



Georgetown EGSA Presents:

# The Predicate

## Volume 6: **Beginnings**

2023



THE PREDICATE  
VOLUME VI

An Academic Journal  
By the English Graduate Student Association  
of Georgetown University  
in the District of Columbia  
D.C., USA

Journal Chair: Noah K Leiter

Editorial Staff: Miles Cooper  
Sarah Licht  
Thomas Ohno-Machado  
Halle Trang

Published May 2023

Copyright © 2023 All Rights Reserved to Original Authors  
Licensed Under CC-BY-NC-ND.



Commercial Use Strictly Prohibited.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alexandra Bowman

Tradition, Originality, and Informed Creativity: *Rear Window*'s Mediation of T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin's Discourse on Art.....1

Miles Cooper

Wallace Steven's One and Thirteen Blackbirds: An Experiment in Postcritique.....13

Isabel Harmet

Education and Vocation in Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*.....23

Desi Isaacson

Considering "Against Theory" with Deconstruction and Chance Operational Poetry.....37

Sarah Licht

Media and the Artificial-Real in "The Lazy River".....45

Racquel Nassor

Grege La Spina's "The Tortoise-Shell Cat": American Imperialist Collection of Frozen Youth.....55

Kavita Premkumar

Irish hands in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*.....69

Halle Trang

Zadie Smith on Indifference and Hope: Constructing the Orientalist "Lazy River" and Prescribing Optimism for Various Tongues.....85

Mary Turkot

The Gender Identity Paradox in Carmen Maria Machado's Fiction.....95

Alexis Young

Modernism and the Phenomenology of Happiness in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*.....105

# Tradition, Originality, and Informed Creativity: *Rear Window*'s Mediation of T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin's Discourse on Art

By Alexandra Bowman

## Introduction

How should an artist make art? How does an artist create art of greater meaning? How can one become part of an artistic tradition?

Perhaps surprisingly, Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 mystery thriller film *Rear Window*, T.S. Eliot's 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" each comment on how one can create more meaningful art and how to most productively serve as an audience to art. Eliot argues in his essay that the "poet" or "artist of any art" working within an existing field derives their significance from their relation to "the dead poets and artists" who made an impact in the field before them, and that originality requires the complete and continual "self-sacrifice" and "extinction of personality" of the artist (37). Meanwhile, Benjamin writes in his essay that accessibility and socioculturally relevant new meanings should triumph over the sustenance of tradition, asserting that upholding ritual and tradition often enables artwork that is valued primarily on behalf of its significance to the past to serve in support of "outmoded concepts" that can be easily employed by fascist regimes (218). Benjamin writes that the act of reproducing artwork, which makes it more accessible to the public, frees the reproduced artwork from "the domain of tradition" (221). While *Rear Window* has previously been viewed as a metaphor for filmmaking, it has not been analyzed for that metaphor's more concrete individual parts and their implications about the consequences of artmaking. These individual parts include the filmmaker versus their audience, the filmmaker's act of looking versus seeing, and the film's thresholds of fiction versus reality. When viewed through these

lenses, *Rear Window* asserts that understanding the value of tradition in one's field but peering further using one's own approach is ultimately the way to contribute to tradition, or Eliot's "existing order" as an artist (37). *Rear Window* compromises between the arguments of Eliot and Benjamin, asserting that while an understanding of tradition is fundamental for developing knowledge in one's field and avoiding retracing steps already taken by previous artists, originality and new achievement can also come from the otherwise amateur ingenuity of the individual.

### **Creating Art and *Rear Window*'s Artists, Audiences, and Characters**

A basic understanding of the processes that lead to the creation of art, and the consumption of art, is necessary to understand this central connection between *Rear Window*, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Amidst the central concept of creating art are key sub-concepts: the act of being inspired towards the act of creating art, the act of being an audience to the art, and the act of being the object that the art depicts, or an object. Precise parallels to these concepts exist in the more raw act of visually seeing something: respectively, the act of looking, the act of seeing, the act of being an audience to the seeing, and the act of being the seen. To connect terms more generally, Jeff's inferences about what he is looking at outside his window are his art — what he is seeing when he looks at the characters in his courtyard. By being present to hear what he sees, Lisa Fremont and his nurse Stella become an audience to his artwork. The things that Jeff looks at are the objects of his art, which Lisa later becomes one of when she crosses the threshold from being an audience member of his seeing to becoming part of the events he is seeing. Together, these terms coalesce to summarize the primary elements integral to the creation of art and its consumption.

*Rear Window* is divided between two primary settings: the close-quarters setting of Jeff's apartment (the apartment-foreground) and the distant setting of what Jeff is looking at in his courtyard, in which he observes the small figures going about their lives - the courtyard-background. For the duration of the entire film up until its

climactic scene, the camera represents what Jeff is seeing, besides shots of Jeff himself, which display him in conversational medium shots; we see the figures in the courtyard as Jeff does. As a result, the figures in Jeff's courtyard that he sees only out of his window are depicted as physically smaller and more distant in the mise-en-scene than the figures who enter his apartment and are depicted through long-to-extreme shots to extreme long shots.



Fig. 1: Example of an extreme long shot of Jeff's courtyard in *Rear Window*.

When Jeff decides to increase the intensity of his voyeuristic investigation, he asks Stella to give him his pair of binoculars, through which the objects of his looking become seen through medium shots. Additionally, Jeff's eyes serving as the film's vantage point becomes increasingly clear upon the entry of the binoculars, given that the black eye cup edges comprise most of the frame, except what is visible through the circular lens in the center of the frame.



Fig. 2: Example of a “binoculars” medium shot of Lars Thorwald, on the opposite side of the courtyard from Jeff, in *Rear Window*.

Cinematographically, Jeff’s girlfriend Lisa and his nurse Stella appear to him, and *Rear Window*’s audience, in medium shots or close-up shots, which are used to depict Lisa on multiple occasions for the vast majority of the film.



Fig. 3: Example of a medium shot of Lisa in Jeff’s apartment in *Rear Window*.

Late in the film, when Lisa decides that not only are Jeff’s conspiracies about Lars Thorwald likely true, but worth acting on, she

breaks into his apartment in Jeff's clear sight. The division of the apartment-foreground and courtyard-background is further illustrated when Lisa crosses the threshold by going from the foreground into the background and is illustrated again when Lars Thorwald crosses it in the opposite direction. After having spent the majority of the film only viewed in the apartment-foreground, she finally moves into the courtyard-background, and by doing so moves from being an audience member of Jeff's seeing to being an active object of that seeing that actively advances the plot he has been observing. In the foreground, Jeff maintains a degree of control; he can only observe what is going on in the background. That is, until the end of the film when Jeff sends Lisa to deliver a note and thus a piece of himself to Lars Thorwald across the threshold, when Lisa crosses from the foreground into the plot of the "background" that he was observing when she does so. This continues when Thorwald crosses from the plot of Jeff's "background" into Jeff's "foreground" in an attempt to murder him. At the climax of the film, the character that Jeff has been looking at and seeing for the entire film, Thorwald, moves from being simply an object of his looking to being a direct audience of his seeing: someone who has become an audience member upon hearing what Jeff saw in the situation when Jeff called him on the phone. Perhaps most importantly, however, the position that the camera took to show the viewer what Jeff was looking at and seeing throughout the course of the film is shifted not to show Thorwald through Jeff's eyes when Thorwald is preparing to defenestrate him, but shows Jeff through Thorwald's eyes as he struggles under the murderer's grasp. In this way, Jeff becomes a direct part of the action he was looking at: he becomes a character in the plot he was seeing.

This switch in perspective is further illustrated when, during the scene in which Jeff is being strangled and defenestrated, the camera finally puts the other residents of the neighborhood that Jeff has been seeing in medium shots and medium-to-close-up shots, free of the use of binoculars. The shot-binary of the film breaks because Jeff has emerged from being a spectator to the plot of his film to becoming a part of that film itself. Throughout *Rear Window*, Jeff transitions from being someone

who only looks to someone who sees; he gradually moves from becoming an audience member of the film to becoming integrated into it. When he merely looks, he is not inferring anything about what he is looking at. When he begins to develop inferences about what he is looking at, he begins to see.

This looking versus seeing dichotomy is illustrated early in the forms of Lisa and Jeff's respective roles in the film, and each other's lives: Jeff is a journalistic photographer and Lisa is an editor of a fashion magazine; Jeff infers about what he sees for a living and Lisa observes existing clothing styles and garments, and thus only sees. Furthermore, right before he first begins to see into the unfolding murder mystery plot, Jeff has an argument with Lisa in which he, and later she, relegates them both to roles in the looking vs. seeing dichotomy. Jeff initially says that he thinks it unlikely that he will want to stop traveling the world as a photographer, and that Lisa is unlikely to end her life as a wealthy socialite in New York City to join him in his journeys, despite her claims to the contrary. Jeff thinks Lisa would be unhappy leaving her life of wealth and stability behind to put herself in regular physical tumult and even danger. Lisa notes that under Jeff's vision, she feels that she is relegated to being only a seer, noting, "I don't care what you do for a living. Somehow I would just like to be part of it. And it's deflating to find out that the only way I can be part of it is to take out a subscription to your magazine." Already in the film, Lisa has shown that she wants to be more than an audience member to Jeff's life, and thus, his "film." Their respective careers, as well as their divide in opinion over whether Lisa could be closely involved with Jeff's active, invasive line of work explicitly draw a line between Jeff being a seer and Lisa being an active audience member, or only one who looks. This division between those who look and see established early in the film sets the stage for a discussion of Jeff as the amateur artist and NYPD Detective Doyle as representative of tradition in Jeff's new art form.



## ***Rear Window*'s Jeff and Detective Doyle: The "Artist" and "Tradition"**

When Jeff becomes a seer upon beginning to develop interpretations of Lars Thorwald's behavior – he was only looking before developing those interpretations – he is working from a limited body of information. As he looks more, he accumulates more information to inform his seeing. Then, tradition and expertise enter the fray upon the entry of his friend Thomas J. Doyle, a New York Police Department detective. Jeff asks Doyle to investigate the murder by first telling him his main observations and his inferences about them. In response to the information Jeff supplied, and his request that Doyle launch a formal investigation, Doyle is quick to assert the fact that he is an expert in investigating homicide cases and Jeff is not. He says in response to Jeff's in-depth observations and analysis of the situation, "you've got a lot to learn about homicide, Jeff." When Doyle and Jeff discuss potentially bringing the evidence Jeff has collected to a judge, Doyle jokes, "I can hear myself starting out. 'Your Honor, I have a friend who's an amateur sleuth, and one night, after a heavy supper–' He'd throw the New York State Penal Code right in my face, and it's six volumes." Doyle's emphasis on Jeff being an "amateur" who knows little of the "lot" that Doyle knows about homicide, and even his emphasis on the size and length of the penal code and its authority relating to the state of New York, highlights the real divide between Doyle's expertise in forensics and Jeff's lack thereof. This contrast establishes Doyle as being aware of the tradition in forensic science, and Jeff as being a newcomer to the field who is without much "relation to the dead poets and artists," as Eliot might put it (37). Jeff certainly is an amateur investigator; all he had to work with up to this point in the film is what he saw by looking out from his window, and his own intellectual acuity. Doyle is not simply mocking Jeff or being cruel when he points out the difference in their expertise: he is stating the truth when he points out this divide.

At this point in Jeff's investigation, he had reached a point at which he could have benefitted immensely from the expertise of someone with formal experience in forensic investigation. While the expert in question, Doyle—who both represents "tradition" and provides information

derived from “tradition” to Jeff—did not provide Jeff with the aid he expected, he did provide the piece of information that Mrs. Anna Thorwald was reported to simply be in upstate New York. This information is key to Jeff’s investigation in two ways: First, the fact that Mrs. Thorwald has been reported to be currently located upstate confirms that Mrs. Thorwald is officially not currently located in the Thorwalds’ apartment, which is fundamental first piece of knowledge to confirm, given that it suggests she must be elsewhere or dead. Second, when another courtyard resident’s dog is found strangled, the information that Mr. Thorwald has arranged for Mrs. Thorwald to appear “upstate” confirms that Mr. Thorwald is creating a story framework that he hopes will help him dodge any police investigations. This latter conclusion encourages Jeff to then look for other behaviors and clues that the police have likely dodged so that he can advance his amateur investigation further.

Jeff could not have attained this key knowledge about Mrs. Thorwald being reported to be upstate on his own, given that his broken leg prevented him from picking up on any information he could not physically look at from his window. If he had not broken his leg, it is also likely that he would not have been able to get this information without consulting the police, or even the Thorwald family’s landlord, who would also be a source of expertise concerning Jeff’s area of study. The fact that Jeff himself is not part of a forensic investigation firm or a law enforcement body that might have access to both information about the Thorwald family and expert information about how to go about the investigation—without which Jeff ultimately puts himself in harm’s way—is parallel to a major argument in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Eliot argues for the importance of building one’s work within the tradition of one’s field of study so that one’s work can be built upon and benefit from existing knowledge. Eliot writes that “the dead writers... are that which we know” (38). In other words, the achievements of those who came before us in our respective fields make up the body of knowledge in a field before new artists in that field can add to it. Little knowledge can be built or retained without that foundation. Building one’s work on the canonical

foundation of existing expert knowledge prevents the artist from retracing the steps already taken by those who came before them. At best, this may manifest in the artist doing the work to come to conclusions or achieving things that have already been achieved. At worst, this lack of knowledge will cause the work to suffer from its ignorance of key information and insights that may or may not already be known to the artist's audience.

It is important to note that in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot does assert that novelty is possible only through tapping into tradition, writing that "no artist of any art has their complete meaning alone," which at first seems consistent with the nuanced, moderating claim that *Rear Window* makes about the combination of the individual's ingenuity with knowledge built on the tradition of the experts who came before them in their field (37). However, Eliot's claim is not in favor of novelty itself: He does acknowledge that novelty exists, but views novelty as a sacrifice of individuality and personality, and an act of conforming to existing tradition. Eliot repeatedly suggests that the artist must undergo a "continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable," and that "the progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (39). This suggestion of the "extinction of personality" reveals the difference between *Rear Window*'s claim and Eliot's, the latter of which remains more extreme on the side of tradition's importance. Much of what enabled Jeff to succeed in his investigation were his own personal approaches to uncovering the mystery. These approaches were not based in the tradition of Jeff's field, given that they so frequently put Jeff in personal danger. These approaches included Jeff sending Lars Thorwald an anonymous note, making an anonymous call, and being alone and unarmed in his room at the climax of the investigation's tension. Thus, while Eliot appears on the surface to make a claim that serves as a compromise between extremes of reliance on tradition and mass accessibility of art and artistry, Eliot does, in fact, develop an argument at the former extreme.

Without the foundation of knowledge obtained from Doyle, Jeff is only an "amateur sleuth." He remains an "amateur sleuth" even after that information is attained, but when he gathers this small bit of information from Doyle about the reports of Mrs. Thorwald's whereabouts, he

increases his foundation of knowledge about the case that enables him to press on further in a more informed and productive fashion.

### ***Rear Window*'s Jeff and Accessibility: Becoming An "Artist"**

Jeff's amateur sleuthing ultimately leads him to a solution in his own investigation into the Thorwald mystery, which the police seemed uninterested in pursuing due to a lack of evidence at first glance. Jeff's success also confirms aspects of Walter Benjamin's argument in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

Benjamin argues that the reproduction of art dissolves the art's "aura," which he defines as its uniqueness grounded in the work's traditional ritual function. He then asserts that eliminating the artwork's "aura" moves the art's primary function from upholding tradition – often due to a "parasitical dependence on ritual" from powerful, often socially conservative individuals within a society – to offering new meaning, particularly in the context of the sociocultural politics of the era in which the artwork is currently being viewed (224). Eliminating this aura also frees the art from upholding the values that cultural leaders have previously used it to sustain. He asserts more broadly that this "dependence on ritual" and tradition can be dangerous in two primary ways. First, it can relegate art's meaning to use by those who would potentially abuse it for their own fascistic purposes of controlling the masses ideologically; secondly, maintaining that a work primarily serves to advance one particular ideology can bring cultural leaders to prevent public access to the art, both physically and ideologically. Benjamin argues that this dependence on ritual can be broken by reproducing the art which will enable the public to more easily access it. Benjamin identifies mechanical reproduction as inherently necessary for this goal of achieving accessibility. At the core of Benjamin's argument is the vital importance of accessibility to art and ideas. This access can be achieved through multiple means with the evolution of technology and circumstances.

Gatekeeping art and ideas from the public has one particular effect that is especially relevant to the plot of *Rear Window*, as well as major

arguments in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”: Cutting off the public’s access to the work of previous artists – work that comprises the art form’s tradition – prevents the public from educating themselves in that tradition and from potentially becoming artists themselves. While NYPD Detective Doyle provided Jeff with key information needed for his amateur investigation, that piece of information was limited to the fact that Mrs. Thorwald was reported to be currently located in upstate New York. With the full extent of Doyle’s expertise in forensic investigation, Jeff could have potentially solved the case more quickly and without putting himself in harm’s way. Perhaps he would not have risked being killed by Mr. Thorwald or ultimately broken his other leg. Jeff would also not have had to put Lisa in harm’s way, and she was physically assaulted by Mr. Thorwald and taken into police custody after breaking into Thorwald’s home. Perhaps Jeff could have solved the case before Mr. Thorwald felt the need to kill his neighbor’s dog who was digging in the garden where Mrs. Thorwald’s body was briefly buried for a time.

### ***Rear Window’s Push For Informed Creativity***

*Rear Window* is not advocating for vigilante justice. It shows the physical harm that can come to individuals who do not have the benefit of large law enforcement bodies on their side and what it is like to fear for one’s life from a criminal whilst unprotected by an institution, especially one with physical force. Rather, *Rear Window* encourages respect for non-expert curiosity, creativity, and innovative approaches to problem-solving that established institutions may not use or even dismiss. This encouragement of new, creative solutions is reinforced by the vital role of Lisa in the investigation, given that Jeff could not have solved the case without her: The wedding ring found by Lisa, who discovered it by breaking into the Thorwalds’ apartment, was the result of a search that Jeff could not have conducted alone given his condition. Even if he did not have his leg to worry about, he may not have gotten away with the break-in as easily as Lisa, who was taken to the police on minor criminal charges for breaking into an apartment.

*Rear Window* demonstrates the importance of combining individual innovation, curiosity, and creativity with the authority and autonomy of experts while decrying the use of either alone in seeing, solving a problem, or creating art. In this way, it serves as a middle ground between the primary arguments of T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin in their respective essays about the creation of art.

### Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, pp. 217–251.
- Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Perspecta*, vol. 19, 1982, pp. 36–42. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2022.
- Hitchcock, Alfred, director. *Rear Window*. Paramount Studios, 1954.

# Wallace Steven's One and Thirteen Blackbirds: An Experiment in Postcritique

By Miles Cooper

In Rita Felski's 2009 article, "After Suspicion", she speaks of a moment in her literary theory class when skeptical modes of interpretations caused many of her students to "turn away" from the enterprise of literary criticism writ large (Felski, 30). These theories, Felski argues, are incredibly "tongue-tied about why literary texts matter," which she deems a vital question to ask, especially for students hoping to pursue a degree or career in the humanities (30). In lieu of a hermeneutics of suspicion, Felski proposes that we begin our intellectual endeavors from a moment when our higher faculties of reason and scientific analysis are, at first, stunned. Instead of demystifying a text, she argues for allowing art to speak to us as the "quintessential mood-altering substance." From there, attendant avenues of moving forward with a thoughtful critical response are possible. By "delving into the mysteries of our many-sided attachments to texts," we can foreground "our first-person implication and involvement in what we read, calling on us to clarify how and why particular texts matter to us." The critical orientation here is "toward meaning rather than truth," and to the "stylistics and narrative devices that shape aesthetic experience."

This article is an attempt to enact Felski's postcritical neophenomenology (or reflective reading, as she prefers to call it) in the practice of close reading, taking as its starting point "a deep sense of curiosity about the nature of our aesthetic attachments, as worthy of sustained and sophisticated investigation" (32). Here, I analyze two poems by Wallace Stevens to determine why I am drawn to one more than the other. I am an admirer of Stevens's poetry, but a devotion to a particular author, Felski reminds us, "is a puzzle for investigation, not a cause for self-congratulation" (32). Thus, my aim is to demonstrate the poetic techniques that Stevens employs that ultimately make me feel more

addressed by one of the poems, without cordoning off what I myself have brought to my interactions with the texts. My goal is to show why I deem one poem to be better than the other: not for everyone, but for this reader. In comparing two works of a poet as abstruse and varied in style as Wallace Stevens, I strive to make the critical playing field as level as possible by choosing to focus on a pair of ornithological poems of Stevens's, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws."

"Thirteen Ways" is one of Stevens's most anthologized and well-known poems. That does not mean it is well-understood, and I admittedly count myself among those who struggle with its opacity. Through thirteen brief sections, Stevens describes a multitude of mental states, all of them with at least one blackbird within them. We begin among "twenty snowy mountains," a frosted scene, where the only sign of life is the blackbird's searching eye. The first section seems at least partially inspired by the form of haiku, and in its brevity it implies a strong sense of finality to the blackbird. The blackbird is miniscule in comparison to the twenty mountains, yet the poem centers on its searching eye. Color is at play here too, but only in greyscale: The eye of the blackbird's darkness, along with its feathers, stands out sharply against the wintry white of the snowy mountains. If Steven's poem was to stop here, I would be tempted to read these three lines in the vein of a philosophical or religious work. This is both because I minored in religious studies in college and because I'm familiar enough with Stevens's oeuvre to feel safe in claiming that a relationship with higher powers, or its lack thereof, is a theme he harps upon with some regularity.<sup>1</sup> The juxtaposition of the relatively microscopic focus of the poem, the blackbird's eye, amongst the grandeur of the setting suggests that the blackbird has greater significance than any other being or the mountains themselves in this section, perhaps more than any other being writ large. One could pontificate, then, on why the blackbird is Stevens's choice of deity, his symbol for life's movement. If the poem ended here, I would be satisfied. I can picture the blackbird's

---

<sup>1</sup> I'm thinking here of "Sunday Morning", "The Plain Sense of Things", "The Death of a Soldier", "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman", "The American Sublime", and "The Poems of our Climate."



dull eye among a blizzard. The section's brevity certainly imparts a fecundity to the three lines, and I respect an artist who does not belabor the point.

In the next section, we're introduced to a first-person narrator who is of "three minds," a self-serious extrapolation of being undecided. The three minds echo the three lines of this section and the one preceding. This repetition begins to set the reader up for expecting numbers as a theme, or at least as a sort of poetic glue around which parts of the poem could be attached to. The title "Thirteen Ways," the numbered sections of the poem thus far, "twenty snowy mountains," the sole moving eye of the blackbird, the triplets of the narrator's mind, and the three blackbirds all contribute to this idea. As in the first section of the poem, the blackbirds exist to perform their natural function, albeit without much florid description or pageantry. The second flock of blackbirds exist in the tree with their minds – however, we are not privy to their thoughts or actions. This theme of the blackbird merely existing continues into the third section, where it whirls in the autumn winds and does nothing else. Yet Stevens's conclusively inserted statement, that the bird "was a small part of the pantomime," catches me. This is the first line that feels larger in scope than just the blackbird's existence. The "pantomime" that Stevens is referring to is difficult to pin, but the blackbird's place among the winds that decide its course feels like a broader statement on determinism and free will. Said another way, the third blackbird is merely a part of the great storm and performance that is life, and its role is "small." So far, all three sections have been three lines or less, without many adjectives or adverbs, and all have intimated towards the blackbird's role in nature: a small part of something bigger. It may not seem like a dramatic change, but Steven's choice to have the third section be only two lines disrupts the numerology that was beginning to build in the prior two sections. Formally, "Thirteen Ways" is a poem in free verse: there is a sporadic and sparse use of rhyme, and the meter varies from one section to the next. Repetition is one of a poet's most reliable tools in my opinion, and Stevens's poor usage of it in "Thirteen Ways" makes it less of a successful poem than it could have been with more poetic techniques employed.

Of course, there is one obvious usage of repetition throughout the poem, and that is the blackbirds themselves. I do not want to neglect each's individuality, as part of my argument is that the poem does not coalesce into a definite whole. Although the blackbirds persist throughout all thirteen sections of the poem, I am ultimately left without a clear image of their being, or if each section is the same blackbird or a different one. Repetition, rhyme, descriptive language, and metaphor: all of these can aid in what is the mark of a successful poem, its imagery, or believability. To feel as if I fully read a poem, I need to be able to say what happened, at least partially. There are poems that do not have a definite course and are successful, like Imagist poems of Pound or Williams, but that is mainly through their strong scene setting and their foregrounding of typed text against the blank space on the page. A poem is not a novel – it does not need to have a plot, but it certainly needs to have a style. Stevens is quite reticent with flashes of stylistics in “Thirteen Ways,” preferring the declaratory to the interpretable. The main aspect of the blackbird's unpicturability comes down to Stevens's continued transfiguration of its essence. From one section to the next, the bird expands, multiplies, rarefies, lives, is heard, is not there. In order, it: moves its eye; has minds in a tree (with no thoughts); is a “small part” of something bigger than itself; becomes part of a married union; provides beautiful “whistling”; is deemed to be an “indecipherable cause” in a windowpane; a lowly and feminine substitute; a mental inevitability; a fleeting image that geometrically borders itself; a catalyst of sonic expecoration to the “bawds of euphony”; merely an imagined shadow in a Gothic fairy tale; a tautological certainty; and finally, once again a part of a wintry scene, although its eye is no longer moving. Let me return to Stevens's word choice in the sixth section to summarize his blackbird: “indecipherable.” The thirteen sections do not come together to form a cohesive image, and I am left wanting some form of individuality or an identifier that could bring the picture together. Perhaps this was part of Steven's goal in taking thirteen different “Ways of Looking,” to create a piece that was as incongruous as possible. If that was the goal, he succeeded, but whenever I read “Thirteen Ways,” I am never able to suspend my disbelief, which constitutes poetic faith.

Felski notes that many affective questions in literary criticism have not been fully explored, such as “trance-like states of immersion or absorption in literature’s virtual worlds... the suddenness with which we can fall in love with, or feel ourselves addressed by, an author’s style” (31). As I show, I never feel as though I am in a readerly stupor when reading “Thirteen Ways,” but I do find the feeling elsewhere in his poetic works. One such place where I fall in love with Stevens’s style is “The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws.”

“The Bird” is similar to “Thirteen Ways” not only in its subject matter – both are prolonged studies of a bird – but also in the way it begins. The first line of “Thirteen Ways,” “among,” here becomes “above,” both spatial identifiers. Notice that while Stevens’s first blackbird is at an equivalent height to the chilling mountains, his parakeet sits over the forest. The parakeet is beyond both nonbird life (the forest) and all the other beings that are part of its species, the general “parakeets.” As an act of comparison, Stevens’s first blackbird stood out among the mountains for its sole inkling of life. His parakeet, however, is in a humid, verdant climate of a forest filled with other birds, and yet still is exceptional. Extrapolating the potentially spiritual reading of “Thirteen Ways,” a “parakeet of parakeets” echoes Jesus’s title as King of Kings, Lord of Lords and Shelley’s Ozymandias’s declaration that he is “king of kings.” Why this particular parakeet? Within the first two lines, Stevens has captured my attention and leaves me wanting to know more about why this bird in particular seems godly among mere mortals.

The other immediate similarity worth comparison is that, formally, “The Bird” also begins with three lines, but Stevens continues to employ this form throughout the entirety of this poem. This stylistic choice gives this poem certain advantages. For one, necessity is the mother of invention: Each tercet productively limits what can be contained in each three-line section. Stevens uses enjambment a handful of times within each section but not between them. Each tercet has a distinctive felt purpose and builds upon what was gleaned from the previous section, opposed to the disjointed shuffling from one vignette to the next in “Thirteen Ways.” Secondly, this poetic form also has the poet working

within a dedicated meter and rhyme scheme. With a few exceptions, all of the poem's lines are in iambic pentameter and each tercet follows an ABB rhyme scheme in isolation.<sup>2</sup> I cannot forget learning in ninth-grade English class that iambic pentameter is the "heartbeat" rhythm of poetic meter. It certainly lends a vitality and vibrancy to this poem and the bird it is focused on, never belaboring too long on lines like "a small part of the pantomime." Stevens seems to feel inclined to make each word count in "The Bird" in part due to its meter, with each line either advancing our understanding of the bird and its climate or blessed by an ornate formulation that lolls on the tongue, like the eleventh line of "Upward and outward, in green-vented forms."

The genius third line of "The Bird" floored me the first time I read it. Stevens moves from scene-setting and introducing the poem's protagonist in the first two lines to a stately description of the bird, "A pip of life amid a mort of tails." The three-syllable "parakeet" as poetic subject, already used three times in two lines, is deftly contrasted with a line of only one- or two-syllable words. This line is where we really start to grasp the tone of Stevens's poem as a whole, which is both opulent and laughingly playful. A "pip" means both a seed at the center of a fruit or a small quantity. Either works for this line's reading: this parakeet is exceptionally rare among its milieu. "Mort," in contrast, can mean a great amount of something, which lines up well with the second definition of pip. There is also the pun on the French verb for "to die," *mort*, and Stevens is certainly fond of employing French throughout his oeuvre. I do not want to limit the poem's possibilities by saying it is one or the other; that would limit multiple plausible interpretations. But for me, "life" as a noun and then "mort" (in the morbid sense) as an adjectival quantity beautifully mirrors the word "amid." "Tails" ends the line in a synecdochal phrase for the other parakeets that inhabit the forest. This synecdoche effectively puts the other birds in the category of most of Stevens's blackbirds from the prior poem: not fully fleshed out or imaginable. "Tails" may be all we get of the other birds, but this choice is intentional

---

<sup>2</sup> There is one inter-tercet repetition between the first and seventh lines of "parakeet."

because it is all we need: they are not worth any more of our time or attention, Stevens says, in comparison to this king of kings.

Some argue that one's first love is never eclipsed in one's heart. The same can be said for the first rhyme one encounters in a poem. Felski's article is helpful again here in reminding us that we "can be taken hold of, possessed, invaded by a text in a way that we cannot fully control or explain and in a manner that fails to jibe with public postures of ironic dispassion or disciplinary detachment" (33). As a reader wades through a poem for the first time, literary devices like rhyme, alliteration, enjambment, and personification serve as rafts among the ocean of a first reading for those willing to spend a devoted amount of time with a work of art, encouraging us to keep going to get at deeper meanings and rereadings. This is what I was hoping for reading "Thirteen Ways," but did not get. By the time I read the second tercet of "The Bird," I knew the rewards would be plentiful. Stevens is a more generous poet in "The Bird" than in "Thirteen Ways," not just in his opulence but also in his directions towards his readers. His use of parentheses in the second tercet lets us know that what's enclosed is a segue. Undoubtedly worthy of being included in the poem, of course, but not directly informative towards the poem's subject or progress. Stevens uses it to describe some of the flora of the forest's colors and I am immediately able to picture a pear whose skin is the color of rust and an aloe plant that is a shocking white. Besides the titular blackbirds, the only real color we get in "Thirteen Ways" is the "green light" in the tenth section.

It is extremely palpable in "The Bird" that Stevens is having fun describing the parakeet. He uses alliteration in moments like "though the turbulent tinges undulate" and "upward and outward" to imbue the bird with an even larger sense of grandiosity. He pulls his readers one direction by saying that it is "not paradise of parakeets," a seeming contradiction to the superlative first tercet, but then uses enjambment in the ninth line to reaffirm that yes, he is his species' paragon because "he broods there and is still." The bird's lack of movement is what distinguishes it from its relatives; it can't bother itself with the earthly movements below. In the fourth tercet, Stevens repeats "panache" to emphasize its double meaning

of great aplomb or of a group of feathers. Again, the word means both, and the tip of the tail is “a drop of water full of storms.” This description mirrors the third line of the poem in its miniscule nature containing far greater possibilities and worlds. The parakeet is nearly supernatural for Stevens in its foreboding brilliance, its metonymy for even greater events of sublimity like “storms”.

Stevens concludes the poem by bringing the bird closer to the divine by giving it a “pure intellect” that “applies its laws,” again suggesting that it is in control, not just of itself, but of the world around it. The linkage is twice more made between immobility and this divine capability, by its moving not on his titular claws, and finally, in never ceasing to “flare, in the sun-pallor of his rock.” “Munches” brings the tone of the poem back down to the carnivalesque and reminds us that the bird still needs to eat to live. But Stevens concludes by using a final double-meaning verb of “flare.” The bird is both spreading itself out in its sphere of influence in non-movement, and also is blazing, like the sun, in its golden splendor. Stevens leaves us with a final religious note by referring to the parakeet’s domain as “his rock,” reminding me of what a host of Gods have called Earth.

In terms of poetic deities, I’m more adherent to the monotheistic parakeet than the diluted ubiquity of Stevens’s blackbirds. “The Bird” is simultaneously a more ornate and less serious poem than “Thirteen Ways.” “The Bird” feels more natural than Stevens’s laboring to fit an image of a blackbird into thirteen discordant scenes. Paradoxically, this panache is the mark of a poet working at the height of his craft with incredible attention to detail who has made it somehow look easy. Although I argue strongly for “The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws” superior aesthetic qualities over “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” this is not to say that I am cemented in my opinions. As Felski points out, readerly transformations “often spring from works that initially baffle or frustrate their readers” (32). “The Bird” baffled me initially as well, but its artistic shine transfixed me from the beginning. In Felski’s words, I’ve shown “the strangeness of the self-evident” in literary works (32). My aim in this essay was to “analyze how formal devices encourage or attenuate” these

aesthetic attachments, via meter, rhyme, metaphor, synecdoche, repetition, personification, and mainly, imagery: Can I see this poem? Can I even see parts of myself in it? It would be bombastic of me to say that I fully understand every word of “The Bird” in pursuit of a final poetic vision, but I do not believe Wallace Stevens would necessarily be able to do that either. As T.S. Eliot said of Dante’s verse, genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.

#### Works Cited

Felski, Rita. “After Suspicion.” *Profession*, vol. 2009, no. 1, 2009, pp. 28–35, <https://doi.org/10.1632/prof.2009.2009.1.28>.

Stevens, Wallace. “The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws.” *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 259.

---. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.” *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. Random House, 1990, pp. 92-95.





# Education and Vocation in Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*

By Isabel Harmet

Jewish-American novelist, Anzia Yeziarska, authored numerous fictional works during the 1920s in New York City after immigrating from Poland as a child. Her 1925 novel, *Bread Givers*, addresses the shortcomings of American education by showcasing the female protagonist's disillusionment with her educational experience. Chip Rhodes, in *Structures of the Jazz Age*, argues that Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* "presents at once an enactment of the ideology of the Progressive educational theory that John Dewey championed" (152). Yeziarska has also been said to hold a view of education that "temperamentally and philosophically" aligns more closely with the Modern School Movement than with John Dewey's Progressivism (Shiffman 260). Dewey's Progressivism and the Modern School Movement both draw attention to similar issues with a traditional educational model in America. In 1916, Emma Goldman's essay, "The Social Importance of the Modern School" was published. In 1917, John Dewey's novel, *Democracy and Education* was published. My essay will first pull out overlapping concerns from these two texts, all of which Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* addresses. I will then conduct a close examination of Dewey's conceptions of vocation and experience before exploring such conceptions in Yeziarska's work in order to account for the particular ways in which Yeziarska adopts Dewey's Progressivism and aspects of Goldman's philosophy. Specifically, Sara's pursuit of education as a vocation will be likened to Dewey's advocacy of "vocational education" (Dewey 335).

Sara values education as an end in itself rather than as a means to becoming a producer in a capitalist society. While Max Goldstein foils Sara in this respect, Hugo Seelig parallels Sara. Sara's experiences with these two characters provide crucial insight into Sara's pursuit of education as a vocation. Additionally, her rejection of capitalism's educational agenda is further revealed through Max and Hugo. Chip Rhodes references this agenda: "The subject formed by the schools in

capitalism is a producer” (Rhodes 155). Sara’s vocation takes precedence over her role as a producer as she values education for its own sake, and she can therefore be seen as refusing capitalism’s desired ‘end’ of education.

### Emma Goldman and John Dewey’s Educational Philosophy

Emma Goldman contends that school “is for the child what the prison is for the convict and the barracks for the soldier--a place where everything is being used to break the will of the child, and then to pound, knead, and shape it into a being utterly foreign to itself” (1). Dewey points out a similar problem when he argues: “That education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory” (Dewey 43). Goldman and Dewey are each concerned that schools’ methods of instruction are forceful and passive insofar as children are not supplied with conditions or instruction that encourages active and willful participation. Goldman and Dewey not only critique schools’ methods of formal instruction but the place of education as well. They each argue that the school is not the only place where education happens. Goldman states: The very notion that knowledge can be obtained only in school through systematic drilling, and that school time is the only period during which knowledge may be acquired, is in itself so preposterous as to completely condemn our system of education as arbitrary and useless (1)

Similarly, Dewey suggests that schools ought to teach “the inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling” (57). The method and manner of instruction in addition to the place where learning takes place are of crucial importance to Goldman and Dewey. Yeziarska addresses the concerns that these two thinkers present through Sara’s experiences. While Goldman and Dewey have more concerns than those I have listed, my analysis will focus on their concerns which I detailed above as they pertain to *Bread Givers*. The shared concerns of Goldman and Dewey represent a progressive critique of the traditional educational system operating within a capitalist and consumerist society.

Before investigating the manifestation of Goldman and Dewey's concerns in *Bread Givers*, I discuss Dewey's conception of vocation in order to depict the disparity between what education is and what education ought to be like (for Sara and Yeziarska alike). Dewey states that "a vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates" (326). After defining vocation, Dewey moves to discuss its relevance in education. "Vocational education," for Dewey, avoids predetermining "some future occupation for which education is to be a strict preparation." This would "injure the possibilities of present development (329). Instead, "vocational education" involves "the subject matter of life experience" and "supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age." This type of education would "direct" "life activities" such that they are "perceptibly significant to a person" and therefore vocational. Sara, in *Bread Givers*, desires this type of education. I will now discuss Sara's educative experiences, including how she "learns from experience" (Dewey) and how she responds to her "formal education" (Dewey). Sara's formal education addresses the shared critiques of Goldman and Dewey. Her formal education also pushes her to contend with the value of education, which leads to her pursuit of education as her vocation.

#### Sara's Educational Desires and Beginnings: Communication and Vocation

Sara's childhood desire to be "like a real person" (Yeziarska 28) is the foundation of her educational ideology insofar as she ultimately decides that being educated and having educative experiences constitutes being a "real person." Before expressing her desire to learn, Sara expresses her desire to "go into business like a person" (Yeziarska 21). Shortly after, she expresses a similar notion: "Earning twenty-five and sometimes thirty to fifty cents a day made me feel independent, like a real person" (Yeziarska 28). At this point, readers can begin to understand what Sara lacks and what she associates with personhood: working a job and having independence. The first major turning point in the novel takes place when Sara communicates her desire to learn for the first time:

More and more I began to think inside myself, I don't want to sell herring for the rest of my days. I want to learn something. I want to do something. I want to someday make myself for a person and come among people. But how can I do it if I live in this hell house of Father's preaching and Mother's complaining? (Yeziarska 66).

Sara's desire to "learn something" is now fused with her desire to become a person and "come among people." Her environment (a "hell house") restricts her potential to "do" and "learn." At this point, Sara values learning as a means to independence and liberation from her restrictive family. Whereas "earning twenty-five and sometimes thirty to fifty cents a day" made Sara feel "like a real person" (28) at the beginning of the novel, she now believes she must "learn something" (66) to become a person. This shift, although subtle, is notable because it in itself signals that Sara has learned something through her experiences in the "hell house" (66). She learned that earning money by selling herring did not give her a lasting sense of personhood or independence.

Before departing from her family, Sara addresses her father and says, "My will is as strong as yours. I'm going to live my own life" (Yeziarska 138). Sara's departing statement suggests that she has in fact learned something from her father, that being the concept of having a "will." By declaring that her will is as strong as her father's, Sara likens herself to her father and unknowingly alludes to her received incidental education, which Dewey defines as "education which everyone gets from living with others" (Dewey 11). Sara and her father share a sense of will. For Dewey, this similarity must have required communication since "men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (Dewey 7).

Sara's experience of undergoing a formal education leads to her understanding of "vocational education" (Dewey 335). She pursues education as a vocation insofar as she ultimately values education for its own sake. After running away from home, Sara begins her "formal" education by attending night school. She professes that she wants to "learn everything in the school from the beginning to the end" (Yeziarska 162).

She is quickly disillusioned when she realizes she cannot get a “quick education for a teacher” (162) and instead must take courses that do not appeal to her. While studying, she says, “I spread my books out on the table and began to hammer into my thick head the difference between a noun, a verb, and a preposition” (164). She goes on to say, “The more I repeated the definitions the more I got mixed up” (164). Thus far, Sara’s educational experience aligns with Goldman and Dewey’s educational critique: “That education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory” (Dewey 43). Sara is receiving an education that is “narrowly conceived for the masses” (Dewey 205), as is suggested by her “hammering” information into her head. This is further emphasized when Sara asks: “How can those tyrants over the college force all kinds of different people to stuff their heads with the same deadness that we all got to know alike? I want the knowledge that is the living life...” (Yeziarska 181). The “*same* deadness that we *all* got to know alike” recall’s Dewey’s statement of education being for “the masses.” Sara eventually exclaims, “Maybe I wasn’t smart enough to swallow all that dry learning you had to swallow to enter college!” (185). “Swallowing” the “dry learning” corresponds with Dewey’s assertion that education is “not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told” (Dewey 43). Sara is “being told,” hence her “swallowing” the “dry learning.” Sara lacks “the knowledge that is the living life” (Yeziarska 181), this being the type of knowledge that Goldman and Dewey also advocate for.

Lacking nourishing educative experiences in school, Sara begins to reflect on her childhood experiences: “Even in our worst poverty we sat around the table, together, like people” (Yeziarska 173). Sara recognizes the social nature of being a person now that she lives in isolation and does not receive socialization in school as she should, according to Dewey. Sara learned from sitting around the table with her family because it was a social experience and therefore an educative experience that she can now reflect on, which furthers her learning. Dewey emphasizes the social nature of education when he states that “the very process of living together is educative” (8). He goes on to say that “All communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of communication is

to have an enlarged and changed experience” (8). For Dewey, communication is incidental education. With this in mind, one can understand Sara’s childhood experiences as incidentally educative.

Sara denounces education when she says “I hated book learning and colleges. All education was against life. I wanted to live and not stupefy myself with geometry” (Yeziarska 187). Shortly after this, a social experience changes her attitude. She goes to a jazz concert with a man she recently met, Max Goldstein: “The brass band lifted me fiercely out of myself and shook me to the roots . . . Lost and forgotten were all thoughts of lessons. The joy of the dance burst loose the shut-in prisoner in me” (194). This experience seems to constitute the “living breadth of life” that Sara desires. When contemplating this experience, she says, “Overnight I had become a changed person . . . and all because of a man” (194). What Sara doesn’t seem to realize is that her fulfillment came from this stimulating and socially engaging experience that represents the living breadth of life.

#### Profit as Education’s “End”

Max Goldstein prioritizes money and does not value education for its own sake. Max’s persona foils Sara in this respect while also teaching Sara more about her own value of education. While spending time with Sara, Max discusses “the biggest game in America,” which is “money making” (Yeziarska 196). He goes on to say. “At the lodge meetings I combine my business and my pleasure. It’s meeting people” (196). Sara reports that he continued to talk of such matters until she “felt worn out” (196). Evidently, Sara is uninterested in listening to Max discuss how he makes his money and how he feels pleasure from doing so. Sara cannot relate to this. Max knows this on some level as he shows when remarking to Sara, “You’re so different. You’re so cold. You’re only books, books, books. I sometimes wonder, are you at all a woman?” (197). Sara, “in a daze,” gives no response (197). Max cannot understand how Sara can value books outside of their potential to aid one’s money-making endeavors. He claims that “only dumbheads fool themselves that education and colleges and all that sort of nonsense will push them on in this world. It’s money that makes the wheels go round” (199). This remark sparks a shift in Sara’s mind as she then saw Max seem to “turn into a

talking roll of dollar bills” (199). When Sara realizes Max does not share her educational values, she immediately decides she cannot possibly marry him.

Max represents the type of persona that a traditional educational model creates. Max’s character identity revolves around his participation in a consumerist society, which is evident in how much time he spends talking about making money. Capitalism “requires and rewards productive subjects” (Rhodes 155), and Max is the ideal productive subject. When Sara rejects Max, she figuratively rejects participating in the capitalist agenda of education and instead begins to fully pursue education as a vocation. Max’s departure made Sara’s eyes grow “bigger and darker. They had become seeing eyes.” She had “seen and felt” (Yeziarska 200). Sara identifies learning as her vocation, or the “activity” of her life that is “perceptibly significant,” (Dewey 329) when she reflects on her present mindset after Max’s departure:

I looked at the books on my table that had stared at me like enemies a little while before. They were again the light of my life. Ach! Nothing was so beautiful as to learn, to know, to master by the sheer force of my will even the dead squares and triangles of geometry. I seized my books and hugged them to my breast as though they were living things (201).

Sara’s epiphany comes as a result of conversing with a persona that foils her own. Her books “again” become the light of her life when Max, a figure who sees no innate value in books, departs from Sara’s life. The fact that Sara now believes there is “*nothing* so beautiful as to learn” emphasizes her value of vocational education. Her social experience of dating Max constitutes an educative social experience (Dewey) and leads to her formation of a fixed value of education. Her value of education continues to be formed by her father and Hugo, emphasizing Dewey’s assertion that “All communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative” (8).

After reconnecting with her father, who disappointed her by condemning her for being “without character” (Yeziarska 207), Sara reflects on this experience coupled with her experience with Max: “These two experiences made me clear to myself. Knowledge was what I wanted

more than anything else in the world ... I must go on. And I must go on alone” (208).

For Dewey, “to learn from experience is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence” (Dewey 149). Experiencing her father and Max questioning her values results in Sara feeling more secure in her value of education. When her father and Max question her, she begins to understand that knowledge is part of her character, hence her realization that she wants knowledge “more than anything else in the world” (Yeziarska 208).

### Sara’s Critique of College and its Alignment with Goldman and Dewey

Sara confronts a turning point in her life when she departs from Max, gets let down by her father, and starts college. Although Sara professes her love of knowledge after departing from Max and her father, she is disillusioned by the expectations she is confronted with in college. Upon arriving at college, Sara says it was “like a dream mounting on a dream was this college town, this New America of culture education” (Yeziarska 210). She is struck by the environment of opportunity and remarks that “the college buildings were like beautiful palaces (211). Sara's attitude quickly changes when she confronts similar problems in college education as in her prior education. She wonders, “what’s all this physical education nonsense? I came to college to learn something, to get an education with my head” (216). Sara realizes education is not catered to her specific interests and needs but rather a structured curriculum with requirements that do not benefit everyone. Sara’s observation, once again, emphasizes that traditional education is for “the masses” as Dewey says. Dewey regards this structure of formal education as aimed at teaching “merely the subject matter of schools, isolated from the subject matter of life experience” (Dewey 11). The “subject matter of schools” differs from the “subject matter of life” in that the former is a means to an end, the end being the student’s fulfillment of becoming a producer in a capitalist society. Chip Rhodes contends that “the subject matter taught in schools should, according to Dewey, dovetail with the students’ day-to-day experiences, helping students develop the skills needed to confront their



social environment” (Rhodes 141). Sara has never had the chance to develop the necessary social skills that her college environment demands.

As she adjusts to the formal expectations of her college, Sara makes what most would deem social errors. She tells her teacher that she is “ready to recite this new book” (Yeziarska 223). When her teacher rejects this offer, Sara wonders, “was the college only a factory, and the teachers machines turning out lectures by the hour on wooden dummies, incapable of response?” (224). Sara’s observations about her educational experiences often dehumanize her education such that it is entirely artificial and has no relevance to real life. Comparing her college to a “factory” also reinforces traditional educational models as being solely concerned with making producers within a capitalist and consumerist society.

Not only is Sara let down by her formal education’s course and classroom structure but by its lack of social structure as well. Sara understands her college as a place that does not make socializing approachable or encouraged. Disappointed, she says, “even in college I had not escaped from the ghetto. Here loneliness hounded me even worse than in Hester Street. Was there no escape? Will I never lift myself to be a person among people?” (220). As noted, Dewey places importance on the social and communicative aspects of learning. For Dewey, “the social environment consists of all the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in carrying on of the activities of any one of its members” (Dewey 26). Sara’s social environment is not conducive to learning since she has little to no positive interactions with other students. Despite her disappointment, Sara persists in her vocation: “I flung myself into the next term’s work with fierce determination to wring the last drop of knowledge from each course” (Yeziarska 222).

Sara associates being a “person” with being educated. Feeling as though she isn’t thriving in her educational experience, she wonders if she “will ever be a person among people” (220) as mentioned before. Rhodes claims that Sara’s sought-after personhood “can only be retrieved through education” (Rhodes 153). Rhodes’ claim is reinforced by Sara’s belief that her studies in psychology give her a sense of personhood: “I had learned self-control. I was now a person of reason. From that day on, the words of psychology were full of living wonder” (Yeziarska 223). After repeatedly

expressing a feeling of lacking personhood, Sara finally remarks that she is a “person of reason” due to studying psychology. Her education amplifies her ability to “learn from experience” (Dewey), which is indicated in her reflection on her childhood experiences: “When I went through those experiences I thought them privations and losses; now I saw them treasure chests of insight” (223). Sara now views her past experiences as educative, and this widens her scope of knowledge insofar as she has developed a mindset that views all experiences as potentially educative.

### The Social Importance of Education

I have discussed Sara’s social experiences as being educative in and of themselves. I have also discussed Sara’s lack of socialization as negatively impacting her educational experience and how this can be seen as aligning with Dewey’s philosophy. Sara’s most educative and emotionally impactful social experiences are with two teachers, her psychology teacher, and later, the principal of the school at which she teaches. As education is Sara’s vocation, it is unsurprising that she feels the most social satisfaction from engaging with people who also value education. Sara is disappointed when her psychology teacher rejects her offer of reciting her book, but she realizes she was too quickly disappointed when she has a friendly interaction with him. Her teacher tells her that he is glad to have found “a student that takes psychology so seriously” (Yeziarska 227). Sara rejoices at this compliment: “How I could be filled to the brim with happiness by the sound of a voice, the smile of a face!” (227). Sara’s social experience directly impacts her motivation to learn. This is evident in how shortly after receiving praise from her teacher, Sara says “I want knowledge. How like a starved thing in the dark, I’m driven to reach for it” (230). Sara’s perspective on her college education changes as a result of receiving attention from her teacher.

Just as Sara’s disappointment with college is diminished through fulfilling socialization with her teacher, Sara’s disappointment with her teaching occupation is diminished through socializing with the principal of her school, Hugo Seelig. When Sara arrives home after graduating from college, she says, “Home! Back to New York! Sara Smolinsky from

Hester Street, changed into a person!” (Yeziarska 237). Although she finally thinks she is a person due to being educated, she is still lacking consistent socialization. She recognizes this when she says, “Till now I had no time to be human or enjoy sociability with people. Now I felt like a prisoner just out from a long confinement in prison” (242). Sara frames her entire education as not being conducive to having a social life. For Dewey, this is a severe flaw in a traditional educational model.

While working as a teacher, Sara becomes saddened by her lack of social contact: “Why was I so silent, so empty? I longed for the close, human touch of life again. My job was to teach - to feed hungry children. How could I give them milk when my own breasts were empty?” (270). The loneliness she feels in her occupation makes her feel a similar sense of disillusionment with the education system that she felt at times throughout her own education. While going to teach, she says, “Mechanically, I dragged my feet to school. Mechanically, I went through the routine of the class work” (275). Sara’s language assigns artificiality and dehumanizing qualities to her teaching experience. Her language recalls her claim that college felt like a “factory” to her. The artificiality she feels from both her college and her occupation, in part, stems from her isolation. Dewey critiques the mechanical nature of traditional education with language similar to Yeziarska’s: “A premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest” (Dewey 150). Yeziarska’s use of language that parallels Dewey’s highlights the way in which Yeziarska sought to address concerns presented by Dewey in her literature.

When Sara starts socializing with Hugo Seelig, she feels a renewal in motivation to teach just as she felt a renewal in motivation to learn in college when her teacher socialized with her. During Sara’s first lengthy conversation with Hugo, she confirms their connection when she says, “We had sprung from one soil” (Yeziarska 278). This connection is further emphasized when they each notice the other’s strength. Sara notices “his face. The features — all fineness and strength” (273). Hugo tells Sara, “you’ve got the fibre of a strong, live spruce tree that grows in strength the more its knocked about by the wind”

(279). The pair's similar experiences in their early lives along with their overlapping value of education provides a fulfilling relationship for each of them. Whereas Max could not understand Sara's values, specifically her values of knowledge and education, Hugo mirrors them. Because Max could not understand Sara and valued education only as a means to profit, Sara rejected him as a partner. Hugo understands Sara. Their connection is further amplified when Hugo desires to learn Hebrew from Sara's father. Before Hugo, Sara's father was the only figure in her life who valued knowledge as an end in itself. Although her father did not respect her decisions, he taught her the concept of having a will and a vocation. With this in mind, Hugo connecting with Sara's father through knowledge reinforces both men's pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself.

As the novel comes to a close with Sara and Hugo deciding to have Sara's father live with them, Sara is finally surrounded by people who share her value of education instead of being trapped within a school that feels like a "machine like simulation." At the same time, Sara never escapes or rejects her unfavorable learning or teaching conditions. Instead, she uses social connections to get through the less-than-ideal conditions. She *does* reject capitalism's desired end of education simply by valuing her knowledge as an end in itself instead of as an opportunity to profit through being a producer. Somewhat dissatisfied and yet seemingly content with this reality, she states, "I suddenly realized that I had come back to where I had started twenty years ago when I began my fight for freedom" (295). Sara's idea of freedom and personhood is, in fact, fulfilled. She wanted to "do" and "learn." She did both.

Yeziarska takes up concerns that Goldman and Dewey share about the flaws of formal educational instruction and the place of education, ultimately suggesting that a traditional educational model wrongly ignores life experience as educative. Dewey emphasizes education as being intertwined with socialization, which is also mirrored in *Bread Givers*. Lastly, Yeziarska shares Dewey's advocacy for "vocational education" as depicted by her character, Sara, and her fight to receive a vocational education that has value in and of itself instead of as a means to profit as a traditional educational model would encourage.

## Works Cited

- Goldman, Emma. *The Social Importance of the Modern School*.
- Hinchey, Patricia, and Dewey. *Democracy and Education by John Dewey: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey*. Amsterdam, Netherlands, Amsterdam UP, 2018.
- Rhodes, Chip. *Structures of the Jazz Age: Mass Culture, Progressive Education, and Racial Discourse in American Modernism*. Verso, 1998.
- Shiffman, Dan. “‘The Kindling Breath of Another Mind’: Anzia Yeziarska’s Critique of American Education.” *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2015, pp. 257–73. *JSTOR*.
- Yeziarska, Anzia, and Alice Kessler-Harris. *Bread Givers: A Novel*. 3rd ed., Persea, 2003.



# Considering “Against Theory” with Deconstruction and Chance Operational Poetry

By Desi Isaacson

In their 1982 essay *Against Theory*, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels argue that authorial meaning and intention are inseparable and that, without intention, there can be no meaning. They state that “The recognition that what a text means and what its author intends it to mean are identical should entail the further recognition that any appeal from one to the other is useless” (724-725). Knapp and Michaels believe one problem with theory is a presupposition of a difference or gap between intention and meaning. This belief is difficult to disprove, but I attempt to find a counterexample in the genre of chance operational poetry, namely “Stein 100: A Feather Likeness of the Justice Chair,” by Jackson Mac Low, to see if there is a hole in Knapp and Michaels’ account, possibly one that can be filled with deconstructionist theory.

To showcase their theory, Knapp and Michaels posit a “Wave Poem” hypothetical. You are strolling along a beach and see the first stanza of a poem written in the sand. A wave washes up, and when it recedes, there is now a second stanza below. At this point, you have two options: you either ascribe an author (perhaps mother nature) or believe it is a coincidence of nonintentional effects from an earthly process (erosion, etc.). Knapp and Michaels say, “In the second case—where the marks now seem to be accidents—will they still be words? Clearly not. They will merely seem to *resemble* words” (728). What you perceived as words were not actually words, according to Knapp and Michaels, but merely shapes in the sand that looked like words. There can be no words without an intending agent and, thus, no words without intent. They add, “As long as you thought the marks were poetry, you were assuming their intentional character” (728). When you saw the first stanza, you assumed an author had written the words in the sand. Just because you did not know who the author was, does not mean you hadn’t assumed authorial intent on *someone’s* behalf.

Later, Knapp and Michaels consider the deconstructionist view, examining an example from Paul de Man in which he discusses Rousseau's *Purloined Ribbon*. Rousseau describes stealing a ribbon, then blaming it on a girl named Marion. Rousseau tries to answer why he did this, "the explanation that intrigues de Man is the surprising one that Rousseau perhaps meant nothing at all when said 'Marion'... 'he was saying nothing at all'" (734). Rather than implicating a specific person, perhaps Rousseau was merely making a noise that seemed to resemble the name Marion.

As a deconstructionist, de Man finds this excuse intriguing because it appears to say something about the structure of language itself. De Man writes, "The fact that the sound 'Marion' can mean nothing reminds us that language consists of inherently meaningless sounds to which one adds meanings" (734). This leads back to Saussure's notion that language is arbitrary – there is nothing about the name Marion that is Marion-like – we simply ascribe meaning to words.

In this, we begin to see Knapp and Michaels departure from the de Man work they cite. They write, "de Man thinks that the material condition of language is not simply meaningless but is also already 'linguistic,' that is, sounds are signifiers even before meanings (signifieds) are added to them" (734). De Man believes language has structure prior to or independent from intention. While we can use language intentionally, the language has characteristics of existence without humans and intent, structure, limitations, etc. Knapp and Michaels continue, "language is primarily a meaningless structure to which meanings are secondarily ... added. Thus, according to de Man, Rousseau's accusers mistakenly added a meaning to the signifier 'Marion'—hearing a speech act where they should have heard only language" (734). Once there is a speech act, there is intent, but if there is language and no speech act, no meaning can be taken. Thus, Rousseau merely made noises that resembled the name Marion.

Knapp and Michaels think that de Man has unknowingly made a fatal mistake, namely that saying 'Marion' is not a signifier in and of itself. They write, "It is not true that sounds in themselves are signifiers; they become signifiers only when they acquire meanings, and when they



lose their meanings they stop being signifiers” (735). A signifier, in their view, cannot exist without meaning. A sound resembling a name like Marion may appear to be a signifier but is not. Knapp and Michaels expand by writing, “De Man’s mistake is to think that the sound ‘Marion’ remains a signifier even when emptied of all meaning. The fact is that the meaningless noise ‘Marion’ only *resembles* the signifier ‘Marion,’ just as accidentally uttering the sound ‘Marion’ only *resembles* the speech act of naming Marion” (735). If there is no intention behind the utterance ‘Marion,’ then it ceases to be a speech act or a signifier, which makes it no longer language. To Knapp and Michaels, language and speech acts cannot be separated. They explain, “De Man recognizes that the accidental emission of the sound ‘Marion’ is not a speech act ... but he fails to recognize that it’s not language either. What reduces the signifier to noise and the speech act to an accident is the absence of intention” (735). There is an equation of speech acts with meaning and language with intention that de Man fails to find.

In de Man’s view, even when we intend things, they are empty. Words and speech phrases are simply mechanisms, an empty vehicle structured by language. Language itself, too, is just a mechanism that we make use of to try to relay meaning. When we read a speech act, we should read it as an empty thing (language). Knapp and Michaels say, “the negative theorist subtracts [intention] ... In our view, however, the relation between meaning and intention ... is such that intention neither be added nor subtracted ... because meanings are always intentional” (736). Knapp and Michaels formulate language differently, as they think it is more than simply a mechanism but has “intention already built into it” (736).

Let’s consider a possible counterexample to Knapp and Michaels. Jackson Mac Low’s poem “Stein 100: A Feather Likeness of the Justice Chair,” is known as an example of chance operational poetry.

The second stanza reads:

White the green grinding trimming thing!

The disgrace, like stripes.

More selection, slighter intention.

Interpretations abound, though I find myself sensing a passage on familial racism, perhaps a close-minded grandparent. A young person sits, stewing

at a racist elder. They “grind” and “trim” a green story of their existence, absent of the issues of race prevalent throughout their life. The youth feels disgrace, even perhaps displays this disgrace visually or vocally “like stripes.” The writer reads into the strategy of how their grandparent explains the world, selectively and for the specific intention of leaving out the ugly parts. There is a tone of frustration and anger accentuated by the exclamation point in the first line and the pause after a heated word like “disgrace.” A later stanza reads,

Inside that large silver likeness, Hope tables thick coal.  
Coal makes morning furnaces darker,  
Joy and success are exceptions.

The author continues thinking about the darkness of their grandparent’s created world. Their stories act as coal in a furnace, bringing heat (anger) to our writer while making everything darker, sadder. In conversation with the elders, joy and success do not come often. They do not understand or refuse to listen. This reading may appear sketchy, but to some extent this is the point. It is nearly impossible to find a close reading that feels correct.

Perhaps to look for meaning in this typical sense is a mistake with a chance operational poem. Simply recognizing that the words function in relation to one another and can depart a plethora of meanings may be closer to an intended meaning. Maybe lines like “Joy and success are exceptions,” speaks more directly to language itself and its ability to mean anything with any clarity (think of Archie Bunker’s utter “despair” in de Man’s account of *Semiotics and Rhetoric*).

Mac Low used Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* as a source text and, through a series of automations of “diastic text-selection procedures” and “random-digit chance operations,” took an output of words to form 117 sentences (Mac Low, “Stein 100”). He made minor “changes and/or additions of suffixes, pronouns, structure words, forms of “to be,” etc. and changes of word order,” but he notes, “I included many phrases, and even whole verse lines, of unedited, though punctuated, output” (Mac Low, “Stein 100”).

There is perhaps much to say on the intent of Mac Low in choosing to have his words originate from Stein, and even his edits, but

the text itself has no intending agent. While language itself cannot exist entirely without an intending agent –someone at the very least created human language to start – de Man thinks of language as a mechanism. It would appear for a deconstructionist such as de Man or Derrida that random, mechanically-chosen words are not a speech act, yet they are still language and have meaning. Knapp and Michaels consider this within their essay “Against Theory 2,” in which they write,

For deconstruction, an author can never succeed in determining the meaning of a text; every text participates in a code that necessarily eludes authorial control ... they are also committed to the view that a text derives its identity from something other than authorial intention. The text is what it is, no matter what meaning is assigned to it by its author and no matter how that meaning is revised by its reader (50).

It seems my ability even to find a meaning within Mac Low’s poem would give merit to the deconstructionist argument that the language exists without an intending agent. In the ‘Marion’ case, if the listener understands Marion to be a signifier, does it not do something more than just resemble the signifier?

Derrida believes that “In order for a sign to be a sign, it must be able to function beyond its original context—that is, it must in principle be readable by someone other than its author or the audience for which it was intended ... Consequently, intention, while it will ‘have its place,’ cannot govern the entire scene and system of utterance” (60-61). This is directly applicable to “Stein 100,” as Mac Low is using a sign for a new function within a different context. The signs used are still making sense and appear to still be able to function for a new audience, even with a new author. Perhaps we have found a problem with Knapp and Michaels account of theory? Intention does not seem to govern this poem, which Derrida believes is not a problem.

In contrast, Knapp and Michaels believe that “Derrida is wrong. Speech acts are not conventional acts, and if they mean anything at all they mean only what their authors intend” (67). They have two possible defenses here. First, these words are not words at all, but marks produced by chance. In “Against Theory 2,” they describe a scenario in which

someone rolls dice to determine whether they will get married or not. “Insofar as she had any relevant intention at all, it was only the intention to roll the dice, and in that intention she succeeded ... the rules determine what you do but not what you mean, because you never mean anything ... because rolling the dice is not a speech act” (64). A similar notion could be said of the poem. While the words are working within the code of language, they are acting more similarly to rolling the dice than a speech act. The intention is only to have a random group of words appear together, not to actually mean anything. The words that comprise the poem are not a speech act (and thus meaningless) due to a lack of intending agent. Like the wave poem, I am reading meaning into something that inherently has none. My mistake here was to unknowingly assign an author. Just because I do not know who they are, does not mean I did not formulate one. Even in my atypical analysis, I could not avoid adding an intending agent.

Second, Knapp and Michaels may argue that the randomness *is* the meaning that Mac Low intends, that he is still an intending agent despite his best effort. Mac Low makes numerous decisions in putting this poem together, and it would be impossible for anyone to create a poem with zero decisions. At the very least, one needs to make the choice to *create a poem in the first place*. From the moment of initial inception, Mac Low has made himself an intending agent and is unable to create something entirely meaningless. Knapp and Michaels say in “Against Theory 2,” “In every case the meaning of the speech act itself is determined by the speaker’s intention. In no case has the speaker failed to determine the speech act’s meaning” (64). Whatever Mac Low’s meaning may be, possibly to examine how random words interact with one another, this is determined by his intention. In this case, my close reading may have some merit, but only again because we have agreed to work within Knapp and Michaels’ groundwork that intent and meaning are the same and agree to call Mac Low an intending agent. It is impossible to find art without intent because, at the very least, someone decided to create and deemed it art in the first place.

This appears to be the genius of “Against Theory,” either way you try to avoid their argument, the circle brings you back to the same spot.

Their argument proposes that theory itself is begging the question. Their problem is not with how to govern a distance between meaning and intention but with the initial premise that there is a difference in the first place. While we tried to find a separation between the two with a chance operational poem, Knapp and Michaels appear to have valid responses: either that the words are not a speech act and are meaningless or that, despite his best efforts, our author is still an intending agent. Trying to find intention without meaning or meaning without intention is a difficult (potentially impossible) task. Perhaps another possible counterexample to be taken up in a later critique would be a case of multiple intending agents.

#### Works Cited

Knapp, Steven, and Walter Benn Michaels. "Against Theory." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4,

1982, pp. 723–42. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343194>.

Accessed 24 Oct. 2022.

Knapp, Steven, and Walter Benn Michaels. "Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and

Deconstruction." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1987, pp. 49–68.

JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343571>. Accessed 24 Oct.

2022.

Mac Low, Jackson. "Stein 100: A Feather Likeness of the Justice Chair by Jackson Mac Low."

Poets.org, Academy of American Poets,

<https://poets.org/poem/stein-100-feather-likeness-justice-chair>.



# Media and the Artificial-Real in “The Lazy River”

By Sarah Licht

In Zadie Smith’s 2017 short story, “The Lazy River,” the narrator describes their and other guests’ experiences at an all-inclusive resort in Almería, Spain, a time that primarily revolves around the existence of and interactions with the titular Lazy River. This chronic fixation on the Lazy River and other forms of media as sources of both escapism and connection with assumed reality allow for an analysis through the lens of Marshall McLuhan’s work on the nature of media and those who use it in his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Through this reading, the rapturous nature of the Lazy River, as well as the omnipresence of other technological media throughout the story, become emblematic of the story’s larger themes of the near-inseparable entanglement between the real and artificial and the ensnaring effect these media have on the resort guests due to both this entanglement and the desire to comfortably escape reality.

Though Smith repeatedly refers to the Lazy River as a “metaphor,” one can easily imagine it to also be a medium in the context of McLuhan’s definition of what constitutes as media (3). For McLuhan, a medium acts as an “extension of ourselves,” a manufactured creation that allows us to do what would be unlikely, if not impossible, with just our corporeal bodies (McLuhan 7). As a body of perpetually flowing water, the Lazy River extends the arms and legs of those who use it, allowing them to move without the same exertion as swimming by pushing them along its route. Perhaps more than understanding it as a metaphor, which can refer to any number of things — real or unreal, natural or artificial — viewing the Lazy River as a synthetic medium brings its artificiality to the forefront. Within the story, this inherent artificiality of the Lazy River places it in a liminal space between the real and unreal, as, while conceptually, the River can be understood as man-made, its presence in the resort appears real in the context of the resort. The narrator themselves points out this fact, describing the River as “a real body of artificial

water,” something whose synthetic nature is often masked by its existence as real insofar as it is a physical thing within the resort that people can directly interact with (Smith 4). This distortion between reality and unreality understood through viewing the Lazy River as a medium is, perhaps most obviously, present in the River’s form. Though extension typically insinuates a moving out of something, the Lazy River extends into itself, forming an “Ouroboros” in which guests perpetually return to where they entered from (Smith 5). While this does not preclude it from being a medium as McLuhan defines it, as the guests within the River are still extended by being moved around it, this cyclical nature contrasts its namesake, a natural watercourse that pushes water and all that resides in it to a particular destination. The Lazy River instead pushes its artificial water in a shape not found in any real river, forming an unnatural perpetual loop.

However, this blatantly synthetic aspect of the Lazy River transforms into a means by which to discuss the real, living content of the River, i.e., the people within it. For McLuhan, focusing on how people use any particular medium “blinds us to the character of the media,” that being its existence as a synthetic extension of us, which for the narrator, leads them to further shift away from the River’s qualities of being an artificial structure within the resort to its undeniable reality of something capable of carrying, if not overpowering, others (9). The narrator seems to acknowledge this fact, stating that “we will all be carried along by the Lazy River” no matter if the guests ride inflatables or attempt to resist the flow of the River, thus showing how the various different ways of using the Lazy River are an ineffectual mean by which to study its nature (Smith 3). However, the narrator hardly discusses the River as something in and of itself without the people who interact with it or witness it. By doing so, the artificiality of the River is simultaneously reified by showing its unnatural structure yet still undermined by fusing said artificiality with its status as a real vessel capable of holding and entertaining the real.

As such, the experience of floating on the Lazy River at an all-inclusive resort feels so natural to the narrator and the other guests to where it is only when the River turns green that they become consciously, and uncomfortably, aware of the “fundamental artificiality of the Lazy



River” (Smith 5). Here, the illusion of reality the narrator and others convince themselves of begins to crumble. McLuhan describes the incorporation of technology in our lives as requiring “new equilibriums” within the people who experience it to comfortably incorporate the extension into their lives (45). Within the story, this equilibrium occurs not through the direct interaction between bodily organs, as McLuhan states, but through a cognitive dissonance that allows for the upholding of the Lazy River’s status as being simultaneously artificial yet real. Once the shift in the River’s visual quality puts this dissonance out of balance, and the artificiality of the River overwhelms any natural reality found within it, the Lazy River cannot maintain its prominence as it did before. Instead, different media enter the forefront of the narrator’s consciousness as a way to explore the nature of artificiality and reality as constructed by those within it, resetting the equilibrium between the guests and the other bodily extensions present in the story.

While other forms of technology appear throughout the story, the hole left by the unbearable realization of the Lazy River’s artificiality is filled with the other sources of media the guests at the resort use. The narrator first articulates this shift by their description of the two sisters and how they spend their time at the resort “taking pictures of each other on their phones” (Smith 6). As with the Lazy River, one can apply McLuhan’s definition of media to cell phones, with the extension being that of the mouth and ears through their ability to transmit sound over great distances. The capacity of cell phones to photograph – the camera embedded in modern cell phones – constitutes another form of media that extends “our own being” through time by imprinting it upon the device to be viewed later (McLuhan 193). However, whereas the Lazy River enmeshed reality and artificiality through the perception of those who float on it, the sister’s phones are artificial creations that spread their synthetic nature such that they construct reality as artificial.

Though the narrator again focuses on how people use media, it is through how the sisters render themselves and their environment artificially real in response to the cell phones that allow for further evaluation of the fluid boundaries between real and unreal. The narrator describes the sisters framing themselves for the photograph “as they are,

and as they are not,” showing that this invocation of the artificial is an act permitted and afforded by the use of the media (Smith 6). Here, the sisters become unreal through the watchful eye of the camera, similar to how cameras and other such lenses “tend to turn people into things” (McLuhan 189). The temporary artificiality of their existence further extends into the twisting of reality and the artificial within the beach the sisters use as their backdrop. They “prep the area” of their shoot, removing what they view as unsightly, such as “stray trash, old leaves, old people,” or any elements natural to the beach that may disrupt the photograph while simultaneously adding “pink flower petals” and other props to further enhance the final product (Smith 6). To the sisters, the beach can operate as, and thus transform into, a set piece just as they are the artificial models for the photograph, the things the cell phones capture. However, this presence and use of media reconstruct the beach as the real-unreal — real in that it is a physical place capable of holding both what the sisters view as its unsightly or preferable elements, yet artificial in how the sisters’ use of the cell phones warps its physical form into the unnaturally photogenic.

Beyond the sisters’ cell phones, the narrator references “our laptops and our phones,” referring to the technological devices owned by the resort guests, forms of media that further complicate this relationship between the real and the artificial by having reality exist within artificial media (Smith 8). These devices extend the same sensory functions as cell phones, but rather than transforming the real world around them into something synthetically constructed, they link the resort guests back into a form of reality. However, this supposed reality, one referenced by the narrator stating that all those on their devices are looking “up his Twitter,” is one only made possible by the addition of more media, such as Twitter, an app that extends our written words (Smith 9). Thus, despite a real person having composed the words the guests view on their screen, the extent to which the Tweets represent reality as such is necessarily intertwined with the artificial medium one must use to write them. McLuhan writes that a medium, in this sense, does not “add itself onto what we already are,” simply acting as passive bodies to be used at our discretion, but fundamentally changes human behavior through their existence (11). This behavioral change exhibits as the users directly

shaping the reality present within media by composing a Tweet, which then changes the reality the resort guests view on their screens. In both cases, reality remains entangled with the inherent artificiality of its projection and construction through media. However, the proliferation of this synthetic reality, beyond the presence of singular mediums, results from the physical space the media exists in.

As the main vessel for media in the story, the Almerían resort itself is a location engendered by the notion that reality can be infused with synthetic leisure if a person leaves their real life for the span of several days or weeks (McLuhan 47). What the narrator calls a “getaway” – the primary activity afforded by the resort – exemplifies this entanglement of the real and artificial since, despite the impossibility of the guests truly escaping their lives as they must return eventually, the time spent at the resort provides them with the illusion of escape (Smith 4). The resort performs this feat by providing the guests with a constant stream of media, both the ones it offers as permanent fixtures within the resort and the personal media guests bring on their vacation. For the former, the resort hosts not only the Lazy River as the guests’ primary attraction but the staff who maintain it, people who operate to “clean whatever scum” the guests have left within the River (Smith 9). This maintenance the resort provides serves to enhance the fluid reality of the River, as it would, in theory, keep its appearance stable to where its artificiality remains largely ignorable, unlike when it turns green at the story’s halfway mark. In the moments when the guests become unnerved by the obviousness of the River’s man-made nature, the resort offers a setting for the latter form of media. Though the beach the sisters take their pictures on may appear natural prior to their reconfiguration of it, it still remains on the resort’s property and, therefore, holds marks of artificiality before the sisters can alter it. To make it more appealing for guests, the resort dots the beach with the “four-poster beds” the sisters use to tan themselves, their ability to make themselves artificial for the cameras aided by the resort (Smith 6). The resort, in this way, operates as a generator for this synthetic reality, supplying guests with all they need to attempt to sever themselves from the real world beyond the resort’s boundaries. However, though simply contributing to this enmeshment of the real and unreal does not mean that

guests will necessarily use the resort's or their own media, the guests still ritualistically turn to media as their sole source of comfort and entertainment within the resort.

The Lazy River presents the most apparent way in which the story explores the almost gravitational pull media exhibit over their users. The narrator describes how the guests “leave the water only to buy flotation devices” or when entering the Lazy River becomes impossible due to the resort staff shutting it down to clean it (Smith 5). In all other waking moments, the guests remain within the River, pulled along the medium's course. Though the narrator never points to a specific aspect of the Lazy River that gives it this rapturous effect, for McLuhan, it is how people use media that causes them to remain fixated on those extensions of themselves, as if the media have put them into a trance. For the media user, though they may be “fascinated by any extension” of their body, they are not aware that what they are experiencing is simply an extended portion of themselves (McLuhan 41). They view the medium they interact with as something purely external to their body, allowing for the entanglement of reality and the artificial to continue because, so long as the user believes the medium exists beyond them, it retains a sense of being real. For example, in the story, despite the narrator focusing on its presence as a metaphor, they never view the River as a part of themselves through it acting as an extension of their limbs. Instead, the narrator sees the River as a location guests can freely “climb back into” after exiting, a being separate from those who float in it (Smith 5). Their initial belief in the full reality of the River — specifically in terms of it being a physical space outside of themselves — combines with the anesthetizing effect of using the River as a means of entertainment and a way to spend their time at the resort, furthering their fixation as a result.

For every part of the body a medium extends, the user must lose a part of their physical self or prior abilities, which McLuhan refers to as “self-amputation” (42). In one sense, this amputation exists as a logical consequence of the extension, such as the resort guests losing the ability to swim through the River as those who resist the flow of the River are “swept away within the minute” of their attempt (Smith 3). It is as though their arms and legs can no longer function as they normally could outside

of the medium, their mobility severed by the River's extension of them. However, this amputation, in terms of the psychological effects media have on their users, also protects the body from the shock of extension, and the acceleration or shifting of bodily processes as a result of the extension, by numbing the user. This "numbness or blocking of perception" enhances the desirability of media, such as the "pliability and ease" of the Lazy River being preferable to the unpredictable and almost too-real ocean (McLuhan 43; Smith 7). So long as they remain in the River – or are interacting with another medium – the guests can remain numb to not just their own extension through media but also to anything more stressful than benign discomforts such as the River turning green. In this sense, media use allows the guests to focus only on the enjoyable aspects of their time at the resort, which, in turn, compels them to further turn to media as a source of comfort.

Though this fascination with and the immediate numbing effect of media prompt the resort guests to start interacting with them, what the media provide the guests escalates their usage. As a person embraces a medium and incorporates it into their life, the relationship between them and the medium becomes reciprocal, where the medium expedites their "wishes and desires," granting the user a direct benefit for their continual media usage (McLuhan 46). This desire media fulfills for the guests is the aforementioned getaway, the "holiday from life" that initially prompted them to travel to Spain to stay at the resort (Smith 5). In the case of the Lazy River, the guests achieve this removal from reality through both the perceptual numbness the River as a medium affords them and the ways in which the River acts as a barrier for having to consider the real world the guests are attempting to get away from. For instance, other than the ocean acting as a natural, unruly counterpart to the peaceful, anesthetizing River, entering the sea would force the guests to come to terms with its "overfished depths, ever-warming temperature," and the other observable effects of climate change and the sully of the environment by humans, the opposite effect the guests yearn for (Smith 7). It is thus only through remaining in the River that the narrator and the other guests can avoid imagining water as anything other than mechanical and soothing, and they can further remove themselves from the world they want a break from.

While the sisters do not avoid the beach in the way the other guests do, their use of their cell phones to take pictures, and the way they stage their environment, come from this similar desire to create the illusion of distance between themselves and the unsightly, unphotogenic world outside of the resort. The narrator assumes that their motivation to put so much labor into taking their photographs is to create a product worthy of being “liked or commented upon,” but their methods of achieving that outcome reinforce the notion that reality must either be placed aside or physically altered so that one can enjoy their vacation from it (Smith 7). For the sisters, the latter route is taken, and their recomposition of the beach works to ensure that, for all who view their photographs, there are no visuals of the pollution commonly present on tourist beaches. Similar to the guests’ aversion to the ocean, seeing litter such as a “sweet wrapper” within the photographs on their cell phones would be enough to ruin their ability to imagine themselves as separate from reality by being on this vacation (Smith 6). As such, rendering the beach as an artificial entity works not only as a facet of the media the sisters use but as a necessity so that the phones and the other media present within the resort can grant them their getaway from real life.

The phones and laptops shown at the story’s end also contribute to this realization of this wish, albeit through different means. Though consuming real-world events through the Tweets of a president may appear to contrast the desire for escapism from the Lazy River or the wish to make one’s reality artificially appealing from the cell phones, it allows guests to remain connected to the outside world while remaining a comfortable distance away from the events they read about through the Tweets. In this sense, the narrator acknowledges the impossibility of truly preventing reality from invading the resort, so how they encounter reality becomes a leisurely activity of sorts, a drip-feed of the outside world in character-limited chunks. By nature of Donald Trump being the author of the Tweets, implied by the detail that the guests have been viewing the Tweets “every night since January,” the guests are able to read his words thousands of miles away from the United States from the comfort of the resort “loungers” (Smith 9). This behavior is as routine to the guests as their interactions with the Lazy River, with the media used operating to

distance the guests as far from their real lives as they wish to be. Insofar as the words they view on their screens are made synthetic through their creation and existence on Twitter, this physical and representational distance furthers the separation between the guests and the geopolitical affairs they read about. Media offer them another layer of comfort through which they can experience reality, not as it truly is, but in a way acceptable when one does not want to directly face what lies outside of their vacation.

Much as the media within the resort aid the guests in distancing themselves from the real world they are attempting to vacation from, the resort itself acts as a barrier between the guests and reality, turning it from not only the carrier of media but a medium in its own right. Beyond providing and permitting the use of media, as a structure, the resort physically encloses the guests inside of it, ensuring that they never have to leave and face the real world if they do not wish to. McLuhan writes that “irritations” such as war, poverty, and other negative aspects of life lead to the innovation and use of media that numbs their users to harsh reality, much like the resort acts as an “extension of our skins” by protecting the guests from what lies beyond it (McLuhan 46; McLuhan 47). While traveling to the resort, the narrator notices the “polytunnels” and the “Africans who work” at the resort if only to show that they are aware of the realities of the resort; however, once safely nested within it, they do not have to focus on the migrant labor necessary to keep the resort running, so long as said workers do not interfere with their media usage (Smith 4). It is only in the moments when the narrator exits the resort that they experience the realities of those unable to escape life by going on vacation. However, hints of the resort pervade these instances, preventing the narrator from feeling too much discomfort from what they find. In the case of the “ladies who plait,” the narrator compares their experiences of immigrating to a different continent to swimming “the Lazy River backward and all the way round,” unable or unwilling to consider their plight further (Smith 8). Since contemplating how the narrator’s privilege allows them to go on a getaway that requires the labor of others would confront them with the harsh realities of not only the world but their contributions to that reality by going to the resort, the narrator must fall back onto the numbing comforts of media. They can retreat behind the

resort's protective walls and luxuriate in the media within them, able to dull the harshness of reality through the illusion of being able to momentarily escape it.

Examining the various sources of media in "The Lazy River" through the lens of McLuhan's media studies reveals the enmeshment of the real and unreal that pervades the story. Through their use of their personal sources of media, the media the resort provides, and by staying in the resort, the guests grow closer to the illusion of a getaway from their real lives. The narrator and the other guests become enraptured by these media as they not only numb themselves from the world beyond the resort but aid in their wish to only experience reality as something comfortable and able to be consumed or warped at their discretion.

#### Works Cited

- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Smith, Zadie. "The Lazy River." *The New Yorker*, 11 Dec. 2017, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/the-lazy-river](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/the-lazy-river)



# Grege La Spina's "The Tortoise-Shell Cat": American Imperialist Collection of Frozen Youth

By Racquel Nassor

"The Tortoise-Shell Cat" by Grege La Spina demonstrates the way a collection of modernist bildungsroman figures can create a colonially impacted American imperialist space. In La Spina's short story, letters from Althea and journal entries from her cousin Edgar follow a young girl, Vida, who shifts into a cat that steals jewelry in the dormitory. Vida's maid, Jinny, uses voodoo to control her, the daughter of the man who let Jinny's husband be sold to another plantation when he was wrongly accused of theft. I argue that "The Tortoise-Shell Cat" by Grege La Spina, originally published in 1924 *Weird Tales* magazine, is a modernist text, refuting Adorno and Horkheimer's Marxist claim that mass culture inherently produces capitalist enthrallment (94-95). Modernist scholars refute the false divide between modernism and mass culture. Indeed, many note that modernist discussion can include mass culture.<sup>3</sup> This modernist lens reveals the way La Spina characterizes Althea, Edgar, and Jinny as a collection of modernist bildungsroman figures who cannot become national citizens and inhabit an American imperialist space where good and evil become ambiguous.

Understanding Grege La Spina with a modernist lens requires a breakdown of the "Great Divide" between high and low culture in modernist literature. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Adorno and Horkheimer argue "all mass culture under monopoly is identical, and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual

---

<sup>3</sup> In "A Weird Modernist Archive: Pulp Fiction, Pseudobiblia, H. P. Lovecraft" Leif Sorensen argues H. P. Lovecraft should be included in discussions of modernist writing because *Weird Tales* magazine operates as a modernist text archive by creating intertextual references between stories in the magazine (502-503).

armature fabricated by monopoly stand out” (95).<sup>4</sup> Under this structure, a public mentality creates the culture industry that creates a system (Adorno and Horkheimer 96). This Marxist understanding that mass culture is separate from art creates, what Andreas Huyssen defines as, a “Great Divide” (viii). He also agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer’s assessment that mass culture relies on mass production, mass reproduction, and homogenization of difference (Huyssen 9). Huyssen further impresses the idea that there is a distinction between high art and mass culture is born out of an “inherent hostility between high and low” (viii).<sup>5</sup> In the absence of the divide between high and low culture in modernist literature, “The Tortoise-Shell Cat” by Grege La Spina can be considered a modernist text.

It is important to note, however, that this approach to erasing the divide between high and low culture to consider prior popular literature as part of the modernist canon is not new. In discussing the place of Gertrude Stein’s modernist and popular writing, Matthew Levay proposes dismantling the divide between popular culture and modernism (1-3).<sup>6</sup> James O’Sullivan has also come to a similar conclusion that there is no clear divide between modernist literature and mass media examining Joyce and Elliot’s work (284). As a basis of my analysis of the false divide between mass culture and modernism, I employ O’Sullivan’s assessment that not all mass culture is popular and not everything popular is produced en-mass in my argument (285). Further, Karen Leick uses a historical approach to examine news media surrounding modernism and found

---

<sup>4</sup> The standards of mass culture are created based on consumer need so “they are accepted with little resistance” (Adorno and Horkheimer 95).

<sup>5</sup> Discussion of Adorno and Horkheimer’s mass culture argument as well as Huyssen’s “Great Divide” establish the basis for debates in modernism concerning the inclusion or exclusion of lowbrow literature, popular culture, or mass culture.

<sup>6</sup> He cites Huyssen’s argument that “‘an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture’—has borne the brunt of repeated critique over the course of the last few years, as numerous critics have argued vigorously for a conception of modernism that does not exclude mass and commercial culture, but instead utilizes such a culture for its own ends” (Levay 5).

modernist authors were part of popular culture, and their work was widely discussed (126-127).<sup>7</sup> Her examination of the presence of modernist texts in popular discussion supports James O’Sullivan’s assertion “mass media played a central role in the ‘high modernism’ of the inter-war era” (283). While O’Sullivan, Levey, and Leick provide useful tools to look at authors within the canon, their approach is also important for looking at authors outside the canon, like Greye La Spina.

I argue that a confusion of categories inhibits the ability to work with post-emancipation and post-colonial modernist texts dismissed as lowbrow literature, popular culture, or mass culture. Highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow are an indication of class. Popular fiction and mass culture are two separate ideas: where consumers define popular fiction through readership, conditions of production define mass culture (O’Sullivan 285-286). Ultimately, modernism operates separately from class distinctions, reception, and production. The exclusionary argument that mass culture cannot be a part of modernist literature is a distraction from the totality of post-emancipation and post-colonial modernist writing. In Everil Worrell’s *The Women of Weird Tales*, she notes, women writing for *Weird Tales* between 1923-1954 are part of a group of genre fiction writers who’ve gone unread due to a dismissal of their work by the academy (1-7). The lack of textual discussion produces myths about women writing for pulp magazines “that they didn’t exist at all, or always had to use male pseudonyms, or had to write narratives similar to what men were publishing at the time” (Worrell 7).<sup>8</sup> La Spina is one of the many

---

<sup>7</sup> Karen Leick notes even though the circulation of modernist books and little magazines may have been small, the discussion of those texts “dominated the mainstream press” as the public “closely followed news about writers” (Leick 126).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, she is one of few scholars to detail Greye La Spina’s life “born in Massachusetts, she worked in New York City as a photographer and stenographer, and then ended up in a small town in Pennsylvania where she took up weaving as a hobby” (Worrell 7). The lack of information on Greye La Spina proves Worrell’s assertion that a lack of

authors modernist critics exclude from discussion because her work is popular and thus outside the bounds of modernist critique. “The Tortoise-Shell Cat” by Greye La Spina, with both modernist collection practices and the modernist bildungsroman as she unpacks the role of the eternal student, eternal boy-detective, and colonially displaced, post-emancipation working and serving class who cannot grow into national citizens in a space with the ambiguity of good and evil.

The bildungsroman follows the maturation of a young person coming-of-age into a national citizen (Esty 1, 5). In *Unseasonable Youth*, Jed Esty argues imperialist colonization stops the growth of bildungsroman because a person separated from a nation cannot become a national citizen (2-3). In Esty’s modernist bildungsroman, the modernist distortion of an imperial colonial presence creates character agelessness resulting in a rejection of maturation, including the development of heterosexual desire and growth into national citizenship (13-14). Interestingly, in “Modernism and Imperialism,” Fredric Jameson examines imperialist colonial systems resulting in meaning-loss where the economic system is “located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country,” causing disjunction between the ruling class and the people they regulate (157). Extending Jameson’s meaning-loss to a post-emancipation working class made up of formerly enslaved people facilitates an ability to recognize the effects of colonization in modernist texts as persistent ambiguity. Workers in an extension of plantation work conditions bring their home countries as well as a distorted colonial space with them and are refused the option of becoming national citizens. Misunderstanding modernist boundaries results in an under examination of “middlebrow detours” unpacking imperialist colonization appearing in post-emancipation workspaces (Esty 3). Althea, Edgar, and Jinny act as modernist bildungsroman figures inhabiting the extension of disruptive plantation work conditions American imperialism establishes.

---

academic interest in pulp magazines has led to the relative disappearance of these texts.

La Spina presents both a modernist collection of archival texts as well as a collection of modernist bildungsroman protagonists. Jeremy Braddock's *Collecting as Modernist Practice* establishes a method of examining modernist literature through a modernist collecting aesthetic (1-3).<sup>9</sup> Further, he identifies the literary anthology as a form of modernist collection, whose inclusions were restrictive, synthetic, and enabling as the collector defines the parameters of modernism with the collection (Braddock 3). Following the approach of the modernist collection, La Spina gathers excerpts from Althea's letters and her cousin Captain Edgar's notebook. Both the letters and notes lack the date, specifically rejecting time in both forms of writing. The temporal rejection in the collection of papers mirrors the same rejection in La Spina's collection of non-temporal modernist characters Althea, Edgar, and Jinny, who inhabit a space disrupted by American imperialism.

With the movement of servants in the text, La Spina expands the post-emancipation plantation space and stops time. Vida establishes an extension of the plantation space when she moves to her dorm as the daughter of "a rich Louisiana planter" (La Spina 96). Vida provides the furniture with her father's money (La Spina 96). Later, "Vida's old colored mammy, Jinny," comes to the dorms to do her laundry (La Spina 98). When Jinny takes Vida's laundry, she goes to the "negro quarters" in Pine Valley, recognizing segregation in the expansion of the post-emancipation working class (La Spina 102). When Vida moves from school to school, she extends the boundaries of the post-emancipation plantation vocational space. Cousin Edgar also extends these boundaries with Peter. He has "old Peter with him" when he decides to settle in the area and uncover the mystery (La Spina 100). Peter's role is not made explicit; however, he is in Edgar's service. Jameson also looks at the imperialist dynamics of

---

<sup>9</sup> La Spina's short story was circulated in the November 1924 edition of *Weird Tales* magazine. In "Fiction, 1895-1926" Mark Bould also notes magazines like *Weird Tales* shaped and defined the concept of genre by collecting stories in combination (30-31). Following this new approach to *Weird Tales* as a modernist collection, one can examine the individual texts within the magazine.

capitalism that produces modernist literature, where even metropolitan literature can show signs of colonial structures (154). Both Vida and Edgar extend the colonial structure of the plantation and effectively freeze the text, producing a collection of modernist bildungsroman figures.

La Spina uses Althea to characterize an inability to learn as the eternal student who cannot clarify ambiguity. The expansion of the plantation space in her dormitory inhibits her ability to learn and grow into a national citizen. Although she is at school, her letters exclusively detail the dormitories. Althea notes, “Studies are going along nicely” once, referring to her education (La Spina 96). However, despite her time at school, she is unable to process information and develop conclusions made with assertion. La Spina implements hyphens to avoid concluding thoughts abruptly, instead moving into descriptions that evade truth (96, 97, 98, 99, 100).

In Althea’s private letters, she demonstrates consistent self-doubt around perceptions of “queer” and “odd” occurrences as her roommate Vida disappears and, in her place, a cat appears (La Spina 96 - 99). She cannot trust her senses or the deductions she makes from them. She notes, “perhaps I’m only imagining things, anyway” (La Spina 96). The threat of laughter impedes Althea’s ability to come to her own conclusions linking Vida, the cat, and the items going missing in their dormitory (La Spina 97). Instead, Althea continuously asks for advice as she admits to her mother,

I don’t know whether or not I ought to report the whole thing to Miss Annette; I’m afraid she’ll think I’m romancing... Won’t you please write me and tell me what to do?... please write me soon and tell me what I ought to do ... If I went to Miss Annette with such a statement, she’d think...I was simple (La Spina 98-99).

La Spina demonstrates ambiguity and uncertainty using a series of questions. Althea cannot form conclusions because neither her education nor her mentors enable her to trust her vision. Instead, Althea is an eternal student whose educational development is not given to her and is unable to

mature into a national citizen as one in a collection of modernist bildungsroman figures.

La Spina adds Captain Edgar into the collection as a figure of frozen youth, the eternal boy-detective. Edgar is frozen in ambiguity and is unable to mature because we do not know his age or where he is in his maturation. Further, as a modernist bildungsroman figure, Edgar evades his future as a mature adult through the denial of his heterosexual destiny. Althea misinterprets her cousin Edgar's interest in her all-girls dormitory as romantic attraction, believing he has "fallen in love with one of the girls" (La Spina 100). Edgar's journal reveals he has no romantic feelings for the girls; instead, he's looking to uncover evil magic (La Spina 103). He is a detective whose investigation is ambiguous and whose conclusions are inconclusive. Edgar's prior ambiguous experience with witches is mentioned, demonstrating that he eschews personal responsibility in favor of endless, youthful investigations (La Spina 102). In a way, he acts as a figure of justice who cannot see the broader context of harm surrounding the current crime. As a result, he cannot recognize the importance of actions that diverge from the narrative he has created, where Vida is evil. At one point, the captain notes, "my old black Peter" was embracing Jinny, the target of his investigation (La Spina 104). When he sees heterosexual affection, he is "furious" because it diverges from his goals to find out what Jinny has to do with Vida, the cat, and the missing jewelry (La Spina 104). Presenting Edgar as an ambiguous youth with an ambiguous background adds a confusion of the self to this understanding of frozen youth, a modernist character type where a young person is stuck in immaturity, as well as national citizenship.

Finally, La Spina uses Jinny, Vida's black maid, to examine the colonially displaced, post-emancipation working and serving class who cannot become national citizens in her collection of modernist bildungsroman figures. Unlike Althea and Edgar, who enter into an extension of plantation spaces where time is frozen, Vida's job continuously stops her growth. La Spina uses magic, freezing Jinny in time to signify the way revenge freezes her life in place and halts her

development when her husband, Peter, is sold to another plantation for a crime he did not commit. She is frozen in place practicing dark magic, remaining motionless for “two hours,” actively stopping the plot (La Spina 102).<sup>10</sup> Edgar notes she defies his expectations of being a “decerped old creature” as a “tall, handsome mulatto woman with flashing eyes that hold a strange magnetism” (La Spina 101). She is a frozen figure shifting between youthful determination and sudden maturation, demonstrating the way her pursuit of revenge preserves her youth. Likewise, Jinny has deep wrinkles “etched by character of her thoughts rather than by the hand of time” (La Spina 101-102). Jinny’s face defies expectation and time. La Spina insists Jinny’s work conditions as a colonially displaced, post-emancipation character develops into pursuing revenge, halting Jinny’s bildungsroman development.

Although revenge inhibits Jinny’s development, Edgar is unable to recognize her motivation in an ambiguous American imperialist space producing a meaning-loss between the imperial ruler and colonial subject. La Spina uses Captain Edgar to examine a confusion of good and evil in post-emancipation imperialist America, where plantation work conditions, not magic, are the real source of evil in the story. Jameson notes that “colonial appropriation” creates a space where the imperial nation-state can subsume and civilize the colonial other for their benefit (156-157). Jameson specifically looks at “the imperialist dynamic of capitalism proper,” where imperialism creates an unimaginable totality of colonial others (154). Edgar fails to recognize the life of Jinny, the colonial other, and the negative effects of plantation work conditions as the source of evil in the text. When Edgar arrives at Althea’s school, he immediately concludes, “the only clue that presented itself” is “the old colored

---

<sup>10</sup> In the Introduction to *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult*, Leigh Wilson argues modernism draws on occult discourse like spiritualism and theosophy because writers “saw the possibilities for a reconceptualization of the mimetic” (1). The occult and magical thinking were important during the time period and produced modernist texts that fundamentally changes modernist artistic practices (Wilson 1-2).



mammy” (La Spina 101). Edgar misidentifies Jinny as a “queer character” who disrupts the dormitory space asserting she practices “voodoo, pure and simple, with a taint of the devil that is unpleasant” (La Spina 101, 103). Edgar recognizes magic, makes a cat appear where Vida was standing, and links it to Jinny. However, he never links her practice of magic to a revenge plot that will reunite Jinny with her husband, Peter, Edgar’s own servant. Edgar is part of a modernist bildungsroman collection that cannot understand good and evil in a colonially defined ambiguous space.

In “Vodou and History,” Laurent Dubois notes that practicing religions like Vodou (or voodoo) “was one way of fighting against the dehumanization of this system, of creating relationships and possibilities that the system consistently sought to shut down” (93-94). La Spina’s depiction of Hattian voodoo follows this tradition; it is only Edgar’s distorted view of the world that misidentifies this practice as evil. It is impossible to effectively detect good and evil as well as recognize cause and consequence under American imperialism.<sup>11</sup> Instead of recognizing colonial structures, Edgar describes “an innocent young white girl who has somehow fallen under [Jinny’s] dominant will-power” (La Spina 103).

---

<sup>11</sup> Nicole M. Rizzuto explores the role of history in the representation of Afro-Caribbean religion and magic in *Insurgent Testimonies: Witnessing Colonial Trauma in Modern and Anglophone Literature* (128-130). She examines the way text identifies and misidentifies magic as a way of exploring the effects of colonization in the depiction of religious laws and regulations (Rizzuto 140-143). Her approach to looking at the way historical events impact the depiction of Afro-Creole religions in texts opens up the ability to discuss the relationship between magic in text and Afro-Caribbean history. Likewise in *The Tortoise-Shell Cat*, historical magics are displaced from their country of origin and cultural-historical moment. Jinny is from Jamaica, but practices Hattian Vodou (or voodoo), displaying either a misunderstanding of Caribbean cultural practices or an awareness enslaved people from different islands share ritualistic practices in either pre- or post-emancipation work environments. This discussion of Afro-Caribbean magic establishes the basis for my understanding of the displacing effects of colonialism in the magic in the text.

When a country raises citizens to understand the world through a single narrative of American progress, characters like Edgar cannot recognize the harm that perpetuates in the aftermath of progressive actions like the emancipation of enslaved Americans. Edgar fails to detect the problem and misidentifies the magic because post-emancipation imperialist America distorts perception.

Additionally, the modernist collection creates a space where La Spina rejects Edgar's definition of evil in the text by denying traditional plot development and leaving all characters unpunished. Jinny is seen with a "fine collection of rings" described as "plunder," and yet, she continues to act as a maid and live in a "squalid cabin" (La Spina 102). She does not claim any financial benefit from the stolen items, nor does she escape her poor living circumstances. Instead of considering her future plans, she is heard muttering her regret and asking Vida for forgiveness (La Spina 102). The evil nature of Jinny's magic is imparted again and again; however, this reveals Edgar's misunderstanding (La Spina 102-104). The captain misidentifies the source of evil in the text, and so La Spina denies traditional plot development that would punish evil actions, further insisting on the ambiguity that comes from imperialist colonial spaces where meaning-loss occurs between the colonizers and the colonized.

Likewise, as formerly enslaved people who've experienced colonial spaces through enslavement, both Jinny and Peter are unable to communicate with national powers. Both detail an inability to communicate Peter's innocence to any authority on the plantation, a stand-in for American imperialist authority, unable to properly govern a group whose needs cannot be understood (La Spina 104). Jinny's only available avenue is revenge through employment as Vida's caretaker, where she turns Vida into a cat who steals jewelry (La Spina 104). A set of actions easier than obtaining justice from American imperialist authority. Jinny receives no punishment. Instead, Peter and Jinny return to Jamaica, resuming married life when they leave the American imperialist landscape and return home to the site of their nation-formation (La Spina 104). Jinny is a modernist bildungsroman figure of the colonially displaced who

cannot experience maturation until she leaves an extension of plantation post-emancipation work conditions that stop her development. Likewise, she is an example of the way colonization and colonial enslavement inhibits the lives of everyone subjected to it.

A confusion of categories has occurred in modernist discourse leading to an artificial divide between modernism and mass culture, as well as an under-examination of modernist texts discussing a post-emancipation American working class. La Spina uses Althea, Edgar, and Jinny as a collection of modernist bildungsroman figures who, disrupted by an extension of plantation work conditions established by American imperialism, cannot become national citizens or determine good from evil in an ambiguous space. The eternal student and eternal boy-detective are modernist bildungsroman figures of frozen youth who cannot receive an education and resist marriage, respectively. Ultimately, the forced migration of enslaved people under American imperialism and maintained post-emancipation vocational spaces create modernist bildungsroman figures who cannot develop into national citizens. The collection of modernist bildungsroman figures inhabits an ambiguous space where good cannot be determined from evil, and the effects of American imperialism are unidentifiable in “The Tortoise-Shell Cat” by Grege La Spina.

#### Works Cited

- Bould, Mark, et al. “Fiction, 1895-1926.” *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Routledge, New York, NY, 2009, pp. 21–31.
- Braddock, Jeremy. “Introduction: Collections Mediation Modernism.” *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2011, pp. 1–28, Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.
- Dubois, Laurent. “Vodou and History.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2001, pp. 92–100. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417501003590>.

- Esty, Jed. "Introduction Scattered Souls-The Bildungsroman and Colonial Modernity." *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 1–38.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. "Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments." *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, Jephcott, Edmund, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 94–136.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Modernism and Imperialism." *The Modernist Papers*, Verso, 2007, pp. 152–67.
- La Spina, Greye. "The Tortoise-Shell Cat." *Weird Tales*, Nov. 1924, pp. 96–104. *Hathitrust*, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435074078585&view=1up&seq=9&skin=2021>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2021.
- Leick, Karen. "Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 123, no. 1, Modern Language Association of America, 2008, pp. 125–39, doi:10.1632/pmla.2008.123.1.125.
- Levay, Matthew. "Remaining a Mystery: Gertrude Stein, Crime Fiction and Popular Modernism." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 4, Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.36.4.1>.
- O'Sullivan, James. "Modernist Intermediality: The False Dichotomy Between High Modernism and Mass Culture." *English Studies*, vol.

98, no. 3, Routledge, 2017, pp. 283–309,  
doi:10.1080/0013838X.2016.1246136.

Rizzuto, Nicole M. *Insurgent Testimonies: Witnessing Colonial Trauma in Modern and Anglophone Literature*. Fordham University Press, 2015.

Sorensen, Leif. “A Weird Modernist Archive: Pulp Fiction, Pseudobiblia, H. P. Lovecraft.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2010, pp. 501–22. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2010.0007>.

Worrell, Everil, et al. *The Women of Weird Tales*. Valancourt Books, 2020.

Wilson, Leigh. “Introduction.” *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult*, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 1–21.



# Irish hands in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*

By Kavita Premkumar

Literary scholarship for Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854) tends to focus on examination of labor relations in the novel, often overlooking the deliberate presence of Irish workers and the role they play in worsening the conditions for characters in the novel. Building from previous critical accounts that note the Irish presence and dominant narratives about Irish immigrants in the Victorian era, this paper aims to examine Gaskell's characterization and inclusion of Irish characters. I argue that Gaskell deliberately includes Irish characters drawn along stereotypically negative lines and Irish "scabs" or strikebreakers to place the novel's exploration of politics in conversation with the politics of the Irish Question — the question of Ireland's status and rights within the United Kingdom. Through this inclusion of Irish characters, Gaskell offers a solution to the threat that Irish immigrant presence poses to English nationalism and sense of identity. Locating the novel as participating in the genre of conduct literature — offering models for her Victorian readers' conduct (behavior) — allows for critical interpretation of Gaskell's expectations of her model English characters. Gaskell builds from England's foreign policy stance of paternalism to Ireland to proffer "factory paternalism," grounded in middle-class relationships to servants, as her solution to the problem the presence of the Irish poses to English national identity.

*North and South* unites the characteristics of the "social-problem" novel with the romantic plotline, ultimately suggesting that Gaskell is creating a model for expected English, female, middle-class interaction with 'insidious' Irish immigrants. In the novel, Gaskell chooses to unite the political actions and opinions of her heroine, Margaret Hale, with her sexuality. Margaret is a heroine described by Sharpe as Gaskell's revision to the ideas of "recessive, sentimental, middle-class femininity" (Sharpe 207). Margaret is both the heroine of the romantic plotline and the

“social-problem” plotline. At the conclusion to the novel, when Margaret marries Thornton, she resolves her romantic plotline. This marriage also resolves the “social-problem” plotline, as their marriage is contingent upon Thornton’s acceptance of her moral values concerning the workers. Through this blending of the heroine’s political opinion and her marital choices, Gaskell’s novel begins to read didactically. Gaskell, with her novel and heroine, is pointing to the unique, powerful role she believes the role a woman can play in the understanding and amelioration of worker-employer relationships as well as the widening sphere of influence available to the middle-class woman. Therefore, Margaret’s advocacy for a form of “factory paternalism” from Thornton, where she suggests he needs to treat the workers as though they are his domestic servants, is really Gaskell’s suggestion of a possible ideal solution to the problem of Irish immigration.

An epigraph included in the novel, taken from “Corn Law Rhymes,” situates the novel firmly as participating in the politics surrounding the Corn Laws (Gaskell 417). The Corn Laws were established after the Napoleonic wars, to limit imports of grain into England. In the years leading up to the writing of the novel in 1845, the English parliament was discussing the repealing of the tariffs put in place by the Corn Laws, finally abolishing them in 1846 following the Great Irish famine (Mitchel, 1; *UK Parliament*). The repealing of these duties was largely opposed by English people engaged in agriculture in any context, but tended to be supported by those involved in the manufacturing and trade sectors. The repeal of the Corn Laws, allegedly to support Ireland as well as themselves, is a facet of England’s general “paternalistic,” foreign policy concerning Ireland. Despite incorporating Ireland in 1801, Victorian English opinion of Irish people was as an inferior race separate from the English. In the novel *North and South*, Gaskell draws on this understanding of Irish as race — one separate and inferior to the English — to construct the place of her Irish characters with relation to her English characters.

Manchester and the fictional location of the novel, Milton-Northern, bear enough similarity to one another that most critics assume that the two towns are identical. At the time of writing the novel,



Elizabeth Gaskell was a resident of Manchester. As a rapidly growing urban industrial center of Great Britain, Manchester was increasingly attractive to potential migrants (Busteed 9). The most concentrated Irish migration to Manchester occurred between 1845 and 1852, a few years before the novel was written, with Irish-born people making up about 15.2% of Manchester's population according to the 1851 census (Busteed 9). This mass migration of Irish people to her home city would mean that Gaskell would come into contact with the prevailing opinion of Irish migration, the most popular opinion being that they were a detriment to the stability of the English nation. Dr. James Kay, a doctor in Manchester, published a widely-read pamphlet in 1832 about the Irish being a detriment to Manchester's rapid growth and position as the first great manufacturing center of the industrial revolution (Bradshaw 1987; Busteed, 1996:141; Kay 1832; Selleck 1994). Kay asserted, in this pamphlet, that the Irish were in a "lower state of civilisation," and were blamed for "providing the native working class with an all too attractive example of how to spend a minimal amount on housing, clothing and furniture, save nothing and dissipate the remainder on alcohol" (Kay, 1832; Busteed, 1996:12). Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish historian, expresses similar opinions in his 1840 work *Chartism*, saying, "in his squalor and unreason, in his falsity and drunken violence" the Irishman constituted "the ready-made nucleus of degradation and disorder," (Carlyle, 1829; Smith, 2014:*Abstract*). Charles Dickens, a close contemporary of Gaskell, drew inspiration from another of Carlyle's works, supporting the possibility that Gaskell likely came into direct contact with Carlyle's statements in *Chartism* (Dickens 14). Echoes of these sentiments can be seen in Gaskell's creation of her Irish characters.

The poor Irish Boucher family that Margaret attempts to vigorously pull into her philanthropic circle, are deliberately not created in the image of the pious, grateful, "deserving poor" of the Victorian imagination, while the English Higgins family are. John Boucher, the father of the family, the Irish character with the most substantial space devoted to him in the novel, is drawn along stereotypically negative Irish lines. When he is first introduced, the key characteristics attributed to him is that he is bad at his work and has a large family. Higgins, a sympathetic

English factory worker, describes him as a “poor good-for-nought, as can only manage two looms at a time,” and a “weak kind of chap,” (Gaskell 248, 288). “Weak kind of chap,” indicates both Boucher’s physical weakness, a detriment in the factory, and implies a weakness of moral character. Even Higgins’ young and sickly daughter, Bessy, is dismissive of Boucher’s character, saying “all folks isn’t wise, yet God lets ‘em live,” (Gaskell 288). Gaskell’s portrayal of Boucher is built from the prevailing opinions that the Irish were bad “hands,” that is, bad at their work. Boucher, therefore, is neither a support to the masters, being bad at his work, nor a support to Higgins and the union, shown as dubious about the union’s ability to help him and his children. Boucher is not merely dubious of the Union, but is actively detrimental to the union’s cause as well during the riot. Gaskell, as established by Cammack, is drawing from the Preston strike to create her riot at Milton (Cammack 114). Gaskell places Boucher, an Irish worker, against the Irish strikebreakers, in a violent deviation from the real events at Preston that creates a link between the Irish and violent behavior. When Margaret spies Boucher’s face in the crowd at the riot, she describes him as, “livid with rage,” hammering home this impression (Gaskell 326). Placing Boucher at the head of the English factory workers, the only recognizable face in the crowd, makes him a character that plays directly into Thomas Carlyle’s assertion in *Chartism* of a prevailing fear of Irish migration, that the Irish threat could pull Englishmen “from decent manhood into squalid apehood” (28). The Irish presence within the factory workers, represented by Boucher, is made a cause of instability – the cause of the strike becoming a riot. After the riot, Bessy quotes her father as saying, “He’d show the world that th’ real leaders o’ the strike were not such as Boucher, but steady thoughtful men; good hands, and good citizens,” (Gaskell 373). Higgins referring to Boucher with these words suggests that Boucher is the opposite - not capable of steady thought, not a good worker, and most significantly, not a citizen. Higgins’ suggestion that the leaders of the strike are “good citizens” is a textual reminder of Boucher’s nationality. Higgins refers to Boucher as “Judas,” a Biblical reference that suggests how Boucher has caused betrayal from within (Gaskell 373, 547). Boucher is also likened to a “weed” by Higgins, phrasing that is suggestive of Boucher’s negative

influence spreading rapidly (Gaskell 546) Higgins suggests “daisy” as a metaphor then dismisses it, deliberately selecting “weed” instead. Daisy would suggest Boucher’s frailness, but “weed” suggests that Boucher has a certain strength in propagating negatively (Gaskell 546). The word “weed” suggests a threat to production, agricultural rather than industrial, but nevertheless suggests the threat that Boucher poses to both facets of English society, the workers and the masters. This suggestion of the threat Boucher poses places the novel in conversation with the Corn Laws yet again.

When Mr. Hale and Margaret discuss Higgins and Thornton, they bring up Boucher’s weakness again, this time in direct comparison to the two English workers:

“There’s granite in all these northern people, papa, is there not?”

“There was none in poor Boucher, I’m afraid; none in his poor wife either.”

“I should guess from their tones that they had Irish blood in them.” (Gaskell 575).

“Granite,” here, is spoken with reference to the English factory worker, Higgins, and is suggestive of the strength of the English and their ability to bear the hardships necessitated by the industrialization of their nation.

“Northern people,” in this context, indicates northern English people, like Higgins and Thornton, who the two were just discussing. Higgins is the first to utter the distinction he sees between people from the north and the south of England. This differentiation plays into the current running through the novel of the internal conflict of England as a nation struggling to form a clear sense of internal unity in the Victorian era, where Ireland and Irish immigrants remain on the outside. The Boucher family not having “granite” in them comes down to their “Irish blood.” That is, Gaskell implies that the family is weak because they are Irish, and Boucher’s suicide drives home his impression of their weakness.

John Boucher’s wife, Mrs. Boucher, allows for the perpetuation of further stereotypes of the Irish, specifically the belief that the Irish were not the “deserving poor,” and they had contributed to their destitute

position. When Mrs. Hale first hears of the poverty-stricken Bouchers, she asks Margaret to make up a basket. The Hale family grows briefly doubtful about the implications the basket would have politically, given Thornton's stern statement that aiding the turn-outs would simply prolong the strike. This doubt is dismissed by Mr. Hale's account of the situation and the Hale family immediately dismisses their initial fear of the Bouchers' situation. Their sympathy for the poor people at Helstone and the Higgins family vanishes and is replaced by vague suspicion that the Boucher family does not even require the simple support of a basket. Given that the economic situation grows so bad that Boucher eventually commits suicide out of an inability to provide for his family, the Hale family is clearly mistaken in this belief. Mr. Hale's account suggests that the contents were "lavishly used by the children," with no member of the Hale family appearing to note that the young children were given free reign over the valuable gift of food because their parents were both unavailable (Gaskell 293). While the children were fed "lavishly" from the basket that day, their poverty is suggestive of a lack of consistent food, and adult supervision would likely have meant the provisions from the basket being used to supplement meals for a longer period of time. Mr. Hale's "consoling and cheerful account," includes Mr. Hale's comparison between the Boucher family and the families at Helstone, where the family used to reside (Gaskell 293). He says:

"But I will go again, and see the man himself,' said Mr. Hale. 'I hardly know as yet how to compare one of these houses with our Helstone cottages. I see furniture here which our labourers would never have thought of buying, and food commonly used which they would consider luxuries; yet for these very families there seems no other resource, now that their weekly wages are stopped, but the pawn-shop,'" (Gaskell 294)

While these lines are a general reflection on the different standards in the two English cities, it is particularly key that this reflection is made immediately after Mr. Hale visits the Irish family. These lines are suggestive of his observation and belief that the Boucher family is bad with money, buying furniture and food they cannot afford and resorting to the pawn-shop when they run out of money, once again reflecting popular

Irish stereotypes. The Hale family does continue to provide their time and attention to the Boucher family, but at no other point do they suggest providing food or other resources to the Irish family again, suggesting their belief that the family did not truly require the handout. Mrs. Boucher and her family are therefore conveniently placed outside Margaret's circle of successful philanthropy. As a model of an English middle-class woman, Margaret will continue to visit the family and attempt to do good, but these lines suggest she thinks she will be unsuccessful with her attempts. In her examination of the changing English perceptions of the Irish in the Victorian era, Traci Scully suggests, "Ghettos, disease and poverty became synonymous with the Irish people, thus laying the groundwork for the middle class to conveniently strike this biologically poverty-stricken race from their charitable guilt," (*Abstract*). The Hale family's choice to no longer provide the Irish family with food suggests that the two families are playing out this precise model - they have been given an excuse to strike the Irish family from their "charitable guilt" as a middle-class family.

Mrs. Boucher, the wife and mother, begins to serve as a contrast to Mrs. Hale. From a surface-level reading, the characters appear similar, two deeply ill mothers transplanted from their home, struggling with their husband's inability to appropriately provide for their family. Margaret hurries to look after her mother when she discovers her mother's illness but critics have read nothing but disdain for Mrs. Boucher's illness (Steele 32). Mrs. Boucher's expression of grief, despite bearing similarities to Mrs. Hale's grief, is not treated with similar sympathy. Gaskell's portrayal of Mrs. Boucher's reaction after her husband's suicide is decidedly unsympathetic. Margaret's internal reflections on the woman's grief, as expressed by Gaskell, suggest that Mrs. Boucher's grief is "unsatisfactory," "unreasonable," and "selfish" in Margaret's view, with only slight suggestions of sympathy for her position as a mother of eight children with a dead husband (Gaskell 559, 561, 560). Gaskell also hints at the gulf of religion between the English and the Irish, when Mr. Hale's ministries to the widow, encouraging her to take comfort in the existence of God, fall short. Even though Mr. Hale himself has engaged in questioning of the doctrines of the Church, Mrs. Boucher's questioning is dismissed as "torpid" despite her turbulent emotional state (Gaskell 560).

The dismissed frailty of Mrs. Boucher's illness casts Margaret as even more of a Wollstonecraftian heroine. Margaret's capability, compassion, and selflessness is remarked on repeatedly, from her parents to the doctor telling her of her mother's sickness. Wollstonecraft urges women to "acquire strength, both of mind and body," and move away from "epithets of weakness" like "susceptibility of heart." Margaret becomes a model of rational womanhood, capable of suppressing her emotions to successfully perform social functions required of her. She is placed against the vivid Irish emotional grief, the "susceptibility of heart" that Mrs. Boucher gives in to. In a similar manner to her husband, Mrs. Boucher begins to serve as a platform for the perpetuation of negative Irish stereotypes.

In addition to the unsavory portrait of the family, the children are described unfeelingly while grieving their father, with Gaskell suggesting that "their brains were dull and languid of perception," (553). Gaskell seems to be implying that the children, rather than being young and therefore not comprehending death yet, are instead biologically "dull" and "languid," stereotypically the "lazy" Irish before even being old enough to work. Through the Irish Boucher family, Gaskell has drawn a deeply unsympathetic portrait of a weak, cowardly father; a frail, selfish mother and dull, languid children.

Through this unsympathetic portrait, the Irish family's need for help is highlighted. The Hale family initially dismisses the Boucher family after the sending of the basket, but Mr. Hale and Margaret's attendance to Mrs. Boucher and the children after Mr. Boucher's suicide allows them to understand how the Hales might have been mistaken in their first impression of the family, and begin to understand the Irish family as one in need of support from the English to survive and succeed. "And yet we dare not leave her without our efforts, although they may seem so useless," says Margaret after visiting the family after Boucher's death, establishing the position Gaskell believes English people must take with regard to the Irish (Gaskell 741). That is, Margaret's statement can be broadened as making a statement about the conduct of all English people towards all Irish immigrants, that the English cannot "dare" to leave the Irish without their efforts of improvement, no matter how useless they may seem. Through the fleshed-out Boucher family, Gaskell lays a

foundation for questioning the possible nefarious influence the Irish might have as part of the English community, but truly drives it home through the Irish strikebreakers. Gaskell uses them as a platform to allow Margaret to begin to ideate a change in approach to the other Irish workers that could allow for positive Irish assimilation.

The only other Irish characters in the book besides the Boucher family are the mass of Irish workers brought in to break the strike. Gaskell deliberately opens the chapter containing the riot scene with a quotation from “Corn Law Rhymes,” that includes the phrase, “Irish hordes,” to characterize the Irish workers that serve as strikebreakers (320). The use of the word, “hordes” creates the impression of a vast, faceless, uncivilized, depersonalized group. None of these workers are granted the space of a personal narrative like the Higgins or Boucher family, and therefore none of these workers are cast in the same light of pity. “Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of their bread,” writes Gaskell, villainizing the Irish workers (329). Severed from the conditions under which they are willing to accept lower wages than English workers, they become a faceless mass betrayal of the factory workers. Scully writes, “While Gaskell can find pity in the lives of the individual workers, such as the Higgins family, the Irish represent the ultimate betrayal,” (135). Bringing in Irish workers to break the strike in *North and South* makes them appear as the cause of instability within the English Industrial Revolution, rather than internal conflict about the value of labor. As Mary Jean Corbett argues, “Thornton and the English workers are linked across their differences of class position in their assessment of the Irish, augmenting the sense that expelling the Irish is necessary to put in place the new cross-class national dispensation, founded on ethnic unity, that the narrative implicitly promotes,” (94). The novel, therefore, reinforces English ideological interests, creating the Irish people on both sides of the riot as a nefarious outside influence on Milton’s functioning. Higgins, representing the Union workers, the good English citizens, cannot negotiate with Thornton because Boucher turned the strike violent, and Thornton, representative of the English factory-owners, will not negotiate because he is able to simply bring in cheap Irish labor and look out for his own bottom line. By placing Irish men on both sides of the riot,

betraying their fellow workers on each side, the larger ideological struggle of capital and labor within England gives way to the questioning of Irish influence on internal English conflict. The Irish presence is a threat to the functioning of English factories. Margaret's reflection to herself late in the novel that, "If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt, if that is not Irish," employs nineteenth-century discourse that uses the word to suggest contradiction of itself (Bigelow 363). This statement encapsulates the actions of the Irish men on both sides of the riot, who serve to contradict their own peoples' goals.

Gaskell articulates a pre-asserted approach to interacting with the Irish, through Margaret, the concept of "factory paternalism." "Factory paternalism," is a concept put forth by Arthur Helps, in his novel, *The Claims of Labour*. The epigraph from Chapter 12 is from Helps' *Friends in Council*, and Chapter 15, the riot scene, is titled "Masters and Men," a reference to a chapter in *The Claims of Labour*, suggesting Gaskell's familiarity with Helps' work (Kanda 55). Helps suggests, in *The Claims of Labour*, that an employer should care for both the moral *and* physical conditions of his workers, their education, their home, their public buildings. Margaret lays the same expectations from Thornton, her model of paternalist relations being the middle-class home, and her own relationship to her servants like Dixon. Margaret pushes Thornton to begin to see the relationship between himself and his workers as paternal one, a simile he borrows to debate with her about her beliefs. "Because you are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have...immense power, just because your lives and your welfare are so constantly and intimately interwoven," says Margaret to Thornton, attempting to impress upon him the vast responsibility she believes he holds towards his workers (225). Margaret struggles to understand the hostility she sees between the masters and the workers and sees Thornton adopting a paternalistic attitude towards his workers as a solution. This paternalistic attitude is part of a larger conversation about Victorian attitudes towards labor and, significantly, reflects the attitude assumed by England towards Ireland. Thomas Sandler, an advocate for the Irish poor law of 1838, said of the Irish, "the poor creatures who take refuge here I do not blame. Absenteeism has deprived them of bread, and its consequences driven



them forth from their country; on the contrary, I would receive and relieve them till a better system is established in their own country,” as well as, “let them be taught again to entertain feelings of respect and affection towards their superiors,” (Lowe 130). These statements situate the English attitude towards the Irish as an attitude of benevolence but also one that seeks to maintain English supremacy. Nicolau argues that this expressed benevolence from Sandler is a characteristic attitude creating English paternalism in Ireland, born from the belief that Ireland requires this support from England.

Gaskell pulls in this larger expectation of English benevolence towards the Irish to wrap up her sub-plots regarding her Irish characters. Ultimately, the Irish people in the novel become the responsibility of the English. Higgins adopts Boucher’s children after his death, and they are now his responsibility to feed. Gaskell’s choice to have Boucher die removes the only father figure from the Irish characters in her text, supporting her advocacy of English paternalism, where an English factory worker character replaces Boucher. Thornton keeps on his Irish workers, and they become a burden on his factory. The workers watching the strikebreakers take their place, hold confidence in the likeliness that “them Irishers,” set about their work in a “bungling way, perplex[ing] their new masters with their ignorance and stupidity,” (Gaskell 424). Thornton confirms this, saying, “The incompetence of Irish hands...was a daily annoyance,” of the issue of training the workers (593). A year and a half after the riot, he repeats the sentiment, speaking of “the utter want of skill on the part of the Irish hands,” (798). Thornton is fulfilling the moral responsibility Margaret lays at his feet by continuing to employ the workers, to his own detriment. Thornton even offers Higgins employment for the sake of Boucher’s children, continuing to shoulder the burden of the Irish workers. Gaskell, through this placement of her characters, is advocating for the dominant opinion of her time: the Irish require this support from the superior moral code of the English to survive. Assimilating the Irish, Gaskell suggests, poses a threat and a burden to the English, but improvement of their base characteristics to a place where they are beneficial to English interests might be impossible. Margaret pushes Thornton to consider his Irish workers in a paternalistic light, and

Higgins is now father to the Boucher children. The children are significantly just under the age of 8, which Cammack points out, is too young to work in the factories (124). Appropriate parenting on Higgins' part might allow for the children to grow up into upstanding workers, assets to Thorton, Milton, and England. "Paternalism," therefore, is Gaskell's proffered solution to the issue of Irish immigration. She suggests that English interest, benevolence, and attention is necessary to mold the Irish into productive members of the United Kingdom.

Therefore, through the Irish characters in the novel, Gaskell is grappling with the contemporary issues of Irish presence in England in the Victorian era. *North and South* allows Gaskell to build a powerful model of Irish assimilation and suggest that England's broader paternal attitude towards incorporated Ireland need to be brought to the factories, a sphere that Irish labor is beginning to occupy. Viewing the Irish as needing guidance and benevolence from the English, Gaskell suggests in the novel, could allow for the maintenance of the English national identity, one that includes Irish workers as a resource requiring guidance to be useful in the larger move to industrialization.

#### Works Cited

- Anderson, Kathleen, and Satalino, Kelsey. "An Honest Up and Down Fight': Confrontation and Social Change in North and South." *The Gaskell Journal*, vol. 27, Gaskell Society, 2013, pp. 108–25.
- Ashworth, Suzanne M. "Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Conduct Literature, and Protocols of Female Reading in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America." *Legacy*, vol. 17, no. 2, University of Nebraska Press, 2000, pp. 141–64.
- Busteed, M. A., and R. I. Hodgson. "Irish Migrant Responses to Urban Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 162, no. 2, [Wiley, Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)], 1996, pp. 139–53. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3059872>.
- Busteed, Mervyn. "The Irish in Nineteenth Century Manchester." *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 18, Mar. 1997, pp. 8–13. *DOI.org*

(Crossref).

- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. "North and South: A Permanent State of Change." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 34, no. 3, University of California Press, 1979, pp. 281–301.
- Cammack, Susanne S. "'You Have Made Him What He Is': Irish Laborers and the Preston Strike in Elizabeth Gaskell's 'North and South.'" *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, vol. 20, no. 4, University of St. Thomas (Center for Irish Studies), 2016, pp. 113–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44807243>.
- Charles Dickens. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Penguin, 1976. *Internet Archive*.
- Clausson, Nils. "Romancing Manchester: Class, Gender, and the Conflicting Genres of Elizabeth Gaskell's 'North and South.'" *The Gaskell Society Journal*, vol. 21, Gaskell Society, 2007, pp. 1–20.
- Corbett, Mary Jean. "Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790–1870: Politics, History and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold" *Cambridge UP*, 2000.  
<https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/full/10.1080/0890549022000026733>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2021.
- Davitt, Micheal. "The 'Times'-Parnell Commission." *Google Books*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Tübner, & Company, 1890.
- Easson, Angus. "Mr Hale's Doubts in North and South." *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 31, no. 121, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 30–40.
- Elliott, Dorice Williams. "Servants and Hands: Representing the Working Classes in Victorian Factory Novels." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 28, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 377–90.
- Elliot, Dorice Williams "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's North and South." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 49, no. 1, University of California Press, June 1994, pp. 21–49. [online.ucpress.edu, https://doi.org/10.2307/2934043](https://doi.org/10.2307/2934043). "The Great Famine." UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparlia>

ment/legislativescrutin

y/parliamentandireland/overview/the-great-famine/. Accessed 11 Dec. 2021.

- Harman, Barbara Leah. "In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's 'North and South.'" *Victorian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3, Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 351–74.
- Kanda, Tomoko. "Labour Disputes and the City: Manchester and Milton-Northern." *The Gaskell Journal*, vol. 24, Gaskell Society, 2010, pp. 47–60.
- Lengel, Edward G. *The Irish Through British Eyes: Perceptions of Ireland in the Famine Era*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.
- Martin, Carol A. "Gaskell, Darwin, and 'North and South.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 15, no. 2, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, pp. 91–107.
- Mitchel, John "Repeal of the Corn Laws - Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)." Library Ireland, <https://www.libraryireland.com/Last-Conquest-Ireland/John-Mitchel-99.php>. Accessed 11 Dec. 2021.
- Moore, Ben. "Invisible Architecture and Social Space in North and South." *The Gaskell Journal*, vol. 32, Gaskell Society, 2018, pp. 17–36. Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.
- Morey, Jennifer. *Subtle Subversion: Gaskell's Use Of Scripture In Her Social Purpose Novels*. College of William and Mary - Arts and Sciences, 1990. DOI.org (Datacite), <https://doi.org/10.21220/S2-T6ND-JP96>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.
- Morse, Deborah Denenholz, et al. *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*. Routledge, 2016.
- Mullen, Gaskell's North and South Mary. "In Search of Shared Time: National Imaginings in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South." *Place and Progress in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, Routledge, 2015.
- Murphy, James H. "Canonicity: The Literature of Nineteenth-Century Ireland." *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, vol. 7, no.

- 2, University of St. Thomas (Center for Irish Studies), 2003, pp. 45–54.
- Parker, Pamela Corpron. “Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘Mary Barton’ and ‘North and South.’” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 25, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 321–31.
- Pikoulis, John. “‘North and South’: Varieties of Love and Power.” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 6, Modern Humanities Research Association, 1976, pp. 176–93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3506399>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2021
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad’s Army*. Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Rose, M. E. “The Doctor in the Industrial Revolution.” *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 28, no. 1, Jan. 1971, pp. 22–26. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.28.1.22>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2021.
- Scully, Traci J. *From Peasant to Pariah: Changing English Perceptions of the Irish from the 1820s Through the 1860s*. West Virginia University Libraries, 1 May 2011. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.33915/etd.3462>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- Sharp, Buchanan. “Royal Paternalism and the Moral Economy in the Reign of Edward II: The Response to the Great Famine.” *The Economic History Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, Wiley, 2013, pp. 628–47.
- Sharpe, Ada. “Margaret Hale’s Books and Flowers: ‘North and South’’s Paratextual Dialogues with Felicia Hemans.” *Victorian Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada, 2014, pp. 197–209.
- Steele, Kathleen R. “‘To Give Way’: Women and Grief in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*.” *The Gaskell Journal*, vol. 31, Gaskell Society, 2017, pp. 21–36.
- Swift, Roger. “Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England.” *Albion*, vol. 29, no. 3, Cambridge University Press, ed 1997, pp. 399–421. *Cambridge University Press*,

<https://doi.org/10.2307/4051670>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.

Swift, Roger. "Thomas Carlyle, Chartism, and the Irish in Early Victorian England." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, Mar. 2001, pp. 67–83. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150301291050>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.

*United Kingdom - Early and Mid-Victorian Britain* | *Britannica*.  
[https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Early-and-mid-Victorian-Britain#ref4\\_83452](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Early-and-mid-Victorian-Britain#ref4_83452). Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Project Gutenberg, 2002. Accessed 28 Apr. 2023.

# Zadie Smith on Indifference and Hope: Constructing the Orientalist “Lazy River” and Prescribing Optimism for Various Tongues

By Halle Trang

Edward Said begins his introduction to *Orientalism* by defining this word as a “way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1). Although Said uses “Orientalism” to describe a set of constructed beliefs about countries in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, the ideas in his introduction shed light on other marginalized and racialized groups in Zadie Smith’s “The Lazy River” and “Speaking in Tongues.” “The Lazy River” is a short story that details the experiences of British tourists and migrant service workers at a resort in southern Spain where the main attraction is a pool that the tourists have the privilege of moving around in. Smith’s lecture, “Speaking in Tongues,” examines what it means to speak in multiple voices with different groups of people and the effects of using various voices over a singular one. Smith demonstrates in both her short story and her lecture that the preconceived notions and beliefs about the Orient—and the marginalized non-Western individuals within this space—persist in an age long after colonialism and imperialism. The goal of this paper is to examine the different ways Smith’s two works discuss and respond to Orientalism. More specifically, I explore the ways in which “The Lazy River” illustrates the harmful effects of indifference and complicity within Orientalism and how “Speaking in Tongues” details the powerful ways in which historically marginalized people can subvert the powers placed upon them by Western ideology through speech.

Before detailing the instances of and interactions with Orientalism in Smith’s work, I will point out some key concepts of Said’s text to establish a framework for interpreting “The Lazy River” and “Speaking in Tongues.” Said employs the work of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault to identify Orientalism as a man-made discourse in which “European culture

was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (3). In taking control of countries in the East (Orient), the West (Occident) constructs the belief that their world and culture is superior to that of the colonized countries. Said argues that this ideology extends beyond the political and social realm into the intellectual and academic realm. The ruling discourse studied in literature and art constructs assumptions about the Orient that are then continually reproduced and upheld by Western powers. As Said writes, “certain cultural forms predominate over others just as certain ideas are more influential than others,” which reinforces what Antonio Gramsci identifies as *hegemony* (7). This ruling discourse continues to establish its political *and* “intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture” (Said 19). In constructing the East, colonial discourse also constructs a West that is everything the East is not. Whereas the West is rational, progressive, and pure, the East is irrational, exotic, threatening, and exists as an “Other” in relation to the West’s “self.” By examining the historical and political contexts in which the West colonized the East, Said demonstrates how Orientalism was produced and continues to be reproduced by oppressive forces. Smith’s writing illustrates how these oppressive forces create a system in which Westerners are complicit in upholding the dominant colonial discourse. Her lecture, on the other hand, demonstrates examples of possible subversion of the oppressive, colonizing system.

Taking into account Said’s explanation of discourse, we can read the lazy river in Smith’s story as the physical manifestation of the man-made Western, colonial discourse of the Orient. In this text, a group of tourists spends their vacation at a resort in Almería, the South of Spain. The unnamed narrator describes the main attraction, a lazy river, as “a circle, it is wet, it has an artificial current” (LR 3). The visitors spend their days floating, swimming, and walking in the water without having to worry about what happens beyond the walls of the hotel. No matter their positions, the characters all have the privilege of enjoying the “non-judgment zone” that is the lazy river (LR 4). In the carefully constructed world of the hotel and the pool, no one judges each other because the only people who use the pool as a means of relaxation are the



Westerners. As the narrator says, “For in this hotel we are all British, we are en masse, we are unashamed” (LR 4). Smith employs the rhetoric of a unifying “we” to portray the group of British tourists as complicit in claiming a “collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (Said 7). These British individuals display their power over those they deem inferior and undesirable—principally embodied by the workers in the hotel.

Several times, the narrator mentions how objects in the resort are cleaned and made presentable. The two girls who spend their days taking pictures of each other by the ocean “prep the area, cleaning it, improving it” and “crop from the shot anything unsightly: stray trash, old leaves, old people” (LR 6). In order to make their images clean and untainted, they hide the undesirable parts of their reality, similar to how marginalized groups are cast aside, treated as disposable, and rendered invisible in the culture of Western hegemony. Like these two girls who set up their backgrounds in an artificial, aesthetic manner, the lazy river is “serviced, cleaned, and sterilized” to preserve the image of a better paradise (LR 7). While the lazy river is cleaned, the narrator steps outside of the hotel boundaries and into new territory where the tourists are forced to reckon with the reality of an unfiltered and contaminated reality.

If we consider the lazy river as representative of Western discourse on the Orient, then the sea can be seen as being a closer global representation of the East, one that the West rarely acknowledges. When the water in the lazy river turns an unappealing green, the narrator suspects that “the color is the consequence of urine or is the color of the chemical put in to disguise the urine” — either way, the green pool emphasizes the “fundamental artificiality of the lazy river” (LR 5). Whereas the pool represents a contained and manmade body of water, the sea signifies an all too real body of water that reveals the “dirty” truth that the lazy river hides each day in the process of sterilization. The narrator says it is “very hard to accept the sea: its abundant salt, its marine life, those little islands of twisted plastic... We pass it by. We walk the boardwalk instead...” (LR 7). Instead of saying it is difficult to *enter* or *get to* the sea, Smith uses the word “accept” in a move that suggests that the British tourists are aware of what happens beyond the walls of the lazy

river, but they refuse to acknowledge the reality that differs from the pristine construction of their localized world in the resort. Rather than stepping into the sea, the tourists willingly turn away and accept the artificiality of the lazy river, participating in the system and reproduction of power.

For a moment, the narrator does seem to recognize the fabrication of the man-made pool and the tourists' relation to the localized social, political, and economic order. If we were to position the lazy river against the sea, it would mean that the sea depicts a reality of the historical, political, social, and cultural contexts in which Orientalism originates. Juxtaposing that is the lazy river which is clean, "pure," and constructed similarly to how the ideas of the Orient are constructed by Western thinkers in order to keep non-Western groups of people inferior. The narrator does understand that the lazy river is a false ideal created by those in power but still makes no attempt to leave the boundaries of that body of water because it offers more comfort and stability than the outside world. This moment of recognition is fleeting, and the narrator returns to the hotel pool right after, where the water is not polluted with "twisted plastic" and "reminders of death itself" (LR 7).

"The Lazy River" further depicts the distorted claims of non-Western people in the instance with Mariatou and Cynthia, who are two female hair braiders from Senegal and Gambia. When the narrator steps outside of the hotel, they remark that "just looking at [the women] you can tell that they are both the type who could swim the lazy river backward and all the way round" (LR 8). This observation is seemingly harmless because one could read this as an act of individual will and determination on the part of the two migrant workers. However, this statement reinforces racial and political stereotypes of the Orient, or the Other, that are frequently found in Western discourse. As Said describes, what is commonly circulated by cultural discourse and exchange within a culture is not 'truth' but representations (21). Readers do not get much background information on these two women, but the British tourists represent them as a certain type of individual just by "looking at them"

and not fully understanding the women's true cultural histories or realities.

The final example of the narrator's complicit participation in the ruling system is at the end of the short story when all the tourists go back to their rooms while the non-Western service workers clean the pool. While they scroll on their phones and laptops, there stands a "fully clothed man armed with a long mop—he is being held in place by another man, who grips him by the waist, so that the first man may angle his mop and position himself against the strong yet somniferous current and clean whatever scum we have left of ourselves off the sides" (LR 9). Like the hair braiders and the African men who work in the polytunnels, these two men penetrate the daily lives of these tourists on vacation. They make themselves visible in a society that works to keep them hidden due to their statuses and positions as inferior subjects. Yet, the story ends here, and it is implied that the next day will be the same for them as they have to work in the hotel and clean up after people to preserve the cleanliness of the lazy river. In this way, the perpetual cycle of Orientalism continues and prevents marginalized people from becoming "free subject[s] of thought or action" (Said 3).

In "Speaking in Tongues," Smith takes a personal approach to examine the ways those who are marginalized, specifically Black people, are forced into submission of a singular voice. She mentions her own journey grappling with different voices: "Recently my double voice has deserted me for a single one, reflecting the smaller world into which my work has led me. Willesden was a big, colorful, working-class sea; Cambridge was a smaller, posher pond, and almost univocal; the literary world is a puddle" (SIT 2). Smith uses bodies of water as metaphors once again to delineate the construction of a universal way of being, a singular way of speaking that is more acceptable within the larger system of power. Whereas Willesden allows Smith to speak with however many voices she desires, the centralized literary world causes her to lose one of her voices. In order to survive in Britain, and in academia, Smith conforms to singularity and speaks in accordance with the dominant language ideology. Because the "culture warns against" having more than one voice, Smith ends up with a singular voice (SIT 2).

Smith further describes the implications of a singular voice and the dominant thinking patterns that keep marginalized people from expressing themselves differently. Said argues that “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied” (5). If speaking in one voice that aligns with the ruling social order is ideal, then adopting multiple voices directly challenges the institutions that uphold it. Smith examines the ways the dominant language ideology permeates real life and performances alike. Smith provides an example of Eliza Doolittle’s struggle with language from George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*: “when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours” (SIT 4). In this case, Eliza loses her original voice and gains another, but it is the dominant language that she is forced to adopt. She becomes an in-between thing, as many marginalized individuals also do. For the contemporary immigrant, “tragically split, we are sure, between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices...one voice must be sacrificed for the other. What is double must be made singular” (SIT 4). Under oppression, individuals are forced to conform to the ruling ideology and lose their voice, but by understanding the configurations of power within that order, it is possible to see how one might use their voice to their advantage.

As the first Black president, Barack Obama is one individual who adopts multiple voices in order to reach a larger audience and to resist singularity. Smith demonstrates how people use their voices differently by providing examples of Obama’s various speech patterns and the use of his multiple voices before and during his presidency. By code-switching, or alternating between different languages and vernacular styles, Obama dispels the notion of an “unchanging and singular” voice (SIT 3). Said writes that the “standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (26). Because of his biracial identity, it is difficult for people to “figure out” a mysterious figure like Obama—they question his multiple identities as well as his multiple voices. They cannot fathom that he would be able to use slang but also speak in a Westernized

manner in the same sentence. However, Obama is able to appeal to many audiences, whether that be white Western audiences or people of color because he can switch from Black vernacular to that of everyday American language. As Smith puts it, “This new president doesn’t just speak *for* his people. He can *speak* them” (SIT 5). His talent is that he can do this and be part of the community rather than being on the outside of it simply because he uses different modes and styles of speech. As Said argues, “we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting” (14). Obama demonstrates how the West’s construction of the Orient can be helpful in understanding how marginalized groups can subvert the same oppressive systems they are placed in.

Smith describes “Dream City” as one such site in which people like Obama can exist and defy the political powers of imperialism. Dream City is a place where the oppressed can come together and speak in different voices instead of being forced to use a singular one. By using the unifying “we” in his presidential campaign, Obama avoids “a singularity he didn’t feel” and draws “us in with him. He had the audacity to suggest that, even if you can’t see it stamped on their faces, most people come from Dream City, too” (SIT 7). Considering America is a Western power that has created its own preconceived notions about the Orient, the Other, and the oppressed, Obama demonstrates that he is one of many people who can fight back against the system. Smith shows in her work that most people in Dream City have “complicated back stories, messy histories, multiple narratives” that Orientalism and the dominant culture often overlook (SIT 7). However, because people like Obama show that it is possible to have multiple voices and use them to resist oppression, “we may be finally approaching a point of human history where you can’t talk up or down to us anymore, but only *to us*” (SIT 11). Instead of remaining in the shadows, people who use their multiple voices are able to display resistance against the powers that aim to keep them subordinate.

Smith offers readers of “Speaking in Tongues” a hopeful ending and says that Obama “seems just the man to demonstrate that between

those two voices there exists no contradiction and no equivocation but rather a proper and decent human harmony” (SIT 16). Rather than having to lose one voice and adopt another, it is possible to have multiple voices and speak in various tongues. Considering the social, cultural, and political history that marginalized individuals have faced, Smith shows how Obama is able to take back the power that was not originally afforded to people like him. By using multiple voices, Obama denies the belief that there is no “true” knowledge that is inherently nonpolitical (Said 10). Rather, the truth about marginalized individuals, their voices, and their identities are all intertwined in a long and complex history of hegemony. Smith describes the ways racialized and oppressed individuals adopt multiple voices, and therefore identities, in order to survive and succeed in a world that forces them into singularity.

Said and Smith offer readers a personal account of their connections to their works and illustrate how important it is to recognize the history of colonization and imperialism in order to produce a better future. In *Orientalism*, Said ends his introduction by saying that if readers can have a better understanding of the historical and sociopolitical history of Orientalism, then they can work on unlearning what Raymond Williams calls the “inherent dominative mode” (28). Smith ends her work in a similar fashion by reminding readers of the sociopolitical hierarchy in “The Lazy River” and by saying it is possible to take up space in the academic, social, and political worlds by using many voices in “Speaking in Tongues.” Both authors share the idea that the future of their academic fields can be a hopeful one for those willing to do the work of unlearning the notions the West has ascribed to marginalized groups. Smith shows readers how to live in a world under imperial hegemony, but she also provides hope for the future. Like Said, whose work reveals the history and truths of a Western constructed discourse of the Orient and how to question these beliefs, Smith offers a hopeful look into the future of unifying bodies, voices, and identities to survive and resist the powers of all oppressors alike.

Both “The Lazy River” and “Speaking in Tongues” illustrate the ways people interact with and respond to the ideas of Said’s Orientalism. Smith’s “Lazy River” shows indifference through an unnamed omniscient

narrator—one who is an active participant in Orientalism but has no desire to step out of it—and also highlights the Western experience of non-Western cultures and peoples. On the other hand, “Speaking in Tongues” details the powerful ways in which marginalized people can create agency and change Westerners’ perceptions of them through speech. Although Smith’s short story and lecture differ in their responses to the ideas of Orientalism, Smith herself reminds readers of the striking visibility and space marginalized people take up in a world that attempts to keep them hidden and subservient.

#### Works Cited

- Said, Edward W. Introduction. *Orientalism*. Penguin Classics, 2003, pp. 1-28.
- Smith, Zadie. “Speaking in Tongues.” *The New York Review of Books*. 26 Feb 2009, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/02/26/speaking-in-tongues-2/>, pp. 1-16.
- Smith, Zadie. “The Lazy River.” *The New Yorker*, 18 Dec 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/the-lazy-river>, pp. 1-10.





# The Gender Identity Paradox in Carmen Maria Machado's Fiction

By Mary Turkot

Carmen Maria Machado's short stories "The Husband Stitch" and "Real Women Have Bodies" both raise central questions about the importance and function of gender for her characters. These pieces explore women's sexuality and the role of their physical bodies as well as how they are viewed and conceptualized by the men around them. There is a clear demarcation in the texts between men and women along with an honest, raw portrayal of the lived experience and trauma of women who fall on one side of that binary. Machado uses characters who have complicated relationships to their sexuality and sense of self to capture the way gender identity restricts and instructs people who identify as women. Using Judith Butler's arguments found in *Gender Trouble*, we can begin to uncover the problematic ways that identity and gender serve—or rather, fail to serve—women, and how Machado's work portrays this paradox. By reading Machado through the lens of Butler's feminist theory, we can see how the stories are not simply advocating for women's liberation by showing us examples of their mistreatment, but rather how they are carefully exposing the ways that womanhood itself—as a concept of "being" or as an identity that one "is"—can be damaging, and in many ways, inescapable due to the binary logic our culture relies upon.

Understanding Butler's main points about the functions of gender and its role in feminist theory is key to dissecting further meaning within Machado's stories. Butler's main position in *Gender Trouble* is to say that *any* way of thinking about gender and the kinds of concrete identities it produces—regardless of how open-minded or inclusive one intends to approach it—is going to be inherently flawed and exclusionary. She claims that "the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions" (Butler 7). This "representational discourse" she mentions is that of gender itself, our way of thinking through and talking about the concept of gender is restrictive

and exclusionary by nature of its own logic. If one identifies as “being” one gender, then they cannot be the other, or others. The process of gendering and identifying oneself as man, woman, or even otherwise is a participation either in the binary or in a type of categorization of self. This seemingly unavoidable practice of categorizing people based on their identities is precisely what leads to imbalance and mistreatment among the different genders, which is what we should be attempting to dismantle as feminists—and so using “woman” as the subject of the discussion becomes problematic. Instead of singularly focusing on liberating or representing the group we call “women,” in turn forcing a non-inclusive categorization onto people with diverse and intersecting forms of oppression, Butler is suggesting that feminism’s goal should shift toward making “a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize” (7). That is to say, we should pay attention to what identity truly is, and how gender can fit into a concept of identity or sense of self without becoming its own exclusive category. This argument also implies that the “natural” existence of gender as identity is itself also a construction that is central to our understanding of these concepts, one we must attempt to rethink if we will successfully subvert the way these ideas function in our culture.

In Machado’s work, feminine character identities are explored in a myriad of ways, through women’s physicality, sexuality, and inner psychology. In “The Husband Stitch,” gender and sex seem at first to be marked out in an obvious and indisputable way, with the physical presence of a ribbon on the body indicating a female, and therefore a woman. However, Machado is actually using the ribbons to show us something about our *understanding* of sex and gender, not to make a statement about the reality of the concepts themselves. She is showing how human understanding is always going to rely on this parsing out of who and what fits within certain categories. To make the concept of gender intelligible at all requires a continual identification and reconfirmation of what that concept looks like and contains—a repetition of logic. This is exactly what Butler means when she states, “that the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies

does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be” (42). Here, Butler is saying that we cannot deny that our own thinking is instructed by a binary logic rooted in heteronormativity, and we cannot pretend that it is not always going to constrain our understanding of gender within its bounds in some way. It is actually *in spite of* this compulsory logic that we can begin to be critical of what sex and gender represent, which Machado successfully guides readers towards through the symbol of the ribbon.

The presence of the ribbon in the story is not necessarily implying that sex is strictly binary or determinate of gender, it is simply showing us the impossibility of an escape from such a binary logic. The ribbons themselves are not the markers of sex or gender; they are not naturalizing the character’s identities. Instead, they are serving as a sort of unavoidable question, forcing both the reader and other characters to ask what exactly does the ribbon tell us? Butler also insists we ask a similar question: “is there some commonality among ‘women’ that preexists their oppression, or do ‘women’ have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women’s cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures?” (7). In searching for ways of answering these questions, we can look at the way the ribbon is treated by different characters, notably male ones. Upon hearing news of the narrator’s pregnancy, her husband becomes fixated on her ribbon and its heritability. The narrator writes that her husband runs “his hand around my throat... grabbing my wrists with one hand as he touches the ribbon with the other. He presses the silky length with his thumb. He touches the bow delicately, as if he is massaging my sex” (Machado 12). It is vital that in this scene, Machado describes the act of touching the ribbon being done “as if” to the narrator’s sex, clearly showing it as something tangential but *not* synonymous with her sex. Similarly, upon finding out the sex of her child, the narrator says “no ribbon. A boy” (Machado 16). These lines are carefully written as two separate sentences, not to be misconstrued as one continuous thought. It is purposefully left ambiguous as to whether or not the ribbon determines the boyhood of the child, proving that the ribbons in the story—though connected to sex and gender—are not directly responsible or indicative of either one. This is why the narrator takes such

delight in the fact that her son “treats [the ribbon] no differently than he would an ear or a finger,” because finally she can be free of the binary constraints that the ribbon seems to put on her despite it not actually defining who she is—since it is just one ungendered part of her (Machado 18).

The story constantly works to showcase how the ribbon affects the behavior and attitudes of characters towards people who possess one, and how it also evokes a kind of obsession in and of itself that does not seem to have any real relation to the person upon which it is tied. When her husband frantically interrogates her about her ribbon, asking “were you born with it? Why your throat? Why is it green?” the narrator has no answer (Machado 20). This obsessive questioning and the expectation of some kind of concrete or comprehensible answer is exemplary of how the logic we use to understand sex and gender cannot ever really capture it, because a heteronormative binary is too exclusionary. The narrator cannot possibly answer—there is no one true answer to such definitive questions about identity, the how or why of a person becoming what they are. In this way, Machado is portraying the cultural construction of gender and *also* sex and the faulty way that we conceptualize them in association with each other. The narrator cannot explain or answer her husband’s questions because there is no logical through-line from which ribbon denotes female denotes woman—it is much more complicated than that. Butler too emphasizes that we cannot actually differentiate much between sex and gender, since “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘pre-discursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts” (11). The Machado piece acts as a visual for this effect—we are presented with a metaphor for sex and gender as one mysterious and unidentifiable, impossible-to-explain trait. Yet, despite its mystery and elusiveness, it still exists in a way that we can only see and grasp in terms of categorical and binary thinking—only *some* people have ribbons, and as long as this is true of any trait, we will continue to cling to it as a basis for identifying and categorizing people.

Machado also uses her character’s fluctuating sexuality to show how gender and desire are fluid and changing, growing with a person as

they have new experiences, even when our ways of understanding these concepts are rooted in categorical and binary thinking. Machado's treatment of heterosexuality in "The Husband Stitch" is reminiscent of Butler's claims that "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of 'the original' ... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (41). Heterosexual desire is not a template for other sexualities to be derived from or copied off of. It exists as a kind of lateral form of desire that functions similarly to homosexuality but is falsely considered to be the initial or "underived" sexuality. Though the narrator of "The Husband Stitch" is in a heterosexual relationship, she still defies many so-called norms generally ascribed to straight women. She says herself, "I know I want him before he does. This isn't how things are done, but they are how I am going to do them" (Machado 3). She is calling attention to the way she plays with the power dynamics assumed to be concrete within a heteronormative understanding of relationships or dating practices. The narrator, though married to a person of the opposite sex, does not follow the unspoken rules of her gender and sexuality. She plays within this power matrix, taking on different roles, and exploring other forms of her own desires. In a moment of sexual awakening, the narrator is attracted to another woman but acknowledges that "I know I should not want her... I am not even certain how such a thing would happen, but the possibilities incense me to near madness" (Machado 22). She is noticing a new "forbidden" passion she had not known before, which both confuses and intoxicates her.

This is, however, immediately squashed by the fetishization of her desire by her husband. In sharing her secret attraction to this woman, the narrator reveals something that feels sacred, as if she had "betrayed [the other woman] somehow" (Machado 23). Here, Machado is showing how the liberating experience of female desire that occurs outside the binary, even for women in heterosexual relationships, can be and often is then diminished into something superficial for the purpose of a male heterosexual fantasy. Though Butler never touches specifically upon this practice, I would argue that Machado bringing it up within this story is a way of showing how such trends perpetuate the failures of our

one-size-fits-all forms of identification—a point Butler would agree with. It is a source of shame for the narrator to feel attracted to another woman when it shouldn't be, and it also goes against her husband's one-dimensional understanding of her. He does not take her homosexual desire seriously—it is only another function of his own pleasure. Her sexual identity possibly being fluid does not occur to him, or does not matter. It does not alter his understanding of who she is, so he simply consumes it for his own fantasy. For the narrator, this experience of liberating desire is reduced to something momentarily outside of her own norm. She is never given the space or acknowledgment she needs to consider the lengths of her own sexuality—so she reverts back into the box of heteronormativity. She does this because of the way that people rely so heavily on these forms of identification despite their many inadequacies, as Butler so often points out. We cling to a sense of identity and of self in our gender and sexuality without understanding them as flowing and fluctuating aspects of ourselves, *not* rigid naturalized identities we cannot change. As Butler shows us, the different ways that sexual desires manifest in people are not replicas of a heteronormative picture, but actually similar feelings and enactments of desire across the board—no matter which gender or sex they are being applied to or experienced with. In other words, the desire the young narrator in “The Husband Stitch” feels originally toward her husband is a raw sexual desire not unlike the kind we see between the narrator of “Real Women Have Bodies” and her lover, Petra. These scenarios are not so different just because one includes a male and female whereas the other includes two females—in fact, they are actually very similar expressions of desire *in spite of* those different combinations of identities involved.

In “Real Women Have Bodies,” the importance of physicality and embodiment in gender identity, especially for women, takes center stage. Machado then explores how such a strictly defined physical presence can wreak psychological havoc on women who do not fit within such confines. To the narrator's horror, the faded women in the story seek out Petra's mother, the seamstress, in order to “just fold themselves into the needlework, like it was what they wanted” (Machado 135). This phenomenon of women disappearing, clinging to a kind of half-life where

they *wish* to be put inside the clothes of other, more substantial women, can be read as a representation of the desperate need for physical identification in order to constitute oneself as “woman.” As Butler argues, the critical theory of feminism requires a subject which in turn must be defined. The fading women cease to be women—cease to be *anything* now that they lack a feminine physical body. Even in the title, a play on the popular phrase “real women have curves” (which itself is a problematic mantra meant to empower women but instead excludes one or another of them with its specificity), Machado is calling into question the process of identification on the basis of gender. But because this fading is happening only to women in the story, it is depicting how the binary is still functioning even when a person is literally unable to exist as a sexual being. Butler notes that “the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium*” (12). So, without this essential blank canvas on which gender can be culturally imprinted, these faded women are left lost and desperate, unable to identify themselves whatsoever.

The body as “instrument” comes starkly into focus during a conversation between two male characters: “‘Hips,’ Chris says. ‘That’s what you want. Hips and enough flesh for you to grab onto, you know? What would you do without something to hold? That’s like—like—,’ ‘Like trying to drink water without a cup,’ Casey finishes” (Machado 128). Here, Machado is revealing just how damaging such a concept can be, since the need for the body to act as a medium inevitably leaves it vulnerable to be exploited as a medium of sexual pleasure as well. These male characters see the feminine body as a literal instrument for their own desires, a tool through which they can gratify their needs, the same as a cup. They also raise the question of “what to do” with a body that cannot be utilized in such a way, and ironically the faded women seem to be asking themselves the same—what do you do with a body that won’t function as a basis of any kind of identity or usefulness? This aspect of the story is calling attention to the necessity of physicality to be sexual or sexualized. As men in the story can no longer view the faded women as

viable sexual partners, what are they? Their physical presence as an inspiration for the sexual desires of men has been taken away, and with it, their entire existence within the available culturally constructed set of identities. Is a woman still a woman if she does not have a feminine physical body?

The imagined response to such a question for Machado is one of distrust and anxiety. She describes the men on the news “talking about how we can’t trust the faded women, women who can’t be touched but can stand on the earth, which means they must be lying about something, they must be deceiving us somehow” (146). Machado implies that since men can no longer categorize women based on their sexual viability, they can only understand them as malicious or untrustworthy—they become alien and therefore threatening entities. This also works to show how men, too, cling to the binary as a way of processing and understanding the world. When it ceases to function for them, they are left with no grounds to identify the faded women, and they are therefore terrified of how to live with people that they cannot categorize within gendered or naturalized terms. This anxiety is universal, as the faded women themselves seem to desire a sensation of substance again, weaving themselves into the clothes that solid women wear. It is a direct metaphor for performance, since these women can no longer be seen as women, they no longer have the necessary body, they continue in their faded state to seek some sort of action that will constitute their role as “woman.”

The solid women share the same anxieties, fearing for their own fading precisely because it means they will have to face their lack of identity. To comfort her suddenly fading partner, the narrator says of faded women: “I don’t think—they’re not dead... but the statement feels like a lie and is unhelpful in every way” (Machado 140). The fact that the faded women are not actually dead becomes almost irrelevant due to how essential we consider such ideas of naturalized identities. It is vital to our culture and our understanding of ourselves that we “be” something, that we have some basis of personhood—and especially womanhood—which seems natural and that we can use to “identify” ourselves. The moment this is taken away, it is as if we cease to live altogether. Machado forces us to ask how can we “be” at all, if we cannot be women, men, or some



gendered or sexual identity? This idea is what Butler continuously relates back to as the complicating factor to her argument—no matter how we try to subvert the constructed norms and the gender binary, this need for some kind of identification is fundamental and inescapable. This is what Butler refers to when stating, “if sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is ‘before,’ ‘outside,’ or ‘beyond’ power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream” (40). Though it is wonderful to imagine and formulate utopian ideas about how gender imbalance and oppression may be solved with the dissolving of the binary or of gender and sexual identities, the very way we think is culturally constructed so that without those ideas we would not even be able to conceptualize ourselves as beings. We need systems of identification in order to understand and situate ourselves in the world. This will not change, so addressing the process that leads to this self-identification is key to subverting the harm it does. This is, I argue, the mission of Machado’s piece. She works to present the process of gendering and un-gendering, revealing how it is not as natural as it seems, yet it is also impossible to simply do away with. This leaves the reader with a new impression of how gender identity can be formulated—perhaps on the basis of something other than the physical body or sexual capability.

In considering the many complex ways that sex, gender, and desire function within Machado’s fiction, we can track the influence such concepts have on feminist arguments because of how we internalize and understand them. Butler clearly outlines the paradox that feminists are faced with since a feminist dialogue aimed towards liberation and representation inherently requires some kind of participation in the gender binary which perpetuates problematic forms of identification. She suggests new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality that would require a questioning of identity itself, and how much a person can truly ever be defined by any one aspect of themselves. These ideas are explored tactfully in Machado’s work, through her ability to weave together different experiences of gender and sexuality that showcase how fluid and changing they truly are. Questions about the importance of the role of the physical body and sexual desire in the very making of a “woman” are

pressed in Machado's stories, encouraging readers to dissect what exactly these concepts are doing. By applying Butler's theory from *Gender Trouble* as a lens to this work, there is so much more to gain and more nuanced statements to be found about the inadequacy of our current formula for categorizing and understanding our own identities as sexual beings.

#### Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2006.
- Machado, Carmen Maria. *Her Body and Other Parties : Stories*. Graywolf Press, 2017.

# Modernism and the Phenomenology of Happiness in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*

By Alexis Young

The literary period of Modernism, which spanned roughly the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked an enormous shift away from bourgeois realism common in Victorian literature towards reflection of lived human experience. Literature by and for this bourgeoisie reality is defined by one of the most prominent Modernist (and Marxist) scholars, Georg Lukács, as “assum[ing] the unity of the world it described and seen it as a living whole inseparable from man himself” (Lukács, 768). Conflicts in these novels arose from a solitude that Victorian writers attributed to the natural circumstances of life. Modernist writers began to realize that, in fact, “their solitariness is a specific social fate, not a universal *condition humaine*” (Lukács, 761). Capitalism, not some underlying fact of human life, was at the source of these conflicts. Only in Modernist literature’s rejection of this bourgeoisie realism does one begin to see themes of “*angst*, this basic modern experience... [that] has its emotional origin in the experience of a disintegrating society” (Lukács, 768). Bourgeois realism describes not a universal human condition, but a condition *created* by capitalism. Disillusioned to a harmony between man and the capitalist world, Modernist writers escaped literary traditions that located the source of human struggle internally to celebrate industry and capitalist growth.

Instead, as Lukács explains, these writers conceptualized the human experience through focusing on man in a Heideggerian sense, as an “ahistorical being... strictly confined within the limits of his own experience. There is not for him—and apparently not for his creator—any pre-existent reality beyond his own self” (Lukács, 761). Lukács continues, stating that “man is ‘thrown-into-being.’ This implies, not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself; but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence” (Lukács, 761). Lukács understands

Heidegger's ahistoricism as akin to the Modernist refusal of trying to extract truths of human existence from capitalist society, a historical and contextualized situation that is not indicative of the true nature of humanity. Instead, the Modernist writer focuses on the individual experience *without* attempting to make broader, universalizing claims about human nature. Instead, these writers use individual experiences to expose problems with modern capitalist society.

This redirection of Modernist literature is a fundamentally phenomenological one. Many Modernist scholars, like Lukács, have turned to phenomenology in an effort to break the shackles of capitalist essentialism. Ariane Mildenberg attributes the common procedures in the two bodies of thought to Husserl's understanding of eidetic reduction, seeing phenomenology as the "eidetic science," or "the pure essence" (Husserl, 62). Both Modernism and phenomenology seek "the essences of the acts of consciousness, via a bracketing of preconceptions and presuppositions" (Mildenberg, 9). This is precisely what Modernist writers attempt—to bracket preconceived ideas of the world and human nature that have been obscured, typically by capitalism, but even more broadly. Both bodies of thought attempt to rethink what has been taken for granted by a reorientation towards knowledge obtained through lived experience.

With a new methodological framework comes new goals and priorities. Instead of celebrating capitalist production and advancement, Modernist writers are left with a question: What, then, should be celebrated? What should be sought after in the essence of human experience after all norms and traditions of capitalist society are stripped away? Because of their similar foundations of eidetic reduction, phenomenology can help answer this question. By bracketing everything that is not "pure" and emphasizing human experience over following presupposed rules, the goal should be to reach an ideal state of existence, or happiness. Both Modernist and phenomenological methodology tend towards prioritizing this most desirable state of human experience over adherence to preconceived traditions.

In no piece of literature is this phenomenological prioritization of happiness more apparent than in Rebecca West's famous 1918 novel, *The Return of the Soldier*. This novel has been hailed both as an example of

high Modernism as well as a rich phenomenological text due to its criticism of characters who choose preconceived societal norms over happiness. When Chris, a shell-shocked World War I soldier returns home with severe amnesia and cannot remember anything that has happened since he was 21 years old, his wife and cousin demand that he should mentally perceive time the way they and most of the human population do, even after it is revealed that Chris is far happier living in the world of the former time period. The two women would rather he experience what they believe to be the normal time, even though doing so would make everyone involved deeply unhappy. Rebecca West uses this novel to phenomenologically critique the acceptance of a falsely objective world over experienced happiness. Modernist literature here agrees with phenomenology—preconceived traditions should be bracketed in favor of a prioritization of happiness.

First, it is necessary to define the preconceived traditions onto which the women in this text cling. Kitty, Margaret, and Jenny all believe strictly in an objective or normal lifeworld that Chris's experience proves is not actually objective. Anthony Fernandez expands upon Husserl's understanding of the body's positioning to reveal the *intersubjectivity* of this lifeworld that the women understand as objective. Husserl states that "each Ego has its own domain of perceptual things and necessarily perceives the things in a certain orientation" (Husserl, 165). Since each person's orientation is different, each will necessarily experience the world differently, even if only slightly. Fernandez reveals that a transcendental structure of intersubjectivity within these different orientations is what makes us believe the lifeworld is objective. He states that "the natural attitude is a mode of comportment or understanding in which we simply take for granted what we perceive as given. We take the world as existing, as there for everyone in much the same way" (Fernandez, 200).

There are two facets to this transcendental structure. First, "an experience of temporal persistence is made possible by recollection" (Fernandez, 201). Experiencing an object the same way numerous times builds confidence that the object holds the form it is experienced as. The second facet relies on the experiences of others:

The other is experienced as a foreign I, an alter ego who exceeds

my sphere of experience... since it transcends that which is essentially proper to me—is the source of all transcendence. In other words, experiencing something as available to others in the shared, intersubjective world is a necessary condition for experiencing it as objective... I experience my own horizon as overlapping with the horizons of other subjects, ultimately establishing a universal horizon of all human subjects. (Fernandez, 201)

If my experience of an object persists over time and other beings with separate orientations and horizons confirm the same experience, the experience appears to be objective. Intersubjective agreement creates an illusion of objectivity in the lifeworld one experiences. Once believing in this sense of objectivity, those who experience objects or qualities of the world differently are not seen merely as different, but wrong. The intersubjective lifeworld is considered normal, and those who do not experience the same temporally persisting, agreed-upon objects and ideas are considered abnormal. If this abnormality is perceived as dangerous or extreme enough, those in agreement with the intersubjective lifeworld feel an urge to “fix” the abnormal person by trying to bring them back into the realm of false objectivity.

Kitty, Jenny, and Margaret all experience a temporal persistence that they, and the society around them, collectively agree upon as normal. Each woman perceives the current time period as the Spring of 1916, the result of a natural progression of a ceaseless and constant passage of time, continuing after the time of Chris’s last memory and temporal fixation in 1901. Kitty and Jenny especially share agreed-upon memories that help situate themselves in 1916. Early in the novel, Jenny recounts several of Chris’s major life events that have transpired since 1901 and changed her and Kitty’s lives: “his father’s death...[Chris] had been obliged to take over a business...Then Kitty came along...Then there had been the difficult task of learning to live after the death of his little son” (West, 8). In fact, for a long time, Chris had been the focal point of her and Kitty’s intersubjectivity. She states that “nothing could ever really become a part of our life until it had been referred to Chris’ attention” (West, 8). The women habitually reframed their own experiences towards those of Chris,

forming their own opinions and recollections based on his references. Most of their attitudes towards the world, then, are based on a collective agreement of experience.

While the novel's women typically look to Chris to help them ground their experiences, their reliance on him has a limit. For Chris to believe he is in 1901 is not, to the women, simply a difference of opinion—it is a complete rejection of the lifeworld in which they and most others live. This aberration is too extreme for them to defer, as they usually do, to his manly advice. Perhaps, as in the example Jenny provides, she might wait to see Chris's reaction before deciding whether or not their parlourmaid was a "good girl," but she and Kitty cannot go so far as to relinquish their perceptions of time, a factor of the intersubjective lifeworld that appears too objective for Chris to challenge (West, 8-9). Jenny notices a stark contrast between her and Chris's experience after commenting on how much older and fatter Margaret has become since she last saw Chris. She notices the wildly different way Chris experiences Margaret due to this abnormal temporality: "I perceived clearly that that ecstatic woman lifting her eyes and her hands to the benediction of love was Margaret as she existed in eternity; but this was Margaret as she existed in time, as the fifteen years between Monkey Island and this damp day in Ladysmith Road had irreparably made her" (West, 48). Even Margaret, who has a chance at regaining her lost love if she lets Chris continue to experience her and the world as existing in the year 1901, admits that his way of understanding time is wrong.

The women view this abnormality as not just different, but outright problematic. Jenny recognizes just how unfavorably, even resentfully, Chris perceives her and Kitty in his temporal state. She laments, "All the inhabitants of this new tract of time were his enemies, all its circumstances his prison bars" (West, 29). The issue is deeper than the inharmonious temporalities that Chris and his wife and cousin experience—this discord positions them as antagonists. Kitty responds to her husband's abnormality by "manufacturing malice," retaliating against both Chris and Jenny with harsh words and by locking herself in her room (West, 31). Chris perceives the women's intersubjective lifeworld as combatant, and she in turn perceives him as an opponent.

This malicious view of Chris's temporal abnormality is intensified once the diagnosis for his amnesia is given by a doctor. Not just a product of his wartime shell shock, Chris's memory loss is revealed to be a product of deep, repressed wish that he had to suppress in order to inhabit the normal, intersubjective lifeworld with Kitty and Jenny. The doctor examines Chris and explains, "His unconscious self is refusing to let him resume his relations with his normal life, and so we get this loss of memory... There's a deep self in one, the essential self, that has its wishes. And if those wishes are suppressed by the superficial self... it takes its revenge. Into the house of conduct erected by the superficial self it sends an obsession" (West, 79). For West, writing in the early 1900s, these notions of conscious/subconscious divide and suppressed wishes come from an understanding of psychoanalytic repression. First diagnosed by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer in 1892, repression happens as a result of a traumatic event "because social circumstances made a reaction impossible or because it was a question of things which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed from his conscious thought and inhibited and suppressed" (Breuer & Freud, 10). Basically, a person experiences a traumatic event or is denied the fulfillment of a wish, and either chooses or is not allowed to properly react, repressing the feelings and thoughts to a subconscious level instead.

Notably, phenomenology understands repression in a manner akin to that of psychoanalysis. Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenological cause of repression in his foundational text, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and even uses the example of an inconclusive adolescent love affair:

For psychoanalysis, repression consists in the following: the subject commits to a certain path (a love affair, career, or work of art), encounters along this path a barrier and, having the force neither to overcome the obstacle nor to abandon the enterprise, he remains trapped in the attempt and indefinitely employs his forces to renew it in his mind. The passage of time does not carry away impossible projects, nor does it seal off the traumatic experience. The subject still remains open to the same impossible future... One present among all of them thus acquires an exceptional value. It displaces the others and relieves them of their value as authentic present moments. We remain



the person who was once committed to this adolescent love, or the person who once lived within that parental universe. New perceptions replace previous ones, and even new emotions replace those that came before, but this renewal only has to do with the content of our experience and not with its structure. Impersonal time continues to flow, but personal time is arrested. (Merleau-Ponty, 85)

In Merleau-Ponty's understanding of repression, when a person faces an insurmountable barrier toward their desired path yet refuses to surrender the path, the mental openness towards the path remains. Neither new experiences, emotions, nor recognition of the path as impossible help the person overcome this subconscious commitment towards the path.

Psychoanalysis and phenomenology both acknowledge the source of repression as a desire (path or wish) that does not come to fruition (insurmountable barrier or trauma). Both realize that if one does not properly work through the trauma or let go of the path, the desire remains. Both recognize that this desire moves to the background but remains ever-present in a person's mental life. For Freud, it roots itself as a continual, suppressed desire in the unconscious, and for Merleau-Ponty, it presents itself as a continued openness towards the impossible future. Both bodies of thought, then, explain why this repression causes so much malice for the family: For Kitty, it reveals that Chris has been secretly loving another woman as long as she has known him. She recognizes the inauthenticity of the experiences they have shared together, as Chris was still secretly open to a future with Margaret the entire time. For Chris, Kitty is part of a path he has taken, but does not truly desire.

For Chris, the repression-inducing trauma occurred in 1901 and compounded in the 15 years between then and the Spring of 1916. Chris describes the day he and Margaret parted ways as "the end of his life, the last day he could remember" (West, 38). The entirety of chapter 3 is his recollection of the romantic summer Chris and Margaret spent together on Monkey Island, concluding with a slight misunderstanding that was never resolved. Just as Chris hoped to reconcile the situation, his father rushed him off the island and back home to England to attend to business. This abrupt removal from Margaret and thrust into business does not allow Chris to react to the trauma that comes with the dissolution of his first

great love. The succession of events of Chris's life post-1901 that Jenny lists at the beginning of the novel (Chris's father's death, inheritance of the family business, marriage to Kitty, and the death of their infant son), were then experienced by him as compounding traumas. These events happened only after Chris had repressed his love for Margaret—he still held a subconscious desire to be with her and held an openness towards a future with her. This continued openness towards this impossible life path arrests his personal time, even as he lives through more experiences. His hopes and desires remain stagnant, even while impersonal time, the time that is understood by the other characters through their intersubjective lifeworld, dictates that he should now experience the world as existing in the year 1916.

A major difference between Chris and Margaret lies in this idea of an openness towards a future with each other. Margaret has notably not repressed her memory since falling out with Chris, though she still carries great affection for him. In her version of the story, she describes undergoing a mourning period. Once Chris departed from the island and “never came, never wrote,” Margaret “fell into a lethargic disposition to sit all day and watch the Thames flow by” (West, 53). While Chris is rushed into a new life, Margaret has time to work through her trauma and give up the impossible path of adolescent love after meeting with the insurmountable barrier of their separation. She marries William Grey, and even if she recognizes that she does not love him with the same passion she did Chris, she speaks of their marriage “cheerfully and without irony” (West, 54). Years later, when she finds the undelivered letters Chris sent her after leaving the island, she weeps, but she does not lose her sense of temporal existence, nor does she try to rekindle her love with Chris. She has accepted the trauma of a lost love and moved forward in her impersonal *and* personal time. After Kitty and Jenny bring her to shell-shocked Chris, she is presented with the opportunity to pursue this path once again, but she declines and asserts the need to return him to temporal normality. “‘The truth’s the truth,’ she said, ‘and he must know it’” (West, 88).

Margaret's statement earns praise from Jenny, but West challenges the choice to return Chris. In a strikingly Modernist and phenomenological

move, West condemns this choice for what Chris's return will do to the characters in the novel: render them unhappy. In the final scene, Margaret shocks Chris out of his repression by showing him a memento of his dead child, and "with his back turned on this faded happiness," Chris is "cured," and returns to the intersubjective life of 1916 (West, 90). The novel closes with each character completely unhappy, a necessary condition for forcing Chris back into the intersubjective temporality. By returning Chris, he cannot fulfill the wish of returning to his true love, but the uncovering of his repressed desire removes the possibility of harmony with Kitty and Jenny. His return to 1916 is a totalizing force, a worst-case scenario for Jenny, Kitty, Chris, and Margaret alike. By ending on such a somber note, West leaves readers with a question around the value of being normal, even at the cost of misery.

An understanding of the phenomenology of happiness further condemns this prioritization of a normal world over human experience. Matthew King's work on phenomenological happiness first attempts to define what true human happiness is. This analysis relies on Heidegger's understanding of "being," *Sein*, as a verb—it is active, something that *happens* (Heidegger, 250). King takes an etymological approach to find a connection between happening and happiness that does not exist between happening and words that indicate other positive states of being like pleasure, contentedness, or joy. This etymological connection exists in the concept of *fitting*. King finds that "'happiness' is derived from the root 'hap', and thus is etymologically related to words such as 'happen' and 'perhaps'... The roots of the English word 'happiness' have to do with fittingness both directly and indirectly... Etymology helps bring deep happiness into view by pointing out fittingness as an aspect of happiness" (King, 50-53). The active happening of being is directly related to both happiness and fittingness. A being's experience of fitting, then, is an essential precondition for experiencing happiness.

"Fitting" can occur in two ways: "Being as it is fitting for us to be and in the sense of our fitting together with things beyond ourselves" (King, 53). A fitting with one's own sense of being can create happiness, but happiness also, and more heavily, relies upon fitting together with

other beings. King describes this second type of fitting, fitting *together*, as one of the most intense experiences of being:

In fact, it is in our relationships with other human beings that most of us engage with being most intensely. Nearly everyone at least understands and desires intimate contact with other human beings... The being of every thing that comes into physical contact with us and engages with our receptivity to being, and thus affects us. What we desire from contact with other human beings is reciprocal affection, in a literal sense; that is, we desire to be affected by their being, and we desire that they will be affected by ours. Intimate engagement with the being of another human being is an important if not defining feature of love... To the extent that we succeed in relating to others, to the extent that we experience, swell in and affirm the fitting-together of their being and our capacity to receive it—to that extent, we love them. (King, 93)

What King describes as love is an intimate experience of interconnectedness that affirms a feeling of fitting-together with both oneself and another. Since this interaction or love with and for other people is both an engagement with being itself and with the being of another, relationships with other human beings offer a wealth of opportunity to experience fittingness, and therefore deep happiness.

When Chris loses his memory, it is precisely this type of fitting together, and subsequent happiness, that is lost to the family. Chris no longer feels he has a relationship with Jenny, and does not even recognize Kitty, let alone experience an intimate affection with either woman. As Jenny internally wails, “it was our peculiar shame that he had rejected us ... By the blankness of those eyes which saw me only as a disregarded playmate and Kitty not at all save as a stranger who had somehow become a decorative presence in his home and the orderer of his meals he let us know completely where we were... this exclusion from his life [was agonizing]” (West, 65). The three are strangers inhabiting the same house, nothing more. There is no affection, no fitting together, and consequently no happiness to be salvaged. Kitty recognizes that even returning Chris to her version of normal would not reinstate happiness as “it’s all such a breach of trust... he isn’t ours any longer” (West, 17). Knowing that Chris

held an openness towards a future with Margaret the entire time they were married is a piece of knowledge that will remain with Kitty even if Chris returns, forever ruining their chances at fitting.

Knowing that the happiness that comes from fitting together is now impossible for Chris, Kitty, and Jenny in either the abnormal *or* normal states, the characters contemplate their alternative options to achieve happiness. One option that Jenny considers is for her and Kitty to grieve Chris. Since they can no longer fit together, and since the danger in holding onto impossible futures has been made clear, the two women attempt to accept their loss. Jenny, in contemplating Chris's true desires, thinks, "I felt, indeed, a cold intellectual pride in his refusal to remember his prosperous maturity and his determined dwelling in the time of his first love, for it showed him so. Much saner than the rest of us, who take life as it comes, loaded with the inessential and the irritating. I was even willing to admit that this choice of what was to him reality out of all the appearances so copiously presented by the world, this adroit recovery of the dropped pearl of beauty, was the act of genius I had always expected from him" (West, 65). Calling Chris saner than her and Kitty, and his repression an act of genius, is a thinly-veiled attempt to make peace with her situation. The "cold, intellectual pride" with which she speaks renders compliments like "maturity" and "pearl of beauty" ironic. Shortly after, and several more times throughout the book, she readmits her opinion that Chris's experience is abnormal and must be changed. This scene, then, is a futile effort to process and accept the loss.

Jenny herself comes to recognize the limitations of her grief, although she misunderstands the source of her struggle. She thinks to herself, "Grief is not the clear melancholy the young believe it. It is like a siege in a tropical city" (West, 62). Matthew Ratcliffe's phenomenology of grief supports the tumultuous description of her experience, but not because grief itself is "a siege." What Kitty and Jenny are grappling with is not grief, but an inversion of grief that resists the typical relief that true grief can provide. The phenomenological understanding of grief is that it is not a fixed emotion, but a continuous reconfiguring of one's orientation towards the world after the loss of life-possibility (Ratcliffe, 657). Put simply, when a person dies, or is lost, the possibilities of their life are lost

with them, but their representation is not gone completely. “The shape of one’s life, and with it the kinds of significant possibilities that one experiences as inherent in things, come to depend on one’s relationship with a particular person. When that person dies, the world endures despite the loss, amounting to a diffuse, nonlocalized sense of his continuing presence” (Ratcliffe, 659). A person’s orientation towards the world largely depends on their relationships and fittingness with other people. Once an orientation-shaping person dies, the living person continues to experience an enduring world, and even continues to experience the one who is lost, but in a different way. Their presence still exists for the living person in thoughts, memories, and other aspects of their lifeworld that were relationally connected to the lost person. Grief, then, is a continuous process of reorientation towards the world with lost life possibilities but a remaining presence. Those who grieve do not lose their entire orientation towards the world, but must reshape the parts of their perception that relied on the life possibilities that no longer exist for them. This orientation can often provide relief, and does not diminish the living person’s feelings of fittingness with the deceased.

Grief is inverted for Kitty and Jenny because they are presented with atypical loss. Chris is still alive—his life possibilities are still present and perceived by all, but the revelation of his repressed desires has completely shattered the women’s orientation toward the world. If Chris had died in war, Kitty would lose Chris’s life possibilities but still perceive herself as Chris’s wife and the caretaker of their house. She would still experience the fittingness with her late husband and over time reorient the meaning and attitude of her identities. In the context of their loss, however, Chris stands right before her, but relinquishes her understanding of her own relationship status and career. Even Jenny, who knew Chris as a child and is therefore remembered by him, is still cast off as the “disregarded playmate” (West, 65). Her previous confusion about grief is replaced by the revelation that she cannot grieve Chris. “Chris is wholly enclosed in his intentness on his chosen crystal. No one weeps for this shattering of our world” (West, 67). What is lost is not Chris’s life possibilities, but Jenny’s and Kitty’s orientation towards the world and understanding of themselves. They cannot learn to reorient their life

without Chris—he is living among them with a future full of possibility, but actively denying their understanding of themselves and their world. This inversion of grief prevents a potentially relieving reorientation, and instead exacerbates the loss.

Since Kitty, Jenny, and Chris no longer fit together, and grief is unavailable to the women, there is only one remaining option that contains any happiness is to leave Chris in his repressed state and let him be with Margaret. Kitty understands that she and Chris no longer fit, whether he returns to the intersubjective temporal lifeworld or not. Chris still loves Margaret, though, and once Margaret reveals that she also still loves him too, a possibility for happiness is opened. She admits this feeling to Jenny during her visit to Margaret's house. After reminiscing about her time on Monkey Island, Margaret exclaims, "I suppose I ought to say that he isn't right in his head and I'm married—but oh!" (West, 46). She has overcome the trauma of losing Chris and does not repress it as an unfulfilled wish, but still feels love for him in both experiences of 1901 and 1916. Because of this continuity, it does not matter which time period Chris experiences—in both, he loves Margaret, and she loves him. To return him to 1916 would not change either of their feelings, but it would prevent them from being together. In his experience of 1916, he is still married to Kitty, must still run his dreaded business, and might even still have to return to war if the doctors allow it. Only in this abnormal state can any fittingness and happiness be extracted.

Why, then, do the three women, Margaret included, demand that Chris return? Shortly before shocking Chris back into 1916, Margaret says that "Nothing in the world matters so much as happiness" (West, 86). It is ultimately the women's understanding of the intersubjective lifeworld as objective, and the perception of Chris as abnormal, that cause them to disregard their own feelings. Jenny declares that "it is the first concern of love to safeguard the dignity of the beloved... if we left him in this magic circle there would come a time when his delusion turned into a senile idiocy; when his joy at the sight of Margaret disgusted the flesh, because his smiling mouth was slack with age" (West, 88). More important to her than fittingness or happiness is Chris's adherence to their intersubjective idea of time. She believes that his temporality would at some point

diminish “dignity,” as others would also recognize his experience as different from theirs, and think him abnormal, living in delusion. Normality, then, is more important to these women than happiness. The moment of recognition comes as Jenny watches Margaret walk across the lawn toward Chris: “I did not wonder that she was feeling bleak, since in a few moments she was to go out and say the words that would end all her happiness, that would destroy all the gifts her generosity had so difficulty amassed. Well, that is the kind of thing one has to do in this life” (West, 83). Jenny sees a complete destruction of happiness as something “one has to do in this life,” because she and those around her value a normality derived from the intersubjective lifeworld above all. In her understanding, any happiness that comes from a departure from this lifeworld must be destroyed.

West, a Modernist writer questioning preconceived traditions of normality, uses *The Return of the Soldier* to expose the flaws in preconceived valuations of normality above all else. By showing the reader a family that spirals into complete misery for the sake of preserving their own beliefs of normality, West reveals the farce in esteeming the rules of a falsely objective lifeworld above human happiness. This Modernist assessment of society’s flawed logic relies on a phenomenological rejection of presupposed societal norms in favor of prioritizing deep human happiness. The two bodies of thought complement one another in this text to call for a bracketing of preconceived ideas about the world, and place value instead on ideal human experiences, no matter how abnormal they may appear. As Chris’s doctor so perfectly expresses, “It’s my profession to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal. There seems to be a general feeling it’s the place where they ought to be. Sometimes I don’t see the urgency myself” (West, 81).

#### Works Cited

Breuer, Josef, and Sigmund Freud. *Studies on Hysteria*. Basic Books, 1957.

Fernandez, Anthony V. “Phenomenology, Mental Illness, and the Intersubjective Constitution of the Lifeworld.” In *Phenomenology*



- and the Political*, 199-214. Edited by S. W. Gurley and F. Pfeifer. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield International.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on 'Humanism.'" In *Pathmarks*, Edited by William McNeill. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989.
- King, Matthew. *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling on Fitting and Being*. Continuum, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472546654>.
- Lukács, Georg. From "Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle." *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, edited by Michael McKeon, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2000.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge, 2012.
- Mildenberg, Ariane. *Modernism and Phenomenology: Literature, Philosophy, Art*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Ratcliffe, Matthew. "Grief and the Unity of Emotion." In *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 41, no. 1, Wiley Subscription Services, Inc, 2017, pp. 154–74, <https://doi.org/10.1111/misp.12071>.
- Ratcliffe, Matthew. "Towards a Phenomenology of Grief: Insights from Merleau-Ponty." In *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 3, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020, pp. 657–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12513>.
- West, Rebecca. *The Return of the Soldier*. Penguin Books, 1988.





