EXCLAMAT!ON:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

DREAMS, VISIONS
& MINDSCAPES

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EDITORIAL BOARD

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EDITORIAL

> 'All that we see or seem
> Is but a dream within a dream.'

> -   'A Dream Within a Dream', Edgar Allan Poe[1]

Drawing on these words from Poe, which inspired the artwork for this edition, Volume 6 of *Exclamation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* probes into the liminal spaces of the mind to consider the myth making and world shaping influence of 'Dreams, Visions and Mindscapes'. In choosing our theme this year, our choice of 'Dreams, Visions and Mindscapes' was one which we felt spoke to all aspects of English, Creative Writing and Film in embodying that sense of imagination which is fundamentally human. We are sure this issue will offer a diverse range of thought-provoking critical and creative pieces to inspire our readers. Through the material in this journal, you will find work that engages with dreams, visions and mindscapes in many different ways; from Victorian mindscapes, to magic, mythology, and the re-envisioning of writers and poetic form, these diverse ideas are nevertheless all united by a fundamental curiosity: to refashion and reimagine the boundaries and limitations of daily life.

As ever, our choice of 'Dreams, Visions and Mindscapes' feels particularly relevant to the ever-shifting political and social landscape of the UK and beyond. With war still raging in the Ukraine, it is a stark reminder of the enduring power of dreams and visions, both as a source of solace and inspiration, and their darker influence on despotic, imperialist fantasies. In an increasingly divisive society, where truths become ever more slippery and free speech and protest are being eroded by the Police and Crime Bill, it is essential that we hold on to our ideals and emphasise the need to interrogate the structures of language, feeling and identity which shape the world around us.

This has been a year of firsts for the journal – broadening our editorial team to work with MA Publishing students, collaborating with international peer-reviewers from India and the USA, and publishing original artwork inspired by the theme of this issue. We are delighted to include the cover-piece and commentary from local artist and Exeter PhD student, Sarah Spencer, and hope this will be the first of many such collaborations in the future, as we expand

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, 'A Dream Within a Dream' (1849), https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52829/a-dream-within-a-dream [accessed 20 June 2022].

our inter-disciplinary focus.   We are thrilled to host our annual conference in person this year, for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Available via livestream and including a digital panel of speakers on our YouTube channel, this year's conference will allow us to promote Postgraduate research to a wider audience than ever before. The theme 'Wilderness, Nature and the Untamed' tackles core issues of identity, landscapes and eco-criticism, which are all the more pertinent in the face of the growing global climate crisis. As with previous editions, this theme will also be used for our 2022/2023 issue, and we encourage all Postgraduate researchers working in English Literature, Film Studies, and Creative Writing to submit their original research.

The production of this volume exemplifies the extent to which the journal has not only continued to grow in reputation and scope, but to which it has become a nationally recognised postgraduate journal, drawing on expertise from all corners of the UK. We could not have produced this volume without the support, dedication, and hard work of all those involved. My thanks and gratitude go out to our contributors, peer reviewers and most especially our editors, for their commitment, enthusiasm, and perseverance throughout every step of this process. I would also like to thank the Exeter HASS PGR team for their ongoing administrative help, especially Jane Tanner, Stacey Hynd, and the Alumni Award for making the conference and physical publication of this issue possible.

Whilst my time with *Exclamat!on* has come to an end, I confidently leave the journal in the very capable hands of Deputy Editor, Chloë Edwards. It has been a privilege to have worked with the journal for the last three years, from joining team as an Assistant Editor for English during the 2019/20 academic year under Ash Gannicott, to progression as Deputy Editor under Joe Holloway for the 2020/21 issue, and I look forward to seeing the journal continue to flourish. I hope that in exploring the content of this and future issues, the research published here will continue to foster discussions, collaborations and intellectual development for many years to come.

Sophie Smith

Editor

Allopoietics as Criticism: An Experiment in Form

Niamh Gordon

Contextual note

This experimental essay developed out of exercises completed in Dr Thomas Karshan's 'Ludic Literature' MA module at the University of East Anglia. In this module we were encouraged to engage in critical play by transforming and translating texts between different written modes and styles. Central to each experiment was always the question: how does this play aid us as critics? What do we learn of scholarly, critical use by working and reworking extant texts, and by adopting the styles and modes of others? This essay is not, then, a traditional academic account of the boundaries of form, the postmodern condition, or translation theory. Rather, it's an experiment; a piece of hybrid creative-critical work which attempts to answer certain research questions through iterative formal play.

1

What would it mean to take a piece of prose and turn it into a poem?

'Turn it' – as if by bending lines of prose back on themselves, poetry might emerge. As if the poem is hidden within the prosodic text, to be revealed by re-examination and reflection, perhaps at an oblique angle. After all, as Paul Valéry cautions, 'poetry is prose.'[1]

But there is a necessary extra step to be undertaken. First, we turn the prose back on itself, revealing the poetry striated within. Next, we must shape that poetry. To turn a piece of prose into a piece of poetry would appear, then, to be a process of extraction, rummaging through the prose, pulling out choice words and depositing them—where?

Into a new arrangement, a new space, a new form.

2

Etymologically speaking, 'translating' carries within it the notion of movement, of 'bear[ing], convey[ing], or remov[ing] from one person, place or condition to another'.[2] Picking up meaning and putting it somewhere new: crossing a boundary of some kind, and containing the meaning within the topology of a different language. For Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'The Translator's Task', the act of translation is not just a carrying across of meaning from one language to another but is, in itself, 'a form,' distinct from the work that is being

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[1] Paul Valéry, 'Remarks on Poetry', in *Literature in the Modern World*, ed. by Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 140.

[2] "translate, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (March 2018), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/204841>.

translated.[3] Further to this, for Roland Barthes, where meaning is located and how it is accessed through the reading process can only be described in terms of spatial movement. He writes, 'the Text is not coexistence of meaning, but passage, traversal; hence, it depends not on an interpretation, however liberal, but on an explosion, on dissemination.'[4]

Kate Briggs asks, 'Do we write translations or do we make them? Or, indeed, do we do them?'[5] They hover somewhere between the already created and the yet to be. The act of translating requires taking meaning from one framework (language, or form) and transforming it so that the same meaning can be understood in another framework (language, or form). However, as Barthes notes, there cannot be a coexistence of meaning when the act of reading is an explosion. The transformation involved in translation is, then, an obscure creative act, writing into being something that is new and not new, a dissemination of some elusive sort of meaning-content. In fact, Benjamin deems a bad translation the 'inexact transmission of inessential content.'[6] Presumably a good one is the opposite, exactly transmitting essential content.

3

To translate a work of prose into a work of poetry (to literally trans-form) is to recognise several undertakings. Firstly, the task of transmitting the essential content. 'Transmitting' feels indirect, as though the medium of transmission is secondary to the intangible idea ('the secret, the "poetic"') being carried across.[7] To transmit is 'to send across an intervening space'; the problem is that the linguistic medium—the words that bear meaning and occupy that intervening space – is all we have.[8] 'Transmitting' skips over the reading process, but it is in this reading process that the temporal distinction between narrative prose and poetic verse is exposed.

How different is it to read prose than to read poetry? Tom Leonard offers up a variety of points of distinction, including the wry observation that 'poetry is all the juicy bits in the juiciest order' while 'prose goes scchhpludd / prose goes scchhpludd scchhpludd clomp clomp clomp'.[9]

Perhaps what he is gesturing towards is that though the reading experiences take place in real time, different modes of comprehension arise when reading narrative prose than poetic verse. The way we encounter and ascribe meaning when reading prose – text which is unbound by metre or structure or verse – relies on a temporally-bound chronological

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[3] Walter Benjamin, 'The Translator's Task', in *The Translation Studies Reader: Third Edition*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p. 76.

[4] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p.59.

[5] Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), p.269.

[6] Benjamin, p.75.

[7] Ibid.

[8] "transmit, v." *OED Online*.

[9] Tom Leonard, '100 Differences Between Poetry and Prose' <https://www.tomleonard.co.uk/online-poetry-and-prose/100-differences-between-poetry-and-prose.html>.

act of reading which is different to how we begin to construct an understanding of the ideas contained in a poetic form. However, it is not just our temporal experience which is different. In changing forms, we move from one space to another.

Briggs uses Robinson Crusoe's building a table as a metaphor for examining the process of translation. A table is a table. But what happens 'when the Englishman makes his table again, with its imported aesthetic, only this time here, with the local materials and in the new setting of this wholly different island?'[10] What happens when we make anew a recognisable thing in a new space, utilising the materials supplied by its topography; namely rhyme, metre, verse form?

As a critical exercise, this transformation is making something new and not new, a strange form of poiesis. Necessarily it is an interrogation of form, but also of the value in generating new work from old, and is a mediation on what conversations may arise out of reflecting on this generation. As a critical process, I would like to term it allopoiesis; that is, a system which ends up creating something entirely other to itself.

4

Robert Coover's 1969 short story, 'The Babysitter', begins at precisely 7.40pm when the nameless babysitter arrives at the Tucker household 'ten minutes late'.[11] Immediately we are made aware of the temporal specificity of this narrative, one which begins at a disjunct. The babysitter is late, but the family are running behind time anyway; already spiralling out from these small, missed margins of time are other potential narratives—what might have occurred had everyone acted timeously? How would these alternates play out? These questions are both answered and decidedly not answered in the following thirty pages of the story.

Brian Richardson isolates the function of any narrative as relating a single intelligible story.[12] A failure to do this is something he describes as typical of postmodern writing, and terms these 'multiple' or 'unintelligible' stories 'nonmimetic fiction[s].' [13] As a piece of nonmimetic fiction, 'The Babysitter' consists structurally of fragmentary sections of varying length, which move between close third-person consciousnesses that are not clearly delineated. We open with the 'she' of the babysitter herself, and then in a new paragraph jump to the 'he' of Mr Tucker, then to Jack, the lonesome and lustful boyfriend, before moving back to the babysitter putting 'her books on top of the refrigerator' and catching 'a glimpse of Mr Tucker hurrying out of the bathroom in his underwear.'[14] These first four sections of narrative occur in a disorientating but comprehensible and, crucially, chronological order—yet the next segment does not fit. 'Her tummy. Under her arms. And

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[10] Briggs, p.250.

[11] Robert Coover, 'The Babysitter', in *Pricksongs and Descants* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), p.182.

[12] Brian Richardson, 'Narrative Poetics and Postmodern Transgression: Theorizing the Collapse of Time, Voice, and Frame', in *Narrative*, 8.1 (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, Jan 2000), p.33.

[13] Richardson, p.25.

[14] Coover, p.183.

her feet. Those are the best places.'[15] Whose voice is this? When is it taking place? It arrives in the narrative as an injection from the future: a question to be answered. On the page, in between the fragments of prose, we experience line breaks and white space. The task of reading the text becomes to fill in these gaps: to draw lines of narrative meaning between sections. We have no option but to move through this narrative space of the prose in the chronological order in which the fragments are provided to us. We figure it out as we read and move through time.

5

The multiplicity of narratives which fracture and refract through 'The Babysitter' operate on an anticipatory basis as much as a retrospective one. Mark Currie explains that 'narrative is understood as retrospection more readily than…anticipation, but it cannot really be one without the other.'[16] In embarking on each small subsection of potential narrative, Coover invites us to project forth the contextual meaning of that potential. We construct coherence only to have it directly contradicted: for example, three paragraphs which each begin at the same point with the babysitter variously 'crying', 'laughing', and 'kissing'.[17] Coover refuses us any single narrative, and certainly refuses logical chronological progression. Currie highlights 'the relationship between storytelling and the mode of continuous anticipation in which we attach significance to present moments' – only as the present moment disappears into the past can we retrospectively make sense of it, and yet we also make sense of the present by anticipating a future moment that will itself retrospectively make sense of this present. [18] In this way, Elana Gomel clarifies, 'the process of reading might be seen as a sort of ontological sleuthing, in which bits and pieces of evidence are incorporated into the constantly modified and dynamic picture.'[19]

With 'The Babysitter', at first this seems possible; in reading we feel as though we can figure out the 'true' narrative at the heart of the story, if only the contradictions would stop coming so rapidly. But as time passes and the narrative space becomes increasingly cluttered, we are presented with relentless impossibility. Jack's desire merges with Mr Tucker's which becomes his son Jimmy's, and the cacophonous narrative becomes a jostling arena of competing voices and desires. This proliferation 'brings to light not just what we desire, but that we desire.'[20]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.5.

[17] Coover, p.191.

[18] Currie, p.6.

[19] Elana Gomel, *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.31.

[20] Maya Sonenberg, 'Not-Knowing and the Proliferation of Plot', *Flashpoint Mag* <http://www.flashpointmag.com/mayasonenberg.htm>.

For Diana Elam, 'postmodernism is the recognition of the specifically temporal irony within narrative,' yet the irony that we experience in 'The Babysitter' is not only temporal but spatial.[21] It is not simply that there is no one chronology, but that as we move through it we realise the timespace of the narrative cannot function. In his 1937 essay 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel […]', Mikhail Bakhtin named this 'intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' the literary chronotope – the timespace of the narrative.[22] This term expresses the particularly close interrelationship of time and space in the literary image; or, to put it another way, 'narrative space is inseparable from narrative time.'[23]

Chronotopes are useful when thinking about how narrative is being constructed and deconstructed in 'The Babysitter.' Each fragment of prose takes us into a new narrative, 'an alternative world with its own temporal and spatial structures.'[24] The desire to reconcile, to build coherence, is inherent in the reading process, but we encounter the same physical spaces at the same times with different outcomes. We are presented with an uncooperative narrative space.

In the story the bath contains multitudes; that is to say, it contains variously Bitsy; Jimmy; the babysitter alone, with Mr Tucker, with Jimmy soaping her back, with Mark and Jack soaping her back, being assaulted, being killed, leisurely reclining, having to cut short her bathing to answer the phone, being walked in on by Jimmy, Mr Tucker, and/or Jack and Mark. As a chronotope it allows us to understand not only the spatial and temporal impossibilities being presented to us, but that they are one and the same.

7

Can we read 'The Babysitter' experiencing all possible narratives as having occurred at once? It seems a uniquely postmodern approach. 'Representations of impossible spaces [are] an integral part of the narrative poetics […] of post-modernity,' Gomel states, and what we experience in Coover's world is a 'flexible, multidirectional, contingent history' whereby conflicting desires and alternate timelines converge and coalesce into one narrative non-Newtonian form.[25] Operating almost like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, picking one narrative would necessitate denying all others, and yet they do exist: on the page, in our minds, and in the narrative space of the text. Narrative is presented as contingent, dependent on a causative chronology which breaks down under the pressure of desire, a violent de-structuring of comprehension. Importantly, space and time are flexible in this

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[21] Diane Elam, 'Postmodern Romance', *Postmodernism Across the Ages: Essays for a Postmodernity That Wasn't Born Yesterday,* ed. by Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), p.217.

[22] M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics', in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. by Brian Richardson, James Phalen and Peter Rabinowitz (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2002), p.15.

[23] Gomel, p.11.

[24] Teresa Bridgeman, 'Time and Space', *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.52.

[25] Gomel, p.6, p.16.

universe. Mr Tucker fantasises onto the page without limit, imagining the babysitter's 'thighs spread for him, on the couch, in the tub, hell, on the kitchen table for that matter.'[26]

8

A different kind of pressure can be found in certain verse forms. Rhian Williams observes that 'a poet might choose [a fixed form] in order to set particularly pressurizing, and so potentially strengthening, restriction on their expression', indicating the force that fixed form poetry requires to hold itself together.[27] Poetic verse forms are sets of constraints which must be adhered to in order to fulfil the said formal attributes, and choosing a particular poetic verse form as a mode of expression is not a choice that can be made divorced of context. Each form carries with it its history, hence writing into a poetic 'tradition'. What prose does not have to carry, and which a poetic translation will impose upon it, is the possible echo of all its previous formal iterations ingrained into the language.

The villanelle is one of the most restrictive poetic forms: in a traditionally structured form-adherent villanelle, '42% of the lines are occupied by repeated material.'[28] Its nineteen lines operate around just two rhymes, and its fixed form was traditionally thought to span five centuries' worth of artistry, stemming from sixteenth-century French balladry and Jean Passarat's 'J'ai perdu ma Tourterelle'. However, the villanelle spent the twentieth century suffering from a peculiar false history. Julie Kane's work in the late 1990s uncovered that its journey from Passarat's example to its more recent nineteenth- and twentieth-century iterations was not one of consistently fixed form at all.[29] Instead, Kane posits, it was unreliable source material used by Theodore de Banville in his 1872 prosodic handbook 'Petit traite de poesie francaise' which fixed the form of the poem.[30]

With its history based in falseness, the villanelle's own journey as a form resists itself.

9

Writing within formal constraints involves a particular kind of creative method. For the Oulipian writer Raymond Queneau, 'inspiration which consists in blind obedience to every impulse is in reality a sort of slavery.'[31] To create without artificial boundaries is to have a misguided sense of one's own liberation.

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[26] Coover, p.195.

[27] Rhian Williams, *The Poetry Toolkit* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p.110.

[28] Tom Barney, 'Literary Evaluation and Poetic Form: Poetic Form and Creative Tension', in *The Quality of Literature: Linguistic Studies in Literary Evaluation*, ed. by Willie Van Peer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2008), p. 73.

[29] Julie Kane, 'How the Villanelle Got Fixed', *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses* (1999) <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7891&context=gradschool_disstheses>.

[30] Kane, p. 6.

[31] Raymond Queneau, *Le Voyage en Grece* (1973), quoted in 'Rule and Constraint' by Marcel Bénabon, in *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature,* ed. by Warren F. Motte Jr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 41.

The false history of the villanelle feels acutely postmodern. It has enjoyed a modest resurgence over the last forty years or so (primarily since Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art' reintroduced it to a post-Formalist poetic world) but its harsh constraints have frequently been co-opted to satisfy a twentieth-century desire to rebel against 'a naïve and graceful form from a naïve and graceful time.'[32] This attempt to 'radically deconstruct an oppressive poetic tradition' that never existed in the first place invokes a Jamesonian crisis of historicity.[33] And yet, as Julie Kane notes, 'the fact is that a hundred-fifty-year-old fixed form villanelle tradition does now exist, although erected on a false foundation: situations perceived as real are real in their consequences.'[34] Again, Heisenberg feels relevant here, history being invoked by the very attempt to measure it. As a poetic form, then, the villanelle's topography is resistant to itself. It is both a breaking with tradition and an enactment of its own continuing history.

10

When it comes to creating meaning, the scaffolding of a villanelle is clearly spatially delineated and carefully controlled. Though its contradictory history is postmodern in feel, its 'adamantly artificial form' speaks to something other, an extant past.[35] Villanelles are iterative and reiterative. They circle back around to set phrases; they call on a very limited scope of rhyme words. They build meaning through repetition.

Terry Eagleton claims that 'in its predictability, repetition may yield us a sense of security', yet it can also work very differently.[36] Rather than generating a sense of security or completion, repetition can speak to a destructive force, one which resists and restricts forward movement, instead falling back into a narrative-breaking stasis. Derrida points out that 'the logic of repetition….remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive.'[37] Here again then do we see the villanelle form open up as something welcoming to a postmodern style, and specifically welcoming to a narrative-resistant short story like 'The Babysitter', which reiterates and repeats as it progresses, in what is an ultimately destructive reading experience as every possible outcome is examined, deployed, and destroyed by an alternate.

11

I translated 'The Babysitter' into a villanelle.

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[32] Amanda French, *Refrain, Again: The Return of the Villanelle* (2004), p. 33.
<http://amandafrench.net/villanelle/>.
[33] French, p. 33.
[34] Kane, p. 269.
[35] Annie Finch, 'Dancing with the Villanelle', *Villanelles* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2012), p. 17.
[36] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 113.
[37] Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics,* 25.2 (1995), p. 14.
<www.jstor.org/stable/465144>.

A Coover Villanelle

'What do you think of our babysitter?'

—when she's doubled over like that in the suds—

Tell her we're coming over to protect her.

Jack laughs nervously and dials the number.

'I thought it was the soap!' 'Tell her to be good.'

'What do you think?' (Of the babysitter.)

Her soft wet breasts rise and fall in the water,

His swats sting: is her skirt up? Her hair is all mussed,

Tell her we're coming over—to protect her—

Western—spy show—she switches back to the drama—

Phone rings, baby screams, thighs spread in the tub,

'What…do you think of the babysitter?'

She'll spank him, she says sometimes. Let her.

—towel down—the nappy pin! —his little neck flushed—

Tell her, 'we're coming over.' To protect her?

'We hope it's a girl.' Hardly surprising. Bend over.

He slams a hard right into the guy's guts.

'What do you think of my babysitter?'

Tell her we're coming over to protect her.

12

Generally speaking, prose doesn't rhyme. However, it does repeat. Motifs, imagistic rather than linguistic, are clear in 'The Babysitter.' I highlighted one of them already – the bath,

which I termed a chronotope. The bath acted as a 'place where the knots of narrative [were] tied and untied' and provided us with a way of seeing conflicting desires and ideologies competing for dominance within the framework of one impossible narrative topology.[38] In villanelle form, this collision of narrative space and time does not function in the same way, mainly because in reading a piece of poetic verse our narrative expectations may differ. The impulse to build meaning, to 'experience the present as an object of future memory' as Mark Currie puts it, is less aggressive, mainly because the expectation is not to build comprehensive narrative understanding or progression through a chronologically building piece of text.[39] However, the present is experienced as an object of future memory through rhyme. The villanelle functions with a strict rhyme scheme operating around two central line-end rhymes. Rhyme functions poetically as through association: an opening rhyme immediately sends out an echo through the future poetic space and waits to be answered by its closing line. With a regular rhyme scheme, we know when to expect these closing rhymes. Therefore each line is experienced as an object of future memory, as a rhyme operates like half of a whole, waiting for completion.

13

Rhymes yoke together concepts. The half rhymes in the translated 'Coover Villanelle' bring together 'suds', 'flushed', 'tub', 'good', 'mussed' – all lifted directly from the original text and all operating to bring together these clashing possibilities. In 'The Babysitter' we have no rhymes, but we do have these reoccurring chronotopes: the bath, the living room floor, the dinner party. These are narrative spaces which also operate associatively, yoking together each previous incarnation with a multitude of possible new outcomes. Specifically, they bleed into one another, so that the underwear the babysitter glimpses on page 183, and tries on at page 193, become an emblem of shame by page 202 and replace the 'panties' she is wearing in the attempted rape on page 200, which are revealed in another attempted rape on page 205. Or perhaps it is the same scene. The images call back to one another across the text.

Rhyme cannot negate: it simply makes a connection without specifying whether or not this is one of similitude or contrast. Similarly, the narratives being propelled through the narrative space of 'The Babysitter' echo and converge around one another with no authorial indication of which is 'correct', of what, if any, judgement we should be making in the white spaces between the text. Instead what we get is a reading experience which Maya Sonenburg says 'keeps [her] looking back even as [she] move[s] forward'; she 'moves' physically through the space of the narrative, yet constantly with an eye on the past.[40]

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[38] Bakhtin, p. 22.
[39] Currie, p. 21.
[40] Sodenberg, see note 20.

For Desiderius Erasmus, exercises in translating form were fundamental to gaining a good humanist education, and would allow the student to 'discover many things.'[41] However, when he speaks of this particular exercise he says we must 'bind prose into meter'—this is restriction, and violent restriction at that.[42] For Oulipian writers, strict form is liberation; it highlights the invisible habitual associations inherent in all creative decisions we make. Strict form serves to show us the impossibility of truly 'formless' thoughts and so acts as liberation from the unconscious and any ideology that may be latent in our mental associations. This violent binding into liberation seems to be exactly how desire functions in 'The Babysitter': as ideological, as unconscious, as mimicked, as inherited. Jimmy's penis becomes his father's as their desires merge and he learns the violence at the heart of the male sexuality being presented, 'watching them from the doorway'[43], just as the babysitter watches (and doesn't watch) narratives of redemptive, violent, gender-bending justice on the television:

> Down forbidden alleys. Into secret passageways. Unlocking the world's
>
> terrible secrets. […] the spy rips off the assailant's mask: a woman![44]

> People are shooting at each other in the murder mystery, but she's so
>
> mixed up, she doesn't know which ones are the good guys.[45]

Violence generates desire and desire, it seems, is inherently violent. Ultimately, this desire is narrative: the desire for ending, for completion and so retrospective comprehension. This is what Derrida calls 'an irrepressible desire to return to the origin', to resist forward movement altogether and return to the safety of the archived, experienced, and understood past.[46]

15

Integral to the villanelle form is this notion of completion. Its opening line is its penultimate, and within the first stanza we know what the final couplet will be in its entirety. It begins with an ending in sight. However, in order to get there we must experience repetitions, re-cast reiterations, and with each repetition the potential for irony grows, both structural and temporal. Mark Currie isolates 'the notion of postmodern style as "accelerated recontextualization", or the recycling of the increasingly recent past,' something which the

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[41] Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), p. 8. <http://blogs.iac.gatech.edu/bellyful/files/2012/11/erasmus_De_Copia.pdf>.

[42] Erasmus, p. 9.

[43] Coover, p. 205.

[44] Coover, p. 199.

[45] Coover, p. 205

[46] Derrida, p. 57.

villanelle form highlights as being a fundamental feature of Coover's original prose.[47] It is also something Julie Kane sees as specific to the villanelle due to its ahistorical history: 'it connotes tradition without bearing the burden of tradition.'[48]

We reach a premediated, already experienced conclusion then, at a point of maximum irony. The beauty in the closure provided by the villanelle is that it is made up of two points already experienced. However, this means it lends itself well to handling 'duality, dichotomy, debate…truths in paradoxical conflict would seem perfect materials for treatment in this form.'[49] The truths in conflict in this case are the governing question at the heart of the short story – 'What do you think of the babysitter? – and its wry, threatening answer, that 'we' are on our way to let her know in person.

16

Fixed form poetry dealing with the postmodern is not a novel thing. More obvious than the villanelle is the sestina, which enjoyed a Modernist resurgence in the 1930s inspired by W. H. Auden: it found its place in the postmodern poetic canon as a form which invokes tight technical restraints while maintaining a deceptively conversational style. Twentieth-century poets like John Ashbery and Elizabeth Bishop utilised the dexterity and technical skill required to create sestinas which keep a disarmingly prosodic tone, creating an inherent conflict between formal technicality and informal style.[50] The sestina spirals, reiterates, and ultimately concludes in a cacophony of repetition in a condensed final stanza whereby the physical space of the poem is overtaken by its driving refrain. More recently, the winner of The Poetry Society's 'National Poetry Competition 2017' was Dom Bury's sestina 'The Opened Field', which was described by judges as having been 'a neutron star […] compressed inside the restraining machinery of a sestina'.[51] Here, form and violence are united.

However, it is important to note the contemporary sestina operates via direct recall, its mechanics relying on the resurgence of key repeated words. It does not make space for the associative qualities of rhyme, nor the narrative propulsion of meter found in the iambs of the 'Coover Villanelle'. What the villanelle gives access to is a topology that is distinctly other from conversation, from prosody. In a villanelle the landscape announces itself as aggressively 'poetic', and the 'content' of 'The Babysitter' has to reconfigure into half-rhymes, imagistic motifs, and sensibility which can be comprehended within the contemporary: because to read a poem is not to embark on narrative—anticipatory or retrospective—but to attempt to experience a moment.

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[47] Currie, p. 10.

[48] French, p. 3.

[49] Philip K. Jason, 'Modern Versions of the Villanelle', *College Literature*, 7.2, (1980), p. 144. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111324>.

[50] See, for example, Ashbery's 'Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape' or Bishop's 'A Miracle for Breakfast'.

[51] Dom Bury, 'The Opened Field' (2017) <http://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/the-opened-field/>.

17

That said, for a form which is so reflexive and resistant to forward motion the villanelle does have a 'narrative or progressive thrust', as does 'The Babysitter'.[52] There is an element of audience participation which both propels and implicates the reader through Coover's sexually violent, physically aggressive world, wherein by reading we allow for the unfolding of the worst possible outcomes to all occur at once: a uniform horror. In the villanelle form this mounting horror finds a home in the refrain and its promise of protection. Who is the 'we' who promise this protection? By the last stanza it has to be us, the readers. 'We' the consumers of this narrative are participants in the violent desires which seek to debase and destroy everything within it.

Moving forward, moving backwards. Opening and closing, creating and destroying. Reading as an explosion.

18

As a critical evaluation of a text, a translation into a new form necessarily draws attention to the properties inherent in the original which can operate in a similar way in the new space, content that can be 'transmitted exactly'. Dialogue is frequently iambic and fits into metre with ease. The opening and closing of rhyme can be found in imagistic motifs. Through utilising the notion of chronotopes it is possible to understand what happens to narrative in a non-narrative form, and conversely, how meaning is still constructed temporally. Spatially, we are able to examine how the text cooperates or resists form. Form is something we often think of as abstract and yet orthographically it makes itself visible on the page in the villanelle form: where we are able to see the start and end in one go. This expresses in verse what Peter Brooks discusses with regard to narrative prose: that 'fabula – "what really happened" – is a mental construction the reader derives from sjizet, which is all he ever directly knows.'[53]

But all of these points somewhat miss the point. As a creative exercise, the translation brings into being a way of comprehending a text, and of comprehending the reading process. In Henri Bergson's words, 'if I glance over a road marked on the map and follow it up to a certain point, there is nothing to prevent my turning back and trying to find out whether it branches anywhere. But time is not a line along which one can pass again.'[54] We can move over the physical iteration of a text limitlessly, but we can only read it temporally.

Poetic form binds us into a present moment, and this essay strives to narrativize that. And of course, formal experiments have leaked across into the body of this work. Form is about dictating in what order and manner we receive information. Form is the timespace of the reading process.

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[52] Jason, p. 140.

[53] Peter Brooks, *Reading for The Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 13.

[54] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1910) <https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Bergson/Bergson_1910/Bergson_1910_03.html>.

19

I started this essay with a question, and now feel undue pressure to finish it with an answer. What does it mean to translate form? Initially I spoke of creating 'a new arrangement, a new space, a new form', and yet the questions which this essay have asked, like a refrain, are questions of the original forms. How does 'The Babysitter' function? Why villanelle? What does the new piece of work show us?

This essay, perhaps then, is a by-product. It operates as the final part of the allopoietic approach; realistically, the questions which come out of the act of translating are necessarily different to those that might now be emerging from this essay. And so the system which so carefully created the poem has now generated something other entirely.

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Breakup Letter to Marinetti

Katie Holmes

Dear Marinetti,

We're breaking up.

I know it was me that dragged our relationship back up after a decade, but it's not going to work out. I'm a different person now. We just don't see the world in the same way. I see you with my new, older eyes. After getting reacquainted with your ideas, there's a voice within me that just cannot be still. I try to employ logic, but I fear I am scrawling the page with demented writing.

I was seduced by a man singing for his love of war and danger. He rode a train like a horse flanked by airplanes. He admired large breasted locomotives and caressed his car. His vision of the future was filled with eternal, omnipresent speed. He drove recklessly through the city whilst black smoke billowed all around. He knew what he wanted and he was prepared to take it with force. You really did put on a performance and what a performance it was!

That fast life you promoted means that we're burning out, exhausted. It seems a little ironic to me that I sit here into the late hours. I'm interrupted by the nocturnal vibrations as my thoughts race while I try to commit words to page. I am squinting to see under the same electric lights which stop me seeing the beauty of the night sky. Looking back, I do fear that perhaps you weren't getting enough sleep.

I'm living in your utopia: a world filled with machines, automation, and war. Where's the human in all this? I've been watching the news and it's filled with conflict and violence. There are people dying as we speak. People, families, children, and whole communities are getting displaced through war. Is violence really the answer? I hope you are happy with yourself.

I've been commuting to the big, dirty city. It turns out that locomotion you were harping on about is a bit shit. They are overcrowded and they don't run on time. Air travel is a massive polluter and space travel is even worse. All those factories have been poisoning our lungs and our planet. We're on the brink of our own demise. I hope this toxic masculine world is everything you ever wanted.

I know that at the wrong side of thirty you would want nothing to do with me. I'm everything you hate and it feels good. I'm renegotiating that power. It turns out I quite like museums; they have great cafes too. It's funny because that's where I found you. Sitting there gathering dust with all the other old men. Cast aside with other useless manuscripts. Your mausoleum is my playground. I joyously sip coffee whilst dancing on your grave. Does that scare you?

It's time to move on.

It's not me, it's you.

It. Is. Over.

Kind regards,

Katie

Critical Analysis

Manifestos position themselves between 'what has been done and what will be done, between the accomplished and the potential.'[1] I first encountered Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto (1909) at college, aged 17. After reading it, I believed that poetry could change the world. In fact, I was ready to 'stand tall on the roof of the world, [and] hurl [...] defiance at the stars!'[2] Fast forward twenty years or so: Brian Eno gives a talk at COP26. Alongside storytellers, artists, and performers, Eno tells a global audience, 'Science discovers, Art digests. Art and culture tell us stories about other possible worlds, lives, and ways of being.'[3] Eno believes that through writing we can experience this imaginary, better world. Aristotle would agree, as 'a poet's object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen.'[4] But, if art really is our sustenance, how can we continue to nourish the world? How can we use culture to make positive social change? Looking for answers to this question led me back into the arms of Marinetti.

'A Breakup Letter to Marinetti' is a critical response couched in the feminine-coded form of a breakup letter. It uses correspondence to understand the ways in which this epistolary form can be a useful space for feminist practice.[5] I am breaking up with Marinetti's ideas and rejecting his vision of the future. The purpose of the correspondence to Marinetti cuts straight to the chase with 'we're breaking up'. A line is drawn. And, similarly to Sylvia Plath, I declare that 'I write only because there is a voice within me that will not be still.'[6] At this stage, dear reader, I believe it is important to state that I am aware my relationship with Marinetti is one-sided and entirely fictional. It is a reactionary thing and an attempt to seize back power, possibly control. This is what women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* would call a 'closure ritual.'[7]

Professor Mary Ann Caws (2002) awards the 'all-time Oscar' for manifestos to Marinetti's performative piece.[8] As I state in my correspondence, 'And what a performance it was!' The Futurists developed a 'rich new language liberated from the bounds of tradition, their poetry and rhetoric addressed topics of broad national and cultural importance.'[9] When

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[1] Mary Ann Caws, *Manifesto: A Century of isms* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. xxi.

[2] F.T. Marinetti, 'The foundation and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)' in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. by Alex Danchev (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 1-8 (p. 4).

[3] Brian Eno, *5x15 at COP26 – Arts and the Imagination Hosted by Brian Eno* (UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) at the SEC – Glasgow 2021, 2022) [accessed 30th September 2021].

[4] Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 124.

[5] Lydia Fellgett, *Amazons and Afterwards: Correspondence as Feminist Practice*, in *Influence and Inheritance in Feminist English Studies,* by E.J. Hogg and C. Jones (Palgrave Pivot, London 2015), p. 34.

[6] Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home*, (Faber & Faber, 1999) p. 56.

[7] Emily Gulla, 'How to get over someone, according to relationship experts', *Cosmopolitan* https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/love-sex/relationships/a32877792/how-to-get-over- someone/ [accessed 12 December 2021].

[8] Caws, *Manifesto*, p. 168.

[9] Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100 (2022) Moma.org. <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/futurism/> [accessed 10 January 2022].

Marinetti's manifesto appeared on the front page of *Le Figaro* in 1909, 'manifestoing started in earnest.'[10] It went on to become, arguably, the catalyst for some significant discourse in the arts 'felt well beyond western Europe'[11], spanning decades. Marinetti's vision of the future has been both applauded and criticised. Marinetti feverishly believed that a 'poet must spend himself with warmth, glamour and prodigality'[12] to get his vision in motion. He shunned the literature of the time for fear it would induce 'slumber'. Marinetti advocates for shunning sleep and working through the night, excited by 'nocturnal vibrations.'[13] The correspondence begins by mimicking the context in which Marinetti claims he wrote his manifesto and, as I goad in the letter, 'I do fear that perhaps Marinetti wasn't getting enough sleep'. Fast forward 20 years or so: imitating Marinetti in parody, I sit up late, feverishly writing a breakup letter to Marinetti. I'm trying to employ logic, but I fear I am scrawling the paper with demented writing.[14] I paint the scene just as Marinetti prophesized. The light shines like electric moons and cars race past like machine gun fire.[15]

Cinzia Blum describes Marinetti's writing as a 'fiction of Power' and a 'male-centered project.'[16] It is clear that Marinetti sees war as 'the only cure for the world.'[17] Marinetti visualises himself as 'a warrior with his head raised to violate, or rape, [aggressively] against a feminized reality.'[18] His contempt for women is referenced several times in his Manifesto. 'The tone is hortatory, contrarian, bullying, rapid-paced' and is linked to a 'feeling of joyousness and rapidity, associated with the power.'[19] Alongside Feminism, Marinetti declares museums and libraries, morality and cowardice, as threats to his revolution. In the letter, I admit that I was seduced by a man singing for his love of war and danger. I describe his vision like a military salute. He rode a train like a horse flanked by airplanes. But I use his own words to liken his love of automobiles to a woman's body or sexual fetish. He admired large-breasted locomotives and caressed his car. His vision of the future was filled with eternal, omnipresent speed.[20] He drove recklessly through the city whilst black smoke billowed all around. Marinetti's words and actions are filled with destruction and violence. He knew what he wanted and he was prepared to take it with force. He even rejected sleep and pensiveness in favour of action and movement.

Marinetti may want to take the world by force, seize power, and destroy anything which does not fit with his vision of progress, but Foucault believed that power can be negotiated, and that a power struggle is a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle:

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[10] Marinetti, 100 Artists' Manifestos, p. xix.

[11] Claudia Salaris, 'The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde' *in Italian Futurism 1909-1914*, ed. by Vivien Green (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014) pp. 22-50 (p. 24).

[12] Marinetti, *100 Artists' Manifestos*, p. 4.

[13] Ibid, p. 5.

[14] Alex Danchev, *On War and Art and Terror*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p. 3.

[15] Marinetti, *100 Artists' Manifestos*, p. 5.

[16] Cinzia Blum, 'Rhetorical Strategies and Gender in Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto', *Italica,* 67 (1990), p. 196-211 (p. 198).

[17] Marinetti, *100 Artists' Manifestos*, p. 5.

[18] Ibid, p. 205, p. 198.

[19] Caws, p168.

[20] Teresa L. Ebert, 'Manifesto as Theory and Theory as Material Force: Toward a Red Polemic', *JAC,* 23.3 (2002), pp. 553-562 (p. 553).

'there is reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal.'[21] Power exists in flux. Heather Love (2007) highlights that a 'central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence.'[22] This oppositional criticism can only exist because of these existing structures of power. Love observes that 'the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them' but that the real challenge is 'to overcome the past and escape its legacy.'[23] Older than Marinetti was when he launched these ideas on the world, this writer is on the wrong side of thirty and would certainly have been tossed 'into the trash can, like useless manuscripts'[24] as 'I see Marinetti with my new, older eyes'. Marinetti wanted to be discarded after thirty. But for this writer, it feels as if it is time to renegotiate that power.

Jack Halberstam provides some useful perspectives about these 'precarious models of success.'[25] Notably, *The Queer Art of Failure* offers us an opportunity to imagine alternatives to hegemonic systems, a theory that links feminism with the 'radical evil conjured by failing, losing, stumbling, remembering, and forgetting.' That failure presents opportunity for critique because it provides the opportunity to refuse to submit to 'dominant logics of power and discipline.'[26] It does seem counterintuitive to react by appearing not to resist or being passive. Halberstam describes activities that looked like 'indifference or inaction' but are actually 'the weapons of the weak.'[27] Halberstam's 'Shadow Feminism'[28] encourages us to fail in the name of progress, to not fall in line. This prompts us to critically reassess the political value of action and indifference.

My original intention was to sit in opposition to the original manifesto. In the spirit of Halberstam, this piece sought to reject Marinetti. Whilst the Futurist manifestos 'valorize avant-garde artistic practices, technology, war, and virility'[29], they certainly champion action over apathy or indifference. Jean Baudrillard defines indifference as 'an original situation, which is not absence, or nothing.'[30] This suggests that it must be something. Baudrillard supports Halberstam's theories and explains that there are strategies to indifference which inflict damage. Masses are indifferent bodies that contain mass violence and mass virulence. However, it is suggested by both that there is a choice to the inaction. Inaction is a tool or an opportunity to reject or object: a chance to protest. If to actively not act is an action, then there is violence in indifference. A silent threat or a cold war?

Even though the correspondence recognizes the allure of his power, it seeks to unpick Marinetti's ideas holding up a mirror or 'shadowing'[31]. It gradually becomes more cohesive.

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[21] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1982), pp. 777-795 (p. 794) [accessed 27 January 2022].

[22] Heather Love, 'Epilogue: The Politics of Refusal' in *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjghxr0.9. [accessed 22 May 2022].

[23] Love, pp. 1–30.

[24] Marinetti, *100 Artists' Manifestos*, p. 6.

[25] J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 5.

[26] Ibid. p. 89, p. 88.

[27] Ibid, p. 87.

[28] Ibid, p. 4.

[29] Blum p. 198.

[30] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Violence of Indifference', *in The Conspiracy of Art,* ed. by Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotex, 2005) pp. 141-155 (p. 145).

[31] Halberstam p. 4.

The lines are shorter, certain, and firm: a representation of the growth and ownership of ideas; a shift. The 'It. Is. Over' is punctuated to create a sense of certainty: a drawing in of breaths. A pause. The letter tries hard not to come across as childish or petty, though towards the end of the letter cracks appear. Marinetti's audacity annoys me and as my patience wears thin, the profanity 'bit shit' slips in. I place myself in a playground to highlight that I am not taking Marinetti seriously. It's a game. I declare 'I like museums.' Am I being childish? Maybe. I envision myself dancing on the grave of Marinetti's ideas as I visit a museum. I am joyously sipping coffee. Revenge? Pettiness? Perhaps both. Finally, an appropriate sign-off is adopted, but not before a take on the cliché 'it's not you, it's me' places the final blame on Marinetti. We are living in Marinetti's dreamscape: a world filled with machines, automation, and war.

If we consider writing as a tool for social change, Woodward tells us that when we make an object such as writing, we are also producing a tool for social inquiry because through objects 'we can better understand both social structures and larger systemic dimensions such as inequality and social difference, and also human action, emotion and meaning.' [32] Even if we don't intend them to, our actions and our outputs can have consequences. Ebert states that 'the manifesto and the polemic are, as might be expected, marginalized in mainstream discourses and treated in the academy and knowledge industry, in general, as modes of non-knowledge.' [33] That a manifesto's '"performative efficacy" …[is]…always haunted by the manifesto's inherent theatricality' [34] reduces manifestos to nothing more than an act. Danchev raises a good point when considering the artist as a 'moralist'. He states that the artist must 'hope that there is, or will be, an audience of sentient spectators, viewers, readers, absorbed in the work: a community, a moral community, for whom it stands up and who will stand up for it.' [35] This creates a shift or share of the responsibility, and therefore the power from the artist to the audience of the work. What if the voices we see are not good? What if we don't act? Are we agreeing? I fear I have more questions than answers. I may have ended my relationship with Marinetti but, undoubtedly, I have been changed by it.

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[32] Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*. (London: Sage, 2007) p.32.

[33] Ibid p. 145.

[34] Teresa L. Ebert, 'Manifesto as Theory and Theory as Material Force: Toward a Red Polemic', *JAC,* 23.3 (2002), pp. 553-562 (p. 553) [accessed 22 November 2021].

[35] Danchev, p. 29.

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<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/futurism/>   [accessed   10 January 2022]

Corrosive Repetition: Temporality and Signification in Works by Samuel Beckett and Bruce Nauman

Chris Doyen

'Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it' – Gilles Deleuze on David Hume in *Difference and Repetition.*[1]

Artwork: Bruce Nauman, *Clown Torture*, 1987. © Bruce Nauman / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and DACS, London 2022.

There is something disconcerting about repetition, particularly the prospect of infinite repetition. Its machine-like relentlessness poses an unsettling dilemma. Although the familiarity of routine can become comforting over time, too much of a good thing sometimes has the opposite effect, resulting in a rupturing of that routine. Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) is an American artist whose video and installation art employs repetition as a technique to attack viewers. Nauman's *Clown Torture* (1987) video installation consists of television monitors featuring clowns embroiled in various predicaments. Two sets of monitors are stacked upon each other, with the images on one of the top monitors flipped upside down while another of the monitors is on its side, which serves to disorient the viewer. With all the videos set on a continuous loop, Nauman's use of repetition acts as a vehicle to defamiliarise viewers.

The space of the Nauman installation, as well as the actions of the characters depicted, call to mind the barren staging of a Samuel Beckett play, the immersive art environment becoming an arena of performance. Nauman has stated that he was highly

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, originally published by Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p.70.

influenced by the playwright, whose protagonists in plays like *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1957) appear as if stranded in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, somewhere between reality and nightmare. In his book *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text* (2007), Steven Connor analyses the motif of repetition in Beckett's work. Regarding the prevalence of the concept of repetition in contemporary art, Connor labels it a subversive act:

> The principle of repetition seems to have acquired a particular power in the cultural era we have come to know as the 'postmodern': in painting, writing and film, the modernist imperative to 'make it new' has been superseded by a desire to recirculate the old or the already known, if only in the attempt to subvert the grounds of familiar knowledge.[2]

Take, for example, a new remix of a favourite song. Often, the updated version has only minimal variations in melody, rhythm, or tone whereas in other cases, the new version differs radically from the original. In this sense, Connor's use of the phrase 'if only in the attempt to subvert' belies the very radical power of subversion. In *Difference,* Giles Deleuze asserts, 'in every respect, repetition is a transgression.'[3] Indeed, the use of repetition may be powerful enough to disrupt signification, disturbing the processes by which audiences arrive at meaning. Nauman's video installations subvert typical art historical modes by delaying the audience's search for meaning while also eventually prolonging that experience of meaning. The strategy disarms viewers while it opens a kind of liminal space, allowing for deeper audience reception of the content of the artwork.

Applying the point Connor makes about the distinction between circular and linear repetition to Nauman's artworks can be illustrative. A look at Carolyn Pedwell's notions of habit is also illuminating in terms of the shock value of Nauman's artwork that has the potential to knock viewers out of their typical lived experience. Kathryn Chiong, in her article 'Nauman's Beckett Walk', focuses on common threads between the work of the playwright and that of the artist, including the motifs of repetition and temporality. Chiong refers to 'Beckett's and Nauman's production, when a spoken phrase becomes a maddening refrain, when a sound begins to grate in its seeming sameness.'[4] The present study picks up where Chiong leaves off by applying concepts from French literary theorist Roland Barthes's essay 'The Third Meaning' (1970) to Nauman's work in order to delve deeper into the deleterious effects of repetition on signification. This study also offers a fuller investigation into the debilitating effect of repetition in Nauman's video installation *Clown Torture* in its stalling of viewers' perception of time.

On Repetition Breaking Repetition

Habits are hard to break. Ironically, the repetition of the looped videos in Nauman's immersive installations act towards breaking habitual thinking. A fitting connection can be made between the struggle to escape embodied in Beckett's characters and that of the characters in Nauman's *Clown Torture*. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir makes direct reference to this force of habit:

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[2] Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text* (Colorado: The Davies Group, 2007), p.2.

[3] Deleuze, p.3.

[4] Kathryn Chiong, 'Nauman's Beckett Walk', *Bruce Nauman* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018), p.76.

All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?[5]

To this, Estragon replies, 'We are all born mad. Some remain so'.[6] In the lines preceding this piece of dialogue, Vladimir suggests to Estragon that because they have so admirably kept their appointment, they deserve a commendation. Vladimir asks, 'How many people can boast as much?' Estragon's frank answer is 'Billions.'[7] In this case, it is the continuing habit that is madness, for on the previous page, Vladimir mounts an urgent appeal to Estragon in an impassioned insistence to 'not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the chance!... Let us make the most of it, before it is too late!'[8] In the final pages of the play, Vladimir reasons, 'We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is the great deadener.'[9] Connor begins his examination of Beckett by exploring the idea of habit as a key feature of the concept of repetition. Regarding the playwright's work, Connor writes, 'His early works show the hopeless, habitual wanderings of characters struggling to escape from habit, even though they are themselves constitutively enslaved by it.'[10]

Portrayal of the repeated, asinine activities in which the characters in Nauman's *Clown Torture* are entangled, such as the one repeatedly walking into the room to have a bucket of water dumped over his head, parallels the utter ridiculousness of some of the quotidian endeavours humanity is commonly caught up in every day. However, repeated viewing of the video by audience members may also ironically enable the repetition portrayed by the clowns in the video to potentially breach the cycle of typical thinking in the viewer. With its incorporation of sound, Nauman's work utilises sensory manipulation as a kind of assault on viewers' perception. Loud noises that attack viewers can be shocking and Nauman's earliest stated goal of artmaking was 'to try to make art that did that. Art that was just there all at once. Like getting hit in the face with a baseball bat. Or better, like getting hit in the back of the neck. You never see it coming; it just knocks you down.'[11] This shock to the system can result in a break from one's typical mindset; however, that abrupt change may feel jarring, which explains some viewers' immediate urge to flee the space of the art exhibition. Even though this sense of instability may feel disconcerting, it does have the potential to bring with it a shift in one's perspective, however brief that may be.

In her article 'Mediated Habits', Carolyn Pedwell sets out to examine the relationship between media imagery and habit. One facet of the reasoning behind her inquiry is the fact that 'visual cultural plays a key role in the mediation of embodied habits of perception,

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[5] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, trans. by Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p.51.

[6] Beckett, p.51.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid, p.58.

[10] Connor, p.1.

[11] Joan Simon, 'Breaking the Silence: An Interview with Bruce Nauman', in *Art in America*, (1988).

feeling and conduct.'[12] In her description of habit, she notes how 'in the tradition of Descartes and Kant, habituation has widely been associated with forms of mindless repetition that keep us tied to the status quo.'[13] What is most interesting about her analysis in light of the present study is the way in which those habits may be disrupted. Pedwell notes how 'in making social processes and routines seem unfamiliar rather than automatic, the defamiliarising effect of particular aesthetic images was interpreted by modernists as having the capacity to bring about changes in habits of perception and behaviour.'[14] She goes on to suggest that 'in a more Deleuzian vein, the wager is that a direct connection with sensation may engender what Brian Massumi (2002) refers to as "a shock to thought": an affective jolt that works less to reveal truth as it does to "thrust us involuntarily into a mode of critical inquiry" (Bennett 2005, p. 11).'[15] Pedwell asserts that through 'the disorientation of undefined affective intensity, the promise of affect is that it will engender forms of knowing that "transform the self who knows" (Bartky 1996, p. 179).'[16]

In the case of the Nauman installation, an interruption in one's daily scheduled programming comes by way of a break from established forms of mainstream media consumption, much of which tend to perpetuate those daily routines by promoting total immersion in the media, rather than abruptly knocking viewers out of the fantasy. According to Deleuze, '…it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind.'[17]

In Nauman's work, the repetition eventually turns in on itself, serving as a mechanism to disrupt the habitual routine of everyday life. Connor points out how art can 'free us from our contemporary servitude to the social forms of repetition in standardization, routine and consumption.'[18] Connor goes on to make reference to an excerpt from Deleuze's *Difference*, in which Deleuze proffers art as a vehicle to disrupt the monotony of the everyday:

> The more standardized our everyday life seems, the more stereotyped, the more subordinated to the accelerated reproduction of objects for consumption, the more art must fix upon and draw out that tiny difference that plays elsewhere and simultaneously between the different levels of repetition…. Every art has its techniques of imbricated repetition whose critical and revolutionary power can attain the highest point in leading us from the dreary repetitions of habit… (*DR,* 375).[19]

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[12] Carolyn Pedwell, 'Mediated Habits: Images, Networked Affect and Social Change', *Subjectivity*, 10.6 (2017), p.151.
[13] Ibid, p.152.
[14] Ibid, p.155.
[15] Ibid, p.149.
[16] Ibid, p.149.
[17] Deleuze, p.8.
[18] Connor, p.9.
[19] Ibid.

Deleuze's conception of the difference between 'clothed'[20] and the 'naked'[21] repetition is illustrative when applied to Nauman's work. Clothed repetition reveals subtle differences each time. Small variations in the recurrent scenarios in Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel titled *Jealousy* provide an example, where slight changes left exposed in the narration, such as subtle shifts in scenery or décor, are oftentimes barely noticed by readers. Naked repetition, on the other hand, consists of exact, one-to-one replication. The looped videos of Nauman's *Clown Torture* qualify as naked repetition in that there are absolutely no variations in the repetition. Seeing the video of Nauman's clowns for the first time is a new experience; the second time, those events are replicated. There is, of course, no change in the video footage the second time around; nonetheless, exact duplication remains impossible. For example, the environment of the art gallery or museum will not be the same each time since there will be different people in attendance. We might go as far as saying the spectator's viewing experience will never be the same upon each new visit, as in the famous axiom regarding never being able to step foot in the same river twice. Deleuze notes how 'according to the law of nature, repetition is impossible'[22] and how 'habit never gives rise to true repetition: sometimes the action changes and is perfected while the intention remains constant; sometimes the action remains the same in different contexts and with different intentions.'[23]

On Repetition Breaking Signification

The naked repetition of Nauman's video installation works toward impeding signification. After repeated viewings of the looped video footage, there could be said to be a movement in two opposite directions: accumulation and disintegration. Upon first viewing, there may be a sense that the clowns in the videos represent the idea of suffering. Watching the performances again, the clowns' actions could suggest a feeling of futility. Another viewing might point to the clowns as a metaphor for members of the audience. This repeated viewing leads to a sort of layering; however, as layers of meaning begin to build, rather than solidifying or cementing the first meaning, this accumulation eventually reaches a critical point where it spills over and dissipates, ultimately destabilising meaning. The link between signifier and signified begins to gradually dissolve in a process of emptying the signifier of meaning. In this way, Nauman's artwork, in effect, obstructs the turning cogs of signification. This concept of accumulation calls to mind Barthes' analysis in his essay 'The Third Meaning' (1970), in which he refers to the third meaning as 'the supplementary meaning.'[24] Barthes describes the first level of meaning as 'an informational level' while the second is 'a symbolic level.'[25] These first two are both in the realm of what Barthes calls 'obvious'. A third level Barthes labels as 'obtuse', and it is this obtuse meaning that is disturbing:

> In short, what the obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism). A number of reasons can be given for this. First and foremost, obtuse meaning is discontinuous, indifferent to the story and to the obvious meaning (as signification of

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[20] Ibid, p.6.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Deleuze, p.6.
[23] Ibid, p.5.
[24] Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning,' *Image Music Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977), pp. 54-55.
[25] Ibid, p.52.

the story). This dissociation has a de-naturing or at least a distancing effect with regard to the referent….[26]

Furthermore, Barthes contends that 'the obtuse meaning is a signifier without a signified, hence the difficulty in naming it.'[27] Barthes' analysis centres on film stills taken from Sergei Eisenstein's films, and it is the removal of these images from the larger context of the complete film that leads to this theory of the third meaning; similarly, the repetition in Nauman's videos results in a kind of third meaning. Barthes illustrates how 'the still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time.'[28] Taking the film still out of context breaks the narrative sequence just as the looping of Nauman's videos thwarts forward narrative progression.

Later in his book, Connor notes the self-reflexivity of Beckett's work and how it turns in on itself like a mobius strip. The characters are just 'there' as, indeed, are the plays themselves, like signifiers without clear signifiers. Connor refers to Sidney Homan's *Beckett's Theatres: Interpretations for Performance*:

> The plays therefore no longer require reference to a pre-existing world, or the addition of any commentary to elucidate meanings which are hidden or allegorically elsewhere; the plays are simply what they are, in an elementary performing present, without before or after, the action [according to Homan] 'complete, pure, itself and immediately experienced by the audience.[29]

This telling description of Beckett's works as plays that 'are simply what they are' calls to mind the minimalist sculptures created by Nauman and some of his contemporaries. Just as the abstract expressionists did with painting, works by minimalist sculptors like Carl Andre and Donald Judd, such as large cubes displayed on the floor or the wall of the art gallery, took sculpture down to its bare essentials: namely, pure form. These sculptural objects, too, 'are simply what they are'; that is, they are pure material and pure form, mostly devoid of figuration or representation and, to some degree, devoid of signification. The forms themselves become less about their own objecthood and more about the viewer's bodily relationship to, and engagement with, those objects in the space of the gallery or museum. Connor notes how 'repetition can sometimes involve the attempt to efface the signifier, so as to collapse the distinction between it and the signified.'[30] Though Connor is referring here to Beckett's language, the same could be said of Nauman's use of the medium of video in *Clown Torture*. There is a curious double movement at play. In one sense, the effacement of the signifier can be thought of as a gradual process of closing the gap between signifier and signified, as if signifier and signified have moved more closely towards one another and eventually fuse. Seen in another light, this effacing of the signifier, as mentioned above in the analyses of accumulation and disintegration, can be thought of as an abrupt rupture of the threads linking signifier to signified, so that they eventually drift apart, unmoored from one another.

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[26] Barthes, p.61.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, p.68.
[29] Connor, p.130.
[30] Ibid, p.37.

Repetition and Time

Some of Nauman's video works, such as *Playing the Violin As Fast As I Can* (1967-1968), involve slight variations in repetition, evoking Robbe-Grillet's narrative style and Deleuze's concept of 'clothed' repetition. This variation involves the spectator to a great degree in trying to anticipate these subtle changes. The sheer repetition in the looping of *Clown Torture* may still involve the spectator's active engagement in the repeated action; however, by foreclosing on any real sense of change, it retards that search for difference, stifling the yearning for variety. Connor illustrates the participatory nature of reading Beckett's work by comparing it to a circus act, with the performer trying to juggle myriad objects at once while the reader also becomes thoroughly caught up in this balancing act:

> Writer and reader are in the position of the circus performer who, in order to keep all the plates spinning on the tops of their poles, must keep returning to them to impart more speed to the individual plates…. We are forced to participate imaginatively in the repetitions which repel and alienate us in Beckett's work.[31]

The same can be said of Nauman's artworks, which often repel the audience. One of the characters in *Clown Torture*, who finds himself in the predicament of attempting to balance a goldfish bowl atop a broom handle, provides a fitting parallel to the precarious position in which audience members are placed.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon engage in myriad repeated actions, such as peering into their boots and looking into their hats. With lots of starting and stopping, and then starting up again, the characters' forward progress turns out to be repeatedly interrupted. Mirroring these actions, their speech pattern could be described as a stutter. The dialogue ultimately becomes circular, where the actors on stage embark on conversations that finally end up right back where they started. The logic itself is circular. This calls to mind Beckett's story 'The Lost Ones' (1970), which portrays characters wandering apathetically in a desolate tunnel. In an interview, Nauman shared the fact that he was deeply influenced by this story, and that he wanted to try to convey that sense of being lost in his work. Nauman confided, 'There's a Beckett [story] called "The Lost Ones" which describes many people in a strange, very accurately and clearly described space…but they're stuck in it. A greenish-yellow light, circular space with no top to it, just black and then greenish light and walking around and around in a circle. When I read this, a very powerful connection to a lot of work I had done before encouraged me….'[32]

Two types of repetition that involve temporality in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, both circular and linear repetition, are examined by Connor. Linear repetition more thoroughly involves time and seems to suggest an eventual end to the series, prompting a sense of anticipation in the audience, as mentioned above, in the attempt to figure out a pattern.[33] Of circular repetition, Connor notes its lack of progression. Although Connor is ambivalent about which type of repetition ends up being more 'corrosive of an audience's sense of

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[31] Connor, p.36.

[32] Constance Lewallen, Dore Bowen, and Ted Mann, *Bruce Nauman: Spatial Encounters* (California: University of California Press, 2019), p.47.

[33] Connor, p.135.

presence,' it seems clear that circular repetition may be more anxiety-producing in its appearing to never end, nor ever offering the audience a moment's relief.[34]

Along with the circularity of the dialogue, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* often appear engaged in a rapid-fire volley of brief statements back and forth, resulting in a kind of scattergun effect:

> Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
>
> Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
>
> Estragon: It's so we won't think.
>
> Vladimir: We have that excuse.
>
> Estragon: It's so we won't hear.
>
> Vladimir: We have our reasons.
>
> Estragon: All the dead voices.
>
> Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
>
> Estragon: Like leaves.
>
> Vladimir: Like sand.
>
> Estragon: Like leaves.[35]

The structure of this discourse is paratactic, consisting of a series of short, clipped statements placed right next to one another. This style results in a choppy rhythm with lots of space between disjointed ideas that aren't neatly tied together for readers, the open space providing ample play between concepts.

In describing Beckett's novel *Watt* as being very difficult to get through, Connor refers to a particular section of repetition:

> The ordinary person eats a meal, then rests from eating for a space, then eats again, then rests again, then eats again, then rests again, then eats again, then rests again, then eats again, then rests again, then eats again, then rests again, then eats again, then rests again, and, in this way, now eating, and now resting, and now resting from eating, he deals with a difficult problem of hunger, and indeed I think I may add thirst, to the best of his ability and according to the state of his future (p.51).[36]

Aside from the quotidian nature of habit and it being portrayed here as rather unsettling, of note in this instance is that the reader's peripheral vision might hint at an eventual end to the series, and some readers may even sneak a peek ahead to the end of it, in search of a conclusion to this onslaught of repetition. Those readers who do not skip ahead may well find themselves caught up in the fluid rhythm of the prose, which could be likened to the trance-like state achieved by recitation of a mantra or chant, ultimately leading readers to a

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Beckett, pp.40-41.
[36] Connor, p.33.

different state of mind. One of the clowns in Nauman's *Clown Torture* video incessantly recites the following: 'Pete and Repeat were sittin' on a fence. Pete fell off. Who was left? Repeat. Oh.... Pete and Repeat were sittin' on a fence. Pete fell off. Who was left? Repeat. Oh....' This goes on and on ad infinitum, the clown trapped in the looped narrative. Another character has a bucket of water dumped on his head in perpetuity, with no real beginning or end to the dramatic situation, like a perpetually stretched present moment. Similarly, one of Nauman's audio pieces at the *Raw Materials* exhibition (2004-2005) consisted of an unending series of utterances, such as, 'Work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work.'

Whereas linear repetition eventually offers an exit at the end, circular repetition involves the tragic feeling of being stuck. The looped video of Nauman's *Clown Torture* blocks the natural advancement of time; in this way, time becomes conspicuous and makes viewers more directly conscious of themselves in the space of the gallery, as if more firmly rooted in the here-and-now. However, that sense of presence in the present moment inevitably becomes like sand slipping through one's fingers.

Likewise, the characters in Beckett's play are mired in an interminable wait, stuck in a kind of purgatory. On a few occasions, most significantly at the end of both Act I and Act II, one of the characters asks the other, 'Well, shall we go?', and although his companion replies, 'Yes, let's go', the stage directions definitively assure readers that '*They do not move.*'[37] At one point in the play, Vladimir suggests that their acquaintances Lucky and Pozzo have changed, to which Estragon replies, 'Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.'[38] Indeed, in the middle of Act 1, Vladimir declares conclusively that 'Time has stopped.'[39] This sense of paralytic stasis parallels the cyclical conundrum in which the characters in *Clown Torture* find themselves. Furthermore, Nauman's manipulation of time via the looped video places the spectator in this same predicament.

Lucky's three-page monologue in the middle of the play becomes a powerful centre piece. The monologue contains two explicit references to temporality, one being the phrase 'outside time'[40] and the other being 'time will tell.'[41] Three pages of statements run together without a single mark of punctuation. Lucky's stream-of-consciousness soliloquy differs markedly from the rest of the curt dialogue found throughout the play. An important refrain that punctuates Lucky's thinking no less than ten times amidst the rather short monologue is 'for reasons unknown.'[42] What this constant interruption serves to do is enact a persistent halting of the forward momentum of the tale. Another instance offering further compelling evidence of this stutter motif comes by way of Lucky's remarks on 'what is more much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labors lost.'[43] A few more examples come when he states, 'I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading' as well as his

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[37] Beckett, p.61.
[38] Ibid, p.32.
[39] Ibid, p.25.
[40] Ibid, p.28.
[41] Ibid, p.29.
[42] Ibid, p.28.
[43] Ibid, p.29.

statement 'on on the beard of flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull.'[44] This stammering points to an inability to progress in his thinking that mirrors the plight of characters found in Nauman's artworks, and as Estragon plainly states on more than on occasion, 'In the meantime nothing happens.'[45] While reading, the readers themselves may find themselves thrust into this space where forward progression is rendered continually stunted.

Various refrains crop up throughout *Waiting for Godot*, for example, 'Will night never come?'[46] Of particular significance is the refrain suggesting they get going, accompanied by the constant reminder that they are 'waiting for Godot.'[47] Connor highlights the characters' predicament:

> Stranded as they are in their agonizing space of waiting, Vladimir and Estragon seem to encounter the paradox of all time; that is, that the only tense we feel has real verifiable existence, the present, the here-and-now, is in fact never here-and-now. The present tense can never simple 'be', because the 'now' of the present tense can only be apprehended the split-second before it happens, or the split-second after. It is never itself, but always the representation of itself…. [48]

Consequently, Connor suggests the circular feel of repetition points to the 'impossibility of any stable present because past and future are ranged about it [the present] so ambiguously.'[49] Regarding *Clown Torture*, there is a sense in which the forward march of time has been obstructed. In reference to this manipulation of time in Nauman's work, Chiong confirms that by 'engaging this perpetual temporal implosion, Nauman pries apart the seam between now and then…'[50] Instead of a steady progression into the next moment of the future, prolongation or elongation of the current moment occurs.

Regarding the shift between live video footage of the viewer and that of recorded footage of the drummer in Nauman's *Learned Helplessness in Rats (Rock and Roll Drummer)* (1988), Chiong acknowledges that 'with every shift Nauman strips away the moorings of past-present, leaving a series of spaced "at onces" that tremble in between.'[51] This may result in making viewers feel more aware of the present moment and, therefore, more 'in the moment.' The video being a presentation of an event that has already passed, the ultimate effect of its being looped is a slowing down or interruption of that representation. Just as the looping icon popping up on a computer screen signals an agonising wait for a website to load, the feeling of being held in suspense can be a difficult one to endure; the Nauman installation locates the audience in this suspended no man's land. At one point in his analysis, Connor focuses on the phrase 'in no time' that comes at the end of one of Beckett's plays:

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid, p.26.
[46] Ibid, p.24.
[47] Ibid, p.50.
[48] Connor, p.134.
[49] Ibid, p.135.
[50] Chiong, p.87.
[51] Ibid, p.86.

The words may also suggest that the audience has participated in a stretch of 'no-time', that is, the 'non-time' of dramatic representation, in which there is no real before or after, or even present tense, but only the representation of them. If we feel ourselves about to be restored to the real time of habitual experience, we may also feel for a moment the anxiety that this theatrical 'no-time' is more like our own lived time….[52]

The 'fourth wall' of the theatre offering an imagined barrier between the events dramatised on stage and the environment of the audience demarks a line separating those fictional events from the space of the everyday. The Beckettian stage blatantly rejects the artifice of realist theatre in its minimalist depiction of a barren domestic environment; it is an unreal, in-between setting that is more evocative of a mental space than of anything tangible. In its rejection of realist artifice as an overt recognition of the action on stage being a fiction, Beckett's work breaches the fourth wall, as if somehow ceasing to be representation. Calling to mind the staging of a Beckett play, the Nauman installation straddles the boundary between performative space and the real space of the art gallery. In light of the immersive feel characteristic of Nauman's exhibitions, viewers may feel as if suspended in this liminal space that could be said to be located outside time.

Conclusion

Nauman's *Clown Torture* video installation recently featured prominently at Nauman's exhibition at Tate Modern in London, before moving on to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The exhibition is currently on view at the M Woods Museum in Beijing, the artist's first comprehensive show in China. It will reach its final stop later this year at the Pirelli HangarBicocca museum in Milan. The announcement for Nauman's show at the Pirelli HangarBicocca venue emphasises how the selection of artworks will 'explore his diverse experimentation in the areas of spatial experience and architectural scale, as well as the use of light, sound, language and video in this corpus of work.'[53] It goes on to declare that Nauman's oeuvre 'is distinguished by an interest in understanding the human experience…as well as the inner workings of the psyche, which he investigates through the perception of the body, and interactions with space, time, and language.'[54] A consideration of the role repetition plays in Beckett's work as it relates to Nauman's artwork serves to shed light on current art historical discussions concerning temporality, signification, and the viewer's experience in Nauman's immersive art installations.

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[52] Connor, p.154.

[53] Pirelli HangarBicocca, 'Bruce Nauman - Neons Corridors Rooms', *Pirelli HangarBicocca*, Unknown <https://pirellihangarbicocca.org/en/exhibition/bruce-nauman/> [accessed 11 July 2022].

[54] Ibid.

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Marechera and the Holy Fool
Adebowale Oriku

'But the old man was my friend. He simply wandered into the House one day out of the rain, dragging himself on his knobby walking stick. And he stayed…his broken body looked so brittle and insubstantial that a strong wind or an expletive would probably have blown him right back into the rain.'

-Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger.*[1]

When I arrived in England in 2001, the ghost of Dambudzo Marechera, the late Zimbabwean writer whose biography I have been trying to write for seven years, appeared to me on my first night. Well, I exaggerate. The ghost of Marechera did not appear to me; it was only a dream. There was nothing Shakespearean or Romantic about the dream, although it was darkish, gothic-*lite* and vaguely portentous. The dream might even be susceptible of interpretative slants by both Freud and Jung – or by the shaman who lived beyond a deep grove in my grandfather's village in a corner of Yorubaland, Nigeria.

The shaman could offer a number of fabulous interpretations: from the dream apparition of Shona Marechera being the transmogrified shade of my Yoruba grandfather welcoming me into England in a kind of warped Dantean fantasia, to the dream being an augury of whatever future I had in England. Of course, Marechera would not have meant anything to the shaman, nor would anything in the world of written literature, but as far as everyone in the village was concerned: *the shaman sees what everyone else cannot see.*

When I was a boy, I went with my father to his ancestral village where my old grandmother lived. Although she occasionally attended church and partook in Christian devotions, kneeling beside her bed to offer up a ritualistic prayer last thing at night and first thing in the morning, my grandmother still visited the hermit-shaman in the woods. She told me tales of the shaman's clairvoyance and wonderful powers of healing and problem-solving. My father, a lapsed Christian, would not approve if he knew his mother took any of his children to the shaman's hut. However, one day, I went with Grandmother to the village market and we stopped at the shaman's hut on the way back home. The shadowy entrails of the hut were exactly what a shaman's abode would look and feel like to a town-bred boy of 10 who had never seen anything like that: fear-inducing, sinister, phantasmagoric, hung with a hive of imageries that evoked a sense of raw, elemental, *terribilità*.

The shaman said to Grandmother:

'Who is this boy you bring with you?'

'My grandson. Oriku's son.'

'An old man came in with him.'

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[1] Marechera, Dambudzo, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993), p.78.

'An old man?'

'Yes. A very old man. Grizzled. Bent. Walking with a cane.'

While this oracular declaration made my doting grandmother become even more superstitiously slushy and affectionate about her ordinary-seeming grandson, it puzzled me, it gave me something to chew over. Of course, I could not see any old codger tagging after me – and not for want of trying. All I could see were shadows and incense smoke and fumed mirrors. *And what's that all about,* I asked myself? A ghost? My grandfather's spectre, or spirit? I stood out among my brothers as the boy who was the 'carbon copy' of our grandfather. I was a physical throwback to a man who had died long before I was born. Such was the resemblance to this unphotographed relative that some of the older folks who knew him called me 'Baba.' Grandfather died when he was about 48, not exactly old, grey and bent. But then, my little-boy's mind quizzed, why should my grandfather ever stop growing, become old and grey, even after death? For some rather hard-to-grasp reason, I did not completely dismiss the shaman's whimsy of an old man shadowing me.

I could not.

In many African societies, *this*-world has a counterworld that is shrouded from mere mortals. As a child who had not yet entered the Cartesian age of moral discrimination, I allowed my imagination to flirt as much as it could with multiple vivid avatars of the old-man alter ego.

While my grandmother watched, rapt, the shaman had drawn me close to him and scored my scalp with a rustic razor.. The shaman snicked his razor against my scalp six more times. The thickset, red-eyed, medicineman then rubbed snuff-coloured powder into the cuts while incanting: 'With this, I am injecting power and protection into your soul - and the old man is giving me a helping hand.'

Although razor-nicked points on my scalp smarted as I walked back home with my grandmother, she told me not to let my father know what the shaman had done. She also said: 'remember to call on the old man who guides you in times of trouble.'

I was still wondering who exactly this old man was when I read something uncannily similar in Marechera's 'The Writer's Grain,' a passage which gave some weight – in my cynical mind – to Carl Jung's idea of synchronicity. Eerie, meaningful, coincidence. And at the end of 'House of Hunger,' there was the old man: small, bent and gnarled.

Dambudzo grew up with eight other siblings in a hovel which, years later, breathed life into 'House of Hunger' and other stories in the collection. After Dambudzo died in 1987, his younger brother Michael said: 'Towards the end of 1969, Mother became mad. She went to consult a *n'anga* (shaman) who told her that she could only get rid of the problem by passing it on to one of (her) children. She did not choose [...] me because I was named after a powerful ancestor whose spirit would protect me from such things. She chose Dambudzo.'

Michael believed that Dambudzo's 'madness' was transferred to him by their mother. For much of his life, Dambudzo detested his mother, and Michael thought this was because his younger brother knew what their mother had done to him. However, during his not infrequent misogynist and mother-hating riffs in his stories, Marechera never let slip that he

was avenging himself, or that he hated his mother because of what she did to him. Marechera may very well have detested his mother, Venezia, for being a prostitute and alcoholic. The writer did not care very much that Venezia was a woman who had few choices in the rotten and depressing environment in which she found herself.

Dambudzo Marechera had little to say about Shona traditions and mysteries; if anything he ridiculed and spurned them. For all his gnomic extravagances, he all but wore his naturalism and lack of religious faith on his literary sleeves. He was a deep, even visionary, writer but he would resist any attempt to wrap his work in any kind of mystical or hermetic cloak. He did not shy away from impressing on everyone that he was a man of his time; a time and a space that was not confined to his natal culture and customs. Even though Marechera might not want to have any truck with anything that reaches beyond the infinite bounds of literary imagination and *mere* literature. Some of his behaviour did suggest a kind of secular shamanhood. He was fiercely talented; he grew dreadlocks; he had a spare, gaminelike, fasting-for-God appearance; he had the oneirophrenic gaze of a seer. And there is the hieroglyphic, koanlike style of writing.

*

In 1998, I left my birth country, Nigeria, and travelled by road through many countries in West Africa to the Gambia.

The end of the last millennium and the beginning of this one was the cusp of my relationship with what I described in an essay as 'belief in the god the coloniser brought to us.' The coloniser and his Christian god were merely the ledge I stood on to defenestrate religion and other purdahed idols whose *raison d'être* turns on the faith of their worshippers. I am 'irreligious,' I used to announce with a certain degree of self-satisfaction and a hint of obfuscation. Like most African countries, Gambia is populated by people who do not see any reasonable alternative to God-belief. A percentage of the Gambian population are Christians but the majority are Muslims with a potent Sufi subtradition. At the heart of this mid-savannah Sufi culture is the marabout: Muslim teacher, scholar, seer, poet and holy man. In the past, marabouts used to live frugal lives, and sometimes they became almsmen and beggars. Generations of marabouts, from the old Mali Empire till today, have contrived to undergird their Islamic belief with ancient traditional religions and wonderworking.

Gambia was as steeped in marabout culture as ever when I arrived there at the end of the millennium. Marabouts had also become modern-day soul doctors providing all sorts of balm to the people. There was an air of awe about them too, air that wantoned between a mere zephyr and a samiel. Gambia's young leader, a soldier who wrested power from the sedate post-independent president, had become a civilian demigod. The former colonel was full of swagger, always wearing white voluminous grand boubous, carting around sartorial accessories which included not just a precise muffler, but also elongated prayer beads, a huge, sheathed sword, and a Quran. A Gambian friend, though scared that the walls might be listening, whispered to me that the preening, gung-ho leader had made himself the de-facto 'Head Honcho of Gambian Marabouts.' I didn't think much of this until after I left the country and I saw videos of the bombastic president on YouTube, in his bouffant robes, 'healing' a Gambian who had AIDS with some nameless liquid thing, probably snake oil.

When I was living in the Gambia the president's multifarious pretensions and megalomania had not become full-blown, although he had begun to throw perceived enemies into jail and plant oversized monuments to himself in the major urban centres and across the small country. More than all, he had just declared to his people and his political foes that he would rule the country for a billion years.

Not being a Gambian, and knowing that their hectoring ruler was evolving into an authoritarian, I wrote nothing about Gambian politics in the *Daily Observer*. Even though I hazarded bits of satirical pieces that I thought would go right over the heads of those who mattered, I concentrated on miscellanies of everyday life: music, literature, life in general, so much so that I called my pieces 'Liferature,' a portmanteau that the newspaper's proof-readers kept hypercorrecting. Being irreligious, I wrote a few articles along the lines of antitheist thinking. In my freewheeling, gonzoesque obliviousness, I didn't pay any heed to the risk I was taking in a country where most people didn't understand why anyone, even the most execrable idiot, would not see the hand of God in everything and everywhere.

I lived not far from the offices of *The Observer*, a fifteen minutes' walk which took me through a crosscutting footpath. Although it was not far from the touristy heart of the town of Bakau, I often walked through a solitary path in a copse between which I could spot only a handful of houses. A middle-aged man lived in one of the houses. I knew this because I had run into the man a few times and had seen him sitting on the porch of the house. He was a tall man, ebony like most Gambians, always wearing an off-blue jalabiya, his balding head bordered by tufts of kinky locks. He was always barefoot.

At *The Observer* offices one of my Gambian colleagues said to me when I asked who the man was:

'Oh, Amadou Bomba. Good man.'

'Good man?'

'Well, he minds his business. And he sees what we can't see. Well, Ade, I know you don't believe…'

'No, no, let's not get into that. Is Amadou Bomba a marabout?'

'Well, not really. Or, yes. I don't know how to describe him… He's not quite there, I don't think, but he sees things. Unlike marabouts, he doesn't offer anything like help to those who go to him. He just sees their future. And you know, I think because he is not very well, anything he sees he tells people: if you're going overseas; if you're going to get a job in the next year; if you're going to go on being poor for the rest of your life. And if he sees death on the horizon, he makes it clear to you that you are going to die soon.'

I whistled dryly: 'That's interesting.'

'And that is why only the brave, or maybe the foolhardy, visit him. He told one man that he would die a terrible and bloody death in a few days; the man got so scared and hopeless that he walked into the sea and never returned.'

'Well, that's serious stuff,' I breathed. I wanted to add, 'at least it was a watery death, not a bloody one,' but I thought this wasn't useful under the circumstances.

'He told a guy that he would be made a government minister. Five years later, he became a minister.'

'Did he have any kind of education? I see him carrying books – three. And when he's sitting on the porch of his house, he's scribbling something, I imagine.'

'He didn't have much education but he reads the Al-Quran, the Bible, and other books. And I don't think he's writing for anyone but himself. By the way, he reads *The Observer* too, our newspaper.'

I nodded: 'I bet he does. And the cottage. How did he get to live there?'

The colleague explained: 'An old Englishman used to live there until some twenty years ago or so. The white man lived in the house for sixty years, a colonial guy, I think, and never left. He lived alone there and didn't have friends. There were lots of fruit trees in his compound but he cut everything off. He wasn't happy about children stealing into the compound to pluck fruits. He didn't like anyone. He'd been dead for a few days before he was found. The house was just there for about a couple of years, abandoned. People said it was haunted by the ghost of the white man. Then Amadou Bomba started to live in it.'

'He lives alone there too,' I said, pretty much rhetorically.

'Well, unless he lives with jinn.'

'Jinn? What's that?'

'It's an Islamic thing. Like maybe Christian demons… No, spirits.'

'And why would you say that. He doesn't look like someone who dines with the devil all the time.'

'Well, I was being tongue-in-cheek, but people say he is the way he is because he got too close to jinn.'

'You mean these things you call jinn made him half-mad?'

'People say those kinds of stuff.' I knew the colleague was still mindful of my irreligion.

I took what my friend at *The Observer* told me about jinn making anyone half-mad in the same way that I would take any story about angels magicking a child into a virgin's womb or human witches morphing into tragelaphs to lay waste to someone's crop farm. I thought nothing of Amadou except that now the man whom I often saw on the way to and from office had a name and that he was an eccentric. I continued to run into Amadou on the way to *The Observer*, and sometimes he would be sitting in front of his house, scribbling what I imagined would be dense runes that only he could decipher.

One day, I saw Amadou again coming from the other direction. We passed each other silently only for me to hear the words, 'Observer Man,' echoing back at me, darkly. My name wasn't 'Observer Man' but there was no one who could answer to that around. No portion of the small bushes around was alight with empyreal flames; the only heat and light I could

feel was the scorching fervour of the Sahara-rim sun, so it could not have been the echo of the voice of any disembodied heaven-bound Behemoth.

'Observer Man' could only have come from Amadou Bomba. I turned around. He stood a few feet from me, his eyes toneless and limpid, if vaguely bewildering. We had never said a word to each other before. I'd thought Bomba might not be interested in exchanging unbidden hellos.

This was the fever pitch of what I described in an article as my 'materialist, post-magical thinking' period and I had sort of been self-indulging in my freedom from the thrall of superstition and mumbo-jumbo (a word I never quite liked to use but had to – it described what I was going to say better.) I wondered whether it would have occurred to me to walk another way if I had known this man would stop me. If you were told that someone who 'saw things' could stop and tell you that you might die within the next few days, you might want to play it safe and avoid him.

But did I believe what the guy in the office told me, all the stories about Amadou's clairvoyance, his communion with jinn? Now I wished I had spent some time checking out what, or who, the jinn were. Hadn't I read something like that in a Rushdie novel – or some other book? And here was this three-eyed guy, jinn's human familiar, stopping me. For some moments, I thought it might have given me some food for thought if Amadou Bomba had announced: *within a few weeks the grim reaper will visit you*. I thought about the obverse too. What if the guy had said: *within a few years you will become the biggest literary superstar in the universe?* Or on a more mundane level: *you're going to become so rich that even Mansa Musa will go green in his grave with envy.*

Am I concealing some kind of fear beneath all these droll fantasies?

'Observer Man,' I heard Amadou repeat calmly.

'My name is Ade,' I said to him.

If he heard that he neither showed nor acknowledged it in what he said next.

'I read the things you write, Observer Man.'

I nodded: 'Thank you.'

'You don't need to thank me for reading what you write. I don't need to thank you for writing them either. In life, we do our duties.' He stopped for a few moments, then continued. 'We walk past each other here every day, that's part of our duties. But when I saw you coming just now, I saw something.'

Now, despite myself, there was a slight flutter of unease. *I need to see things clearly*, I said to myself. This was just a man, a holy fool perhaps, who was now about to utter some vacuous nonsense.

'Observer Man,' Amadou began, 'I see that you will write a book about the life of a writer from another land.'

'A writer from another land?'

'Another country in our dear Africa, not where you came from. A young man who is gone from us now.'

I began to wonder: *what's the point of all this?* What if I would write about the life of a dead young man from another country in Africa? Even though swearing hadn't become an acquired vernacular for me, I swore under my breath: *Fuck it. Is the guy trying to be oracular or something?*

But then Amadou said: 'I stopped you because I see that this person you're going to write about is a jinn.'

'A what?' I heard him right, though.

'A jinn. He was born of fire. It's going to take seven years to write about his life.'

'All of seven years?'

'That's what I see. This person from another country in Africa was a troublesome man.'

'Man or jinn?'

'It is possible to be both. And in his native language, his name means Trouble.'

'Oh, really?' I was trying too hard to be dryly cavalier.

When I left Amadou and walked to *The Observer* offices, it wasn't difficult for me to guess who the young man that he said I would write about might be. But to begin to think about the young African writer whose life I would write about for seven years would mean that I had taken it as a veridical statement. It would mean that I believed that Amadou had indeed seen something. Was this not what wise existentialists of old called *bad faith*? What would become of my 'post-magical thinking' godless chic if I lapped up this truly baffling message? And wasn't I somewhat relieved that Amadou Bomba didn't foresee death? Even then, how could I erase it from my mind that someone just told me that I would write about a man who was – still is – also a jinn?

When I left the office, I didn't go home straight as I would normally do. I took a taxi to the Gambia National Library in Banjul and threw myself into the world of jinn. Quickly I remembered where I had read about jinn many years ago. It was in the *Arabian Nights*, a book read with thrilled, jejune throwawayness. *The genie in the bottle*: Orientalists had transposed jinn into genie.

However, what I read about jinn in the library was more than mere fairytale frippery. Jinn are central to the Islamic imagination. While humans were formed of clay, jinn were forged in smokeless fire. Jinn are neither demons nor angels. Nor human. They occupy the same earthly space as humans and sometimes can take the human form. They can marry, fuck, have children, eat, fart, and shapeshift into anything they desire. They can see humans but humans can't see them. Jinn can possess humans and make them do awful things. They often try to persuade humans to stray from God. Satan is believed to have been let loose from the more sinister corners of jinn's otherworld. Jinn have the power of telepathy,

telekinesis, and telegnosis. Jinn live in shitty places; they thrive in untended graveyards, batpoop-filled caves, and gloomy, shady holes.

During the bus ride back home, there were moments when I thought my imagination was playing some kind of trick on me. Did Amadou stop me to say that I would be writing about the life of a young African writer who was also a jinn for all of seven years? There was no doubt that he did. *What exactly does that mean*, I said to myself? I'd been drifting away from religion and self-assuredly emptying its mythological bag of tricks for so many years that this sounded as preposterous to me as the tale of the Fall. And having never lived in an Islamic society where jinn were almost as real as humans, I found this even more unbelievably fabulous. I thought it was best to forget that Amadou told me anything and continue to write and revel in my impious bliss, continue to see things through the vistaed lens of reasonableness. I even toyed with the idea of walking another way, so that I would never see Amadou again. I chided and reminded myself that I was not supposed to believe the words of this new-fangled Nostradamus who reminded me of Peter Tosh in his Bush-Doctor incarnation.

I truly forgot about what Amadou told me, even though I still saw him almost all the time that I walked the path. Now all he did was nod at me, wordlessly. I tried to say hello but he only mumbled and went on his way.

At *The Observer*, I continued to write, copiously.

The managing director who hired me had left the company. Mousa Sanneh was an urbane, affable, and eminently open-minded man. When I arrived in the Gambia in 1998, I began to write for *The Observer* on a freelance basis. After some three months, Mousa Sanneh had invited me into his office.

The editor, Omar Sharif Bojang, and the deputy editor, a shy, everlastingly tie-wearing Liberian émigré, were present. Sanneh waved me to a seat in his grand, plush office. He told me that he wanted me to join *The Observer* as a Staff Writer because of what he described as the 'magicality' of my writing.

I happily accepted.

In the next few months, I went into creative overdrive, birthing tons of stuff: prose, parodies, poetry – ditties really, short dramatic pieces. On an occasion, overwhelmingly fertile and febrile, I wrote three different things for the weekend edition of the paper. And in a fit of an embarrassment of riches, I thought I should use a pseudonym for two of the pieces, but when I saw the paper the next day everything I turned in carried my name. When I asked the editor why he did not use the pseudonym, he said to me:

'No one knows Eda Ukiro. They only know Ade Oriku. It's a name to conjure with. It didn't take long for Dickens to drop Boz.' Besides being a sharp dresser, Omar Sharif Bojang – whose nickname was Mr. Bojangles – could be wittily disarming.

From being managing director Mousa Sanneh moved on to other things.

Enter Mohammed Baldeh, a man whose very presence reminded me of two Shakespearesque words: abdominous and pinguitude. I should allow the reader the

indulgence of finding out what these words mean. If this large, potbellied man had noticed me, he did not acknowledge it. I saw some of the staff at *The Observer* going into his office for some reason. I later heard that there was a lot of brown-nosing going on and that the satyric side of the man sometimes attracted a couple of the younger female staff whom, *faute de mieux,* I shall call nymphs.

For my part, the arrival of the new managing director did not mean anything. In my carefree, laidback way, I just carried on writing with energumen abandon. One afternoon, I was summoned to the managing director's office. The becapped man bulked over the huge executive table; the large sleeves of his mamba-green kaftan held a pair of roly-poly arms whose doughy business-ends were bunched over the table. Omar Sharif Bojang was sitting in one of four armchairs in the now overplush office. I could see a look of concern on his face and he didn't make eye contact with me.

Mohammed Baldeh waved his capacious kaftan sleeve at another seat:

'Take a seat, gentleman.'

I sat, my mind blank. Except for a couple of hellos, I had never said anything to the man, although I'd had the impression that he would not invite me into his house to dine with him and his harem of four wives and eighteen children. He didn't waste any time before he said to me:

 'Who do you write for?'

I was knocked back by this question.

 'Who do I write for?'

Mohammed growled: 'Yes. Who do you write for?'

Still puzzled, I replied: 'I write for readers of *The Observer*. People.'

With a degree of self-restraint, Baldeh bristled and scoffed: 'I am not sure you do. Let's cut to the chase. I can't read what you write. A lot of people in my circle can't understand what you write. My editor here said you write well, that you're the best writer he's got now. But I can't see that. You write all those difficult words that no one understands.'

I stammered: 'But people read what I write – a lot get back to me.'

The big man spat: 'People? What people? Who are you, by the way? You're from where? They told me you're from Nigeria, but who knows? My understanding is that you keep to yourself a lot... that you don't believe in God, you write things like that. You don't write for people, young man. You write for the jinn.'

 'Pardon me?'

 'You write for Shaitan, for jinn. We have to let you go.'

 'Let me go?'

'Yes. You are sacked. With immediate effect. You'll be paid 2 weeks… a month instead of notice. But you have to leave now.'

Critical Commentary on 'Marechera and the Holy Fool'

The Metabiography of Dambudzo Marechera

'Marechera and the Holy Fool' is taken from one of the chapters of the creative practice part of my Ph.D. project. The provisional title of my thesis (creative writing) is *Lost in Menippea: The Metabiography of Dambudzo Marechera.* Dambudzo Marechera was a Zimbabwean writer who died in 1987 of AIDS at the age of 35. He was the quintessential African 'poete maudit' who has remained a consequential, if liminal, figure in African literature.

For reasons as complex and elusive as he, it has been impossible to write a conventional, 'cradle-to-grave,' biography of Dambudzo Marechera. My attempt at biographising the Zimbabwean writer has gone through many degrees of revaluation and configuration before it became a 'metabiography.' Reminiscent of the dyadic complementarity of historiography and history, metabiography is becoming pivotal in the mediative role it is now playing in biographical studies and writing.

However, I have focalised 'metabiography' in its foundational and minimalistic sense, by which I mean a biographical composition that integrates authorial self-awareness and extrospective engagement with various forms of life-writing. Owing to perennial discontinuities and fragmentation, and his seeming self-aware embrace of abnormalism, it would have been impossible to write Marechera's life without the interanimation of methodologies, subjectivities, viewpoints, and even styles. Among other tools of creative practice, Menippean polyvocality has helped with the negotiation of the treacherous and protean landscape of the 'Marechera myth,'[2] and in the production of my thesis.

The Marechera mythology is problematised by its multivalence. Subsumed within the mythology are madness (or a semblance of madness) and other elements like paranoia; various forms of psychoneurosis; mythomania; abjection; unreliability: immorality; amorality; Menippea;[3] and the uncanny. In so much as this commentary is a reflexive addendum to the short story, 'Marechera and the Holy Fool,' the emphasis will be on the uncanny.

In the story, I, the raisonneur, find myself caught up in a crisis of uncertainty, perturbation, unbelonging, alienation, doubt, and self-doubt. I confront situations where unreality traverses the complex ruts of reality, and where parapsychic intrusions ruffle my

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[2] Flora Veit-Wild accentuates this phrase in *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Works* (Asmara, Africa World Press, 2004), p. xiii.

[3] For a definitional precis of *menippea* (or Menippean satire in general), see Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (University of Minnesota, 1984), pp. 108 – 120 F. Anne Payne's *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1981) and Northrop Frye's passages on Menippean satire in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 309-312, are also useful resources.

ostensibly settled, not to say canny, naturalism. From the visit to the hermit-shaman in the early part of the story to the closing encounter with the character who avers that I – an openly atheological perspectivist – am writing for preternatural entities, there is a convergence of suggestions and implications of the uncanny.

The uncanny is a phenomenological continuum whose immanence in being and in nature was recuperated and foregrounded by Sigmund Freud in his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919).[4] Ernst Jentsch's 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' (1906)[5] provides a frame of reference for Freud and subsequent exegetes of the uncanny. Jentsch identifies dolls and automata as objects that may provoke uncanny responses or sensations. He postulates that an object or figure calls forth an eerie, unsettling feeling in its observer when the observer cannot decide whether the figure is animate or inanimate, or whether it is a sensate being or an automaton. Jentsch also instantiates the uncanny effect that epileptic fits and the manifestations of insanity may summon up in the observer.[6]

Beyond such staples of the uncanny as death, ghosts, magic, doubles, doppelganger, or fear- and frisson-inducing automata, the constitution of the uncanny is amorphous, complex, and airy. Freud not only seeks to qualify the limitations of Jentsch's percipient paradigms of the uncanny, but he also endeavours to extend their frontiers. Nicholas Royle, who revisits and rereads Freud's 'The Uncanny' in his seminal *The Uncanny,*[7] asserts: 'Freud's 'The Uncanny' is a peculiarly uncertain, wavering, and eccentric text.' Anneleen Masschelein asserts in *The Unconcept* that 'constructing or mapping a genealogy of the uncanny is not an easy task.'[8] This is the received axiom of the uncanny: its enveloping opacity, indeterminacy, and anomaly. As a concept – a percept – the uncanny is a chimera and has had a most diffuse phenomenological resonance in its interpretations.

However, in part-paraphrase, Royle encapsulates Freud's description of the uncanny in the following way: ''everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light…' (The uncanny is) about what is elusive, cryptic, still to come back.'[9] Freud further clarifies: 'an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary…'[10]

In the eyes and minds of the Western and African reader and/or observer, the lineaments of the uncanny are marked by sociocultural subjectivation. In the Western imaginary, the uncanny sometimes takes the tone of mere feyness as in the momentary spookiness of puppets and their human ventriloquy. On the other hand, in most of Africa, the uncanny is invariably yoked and layered with the occult and the arcane. Even though the uncanny is universally associated with night and darkness, at its blazing meridian the African

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[4] The essay is one of five in a collection of Sigmund Freud's writings entitled *The Uncanny* (Penguin Books, 2003).

[5] See Jentsch's 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' in *Uncanny Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 216.

[6] Ibid. pp. 226-227.

[7] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

[8] Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept* (State University of New York, 2011), p. 7.

[9] Royle, p. 51.

[10] Freud, p. 150.

sun – and what it is capable of 'revealing' – is uncanny. Everywhere, death and the dead are at the heart of the uncanny; however, in my native Yoruba culture, pregnancy and the unborn are infinitely uncanny. While the association of such beliefs as 'animism' and 'paganism' with Africa is often overdetermined, rivers, rocks, and roads may still be construed vitalistically in various parts of the continent. This is why the interpretation of the uncanny in the postcolony is doubly problematic. Colonialism and the belief systems that came with it also introduced a degree of syncretic gnosis into Africa's spiritual universe and this again complicates what I would describe as the 'theological uncanny' on the continent.

The spurning of religion and the supernatural is central to Dambudzo Marechera's nonconformism and/or quasi-nihilism. He removes himself from both traditional Shona mysteries and the Christian religion. Although I come from an African space and culture that is different and separate from Marechera's, my irreligion and naturalistic view of the metaphysic of the human condition coincides with the Zimbabwean writer's. But where I am expressively and openly iconoclastic about my antitheism,[11] Marechera ventilates his non-belief by way of fictive and ludic defamiliarisation.[12] Even if Marechera would find Jennifer Armstrong's attempt at spiritualising him and his oeuvre and hypostasising him as a writer-shaman in her Ph.D. thesis 'mystifying,'[13] *Dambudzo Marechera as Shamanistic Doppelganger* offers a constitutive, explorable, and necessary byway into the penumbra of Marechera's anarchic literary universe.[14]

For all the inducements to uncanny responses in Marechera's works, life, and even appearance, hypothesising him in the guise of a shaman/seer/healer profoundly problematises the writer's inveterate and monomaniacal devotion to literature, particularly modern literature. 'Literature is uncanny,' declares Nicholas Royle,[15] and it can very well be uncanny without the makeweight of metaphysics or the dead-hand of mysticism. Over against any supersensible apprehension of Marechera's spirituality, I have grappled with the aporias of what may be described as the profane uncanny in the reading and apprehension of Marechera's works and in writing about him and his works. For instance, remembrances of a university classmate from 30-odd years ago, who considered himself a Marechera votary, and shared some characteristics with the Zimbabwean writer, have offered me the opportunity of an enactment of the double/doppelganger agon in the 'metabiography'.

I, like Freud, remain largely a sceptic as concerns religious belief, spiritualism, and supernaturalism; however, coadjacent with the great man's inclination for polemical paradox, for me the excitatory and transcendent allure of the uncanny inspires intellectual assay. As narrated in 'Marechera and the Holy Fool,' my ineluctable association of the uncanny with Marechera predates my attempt at writing his biography. I had found trace-elements in his books, in anecdotes about him, and even in his pictures and looks (habitus). The implication of habitus in the reading of inbeing often instigates caution. However, within

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[11] Now, my antitheism is in a state of nontheistic simmer.

[12] See *Black Sunlight* (Penguin Books SA, 2009).

[13] From Dan Wylie's 'Critical Diaries,' http://danwyliecriticaldiaries.blogspot.com.

[14] 'Dambudzo Marechera as Shamanistic Doppelganger' was submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia, School of Social and Cultural Studies, English and Cultural Studies in 2010.

[15] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 15.

the context of the African society in which Dambudzo Marechera was born and where he lived and returned to after he had spent some time in the United Kingdom, the dreadlocks he wore for most of his adult life hint at the uncanny: they suggest otherworldliness and theurgic madness.[16] And madness, a condition that has unstably been tied to Marechera, is redolent of the uncanny.

Excess, self-indulgence, and verbal tricksterism are some of the many sins of Dambudzo Marechera. In a moment of self-regarding Nietzscheanism,[17] he declares: 'I think I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met.'[18] With this statement, Marechera unconsciously, albeit self-consciously, anoints himself with the chrism of the uncanny. To be sure, the foregoing is a mere figuration, because if Marechera was possessed of any hieratic insight or shamanic, seeing eyes, it was in the way he was able to infix himself on the cusp of the evolving post-Freudian corpus of the uncanny.

In *Uncanny Modernity*, Jo Collins and John Jervis inquire: 'Where does the uncanny come from? Why does it keep returning? Could it be that the uncanny is a distinctly *modern* experience?'[19] The authors go on to stress that the uncanny is by no means a strictly modern experience while arguing that, with Freud offering the 'key cultural resource,' the uncanny, particularly since the 1970s, continues to cast a long and dappled shadow on both modern and postmodern aesthetics. Jervis expatiates: 'Modernity as time is constantly producing and reproducing the conditions of uncanny figuration, aspects that return as potentially familiar yet misrecognised… modern culture endlessly reproduces a figural past that haunts us, a past in which the past as past, and the dead as dead, are forever 'unplaced.' The apparently small, even trivial, voice of the uncanny can thus reverberate powerfully through the whole structure of modern civilisation.'[20]

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[16] Amongst the Yoruba, dreadlocks more than hint at the uncanny; they are the very representation of it. Some Europeans, for example, might not be aware that some African children are born with precocious buds of dreadlocks. In Yorubaland, such a child would be named 'Dada' (nothing to do with Dada-ism). Perhaps more than any other Yoruba child who is born with congenital markers, Dada is the embodiment of the uncanny. She (or he) is believed to be the child of the whirlwind spirit or demon, a child-god, or a heaven-born wunderkind and child-mage. The Igbo, in eastern Nigeria, denominate the dreadlocked neonate as Ezenwa, 'Child King.' Semi-fictionally, I narrativise the surreal prodigy of Dada in a chapter of my autobiographical *Schopenhauer's Child* (2012). Madness is also linked with dreadlocks because mentally ill people who walk the streets and sleep rough (unfortunately not an uncommon sight in parts of Africa) often carry rampant kinks of matted air. Across West Africa, it is also not unusual for shamans and theurgists, Christian 'prophets' and 'apostles', to cultivate dreadlocks. Significantly, dreadlocks are the most distinguishing feature of the 'holy fool'. Even though diasporan Africans who practise the Rastafarian religion valorise dreadlocks, there is a certain transhistoricity to the association of dreadlocks, or 'locks,' with the uncanny. The dreamworld allure of elflocks and the impactful singularity of Polish plait endure. And apropos of 'holy fools', in Eastern religions like Hinduism and Jainism, the sadhus, particularly their naked avatars, also privilege jata (dreadlocks).

[17] Here I am specifically alluding to Friedrich Nietzsche's egotistic sententia: 'I know my lot. Some day my name will be linked to the memory of something monstrous, of a crisis unprecedented on earth… I am not a man. I am dynamite.' *Ecce Homo* (OUP, 2007), p. 88.

[18] Grant Hamilton, ed. *Reading Marechera* (James Currey, 2013), p. 79.

[19] *Uncanny Modernity* (Palgrave, 2008), p. 1.

[20] Ibid. p. 41.

'Marechera and the Holy Fool' is a manifestly modern exemplum of the abiding occurrence and autotelicity of the uncanny. The story is shot through with irresolution, paradoxes, incertitudes, and the Real/Imaginary counterpoints. What vestige of belief and faith remains in me? What effect does the subsistence of the uncanny have on my ontological deflation of the religious sublime? Is my choice of biographical subject, Dambudzo Marechera, uncannily predetermined, or a function of elective, uncanny affinity?

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Make Room for Magic
Laura Reeves

I was nineteen, inside the esoteric cliché

side street, incense, dark wood, purple fabric,

Infatuated, incapacitated by an inappropriate man

yet again, searching for answers — pulling cards

She told me, 'There is a man causing you sadness'

there always has been

I rejected the symbols from occult divining

until Annabelle read for me fifteen years later

On the table in front of her — a crystal,

a feather, a cup of tea, the cards. Her hands

a morning with nowhere important to be

Rose of Jericho unfurling in a saucer

The Empress, pomegranates and velvet

woman ruling, energetic companion

lush forest and winding stream surround her

connecting with nature, golden wheat,

reflecting her abundance, it was

the life I was changing and making

The Magician, contradictory counterpart

manifestation, resourcefulness, power,

inspired, determination to succeed

a cup, a pentacle, a sword, a wand

around his waist, a snake biting its own tail

the alchemy of realising intentions

The morning was never repeated

time simultaneously stretched and squashed,

perspectives shifted, the yawning rose

Annabelle disappeared as intense as she arrived

Since then, I use tarot, with a pinch of salt

a prompt for introspection, to understand

Synchronicity reclaiming imagination

Activism, self-care shared online

Urban Outfitters tarot colouring book

Affective assemblages, legitimise thoughts

mystical now mainstream. Make room for magic

or a young woman's reflections

Tarot: From Italy to Instagram

The Fool stands on the edge of a cliff, about to take a step, unaware of the void below. He looks upwards at the sky whilst the mountains loom behind him – an ominous symbol of what is to come. In one hand, he holds a white rose, a symbol of purity, and in his other hand, he carries a knapsack with his minimal belongings. The small white dog at his feet a loyal companion, sensing the uncertainty ahead. He is about to begin a careless journey. It is a leap of faith into the unknown.

The origins of tarot cards can be discovered in 15th century Italy, where a royal card game called *tarocchini* was played.[1] The 78 cards would then become linked with divination and occult practice throughout the 18th century.[2] However, the relationship between tarot, the patriarchy, and femininity has become closely combined, and the differing interpretations of these boldly coloured cards demonstrate that there are 'reasons to believe

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[1] Michael Dummet, "Six XV-Century Tarot Cards: Who Painted Them?" *Artibus et Historiae* 28.56 (2007): 15-26 (p. 17) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20067158> [accessed 14 June 2022].
[2] Mike Sosteric, "A Sociology of Tarot." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 39.23 (2014): 357-392 (p. 357) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/canajsocicahican.39.3.357> [accessed 14 June 2022].

that the tarot had far more sociological significance than first attributed to it'.[3] Most notably, the creation of the 'Rider-Waite' deck, which was published in 1910 by Rider and commissioned by Arthur Edward Waite, highlighted how tarot symbolism was entwined with the patriarchy and elite groups.[4] Cards of noble symbolism were co-opted by the occult patriarchy and Freemasons, and tarot would be considered 'an essential part of ideological indoctrination in secret brotherhoods, and a tool useful for facilitating the mutual education of the emerging social elites.'[5]

Conversely, the Rider-Waite deck was illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith, a woman whose contributions and history were obscured by Waite himself. Her designs, which were commissioned by Waite, were inspired from the 15th century card game, whilst incorporating Japanese wood block printing and the Art Nouveau posters of Aubrey Beardsley (Palumbo).[6] Her artwork relied on Symbolist tradition to utilise metaphorical and emotional imagery, and she was chosen by Waite due to her potential to develop a deck with 'an appeal in the world of art and a suggestion of significance behind the symbols...'[7] However, Waite would only pay her a small fee for the large project and obscured her contributions by taking credit for much of her work.[8]

Although part of the occult group the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Colman Smith's work was noted for following 'spiritualism of late Victorian England as a practice and belief system outside the dominant patriarchy of the time'.[9] Furthermore, as women's role in society changed, their 'pursuit of equal rights and fair treatment is intimately tied up with the rise and spread of witchcraft as a spiritual and religious practice.'[10] Colman Smith would demonstrate this throughout her work, and her legacy would suggest that she was not an anomaly in the world of the occult, and that 'the histories of witchcraft and feminism, indeed occult spiritual practices and political revolutionaries in general, are closely connected.'[11]

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[3] Ibid, p. 358.

[4] Juliette Wood, "The Celtic Tarot and the Secret Tradition: A Study in Modern Legend Making." *Folklore* 109.1-2 (1998): 15-24 (p. 6) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1998.9715957>; Sosteric, p. 378.

[5] Sosteric p. 368, 378.

[6] Jacqui Palumbo, *The woman behind the world's most famous tarot deck was nearly lost in history* <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/pamela-colman-smith-tarot-art-whitney/index.html> [accessed 14 June 2022].

[7] A. E. Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought: A Retrospective Review in the Form of Memoirs* (Dublin: Bardic Press, 2016), pp. 184–85.

[8] Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, *Pamela Colman Smith: Artist, Feminist, and Mystic* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, Liverpool University Press) (pp. 175-176). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1zgdvpp.10> [accessed 14 June 2022].

[9] Sosteric, p. 381.

[10] Jessa Crispin, *Feminism's Hidden Spiritual Side* <https://daily.jstor.org/feminisms-hidden-spiritual-side/> [accessed 06 July 2022].

[11] Ibid.

Now, seventy years after the publication of the Rider-Waite deck, Colman Smith's influence within pop culture and social media has been widely acknowledged, particularly due to the rising self-care movement that has helped to bring tarot to the mainstream.[12] Furthermore, with Selfridges London now offering readings, and Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri's 2021 collection of dresses inspired by tarot imagery, the occult has become romanticised throughout mainstream, and specifically feminine audiences.[13] With the term 'tarot' now offering nearly eighteen million Instagram posts on readings, tarot card spreads, spiritual quotes and advice, its prior purpose as a form of ideological indoctrination has changed significantly.[14] Helen Gregory suggests that this shift in purpose 'can be seen in the language of contemporary spirituality and in the ways in which tarot is currently being "put to work" as a tool for developing intuition and psychic ability, as well as divining for the immediate future.'[15]

However, whilst the self-care movement has begun to transform societal perceptions of tarot, wider society continues to be wary of occult practises, with fortune telling often being considered a class B misdemeanour offence in New York.[16] This varied social perception has demonstrated that there is a need to 'reinvent the antiquated image of what a fortune teller is' and shed the cliché of the seaside gypsy woman.[17] Furthermore, Coco Khan's *Guardian* article explores how her initial cynicism changed after her own tarot experience, stating that 'anything that helps people open up and speak about their troubles must have value. And so I appreciate once more how therapy comes in many forms, and am less quick to judge.'[18] Therefore, it becomes clear that the role of tarot has expanded from its prior forms of entertainment and amusement, and coinciding with the rise of social media, has entered a new dawn of self-care routines and introspection.

Make Room For Magic has been inspired by the new search for spirituality and self-care, where tarot cards offer time to reflect on thoughts and study the artwork, yet still create a sense of being 'left staring at the cards, wondering where the vibes are or if you're

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[12] Elle Hunt, *When the mystical goes mainstream: how tarot became a self-care phenomenon* <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/oct/27/tarot-cards-self-care-jessica-dore-interview> [accessed 14 June 2022].

[13] Selfridges, *0800-Psychic-Sisters: The Psychic Sisters go digital*. https://www.selfridges.com/GB/en/features/moodboard/psychic-sisters/ [accessed 05 July 2022]; Sarah Mower, *Christian Dior: Spring 2021 Couture*. https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2021-couture/christian-dior [accessed 05 July 2022].

[14] Instagram, *#tarot* <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/tarot/?hl=en> [accessed 07 July 2022].

[15] Karen Gregory, 'Negotiating Precarity: Tarot as Spiritual Entrepreneurialism', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40.3/4 (2012): 264-280 (p. 266). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23333498> [accessed 07 July 2022].

[16] The New York State Senate, *Fortune Telling* <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/165.35> [accessed 05 July 2022].

[17] Gregory, p. 274.

[18] Coco Khan, 'I've always scoffed at superstition – but will tarot have the last laugh?' *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jul/16/ive-always-scoffed-at-superstition-but-will-the-tarot-have-the-last-laugh> [accessed 14 June 2022].

missing some crucial link to the magic other people speak of.'[19] The multiple interpretations of tarot demonstrate a complicated past that reflects our internal worlds and beliefs. Consequently, whilst The Fool stands on the edge of the cliff as a young, white man, perhaps we should also consider Mike Sosteric's question: 'why does popular commentary on the tarot accept elite justification, ideology, and fanciful legend, rather than taking a more critical stance?'[20] The cards featured in *Make Room For Magic,* such as the Empress and the Magician, demonstrate the obvious feminine and masculine archetypes deployed throughout the tarot, and the power they are believed to behold. Yet, marginalised subcultures still rely upon these centuries-old hierarchical 'archetypes to facilitate self-journey and awareness, reading deep archetypal significance from them.'[21] *Make Room for Magic* explores this concept further, and the speaker's originally conflicting emotions towards their spirituality: 'I rejected the symbols from occult divining' demonstrates the shifting nature of tarot today. However, whilst their second experience is positive, it still brings into question whether these are just 'a young woman's reflections' or whether there's a deeper connection to spirituality and femininity that defies patriarchal expectations. Demonstrating self-awareness concerning the multifaceted use of the cards in current society, the legacy of Colman Smith's work has been reclaimed as a tool for female empowerment.[22] Akin to the Rose of Jericho continuously unfurling, the meaning of the tarot is continually evolving.

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[19] Gregory, p. 275.
[20] Sosteric, p. 377.
[21] Ibid, p. 363.
[22] Ibid, p. 363.

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Panoptic Phantoms: The Uncanny Gaze of the Spirit in 19th Century American Photography

Ashleigh Black

According to Louis Kaplan, spirit photography can be perceived as another way of interpreting the camera's ability to 'see the invisible and reveal truths beyond the powers of the naked eye.'[1] Photography is a medium born using light and as such was thought to render the invisible, visible. Through the camera, tangible evidence and confirmation of belief in life after death was sought after during the nineteenth century. Lewis Spence defines spirit photography as 'the production of photographs on which alleged spirit-forms are visible.'[2] This essay examines the application of panopticism to a selection of spirit photographs from the nineteenth century. The purpose of this paper is not to debate the existence of spirits or the authenticity of spirit photographs: instead, it provides an analysis of the uncanny gaze of the spirit.

Jeremy Bentham and the Prison-Panopticon

Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham published his *Panopticon or Inspection House* in 1791. In the book, Bentham outlined his architectural conception of a panopticon which, in principle, would reform and rehabilitate inmates through continuous monitoring by guards. Bentham was concerned with the welfare of human beings and championed reformative imprisonment over execution. At the time of Bentham's conception of the panopticon, the English legal system was known as *The Bloody Code* because it designated over 200 crimes as capital offences. Executions were public spectacles, with prisons and jails serving as custodial waiting rooms, holding the prisoners while they awaited the inevitable.

Within the wider context of crime and punishment during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Bentham's archetypal panopticon was a response to an antiquated legal system. The panopticon was designed as a circular building consisting of separate cells for each inmate which were partitioned so that they could not see or converse with one another. A central watchtower ran through the heart of the prison which permitted the guards to observe the inmates. A light was constantly shining into each cell, making it difficult for the inmates to see whether they were being watched. Bentham reasoned that the inmate must presume that they are under constant surveillance and in doing so would adjust their behaviour. Bentham stated that the essential purpose of the prison-panopticon was 'seeing without being seen.'[3] Using solitary confinement and surveillance, the inmates would eventually reform themselves.

In the context of photography, the camera serves as the all-seeing eye, like the panopticon. The camera is a machine capable of capturing intricate details elusive to the naked eye. Rosario comments on the coexistence, as well as tension, of darkness/light and spirit/matter in both Spiritualism and photography.[4] Bentham's panopticon utilised light to

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[1] Louis Kaplan, 'Where the Paranoid Meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography', *Art Journal*, 62:3 (2003), p. 19.

[2] Lewis Spence, *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (New York: Cosimo, 2006), p. 379.

[3] Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon: Or the Inspection House* (Dublin: Thomas Byrne, 1791), p. 21.

[4] Arias Rosario, '(Spirit) Photography and the Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel', *Lit London,* 20:1-2 (2009), p. 97.

banish darkness, permitting the guards to be able to keep watch inside the prison cells. The camera, like the panopticon, illuminates subjects that would otherwise go unnoticed by the naked eye. As Flint pointed out, to make something visible is to both understand it and gain control over it; therefore, the camera is the perfect panoptic tool.[5] In 1861, jeweller and engraver William H. Mumler (1832-1884) claimed to have taken a photograph of a spirit, triggering his career as a self-proclaimed spirit photographer. Portraying the dead became both a business and a form of art. As a visual commodity, spirit photography was a lucrative commercial phenomenon both within and without Spiritualist circles. The phenomenon of spirit photography took off in the United States around this time which corresponded to the rise of Spiritualism. Modern Spiritualism originated in New York in 1848 with three sisters: Leah, Margaretta, and Catherine Fox, also known as the Fox sisters. The women claimed to be plagued by consistent rapping sounds which they eventually 'interpreted as a coded message from a spirit of a murdered pedlar.'[6] The Fox sisters gained notoriety for their alleged ability to contact the spirit world through séances. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defined Spiritualism, in religion, as a movement 'based on the belief that departed souls can interact with the living.' [7] **Séances** facilitated by a medium, a person claiming to have the ability to contact the spirits of the dead directly, were held to try to communicate with the spirit world. The Spiritualist movement gained popularity and established itself through the building of churches and the forming of organisations. The demand for spirit photography was born in the aftermath of the American Civil War 'which had profound effects on American photography.'[8]

Fig. I- Robert Bonner by William H. Mumler, c.1869-1878, albumen silver print, J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Ghosts on Glass

Mumler produced his first spirit photograph in 1861 after experimenting with self-portrait photography. The resulting image showed Mumler was not alone, and he was convinced that the ethereal form beside him bore an exact resemblance to his cousin who had died thirteen years previously. The medium of photography was first used by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce who captured what is to be considered the world's first photograph in 1826/27. Photography became commercialised in 1839 after Louis

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[5] Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), p. 6.

[6] Tom Gunning, 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny' in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. by Patrice Petro (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 46.

[7] 'Definition of Spiritualism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <spiritualism | religion | Britannica> [accessed 20 January 2022].

[8] Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: The British Library), p. 16.

Daguerre pioneered the daguerreotype process. Daguerre's process resulted in a positive image which meant that copies could not be obtained from it thereby rendering daguerreotypes an expensive commodity. By contrast, William Henry Fox Talbot's 1835 calotype process produced a negative image so copies could be made from the latent print. Ramalingam noted how the camera was able to take 'the flickering spectacle of moving reality and turn it into a static record.'[9] The new medium of photography provided a lucrative business opportunity for professionals and amateurs alike.

The debut of the spirit photograph provided evidence of otherworldly immortality and gave further credence to the work of mediums and psychics. Mediums were often present in photographic studios to ensure the presence of a ghost during a sitting for a portrait. William H. Mumler's wife, Hannah, was a medium and was employed in his studio. Mumler charged ten dollars for his spirit photographs, and despite the expense, the sitter was not guaranteed the appearance of a ghost. While on trial for fraud in 1869, Mumler spoke of the door of religious sectarianism whose 'panels are penetrated by the worm holes of many ages, through which the bright, effulgent rays of the spiritual sun begin to shine… and tumble to earth.'[10] Mumler sought to convince people that their belief in spirits and the afterlife was a constant truth in an ever-changing world.

During the trial, the prosecution attempted to show several different ways in which Mumler could have faked his spirit photographs. Mumler advocated himself as a tool of the spirits, trading in the beings and doings of the unseen and otherworldly. Suspicion of fraud was raised when a few of his customers began to recognise the faces of the spirits in their portraits as neighbours or friends. Ultimately, nothing could be proved or disproved because, put simply, Mumler had not been caught red-handed. The case was dismissed and Mumler's reputation was tarnished, and he died penniless in 1884. His spirit photographs captured ghosts materialised by the camera which opened a new realm of visualisation upon the otherworldly.

According to Kaplan there are two ways of examining spirit photography. The first is viewing it as nothing more than a parlour trick or 'an unseemly game of duplicitous double exposure.'[11] The second is to see it as an intervention of the afterlife 'onto the plane of conventional reality.'[12] These observations provide an insight into attitudes on spirit photography during the nineteenth century which appeared to oscillate between fraud and absolute proof of the existence of life after death. Additionally, Kaplan claimed that spirit photography was considered to be an extension of photography, a medium that 'had already conquered space and time to reveal the microscopic and the telescopic.'[13] Sontag suggested that the fascination with spirit photography was founded in the fear that the camera could potentially steal a part of the person's soul.[14] Just as mediums, or psychics, were believed to be the conduits through which spirits spoke, the camera was considered to be the window

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[9] Chitra Ramalingam, 'Fixing Transience: Photography and other Images of Time in 1830s London' in *Time and Photography*, ed. by Jan Baetens et al., (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2018), p. 3.

[10] William H. Mumler cited in Elbridge T. Gerry, *The Mumler 'Spirit' Photograph Case. Argument of Mr. Elbridge T. Gerry* (New York: Baker, Voorhus & Co Law Publishers, 1869), p. 20.

[11] Louis Kaplan, 'Spooked Time: The Temporal Dimensions of Spirit Photography' in *Time and Photography,* ed. by Jan Baetens et al. (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2018), p. 28.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, p. 31.

[14] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 158.

into the afterlife: a dominion of phantoms unrestrained by the laws of time and space (see Fig. I).

In the context of panopticism, the camera was a third eye, capable of rendering the invisible, visible. Jeremy Bentham's panopticon design combined observation and light: without light the guards would not have been able to observe the prisoners in the cells. Also, if there was no light constantly shining into the inmates' cells, they would be aware when they were being watched by the guards thus removing the requirement for modifying their behaviour. Gunning defined spirit photography as a juxtaposition of the physical presence of a person 'with its contrary, a phantom-like transformation of the physical body, weightless or permeable.'[15] Furthermore, Gunning also asserted that the blend of presence or absence of the spirit formed the basis of spirit photography.

Understanding the Uncanny

In 1919 Sigmund Freud published *Das Unheimliche* or 'The Uncanny' which was an essay that explored the etymology and experiences of the 'unhomely' or 'uncanny.' For Freud, the uncanny was associated with feelings of anxiety and dread, caused by putting oneself 'in confrontation with death or its return.'[16] In Gunning's 1995 essay 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny' he explores the concept of the uncanny when applied to spirit photography. A spirit photograph was more than a novelty item for entertainment because it provided proof of a scientifically established hereafter. The parallels between the uncanny and spirit photography were drawn towards the late nineteenth century. For example, a newspaper article from *Empire News & The Umpire* reported that the spirit looked more like 'a cloud or a wraith' and that the photographer dealt in 'the uncanny sights of the world.'[17] The mere sight of the appearance of a ghost was not what made spirit photography uncanny. Instead, the unsettling dread-induced anxiety was emitted by the fact that the gaze of the spirit could not be returned by its viewer. The unreturnable gaze and the feeling of constantly being watched is the root of the uncanny in spirit photography.

The concept of the uncanny and the appearance of spirits featured in nineteenth-century literature. Christina Rossetti's 1866 poem 'The Poor Ghost' is a conversation between a man and his recently deceased lover. The first, second, eighth and ninth stanzas of the poem encapsulate feelings of anxiety and the uncanny. The first stanza is constructed as one question which asks why the spirit has appeared to him. Within the first four lines the reader is given a vivid description of the spirit which has characteristically pale features and a hollow, lamenting voice. Rossetti's use of repetition for the word 'hollow' emphasises the ethereal voice possessed by the spirit. In the second stanza, the spirit answers the question and explains that she has journeyed from the 'other world' to visit him. The reference to the 'other world' implies an existence of the afterlife. In Spiritualism, its believers hold that there is another world, or summer land, which is full of the spirits of the dead; and is a place where they can live on in sunshine and peace.

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[15] Tom Gunning, 'To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision', *Grey Room*, 26 (2007), p. 100.

[16] Kaplan, 'Spooked Time: The Temporal Dimensions of Spirit Photography', p. 32.

[17] *Empire News & The Umpire*, Sunday 8th June 1890.

'Oh whence do you come, my dear friend, to me,

With your golden hair all fallen below your knee,

And your face as white as snowdrops on the lea,

And your voice as hollow as the hollow sea?'

'From the other world I come back to you:

My locks are uncurled with dripping drenching dew,

You know the old, whilst I know the new:

But tomorrow you shall know this too.'

'I go home alone to my bed,

Dug deep at the foot and deep at the head,

Roofed in with a load of lead,

Warm enough for the forgotten dead.'

'But why did your tears soak through the clay,

And why did your sobs wake me where I lay?

I was away, far enough away:

Let me sleep now till the Judgement Day.' [18]

The poem suggests that the spirit of the woman has been pulled away from her rest by the grief of her lover. The spirit observes that though he proclaims to love her, he cannot look upon her. Her lover's inability to meet her gaze suggests that although she was once familiar to him, the sight of her in her dematerialised form is uncanny. In her ghostly manifestation her living lover cannot meet her gaze. In the eighth stanza the spirit recounts her own grave, thereby reinforcing to the reader that she is dead. The spirit is drenched in dew, or water which encapsulates the etherealness of her appearance. According to Greeley, water is 'the life force of all creation, the generative dynamism of existence.'[19] Not only is water part of every facet of life, but it is also representative of fluidity and movement. In the context of the poem, the spirit drenched in water implies the transition from the world of the dead to the realm of the living. Her lover's tears are the reason that she was disturbed from her sleep and pulled away from the tranquillity of her resting place. The appearance of

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[18] Christina Rossetti, 'The Poor Ghost' (1866).
[19] June-Ann Greeley, 'Water in Native American Spirituality: Liquid Life- Blood of the Earth and Life of the Community', *Green Humanities*, 2, p. 156.

his dead lover causes the man deep dread and anxiety; she can watch him from beyond the grave, but he cannot see her.

From a contemporary perspective the sight of the uncanny can be analysed using an episode of *Doctor Who*. In 2006 the BBC aired the twelfth episode of the second series of *Doctor Who* titled 'Army of Ghosts.' The Doctor returns to earth to discover human-like ethereal shadows appearing at certain times during the day, a process referred to as 'ghost shift.' Humanity has come to accept the spectres as manifestations of deceased loved ones. The initial reaction was one of fear and anxiety; their uncanny appearance and presence in the world was unwelcome. However, over time they became a familiar sight and were soon believed to be disembodied spirits. The belief that these manifestations used to be people that they knew meant that the spectres were literally being willed into existence and pulled through 'the void.' In the *Doctor Who* universe 'the void' is a term which refers to the empty space in between parallel dimensions. In making the uncanny or the unfamiliar seem familiar, the feeling of anxiety and dread is thereby removed. The ghosts' appearance is unsettling because they can appear and look upon the living at their own volition; therefore, the gaze cannot be returned. Moreover, within the context of Spiritualism and spirit photography, the unwavering belief in a supernatural presence gives credence to the appearance of the phantoms. Eventually it is revealed that the 'ghosts' are not dematerialised forms of deceased relatives and are in fact Cybermen, a race of cyborgs who want to remove all trace of humanity from the universe. Humanity's acceptance of the 'ghosts' and the desire to wish them into existence demonstrates an eagerness to familiarise the unfamiliar.

Spiritus ex Machina

The spirit is never fully seen, nor can its gaze be located; so there is the sense that someone is watching, and this is confirmed when confronted with the resulting spirit photograph. Kaplan remarked that the owner of the spirit photograph accredited 'the paranoid impulse in becoming subject to the gaze of a dead relative' who watches from beyond the grave.[20] The sense of dread and paranoia relate to Freud's description of the uncanny. Kaplan argued that this sense of being watched is paranoiac; however, contextually it is not paranoiac but panoptic. The gaze of the spirit is omnipresent and, like the camera itself, cannot be returned. In Cartesian dualism, the mind as a non-physical entity or 'ghost' inhabits and interacts with the machine, which in this instance, is the camera. Using what Kaplan dubbed 'social misrecognition'[21], the gaze of the spirit establishes this misrecognition which manifests in the viewer not as paranoia, but as a panoptic awareness. Photography 'affirms the strangeness of the Other'[22] or in this case, the spirit.

Even without a discernible face the spirit fulfils what Foucault called the seeing without being seen dyad.[23] Fig II is an example of this; a ghostly manifestation without an apparent face or features can be observed. Despite its transparency the viewer can recognise that the ethereal form is human although it is lacking basic features such as a mouth and

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[20] Kaplan, 'Where the Paranoid Meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography', p. 26.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Jennifer Green-Lewis, 'At Home in the Nineteenth Century: Photography, Nostalgia, and the Will to Authenticity' *Nineteenth Century Contexts: Postmodern Victorians*, (2000), 22:1, p. 53.
[23] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 16.

eyes. The faint outline of a baby is visible, also without essential human facial features. The seated woman, known as Mrs. H.B. Sawyer, has been positioned in a chair, looking down with her arms formed in a shape suggestive of cradling an infant. Holmes remarked that those in mourning see what they want to see in the spirit photograph, but it is enough to pacify the grieving mother who 'accepts the spirit-portrait as a revelation from the world of the shadows.' [24] In every aspect of photography, more significantly spirit photography, there is the permeability of light over darkness which demonstrates a striking similarity with panopticism.

Conclusion

The rise of Spiritualism in the United States complimented the demand for spirit photographs. Prior to 1861, mediums and psychics attempted to contact the dead **via s**éances and other occult activities such as automatic writing and Ouija boards. For Spiritualists, Mumler's invention or 'discovery' of spirit photography heralded a new method of communication between the living and the dead. Through the camera, a spirit was able to appear materialised providing evidentiary proof of the existence of the afterlife. The fact that spirit photographs

Fig. II- Mrs. H.B. Sawyer by William H. Mumler, c.1869-1878, albumen silver print, J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital Image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

could capture the likeness of a living person and 'at the same time the transparency and insubstantiality of ghosts seemed to demonstrate' the uncanny quality of photography which was its ability to produce a spectre-like double.[25] Thus, the camera as a third eye added to the feeling of being watched, developing a panoptic awareness that was not prevalent in society until the inception of photography. Sontag recognised that the fear of the camera stealing a part of someone's essence was more prevalent in non-Western cultures; despite this, there remained a trace of magic in the art of photography. Ultimately, the panoptic gaze of an otherworldly apparition had a prevailing psychological impact. The shadow of a spirit or otherworldly being is enough for the viewer of the photograph to become acutely aware that they are being watched and that the spirit is seeing without being fully seen.

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[24] Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Doings of the Sunbeam', *Atlantic Monthly* (1863), p. 14.

[25] Tom Gunning, 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny' in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 47.

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Reimagining the 'Queen of Crime': An Interview on Modern Visions and Adaptations of Agatha Christie

Sophie Smith

Following the release of Death on the Nile (2022), Exclamat!on Editor and Christie Researcher Sophie Smith sat down with Dr Mark Aldridge, Dr J.C. Bernthal, and Sarah Martin to discuss the ever-evolving depictions of literary detective Hercule Poirot and the legacy of his creator, Agatha Christie.

A brief introduction to our contributors:

Dr Mark Aldridge is Associate Professor of Screen Histories at Solent University and is author of several books including *Agatha Christie on Screen* (2016) and *Agatha Christie's Poirot: The Greatest Detective in the World* (2020).

Dr J.C. Bernthal holds an AHRC-funded PhD from the University of Exeter and has published widely on Agatha Christie. His books include *Queering Agatha Christie* (2016), *The Ageless Agatha Christie* (2016), *Agatha Christie Goes to War* (2019, with Rebecca Mills), *Agatha Christie: A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (2022), and *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Agatha Christie* (2022, with Mary Anna Evans). Since 2014, he has organised or co-organised the International Agatha Christie Conferences, which started life as a small postgraduate symposium in Exeter.

Sarah Martin is a PhD student and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Chester and Bournemouth University. Her research examines the role of female detection and psychogeography in Golden Age Detective Fiction. Sarah's areas of research include crime fiction from the nineteenth century to the present day. Sarah has contributed to *Clues: A Journal of Detection, Agatha Christie Goes to War* (2019), and *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Agatha Christie* (2022).

Sophie Smith is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Exeter, examining representations of biological criminality and eugenics in Golden Age Detective Fiction. She is Editor of *Exclamat!on*, Co-Editor of the *Postgraduate Journal of Medical Humanities* and author of 'The Spectre of Heredity' in the forthcoming *Genetic Histories and Liberties* (2022) for Edinburgh University Press.

SS: Having seen Kenneth Branagh's latest adaptation of Christie in *Death on the Nile* (2022), what were your initial reactions to the film and the deviations from the novel?

JB: What really excites me is that the stories are being brought to a new audience. I know that's a bit of a tired thing to say sometimes, but I do know so many people who like genuinely like these two Branagh films who have never read, and probably will never read, an Agatha Christie book in their life. What excites me is that it is those stories, those central plot points and the central, passionate elements of the books, especially *Death on the Nile* (1937), that have been brought onto the screen in a way that is extremely modern and extremely appealing to a lot of people. Of course it isn't David Suchet and it's not Peter

Ustinov, but those films still exist and the books still exist, and I'm just pleased that these versions exist too.

MA: I felt the same as Jamie, really, which is that it was exactly the film that I expected it to be. If I'm honest, which is a film that isn't for made for me, although we can still enjoy it and it's on its own merits. It's there so that people who assume they're never going to pick up an Agatha Christie can go and watch it. I remember the whole thing about when these adaptations moved up a gear in the 1980s and became more than just the occasional film. One of the big rationales was that when they were doing things like American TV movies and stuff, it keeps the Agatha Christie idea alive. I remember Mathew Prichard saying – when I interviewed him for my book – he said we always knew they weren't being made for us to sit and watch at Greenway and say how lovely, we thought they were perfect. These are made for audiences who want to have a couple of hours of entertainment – there's a glimpse of Agatha Christie's core story still running through, but they're not designed to be absolutely faithful retellings of the novel. For me, I prefer the more faithful retelling. But I thought it did some really interesting things the whole way through and I thought it was really interesting how these two films have really made Poirot a central character in a way that actually they were actively avoiding for quite a long time. It was when they did the original *Murder on the Orient Express* in 1974. The whole thing about who was going to be Poirot didn't seem that important, because actually they were saying he doesn't have to be the star of the film. Whereas in both of these he definitely is the star of the film, you know, he gets the best close-ups, he gets all of the action, he gets the most dialogue, which is really different to how it's often been treated before where he's been an enabler for a wider story. Here he really is the focus.

SM: I also enjoyed it – I loved the update of the things like the costumes and the glamour that so often other adaptations haven't focused on. The people are often very, very fashionable, and you know Christie has a brilliant way of describing people's dress and fashion and things in very few words. So visualising that, with all the fabulous dresses, picks out elements of the texts that are there but might not be picked up on in the novels. It highlights all these aspects that you might not think of as being part of Christie, and Branagh really accentuates this, which I think makes it exciting.

SS: Were there any aspects you felt didn't work?

MA: I had two things that I wasn't too keen on. The first was that I felt that the clues were a little underdeveloped and it felt a little bit like Poirot got to 100 minutes and finally decided "I'm going to tell you how it's done!". So that was a bit of a shame. My other thing is that I was so distracted by Bouc's coat! I honestly thought it was an error and they'd forgotten to edit it out as it looked like the big coats they're given on film sets to keep warm and to protect the costumes. I was really confused. Obviously, the colour of his coat is significant later, but I felt that the central clue about the coats disappearing, actually, you didn't need the coat for that, it could have just been a suit jacket.

JB: The coat I actually liked, I thought: 'It's going to be a clue of some sort. Whatever the hell is going on with this coat?' I quite liked that there was obviously some form of puzzle included that I didn't know anything about. But one thing that annoyed me a little was the perfunctory red blooded male thing regarding the addition of a love interest for Poirot. And his origin story being so superheroish; I completely understand why it's done. I was pleased to see that

Kenneth Branagh doesn't hog the camera quite so much in this one as he does in *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017), but, as you say, he still gets the best shots. I did wonder why the young Poirot was being played by Kenneth Branagh, rather than a young actor. So, some of that sort of stuff irritated me and I thought they overdid the sex for the sake of sex a little.

SM: I agree, I found the dance was so intense and very, very sexualised which made me question what was going on, but I know Kenneth Branagh has stated that he intended the film to be 'a very dark, very sexy, unsettling kind of film' in the Fourth Wall Podcast.

SS: One of the things I found odd and incongruent was with Salome Otterbourne. I was fine with changing her from a novelist to a jazz singer and felt that worked with the tone of the film, but I felt the anachronistic electric guitar made her feel like a bizarre parody of Jimi Hendrix, rather than letting her have her own moment. So, I found that very off-putting and distracting.

JB: It's a very anachronistic film, I would say, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. Christie has always been escapism and the films have always reimagined the past in whatever way. Whether it's the sort of golden suburbia of the Thatcherite 1980s adaptations or this, which I think is a much more fun and diverse view of the inter-war period. Which I'm all here for. Honestly, if they played the character as in the book, I would have been personally offended if anyone but Angela Lansbury played that part.

SS: The survival of Salome Otterbourne is the most significant change with this adaptation. How did you feel about the switching of Bouc for Salome as the third murder victim? What do you feel this adds/takes away from the narrative?

MA: I loved that, it was my favourite change. I thought that was so clever and it really took me by surprise. So that was nice to have something that's different, but I thought that was such a clever way to ramp up the tension a bit to make it feel like it was more than just a whodunnit. Not that it's ever just a whodunnit, but this was something that had real resonance for Poirot and made it more personal.

JB: That was my perspective, too. It genuinely surprised me, although I'd been prepared for something to be very different. I think it crucially works because, and I hate to criticise St Agatha, but the third death in the novel feels a little unnecessary. It's very much there to propel Poirot into action to say, 'OK, I'd better stop prevaricating because I've known who did it for half the book now.' And that's reflected, I think, in both the previous film adaptations. In the David Suchet film, it's so rushed that you hardly know what's going on at the end and it's just like, 'this bit was in the novel, we have to stick this death in.' In this version, the third murder really had a reason, not so much in terms of the mystery but, as Mark says, making the crime personal to Poirot and the viewer who's followed him and his sort of bromance with Bouc for the last two films.

SS: Yes, I think it gave it that emotional intensity and that, I hesitate to use the term vendetta, but that real impetus to kind of get on and drive up the tension, because I don't necessarily feel there was a lot of tension before that. Do you feel that, in having Salome survive, it goes some way towards reducing that sense of one-dimensional characterization that's often levelled at the detectives in these stories?

MA: I think films have very different requirements to books. The fact that we have many Miss Marples, many Poirots, many iterations of Sherlock Holmes that have all got different people

preferring, says how much it is about interpretation for a particular type of screen adaptation. For these, it's very much about Poirot as the detective, as the star. It makes sense that a film at this point, especially with Kenneth Branagh in the lead who's also directing it, it's probably going to want to make a bit more of Poirot than films normally do. It's not enough just to have a really good story. You've got to have a central character that people want to engage with, and I think that's a big way that Hollywood has changed in the last 30 or 50 years. You've got to have that star presence at the centre of it, especially if we're going to have that recurring character as well. There's got to be sort of that sense of continuity, character development.

SS: That's interesting, because I've always read Poirot as a queer or a asexual character and I wonder if trying to push the mainstream appeal comes at the cost of making Poirot feel more reductive by placing him into a heterosexual matrix? As author of *Queering Agatha Christie*, Jamie, I'd be really interested to hear your thoughts on this.

JB: I agree and slightly differ from everyone on this. I agree it seems to be an ongoing pressure of the film industry, I would say I think every screen adaptation of Poirot, except for the Japanese anime has made him explicitly heterosexual. Also, every big screen version of Sherlock Holmes has put some sort of red-blooded heterosexual masculinity into him, and these are two sort of famously not-interested-in women characters. But what interested me watching this film and *Murder on the Orient Express* is the introduction of Katherine Gray as a former love interest, and how they just have to throw in these signals that he is heterosexual. The camper he's being, the more we have to be reminded that he likes women. And it reminded me of a scene in in *Mrs McGinty's Dead* (1952) where a crime writer is talking to Robin, a man who's adapting her novel as a play and the conversation apparently is said to mirror one that Christie may have had with Michael Morton, who adapted *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) for the stage and gave Poirot a young, glamorous girlfriend called Caryl. Robin says, 'My dear, [your detective] can't be a pansy', which suggests this whole thing has been ongoing awhile and which may be one of the things behind Christie cutting Poirot out of stage adaptations of her books, including *Murder on the Nile* (1944).

SS: The film does offer a number of relationships beyond the central love triangle. And there's a formula to focus on sex. How much does this dominate the narrative? Do you think it makes the murders a secondary concern, or is it absolutely fundamental, integral to what drives the text?

JB: It wasn't for me, but I don't have a problem with it being in the film. I also didn't mind the developments to Dawn French's and Jennifer Saunders' characters, which I think could have been done in a much more heavy-handed way. The novel is about love, but love covers a lot of bodily passions, I think. And a lot of obsessions and emotional extremes which Christie was very aware of, and which absolutely informed both the narrative and the mechanics of the crime.

MA: I mean, people always had sex. It didn't come in the 1960s. So there is this thing that, because we're so used to older films and media, being much more cautious about showing sex, it can then sometimes be a shock when you do have people being much more open about it, despite the fact that in the real world people were. Certainly, that dance sequence was steamier than I was expecting, but the fact that it then became memorable probably says that it was very effective. Because that whole sequence had to be a shorthand for an

awful lot of stuff and really had to establish how these three central characters interacted and give a little hint as to where we might go.

SM: I think you get a real sense of the sexiness if you compare this novel to a 19th century text, the presence of sexiness is so much louder, and I like that the film draws that out much more because I feel like maybe modern audiences don't acknowledge the sexiness of the texts as much because it's not quite as explicit as what we're used to.

SS: I agree, I think there has been a tendency towards the conservative nostalgia that we get from the Thatcherite 80s onwards, it's all very much country idle, stripping it of the sex to package that cosiness.

JB: It crossed my mind that maybe a reason the Salome Otterbourne character was changed was because in the book she is a pulpy romance novelist who 'writes quite frankly about sex' and everyone's bored of her books. So, she decides she's been cancelled for being too edgy, but it might have sat uncomfortably in such a 'look how shockingly sexy we're being' film.

SS: This character also speaks to the role of celebrity, something Christie satirises through the semi-autobiographical Ariadne Oliver in other novels. So, what place do you feel celebrity has within shaping the narrative?

JB: There was a really interesting blog post recently by Chris Pittard. He talks about Linnet Ridgeway, the victim in *Death on the Nile*. She is a character who is famous for being famous, and that's really interesting. A lot of people have compared the character in this film to a Kardashian. Yeah, and that's not a creation of the film. That's something that is there in the text. So that is these were conversations that were being had a lot at the time, as if it was a new thing, just like they were being had in the 1890s, as if it was a new thing that someone is famous because their parents made a lot of money. It's threatening the class system and embracing this new changing shape of celebrity. And it's scary and unknown. It's the worst kind of nouveau riche because it's inherited nouveau riche. And she is not famous for any talent or skill or any right of birth traditionally, but famous because she is famous. That's not an element that has been drawn out much in other interpretations of the novel.

SS: In terms of the film trying to be modern and very stylized, in interviews Branagh has said he wanted to focus on this idea of adventure and vicariously experiencing this Golden Age of travel and that he saw that as a primary draw to Christie. Do you feel the settings and the travel is part of the enduring appeal of Christie? What does this focus on the visual and spatial elements add to our experience of the film?

SM: With the progress in in travel and workers' rights like the Holidays with Pay Act 1938, travel was becoming more viable for the working class, and these novels allow readers, regardless of their class, to inhabit these really interesting spaces that they've never seen before, and they can travel to all of these places vicariously. But what Christie offers us is not just this exotic influence, but also that closed space on the ship which echoes the closed community that detective fiction readers are used to. And one thing that I did like that they kept in spatially is the falling rock, as a rejection of people inhabiting that particular landscape. If we think of the period, with upper class white tourists like Lord Carnarvon coming in and taking artefacts to put in the British Museum, then we can interpret this as the physical landscape contributing to a rejection of this colonialism, and I think that's quite powerful.

MA: It's no coincidence both of these films have got their setting in the title. That is how important it is to make them distinctive. I just saw it mentioned briefly about how some of the really strong 1930s texts, especially mysteries, have particularly endured not, I think, necessarily because they are any better than some of the others. *Lord Edgware Dies* (1933), for example, is a very strong mystery novel and Peter Ustinov did an adaptation in a very grey London in the 80s. But it doesn't have that iconography, which really makes things stand out as a film. I think about how important location is; the president of 20th Century Studios, Steve Asbell, has said the next film will be an adaptation of one of her lesser-known novels and set in Venice. And the fact that none of her novels are set in Venice tells us clearly that it's very important that there is a distinctive visual setting for these films to stand out.

SS: In terms of the visual dimensions of the film, stylistically this adaptation has more action, and is slightly more visceral and macabre, particularly the scenes in the makeshift mortuary where the bodies are laid out under the hanging animal carcasses. How did you respond to this tonal shift away from the traditionally more clean-cut visions of Poirot we're perhaps used to from the Suchet and Ustinov adaptations? Do you feel this is reflective of a wider trend in Christie adaptations over the last ten or so years?

MA: Again, I think scenes like Poirot firing the gun, and his chase scene with Josh Gad's character in *Orient Express* speaks to wanting to present Poirot in the hero role rather than the detective role to centralise him more. If you watch the deleted scenes from *Orient Express*, you see that actually that was going to be even longer and there are a couple of other bits of action that were filmed and then snipped out. So I thought that was quite interesting, because that says that they weren't quite sure even when filming it about what this balance was going to be, and I can understand this reluctance to make a film that's too talky. Certainly if you watched *Murder on the Orient Express* from 1974, it's a very talky film. It's a really, really talky film, and that makes it great for a lot of Agatha Christie fans. But as a film for a general audience now, fifty years later, you're not going to be able to get away with that very episodic structure the book has.

SS: Do you feel it draws on some of the tropes of more modern crime novels, with their focus on post-mortems, so that bodies play a more central role in these adaptations and are more of a spectacle? I'm thinking particularly of the scene where the body of Rose Leslie's character is going round the wheel.

MA: I liked that. There was a real shock to it and I think this has to speak emotionally to those of us who really love Christie, but it also has to work on its own merits, so it's got these sort of horror film moments that can be really shocking. Death isn't just 'Oh, here's another victim. Let's put them in the morgue.' Death is sort of horrible, and as Jamie said when discussing *Nemesis* on the All About Agatha podcast, you can't allow the murderer to say oh well, you know they're at peace now. No, they're not at peace. They're a rotting corpse. You know this is, this is the reality of it and I sort of felt there was a bit more of a sense of that in certainly *Death on the Nile*, that actually death isn't clean and nice and sort of, you know, quietly trundled off to the morgue. It's sort of horrible, yeah, and it really kind of – we're talking about iconography, the pig carcasses. The idea that we are all meat. It's really reinforced with that.

SS: There's certainly a trend in the recent BBC adaptations towards a darker and more visceral depiction of death, such as the disembowelling of Rogers in *And Then There Were*

None (2015), and I think adaptations within the last ten years have both tried to present the darker reality of these stories, but to also contextualise them more firmly historically. If we think about the inclusion of the nuclear bunker in *Ordeal by Innocence* (2018), the move forward to a Cold War setting of *Partners in Crime* (2015), Poirot's engagement with the First World War in this film and *The ABC Murders* (2018), why do you feel these choices have been made?

MA: I think it's really difficult to, when you're writing a book to locate it in a historical moment. It's very, very difficult to do that at the time because you don't know where the story is going or what the significance of things are going to be. For instance, when Christie was writing *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* (1940) she had conflicting advice about what importance the war should have, and so she was told by some people, 'Ignore the war,' then the American magazine that was interested in it said, 'Well, where's the war?' So she had to actually do rewrites about that to bring in the war all over the place. I think now at a distance suddenly you can see patterns that you can't when you're in the middle of it so it becomes part of a historical moment, which we can't really understand.

JB: I think of her as a war writer, and I'm pleased she's being seen that way. War is a relevant aspect of the books and relevant now, so it would be slightly alarming if dominant cultural productions didn't reflect that to some extent. The BBC's adaptation of *The ABC Murders* (2017) was explicitly paralleling Brexit. Whatever anyone said, it was very clearly drawing those parallels, and I think that's an important thing for adaptations to be doing. It is also a kind of cultural shorthand that lets people into those periods of history as well, seeing things that are currently on their minds.

SS: What were your thoughts on the reimagining of Poirot's backstory in this adaptation as an injured war veteran, and in other recent adaptations? What can this add to our perception, or enjoyment of, the character?

MA: I think that when you put a property like this out there to be adapted you have to give a lot of freedom to what a writer feels they want to do with the character, and that can have really positive results as well as ones that other people don't like. I can understand that if somebody wants to come and say, hey, I've got a really interesting take on Poirot. And I don't think that the die-hard fans are ever going to accept that. But then it's also not for them or us. It is for the writer in a sense, because yeah, the writer has got something that they want to really tap into there. But it's surprising how many things become popularized in films that that end up being integral to a character that you go and try and find in the book. And it's, it's just not there. Like sunlight, against Dracula coming from *Nosferatu*. I think that you've got to have this gamble if you're going to have interesting adaptations and not just the same thing every time. Giving someone the flexibility to do it is what creates interesting adaptations, and with that you will have hits and misses.

SM: Yeah, as Mark was saying, there are these interesting add-ons that we gain from adaptation – the iconic image of Holmes in the deerstalker is technically from adaptation in the form of Paget's drawings. And perhaps again it potentially adds to that enduring characterisation and visual iconography.

JB: From my perspective as a queer academic, I found it very interesting that Poirot's campest asset, this symbol of vanity, had to be explained in the most macho heroic way possible. I thought that was very interesting and telling. I'm not sure the serving in the trenches

explicitly contradicts Christie's version of his origin story, as she says he was the head of the Belgian police force, but he was also active in the war. Making Poirot a priest in Sarah Phelps' *The ABC Murders* absolutely contradicts canon, but I thought it was fantastic, though I know I'm in the minority.

MA: What I liked about that particular adaptation was that they were completely upfront in saying Sarah Phelps has not read any other Poirot books. This is an adaptation of only one Poirot book, it is not part of a series, it is a single interpretation of a single novel that has got no further ramifications beyond what it is as an adaptation. And I thought that was a really interesting way to do it.

SS: And it's not just Poirot that's been adapted, as there have been a number of recent film and literary adaptations of Christie and her life, such as Andrew Wilson's Agatha Christie Mysteries (2017-2020), *The Christie Affair* (2022) and *Agatha and the Truth of Murder* (2018). What do you think it is about Christie that makes her so enduringly fascinating and ripe for exploring and novels and films?

JB: The fact that Christie is famous makes her a popular thing for people to write about, and we know a lot more about her life now, but traditionally we knew very little about her personal life and people are very keen for her to be like a character in a mystery. There have been films and books and sensational things written about her disappearance in 1926 because it was the one, or perhaps the most obvious, mysterious event in her life.

SM: It was just very unfortunate and sad. Agatha was a very shy, private person and she was at a traumatic point in her life with the death of her mother and breakdown of her marriage, and she needed to get away and it was over-sensationalized. Maybe what makes it a source of fascination for people is that it does speak to a lot of emotions that we're all feeling; that sense of desperation, that sense of being rejected by somebody we love. There's a lot of very human and universal issues and emotions in there. And of course, you've got glamour of her life as a writer in the 20s and the 30s, and she's got some money and she travels to all these wonderful exotic places. I think the fact that she kept herself to herself so much helps as well, because we don't really know anything about her as a person. There are some parallels there with the Queen, whose life has been the subject of several adaptations, and solves murders in some, such as the novels of S. J. Bennett. This ambiguity means that they can be whatever we want, and in some of the books about Agatha Christie I very much get the impression that the author has put themselves into Christie's frocks and sensible shoes. The character reflects who they want Agatha Christie to be, because we all feel we know her from reading her books.

SS: In terms of the adaptations, either of Christie's life or her characters, which ones have been your favourite? Which do you think are the best?

MA: For me the best ones are the ones that maintain the core of what Christie mystery is and what the characters are about, and then add something because I think if you are too close to it then actually it can be a little bit dry because a novel is not a film. So, for me my probably top three all do that. The 1957 Billy Wilder version of *Witness for the Prosecution* takes her play and just adds extra bits to make it even more entertaining for the screen by adding humour and stronger characterisation for some of the characters. It's a really engaging experience that keeps everything in the play and just adds that Billy Wilder magic to it. So I love that one. I love Peter Ustinov's *Evil Under the Sun* (1982). The addition there is

the fun, the glamour, the campness. It's a contested field here, but it's comfortably the campest. My third is probably David Suchet's *The ABC Murders* (1992), because it again maintains the core of the novel and it reimagines it a little bit more as a sort of film noir or thriller. It's got these really strong, almost scary elements to it with the brooding menace of this killer who's out there and we get little glimpses of them. It's just so clever. And then it's got silly things like comedy bits with Captain Hastings, which again help to keep you engaged with it. So those three all do the same thing: say we don't need to change what's in the book, but here are some things that we can add to make it a more filmic entertaining experience.

SS: Yes, one big alteration that the Suchet Poirot series did was to put Hastings in so many more of them, as he's only in 8 of the novels and some of the short stories, and that's a change that I absolutely love. I think Hugh Fraser is wonderful and giving Hastings a bigger role really adds to the experience.

MA: Well, it's the thing about making it work as a series, which is why they added Hastings and Japp and Miss Lemon and in the early years because the feeling was that you couldn't really run a series without having Poirot have someone consistently to speak to. That's what seemed to sort of happen, and so you need to have him with his sort of surrogate family for it to work.

SM: I think *Evil Under the Sun* is probably my favourite too. The actresses in that are so fabulous, how can it not be one of your favourites? I also love the 2015 *And Then There Were None*. I've got to mention Joan Hickson's Miss Marple series (1984-1992) and Margaret Rutherford's Miss Marple films, as they are just incredible. And I feel the same about David Suchet's Poirot series, because I grew up with Suchet playing, and I actually used to be really scared of him as a child. It's only as an adult in the past few years I've kind of like got more and more involved in researching Christie and visited the Poirot novels and actually be like, 'Oh my God, I like Poirot.'

JB: I'm also going to have to say *Evil Under the Sun*, I'm afraid! It's gloriously camp and I love Cole Porter as well, and they used this music in that wonderfully. And what can you not love about Diana Rigg and Maggie Smith bitchily singing to each other? So and even the silly bits, the swimming in the sea scene where he just walks around in his bathing suit. Absolutely loved that and of course grew up with those old films. Otherwise, I would say probably the 2015 *And Then There Were None* because it suddenly got a whole generation of people saying they'd always considered Christie to be a serious writer. Which is something only a good adaptation can do it seems. I'd also say the 1981 *Seven Dials Mystery*. I just found it really fun and I think because I just watched it on an old VHS over and over again when I was little and it was a completely different world. Because I I'm from a theatrical background and they are quite theatrical productions in shaky sets made of chip board kind of thing, it's just really fun and witty in my opinion, and hammy in a staging way rather than a filmy way.

SS: What would you like to see adapted next?

MA: In terms of the next Kenneth Branagh adaptation, I think it would be really interesting if they adapted *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and *Curtain* (1975) together, because they're obviously wanting to try to present this story of Poirot's life, so it would be really interesting to have Poirot going back to Styles and sort of kicking off with *Curtain* and then flashing back to when he was there, solving *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Then we could see both ends of his life in one film which, seeing as the Kenneth Branagh films are so focused

on his story, would seem to me to be quite a nice way to do it. And both are stories that can be slimmed down without too much hassle. So yeah, that's a bonkers thing that they'll never do. But that would be my choice.

SM: I would love a really good version of *The Secret Adversary* (1922) which portrays the female detective, Tuppence Beresford, as the flapper girl she's written as, and a focus on the city space which there hasn't been as much focus on. I'd also like to see another version of *Deadman's Folly* (1956).

JB: I'm looking forward to the *Why Didn't They Ask Evans* (2022) series. I'd love to see Emma Thompson play Miss Marple at some point. One that's never been filmed – and Mark's book *Agatha Christie on Screen* (2016) talks about some aborted attempts to film it – is *Death Comes as the End* (1945), which is set in ancient Egypt. I'd really like to see that filmed in the future.

MA: I'll tell you what I think the difficult thing is about *Death Comes as the End*: I don't know how you can make them talk convincingly, because how do you have ancient Egyptians talk to each other in English? In the scripts that I've read, which doesn't include the recent aborted BBC One but the ones in the 80s, they all make them talk in this sort of Shakespearean way. So I think that is a really big barrier to being able to tell that story, so I'd love to see someone solve that. What I think is the biggest problem is actually making you interested in these characters from thousands of years ago and having them engage with each other in a way that you could care about. I think that that would be really, really tough.

SS: I'd quite like to see *Murder is Easy* (1939). I think that could be a fun one. I'd also like to see like a TV film or series of *A Murder is Announced* (1950) or *The Moving Finger* (1943).

Dreamchild Turned Dreamwoman: Female Coming-of-Age within Lewis Carroll's Alice Texts

Leah Brown

Albeit published over 200 years ago, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) continue to spark academic debate. As the novels centre around the seemingly nonsensical dreams of a Victorian girl named Alice, they easily lend themselves to a psychoanalytic reading. By intertwining psychoanalytic criticism with feminist criticism, one can link the phenomena of subconscious dreams to subversive displays of Victorian femininity. Through her dreams, Alice comes of age outside the ideals of Victorian society and secures her identity as a maturing woman, thus establishing autonomy and authority for herself in dreams where such behaviour is permitted and even encouraged. Alice's implicit control over the dreamworlds manifests her desires to defy Victorian gender norms through her own independence and the nonconforming female characters she meets. Although Alice inhabits a reality unaccustomed to female autonomy, her newfound authority within the dreamworlds influences her unwritten future as a Victorian woman, thus impacting the mental growth and maturity she undergoes despite the strictures of her daily life.

Widely beloved and adapted into a multitude of films, novels, and even video games, the original *Alice in Wonderland* follows Alice, a seven-year-old Victorian girl, as she accidentally falls down a rabbit hole into the nonsensical world of Wonderland. As she travels through the underground world, she meets a wide variety of maddening people alongside talking animals and plants, all of whom contradict the world of strictures and logic from which she comes. Her journey comes to a head when she meets the cruel Queen of Hearts, and Alice's defiance toward the monarch leads her to awake, revealing her journey to be nothing more than a dream. This overall plot structure is replicated in Carroll's second Alice text, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, in which Alice crawls through her drawing room's looking-glass into another topsy-turvy world. In the Looking-Glass world, the Red and White Queens guide Alice across a chessboard-like landscape to become a queen herself. Like Wonderland, here Alice meets a variety of eccentric characters who challenge her self-perception and beliefs; but, in revisiting the dreamscape, she triumphs over the madness to become a queen and awakes from a dream once again.

Despite an abundance of contemporary criticism on Alice's dreams and refusal of Victorian gender norms, these two viewpoints are rarely linked together as causes of her independence as a Victorian girl. As a result, there is a gap in research that employs both feminism and psychoanalysis when claiming Alice's actions are proof of her self-formed identity and autonomy. By taking texts by feminist critics, including Catherine Clément, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, one can draw together the two disciplines to support an argument fuelled by both forms of discourse. Many contemporary critics, including Aihong Ren, Edith L. Honig, U. C. Knoepflmacher, Gerald P. Mulderig, and Sara B. Romera, focus on the implications of Alice's defiance of societal norms for women: young girls specifically. They all credit Alice's personal maturation to her refusal to abide by society's oppression of Victorian women. On the other hand, psychologist and dream researcher Kelly Bulkeley has presented the most recent work on dream research in

relation to Carroll's texts; however, he does not expand on the implications of such dream research and psychoanalysis on Alice's overall psyche and her perception of her journeys. Scholars who do link Alice's dreams with her independence, such as Ronald R. Thomas, describe her authority over her actions in Wonderland as an extension of her authority over her dreams; however, little is done to contemplate this authority as a subversive display of femininity in Alice at the same time. This paper looks to unite these arguments to further contemporary understanding of Carroll's Alice texts and of Alice herself as an iconic Victorian character.

Both Wonderland and the place beyond the Looking-Glass exist within Alice's mind as afternoon dreams. Whether she is falling down a rabbit hole or stepping through a mirror, Alice traverses nonsensical worlds entirely of her own creation. These dreams are undeniably a part of Alice herself; whom she meets and what she experiences are all parts of her own psyche that are still whimsical and freewheeling despite the constraints of Victorian society. During the Victorian era, Queen Victoria championed the gendered ideology of separate spheres in which men traversed the public sphere as 'active, progressive, [and] defensive' individuals, and women resided within the private sphere of the home and were prized for being 'enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side'.[1] Gender in the nineteenth century was prescribed to this very narrow binary that trapped people into a singular mode of being, thus challenging the ability to divert from one's allocated societal role. Mid-Victorian children's literature often embodied these roles and other societal expectations of individuals at this time, thus making children's books more educational and didactic than fantastical and entertaining, as one may view modern-day children's literature. As such, Carroll's first Alice text redefined Victorian children's literature and what it could be '[b]y dispensing with ponderous moralizing and appealing directly to the child's desire for amusement'.[2] Alice's adventures carry the whimsical nature of childlike exploration without the hindrance of social expectations of young girls, who were meant to embody feminine characteristics such as '[m]odesty, service, [and] forgetfulness of self'.[3] However, Alice's acts of dreaming that grant her authority and autonomy demonstrate an aversion to Victorian women's stereotypical roles by straying from the model children's literature protagonist of the time period.

One can analyse the dreamlike state of Carroll's Alice texts through the lenses of Freudian philosophy and current dream research. In a Freudian perspective, Alice's dreams become wellsprings of latent content lurking under the surface of supposed madness. In these dreams, Alice addresses her struggle to be heard and her inability to claim autonomy as a young, rebellious girl in a Victorian world in which women were expected to be docile and acquiescent. The Freudian concept of the 'dream-work' heavily colours the Alice texts and takes their seeming nonsense to a higher, more intuitive level of symbolism and hidden

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[1] John Ruskin, 'Lecture II.—Lilies. Of Queens' Gardens', in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library edn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), XVIII (1905), pp. 109–144 (pp. 121–123).

[2] Gerald P. Mulderig, 'Alice and Wonderland: Subversive Elements in the World of Victorian Children's Literature', *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 11, 2 (1977), 320–329 (p. 320) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1977.00320.x>

[3] Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England,* 2013 edn, Routledge Library Editions: Women's History, 14 (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 50.

meaning. The standard dream-work 'consists of thoughts – a few of which may be objectionable and unacceptable, but which are correctly constructed and expressed'.[4] Alice's dreams are composed of her inner thoughts and feelings, many of which she never tackles outrightly due to her preoccupation with the nonsense in her path. However, recurrent themes, such as Alice's struggle for identity coupled with her quest for maturity and autonomy, paint every page of Carroll's texts from the moment Alice falls down the rabbit hole. Unlike common Victorian children, Alice is impulsive and not easily directed or entertained, thus leading to her creation of dreamworlds.

'Nonsense and absurdity' are also characteristic of Freudian dream-works, both of which 'have their meaning' in the context of dreams.[5] In both Alice texts, but particularly in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* Alice finds herself in a foreign and nonsensical land:

'[W]e're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'

'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.

'You must be,' said the [Cheshire] Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.'[6]

This absurdity causes Alice much anxiety as she is only accustomed to her strictly regulated reality. Madness manifests itself in Alice's dreamworlds through the Freudian concepts of condensation and reversal. Condensation, in which 'latent elements which have something in common [are] combined and fused into a single unity in the manifest dream', highlights much of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* as the small cast of characters are forced to play many roles to serve the purpose of their latent meaning.[7] For example, the entirety of motherhood is embodied by the Duchess, a violent woman who jostles her baby and abandons it in the care of an even more violent cook and Alice. By distilling motherhood into this single, volatile character, Carroll presents Alice's perception of motherhood as a state to fear. Consequently, Alice shirks any responsibility for the baby: 'altogether Alice did not like the look of the thing at all'.[8] Furthermore, the baby's transformation into a pig demonstrates Alice's internal dislike of Victorian motherhood, as she displays repulsion toward the infant even before being forced to hold and nurse it.

Reversal, on the other hand, is ever-present throughout *Through the Looking-Glass,* as the entire world functions in a backwards fashion that makes Alice falter. The world of the Looking-Glass is undeniably 'a "topsy-turvy" world [...in its] reversal in the order of events, so that what precedes an event causally comes after it in the dream'.[9] Much of Alice's instruction by the reigning queens is focused on tackling things in reverse, which goes against every fibre of her Victorian being. Described by the White Queen as 'living backwards', nearly every situation in the Looking-Glass world is characterised not by a lack of order but rather a reversal

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[4] Sigmund Freud, 'The Dream-Work', in *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. by Richard J. Lane (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 245–253 (p. 247).

[5] Freud, 'Dream-Work', p. 249.

[6] Lewis Carroll, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass,* 2015 edn (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2015), pp. 1–106 (pp. 53–54).

[7] Freud, 'Dream-Work', p. 246.

[8] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 51.

[9] Freud, 'Dream-Work', p. 250.

of order.[10] No matter whom Alice encounters, she is expected to understand the lifestyle of 'living backwards' and is often criticised when she tries to do things in a more sensical manner. This is seen when she attempts to hand out cake during the Lion and Unicorn's battle:

> 'I've [Alice] cut several slices already, but they always join on again!'

> 'You don't know how to manage Looking-glass cakes,' the Unicorn remarked. 'Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards.'

> This sounded nonsense, but Alice very obediently got up, and carried the dish round, and the cake divided itself into three pieces as she did so. '*Now* cut it up,' said the Lion, as she returned to her place with the empty dish.[11]

This reversal is also present more symbolically in Alice herself. As Freud explains concerning reversal, 'Quite often in dreams it is the hare that shoots the sportsman'; similarly, Alice, in the context of her dreams, reverses the way of the world to grant herself more authority and autonomy than she has in reality.[12] For example, despite being a pawn on the chessboard of the Looking-Glass world, Alice exhibits a fair amount of agency:

> Alice felt a *little* timid about going into [the wood]. However, on second thoughts, she made up her mind to go on: 'for I certainly won't go *back*,' she thought to herself, and this was the only way to the Eighth Square.[13]

To reach queenship, Alice must abandon her traditional role as a chaperoned child and passive woman to strike out on her own despite the warnings of the patriarchal adult figures around her. Her dreams may turn everything upside down in a way that does not suit her at first, but this 'living backwards' enables Alice to reach many goals, such as queenship, which would be impossible for her in reality.

Alice's desire for and eventual obtainment of queenship derive from another Freudian dream-work concept: wish-fulfilment. Particularly concerning the dreams of young children, Freud claims that such dreams exist as 'obvious fulfilments of wishes [...] they have been transformed from a wish into an actual experience'.[14] Throughout both Alice texts, Alice wishes for things that eventually occur, thus highlighting her subconscious agency while navigating her dreamworlds. The most significant of these wishes is her desire for queenship in *Through the Looking-Glass,* which Alice expresses immediately upon her invitation to join the chess game: '"I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join – though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best"'.[15] This wish propels Alice throughout the text, as she crosses the entire dreamland to reach the Eighth Square and promote herself to Queen Alice.

However, this wish is not as simple as wanting to dress up and play the part of royalty; this instance of wish-fulfilment reveals Alice's latent desire for more independence and power in her life, particularly in a position of feminine authority. As a young Victorian girl, Alice's options in life are quite limited to the stringent gender roles prescribed to men and women,

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[10] Lewis Carroll, 'Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There', in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass,* 2015 edn (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2015), pp. 107–234 (p. 165).
[11] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', pp. 196–197.
[12] Freud, 'Dream-Work', p. 250.
[13] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 146.
[14] Freud, 'Dream-Work', p. 246.
[15] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 135.

thus prohibiting anything that strayed from this binary. However, in her dreams, Alice can reach for anything, even the impossible title of queen of her own world. Furthermore, this moment of wish-fulfilment highlights a more dismal reality for Alice: despite her dreams, a position of such independence and autonomy for her only exists in a reversed world. In a male-dominant world, 'woman is passive or she does not exist', and Alice will unfortunately not be an exception once she awakens.[16]

This desire to resist society through dreams has also been tackled by current dream research, which defines Carroll's Alice texts as 'a conceptual tool for resisting the oppressive normality of adulthood in Victorian England'.[17] Building on Freudian concepts of disorder and condensation, modern dream theory goes a step further in asserting Alice's coming-of-age and growing independence throughout her dreams. During her adventures, Alice must be more outspoken and self-serving to accomplish her goals, which would be frowned upon for Victorian girls, who 'were adjured to keep clean, to keep quiet, and to keep still'.[18] Alice's dreamworlds provide a new level of 'cognitive freedom' that allows her to 'revitalize and reconnect with [her] innate capacity for free choice and action'.[19] She often has to yell to be heard and directly opposes authority figures when they are out of line. One of her most distinct moments of outward rebellion is during the trial toward the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in which she opposes the Queen of Hearts despite the threat of beheading:

'Hold your tongue!' said the Queen, turning purple.

'I won't!' said Alice.

'Off with her head!' the Queen shouted at the top of her lungs. Nobody moved.

'Who cares for *you?*' said Alice. […] 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'[20]

This action, while incredibly defiant, shows Alice following her own moral code in a harrowing situation. Rather than sit idly by and allow people to be beheaded for misdemeanours, Alice takes a stand for what she believes is right.

The Alice texts' focus on dreams is also enforced at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass,* as Alice questions who truly dreamed the dream: herself or the Red King:

'let's consider who it was that dreamed it all. […] it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! *Was* it the Red King?'[21]

In this open-ended question, Carroll asks not only Alice but his readers as well to reflect on their own agency in their lives; in other words, '[a]re you actively creating the dream of your own life, or are you merely a character in someone else's dream?'.[22] Now that Alice has

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[16] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, 'Sorties: Out and out: attacks/ways out/forays', in *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. by Richard J. Lane (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 654–664 (p. 655).

[17] Kelly Bulkeley, 'The subversive dreams of Alice in Wonderland', *International Journal of Dream Research,* 12, 2 (2019), 49–59 (p. 49) <https://doi.org/10.11588/ijodr.2019.2.62445>

[18] Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 23.

[19] Bulkeley, 'Dreams of Alice', p. 56.

[20] Carroll, 'Wonderland', pp. 103–104.

[21] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 233.

[22] Bulkeley, 'Dreams of Alice', p. 58.

reentered reality, she must decide for herself, without the prompting of her Looking-Glass acquaintances, how much agency she can truly claim as her own.

Through the frame of Alice's dreams, Carroll crafts a coming-of-age narrative in his first Alice text; then, Alice's maturation continues in *Through the Looking-Glass*. While the first Alice text helps Alice transcend her childhood and grow up, the second Alice text further develops her maturity into adulthood. After spending time in Wonderland stabilising her identity by gaining independence, Alice must traverse the world of the Looking-Glass to enforce her adulthood and expanding maturity on the dreamworld around her. Even though Alice is young, her journeys within Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world present the maturation of a little girl into a self-possessed young woman through her various adventures and interactions with the chaotic characters she meets. However, to truly witness this slow but steady growth, one must start with the child Alice of Wonderland. Even before she falls into Wonderland, Alice is placed in a familiar childhood position: chaperoned by her older sister. She even pokes fun at her sister, particularly for the book she is reading:

> Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice 'without pictures or conversation?'[23]

Like any child from any era, Alice cannot find enjoyment in more mature pursuits. However, her interest in what her sister is reading demonstrates Alice's understanding of the stark contrasts between childhood and adulthood. Despite deeming her sister's book dull, '[Alice's] wonder about the meaning of [an] adult's book suggests her curiosity about the adult world'.[24] Alice still views herself as distinct and separate from adulthood, but her curiosity latches onto anything foreign to her, as is presented throughout her time in both Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world.

Once Alice enters Wonderland in Carroll's first book, she is immediately thrust into an 'adult' – and therefore foreign – world. She grows and shrinks against her will, thus struggling to fit in a world that seems to hinder her at every step. However, Alice is cognisant of the growing up she must endure to return to her own world and enter the lovely garden. This strange series of growing and shrinking propels Alice on her hero's journey toward adulthood. Like many fictional heroes, 'the journey will involve changes in [Alice's] selfhood'; through the friends she makes and the trials she overcomes, Alice will definitively leave Wonderland a changed person.[25] '[T]he transition between [Wonderland] and [reality]; from [real] time to another time; from youth to adulthood' is the hallmark of the portal-quest fantasy mode, of which Carroll's Alice texts is one of the first.[26] The distinct barrier between her Victorian reality and Wonderland allows Alice to grow without the gendered ideology of society inhibiting her. As such, Alice's identity as known to herself is the crux of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* as she consistently questions who she is and how she has changed since her fall down the rabbit hole: a sort of portal in a sense. Even for such a young girl, she acknowledges

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[23] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 7.

[24] Aihong Ren, '"Who Am I": Alice's Quest for Knowledge and Identity in Wonderland', *Studies in Literature and Language,* 8, 3 (2014), 126–132 (p. 127) <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/n>

[25] Edith L. Honig, *Breaking the Angelic Image: Woman Power in Victorian Children's Fantasy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 76.

[26] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 1.

that her journey through Wonderland will be one of personal growth, although she initially resists these changes. In her Victorian reality, Alice must accept 'what [she] had been taught to perceive as [her] "feminine" social identity', thus making this independent quest a foreign venture for her. [27] However, Alice's quest for identity, when intertwined with her quest for maturation, highlights the agency Alice claims for herself while in her dreamworlds. When trying to decide if she has become someone else, Alice remarks, '"Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else"'. [28] Unlike many young protagonists of portal-quest fantasies, Alice does not fear her dreamworld; rather, 'Alice imposes herself on fantasyland, [...and] does not act as a stranger' within Wonderland. [29] She takes the creation of her identity into her own hands and pursues the answer herself, thus beginning a journey of maturation toward an independently determined identity of her own.

Alice's identity is never more questioned than in her interaction with the Caterpillar, who ponders his own identity, as he still must traverse subsequent life stages to become his most mature form: a butterfly. Alice is immediately bombarded with the question, '"Who are *you*?"' [30] Throughout the conversation, Alice cannot explain who she is, as the Caterpillar refuses to accept what she says. Akin to the stages of adolescence and adulthood, Alice is forced to have some sort of understanding as to who she is; she can no longer float through life without a strong sense of self and purpose. She has never been put in a position in which she must independently understand herself. Unlike the real world, Alice does not have adults policing her thoughts and actions in Wonderland, and, as such, she must make decisions for herself *about* herself. Prior to this experience, she has only been 'encouraged to suppress [...] any desire for power or independence'. [31] The Caterpillar pushes Alice toward maturation, which allows her to exhibit 'far more freedom for the display of independence and for growth and maturation through experience'. [32] Without anyone instructing her, Alice must find the answers within herself and craft her own personality. In this sense, the Caterpillar, albeit abrasive, sets Alice on the right track for her time in Wonderland and eventually reality. Especially as her journey continues through Wonderland, Alice encounters many characters who try to tell her who she is and how she must behave, almost as if they are warped versions of the 'parent-figures' she is 'accustomed to heeding' aboveground. [33] By instilling within her the importance of self-discovery and identity, the Caterpillar encourages Alice to develop on her own terms, thus helping her resist the overbearing influences of the many adult characters she meets throughout Carroll's first text.

As readers see Wonderland through Alice's eyes, they are conditioned to view the world as not only mad but also adult. Much like home, Alice is consistently ordered about and infantilised, even as she matures. She is expected to learn her place as a future Victorian woman, which includes passivity and inferiority, even in Wonderland. However, she learns that to persevere in such a strange land, she must work within its systems and exert her own agency in response to the aggressive actions of those around her. Unlike her reality, Alice has

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[27] Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 2.
[28] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 16.
[29] Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. 28.
[30] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 37.
[31] Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 2.
[32] Honig, *Angelic Image*, p. 8.
[33] Ren, '"Who Am I"', p. 128.

more control in her dreams and can therefore openly act out against these patriarchal notions of 'proper' feminine behaviour. While she spends much of the first half of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* attempting to apply Victorian logic to situations, she begins to change her plan of attack after meeting the Cheshire Cat, who reminds her that madness is oftentimes unavoidable:

> 'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.

> 'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat.[34]

To succeed, Alice must adapt; she has to roll with the proverbial punches from mad hatters and belligerent queens to survive and achieve her optimal growth. She takes ownership of her situation as she comes of age as well. After running about like a frightened, lost child, Alice starts to accept the realities of her dreams and uses her awareness of the dream state as a method of perseverance. For example, when she first meets the Queen of Hearts, Alice remarks to herself, '"Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!"'[35] She disregards the insults and infantilisation she receives to understand the truths of Wonderland and her dreaming state. Much like a mature adult, Alice no longer feels the need to throw a fit or cry, as she did earlier in the book, but rather works her way through events as logically as she can to be sensible yet adaptable to the situation at hand.

Alice's coming-of-age journey through Wonderland reaches its climax during the trial scene; for the first and only time in the Alice texts, Alice grows without the aid of something else, be it food, drink, or a fan. This growth makes her uncomfortable, similar to her past experiences with drastic size changes, but she refuses to allow the discomfort to rule her: 'she was beginning to grow larger again, and she thought at first she would get up and leave the court; but on second thoughts she decided to remain where she was as long as there was room for her'.[36] Alice's growth is presented in a very visual, physical manner to emphasise that her mental growth has also reached its peak: adulthood.

After facing many trials, Alice becomes an autonomous individual who shapes her own life and identity. Her growth gives her a newfound sense of authority as well, as she is no longer afraid to confront the many adult figures of Wonderland who have ordered her around for much of her journey. As a result of her personal growth, '[t]he empowered Alice can boldly challenge the adult values, even when the adult comes from the royal family – the Queen herself'.[37] Alice's final outcry of adulthood and independence from the bloodthirsty monarchy of Wonderland is when she outrightly defies and insults the Queen of Hearts in court:

> 'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first – verdict afterwards.'

> 'Stuff and nonsense!' said Alice loudly. 'The idea of having the sentence first!'[38]

This impactful moment, followed by Alice's complete refusal to abide by the Queen's declarations, codifies Alice as the adult she has been inadvertently working toward becoming throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* While her growth may be shaky, and she

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[34] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 53.

[35] Ibid., p. 67.

[36] Ibid., p. 94.

[37] Ren, '"Who Am I"', p. 131.

[38] Carroll, 'Wonderland', pp. 103–104.

returns to reality quite soon after this event, the coming-of-age that Alice experiences in Wonderland does not disappear as soon as her dream fades; rather, 'her dream adventure hints at her future self. The dream enacts in a symbolic way the future confrontations of her development, thus preparing her for the growth and emotional changes brought about during puberty'.[39] Alice is now equipped with the independence and perseverance needed to navigate the landscape of Victorian coming-of-age and maturity. Despite her patriarchal upbringing, Alice will be properly prepared for 'problems of identity experienced by women who have always been supported by someone else'.[40] Through her dreams, she has gained independent thought and ambition without societal pressures discouraging her.

The lasting effects of Alice's maturation through Carroll's first Alice text are further built upon in the second. However, there is a clear qualitative difference in the kind of maturation Alice undergoes in the Looking-Glass world compared to that of Wonderland. In Alice's reality, she has only aged six months since her time in Wonderland; however, her adventures in the Looking-Glass world only continue her journey toward complete maturity. While Alice may have experienced a proper coming-of-age in Carroll's first Alice text, Carroll's second text highlights the maturing that Alice must still undergo to reach full self-realisation. Rather than this further maturation being a chaotic and unpredictable pursuit of identity, this time around, Alice has gained some confidence from her last adventure. She is no longer a naïve child; rather, she traverses the world of the Looking-Glass with one specific purpose: to mature and become a queen.

From the beginning of the second Alice text, Alice has a noticeable level of autonomy and independence, which has replaced her reckless curiosity of the former novel. She approaches situations with resolve despite how often everything works against her. Similar to the first text, Alice also finds herself unable to enter a garden, but rather than crying over her situation as she does in the first text, she tries every method possible until she can find the way to her desired destination:

> 'I should see the garden far better,' said Alice to herself, 'if I could get to the top of that hill: and here's a path that leads straight to it – at least, no, it doesn't do *that –*' (after going a few yards along the path, and turning several sharp corners), 'but I suppose it will at last. But how curiously it twists! […] Well, *this* turn goes to the hill, I suppose – no, it doesn't! This goes straight back to the house! Well then, I'll try it the other way.'

> And so she did: wandering up and down, and trying turn after turn, but always coming back to the house, do what she would.[41]

Despite the path never actually leading where it seems to, as per the madness of Alice's dreamscapes, Alice continues to 'resolutely [turn] her back upon the house' in pursuit of the garden.[42] As Alice has gained the maturity to keep going when the going gets tough, she reaches the garden far sooner than she does in Wonderland. Unlike her childish self that readers have come to know, 'the *Looking-Glass* Alice embodies Carroll's much stronger

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[39] Ren, '"Who Am I"', pp. 131–132.
[40] Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 119.
[41] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 129.
[42] Ibid., p. 129.

endorsement of the mastery that comes through growth'.[43] While Alice may not have yet reached full maturity, she shows a great amount of growth from the outset of Carroll's second Alice text that she lacked at the start of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

Whereas the Alice of Wonderland had to become mature and independent in her own right to secure her identity, the Alice of the Looking-Glass world must grow in a way that enforces her maturity and adulthood on the people around her. Alice knows that she has grown and expects to be treated as such, but she learns that those around her do not view her as she views herself. Even the talking flowers see Alice as a childish weed with low intelligence:

'I never thought of that before!' [Alice] said.

'It's *my* opinion that you never think *at all*,' the Rose said in a rather severe tone.

'I never saw anybody that looked stupider,' a Violet said, so suddenly, that Alice quite jumped.[44]

Alice expects how she feels internally to be reflected externally, but she is still a seven-year-old girl who appears to lack any of the authority and agency she fought for in Wonderland. Similarly, maturing Victorian girls 'tended to be seen as a problem when and where [they] showed signs of cherishing anything resembling autonomy'.[45] However, this setback does little to deter Alice, as she dismisses these insults and enters the chess game as a pawn to cross the world of the Looking-Glass and become a queen. Rather than allow the words of others to stop her, Alice makes her way to the Eighth Square to secure her crown and remains steadfast in the assertion of her independence.

For Alice to achieve the lofty goal of queenship, she must continue her quest of maturation. However, she struggles to keep a firm grasp on her goal and identity. To reach the Eighth Square, Alice has to travel through a wood in which people forget who they are, and Alice herself is no exception. As she makes her way through, she remarks, '"And now, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I'm determined to do it!"'[46] Similarly to how the Caterpillar constantly questioned Alice's identity in the first Alice text, she repeats these questions of identity to herself throughout the second Alice text. She understands that to be successful, she must know who she is; her identity must be maintained even more so in a world that repeatedly strips her of it. This theft of identity is a problem Alice will also face frequently in her reality, which will try to wrench away her autonomy and independence, as both qualities are not befitting a Victorian woman. When this outward attack on her identity does not prevail, the world of the Looking-Glass tries to shake her again, this time with Tweedledee and Tweedledum's theory that Alice is nothing more than a figment of the sleeping Red King's imagination. The twins try to convince Alice that she is not real, much like how male figures in reality will try to persuade her that her notions of female agency are misguided. While the twins may briefly succeed, Alice stays firmly rooted in the identity she has secured for herself:

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[43] U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childhood: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 197.

[44] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 132.

[45] Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 138.

[46] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 147.

'[Y]ou're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real. […]'

'I know they're talking nonsense,' Alice thought to herself.[47]

Unlike her last dreamworld adventure, Alice knows who she is and where she stands; now, her goal is to ensure that everyone around her understands as well.

In securing her identity, Alice must not only acknowledge who she is within her dreamworlds, but she must also understand herself as she relates to reality. Alice's gender dominates her conception of herself, as society strongly influences who she can and cannot be as a future Victorian lady. Victorian belief grounded itself in biological essentialism in relation to gender, as women supposedly possessed an inborn inferiority to men.[48] In granting men innate superiority and authority, society denied women the opportunity to be independent and ambitious. While Alice is only exposed to proper women within her reality, such as her mild-mannered sister, the women of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world present Alice with alternate displays of womanhood, many of which promote agency and autonomy. However, as these women are all part of Alice's dreams, their behaviours and demonstrations of subversive femininity stem from Alice's own mind. In this way, Alice recognises the mistreatment of women in her reality and subconsciously works to correct it in her dreams. Rather than present readers with examples of standard Victorian women, Carroll creates subversive figures and posits them as inventions of Alice's imagination; as such, they reflect Alice's ideas of what women could be if allowed to act how they wished.

Although there are only three women present in the first Alice text, each one demonstrates a more outspoken – even violent – femininity not on display in proper Victorian society. Alice's first introduction to such alternative presentations of womanhood is her meeting with the Duchess and her Cook. From the moment she enters the house, a normally docile and domestic sphere, Alice is met with chaos and violence: 'the cook took the cauldron of soup off the fire, and at once set to work throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and the baby'.[49] Prior to this occurrence, Alice had met with the Caterpillar and is now in search of a definitive identity for herself, and stumbling into a scene of improper domesticity is no coincidence as her first step on this journey. As a growing Victorian girl, Alice must acknowledge her future: motherhood; however, the motherhood presented via the Duchess is unlike anything Alice has ever seen. As the Duchess exists within Alice's mind, 'Alice shows through […] the Duchess a subversion of the image of the ideal loving mother that Victorian society value[s], thence, offering a critique and refusing that role'.[50] Furthermore, when the Duchess dumps her baby onto Alice, Alice is at a loss for how to care for it. As the baby cries and grunts, Alice remarks, '"If you're going to turn into a pig, my dear, […] I'll have nothing more to do with you. Mind now!"'[51] Alice takes no interest in the baby nor displays any form of maternal instinct; rather, she is somewhat disgusted by the prospect of caring for the infant at all. As Alice is mentally experiencing a form of adolescence and adulthood

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[47] Ibid., p. 158.

[48] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide,* 3rd edn (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), p. 81.

[49] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 49.

[50] Sara B. Romera, 'Revising *Alice in Wonderland:* An Analysis of Alice's Female Subjectivity in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'*, *Blue Gum,* 4 (2017), 14–22 (p. 17)
<http://www.ub.edu/dpfilsa/Blue_Gum/BlueGum_Vol4/3.%20Sara%20Bermejo.pdf> [accessed 21 January 2022].

[51] Carroll, 'Wonderland', pp. 51–52.

throughout Carroll's first text, Alice's moment with the Duchess's baby serves as a sort of test. She loses points as a future 'image of the True Woman – the submissive, domesticated female'.[52] However, Carroll does not demonise or reprimand Alice for this decision and allows her to progress through the narrative of her own accord; there is no correction or moralisation of her actions, as would be present in many other Victorian children's stories. Rather than growing into her rightful role, Alice abandons the baby-turned-piglet in the woods before continuing her journey.

Alice's interactions with both the Cook and Duchess shape how she goes about the rest of Wonderland in terms of her feminine growth and autonomy. Rather than passively accept when others push her around, Alice asserts herself amongst the wild creatures, particularly those who are male. For example, in approaching the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice is refused participation at an all-male table under the pretense of there being no suitable space for her despite many empty chairs: '"No room! No room!" [the Mad Hatter and March Hare] cried out when they saw Alice coming. "There's *plenty* of room!" said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table'.[53] Rather than give in to their ludicrous demands, Alice asserts herself in a male-dominant world. However, after enduring much of their rudeness and mockery, Alice elects to leave the table, thus highlighting that although a woman may desire a place in a male-dominated world, and technically be offered participation, she will always be ostracised by male-specific rhetoric. Like many women, even today, Alice longs to be included in such events and discussions but also cannot bear the simultaneous mistreatment she receives from men:

> [The] rudeness was more than Alice could bear: she got up in great disgust, and walked off; […] neither [the Mad Hatter nor the March Hare] took the least notice of her going, though she looked back once or twice, half hoping that they would call after her.[54]

Fortunately, Alice does not allow such instances to discourage her growth toward autonomous femininity and maturity.

The most prominent of Carroll's women in both Alice texts is the Queen of Hearts, the gory monarch of Wonderland. Refusing to kowtow to anyone, the Queen of Hearts rules with an iron fist and unrestrained passion, as she is quite easily angered and always appeased in her wishes. She even intimidates her husband, who suffers incredible emasculation in the face of her violent feminism and goes as far as to hide behind Alice as his wife rages: '"don't look at me like that!" [The King] got behind Alice as he spoke'.[55] On the croquet ground, the Queen of Hearts exemplifies complete dominance and control, as everyone present fears upsetting her in any way, shape, or form. While Alice may not be very fond of the Queen, '[t]he fact that Alice creates a powerful female character [who] deviates so much from the patriarchal society in which [Alice] has been raised […] is very significant'.[56] To some critics, such as Aihong Ren, the Queen of Hearts exists solely as a vicious characterisation of a so-called strong woman 'full of disorder, madness and rage'.[57] However, the Queen shows Alice that such alternative

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[52] Honig, *Angelic Image*, p. 8.

[53] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 56.

[54] Ibid., p. 63.

[55] Ibid., p. 71.

[56] Romera, 'Revising *Alice*', p. 18.

[57] Aihong Ren, 'A Fantasy Subverting the Woman's Image as "The Angel in the House"', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies,* 4, 10 (2014), 2061–2065 (p. 2062) < doi:10.4304/tpls.4.10.2061-2065>

expressions of femininity are possible and that she already has some of this ability to go against the grain within her own mind.

Following Alice's coming-of-age in Wonderland, the women present in *Through the Looking-Glass* demonstrate better options for a maturing young woman. The only human women Alice encounters in the Looking-Glass world are its queens: the Red Queen and White Queen. Both women exemplify the feminine extremes of assertive independence and emotional motherhood, respectively. However, both take it upon themselves to guide Alice toward her goal of queenship. Although Alice is a Pawn in the world of the Looking-Glass, both queens encourage her to seek beyond her current position. In aligning the Looking-Glass world with the layout and rules of chess, Carroll grants the queens the utmost agency, as they are the only pieces that can move about however they please. Rather than leaving Alice to fend for herself, as she did in Wonderland, the queens explain the general rules of their world and give Alice direct instructions for obtaining her own freedom and agency:

> 'I [Alice] should *like* to be a Queen, best.'

> [Alice] glanced rather shyly at the [Red] Queen as she said this, but her companion only smiled pleasantly, and said, 'That's easily managed. You can be the White Queen's Pawn, if you like […]; and you're in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you'll be a Queen.'[58]

Unlike Wonderland, where the Queen is very violent and aggressive, Alice has imagined improved female role models this time around. This change in her own perception of femininity reflects Alice's maturity in Carroll's second text as well. As she has already come of age, Alice can continue to mature and decide for herself what kind of woman she wants to be.

Between the Red and White Queens, one can observe two alternate exhibitions of femininity that introduce Alice to healthy yet subversive outlooks on her gender that she does not experience in her Victorian reality. The White Queen presents the form of womanhood most acceptable to Victorian society, as she is very emotional, maternal, and – one could argue – even ineffectual; after all, as the White Pawn approaching queenship, Alice is positioned as her replacement, in a sense. Regardless, the White Queen does not belittle Alice's feminine agency and maturity; rather, Alice navigates the White Queen's gentle nature while maintaining her own self-possession. Even though the White Queen asks of her help in more domestic matters, Alice stands up for herself in a confident yet polite manner:

> 'But really you [the White Queen] should have a lady's-maid!' [Alice said.]

> 'I'm sure I'll take *you* with pleasure!' the [White] Queen said. 'Twopence a week, and jam every other day.'

> Alice couldn't help laughing, as she said, 'I don't want you to hire *me*.'[59]

The White Queen is gentler and more maternal, very much like the women Alice is familiar with from Victorian society. Whereas in Wonderland, Alice was outspoken in her disdain for motherhood and children, Alice now has the maturity to accept the differences in others without losing herself. Rather than force all women to abide by certain codes of conduct, the

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[58] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', pp. 135–136.
[59] Ibid., pp. 164–165.

world of the Looking-Glass grants women more flexibility, something which Alice enjoys during her time there. While more stereotypically feminine women, like the White Queen, exist, other modes of femininity are not hindered nor belittled as a result.

Directly opposite the White Queen is the Red Queen, who represents a more stable version of subversive womanhood compared to the White Queen and Queen of Hearts from the previous Alice text. Carroll envisioned the Red Queen to be 'cold and calm; she must be formal and strict, yet not unkindly'.[60] Unlike her queenly counterparts, she is not violent and easily impassioned, nor is she weepy and docile; rather, the Red Queen is direct and instructive, not allowing others to tell her who she must be or how she should behave. Upon first meeting, the Red Queen informs Alice of her authority over the Looking-Glass world in quite simple terms:

> [Alice] explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way.
>
> 'I don't know what you mean by *your* way,' said the [Red] Queen: 'all the ways about here belong to *me*.'[61]

While the Red Queen is sometimes a bit too bossy for Alice's liking, she truly helps Alice navigate a world that so often works against her. In doing so, the Red Queen prepares Alice to return to the real world and take the pressures of Victorian society in stride as much as she is able.

As *Through the Looking-Glass* is meant to help Alice further mature, Carroll introduces Alice to various representations of womanhood not only to give her options but also to encourage her to acknowledge and respect the different lifestyles of those around her. While Alice may feel overwhelmed by the violent women of Wonderland, the Looking-Glass world offers her the opportunity to seek autonomy via her own definition of femininity, even if it does not align with that of her reality. Victorian notions of public/male versus private/female spheres equated 'the term "masculine" to [...] "active" [and] the term "feminine" to [...] "passive"'.[62] However, Alice denies the strictures of gender roles and, through her movement into proper queendom, achieves newfound authority and autonomy as a woman in power. She begins to stray from more conventional displays of femininity that would '[expect her] to be ornamental, domesticated, and submissive' and instead delights in the opportunity to secure her royal title.[63] As she grows closer to her goal, she becomes more resolute in her stance, as she expresses to the White Knight, '"I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be a Queen"'.[64] Not only does Alice refuse to accept the rules of a society in which she is made inferior, but she also remains firm in both her femininity and independence in the process.

Alice's growth throughout both of Carroll's texts eventually renders her a young woman who is not easily deterred nor upset; she has obtained a firm grasp of who she is, both as an adult and as a woman. In the beginning of her grand dream journey, when she cannot

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[60] Lewis Carroll, '"Alice" on the Stage', *The Theatre*, 9 (1887), 179–184 (p. 182) <https://uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/alice-on-stage/docview/7869458/se-2?accountid=10792> [accessed 21 January 2022].

[61] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 133.

[62] Luce Irigaray, 'The Blind Spot of an Old Dream', in *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. by Richard J. Lane (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 644–652 (p. 645).

[63] Honig, *Angelic Image*, p. 69.

[64] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 200.

access the Wonderland garden, she dissolves into tears and bitter frustration: 'to get through was more hopeless than ever: she sat down and began to cry again'.[65] She nearly accepts the fact that her desire to reach a place to which she is not granted access is a waste of her time. However, at the end of her journey in the Looking-Glass world, Alice truly comes into her own as a confident, self-possessed young woman. When she witnesses the Red Queen giving orders during her coronation banquet, Alice recognises that she now has just as much authority: 'However, [Alice] didn't see why the Red Queen should be the only one to give orders; so, as an experiment, she called out "Waiter! Bring back the pudding!" and there it was again in a moment, like a conjuring-trick'.[66] Like the Red Queen, Alice now has earned true autonomy as a woman in power. She enjoys a level of newfound authority in her coronation and subsequent completion of her wild and fantastical dream journeys. In finally achieving authority, Alice 'assert[s] her own right as an independent, courageous and self-confident [woman]'.[67] She has undergone multiple trials in which she has been mistreated, infantilised, and pushed about, only to become mature and confident in who she is and can be. In a sense, she has endured the social pressures of a maddening patriarchal world and has established for herself a new mode of existence as a future Victorian woman.

Alice's authority obtained in the world of the Looking-Glass is not fleeting, either; rather, as she wakes from her dream, 'she emerges into the realm of consciousness to assert her authority'.[68] In her waking, Alice presents herself as the conductor of her dreamworlds and therefore the inciting force behind their creation. While others try to convince her that she is a figment of the Red King's imagination, Alice awakes with the knowledge that she was the one in control the whole time. Carroll ends the second Alice text with the following words: 'Which do *you* think it was?'; he leaves the debate over the true dreamer up to his readers.[69] This open-ended resolution incorporates readers into Alice's quest for identity as well as implies the free rein of the imagination. Despite the social expectations of the Victorian era, Carroll champions independence for the children reading his novels, and in creating a whimsical story rather than one with a socially-scripted moral, he encourages children to embrace and pursue who they want to be as Alice does. Even if Alice is unable to hold the same level of authority in reality as she has in the Looking-Glass world, she has still established a resolute identity as an autonomous young woman in spite of Victorian-era expectations. Though not a didactic lesson, the call for imagination and self-discovery present within Carroll's Alice texts demonstrates a revolutionary mode of being for Victorian children, especially girls.

In short, Alice's incredibly journey of maturation enables her to grasp a wider concept of femininity, which in turn allows her to understand her true identity as a subversive, powerful heroine. As Alice comes of age throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* she better understands who she is and what it means to define herself without outside influences affecting her definition. As she continues to mature in *Through the Looking-Glass,* Alice better conceptualises her femininity and place in an adult world that enforces binding strictures on women. In placing such subversive ideals within the frame of a young girl's dreams, Lewis

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[65] Carroll, 'Wonderland', p. 14.

[66] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 224.

[67] Ren, '"Who Am I"', p. 131.

[68] Ronald R. Thomas, *Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 60.

[69] Carroll, 'Looking-Glass', p. 233.

Carroll grants his heroine the agency and autonomy he feels she deserves. Despite the ruling powers in the real world, Alice still experiences inner coming-of-age and maturation in a way that encourages her to seek power and autonomy as a soon-to-be Victorian woman. Her control over her dreamscapes allows Alice to experience her feminine identity outside of patriarchal conventions, thus making her dreams the ultimate act of independence and autonomy.

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A Dream Within A Dream: An Artist's Response and Commentary

93

Sarah Spencer

'A Dream Within a Dream' – Final Painting

The inspiration for this painting comes from Edgar Allan Poe's poem, 'A Dream Within a Dream'. In this piece, a grief-stricken speaker questions the nature of reality and expresses despair at the ephemerality of life, as the second stanza sees them, in their dreamlike state, desperately trying to save grains of sand from a 'pitiless wave'. The poetic voice ponders the well-trodden philosophical possibility that life is an illusion, a dream- a great unanswerable question that many of us have contemplated.

Initial Concept Sketch

Quite often, initial artistic responses evolve into the best ones, and this painting is a development of the first image I saw in my mind's eye when reading Poe's poem. I began by gathering images of other artistic representations of dreams and images of crashing waves and brooding skies as inspiration (these were diverse- from Salvador Dali to Josephine Wall, from my father's paintings to Hokusai). I then took photographs and made sketches of my partner's hands at Dawlish Warren as sand slipped through them, before realising that a clenched fist, complete with tensed tendons in the wrist, would better express the desperation as the sand- an age-old metaphor for time- slips away and disperses into the wave.

Hand and Sand Study

I intended this piece to capture something of the feelings expressed through Poe's words and to give the impression of a dreamlike state, an alternate or heightened reality. The powerful, unsettling colours reflect the tone of the poem; the speaker is hopeless, desperate as their existential thoughts crowd in. The brushwork conveys the overwhelming force of the 'pitiless wave' as it draws away the sand and swirls into an engulfing vortex, in which sea and sky- reality and dream- merge into one. At the centre is an orb of light, which represents both the 'dream within a dream' and my personal response to the poem. It can variously be interpreted as the soul of the poem's speaker or the painting's viewer, life, the sun, or a glimmer of hope- because, though the poem is deeply melancholic, these are all things which have the power to draw us out of the darkest recesses of our minds.

I sought a painting method that would best convey the turbulent, foaming water of the surging wave. Experimenting with acrylics, I used sponges, palette knives, old credit cards and spray bottles before I eventually tried paint pouring- whereby paints are mixed with a special medium and water to make them fluid enough to pour. The medium ensures that the colours do not muddy when poured together, but rather swirl into eddies and whirlpools that are as difficult to control as the 'pitiless wave' itself. I usually favour meticulous brushwork, so using a combination of these expressive methods tested my willingness to relinquish control. In the end I discovered a happy compromise- using a pipette to administer the pouring paints meant that I could localise the flow and combine them with other painting techniques to create the mixed-method final painting.

An Experiment with Paint Pouring

Though the colour scheme of the hand took some deliberation, I ultimately opted for a purplish palette and a quasi-realistic depiction to contrast with the unreality of the background. Initially, the painting was designed to be cropped at the base of the wrist, but I felt that I could extend the metaphor of the wave by submerging the poetic voice within it to emphasise they are utterly engulfed by the force of everything it represents- emotion, time, grief, reality.

The result is a piece unlike any other I have made, that, I hope, captures something of Poe's poem and aptly addresses the theme of the journal's present issue. I certainly have very much enjoyed the process, and cannot help but wonder:

'Is all that we see or seem… But a dream within a dream?'[1]
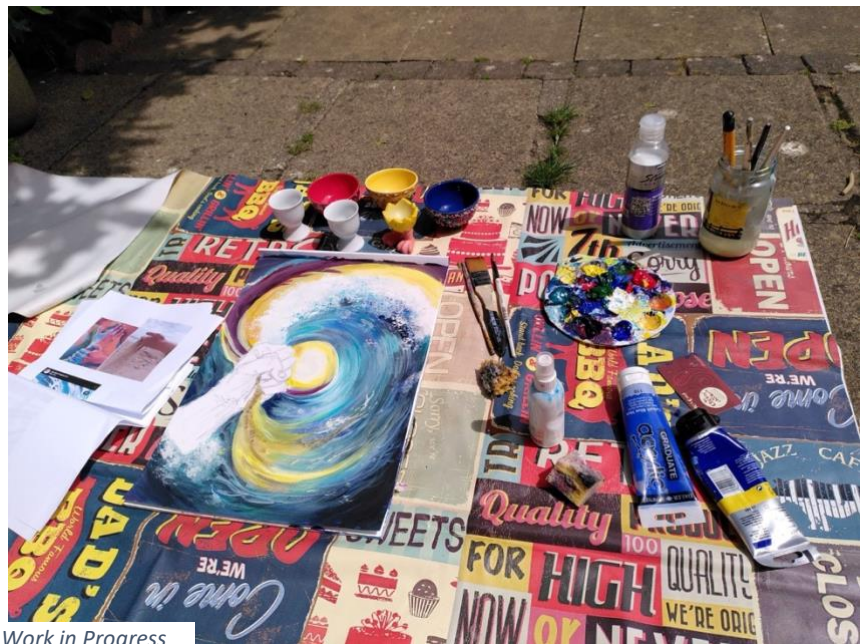
Work in Progress

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, 'A Dream Within a Dream' (1849), https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52829/a-dream-within-a-dream [accessed 11 July 2022].

A Dream Within a Dream
Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!

And, in parting from you now,

Thus much let me avow —

You are not wrong, who deem

That my days have been a dream;

Yet if hope has flown away

In a night, or in a day,

In a vision, or in none,

Is it therefore the less *gone*?

All that we see or seem

Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar

Of a surf-tormented shore,

And I hold within my hand

Grains of the golden sand —

How few! yet how they creep

Through my fingers to the deep,

While I weep — while I weep!

O God! Can I not grasp

Them with a tighter clasp?

O God! can I not save

One from the pitiless wave?

Is *all* that we see or seem

But a dream within a dream?[2]

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[2] Ibid.

Stealskin

Naomi Adam

'At the edge of the sea, an interaction with a magical creature constitutes a core experience
in which the supernatural world and the natural world intersect.'

~ Nancy Cassell McEntire, 'Supernatural Beings in the Far North: Folklore, Folk Belief, and
the Selkie'[1]

I heard
the tide was high that night,
a foam frill to the wan shore
as waves claimed footprint alibis
for Davy Jones' evidence drawer.

A full-moon night, that fateful night,
lunar patina to the scene;
sole sounds sea's susurration,
tssk of marram bleached blue-green.

The night all-but deserted
til she surfaced from below –
her hair dark, thick, waterlogged and seal-slick,
lacy lengths of kelp in tow.

As she slithered to the shoreline
it billowed in her wake,
her milky skin made translucent by moonlight
and her oil-black tail opaque.

But oil will skim milk's surface –
liquid harmony cannot hold –
she reached the sand, and with nacreous hand
unzipped the tail to fold.

This was a movement practised:
with clear proprietorial knack
she concertinaed neatly

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1 Nancy Cassell McEntire, 'Supernatural Beings in the Far North: Folklore, Folk Belief, and The Selkie', *Scottish Studies*, 35 (2010), 120-43 (p. 134).

her sealskin Pac-a-Mac.

It was stashed under an oxter,
as she dildered up the strand
then stopped hilder-turned, transfixed,
on the border between sea and land.

Sloping to both sides of her
clustered cottages, jewel-hued,
their facades lacquered ruby,
citrine and spinel-blue.

By now her Lot's-wife lips blushed blue, too:
she was due a chitterin bite
or a frothy soya latte
(decaff at that hour of night).

So away she turned, shale skittering,
headed homeward up the shore
while in her head – a cranial conch –
echoed a dulled sea's roar.

* * *

She had always known herself other
and later, learning the truth,
had obscured her marine dealings
so as to conceal the proof.

Though she shirked a good fish supper
and the townsfolk thought this odd –
likely she felt some affinity
to the battered victim cod.

''She's a fush!'' cliped local bairns
citing webbed foot and finger;
if adults hooted, ''Hod yer wheesht!''
their eyes would always linger.

There was something fishy afoot, they were sure,
the snirly raised-eyebrow brigade –

so she made her finned forays in darkness,
convinced suspicions would fade.

* * *

On this final, moonbright night,
having schlepped from shore to door,
she paused upon the threshold
seemed perplexed by what she saw.

A fire glowing in the grate –
the curtains leaking amber –
though she had snuffed the flames
before her nocturnal meander.

And then they came – all smartphone flash –
she recoiled – too bright! too bright!
silver aureoles pulsed before her
obscuring her sight.

Instead she would have seen her future
as if through sea-glass crystal ball:
her hybridity a tourist draw,
fodder for Facebook walls.

A selkie-selfie industry –
she would become The Mermaid Meme
(they would not distinguish genus
on these instant Insta feeds).

Now let's end this sorry tale:
they stole her tail away,
the skin sold to a museum
for an exhibition on the Fey.

If the rivets seem mere scales,
they pin it in its place,
while out there, pining, on two legs
its true owner
      Selkie Grace

'Stealskin': A Stylistic Analysis

1. Introducing the Selkie

Through the selkie, as McEntire acknowledges, 'the supernatural world and the natural world intersect'.[2] This comes as a result of the creature's hybridity: the selkie is sometimes human, sometimes seal. Originating in folklore centred around the Orkney Islands, it is the Scotch sister-in-myth to, among others, France's *mélusine*, the *nixe* of Germany, the *susulu* (Turkey) and the *rusalka* (Russia), though its most famous sibling is undoubtedly the mermaid, due in no small part to its recent Disneyfication.[3] The commercial success of Disney's 1989 transmedial adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's original 1837 source text, *The Little Mermaid*, has since paved the way for further filmic interpretations of related folkloric tales. For instance, Zsofia Marki identifies a slew of millennial selkie-inspired films, including *The Seventh Stream* (2001), *The Secret of the Kells* (2009), and, most recently, 2014's *Song of the Sea*.[4] Yet each of the aforementioned marine-based myths span centuries, if not millennia, conjured by the fertile imaginations of those living in close proximity to the coast. Indeed, cross-species transformation is recorded in the earliest extant narrative, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which dates to 2150 BC.[5] Ultimately, wherever there have been bodies of water and bodies of women, these myths have proliferated.

The selkie differs slightly from related supernatural beings as a creature capable of therianthropy, able to transition from seal-form to human-form, and back again. As long as, that is, the skin of the selkie is not stolen. Yet this is precisely the trajectory that so many classic selkie tales take.[6] It is one reproduced in the narrative poem 'Stealskin', which concludes with the forced cleaving of the protagonist selkie from her eponymous skin. However, whilst taking inspiration from the selkie's centuries-old mythic heritage, the poem also incorporates several contemporary elements. Referenced are recent technological items (smartphones), popular social media platforms ('Facebook', 'Insta[gram]') and the nation's current third favourite takeaway meal.[7] Especially motivated are the poem's allusions to social media, implicated as these sites are in a culture of voyeurism and social judgement. This thus provides a twenty-first century update to the corpus of selkie myths in which 'local communities never fully accept the selkie [...] because of her otherworldly strangeness'.[8] Moreover, the selkie trope is commonly acknowledged to be a gendered

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 'The Little Mermaid: Icon and Disneyfication', *Scandinavian Studies* 80, 4 (2008), 437-454; Zsofia Marki, 'Seal Skin and Language - Contemporary Adaptations of the Selkie Wife Tale', *Americana e-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 13, 2 (2017), n.p.

[4] Marki, n.p. See also: *The Seventh Stream*, dir. by John Gray (Kansas City: Hallmark Hall of Fame Productions, 2001); *The Secret of Kells*, dir. by Tomm Moore (Kilkenny: Cartoon Saloon, 2009); *Song of the Sea*, dir. by Tomm Moore (Kilkenny: Cartoon Saloon, 2014).

[5] Venetia Laura Delano Robertson, 'The Beast Within: Anthropozoomorphic Identity and Alternative Spirituality in the Online Therianthropy Movement', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, 3 (2013), 7-30 (p. 11).

[6] Peter le Couter, 'Slipping off the sealskin: gender, species and fictive kinship in selkie folktales', *Gender Forum* 55, 1 (2015), 55-82 (p. 61-2, 75-6).

[7] Connor Ibbetson, 'The UK's favourite takeaways', *YouGov* <http://yougov.co.uk/topics/consumer/articles-reports/2021/02/05/what-britains-favourite-takeaway>, [accessed 19 May 2022].

[8] Marki, n.p.

construct. [9] Male-based selkie myths follow a dichotomous narrative trajectory to their female counterparts, largely ending happily. Female equivalents typically feature social discord, verbal and physical violence, rape, and even death.[10] This is reflected in the fabula of the poem discussed here, which functions as a commentary upon the commonplace policing of women's bodies and behaviour. The selkie protagonist refuses to conform to societal norms on so many levels, from what she eats to how she spends her leisure time, and is consequently gossiped about, proclaimed 'odd', and ultimately punished for her deviation by the forced removal of her most precious property: her sealskin.

This paper proposes to conduct a stylistic analysis of the poem 'Stealskin' so as to elucidate how its linguistic 'texture' services its literary-thematic functions. As Stockwell elucidates,

> The proper business of literary criticism is the description of readings. Readings consist of the interaction of texts and humans. Humans are comprised of minds, bodies and shared experiences. Texts are the objects produced by people drawing on these resources. Textuality is the outcome of the workings of shared cognitive mechanics, evident in texts and readings. *Texture is the experienced quality of textuality*.[11]

This text-centric enterprise, taking the text as artefact and supplementing its analysis with recourse to the responses it triggers in readers, is central to the discipline of stylistics. The following subsection contextualises further this innovative interface discipline, prior to investigating 'Stealskin' from a stylistic perspective.

2. Contextualising Stylistics

Stylistics can be glossed as a discipline at the interface between linguistics and literary criticism. A stylistic approach scrutinises the language of texts so as to provide insight as to wider thematic and/or contextual meaning.[12] This textual exploration can be conducted on multiple levels: discourse architectural, narratological, structural, lexical, semantic, typographical, morphological, and phonological, to name but a few.

As Leo Spitzer acknowledged via his construct of the 'philological circle', through stylistics a relationship of analytical reciprocity is developed between linguistic description and literary interpretation, encapsulating the collection of linguistic evidence and the elaboration of aesthetic function.[13] This self-perpetuating enterprise is diagrammatised in the Appendix, as Fig. 1.

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[9] le Couter, p. 68; Marki, n.p.

[10] le Couter, pp. 75-6.

[11] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 1; my italics.

[12] Mick Short, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (London: Longman, 1996).

[13] Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948).

3. Investigating 'Stealskin'

Beginning on the broadest level of analysis, the poem features a frame narrative, thus doubling its attendant narrator/narratee roles. The first-person narrator has, at one point in time, been the narratee for the tale now retold. The tale then relayed is consequently beholden to hearsay, as is flagged by the *verba sentiendi* [14] of the first line. The function of this discourse architectural technique is threefold. Firstly, it acknowledges the predominantly oral origins of the selkie myth: these stories would initially have been relayed via tongue, not text, among the remote, often insular communities of Scotland's highlands and islands. [15] Secondly, it alludes intertextually to Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, similarly structured as a framed narrative in its original edition. [16] As acknowledged above, the two tales share a common folkloric heritage, despite their almost diametrically opposed endings. For, while the titular Little Mermaid is united with the sea by the narrative's end, 'dissolv[ing] into white foam', [17] selkie Grace has her sea-centred existence ruptured by the forced removal of her sealskin: she will never return to its depths. Thirdly, the use of a frame narrative enacts on a discourse architectural level the distancing apparent on the thematic level. The teller is perpetually at one remove from the selkie and the night of her discovery; the chronologically distal deictic in the phrase 'that night' is an index of this displacement. Overall, a recourse to hearsay on the part of the teller, and the consequent unverifiability of the tale told, imbue the poem with an aura of enigma. Of course, as the reverse to this, the selkie's unknowable nature – her 'other'ness, her 'odd'ness – is also foregrounded.

This impression continues on the narratological level through the deployment of external focalisation. This perspectival technique, as Genette acknowledges, relies heavily upon conjecture, again investing narratives with a sense of mystery. [18] With this perspectival sub-type, 'the narrator says less than the character knows'. [19] Similarly, in 'Stealskin', the motivations of the selkie must be imputed from her behaviour. Clearly, the anonymous first-person narrator is not privy to the innermost thoughts of his subject, Selkie Grace. Yet the attenuated viewpoint of the narrator does not prevent his sporadic presumption of these thoughts. This is particularly apparent towards the latter half of the poem, as in, for instance, line 70. In this line ('Instead she would have seen her future'), a strongly epistemic modal is used somewhat disingenuously, pretending to an omniscience the narrator does not possess. Ultimately, statements like these are mere conjecture, the selkie's cogitations remaining opaque. Nonetheless, the selkie Grace remains the topic of the poem throughout; in the terminology of Chatman, she is both 'center' and 'interest-focus' of the text. Yet, as

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[14] Also 'verb of perception'; see Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The structure of the artistic text and a typology of composition*, trans. by Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

[15] Andrew Jennings, 'The Finnfolk', *University of Highlands and Islands* <http://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/cultural/centre-for-northern-studies/research/conferences/previous-conferences-/the-finnfolk/>, [accessed 20 May 2022].

[16] Hauberg Mortensen, p. 443.

[17] *ibid.*, p. 447.

[18] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 232-3.

[19] *ibid.*, p. 234.

acknowledged above, she is never its 'filter'.[20] Instead, others recount the events to which she is central. The doubly-mediated narration of her own story indicates a lack of agency; even perspectivally, the selkie is the constant subject of scrutiny by those around her.

On the grammatical level, the selkie's social exclusion is similarly evident. Pronouns, for instance, are indicative, distinguishing the solitary 'she' or 'her' of the selkie from an exclusive 'they' out-group comprised of the rest of the community. Lexically, this echoes Neruda's elegiac poem 'Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks', which employs a similar pronominal binary in its critique of the patriarchal system.[21] Meanwhile, whilst a nominal is eventually attached to the selkie - the polysemous 'Grace' - neither the poem's narrator nor the wider community ever emerge from anonymity. The implication is that they are assured their privacy, while Grace becomes 'fodder for Facebook walls' and subject of community gossip.

On the structural level, linguistic decisions are similarly ripe for literary interpretation. Take, for instance, the regular alternate rhyme scheme and iambic metrical patterning. Both may be assigned a mimetic function, reflecting the recurrent motion of the ocean's waves lapping upon the shore, a motion referenced in the opening stanza. In a related demonstration of phonological iconicity, sibilant alliteration can be traced throughout, evoking the susurration of the sea. This contrasts with the substantial use of bilabials and plosives in stanza 17, the poem's volta. The far harsher sound of these phonemes – which has a physiological precedent, given their place of articulation – aligns with the harsh reality the exposed selkie endures. Alongside its iconic interpretation, the regular rhyme scheme also suggests the inevitability of the narrative's trajectory, as the selkie is propelled up the beach, to her house, and to discovery. Further attendant to this is the retrospective narration, the dominance of the simple past tense implying that the tale's tragic trajectory could never have been anything other than what it was.

Indeed, in conforming to the exceedingly formulaic traditional corpus, a tragic ending is an inevitable feature of the female-focused selkie myth.[22] The intertextual allusion to Lot's wife only compounds this. As Genesis 19 records, this biblical figure was transformed into a pillar of salt as divine punishment for turning to witness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Pre-modifying reference to the selkie's 'lips', the allusion hence both indicates their saltiness (a product of sea-bathing), as well as suggesting, more ominously, the dangers inherent in stopping to turn around and look at a scene behind you. Perhaps if the selkie had not 'stopped, hilder turned, transfixed' on the liminal 'edge of the sea'[23], the reader may infer, she would have avoided the ambush of the townspeople.

On the semantic level of analysis, colour symbolism proves particularly meaningful. This technique is also 'one of the very effective narrative devices' deployed by Andersen in his 1837 *The Little Mermaid* narrative[24], and yet another point of comparison between this

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[20] Seymour Chatman, 'Characters and Narrators: Filter, Center, Slant and Interest-Focus', *Poetics Today* 7, 2 (1986), 189-204.

[21] Pablo Neruda, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

[22] le Couter, pp. 61-2.

[23] McEntire, p. 134.

[24] Hauberg Mortensen, p. 447.

classic and the poem 'Stealskin'. During the poem's initial stanzas, much is made of the chromatic black/white binary. Not only does this reflect the duality of the selkie as a 'liminal'[25] being, it alludes to the common trope in selkie mythology which figures the selkies as dark-haired, dark-eyed outcasts among a predominantly fair populace. [26] Even physiologically, Selkie Grace proves other amid her Orkney community.

On the lexical level, to index this specific locality, the poem incorporates many Orkney dialect terms. In this regard it recalls Monique Roffey's award-winning *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, which interweaves basilectal Creole into the narrative in order to establish a firm sense of place.[27] In 'Stealskin', Orkney colloquialisms[28] occur as both single words of various classes (e.g. the verbs 'cliped' and 'dildered' alongside the adjectival 'snirly') and set phrases (e.g. 'Hod yer wheesht'). The latter of the two utilises dialect representation via the fictolinguistic [29] techniques of semi-phonetic respelling and eye dialect, in order to approximate the oral. For, as several scholars note, the selkie myth is an originally oral one.[30] Written variants are relatively recent, able to be traced back a couple of centuries at most.[31] The selkie myth's oral roots find further stylistic manifestation in 'Stealskin' via the repeated use of sentence-initial conjunctions. These comprise 'And', 'But', and 'So': syntactically non-standard in a formal, written context, they have been identified as frequent in just this positioning in everyday speech.[32] Typographically, speech patterns are also represented by the prevalence of en-dashes. Occurring throughout (stanzas 3, 5, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19), they mimic the disjointed nature of spontaneous speech and its commonplace non-fluency features.[33]

A final lexeme of note occurs in the penultimate stanza. These lines document the sale of the selkie's stolen skin to a museum exhibition focusing on the 'Fey'. A polysemous term, *fey* is interpretable in three distinct ways. In current parlance, it is most likely to refer to those 'possessing or displaying magical, fairylike, or unearthly qualities'. [34] More archaically, it can also denote those feeble or timid.[35] Clearly, the selkie depicted throughout 'Stealskin' aligns with both these descriptors. She 'obscure[s] her marine dealings / So as to obscure the truth' of her alterity, instead conducting 'her finned forays in darkness'. Finally, in a chiefly Scottish context, *fey* denotes one 'Fated to die, doomed to death'.[36] This recalls the above discussion surrounding the inevitably tragic ending of the archetypal selkie tale. While the selkie of 'Stealskin' does not die literally - as several of her folkloric forebears do - her altered, landbound existence, forever 'pining on two legs', can be seen to constitute a

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[25] Marki, n.p. Similarly, both Marki (*ibid*.) and Robertson (p. 25) refer to the selkie via the portmanteau neologism 'humanimal'.

[26] On this, see Jennings; le Couter; Marki (*op cit*).

[27] Monique Roffey, *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2020).

[28] See further Amy Sackville, *Orkney* (London: Granta, 2013).

[29] On this coinage, see Susan L. Ferguson, 'Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in the Victorian Novel', *Style* 32, 1 (1998), 1-17.

[30] See, e.g, Jennings, le Couter, Marki and McEntire (*op cit*).

[31] le Couter, p. 72.

[32] Violeta Sotirova, D.H. Lawrence and Narrative Viewpoint (London: Continuum, 2011.)

[33] On the 'conversational mimicking effect', see Sotirova, p. 164.

[34] *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com/>, [accessed 26 May 2022]. s. 5.

[35] *ibid*., s. 4.

[36] *ibid*., s. 1.

metaphorical death of half of her identity. Hence the divergent typography of the final two lexemes: the selkie's divorce from her skin is both irrevocable and unnatural, just as is the separation of the final line from those preceding it. The implication is that this outcome is as unnatural as the metre in which it is couched.

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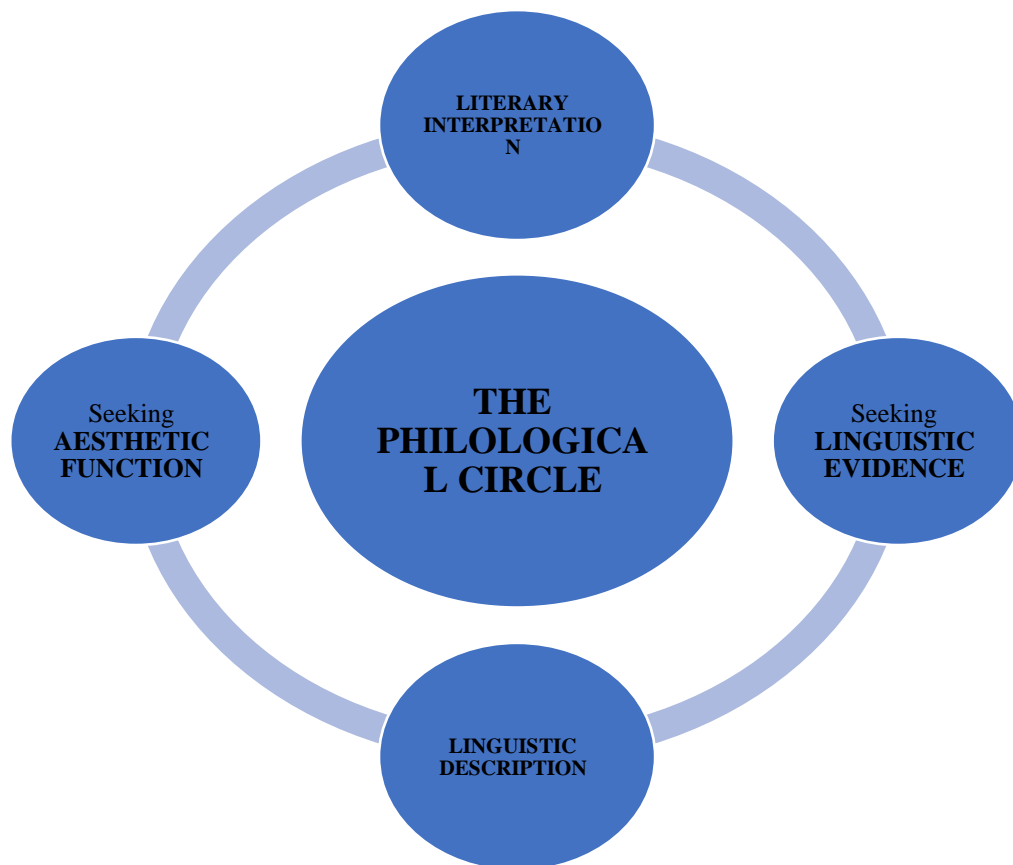
Appendix

Fig. 1. The philological circle, after Spitzer (1948)

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