Ibn al-Athir mentions the princess namelessly as a “prisoner of Bohemond” in his first book of the *al-Kāmil fit-Tārīkh*, “The Complete History” (al-Athir 60). Albeit brief, the “Account of Frankish Deeds” provides a non-Western, non-Christian account of Melaz that often goes unnoticed by scholars, limiting her existence and subjecting it to a strictly Western narrative (al-Athir 60, 61). Bohemond is said to have negotiated his own release from the Dānishmend within this account, giving his captor “100,000 dinars and the promise that he would free the daughter of Yaghī Siyān who had been lord of Antioch” (al-Athir 60). All historical accounts of Melaz align her with Yaghī Siyān, the ruler of Antioch from 1086 to 1098 (Birk 470). While heavy romanticization and fantastical elements have plagued her depiction, Melaz must be recognized as a lived figure in order to understand her exertion of agency. Her femininity and sexuality may have been placed under Christian rule, but they are not to be limited to elements of Christian fantasy.

Melaz’s conversion to Christianity reinforces the link between feminine bodies and mechanisms of religious and cultural control. She embodies the Christian ideal of female obedience and service to men; she is constantly aiding Bohemond and his men out of “love,” even going so far as to risk her own life for them, yet asks for little in return (Vitalis 363, 367). Upon her introduction in Book X of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Orderic Vitalis depicts Melaz as the perfect subject for conversion, noting how she “loved the Franks passionately” and eagerly learned about “the Christian faith and true religion” from them during their captivity (359, 361). Her romanticization continues in Vitalis’s portrayal of her appearance and behaviour; she is “beautiful,” as one would expect of a princess, but also “pale,” “prudent,” and “sweet” (Vitalis 359–379). If her willingness to convert was not enough, Melaz’s notable paleness would certainly convince Western Christians of her piety, as dark skin was typically associated by medieval commonfolk with *saracens*—a Crusader term for people of Arab and Muslim origin—and “prosperity is marked by white” (Abelard

74). Rather than being an “exotic Eastern woman,” Melaz is portrayed more closely to “a conventional Frankish aristocratic woman” (Yarrow 142). Yet, Vitalis still does not grant her full proximity to “whiteness” in his account of the princess (Abelard 74). Her name, “Melaz”—Greek variant “Melas” and Arabic variant “Malaz”—is a racial marker, and it is unlikely her true name (Strong 3189). Both variants are traditionally masculine, and would not have been used for a noblewoman such as Melaz. Orderic Vitalis would not have been familiar with Arabic names as an English monk, so the form he references is certainly the Greek “Melas,” meaning “black” or “dark”—the root word for “melanin.” This name was used for individuals with dark hair or a darker complexion, traits Melaz would plausibly have, given her Turkish-Arab descent (Strong 3189). She is an accepted convert to Christianity, but Vitalis’s name choice ensures that she is an anomaly within it. His reductive account shapes Melaz into the quintessential “enamoured Moslem princess,” using her as a narrative device in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* to affirm Christian superiority and humanize the crusaders (Warren 346). Melaz’s story was noted as the earliest known example of her archetype: the beautiful oriental princess who becomes enamoured with Christianity and a Christian man (345). The defining elements of the oriental princess archetype fashioned after Melaz are simplistic and stereotypical: “the release of a prisoner by the daughter of his captor; her conversion to his faith; her return with him to his native land” (346). While the narrative’s romanticization and simplification limits the princess’s autonomy, Melaz still exercises agency within the patriarchal confines of *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

In Melaz and Bohemond’s perceived romance, the princess does not await her prince—rather, she is the pursuer of Bohemond. Even within the constraints of a hyper-masculine crusader account, Melaz shows evident signs of female self-determination by choosing Bohemond as her lover. Vitalis depicts Melaz as the initiator of their relationship and desires, with her falling for Bohemond first and seeking contact with him (359, 361). Through

Bohemond's rescue of Melaz from her father, Vitalis attempts to emphasize the chivalric stereotypes expected within their relationship, yet Bohemond never satisfies this trope. It is he who is subjected to Melaz's desires, and he who is pursued. Her desires actively shape the outcome of Bohemond's chapter in Antioch, with her romantic emotions fuelling her urge to convert to Christianity and aid in the crusaders victory. Melaz's open pursuit of Bohemond positions her as a director in the narrative rather than a mere object of exchange. Even when she was transferred from Bohemond to his cousin, Roger, it was Melaz's choice to pick whom she wed; Roger was merely Bohemond's suggestion (379). Vitalis intentionally avoids portraying Melaz's desire as sexual. Rather, "her love and admiration" for the Christian men give way to "deep sighs over discussions of their religion," depicting her as emotionally and spiritually interested as opposed to sexually (Yarrow 149). Melaz's choice to marry an enemy of her father, specifically a Western Christian man, is also a radical act of agency. Breaking away from familial expectations and political alliances with her conversion, Melaz destroys cultural boundaries by choosing a life outside the constraints of her birth (Vitalis 370). It becomes clear throughout Bohemond's Antioch chapter that Melaz yields a surprising amount of narrative power, with Vitalis's text relying on her character to make its ideological point and emphasize the theme of Christian superiority. Melaz exists to crusader ideology as both a tool of conversion and a figure essential to sustaining it, demonstrating agency while playing within the confines of the very structures made to imprison her.

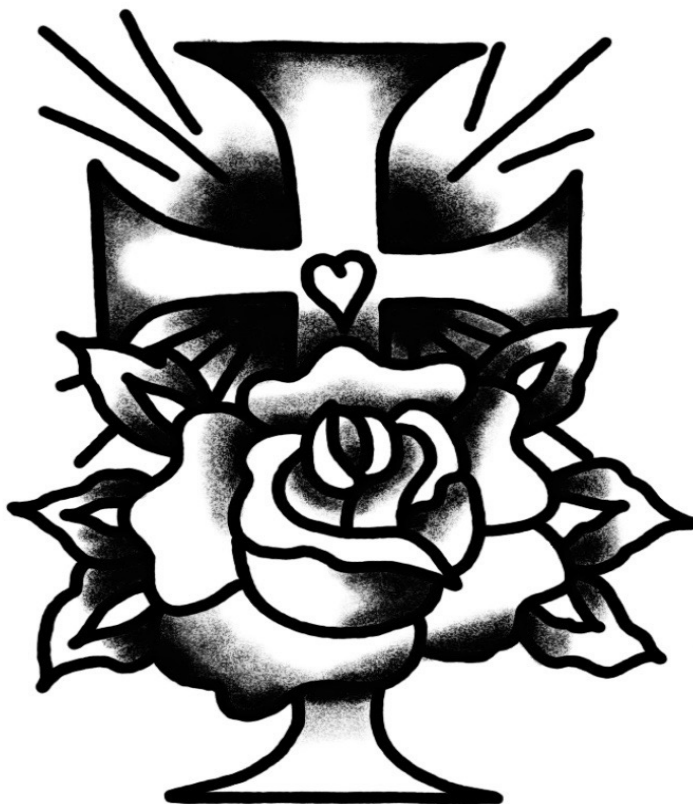
Both Heloise and Melaz are women shaped by male authors within Christian moral frameworks. Their bodies function less as autonomous agents and more as instruments: mediums through which moral lessons are taught, or objects that serve to define. Despite their restrictive circumstances and narratives, both women achieve agency within their stories, creating pathways to their own self-assertion within the constraints placed upon them. Gender hierarchies, religious frameworks, and

social structures attempt to hold both women steadfast to what is expected of them. Heloise speaks for herself, as seen in her famed letters to Abelard. She cultivates textual and intellectual agency as she shapes the outcome of their correspondence to her own liking, reversing the teacher-student power dynamic between her and Abelard while doing so. She refuses to be a quiet wife or an obedient nun for a man's sake and she embraces her womanhood as an act of defiance. Melaz is subject to external narrative control in being voiced by author Orderic Vitalis, yet she maintains a high level of agency within her importance to the text's progression and the victorious outcome of Bohemond's crusader story. She resists religious conquest, instead choosing her own path towards Christianity. Vitalis may try to skew her story for his audience's pleasure, but he cannot deny her lived experience. Both women navigate and resist the patriarchal Christian frameworks they reside in, rejecting the ideals of the Original Sin and claiming agency wherever possible. Despite their differing paths towards agency and the cultural contrasts between them, Heloise and Melaz equally assert themselves within restrictive environments, disrupting medieval notions of a woman's place in Christendom and demonstrating that the female body cannot, in fact, be conquered.

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EDITORS & CONTRIBUTORS

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Anna Johnston is a second-year English Honours major. Her academic interests are vast and largely without focus, ranging from Restoration poetry to contemporary non-fiction. This is her first year on *The Albatross* editing team, and she is looking forward to seeing how it comes together!

Eric Josephs graduated from the UVic Faculty of English in 2023 and has now returned as a student to pursue French and Education courses. This is his first year being involved with *The Albatross* and he is excited to participate in its production. He would like to thank his fellow Albatrossians as well as his two cats, Eve and Blue.

Kajal Keely is a fourth-year Writing student with a focus on creative non fiction and screenwriting. When not writing or editing, they can be found watching the same TV show on repeat for the thousandth time. This is their first year editing for *The Albatross*.

Soren Kim is a fourth-year English Honours major, and is currently working on a JCURA adapting poetry for Dr. Corinne Bancroft's Braided Narratives project. This is his second year editing for *The Albatross* and his first year as contributor. Outside of class, he can be found hiking, climbing, and scrolling through hi-hat samples. His academic interests include modernist and contemporary poetry.

Riley Kormendy is a fourth-year UVic student pursuing an English major and professional communications minor. This is her first year working on *The Albatross*. Her academic interests include twentieth-century English literature and rhetorical composition, which she has advanced through her editorial contributions. Riley hopes to leverage her passion for clear, effective written communication in her professional pursuits.

Lisa Loewen is a second year English Honours major and business minor, and this is her first year editing for *The Albatross*. Outside of editing, Lisa enjoys scouring the public library app for free eBook downloads and thrifting shoes she seldom wears. She is excited to continue editing for *The Albatross* in the future!

Davey Long is in her fourth year of a double major in English and Writing. She is a retired creative nonfiction editor for *This Side of West* and has been creative nonfiction editor for *The Warren Undergraduate Review* for two years. However, this is her first year editing academic writing with *The Albatross*. Her academic interests include sex, gender, horror, and postmodernist poetry, which chronically bleed into her own writing pursuits.

Jude Lovell is a fourth-year English Honours and History major. He is beyond grateful to his grandparents for their support and love. Jude is the current head of a creative writing club on campus, *The UVic Novelist Society*. Recent publications include two factsheets on the Antiracist History and Theory website. His academic interests include the Bible, religion, horror fiction, history of race, and antiracist theory. This is his first essay published in *The Albatross*.

Saroya Manoharan's artworks are featured on the front and back cover of *The Albatross* Volume 16. An explorer of dreams, her work envisions the suspended belief of childhood and the surreal glamour of adulthood. Her visuals often take the form of drawing, painting, and sewing. She is in her fourth year of Religious Studies at Queen's University studying meaning making—cultural marketplace, political extremism, and contemporary Buddhism. A longtime fan of Ava Ugolini, she is honoured to participate in this year's edition of the bird book.

Alexander McLauchlan is an Honours English Major born on the traditional, unceded territories of the Lheidli T'enneh. His research interests include the work of Fredric Jameson and poetic theory. He is a two-time contributor to *The Albatross*, and writes film criticism for *ODDCRITIC* magazine.

Yuliya Morzhakova is a second-year English Honours BA minoring in Political Science. Her academic interests include Early Modern and postmodern literature, with a focus on comparative philosophy and socio-political revolutions. She likes to brew specialty coffee, practice Ashtanga yoga, talk about Dune, and worry (happily) about her future. This is her first year editing for *The Albatross* and the political science journal at the University of Victoria, *On Politics*.

Audrey Mugford is in her fourth year of an Honours English degree at UVic that she hopes to complete at some point before 2028. This semester, she is studying abroad in Glasgow, Scotland at the University of Strathclyde with a focus on English colonization of Ireland. Back at home, her interests include postcolonial studies and 20th-century Canadian literature.

Luca Pashkewicz is a third-year student in the English Honours and Humanities Scholars Program at the University of Victoria. Currently, Luca's scholarly interests concern representations of theodicy in Postmodern American fiction. Luca intends to enter Catholic Seminary upon completing his degree.

Kaden Perkins is a third-year undergraduate student pursuing an English degree with a minor in Professional Communications.

He likes media, people, and writing biographical statements. This is his first year editing for *The Albatross*.

Ekamjot (Ekam) Pooni is a fourth-year Political Science Honours student with a passion for English. This is her fifth and final year editing for *The Albatross*. Her research interests include feminist theory, critical race theory and post-colonial theory, particularly in the context of Canadian politics. Outside of school stuff, she can be found devouring fictional novels when she should probably be reading academic articles, spending too much money on coffee and engaging in conspiracy theories.

Cella Pop is a fourth-year undergraduate double major in honours English and honours Greek & Roman Studies. Cella's primary academic interests include Greek mythology, Biblical narratives, young adult novels, post-modern fiction, and feminist literature. Aside from academic writing, Cella is involved with UVic's chapter of *Her Campus*. This is Cella's first year being involved with *The Albatross* and she is excited to contribute an essay for Volume 16.

Dylan Rickerby is the best dealer of all time. A perpetual hardmaxxer, they created the internal illustrations for Volume 16 of *The Albatross*.

Erin Slater is a fourth-year student graduating this spring with a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Professional Communication. She has a strong interest in strategic and creative writing, and plans to pursue a career in the communications field after completing her studies. This is her second year with *The Albatross*.

Jordyn Sziraky is a student in her second year. She is currently studying English, with a future intention of pursuing a minor in either Indigenous Studies or Political Science. This is now her second year editing for *The Albatross*, and she is incredibly grateful to have returned to an environment rife with the opportunity to engage in the editorial experience. When not editing for *The Albatross*, you can find her stressing out over academic due dates and deadlines.

Izzy Tobias is a third year English Honours student. He loves vulgar, dark, and scary things, and it is his first year editing for *The Albatross*.

Becky Turner is in her fifth and final year of an English Honours degree, and is currently working on a thesis about Victorian women's poetry and gift culture. In addition to being a returning member of the English Students' Association, this is her third year editing for *The Albatross* and her first time being published! In her spare time, Becky can be found reading at her local thrift store, scrapbooking, or making herself fancy coffees.

Ava Ugolini is in her final year of an English Honours degree. Over the moon to be publishing her friends and peers in print, she has plotted on managing *The Albatross* since starting as a copyeditor three years ago. Ava is looking forward to graduate studies at McGill, continuing research on Karen Solie (the GOAT) and Canadian lyric historiography.

Amy Vitkauskas is a fourth-year student finishing her degree as an English major and Professional Communications minor. Passionate about writing and fashion, she plans to pursue a career in fashion journalism or communications after graduation. Her other areas of academic interest include gender studies, social justice, and medieval studies. This is Amy's debut in *The Albatross*.

Sterling Wesson is a fourth-year Writing major known for many things, including wearing the same outfit every day like a cartoon character, befriending the rats that live in the university walls, and writing and directing a feature-length film. This is his first year working for *The Albatross*. He thought he would be making alliances with the rats of the sky (pigeons), but being a substantive editor is a pretty cool consolation prize.



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