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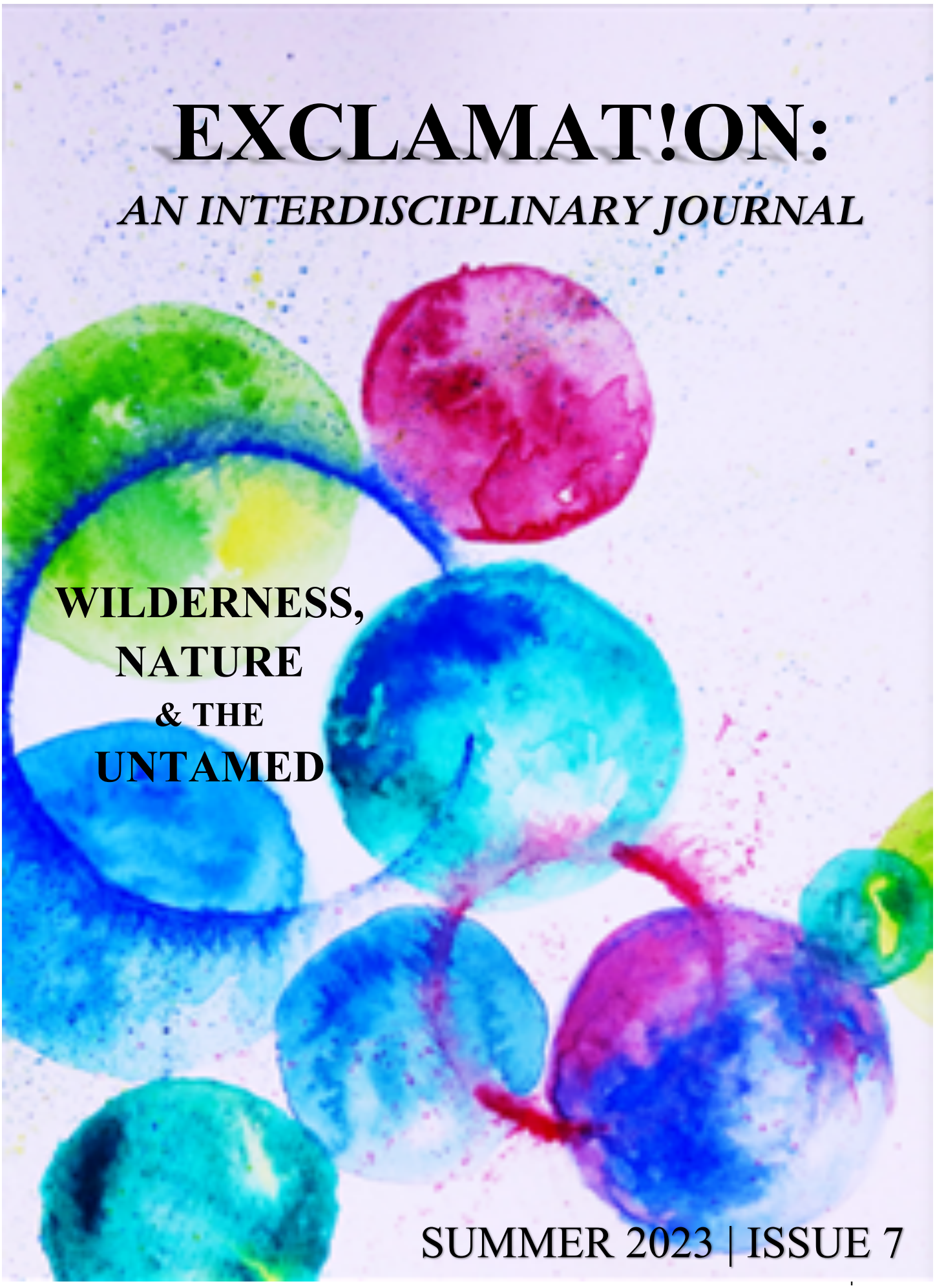

WILDERNESS, NATURE & THE UNTAMED

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Wilderness, Nature & the Untamed

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EDITORIAL BOARD

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EDITORIAL – Part I

'Green in nature is one thing,
Green in literature another.'

- ***Orlando*, Virginia Woolf**[1]

As the summer draws to a close and indeed, as the cyclical changing of the seasons makes itself known in shortening days and unusual temperatures, it's a reminder of the natural world's backdrop to our seemingly swiftly passing year. With each season, however, the stability and expectations of the seasons ahead mutate as the heightening visibility and palpability of the warming of our planet increases.

One word in our theme for this year's issue feels particularly significant in its apt timeliness towards our current moment: what does it mean to be untamed? The weeks leading to this issue's publication were bookmarked by headlines announcing extreme and often devastating weather events across the globe. It seems almost reductively obvious to label the climate emergency as untamed, uncontrollable, forceful, as though words cannot quite fully articulate the scale of the issue. How, then, do we respond to and articulate our experiences and emotions of this moment? What does it mean to be alive during this moment, and how does this affect our sense of who we are?

The humanities allow us to explore and document the human experience at its most complex. In this context, 'untamed' might refer to creativity, boldness, innovation and crucially, freedom. Our opening quote from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, nearly a century old, alludes to the capacity of the arts to depict the evolutions, richness, and diversity of the natural world. With the endless possibilities for this and our current historical moment in mind, we excitedly received a broad crop of articles responding to this year's journal theme of 'Wilderness, Nature, and the Untamed'.

Accordingly, we are delighted to present the work of talented postgraduate students across the nation exploring these ideas in the articles that follow. The topics in this issue work across poetry, fiction, and creative writing in different cultures, centuries, and approaches, highlighting the vastness of interpretations of this year's theme. We are grateful to each

[1] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Vintage Classics, 2016), p. 8.

contributor for choosing to publish their work in *Exclamat!on* in this culmination of both our publication process and their individual dedicated hours of critical study and research.

On the topic of bringing this issue to fruition, I want to express my gratitude to the team involved in producing this year's edition. I am very thankful for the work of my Co-Editor Kirby Archer and the hours and emails she has put into the journal this year. Our committed, conscientious, and enthusiastic Assistant Editors and Copyeditors have each contributed to this journal, and for this I am grateful to each of them. My thanks also go to our peer reviewers and the University of Exeter's Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences Postgraduate Research staff for their ongoing administrative help; particular thanks go to Jane Tanner, Stacey Hynd, and Morwenna Hussey.

Lastly, on a personal note, the publication of our 2022/23 issue of *Exclamat!on* also marks the end of the three years I have spent with the journal since beginning my PhD. It has been a privilege to have worked with the journal during this time, moving through the ranks as Assistant Editor for English under Joe Holloway for the 2020/21 issue, before supporting Sophie Smith as her Deputy Editor for the 2021/22 issue. It has been a pleasure to be involved with an exciting, rewarding academic publication at this level.

I very much look forward to seeing the progression of *Exclamat!on* over the years to come and I thank you for reading. I hope you enjoy the articles ahead, and that they also prompt further discussions, readings, and reflections.

Chloë Edwards

Co-Editor

September 2023

EDITORIAL – Part II

We are thrilled to present the 2023 issue of *Exclamat!on* with the timely theme of 'Wilderness, Nature & the Untamed', even as we fear or even mourn the changes and losses attendant to our era of climate crisis. It is difficult to imagine a topic more relevant to our lives and those of all living creatures. We all live in and *are* 'nature', broadly defined, and as the years go by the changes to our climate and environment become more obvious and confronting. It is unsurprising then that the journal's theme struck a personal chord for many of our editors and contributors, including me. I have seen the indisputable changes to my home state of California over the decades of my life, as its human and non-human citizens alike endure drought, mudslides, air pollution, and highly destructive storms and fires. Yet even as these extreme but increasingly expected weather events dominate our days, many Californians' experience of the state continues to be profoundly shaped by its stunning beauty and biodiversity. The California I want to share with my daughter centres on its astonishing range of landscapes, from mountains to sea; its black bears, condors, and salamanders; the Dawn Wall of Yosemite, the snow-capped peak of Mount Shasta, and golden fields as far as the eye can see. Efforts to extend care for our ailing environment can be understandably shaded in fear and pessimism, but we must always return to the beauty and the awe we feel for the world of which we are part. I believe that holding on to the wonder that our world inspires is key to helping us confront ecologically destructive practices and build better relationships with our fellow species.

The essays and stories in this issue showcase suitably diverse responses to the immense, confounding, magnificent subjects of wilderness, nature, and the untamed. Essays by Mai Hoang Nguyen, Isaac Holden, and Matt Jones emphasise the significance of place in the formation of personal or national identity and advance divergent considerations of human-built cities as part of a 'natural' landscape. Paul Anthony Knowles interrogates anthropocentrism as an obstacle to ecologically friendly practices and interspecies relations, while my own essay and Paula van Eenennaam Sánchez's make a case for our entanglement and kinship with other species, noting how environmentally destructive practices harm us all. Moving and evocative short fiction by Julie Lockwood, Imogen Dobson, and Suzanne von Engelhardt, as well as Keren Poliah's fascinating essay about occult practices in Mauritius and Ella Geraghty's playful and profound essay on the liminality of life and death, represent the

magical, mysterious, or spiritual qualities of a world and ecosystems that are ultimately unknowable to us in their complexity and dimensions.

Thanks go to my co-editor Chloë Edwards, who brought knowledge and experience, calm leadership, and many hours of committed effort to producing this year's journal. Thanks also to our dedicated team of Assistant Editors who attentively stewarded each piece to its final form, and to the contributors, whose thoughtful and passionate submissions have built a timely and affecting issue. Given the urgency and ubiquity of the topic at hand, these pieces are often deeply personal, and we are grateful to the authors for sharing their responses to our beautiful, surprising, agentic world during this time of growing consciousness and change.

Kirby Archer

Co-Editor

September 2023

An Ecological Reading of Mark Haddon's 'The Pier Falls'

Paul Anthony Knowles

'No one wants to believe that time and weather can be this dangerous.'[1]

— '**The Pier Falls' by Mark Haddon**

'Our behaviour is more likely to be changed by promise than by menace. We will not save what we do not love.'[2]

— **Robert Macfarlane**

If we are to concern people with the ecological issues of climate change, contemporary disconnection from the landscape, and environmental degradation (amongst other modern, ecological concerns), then literature must unburden itself from the shackles of Edenic-pastoral representations of contemporary landscapes and instead present readers with realistic descriptions. I claim that in 'The Pier Falls' different modes of the pastoral are used to write against an idolised-mythologised, nationalist, nostalgia of a golden-past where human and the more-than-human coexist in harmonious relationships that never existed. This mythologised-nostalgia — which in 'The Pier Falls' is represented through the opening narrative of golden seaside holidays of yesteryear, where the English Riviera and seaside destinations would be jampacked with contented holiday makers — hides, at best, human ignorance and a lack of awareness of the more-than-human world and, at worse, human violence perpetuated against the more-than-human world.

Throughout 'The Pier Falls' the anti-pastoral mode is deployed to dismantle these notions of the harmonious relationships between the human and the more-than-human world, and instead conveys the dangers of ignoring the more-than-human world and seeing it as merely the backdrop for anthropocentric existence. 'The Pier Falls' uses the post-pastoral to explore the possible future relationships between the human and more-than-human where anthropocentric agency, power, and privileging is reduced, and the more-than-human world holds equal or greater agency and power. In this paper I define and align my understanding of the contemporary pastoral in relation to three contemporary pastoral writers and critics: James Rebanks, Terry Gifford, and Kenneth R. Olwig. The definition of the pastoral provided at the start of James Rebanks' book, *English Pastoral,* introduces an interesting dichotomy: the contemporary, dominant understanding of the pastoral, (where the pastoral is used as an adjective that refers to or *is* 'pertaining to shepherds, hence, relating to rural life and scenes'), contrasts with the more interesting, antiquated idea of the pastoral that seems to have been eradicated from our contemporary understanding — where the pastoral relates 'to the care of souls'.[3]

[1] Mark Haddon, *The Pier Falls* (London: Vintage, 2017), p. 16.
[2] Robert Macfarlane, 'Environment: New Words on the Wild', *Nature,* 498, (2013), 166-167 (p. 167).
[3] James Rebanks, *English Pastoral: An Inheritance* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2021), p. 1.

This idea that the pastoral should be more than an aesthetic approach that 'relates to rural life and artistic scenes' is developed by Kenneth R. Olwig in his essay, 'Recovering The Substantive Nature of Landscape', from his collected-essay-anthology, *The Meanings of Landscapes: Essays on Place, Space, Environment and Justice*.[4] Olwig argues that landscape should not just be conceptualised as 'being either territory or scenery', but that the critical concept of landscape should be conceived as a 'nexus of community, justice, nature, and environmental equality'.[5] Olwig proposes that we can critically restore the substantive meaning to the word 'landscape' by tracing its etymological origins to the word 'Landschaft', which carries much more meaning than just 'beautiful, natural scenery'.[6] Olwig argues the 'Landschaft' was 'imbued with meanings, etched by customs in the land that were at the heart of the major political, legal, and cultural issues of the time'.[7]

Terry Gifford in his book, *Pastoral: A New Critical Idiom*, gives us three pastoral modes to consider in relation to literature. Firstly, we have the traditional or Edenic-pastoral, which he describes as an aesthetic deriving from '16th century classical literary forms' that used 'motifs stemming from certain early Greek and Roman poems about life in the country — the life of the shepherd in particular'.[8] Secondly, we are presented with the anti-pastoral, which he depicts as being the aesthetic of the pastoral that comes under scrutiny from an ecological viewpoint. Gifford gives the example of how an environmental activist might view Edenic-pastoral representations and imbue them with anti-pastoral meanings: 'a Greenpeace supporter might use the term as a criticism of the tree poem if it ignored the presence of pollution or the threat to urban trees from city-developers'.[9] Gifford develops this idea by suggesting that the 'difference between the literary representation of nature and the material reality would be judged to be intolerable by the criteria of ecological concern', leading to the traditional or Edenic-pastoral being used in a pejorative sense, and the anti-pastoral offering a counter movement through providing realistic descriptions of the more-than-human world.[10] Thirdly, and most interestingly for my argument, Gifford defines the post-pastoral as 'a mature, environmental aesthetic that recognises that some literature has gone beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated, natural world that includes the human'.[11] The post-pastoral is concerned with the 'Ecocentric repossession of [the] pastoral' that symbolises a 'shift' from the 'representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake'.[12] The post-pastoral 'exemplifies the way this positioning of the self towards nature leads inevitably to a humbling that is a necessary requirement of the shift from the anthropocentric position of the pastoral to the Ecocentric view of the post-pastoral'.[13]

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[4] Kenneth R. Olwig, *The Meanings of Landscapes: Essays on Place, Space, Environment and Justice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019).
[5] Olwig, p. 22.
[6] Olwig, p. 28.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.
[9] Gifford, p. 3.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Gifford, p. 148.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Gifford, p. 152.

Emerging from Gifford's theorisation of the post-pastoral, this paper argues that in 'The Pier Falls', Haddon envisages ecocentric agency to incite debate and discussion on how the more-than-human and the human world has functioned in a destructive co-existence and the need for this relationship to change in the future in order to avoid environmental catastrophe. The power of Haddon's short story, this paper will argue, is its ability to allow readers to experience, on an empathetic level, the agency of the more-than-human world. This empathetic experience provides readers with a greater understanding of the more-than-human world and can often challenge personal, prejudiced modes of thought. Haddon performs a movement of enmeshment by positioning readers in entangled and complex relationships with the more-than-human world. It is this exposure with the natural world that challenges their anthropocentric modes of thought.

An Ecological Reading of 'The Pier Falls'

Mark Haddon's short story 'The Pier Falls' from the eponymous 2017 collection documents the tragedy of a crowded pier, full of holidaymakers, collapsing into the sea on the '23 July 1970' in a southern seaside holiday resort.[14] Haddon explores the impact of this tragedy on the coastal community and the after-effects of the catastrophe over a ten-year period. Haddon lulls readers into a false sense of security in the opening pages, where he presents readers with a pastiche of a 1970 seaside resort, a coastal holiday destination filled with a 'gaudy rank of coffee houses and fish bars' and 'knickknack shops' that sell '99s and dried seahorses in cellophane envelopes' and where 'two thousand people saunter along the prom'.[15] Through encapsulating imagery so richly nostalgic, where a 'deck chairman […colle[cts] rentals' and the 'Strauss waltzes' plays on repeat as 'boys from […] ticket booths ride shotgun […] on bumper cars', Haddon captures the innocence of the golden age of quintessential British seaside holidays.[16] Coupled with the profusion of sensory imagery describing the pier-side (where the air is 'thick with the smell of engine grease and fried onions', and where 'a portly woman hammers a windbreak into the sand' and a father is shouting '"no deeper than your waist"'), readers are transported directly into this day in 1970.[17] The pier collapsing is therefore made to seem even more traumatic and unexpected, as readers like the holidaymakers in the scene, are caught unaware: 'a wide semicircle of walkways is hauled seaward by the weight of the broken girders underneath. A woman and three children standing at the rail drop instantly'.[18] The sudden and unexpected collapse of the pier, this paper claims, presents from this moment in the narrative a post-pastoral landscape. The collapse of the pier is the catalyst for the 'Ecocentric repossession of [the] pastoral' that symbolises a 'shift' from the 'representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake' in the story.[19] I assert that Haddon's deliberate use of nostalgia makes comment on humans seeking refuge in an idealised past, where human and more-than-human relationships appear harmonious. Subsequently, readers avoid confronting the difficulties of a

[14] Mark Haddon, *The Pier Falls* (London: Vintage, 2017), p. 3.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid, p. 4.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, p. 4-5.
[19] Gifford, p. 148.

complicated, worsening climate crisis in the present day. This paper argues that the collapsing of the pier shatters such illusions of a golden past, suggesting, on the contrary, that this harmonious relationship between the human and the more-than-human world never existed.

In 'The Pier Falls', figurative language symbolically signifies human disbelief and anxiety:

> The other three swim on into the archipelago of bodies and broken wood. The pier looms overhead, so much bigger than it has ever seemed from the beach or up there on the walkway, so much darker, more malign. The men can hear the groan and crunch of girders still settling beneath them in the water.[20]

The use of the unsettling onomatopoeia 'crunch' and 'groan' in conjunction with the verb 'loom' signifies the need for a post-pastoral change towards a more environmentally conscious perspective and away from modes of privileging anthropocentric desires. Such anthropocentric desires are typically fulfilled by the destructive exploitation of the natural world. For example, the selling of 'dried seahorses in cellophane envelopes' as seaside memorabilia.[21] On the opening page, the omniscient narrator implies that humans have avoided the warning signs that the pier was about to collapse as the 'balustrade['s …] pistachio-green paint has blistered and popped in a hundred years of salt air'.[22] This makes us, as readers, contemplate the significance of human failure to maintain the pier. This paper suggests that Haddon is commenting here on the reluctance of twentieth century ideology to conceptualise and engage with climate change; this idea is reinforced when we see how the crowd, watching the tragedy unfold, attribute the collapse to an IRA bomb instead of to nature: 'No one wants to believe that time and weather can be this dangerous'.[23]

This paper claims that perspective is a key literary technique used by 'The Pier Falls'. In the above extract, perspective functions on a structural level to dismantle anthropocentric hierarchies of human domination over nature. The swimmers enter the liminal and fluid space of the sea as they move from walking along the pier to swimming below it. The swimmers view the pier from within the sea and they are forced to re-evaluate their relationship with the natural world. This post-pastoral shift in structural perspective is also supported on a linguistic level through the figurative and comparative language: 'looms'; 'bigger'; 'much darker'. Through being exposed to nature's perspective of the pier, the swimmers must re-evaluate their anthropocentric views on nature while no longer viewing the more-than-human world with anthropocentric arrogance: 'so much bigger than it has ever seemed from the beach or up there on the walkway'. Haddon uses structural and linguistic perspective to dismantle anthropocentric power hierarchies that position humans above the more-than-human world.

Other similar examples of this post-pastoral strategy can be observed in Haddon's use of recurrent piscine imagery. The first use of piscine imagery in 'The Pier Falls' is used to describe the death of a man slipping down the broken pier: 'the taller man with the braces

[20] Haddon, p. 8.
[21] Ibid, p. 1.
[22] Ibid, p. 3.
[23] Ibid, p. 10.

and the rolled-up shirtsleeves slides down the buckled planking till he is brought to a halt by a spike of broken rail which enters the small of his back. He wriggles like a fish'.[24] Later in the story, piscine imagery is used to describe survivors coming aboard a lifeboat: 'some slither into […] the boat like netted fish, sodden, glassy-eyed, oblivious'.[25] A final example of piscine imagery is the biblical reference engraved on the tombstone of the unknown victim of the collapsed pier: 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind'.[26] In the first two examples, similes are used to dismantle anthropocentric power hierarchies through Haddon's use of zoomorphism: 'wriggles like a fish' and 'slithers into the […] boat like netted fish'. In the first example, Haddon linguistically destroys anthropocentric hierarchies through his deployment of violently graphic imagery: 'a spike of broken rail which enters the small of his back'. This makes readers rethink anthropocentric privileging; the man is subjected to the same barbaric methods used to capture fish, leading readers to question exploitive and aggressive measures of fishing which destroy ocean biodiversity. Haddon's simile can be extended to any barbaric method of hunting where animals are exploited for human pleasure. I would suggest that the imagery of the 'netted fish' supports my previous point — the imagery used evokes a fish being hooked; both similes work in conjunction as a powerful critique on the harmfulness of environmental exploitation and degradation by humans. This reinforces my earlier analysis of the 'dried seahorses' being sold to fulfil anthropocentric desires.

As this paper has already mentioned, Haddon's structural zoomorphism enacts what Gifford calls 'Ecocentric repossession'. [27] By extension, I argue that this is an example of exposure: Haddon exposes the characters in the story to the more-than-human world (the sea), thus challenging their anthropocentric privileging. It is through this exposure that the dangerous inequalities of the power hierarchies that exist between the human and the natural world are uncovered. Again, this paper suggests that Haddon exposes the dangerous fallibility of anthropocentric privileging through the provocative triad: 'sodden, glassy-eyed, oblivious'. The imagery of the survivors being 'glassy-eyed', coupled with the adjective 'oblivious', comments on this fallibility; the survivors are blind and 'oblivious' to the dangers of anthropocentricism. This is the very privileging that alienates them from the natural world. In this way, they fail to see how this estrangement could lead them down a destructive path — until the pier collapses.

The biblical reference Haddon uses at the end of 'The Pier Falls' is arguably evidence for an ecological reading that promotes ideas of entanglement and enmeshment. The imagery of the 'net' acts as a metaphor for entanglement as it is the literal meeting point of the human and the more-than-human world. The second part of the biblical reference — 'gathered of every kind' — is subtly deployed by Haddon as he chooses a scriptural passage that does not place humans above the more-than-human world. The openness and inclusiveness of the noun 'kind' implies that the human and the more-than-human world could exist in equal co-dependence in the future. This idea is supported on a structural level in strategically employing this biblical reference as the last piscine image. Through my ecological reading, I contend that this promotes a movement away from dangerous,

[24] Ibid, p. 5.
[25] Ibid, p. 12.
[26] Ibid, p. 18.
[27] Gifford, p. 148.

exploitative relationships with the natural world and instead towards harmonious co-existence between the human and the more-than-human world.

'The Pier Falls' can also be seen to critique anthropocentric behaviour through its depiction of the apathy and alienation of the spectators after the collapse of the pier. I suggest that this operates symbolically to emphasise the apathetic reaction and reluctance of contemporary society to actively confront the realities of climate crises. This is exemplified in the following passage:

> Evening comes. The front is unnaturally empty. No one wants to look at the pier anymore. They are elsewhere eating scampi and baked Alaska, watching *The Railway Children* at the Coronet, or driving to neighbouring resorts for evening walks against a view that can be comfortably ignored.[28]

If the pier collapsing serves as a metaphor for climate change, then Haddon's use of the quantifier 'no one' hints at the scale of contemporary human apathy towards the more-than-human world. This apathy towards climate change is developed further in the last line: 'driving to neighbouring resorts for evening walks against a view that can be comfortably ignored'. The verb 'driving' hints at the lengths humans will go to in order to ignore environmental degradation. On the contrary, the phrase: 'against a view that can be comfortably ignored' emphasises the alienation that exists in contemporary human relationships with the more-than-human world. Haddon, whilst exploring this contemporary apathy in 'The Pier Falls', also deliberately challenges and confronts this apathy in the use of the chronological and statistical interjections of the detached, omniscient third-person narrator, preventing the reader from escaping the reality of the disaster. This is exemplified in the following two examples: 'Sixty seconds gone, seven people dead, three survivors in the water', and 'The final person dies, deep inside the tangle of planks and girders. He is fifteen years old'.[29] I suggest that Haddon establishes and uses the tension and conflict between these distinctive narrative perspectives to explore the multidimensional, contradictory, and ever-changing relationships that people have with the natural world. I have identified four key perspectives that permeate 'The Pier Falls' and which, taken individually, would lead to over simplistic and reductive readings; it is only by viewing them conjunctively that we see the true complexity of human relationships with the more-than-human world.

This paper will now briefly evaluate these four juxtaposing perspectives and explain the role they perform in Haddon's construction of narrative. Firstly, there is the perspective of the omniscient, detached third person narrator which operates solely in chronological, linear time to recount the catastrophe: 'An hour and half. Sixty-four dead'.[30] Secondly, we can observe the use of third person, free indirect discourse, which portrays the many different perspectives of the survivors: 'the prospect of being lifted into the helicopter is many times worse than that of the structure collapsing beneath him'.[31] Thirdly, it is interesting to consider the use of the third person omniscient narrator which operates in fluid time, travelling between the past, present and future. This perspective explores the

[28] Haddon, p. 16.
[29] Haddon, p.6; Haddon, p. 14-15.
[30] Ibid, p. 15.
[31] Ibid, p. 13-14.

far-reaching consequences of the disaster: 'The ninth is a girl of fifteen who ran away from her home in Stockport six months ago. Her parents will never connect her to the events in the newspaper'.[32] And fourthly, there is the collective perspective of the crowd. This operates in contrast to individual survivor perspectives and is arguably used by Haddon to explore how dominant discourses of disasters are recounted from the collective experience: 'Everyone is thinking how they will tell the story to friends and family and workmates'.[33] Haddon implies that the risk here is that individual trauma is erased from disaster narratives and replaced by a mass-consciousness. This is represented literally through the mass of humans watching the disaster unfold from the crowded promenade. Haddon's use of multiple perspectives counters the danger of a simplified and singular representation of the more-than-human world that could lead to reductive, hegemonic readings.

In this paper, I have argued that in order for contemporary society to begin to tackle the challenges of climate change, we need literature, ecocriticism, and contemporary pastoral representations of the more-than-human world that promotes respect for the natural world and envisages successful co-dependence between the human and the more-than-human world. Such an approach is perhaps most eloquently and succinctly put by Robert Macfarlane when he writes: 'We will not save what we do not love'.[34]

[32] Ibid, p. 16.
[33] Ibid, p. 10.
[34] Macfarlane, p. 167.

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Altered Bodies: The Vulnerable Human in the Post-Apocalyptic Environment

Kirby Archer

Post-apocalyptic narratives comprise an enduring genre in contemporary art and literature. While the 'end of the world' has been envisioned in many forms, the human figure at the centre of these narratives is always irrevocably altered – mentally, emotionally, and physically. In this essay, I will consider Margaret Atwood's 2003-2013 *MaddAddam* trilogy as a contribution to the apocalyptic genre that foregrounds the altered, vulnerable human body in post-apocalyptic landscapes and poses delicate questions about the nature of humanity. Like other authors in the genre such as Cormac McCarthy and Jim Crace, Atwood links the alteration of the body to the degradation of the wider environment. As fiction with environmental themes proliferates in our time of climate crisis, new apocalyptic narratives readily incorporate the wider living world into a genre that has traditionally focused on the demise of one species – the human – positing that the fate of all species is connected. In this essay, I will demonstrate Atwood's role in this shift, focusing on how *MaddAddam* interrogates the structure and utility of apocalyptic narratives and ultimately moves the genre away from merely a cautionary tale about the future of humanity into a critique of our current ecological practices that highlights the 'unnatural' things we do to our bodies and to those of other species, suggestive of our shared vulnerability as well as a clear connection between our degrading treatment of the environment and ourselves.

As Greg Garrard has written, the concept of a humanity-ending apocalypse has preoccupied humans for thousands of years, with some form of apocalyptic warning appearing in the holy books and oral literature of many major religions.[1] Claire Colebrook distinguishes between contemporary deployments of the term apocalypse that refer to 'the end of 'our' way of life' and extinction, which usually refers to the demise of non-human species.[2] Apocalyptic narratives are popular and prolific in the twenty-first century, and although they are driven by many (often interlinked) concerns such as disease and war, growing awareness of climate change has influenced the way that many artists portray world or humanity-ending events. Lawrence Buell has written that the notion of apocalypse gives freighted power to warnings about climate catastrophe, calling it 'the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal'.[3] Authors of eco-fiction harness the existential fear evoked by apocalypse to bolster their depictions of our changing climate. The metaphorical power and high drama of apocalypse

[1] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 93.
[2] Claire Colebrook, 'The Future in the Anthropocene: Extinction and the Imagination', in *Climate and Literature*, ed. by Adeline Johns-Putra (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 264.
[3] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 285.

makes it an appealing trope for authors who wish to inspire climate action or memorably depict the worst possible climate outcomes.

Although apocalyptic narratives are common, scholars such as Pieter Vermeulen have noted that in literature, the 'end of the world' is typically a misnomer.[4] Vermeulen and Colebrook have observed that most apocalyptic narratives focus on the demise of or irrevocable alteration of humankind, rather than the possibly concurrent demise of non-human animals and other entities, emphasising that the 'end of the world' as it is usually conceived is really about the end of the human species, or more specifically, as Colebrook and Vermeulen argue, the end of a certain experience of (Western, capitalist, high-consumption) humanity. The latter is arguably more representative of Atwood's 'apocalypse', in which society as the characters know it is destroyed, but a significant number of humans survive a catastrophe that initially appeared species-ending. Apocalypse and dystopia go hand in hand in literature and film; typically, either the 'apocalypse' is a misnomer for a seismic event that creates a dystopian society, or a dystopian society precedes apocalypse. Both scenarios seem true at different points in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, in which an apparently apocalyptic pandemic event leaves more human survivors than initially expected. Although Vermeulen and Colebrook are critical of how apocalyptic narratives may conflate the human species with a particular experience in a particular time and place, writers are often self-aware on this subject and willing to argue that qualities that might make us uniquely 'human' are worth preserving. Atwood's interest in what constitutes the human is evident in her treatment of the genetically modified Crakers as humanoids or pseudo-humans as well as the experiences of her isolated surviving human characters, who worry about losing their humanity. The Crakers appear more human-like as the trilogy progresses precisely because of the unearthing of certain common traits they share with their species of origin, traits that Atwood seems to appreciate as largely unique to us and that would be a shame to lose in the event of our total extinction.

Authors of eco-fiction sometimes realise that the end of humankind does not necessarily mean the end of other species or 'the planet'. They may gleefully depict the sunset of humanity as just desserts, perhaps bolstered by the half-hearted assertion that solving the human problem will help to restore the health of other beings and save Earth's biosphere – something that Atwood comes close to suggesting via the bucolic conclusion to her trilogy, in which a healthier and more vibrant nature flourishes in the absence of more than ninety-nine percent of the erstwhile human population. The creative impulse to rid one's fictional planet of 'bad' humans is sharply satirised in T.C. Boyle's 2000 novel *A Friend of the Earth*, and it is also something Atwood takes up with the God's Gardeners, her fictional eco-cult, who somewhat eagerly prophesise a 'Waterless Flood' that will exterminate those humans 'who have broken trust with the Animals'.[5] Their prophesy precludes the idea that radical change can occur without a significant decline in the human population. Colebrook points out that the anxieties attached to popular depictions of total or near-total apocalypse obliterate the more likely possibility of 'a radical end that would not be an end for us' – instead, it might be the end of certain practices, lifestyles, and systems that negatively impact

[4] Pieter Vermeulen, *Literature and the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 164.
[5] Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), p.91.

the environment, among other things – 'and that might generate another world'.[6] The hopeful possibilities of (admittedly less dramatic) non-apocalyptic future-set narratives are often obscured in favour of the urgent drama and fear afforded by familiar apocalyptic tropes.

As Vermeulen suggests, many of the formal qualities of apocalyptic literature hint at the difficulty of imagining total human extinction, because there is always at least one survivor to recount the tale and follow into the new world – and, as we shall see, many writers hedge on the totality of the apocalypse they've initially rendered, introducing other survivors as the plot moves forward who put the concept of a lone and last human testifier to rest.[7] Although these plot developments challenge the very notion of apocalypse, and are often subject to implausible coincidence, they are more reminiscent of the seismic changes our species will experience in coming years than a total extinction scenario. Scholars including Alexa Weik von Mossner have cited research showing that overly pessimistic climate fiction may in fact discourage readers' environmental commitments,[8] but many eco-critics defend the genre's utility beyond mere entertainment. Lawrence Buell has offered a standard defence of apocalyptic scenarios in literature: 'Can our imaginations of apocalypse actually forestall it […]? Even the slimmest of possibilities is enough to justify the nightmare'.[9] Louise Squire partially attributes disastrous ecological practices to the human tendency toward 'death denial', finding some value in the God's Gardeners' acceptance of their mortality, which they try to normalise through frequent appeals to humans' oneness with nature, which includes our eventual dissolution into differently arranged molecules. Squire writes, 'Fiction that employs a theme of death in dealing with environmental crisis might therefore be read as enacting a leverage for change or as evoking a recognition of our ultimate corporality'.[10] But Alexander Menrisky rightly critiques the tendency amongst eco-critics, particularly material eco-critics, to 'flatten' distinctions between humans, non-human animals, and other 'matter' to the point where 'dying in general is politically unobjectionable', noting that Atwood critiques a similar flattening in the Gardeners' rhetoric, as they at times seem to welcome the impending extinction of humankind.[11] The fear felt by the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman, toward his mortal dissolution and all that accompanies it pre-emptively undermines the Gardeners' blithe overtures to the sacredness of sharing one's 'protein' with other species. When it comes to the individual, the irrevocable alteration, up to and including dissolution, of one's corporeal being cannot be altogether accepted as a necessary development, particularly in the guise of what Menrisky calls the

[6] Colebrook, p. 264.
[7] Vermeulen, p. 152.
[8] Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), pp. 162-3.
[9] Buell, p. 308.
[10] Louise Squire, ''I am not afraid to die': Contemporary Environmental Crisis Fiction and the Post-Theory Era', in *Extending Ecocriticism: Crisis, Collaboration, and Challenges in the Environmental Humanities*, ed. by Peter Barry and William Welstead (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 27.
[11] Alexander Menrisky, 'Hallucinogenic Ecology and Psychoanalytic Prehistory in Margaret Atwood', *Mosaic*, 52.3 (2019), p. 32.

Gardeners' 'romantic primitivism' in which a world free from meddling humans is a purer, more 'natural' world.[12]

In many recent post-apocalyptic novels, environmental decline occurs simultaneously with, or is directly responsible for, the depletion of the human species. The *MaddAddam* trilogy is an interesting focal point both for the study of eco-fiction and apocalypse narratives. The three-book structure of the series calls into question whether the 'apocalypse' has really occurred. As the series unfolds, we see that a significant number of humans have survived and are building a potentially more peaceful society than the one that came before, thus seemingly undermining the central premise of an 'apocalypse'. Hope Jennings thus identifies Atwood as 'one of contemporary literature's most rigorous demythologizers of Apocalypse' even as she is a notable contributor to the genre.[13] Paul Harland reads the conclusion of the trilogy as indeed signalling the end of the human species, as it appears humans will be 'replaced' by a hybrid race who are the offspring of humans and bioengineered humanoids called Crakers.[14] Unlike Harland, I view the potential end of humanity in *MaddAddam* as thwarted both by the survival of indisputable humans and by the evidently enduring human nature of the Crakers, and contend that Atwood's extensive consideration of the 'humanity' or kinship of bioengineered animals is part of her representation of how the human is altered in post-disaster landscapes.

Many apocalyptic stories incorporate what Kim Stanley Robinson calls 'abrupt climate change'.[15] These are not-strictly-scientific depictions of sudden, large-scale, immensely destructive climate events like those in Hollywood films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) or Robinson's own *Science in the Capital* trilogy (2003-2007). In these fictions, climate change operates like the extremely sudden species-collapsing mechanisms that precipitate disaster in other apocalyptic storyworlds, like the unsurvivable pandemic in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) that spreads like wildfire. Robinson extols the imaginative power such a rendition of climate change can bring to the novel format, but Rob Nixon argues that climate change is representationally challenging precisely because of its true phenomenon of 'slow violence' – it is an encompassing form of disaster that is 'slow moving and long in the making' and 'indifferent […] to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world'.[16] Atwood approaches this representational dilemma by including both a universally fatal pandemic and the looming background spectre of climate change, which afflicts the few characters who have managed to avoid contact with the virus. Thus, *MaddAddam* benefits from the bloody spectacle of an apocalyptic disease, which conveniently clears the scene for a (near-) post-apocalyptic setting, while allowing space to investigate the long-term corporeal effects of climate change on the surviving human bodies,

[12] Ibid, p. 21.
[13] Hope Jennings, 'The Comic Apocalypse of *The Year of the Flood*', *Margaret Atwood Studies*, 3.2 (2010), p. 11.
[14] Paul Harland, 'Ecological Grief and Therapeutic Storytelling in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 23.3 (2016), p. 583.
[15] Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Ecocriticism, Genre, and Climate Change: Reading the Utopian Vision of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* Trilogy', *English Studies*, 91.7 (2010), p. 753.
[16] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 3.

along with the other changes to their environment that have resulted both from significant human species loss and from the depredations of the pre-pandemic dystopian society.

Atwood slowly reveals the cause of the apocalyptic scenario in *MaddAddam* as the series progresses, a narrative strategy that intriguingly takes on the representational problem of climate change proposed by Nixon: the slowness of climate change is replicated in the story's unfolding, but the unknowns generate mystery and suspense to help maintain the reader's interest. The series begins with *Oryx and Crake* (2003), which unlike the second and third instalments is told solely from the perspective of Snowman, formerly known as Jimmy, who at first appears to be the last living human in a recognisable but strangely altered environment. Snowman intersperses tales of his present-day misery with memories of a better but not very good time, when other members of his species were still living and known to him. Snowman's initial belief that he is 'the last true human being' hints at Atwood's metatextual commentary on cultural myths and assumptions about our vulnerability as a species.[17] Snowman's fear that he is 'all alone' may be partially influenced by growing up in a society that is simultaneously anthropocentric – treating non-human animals and nature with gruesome carelessness to feed and entertain and placate people – and, not incidentally, catastrophically oppressive and violent to its human citizens.[18] The sense of a possible, extreme ending lurks beneath Snowman's childhood memories, and he is devastated but not necessarily surprised when humanity collapses. Apocalyptic games ('Extinctathon'), expectations, and warnings are ubiquitous in the pre-pandemic society, much as they are in our real-world media and entertainment, creating in its citizens a submerged fear of imminent collapse that makes everyday life an alarming experience, yet is nonetheless insufficient to inspire action. As Jennings puts it, Atwood is critical of apocalyptic narrative even as she constructs one; *MaddAddam* may very well be 'a cautionary tale about *our* cautionary tales'.[19]

The effects of a changed climate, which cannot simply be undone, are mostly shown through the immense toll the altered environment takes on Snowman's body. From the first pages of *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood emphasizes Snowman's physical decrepitude. He is covered in 'bug bites' and must resist itching off his scabs: 'blood poisoning is the last thing he needs'.[20] Already, Snowman's material discomfort is evident to the reader, as is the severity of injuries and afflictions that were only minor annoyances in his pre-pandemic life. Snowman possesses no insect spray, sunscreen, or antibiotic ointment; he is at the mercy of the smallest wounds, and continually exposed to pain and danger. He lives in fear of bioengineered creatures who are free to roam wild, now that all the humans are apparently dead; these creatures, living amalgams with names like liobam, rakunk, and wolvog, are altered too, due to unbridled technological experimentation.

Like many authors who represent the end of the world – or, if we follow Colebrook's critique, *a* world – Atwood shows interest in identifying the qualities that make us distinctly human, even as she complicates the distinction by introducing bioengineered animals who

[17] Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), p. xiii.
[18] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 10.
[19] Jennings, p. 11.
[20] *Oryx and Crake*, p. 3-4.

are partly human themselves, such as sensitive, ritual-prone 'pigoons' whose brains contain human neocortex tissue. Snowman's anguish often revolves around language as an expression of humanity, and how in the absence of other people with a shared language, he feels the human part of himself breaking off and falling away.[21] He longs 'to hear a human voice – a fully human voice, like his own'.[22] In one scene, Snowman realises he is starving to death, and is further anguished by his inability to recall the names of the nutrients required for human survival: 'What's happening to his mind? He has a vision of the top of his neck, opening up into his head like a bathroom drain. Fragments of words are swirling down it, in a grey liquid he realizes is his dissolving brain.'[23] Snowman thus envisions his death primarily as it relates to his loss of language and knowledge. The loss of self frightens him more than the shutdown of his body, even as the two are linked. The best he can do is to speak out loud, make lists, and try to recall book passages verbatim in an effort to preserve his language, sanity, and sense of being human. He feels that otherwise he will lose himself entirely, but the artificiality of his conversations with himself only serve to underscore that something fundamental about his human existence has shifted. Vermeulen has observed that the structure of the post-apocalyptic novel undermines the notion that it tells a truly apocalyptic story: 'the end can only be narrated if it is survived'.[24] Snowman is preoccupied by the significance he invests in memory and the responsibility of bearing witness to the existence of others who came before, which Vermeulen has identified as a common theme in apocalyptic narratives. Snowman considers making lists 'to give his life some structure', but the thought of writing anything for a non-existent reader overwhelms him emotionally: 'even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and his ledger and learn his fate. Snowman can make no such assumptions; he'll have no future reader, because the Crakers can't read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past.'[25]

The man formerly known as Jimmy calls himself 'Snowman' in the post-pandemic timeline because he now thinks of himself as a monster. He considers himself 'The Abominable Snowman – existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards', and he introduces himself as such to the Crakers who live near his forested hideout.[26] This indicates the importance of other humans in Snowman's conception of himself. In the absence of other people, Snowman cannot say if he really is alive; without others to recognise and bear witness to him, it is almost as though he does not exist. Snowman effectively requires the recognition of other humans to testify to his corporeal materiality. Atwood contrasts the apparent physical perfection of the bioengineered Crakers with the decrepit Snowman. The Crakers, healthy and happily naked in the scorching climate, are 'amazingly attractive', the colour of 'chocolate, rose, tea, butter, cream, honey – but each with green eyes'[27]. Snowman

[21] The Crakers speak English, but with a limited vocabulary. They do not understand humour, irony, or metaphors, and conversing with them to tends to worsen Snowman's sense of isolation.
[22] Ibid, p. 10.
[23] Ibid, p. 149.
[24] Vermeulen, p. 152.
[25] *Oryx and Crake*, p. 41.
[26] Ibid, p. 7-8.
[27] Ibid, p. 7.

is wild-eyed, hairy, and unwashed, the subject of Craker rumours pertaining to his beard and his need for clothing: '*Snowman was once a bird but he's forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out, and so he is cold and he needs a second skin, and he has to wrap himself up*'.[28] These explanations emphasise Snowman's animality, his likeness to birds and other creatures that pre-pandemic humans might have thought of themselves as incomparably superior to, as well as his vulnerability. He needs things that the bespoke Crakers do not, simply to stay alive.

One mode through which Atwood poses challenging questions about the nature of humanity is her depiction of the almost-human characters that populate the world of *MaddAddam*. 'Posthuman ambiguities are embodied in the monstrous new race created by Crake', Jane Bone writes, noting that contemporary depictions of monsters are not straightforwardly negative.[29] Indeed, the Crakers have many positive qualities. Bone cites Marina Warner's observation that modern monsters 'don't emanate from nature […] they're either men – or man-made'.[30] Much as I find myself diverging from Paul Harland's reading of the Crakers as decidedly non-human, so I find Bone's characterisation of the Crakers as 'monstrous' to be imprecise. Neither Snowman (man) nor the Crakers (man-made, surely, but then again, aren't we all?) are monsters but they are living beings, possibly equivalent in consciousness. If the Crakers can be read as humans or at least human-adjacent, they might also be seen as an extreme expression of bodily alteration in a dystopian environment. After all, Crake perceives his creations as 'perfected' humans, using the human as a starting point in his design and discarding all the problematic qualities he views as uniquely human to create an improved substitute and successor to the species. Both the Crakers' bodies (beautiful, strong, immune to disease and sun damage) and their minds (docile, literal, free from bellicosity and prejudice) represent sweeping changes to a figure that is nonetheless entirely recognisable as human in origin and, in some ways, in enduring nature.[31]

Although the differences between Crakers and humans are at first emphasised in *Oryx and Crake*, the distinctions between the two begin to collapse as the trilogy progresses. Ultimately, Crake is not able to eliminate many of the qualities he disdains in human beings from the Crakers. From their interactions with Snowman, they develop their own religion-like system of myths, beliefs, and rituals and learn to read and write. Even the bioengineered pigoons are shown to have more 'human' traits than initially suspected, and positive ones at that. Although Snowman first fears their 'sly' and 'creepy' intelligence, they form an alliance with humans and Crakers and show themselves to be resourceful, brave, and sensitive, going so far as to conduct funeral rites.[32] As the trilogy develops, Atwood playfully reverses the anthropocentric identification that the pigoons are human-like, conversely suggesting that humans may, in fact, be more pigoon-like or more Craker-like than first assumed. In doing so, Atwood pays credence to the productivity, ecological and otherwise, of understanding

[28] Ibid, p. 8.
[29] Jane Bone, 'Environmental Dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37.5 (2016), p. 631.
[30] Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 21. Warner here elides a question that perpetually befuddles ecocritics: what is nature?
[31] *Oryx and Crake*, pp. 304-5.
[32] *MaddAddam*, p. 267.

ourselves to be animals. Harland reads the conclusion of *MaddAddam* as forecasting a better, more peaceful world that is nonetheless tinged with grief at the 'replacement' of humans by Crakers.[33] But Atwood's characterisation of the surprising and constantly-evolving Crakers resists a view of the Craker-human hybrid as fundamentally less human than those who came before, suggesting they might be merely altered – just as Snowman and the other human survivors have been altered by their changed environment. Harland continues, 'Atwood invites her readers to identify precisely which characteristics would amount to the loss of humankind as we know it, and as a corollary, asks them if the traits that we possess must necessarily lead to our extinction.'[34] Although Bone insists that Atwood portrays the Crakers as 'archetypal clone[s]…who can only be thought of in quasi-human terms', their 'humanity' or inhumanity may be beside the point.[35] The most impactful development at the end of *MaddAddam* is that the humans, Crakers, and pigoons have found a way to live peacefully together, and the inherent human and/or animal qualities of each group are less important than this outcome, particularly as the groups begin to blur together anyway.

Although Atwood critiques the Gardeners' theology, the conclusion of the trilogy looks like a fulfilment of their wishes for interspecies respect, as the characters come to appreciate one another as similar but unique individuals, and the necessity of identifying and prioritising particularly 'human' traits declines somewhat in importance. As three human women give birth to four Craker-human children at the close of the trilogy, questions about what qualities the children will inherit 'are much discussed around the MaddAddamite dinner table' but are of secondary importance to the social cohesion and shared caring responsibilities of the united groups.[36] 'The three mothers and the four children are all doing well, and the Craker women are ever-present, purring, tending, and bringing gifts', Atwood writes.[37] One Craker attests, 'All of the babies make us very happy.'[38] Over time, all species who survive the pandemic achieve better bodily health, security, and interpersonal relations. Even as they continue to be altered by their new circumstances, these alterations become less harmful and destabilising, and come to be greeted with hope and curiosity instead of fear.

Atwood's documentation of bodily threats and alterity in the post-apocalypse timeline is paralleled by those of the 'before' timeline. Pre-pandemic, Atwood suggests that humans may only *appear* to be in less danger and to have more agency and control over their own bodies, because they face so many insidious incursions backed by the power of corporate marketing and the normalisation of material culture. Snowman recalls the social isolation he experienced as Jimmy, his younger self, as he moved into his pre-determined place in the rigid dystopian class structure. Pedigreed by his relatively privileged upbringing, but not particularly bright enough to be a well-compensated star, he toils in one of the many ethically questionable corporations of the pre-pandemic world. Describing the image-

[33] Harland, p. 583.
[34] Ibid, p. 589.
[35] Bone, p. 634.
[36] *MaddAddam*, p. 380.
[37] Ibid, p. 380.
[38] Ibid, p. 381.

obsessed, consumerist lifestyle virtually all his peers are led to, he remembers a life and a job filled with 'Cosmetic creams, workout equipment, Joltbars to build your muscle-scape into a breath-taking marvel of sculpted granite. Pills to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier. It was his task to describe and extol, to present the vision of what – oh, so easily! – could come to be'.[39] The people in his milieu are obsessed with improving or merely changing their image and thus superficially evading signs of their mortality, but the social pressures, not to mention money-making corporate machinations, of such an environment prove to induce the opposite of good health and beauty amongst its citizens. A few pages later, Jimmy unwittingly describes how the pills and foodstuffs that are supposed to enhance his body and mind are instead breaking it down: 'If he skipped the gym he'd develop flab overnight, where none was before. His energy level was sinking…His hair was getting sparser around the temples, despite the six-week AnooYoo follicle-regrowth course he'd done. He ought to have known it was a scam – he'd put together the ads for it – but they were such good ads he'd convinced even himself.'[40] Jimmy and his peers are so conditioned to believe over-hyped marketing that he is fooled by his own work. This is both an indictment of Jimmy's declining judgment – compromised by his intake of pseudo-food and pharmaceuticals – and his propensity for wishful thinking, which may be a form of self-preservation in this highly artificial and stultifying environment. The passage also serves to highlight how many things we put around or into our bodies go unexamined, even when we should know they might hurt us. Here, Atwood critiques real-world bodily threats that many take for granted as normal, unavoidable, or even positive. When Crake distributes his humanity-destroying virus through sex enhancement pills, the reader realises Atwood's foreshadowing; the strategy of hiding the disease inside of the 'cure' has been extensively employed by pharmaceutical companies throughout the novel.

Jimmy's apathy and acquiescence to his tainted environment thus leads to striking physical consequences. He also experiences guilt as a physical sensation. When he first meets Oryx, a former child sex trafficking victim who reminds him of his complicity as a participant in a brutally sexist economy, he feels 'burned' and 'eaten into' by her gaze.[41] As Snowman, he experiences guilt from his complacency during the events preceding the pandemic. He now endures the punishment of isolation, having only his regret and shame to keep him company. This goes beyond mental distress to alter his corporeal being. Sometimes, his mental anguish and physical deprivation induce hallucinations, as when he thinks he can hear Oryx whispering in his ear, or when he defends himself out loud to an invisible army of judgers. 'I didn't do it on purpose,' Snowman wails to his imagined audience 'in the snivelling child's voice he reverts to in this mood.'[42] Even in the midst of 'pointless repinings', Snowman feels (and perhaps hopes) that 'he has a listener: someone unseen, hidden behind the screen of leaves, watching him slyly.'[43] This gets to the heart of what Vermeulen identifies as one of the apocalyptic genre's chief horrors: the idea that there might one day be no more

[39] *Oryx and Crake*, p. 248.
[40] Ibid, p. 252.
[41] Ibid, p. 91.
[42] Ibid, p. 45.
[43] Ibid, p. 46.

conscious testifiers to the existence of humans. Snowman would rather have a witness to his embarrassing breakdown than total privacy.

Vivid hallucinations have many causes in Snowman's life. In the aforementioned scene they arise from inner turmoil and probably hunger, and in *MaddAddam* (2013) as he suffers from an infected cut. The God's Gardeners voluntarily take part in hallucinogenic 'vigils' that they believe draw them closer to the non-human world.[44] Atwood appears somewhat less sceptical of the Gardeners' 'carefully calibrated blend of plant toxins' than pharmaceuticals that are designed to be addictive or even to 'cure' a problem induced by the same substance, in an endless feedback loop.[45] Atwood draws on a historical association between hallucinogenic drugs and 'ecological consciousness' as the God's Gardeners undertake their vigils for very different reasons than those who take corporate pharmaceuticals, and generally come away with a renewed connection to the other animals in their midst.[46] Notably, the Gardeners are not harmed by their 'organic' drug consumption, whereas pharmaceuticals are the deadly vehicle for Crake's pandemic virus. Even so, Menrisky argues that the mode of the virus 'literalizes the dissolution' between human bodies and other-living matter that the God's Gardeners seek through their vigils; the virus 'reduc[es] human bodies to decaying and recycled matter', a process with which the Gardeners are obsessed. Menrisky continues, 'Atwood's novels draw lines of affinity between psychic and physical dissolution – hallucination and death – in the figure of the drug, in such a way that denounces hallucinogenic ecologism as a practice inimical to a sustainable environmentalism that takes continued human existence as one of its aims.'[47] Menrisky problematises the Gardeners' preoccupation with 'the renewal of matter after death';[48] departed members are effectively made into compost, their resting places marked with trees that held symbolic significance for them during life. Gardener creed does not greet this ultimate form of bodily alteration with fear. Discussing death, the cult leader Adam One says, 'Let us pray that if we must sacrifice our own protein so it may circulate among our fellow species, we will recognize the sacred nature of the transaction'.[49] On the one hand, this view promotes acceptance of the ultimate form of bodily alteration – death, and the transformation of our molecules. On the other hand, the Gardeners' expression of an environmentalism that reduces 'the human to its biology' does not contend with the complexity of life and the innate desire to sustain one's existence, even in an environment that is unsparingly harsh.[50] Overriding the desire for life and the continuation of one's species is one of the chief problems of apocalyptic fiction that entertains the notion that a reduction in humans might be positive for other livings beings that comprise the environment.

Snowman does not at first share the Gardeners' embrace of death as a part of life that may be worthily beneficial to one's fellow species. Much as he experiences guilt as a physical sensation, so he suffers from the deleterious corporeal effects of grief. He seems to

[44] *The Year of the Flood*, p. 171.
[45] Ibid, p. 171.
[46] Menrisky, p. 26.
[47] Ibid, p. 21.
[48] Ibid, p. 21.
[49] *The Year of the Flood*, p. 347.
[50] Menrisky, p. 34.

grieve as much for personal loved ones like Oryx as he does for the totality of humankind, who are for him more significant than other species; he fears the bioengineered animals in his midst are not merely dangerous but 'malevolent'.[51] Throughout his life, he feels there is a 'different, secret person living inside him' that others know 'nothing' about.[52] His inability to express his feelings leads to bottled grief and anguish that must be physically borne, as must the shame of his acquiescence to destructive forces. Harland writes, 'The likely extinction of Homo sapiens, Atwood suggests, is a reminder that there are genetic dead ends in evolution, and that humans like us are likely candidates for extinction, given our lack of stewardship of the planet'.[53] Despite opining that human extinction is 'likely', Harland advances a typical understanding of the purpose of apocalyptic fiction, writing 'The greatest value of fiction, as Atwood's own poetics and evolutionary biology confirm, is in aiding survival, touching the heart in such a way as to forestall disaster and allow escape'.[54] Intriguingly if, I would suggest, impractically, Harland suggests 'the accumulation of sorrow' at *MaddAddam*'s conclusion results less from the sunset of humanity and more from an 'ecological grief arising out of the corporatist economy that dismembers or destroys the natural world'.[55] Although many eco-critics critique the continued centrality of humans in environmental narratives – Harland here is suggesting that there is a wider 'planetary tragedy', as Swarnalatha Rangarajan would have it, that outweighs the human drama[56] – Snowman and his fellow survivors' visceral struggles and physical alteration may be easier for readers to conceptualise than widespread biospheric change. Following these characters gives readers a focal point which then filters out to the wider environment and the changes non-humans are subjected to. Harland sees Atwood inducing in her readers an empathetic grief as a 'therapeutic corrective' to the trajectory many climate scientists warn about. For such correctives to take effect, it may be necessary to impress on readers the extent of Snowman's post-apocalyptic suffering. He feels the loss of his species and all that came before not merely as a theoretical exercise, but with every part of his body.

Atwood's attention to food in both the pre- and post-pandemic environments also serves to extend her critique of the altered body. She takes the concept of genetically engineered foods to an extreme via grotesque lab-grown almost-meat that is harvested from a headless but freakishly living organism. The post-pandemic Snowman must survive on whatever food he can get his hands on, including the apocalypse-outlasting remnants of the capitalist pre-world like steroidal 'Jolt bars', whose side effects may include infertility. His simplest pleasure, soon to be gone forever, is a real mango, a contrast to the ultra-processed rations and bioengineered animal flesh that are his main culinary options for survival.[57] Atwood uses the heightened survivalist setting to interrogate food systems, particularly the shifting ethics of vegetarianism, but she also offers a searing critique of the food consumed

[51] *MaddAddam*, p. 206.
[52] *Oryx and Crake*, p. 58.
[53] Harland, p. 583.
[54] Ibid, p. 584.
[55] Ibid, p. 587.
[56] Swarnalatha Rangarajan, *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2018), p. 1.
[57] Although the mango is a remnant of 'real' food, it is also a sign of the pre-pandemic world's globalised food system; Atwood's clues about Jimmy's geographic location indicate a place where mangoes are non-native.

in the pre-pandemic world; little thought is given to what these mad-scientist creations are *doing* to the humans who consume them, let alone the inconceivable suffering of the lab-grown organisms. Atwood's lab meat is an extreme representation of Carol J. Adams' concept of the 'absent referent', where food words like 'pork' and 'beef' stand in for the once-living 'pig' and 'cow' and obscure their animal origins.[58] Here, even the living organism, pre-death, has had its head and other identifiable animal characteristics removed.

Snowman's dependence on animal protein is a recurrent reminder of the apparent corporeal superiority of the vegan Crakers, who eat and re-eat simple plant stuffs. Atwood suggests that lifelong reliance on certain food systems increases Snowman's vulnerability in his new environment. As Laura Wright argues, the *MaddAddam* trilogy explores veganism and other dietary practices as a response to ecological crisis; Snowman's lack of anything resembling an ethics of food pre-pandemic contributes both to the breakdown of his body and to the sense that he is complicit in upholding the unjust hierarchy and practices of that dystopian society. Although Wright concedes that veganism may be viewed both inside and outside the text as 'extremist', she argues that anti-consumerism and dietary extremism are 'exactly what enable the Gardeners to survive the waterless flood that marks the end of the world'.[59] Wright's analysis is complicated by the fact that the Gardeners are not fully vegan. They will eat animal protein when the circumstances demand it, and it is arguably the flexibility of their dietary ethics and their self-sufficiency that enables their survival, not veganism. Their propensity to plan (or hope, as Menrisky argues) for the worst is also critical to their survival of the pandemic. Where Snowman's survival of the pandemic is due to a strange kind of a luck – he is unwittingly inoculated by his erstwhile friend Crake, the creator of the benevolent Crakers as well as the violent pandemic virus – the Gardeners' avoidance of pharmaceuticals, among other things, is their salvation. As Wright puts it, 'a life of privation on the part of the God's Gardeners is what spares them the fate of the rest of humanity'.[60] It is not incidental that the Gardeners' life-saving diet is one based on respect for all living creatures, as Atwood suggests a lack of empathy and compassion for the living, human or otherwise, worsens the crisis world Jimmy/Snowman inhabits as an apathetic everyman. His body is a canvas on which the predations of his dystopian, environmentally compromised society are laid bare. No human can remain wholly untouched by such incursions on the environment of which they are part.

Both pre- and post-pandemic, Snowman suffers a variety of environmental assaults on his body that arise from human sources, such as unregulated bioengineering or environmentally degrading practices. The food he can afford is either garbage or the result of gruesome, unethical science experiments; he is tormented and possibly poisoned by pharmaceuticals he has been socially conditioned to trust; intensified sunlight and heat blister his vulnerable body; mental health and personal potential are forestalled by isolation and loneliness. Whether or not the human species is undone by an unpredictable cataclysmic

[58] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 2nd edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. xxiv.
[59] Laura Wright, *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), p. 83.
[60] Ibid, p. 85.

event, or the 'slow attrition' of climate change described by Rob Nixon, the harms of environmental alteration afflict innumerable individuals in our modern world. Atwood merely heightens the details of experiences that all of us are unwittingly subject too, with known and unknown adverse outcomes on our health and well-being. If most apocalyptic eco-fiction is characterised or justified by its creators and critics as a 'warning', even though it might fail to function as such,[61] one achievement of the genre might be in the way it thoroughly investigates, catalogues, and speculates about the hazardous effects of eco-hostile activity on the human body that is often taken for granted in modern life. The most useful 'warning' of all in apocalyptic narratives may not be panic over a great threat to humanity, but instead the insistence that we confront the things that plague us, now and in the foreseeable future.

[61] The environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht has coined and catalogued several neologisms that describe climate change-related emotions. Albrecht observes that many negative 'earth emotions', such as 'eco-paralysis', leave the person experiencing them so hopeless and confused that they promote apathy and inaction, rather than productive commitment. The sociologist Kari Norgaard has also written about how awareness of climate issues and exposure to frightening potentialities does not easily translate to changed behaviour.

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Lost

Julie Lockwood

For a slice of a second, he thought the figure asleep in his bed was that girl from a story. The one with bears and porridge. What was her name? Something to do with colour. Goldilocks. Her name was Goldilocks. But then he realised how ridiculous that was – there were no bowls or chairs and no steaming pot of breakfast. Nothing like that around his little den. And the person in his bed wasn't a blonde ringleted child in a stripy blue dress. She was an old woman (probably at least fifty) with dirty grey-brown hair splashed down the back of her thick coat.

He put his bag down onto the piece of worn green plastic that was the floor of his home and watched as she snored lightly and inconsistently. One of her arms was flung over her head and the other rested gently on his worn blanket, his fist curled like a baby. The skin on her face was stretched and thin; the skeleton that she would one day become hovered dangerously close to its surface. She might look better dead, he thought, with her tired flesh dissolving in the bodies of worms and other animals.

Her breathing came in small irregular puffs, as if the whole business was something she found rather tiresome. Sometimes, it stopped for what felt like far too long. The pause filled the air around them. He held his own breath. His body tensed. His knuckles cracked. Then, with a casual snatch of air, her chest resumed its uneven rise and fall. He exhaled.

The coat she wore was brightly coloured. Scarlet, he thought it might be called. It was done up to the collar, despite the clammy afternoon warmth inside the shelter. The cloth had faded in places to a murky pink, and it was tinged with dark stains. The edge of the sleeve was frayed. Loose ends hung from it like tears. Once though, he could tell, it had been a special coat. A standout from the crowd coat. A look at me coat. A long time ago, either this woman or another had tried it on, twirled around and looked, with a matching lipstick smile, into the mirrored eyes of loved ones and demanded compliments for the discovery of such a unique item. What a shame it had come to this. His hand reached out towards it. He longed to touch the thick woollen fabric, to feel its weight and to run his fingers over the bumps of hundreds of tiny squares which might reveal their stories. He wasn't quite brave enough though and his arm stayed there, poised in the air, waiting.

The woman's lashes began to flicker. She made a couple of small mewing sounds and uncoiled her body. Then her eyes snapped open like shutters and she sat upright.

"Who the fuck are you?" she demanded as she wiped a slug of saliva off her chin.

Social conventions were usually beyond him, but he did know that was wrong. She'd crawled into his bed in the middle of the afternoon while he was out. It wasn't much of a bed, granted, just a thin roll of mattress and some blankets – but it was his. He should be asking her that question, not the other way around. Unfortunately, his tongue felt glued to the ridges along the top of his mouth, and he was unable to form any sounds. So, he just stared at her.

She stared back. He didn't really get visitors here, in this tiny corner of the woods. Sometimes, the man and woman with the matching green jackets and sturdy boots and their bouncy dogs would walk by and pass the time of day. Occasionally, a middle-aged man on a mountain bike, trussed up like a turtle in body protection, would struggle between the trees and nod in his general direction. That was it. No one else had ever appeared. And certainly not in his bed.

He looked down at his still outstretched arm. Slowly, hoping she wouldn't notice, he brought it back towards himself and wrapped it tightly around his body. It seemed to break the silence between them.

"I'm going to get up, so you'd better piss off." Her voice, softer now with a hint of a sing-song accent, was kinder than her words.

She was right to want him to go, he conceded. She couldn't get off the bed while he was there, looming over her, there just wasn't room. He parted the tarpaulin flap that was his front door and stepped outside into the clearing. He sat on a fat tree branch and poked at the barely alive embers of his fire with a stick, waiting.

When, at last, she emerged, he saw she was tiny and thin with a pointed face like a baby bird. Maybe that's what she was? A little chick lost on her way to tell the king the sky was broken? Perhaps he should keep her here, wrap himself around her, and stop her from getting hurt? The feeling gave him a shifting ache in his bowels which wasn't unpleasant.

"Afternoon." She tucked a piece of hair behind an ear that boasted a gold hoop. The hoop had pulled her earlobe down and made a green mark where it emerged through her pink flesh. "Budge up then," she said.

He moved up slightly and she perched down beside him.

"I'll make us a roll up. Special treat." She fished around in one of the tattered deep pockets of the coat and pulled out a nearly empty packet of tobacco. Very carefully, picking up individual flakes with the tip of a bony finger that she wet with her nearly white tongue, she rolled two thin cigarettes.

"Here's yours." She handed him one and put her own between her yellow lips. He struck a match to light it, holding it out towards her. It flared momentarily in front of her face, and he saw a look swept by, fear or delight. He didn't know which. With a shaking hand he lit his own. They smoked in almost companionable silence.

"Lived here long?" she asked suddenly, flicking a maggot of ash into the fire in a perfect arc.

He shrugged. What was long? He'd been here for two winters – one harsh, one less so – and a summer. It was probably spring now. The trees were thickening with leaves. Blue flowers lined the ground, jostling with the white ones that smelt of cooking. Fat bushes were laden down with round purple flowers. He supposed he had been there quite a while. Not as long as other bits of his life had been though. But sometimes, back then, a day, an hour, a minute had felt like several lifetimes.

"Chatty, aren't you?" She scratched at her head. As she did, the sleeve of her coat shrank back and on her wrists lines of neat scars that collided with the inky graffiti of a home drawn tattoo. There were letters surrounded with wobbly hearts. It probably said something important. Words made him anxious though, so he looked at the two woodlice pushing their armoured bodies against his foot.

"Got any food? I'm starving. What do you do here? Hunt for rabbits? Gather stuff for a stew?"

It almost made him smile. The rabbits had been on to him for months. And apart from blackberries he had no idea which of the woodland plants were edible and which would make him ill. All his food came from the bins outside the supermarket two miles away. He had to scale a fence to get to them and sometimes the security guards spotted him and chased him away, but usually he managed a decent haul. He fetched his backpack and handed it to her.

"Bloody hell!" she exclaimed as she opened it. "Look at this! Can I have some?"

He nodded slightly and she tore open the packaging and pushed random items of out-of-date food into her mouth with both hands.

"This is good!" She dipped her hand into a squashed container of fermenting salad. Then she ate three bread rolls and a black banana. "Here, have a donut. They're delicious."

She handed him the sticky bag. He put it on his lap. He couldn't eat in front of her. He hadn't eaten in front of anyone for as long as he could remember. It was all right for her, sitting there with crumbs falling from her chin, pale brown food swirling around inside her mouth. She didn't care. He wasn't going to snatch it away from her or fight her for it. She didn't have to carry that worry. His stomach gurgled. He was hungry now, watching her devouring his supplies.

Eventually, she stopped eating and wiped her face roughly with the sleeve of the once beautiful coat. "Don't suppose you have any alcohol?"

He shook his head. "Oh well. Bad for me anyway. Tea? Coffee?"

He shook his head again. They didn't put coffee or tea in the supermarket bins.

"Water?"

He handed her his water bottle and she gulped great mouthfuls of it. It gurgled as it made its way down her throat to slosh noisily in her stomach. When she gave the bottle back to him, she smiled. There was a gap where a tooth should have been.

"That's better!" She sighed and tipped her head back to look up through the canopy of the trees to the chips of sky above. He watched her Adam's apple floating gently under her rather grubby skin.

"Quiet here, isn't it?" she said.

He wanted to say that no, it was never quiet. He'd thought that at first, but the longer he was there the noisier it had become. The air was full of sound: buzzing aeroplanes, the shouting crows, the woody coo of pigeons. And the wind: soft and playful or dark and moaning. Behind

it all, the whine of the traffic on the main road. And on past these sounds, there were the others. The ones that had taken a long time to show themselves. The animals' heartbeats, the gentle popping as insects were pushed out of eggs, the slow creak of growing trees and the incessant dirge of rotting leaves. Sometimes he spent whole days just listening. Lying back on his bed, ears full of noise. Noise that almost blocked out the pictures that sat on the edge of his brain.

"It's peaceful. Not like where I'm from." She picked up a stick and tossed it towards the fire. It didn't ignite. "There's always someone shouting at you there, wanting a piece of you. So much moaning and yelling and screaming. It shreds your mind. You can't think. I've had enough of it." She kicked at the soft ground with her foot. She wore trainers. They were in surprisingly good condition.

"That's why I've come down this way. I'm looking for peace. Peace and quiet."

The creamy evening sunlight filtered in through the trees and pools of it rippled on the woodland floor. The beetroot scent of the churned-up earth hovered like mist in the air. For a moment, their worlds overlapped a little. There was her and there was him and in the Venn diagram intersection between them, there was, and now there always would be, that day.

"I think I was heading to the coast," she said. "Don't know how I ended up at yours. Must have got lost. Missed a turning. How far to the sea?"

He shrugged. It was probably quite a way. If you stood at the very top of the hill and the wind was in the right direction, you could sometimes catch a streak of sea air on the breeze. But not often.

"I think it would be nice to watch the waves," she said quietly. "You could get lost in the sound of them."

Wherever she was heading, she was ill prepared. She had nothing with her. No bag, no rucksack, no bed roll. No wicker basket of provisions covered with a checked cloth. He wondered if she had lost her things or if her whole life was curled up in the corners of her deep coat pockets, languishing there with the bits of fluff and balled up scraps of tissue.

She tried to roll another cigarette but there was so little to go in it was pointless. "Got a son must be about your age," she said. "Only at the moment, he's dead." She sniffed loudly. Then she made a noise in her chest which made him want to run away. She'd better not cry. She could get angry and shout, he was all right with that. But she couldn't cry.

"Which means," she continued, poking him in the side with her hand, "that you probably have a mother my age."

He looked at the hand jabbing at him, then at her face. Her eyes, nestled there amongst her lines, were a perfect turquoise. She had been pretty once. Young and pretty. Just like his mother had been.

"So, where does a girl, you know…?" She stood up and jiggled about a bit and put her hand between her legs.

He inclined his head towards the bushes, and she walked away from him, swaying slightly like a young deer. When she was out of sight, he thought perhaps he had imagined her, that she was a forest fairy, sent to tease him. But then he heard the rasp of material as she altered her clothing and the hiss as she peed. When she came back, he almost smiled. She sat down again and this time, she leaned slightly against him. For a long time, they barely moved.

The sounds around them began to change as the birds returned to their nests and the flowers furled up for night. It was beginning to get late. Would she be wanting to stay the night? The idea made him almost shake with fear and excitement.

"Time to hit the sack?" she said at last. "I've got a long way to go tomorrow if I'm going to find the sea."

He let her enter the shelter first. She lay on the bed, pulled the hood of her coat up and covered herself in his blankets. He fastened, as much as he ever could, the door flap and manoeuvred himself onto the mattress beside her. There was very little room. He had no choice but to put his arm around her, draw her to him. She pushed her head into his chest and his face was immersed into the hood. It smelt of wood smoke and stale biscuits and vinegar.

As they lay there, together. A memory crept up on him. She had never been Goldilocks, this strange woman in the coat, she was another girl in a different story. A story that someone told him long ago. A story he asked for every night. A story someone whispered into his ear about the little girl who wanders off the path into the dark forest even though her mother warned her not to. Afterwards, the storyteller had soothed him to sleep with a soft voice and softer hands. Thinking of that made his stomach churn with a hunger that wouldn't be satisfied with any amount of spoils from the supermarket bins.

"Sleep tight," she muttered, "Mind the bugs don't bite."

He chuckled, there were always bugs here. She didn't hear the gurgle that was his laugh though, she was already asleep.

He lay awake for a long time, ignoring the usual night noise, concentrating solely on listening to her uneven breathing. To give her more room, he curled his leg backwards behind him. Very soon, cramping spasms rippled across his calf. He bit his lip against the pain. If he moved, he might disturb her. And if she was disturbed, she might leave.

When the night was at its darkest, he felt her stir. A whimpering sound escaped from the side of her mouth. Slowly, she undid the big buttons of her coat. She pushed the heavy material aside. Then she scrabbled with the layers underneath. She cupped the back of his head in her small hand and pulled it down onto her empty breast. The skin was surprisingly smooth. He ran his mouth over her slack chest, searching. When, at last, he found the hard point of her nipple, he drew it into his mouth, and sucked hard. Briefly, she stroked his hair. He heard her sigh and they drifted into sleep together.

It was late when he awoke, his muscles stiff and sore. He knew, before he opened his eyes, that she was gone. Perhaps she'd be sitting on his log seat smoking her thin roll up or in the

bushes peeing? He scrambled out of the shelter, wobbly on his numb legs. She wasn't there. He stumbled a little way down the overgrown path, stinging nettles rasping against him. She wasn't there either. She couldn't have gone. She shouldn't have left him. Not again. Not a second time. He ran in and out of the trees, sharp branches whipped against him, brambles scraped his skin. Where was she? There was no sign of her.

He had to think clearly. There would be signs. There were always signs. It was impossible to disappear without them. There must have been signs last time. He'd just have been too young and too stupid to see them. Now it would be easier. There would be bits of that coat caught on branches. Threads of it. Footprints from those new trainers. There would be something, anything.

He searched until the sun was straight above him. Then he came back to his empty home. She shouldn't have come. She shouldn't have wandered off her path and disturbed his peace. He kicked his backpack with the remains of his food out of the way and sat on his log. A bruised apple rolled onto the forest floor. He picked it up and opened his mouth. He wasn't hungry. His stomach, he noticed, was heavy. Acid bile rose up in his throat. He threw the apple into the bushes.

And then he saw it. Next to his shelter, dangling from a branch, twitching slightly in the breeze like a hanged man, the scarlet coat.

He threw back his head and howled to the indifferent sky.

Critical Commentary

*Los*t holds the shadows of fairy tales within its narrative and places itself somewhere on the boundary between fictional reality and myth. Where it sits along this spectrum is largely dependent on the reader's experience. In the introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Angela Carter states that a traditional, or 'Old Wives' Tale', would usually 'positively parade its lack of verisimilitude'.[1] This story promotes the idea of lack of truth with its hints towards anthropomorphism, its magical elements and the ephemeral nature of its characters, yet at the same time, it sits these elements against a background of solid reality.

The two characters inhabit a world which is beyond that of normal cultural expectation. The mute protagonist, with his intense sense of hearing, lives alone in the forest. The woman has stepped off an already unclear path and wandered to his door. They both exhibit recognisable fairy tale tropes – they are both physically and metaphorically lost from society and live beyond the boundary of usual expectation. Yet they are anchored in normative behaviours – behaviours rarely explored in such tales – by their need to carry out basic human functions. They have to eat, to sleep, to urinate. And they both appear to yearn for a certain level of human companionship despite the implication being that they have previously rejected such relationships due to the experience of traumatic life events. The

[1] Angela Carter (ed), *The Virago Book of Tales* (Virago, London, 1990) p. xi.

alterity of their existence is the background against which their story is set, yet it is everyday reality which provides the narrative action.

How these characters appear to the reader, how real or unreal they come across, depends on the reader themselves. Dominic Head states that "a sense of self for each one of us slowly develops through a process of acculturation"[2] and he believes that this sense of selfhood can be developed by reading – or hearing – stories. *Lost* contains a series of implicit and explicit references to fairy tales – *Goldilocks*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Chicken Licken*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, etc. Fairy tales that are present in various forms across many cultures. The reader's response is dependent on which tales – and which version of these tales – they are familiar with. The self (i.e., the reader) constructs a meaning based on their previous knowledge of story. Thus, the narrative promotes the blurring of the boundary between the written word and the reader. This echoes Wolfgang Iser's theories on the development of literary meaning. He believes that this emerges through a 'convergence between text and reader'. An individual response to the story which would 'not otherwise come into existence'[3] is promoted and that response is taken forward as part of the reader's cultural journey.

The detail of the story is employed to develop this idea. James Wood says that detail is used to 'focus to fix an impression'.[4] Whilst this is true if reader and writer are completely aligned in their cultural experiences, if this is not the case, the inclusion of detail such as the red coat or the apple may lead the reader to a different type of story. Rather than becoming fixed, the detail adds to the surreal nature of *Lost.*

Although the fairy tale references exist within the lines of *Lost*, the notion of fairy tale is also subverted by the refusal of the text to carry some of the overriding elements of these types of narratives. There is no happy, nor even conclusive, ending. The text also fails to deliver any suggestion of didactic inference – another aspect typically present in a fairy story. The marginalised characters foregrounded would not be those that would traditionally receive a positive outcome and here, the conclusion is vague. Therefore, both the ending and any potential lesson gained from the narrative only exists within the imagination of the reader, further blurring the boundary between the two.

Lost's aim is to adopt a position of fluidity and be open to a process of transformation dependent on the contextual circumstances in which it is discovered, thus following the tradition of fairy tales across the centuries.

[2] Dominic Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond (*Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2009), p.7.
[3] Wolfgang Iser, *Modern Criticism and Theory,* ed. Lodge, D. (Pearson, Harlow, 2000), p. 188.
[4] James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (Vintage, London, 2009), p. 52.

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Words from World Watchers: when the veil is lifted

Keren Poliah

Content Warning: The following is a nonfiction piece I wrote about a Mauritian woman who was one of my participants in my research on occult practices in Mauritius (African Island country). The excerpt contains descriptions of spirit possession and animal sacrifice.

'when the veil is lifted' (excerpt)

By the end of the year I became a woman, my sister fell very sick. I remember being scared that she would be taken away from me and locked at Brown Séquard. She was only four and still hopping to kindergarten every morning. Our home at Surinam was surrounded by trees, and so was the whole village. Back in those days, and even though it was only thirty years ago, the village had few houses each separated by six or eight large trees. Our gardens, schools, hospitals, and streets were all forestry with majestic mango, litchi, longan, *badamier*, *fruit à pain*, *corossol*, and banyan trees breathing among us.

At my sister's kindergarten school, there was a large *fruit à pain* tree, one whose finger-like branches seemed as if they were bending to pick her up whenever she had her lunch under its shade. I didn't like that tree, it gave me chills. I snatched her away from its shade when I picked her up after school. On the day that my sister fell very sick, I found it strange that she didn't hold my hand on the way back from kindergarten. She didn't hop and run at every five metres along the dusty street. She walked with her head bent, and her small hands tucked in her skirt's pockets. I nudged her and pinched her chubby cheeks but she kept her eyes on the dry yellow land until we reached home. Once home, she threw herself in our mother's arms, flailed her legs violently and started crying as if someone was torturing her by removing her toenails one by one with a sharp tong. And every night, at exactly midnight, she cried and wailed like that for a week. At first, she started sobbing and then the screaming followed in those earlier hours before dawn. Her agonising screams scared us all and her cries sounded like someone whose intestines were being pulled out of the throat. Among her sobs, she was whispering, '*serpent piker, serpent piker, serpent piker*' (snakes sting, snakes sting, snakes sting). Her warm tears stained my mother's long skirt until the rooster sang at four.

After a week of figuring out what was wrong and why my sister was seeing snakes we couldn't see, my father spoke to Tonton who said, '*B kapav lin pass dan ene movais l'heure* (maybe she passed through something at a bad hour). Don't worry, I'll drop by tonight.' When he came, Tonton only had to step into the same room as my sister to know exactly what was wrong. He looked at her with his blank eyes like he was staring into the empty space between him and my sister which, to him, seemed filled by something that had all his attention. He listened even though no one was speaking and he gave a slight nod to his right. Then he asked my mother to get him a glass of white rum which he gulped.

'What did you give her in her bread to school that day she fell sick?' he asked.

'Sardine,' replied father.

'Don't you know not to give children sardine in their bread because they walk around with their bread everywhere when they eat?' Tonton nodded his head in disbelief that my father had allowed something so ridiculous to happen. Tonton said that there is a tree near my sister's school, the same witchy *fruit à pain* tree I disliked, that is inhabited by spirits. '*Revide encor ene ladan* (pour another)'; he gestured at his empty glass which my mother refilled. He gulped the rum and said, 'Don't ever give your child sardine to eat anywhere. After all, we use that for prayer offerings.'

My parents understood what I didn't: that they had just offered their youngest daughter to spirits living in a tree. Since there was no proper binding ritual, the spirits were hovering above my sister, haunting her soul into giving up her tiny body. '*Zot fer la priere gran dimoune laba* (they offer prayers to *gran dimoune* there),' he added, knowing that *traiteurs* (sorcerers) occasionally summoned and prayed to the guardians in that tree. Even my parents offered sardine to our *gran dimoune*, also known as *gardien lakour* (guardian of our land). It was an annual ritual during which father lit a candle, sliced a lemon in two, poured a glass of white rum and left a freshly baked round *pain maison* with sardine in the corner of our yard.

'*Revide encor ene ladan*,' said Tonton. He swallowed his drink and started praying. We call this ritual *fer ene pass* which translates to 'do a pass' and holds no meaning to non-native speakers. To us, it is the art of *traiteurs* when they take a knife, *zerof* (cloves), and a sewing needle to mimic drawing the shape of the Christian cross on their client. Tonton made the sign of the cross on my sister using each of these ingredients. He repeated the process three times in front, back, and on either side of my sister while reciting some incantations. He took a necklace with a wooden cross hanging from it and put it around her neck. He said that the cross was blessed with holy water and prayers. He strictly instructed my parents not to remove this necklace from her until he returned. He didn't say when he was coming back and he left after downing another glass. But that same night, my sister slept peacefully until morning.

About a week later when my sister was bathing under the *corossol*, my mother removed the necklace and hung it on a branch. She forgot about the necklace until midnight, when my sister started crying and screaming like she did before. '*Serpent la lor mo lipied* (the snake is on my leg). Look at it here. It's on my hand! Get it off! Get it off!' She closed her eyes and shouted for my mother to make all the snakes go away. I stayed outside the room, occasionally glancing at the floor in fear of seeing a snake. I shivered and almost staggered after being shocked by my own long wispy curl dangling over my shoulder. After finding the necklace, Father brought it and made my sister wear it, but nothing happened.

The next day, Tonton had to come back to whisper his incantations and tie the necklace to her. The necklace with the wooden cross remained a part of my sister's body for weeks. When Tonton returned to seal his final rituals, he looked at my sister and smiled gently. We all remained in silence while Tonton nodded to his right side, listened attentively, provided an indiscernible answer to someone only he could talk to, and then asked my mother for his usual glass of rum. After he had drunk, prayed, and removed the necklace himself, my sister never suffered from seeing the snakes. Being only four, she even quickly forgot about the whole terrifying experience.

But I didn't. And since then, I noticed all the times Tonton whispered, nodded, smiled, and leaned towards his right. In my mind, I treated Tonton like he was two persons, not one. Since

he was always drinking for two and claimed to be constantly accompanied, I wondered about his daily life including taking a shower, going to the toilet, having sex with his wife. I never met his wife, but I wondered about how she felt. Where was the *gran dimoune* during those moments she was intimate with her husband? Did Tonton ask it to leave for a few hours sometimes? I was too shy to ask so I only observed. During the days Tonton *fer ene pass* for his clients and gulped their rum, he was never drunk. But when he rejoiced during a festive occasion, drank whiskey, and had a good laugh, he was as drunk as a lord. He could barely hold himself and fell in our garden on his way out. My sister even laughed at him when he wobbled to the gate with mud and mother's *genda phool* plastered on his right cheek.

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We, Tamils, have various ways of worshipping the ones who guard our land and family. We call them *gran dimounes* because they hold the respected position of our ancestors and elders who have passed away. Some pray to the ancestors themselves, but my in-laws pray to guardian deities. I was introduced to them on my second night after the nuptials: Madhurai Veeran, Muneeswaran, Periyachi Amman, and Kateri. They are the relatives I never see but whom I must feed, worship, and serve. They live in a narrow path between our house and the concrete wall separating us from our neighbour. My in-laws live on the ground floor and when I look at this narrow path from my kitchen window, all I see are four dried banana leaves, each on top of their respective rocks. The food left on those leaves has rapidly decomposed in February's heat and I can barely see what my mother-in-law left on them. I am expected to at least remember the *gran dimounes*' favourite meal, but I only remember their names and what happened on my first time meeting them.

It was the second night I had spent at my husband's house. I was still crying for my parents, sister, and the freedom I had lost. My husband's house was at Trois Boutiques, and I counted more than eight villages between Surinam and his house.

My tears fell on my hennaed hands as my mother-in-law was brushing through my long black hair and I thought of my mother doing the same for my sister.

'I always wanted a daughter,' said my mother-in-law. 'I have to show you something, *Beti*. Come to the front yard when you're ready.' She kept the brush on the table, I nodded and she left. I felt lucky to be here in such a modern home with loving in-laws. I had yet to know who I married, but I trusted time would unfold everything at its pace. I lifted the veil of my golden yellow saree to cover my head and headed out to the garden where my husbands' parents were waiting for me. They stood at the entrance of the narrow alley between our double storey house and the tall concrete fence.

'Serade *Beti*, we're going to introduce you to our *gran dimounes*.' They invited me to follow them. I looked around for my husband and sensing my unease, my mother-in-law added, 'He's not here. He's out with his friends.'

My father-in-law presented the *gardiens lakour* and said, 'You're lucky you're getting to see our annual prayer to them today.' He placed one clay *diya* on the first rock, filled it with ghee, and dipped in a cotton wick. 'We pray them to guard our house, protect our family, and

prevent anything bad from entering our yard.' He drowned the cotton wick floating in the ghee and lit its tip which was left hanging over the *diya*'s lips. He repeated the process on all rocks and then turned to his wife for her to give him four glasses of rum. '*Traiteurs* use those same *gardiens* to harm and carry their evil deeds, but in our yard, those saints are ours. They protect us.' He placed the glasses on the rocks and continued, 'We need to treat the *gardiens* well, as per their personalities and tastes.' He picked the *goni* bag at his feet and kicked the snail which had started its climb towards the handle. He removed a lemon from the bag and sliced it in half. 'We slice a lemon instead of a chicken,' he said while placing the halves on the third rock. He took a round *pain maison* with sardine, unwrapped it from its large tissue paper and placed it in the middle of the banana leaf.

He made a slight nod to his wife, and she left towards the backyard.

He removed another lemon from the bag and placed it in one piece on the second rock while saying, 'We put a whole lemon where a chicken doesn't need to be sliced but is simply offered without pouring blood.' Then he took a round *pain maison* with dried salted cod and arranged it like on the previous rock.

We remained in an awkward silence which probably lasted for two minutes. The silence underlined the emptiness in my chest, and I thought of how I wanted to run away from this dark alley. The rays of the sun shone in the blue bucket a few metres away from me. The wrinkles on the water's smooth surface let my thoughts drift to the ocean of Surinam behind my parents' house. I stepped into the light, closer to the bucket and faced the front yard so that my father-in-law couldn't see the tear shining in the corner of my eye. I had thought the sun would burn my bare feet and skin, but its warmth was surprisingly reassuring. The concrete floor was as warm as my mother's kitchen.

'Bring the bucket here *Beti*,' said my mother-in-law. Startled by her squeaky voice, I clumsily picked up the heavy bucket, spilled some water on the way and then decided to simply drag the vessel in the alley's shade. When I faced my in-laws, I was shocked in a very unsettling way.

There was a black rooster in my father-in-law's hands. It was a jet-black rooster, one of the fattest chickens I had ever seen, with not an iota of white, yellow, brown, red or any colour on it. My mother-in-law took the bucket from me and splashed the cold water on the roots of her papaya tree. She proceeded to fill the bucket with boiling water from a *marmite*. I shivered. I hadn't realised that the *marmite* had been next to the first rock all this time. I started trembling when my father-in-law took the rooster by its skinny legs and turned it upside down.

The animal growled and cawed as loudly as it could and my mother-in-law said, 'Let's get this over with quickly.' She held its neck and wings down. My father-in-law tied thin jute ropes around the rooster's wriggling feathery body so tightly that they prevented its wings from flapping. My eyes met the animal's eye during that process and I thought I saw tears, fear, and a reflection of the clouds in them. My father-in-law dipped the animal headfirst in the boiling water and waited, until all its contortions stopped. It was over in less than a minute, but time had never seemed to move so slowly for me. My hands covered my mouth to prevent my screams and lunch from gushing out. He pulled the wet dead chicken out, letting it hang over the bucket for water to drip back in. The glossy black feathers were lying all over the place and the black skin hung limply. I saw the animal's bulging eye, now forcefully closed by

swollen skin and steam wafting out. 'Kateri, she is a fearful one, isn't she?' My father-in-law was getting ready to continue his lecture but my legs were trembling and I couldn't hear his voice anymore.

There was this ringing noise in my ears, like a life support machine was inside my head, indicating someone's death. The world around me was moving even though I was still, and I started running. I ran on the swirling pavement and up the stairs which seemed like they were floating away from me. I ran in the corridor and tried to avoid the walls which were crashing on me. I heard my mother-in-law's voice from a distant tunnel behind but I wanted to be far from her. I struggled to walk towards my husband's room, holding on to the same walls I thought were falling.

I could get no further than the house's front door. I sat on the cold marbled floor, closed my eyes, and let my head hang out of my veil, wherever gravity pulled it. When I woke up in my husband's bed, I heard my mother-in-law tell my husband that I am too skinny and should be fed better to avoid heat stroke. Over the months, I [had no choice but to pretend that I] accepted my in-laws and their religious ways.

Critical Commentary

'when the veil is lifted' is a chapter from my nonfiction piece *Words from World Watchers* (forthcoming, 2024), narrating occult experiences in Mauritius. Based on observations, qualitative analysis of diaries and photographs, and unstructured interviews with those affected by occult practices, this chapter is an account of the experiences of a Mauritian woman, here represented as a character named Serade. The creative investigation behind this piece can be detailed as a research sequence which involves tracking a story, interviewing the participant, making transcripts, and collecting data from her life to reconstruct her experiences. My first-person narrator is someone whose knowledge is limited, cannot say more than my participant knows, and remains within her own community. This provides me, as a writer, with a tight control and steadiness required for the narration of traumatic occult experiences. Serade is a narrator who speaks strictly for herself but shares the same environment and culture into which every other Mauritian participant was born. Testing the boundaries of creative nonfiction, the narrative follows Serade as her Tamil heritage imbibed by the occult informs her experiences of family life, puberty rites, marriage, and mothering. The following commentary particularly extends the untamed nature of the occult in Mauritius for the reader to understand the practices and their origins.

In my community and among my participants, *sorselri* (sorcery or witchcraft), *longanis*, *fer diab* (devil's work), *travail traiteur* (traiteur's job) are the terms I came across. These are closely associated to what Seetah Krish writes in his article on 'Le Morne Old Cemetery' (2015), as he explains the origin of *longanis*. *Longanis* is derived from 'l'onguenniste, a producer of ointments, the practice can be referred to as sorselri [...] commonly referred to as "witchcraft," when translated into English'.[1] *Longanis* is a Mauritian syncretic belief system born from African traditions, European Christian iconography, and South Asian rituals. When asked about the difference between witchcraft, sorcery, occult, *longanis*, and *traiteur*, my

[1] Seetah Krish, 'Objects Past, Objects Present: Materials, Resistance and Memory from the Le Morne Old Cemetery, Mauritius', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 15.2 (2015), p. 234.

participants found none and unanimously said that it denotes evil. However, participants remained open to shifting meanings, allowing the words their own freedom to convey, insinuate, and manoeuvre comfortably in every sentence. Sometimes, the *traiteur* is someone who heals the sick, and other times the *traiteur* casts a spell to harm. In some participants' stories, the *traiteurs* act as priests by day and witches by night. It is not unusual for practitioners to enter this state of duality as even the deities are worshipped for being good and malevolent. This is highlighted during the *grand dimounes*' annual prayer when we witness Serade's father-in-law saying, '*Traiteurs* use those same *gardiens* to harm and carry their evil deeds, but in our yard, those saints are ours.'

The boundaries between the world of *nam* (spirits) for witchcraft and religious worship seem vague. There is a messy symbiotic relationship and unclear distinctions where rituals, sacrifices, and offerings made to a deity in a temple are the same as for a deity used for witchcraft intending harm to others. These unclear distinctions are not uncommon for the Mauritian who is also often seen to be practising numerous religions. As detailed in Klocová's research, 'Cigarettes for the Dead: Effects of Sorcery Beliefs on Parochial Prosociality in Mauritius' (2022), the Mauritian practises 'more than one religion' and borrows 'aspects of worship from another tradition'.[2] Indeed, in my community, I have witnessed Hindus making a pilgrimage to Père Laval, Catholic friends walking towards Grand-Bassin for Maha Shivaratri, and Telugus being invited to *qurbani* during the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah. This acceptance of and engagement with different cultures and beliefs also enables practices ranging from religious to occult to be embraced. In the excerpt, we witness Serade's parents turn to a trusted *traiteur* instead of a priest to carry out apotropaic rites saving their daughter from spirit possession. These rites from *traiteurs* and priests are often similar or completely identical in nature, with the exception that one practises through a deity in a temple and the other through an alternative spirit or deity. The rites associated with *gardiens lakour* include offering rum and burning of cigarettes, which are an integral part of some religious practices as well. Anthropologist Maya De Salle-Essoo makes a list of items left at shrines in Mauritius.[3] She notes that cigarettes and alcohol are commonly found at a particular type of shrine called lagrot (French for 'grotte' meaning 'cave'). Lagrot is a man-made structure in the form of a cave dedicated to Père Laval, Mary, angels, or saints. The lagrot is a place for praying where passersby stop for a few minutes to light a candle, make offerings, or fulfil a promise they had made if their prayers were to be answered, and pour a glass of rum for the spirit of the lagrot. This practice is also recognised by the spirit working with the *traiteur* who helps Serade's sister. In fact, Tonton ingests alcohol when he is communicating with the spirit, which is usual for *traiteurs* working with a spirit as familiar.

At Serade's in-laws' home, we meet four deities who are associated to being guardians or being used as malevolent spirits by *traiteurs*. The black rooster is sacrificed for Kateri Amman who is often regarded as a form of the goddess Parvati. The statue of Parvati stands in temples, but she also has a ferocious manifestation in the form of Dakshina Kālikā (also known as Kali). Kali is usually associated to the practice of witchcraft, particularly when her statue is found in forests and remote locations near rivers. Traces of offerings and rites are identical at the feet of the goddess, both at the temple and remote locations, although one is

[2] Eva Kundtová Klocová, 'Cigarettes for the Dead: Effects of Sorcery Beliefs on Parochial Prosociality in Mauritius', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 12.1-2 (2022), pp. 116-131.
[3] Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Maya de Salle-Essoo, 'Saints and Evil and the Wayside Shrines of Mauritius', *Journal of Material Culture*, 19.3 (2014), pp. 253-77.

for religious purposes and the other for witchcraft intending harm. Periyachi Amman is also a manifestation of Kali and is worshipped as the protector of children. Both Kateri and Periyachi often protect or possess their devotees and demand animal sacrifices in return.

The relationship between guardian deities and devotees can be characterised, like Govindrajan says, by 'reciprocal indebtedness'.[4] This reciprocal indebtedness arises when devotees feel indebted to the favours given by the deities and have to repay them. In other instances, the devotees seek to acquire a favour, blessing, or service from the deity, and offer a life in exchange.[5] Some favours require a smaller life, that is the life of a bird, chicken, or cat. Other favours require bigger lives, like a cow or goat. At times, human sacrifices are also offered, placing the *traiteurs* and their clients at the heart of scandals and crimes. For example, in 1979, a young boy was killed by two clients urged by a *traiteur* to cut the boy's throat to suck his blood for a ritual. In 2002, a 15-year-old girl was killed by a man who was advised by a *traiteur* to take two fingernails of a virgin for occult practices.[6] The thought is: the bigger the favour, the greater the importance of the life to be sacrificed. The deities also accept substitutes when the devotees carry out a special prayer requesting the deity to accept an offering other than life. In her last interview, Serade confided that her in-laws stopped their annual animal sacrifices and adopted alternatives. In other interviews I carried out, the younger Mauritians also stated that they were less likely to search for a black rooster and boil it to death in the corner of their yard, leading to elders having to change sacrificial rituals. Since animal sacrifices denote witchcraft, evil, and death, it is frowned upon, as people refuse to carry them out openly to avoid the social stigma attached to them. The shedding of blood becomes symbolic in familial ancestor worship of *gardiens lakour* and prayers seeking the protection of deities. The animal sacrifices can be mirrored by 'splitting a coconut, or cutting a piece of fruit, which is then sprinkled with red dye to signify the shedding of blood'.[7] The actual bloodshed is kept for the dark hours of occult practices for the fulfilment of bigger favours in relation to healing sickness or intending harm to others. However, these human sacrifices were not always meant for such big favours. In the eighteenth century, Creoles from Mauritius and Réunion Island reached Madagascar to seek profit and were well-established by 1823, the time of the Merina conquest.[8] For Karembola and Betsimisaraka, Cole and Middleton mention that ancestors are the 'source of being' even though ancestor worship proved to be very dangerous, demanding human sacrifices to honour their memory.[9] Elders were responsible for passing on traditions and if there was a failure to do so, they feared their generation would be annihilated and subjected to ancestral wrath in the form of illnesses or death. Ancestors provided the social identity of families and had the power to bless and curse, thereby making it a priority that their demands were always met. This might be one of the many ways Malagasy influences perpetuated in Mauritius and were merged with existing beliefs of the population.

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[4] Radhika Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 60.
[5] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871).
[6] La Redaction, 'Longanistes, traiteurs, et assassins', *L'Express* <https://lexpress.mu/article/%C2%ABlonganistes%C2%BB-%C2%ABtraiteurs%C2%BB-et-assassins>
[7] Krish, p. 240.
[8] Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, 'Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* 71.1 (2001), p. 7.
[9] Ibid., p. 14.

During those years (1810-1968), Mauritius was a British colony. The European view of witchcraft also focused on a highly gendered text which associated witchcraft to women and had authority in court. *The Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of the Witches) was first published in 1486 and served to propagate mainstream Christian orthopraxy, classifying magic and witchcraft as heretical, diabolical, and backward. The marginalisation and criminalisation of witches in Britain controlled women's bodies and limited female agency. Italian anthropologist Valerio Valeri provided a gendered view of sacrificial rites as he wrote that men turned towards pure goddesses and women turned towards impure gods.[10] The pure goddesses were like the Ammans, demanding male sacrifices while the impure gods were the minor deities accompanying the Ammans and often demanding female sacrifices. This practice accentuated the religious purity of men in contrast to the impurity of menstruation and the female body. Yet, it also associates masculine traits to the goddesses and feminine traits to the gods. The consort of Kateri Amman is Muneeswaran, also known as Shiva, the consort of Parvati/Kali. Muneeswaran is the Tamil guardian deity and a malevolent spirit who must be venerated for protection and to avoid incurring his wrath in the form of diseases and crop failures. Madhurai Veeran is a minor deity for land protection, associated to Mariyamman, a rainmaking goddess. Muneeswaran and Madhurai Veeran are also companions of Periyachi Amman, and they have supportive roles when related to the Amman goddesses. In contrast, Serade's father-in-law is the one who sacrifices a rooster and takes an active role in all the rituals for the Ammans and minor gods, because the patriarchal Tamil family adopts traditional gender roles.

In interviews of Mauritian participants, women are often ardent devotees of the Amman goddesses and are possessed by them. *Traiteurs* are also either men or women, working with either male or female entities. *Traiteurs* often choose to become *traiteurs* depending on ancestral worship, traditions passed down since generations, or the affinity an individual might have for a deity, spirit or practice. Generally, there is no apparent gendered perception of *traiteurs* in Mauritius. In fact, the spirits-deities also take on the role that the devotees want them to, with Muneeswaran or Madhurai Veeran also acting as the sole guardian for many families. The Mauritian world of the occult serves to unite dichotomous existences of a society – good and evil, individuals and entities, male and female – as one. This concept of duality is also apparent in deities of new pagan religions and existed even in past religious movements. While some people value religious and occult practices as their means to an end, others like Serade remain shocked, confused, and against this untamed nature which does not differentiate between good and evil.

[10] Valerio Valeri, Kingship and Sacrifice, trans. by Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 112.

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Alternative Topographies: Spatial Transformation and the New York School

Isaac Holden

Frank O'Hara's 'I do this I do that' poems, according to Siobhan Phillips, 'make art from untransformed quotidian detail.'[1] Andrew Epstein makes a similar claim that O'Hara's contemporary, James Schuyler 'do[es] not seek to transform or to transcend the mundane, ugly, plain, or unpoetic features of everyday life'.[2] However, Timothy Gray asserts the opposite, arguing that 'Schuyler discovered that strange transformations could, and often did, take place'.[3] Evidently, when it comes to these poets, transformation is a contentious term, with one camp emphasising an aesthetic that avoids transformation, while the other views transformation as integral to those same works. Furthermore, the reference to the quotidian by both Phillips and Epstein situate this reading within the study of everyday life, a realm where transformation is often evoked. Henri Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World* ends on the imperative 'Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!'[4] while Michel de Certeau argues that the street 'is transformed into a space by walkers'.[5] Examining a sample of O'Hara's and Schuyler's works while considering how they portray the spaces of everyday life may enable us to understand how critics have arrived at such different interpretations of transformation in these texts. Both poets were central figures in the loose milieu of American writers rising to prominence in the 1950s and early 1960s that would become known as the New York School. Although the idea of a 'school' is partially a joke,[6] the identification with New York emphasises their particular affinity for space and a shared poetics that 'formally registers a sensitivity towards the urban and/or built environment'.[7] Consequently, although the selection considered here is too narrow to make generalisations about the New York School as a whole, I hope that the attention given to spatial practice will open new avenues for reading the poets' relationships with their environment. In particular, I seek to build upon the theory space formulated by de Certeau to introduce Valeria Luiselli's idea of the *relingo* as a critical concept. To my knowledge, the *relingo* has not previously been explored within English literature, and by using it as a lens to read O'Hara and Schuyler poems, I intend not only to interpret the ways in which these poets creatively engage with space, but to also demonstrate the *relingo*'s utility as a critical tool for

[1] Siobhan Phillips, *The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.7.
[2] Andrew Epstein, *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 83.
[3] Timothy Gray, *Urban Pastoral: Natural Currents in the New York School* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), p. 116.
[4] Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. by Sacha Rabinovitch, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 204.
[5] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 117.
[6] Geoff Ward, *Statutes of Liberty: The New York School of Poets*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 6.
[7] Yasmine Shamma, *Spatial Poetics: Second Generation New York School Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 10.

discussing spatial practice more broadly. While my writing focuses on O'Hara and Schuyler, these are just the first steps.

Upon first reading, the imagery used by O'Hara in the 1964 poem 'A Step Away from Them' appears non-transformative. As the narrator walks through the streets of New York, he describes what he sees:

> I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
> CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
> Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice*.
> And chocolate malted. A lady in
> foxes on such a day puts her poodle
> in a cab.[8]

O'Hara begins this passage by definitively situating the reader in a named place with named people, creating a sense of defined location: an archetype that recurs throughout the poem. The sense of place is intensified by O'Hara's typography, where the capitalisation gives the sensation of reading 'JULIET'S/CORNER' as one of the bright neon signs the narrator mentions earlier, therefore giving the sense that the city is present through the form of the poem in conjunction with the textual content. This moment is surrounded by a series of images of the 'cheeseburger', 'chocolate malted', and 'a lady in/foxes' that are presented without any metaphor and in a largely paratactic style. Presenting the succession of everyday details in this way produces an impression of the eye moving between the objects on the street. It provides sensual data to the reader literally without analysing the relationships between them or attributing significations to objects beyond their appearance in the moment. When Phillips refers to 'untransformed quotidian detail', it seems she is likely referring to this seemingly plain style that relays the imagery of a place literally. However, I do not believe that transformation is limited to formal practices; when we consider the concept of space more generally, other readings emerge.

When thinking about spatial practices, de Certeau makes an important distinction between 'place' and 'space':

> a place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. […] The law of the "proper" rules in the place.[9]

The first part of this definition, 'elements […] distributed in relationships of coexistence,' considers 'place' as that with physical boundaries. Juliet's Corner may be considered a place in so far it is a distinct element, the borders of which are prescribed by its relationship with the neighbouring buildings. In de Certeau's terms, the idea of the 'proper' in the second part of this definition attributes an ideological dimension to place since 'proper' is that which 'serve[s] as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles")'.[10] The mercantile connotations of 'competitors' and 'clienteles' make clear de Certeau's association of the proper with capitalist ideology.

[8] Frank O'Hara, 'A Step Away from Them', in *The New York Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Mark Ford (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), pp. 28-29 (p. 28).
[9] de Certeau, p. 117.
[10] Ibid., p. xix.

Therefore, the propriety of places emerges from the way they define and are defined by capital relations. The place of Juliet's Corner, in this case, is a site of commerce that transforms O'Hara into its customer. Space, on the other hand, is what subjects transform place into:

> Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient [place], situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities […] *space is a practiced place.* Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.[11]

These ideas of 'polyvalent unity' and 'practice' are key to examining how O'Hara engages with New York in his work.

Returning to the passage from 'A Step Away' with space in mind, the paratactic imagery represents more than a process of observation; it represents a practice of making associations. As a neon sign, 'JULIET'S/CORNER' marks the restaurant as a place of commerce. However, the enjambment separates the possessive from the location, isolating the person of Juliet. With this emphasis on 'Juliet', the introduction of 'Giulietta' in the next line depicts an act of mental association where 'Juliet' is de-anglicised and reconnected to a real person. O'Hara then places Giulietta within a social context as a 'wife' and '*bell' attrice*' (a beautiful actress) with the shift to Italian, revealing both her theatrical aspirations and her position as a racialised minority. He then returns to the scene of commerce with 'And chocolate malted', but only after the digression into Giulietta's life; consequently, it is not clear whether O'Hara is observing the chocolate malt or if this is an unattributed discourse between him and Giulietta. While 'JULIET'S/CORNER' is a designation of place, the way O'Hara responds to this place evokes and unites a series of disparate associations with the people within, as well as commodity-oriented relationships. This bringing together of different associations is what de Certeau means by 'polyvalent unity'; by interacting with Juliet's Corner, O'Hara makes it a site of human practice with multiple connotations. He becomes the walker who transforms the street into a space. It is in this context of place and space that Gray identifies New York School practices as transformative, through the way they 'announce new realms of being, even as they playfully undermine the stability typically ascribed to place. […] these spatial realms become pastoral heavens'. [12] Although Gray's argument is rooted in the specific transformation of the city into a pastoral realm, it serves as an example of how the making of place into space is an act of transformation that shifts the resonances of the city beyond their relationship with the ideological proper.

However, it is crucial to note that the literal presentation of sensory detail and the sense of movement through space are not lost in this practice. To the contrary, O'Hara draws on the everyday details of the street to enable the transformation of place into space. The objects themselves are not transformed, but the relationship between O'Hara and these objects enables the transformation of the places they inhabit into space. In this sense, the transformation of place into space can be read through Paul Willis's theory of symbolic creativity, defined as 'the application of human capacities to and through, on and with symbolic resources and raw materials […] to produce meanings'.[13] It is easy to see the objects

[11] de Certeau, p. 117.
[12] Gray, p. 16.
[13] Paul Willis, 'Symbolic Creativity', in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. by Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 282-92 (p. 283).

O'Hara observes as the 'raw materials' his capacities act upon to produce the meanings that create space, and therefore see space-making as a form of symbolic creativity. However, Willis goes further than de Certeau and claims that symbolic creativity 'transforms what is provided and helps to produce specific forms of human identity and capacity',[14] generating the possibility of reading the relationship between the individual and the environment as an identity-forming practice. While for de Certeau the reaction to the environment allows place to be transformed into space, Willis sees individual identity as that which is shaped. This difference also gestures to a significant limitation of Willis's theory since his emphasis on 'the market' as that which raises 'the popular currency of symbolic aspiration'[15] implies that it is the proper, capitalistic aspects of place which drive symbolic creativity, and that it is a unilateral relationship where relationships with one's surroundings can shape individual identity, but not the inverse.

O'Hara's practice of space challenges Willis's implicit assumptions by positing two suggestions: that the individual can play a role in shaping place into space, and that the raw material for this symbolic creativity can come from outside the realm of 'commerce and the consumption of cultural commodities'.[16] Such is the case when O'Hara describes the avenue:

> […] Puerto
> Ricans on the avenue today, which
> makes it beautiful and warm.[17]

The Puerto Ricans that stimulate the sensational transformation of the avenue into a 'beautiful and warm' space are not connoted with commerce like the sign for Juliet's Corner. While O'Hara's exoticisation and stereotyping of these Puerto Ricans is problematic, it highlights their status as a marginalised group which falls outside both the system of cultural commodification and de Certeau's proper since their othering makes them that 'exterior' from which the place distinguishes itself. Evidently, spatial practices do not rely solely on either place or commodities, and our understanding of the relationship between individuals and the environs they inhabit needs to be developed further.

One such alternative spatial theory is offered by Valeria Luiselli's concept of *relingos*: small, undeveloped areas in the city which are 'like odd pieces of a jigsaw, the origin and purpose of which no one remembers any longer, but which, equally, no one dares to destroy or use in any permanent way'.[18] Luiselli's simile of odd jigsaw pieces reflects the broader language of incompleteness with which she describes *relingos* as 'absences', 'abandoned', and 'on the margins of metropolitan life',[19] highlighting the way they do not cohere into the overall structure of the city. This exclusion from the city and lack of known purpose means that *relingos* also evade the proper since 'proper' relies on definition as 'spatial or institutional localization',[20] while the *relingo* relies on its absence. From this absence, the *relingo* becomes a 'sort of depository for possibilities, a place that can be seized by the imagination and

[14] Ibid., p. 285.
[15] Willis, 'Symbolic Creativity', in *The Everyday Life Reader*, p. 291.
[16] Ibid., p. 289.
[17] O'Hara, 'A Step Away from Them', p. 28.
[18] Valeria Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, trans. by Christina MacSweeney (London: Granta, 2013), p. 71.
[19] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[20] de Certeau, p. xix.

inhabited by our phantom-follies'.[21] *Relingos* are, therefore, sites of transformation both literally (as they are used as football pitches or 'the venue for a *tertulia*'[22]) and imaginatively through 'phantom follies', that is, the whims and desires the subject projects onto the *relingo*. As sites that are transformed by human interaction, *relingos* are domains of space which resonate with de Certeau's theorisation of practiced place. However, because *relingos* are drawn from gaps instead of defined and institutionalised locations, they offer a means of expanding upon de Certeau's ideas by presenting the possibility of space constructed outside of place. Being 'on the margins of metropolitan life', *relingos* gain the capacity to absorb that which is marginalised or excluded by the structures of place (like O'Hara's Puerto Ricans) and thus, offer tactical positions from which subjects can create space without relying on said structures as raw material. In this sense, the *relingo* enables us to critically examine the more marginal areas of spatial practice and centre different subjects that de Certeau's formulation risks overlooking.

Relingos are relevant to the New York School because they enable a spatial practice which neither depends on cultural commodities nor subsumes the subject into place. Such a practice occurs in James Schuyler's poem 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank' when Schuyler imagines taking the ferry:

> across the Hudson (or West River,
> if you prefer). To be on
> the water in the dark and
> the wonder of electricity -
> the real beauty of Manhattan[23]

The river, as a flat landscape physically separated from the architecture of the city, already suggests a *relingo.* Schuyler develops this idea further with the parenthetical 'or West River,/if you prefer', which undermines the stability of the place by rendering the given name indeterminate, starkly contrasting the specificity of the named places that appear earlier in the poem. The subsequent line then transfers the power to name the river onto the reader. But it does so in a casual register that renders this naming irrelevant as the parentheses close, thus shifting the emphasis to the 'To be on' at the end of the line. This produces the sensation that the location is undefinable and that the action of being there is what makes it significant; this placelessness transforms the river into a *relingo*. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to access 'the real beauty of Manhattan'.

The significance of this moment becomes apparent when compared with an earlier point in 'Dining Out', where Schuyler attempts to list New York:

> Gage and Tollner's, the Clam Broth House,
> McSorley's and now McFeely's. Was
> that the most beautiful of the
> ferry houses or am I thinking
> of Christopher Street?

[21] Luiselli, p. 74.
[22] Ibid., p. 72.
[23] James Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', in *The New York Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Mark Ford (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), pp. 192-98 (p. 197).

> […]
> And wasn't
> there one at 42nd? It couldn't
> matter less, they're gone[24]

The initial succession of named places gives the impression of a well-defined city, but this is undermined by the lapse into questioning as Schuyler struggles to remember which building he is thinking of. This uncertainty is furthered by the way the verse is structured; 'Was/that' immediately follows the list of restaurants, suggesting that 'that' refers to those restaurants, only for the following line to suddenly switch the subject back to ferry houses. As a result, not only does the poem show Schuyler's uncertainty over which ferry house he is thinking of, but it also leaves the reader uncertain about what Schuyler is asking about to begin with. This uncertainty peaks as Schuyler questions whether the building on 42nd even existed, before resolving that the answer to these questions 'couldn't matter less', rendering the attempt to map the city from within pointless. This movement from apparent clarity to confusion contrasts the latter moment where the indeterminacy of the river as *relingo* enables the poet to clearly conceptualise New York by entertaining the possibility of the 'real'. Through this clarification, the *relingo* can be understood in the context of Epstein's argument that 'for the elusive everyday to become legible and its elements perceptible, a reconfiguration of the geometry of attention is often necessary'.[25] As an alternative space, the *relingo* figuratively creates a new geometry which offers a perspective that makes the everyday legible without relying on the legitimation of the proper; Schuyler is therefore able to transform the lived experience of the city from a muddle of places to a space of authentic beauty, generating his own image of the city independent of the determinations of place.

However, for Schuyler and O'Hara, *relingos* are rarely so straightforward. Schuyler immediately follows the glimpse of real beauty with 'Oh well',[26] shifting from a poetic to a casual register as the sublime moment collapses. The dismissal of the moment reminds us that the ferry trip was not realised and that Schuyler is describing only a desire to visit a space beyond the confusion of the city. Therefore, if there is a *relingo,* it is not one visited but one imaginatively constructed. The idea of a *relingo* created by the subject's imagination is a somewhat unusual use of Luiselli's term, given the significance of plots of land in her definition. However, the concept of *relingo* as a temporary 'depository for possibilities'[27] suggests that they could exist in any space when it is 'seized by the imagination',[28] but only for the moment the imagination acts upon it. In this sense, *relingos*, like de Certeau's spaces, are something practiced, reconnecting them with de Certeau's practiced places. However, there is now a subtle distinction: de Certeau relies on subverting the proper of place, while Luiselli relies on seizing absences where the subject can craft their own spaces.

O'Hara constructs this kind of *relingo* in the poem 'Joe's Jacket':

> […] Joe is still up and we talk
> only of the immediate present and its indiscriminately hitched-to past
> the feeling of life and incident pouring over the sleeping city

[24] Ibid., p. 195.
[25] Epstein, p. 68.
[26] Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', p. 197.
[27] Luiselli, p. 74.
[28] Ibid.

which seems to be bathed in an unobtrusive light which lends things
coherence and an absolute, for just that time as four o'clock goes by[29]

Although this scene presumably occurs in a bedroom, the only indicator of place is the mention of the 'city'. O'Hara's description of the city as 'sleeping' suggests that the scene occurs beyond the normal operations of place, especially in the context of 'the city that never sleeps', where inhabiting a sleeping city would figuratively place oneself beyond New York. Consequently, the place feels indeterminate and the focus falls on the act of talking as what brings forth 'the feeling of life and incident' that defines the scene. In this sense, the moment of intimacy makes the bedroom into a *relingo*, although – as in 'Dining Out' – only temporarily; 'as four o'clock goes by', the stanza breaks and the moment of the *relingo* collapses back into the 'less than average day'.[30] For both Schuyler and O'Hara, these *relingos* enable a new vision of their environment, either revealing 'real beauty' [31] or lending 'coherence and an absolute'.[32] In each case, the *relingo* is not a straightforward transformation of place into space, but the creation of imaginative spaces within moments of everyday life where the poet is freed from the impositions of place and can, therefore, transform their perspective of the city from one of incoherence to that of harmony.

However, while the *relingo* here is based on a single moment, its temporality is more complex. 'Joe's Jacket' claims to focus 'only on the present', but this 'only' is undermined as O'Hara adds 'and its indiscriminately hitched-to past'.[33] The attempt to isolate the present immediately fails as it inevitably carries the past with it. Despite the appearance of an internally coherent moment, there is an underlying tension as this present indiscriminately gestures to moments beyond itself.

Epstein identifies this same tension in Schuyler's work, highlighting that his poetry emerges from 'attention to the present and immediate' but 'At the same time, […] allows the present to mingle with memories of the past'.[34] We have already seen such intermingling in 'Dining Out' when the list of existing restaurants slips into an attempt to remember which of the demolished ferry houses was most beautiful. Here, a link emerges between spatial practice and the tension between present and past, as it is the immediate experience of dining at McFeely's which prompts Schuyler's attempt to chart the extant restaurants which, through the linking of 'Terminal Hotel' with ferry terminals,[35] also becomes an attempt to remember the ferry houses. As the attempt to determine the city slides into futility, Schuyler mourns these lost places:

I cannot accept their
death, or any other death. Bill
Aalto, my first lover
[…]
used

[29] Frank O'Hara, 'Joe's Jacket', in *The New York Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Mark Ford (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), pp. 41-42 (pp. 41-42).
[30] O'Hara, 'Joe's Jacket', p. 42.
[31] Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', p. 197.
[32] O'Hara, 'Joe's Jacket', p. 42.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Epstein, pp. 78-79.
[35] Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', p. 195.

to ride the ferries all the
time[36]

The way the present experience of McFeely's causes Schuyler to make associations beyond that place suggests that memory is a particular form of symbolic creativity and spacing that takes the places of the present as raw material to generate meanings and connections within the individual through associations with the past. But the specific way memory functions alongside spatial practice reflects an important nuance of symbolic creativity.

I have omitted a long parenthesis from the above extract. This parenthesis acts as a kind of textual *relingo*, a space of absence within the poem where Schuyler makes an extended digression into memories: not of New York, but of life with Bill Aalto. It initially appears that this memory has been spontaneously produced by the word 'death', leading Schuyler to associate the death of the ferries with the dead man. In this sense, the imagery of the place produces individual meaning in line with Willis's and de Certeau's ideas. However, after the parenthesis closes, it is revealed that the digression emerged not just due to the mention of death, but because Bill rode those ferries when he was still alive. Since the bracketed section lasts thirty-seven lines, it serves as a formal buffer, a kind of giant caesura that disrupts the poem's rhythm and breaks the otherwise obvious association between Bill and the ferries. Consequently, when the ferries return in the line 'murder when they drink) used/to ride ferries',[37] it feels jarring, both because of the stilted rhythm and because the length of the digression means we have likely forgotten that Schuyler was talking about ferries to begin with. Hence, there is the need to retrace our reading to understand how they relate to Bill.

By masking that the ferries prompted the memories of Bill until after the reader has experienced these memories, Schuyler subverts the order of symbolic creativity. Since the image of the ferries follows from the memories of Bill, there is the sensation that it emerges from those memories instead of provoking them, and therefore, the ferry houses are perceived as a visual remnant of Bill and not simply as objects that he is associated with. Consequently, while the imagery has not changed, the places of the old ferry houses are no longer purely that of the proper; they are irrevocably marked with grief, bearing the death of the ferries and the death of Bill. Memory, therefore, is a form of symbolic creativity that flows both ways; it draws upon the materials of place to create space that reaches into the individual's past, but also uses these memories as raw material to shape place itself by printing personal experience onto it.

From this perspective, we can both corroborate and contest Epstein's claim that Schuyler 'do[es] not seek to transform or to transcend the mundane, ugly, plain, or unpoetic features of everyday life'.[38] Epstein is correct to state that Schuyler eschews epiphany and transcendence; if he ever seems to approach such moments, like 'the real beauty of Manhattan'[39], they are dismissed with an 'Oh well'[40] as the verse returns to quotidian detail. Like O'Hara in 'A Step Away', Schuyler drifts through the city and recounts objects and locations without relying on metaphor, so that everyday life appears untransformed.

[36] Ibid., pp. 196-97.
[37] Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', p. 196.
[38] Epstein, p. 83.
[39] Schuyler, 'Dining Out with Doug and Frank', p. 197.
[40] Ibid.

However, through his use of memory, Schuyler does transform everyday life, just not in the way Epstein understands it. Through memory, everyday life becomes a palimpsest of personal associations that enable the poet to read himself within it, transforming the city from the place of the proper to a space of human experiences. Memory, like the *relingo*, transforms the place of the everyday by transforming our perception of it.

While the poems we have examined initially present reports of untransformed quotidian detail, they go on to demonstrate various spatial practices that transform the realm of everyday life into a site of personal significance. De Certeau's space and Willis's symbolic creativity enable the generation of significances which transform place into a space full of resonances beyond the ideological reach of the proper. Luiselli's *relingos* open up further readings where de Certeau and Willis's focus on subverting the ideological proper risks overlooking the marginal. As a critical concept, *relingos* circumvent this issue by allowing for entirely new spaces to be imaginatively constructed within the gaps and margins of everyday life that offer both relief from the incoherencies of the city and alternative perspectives of it, unboundaried by place. Memory, meanwhile, enhances this sense of dualism within spatial practice, allowing place to generate spaces of memory while also transforming place by writing those memories and, by extension, personal identity onto it. Bringing these different concepts together elucidates how reading the spatial practices of these poets not only reveals the ways they locate their own subjectivity within place, but also creates a way of reading that prioritises the subjects and their social relations as what shapes New York, rather than the built environment. Such space practices, particularly the *relingo*, have implications beyond literature and within the wider field of spatial studies. Doreen Massey's proposition, for example, that 'Space does not exist prior to identities/entities and their relations',[41] resonates with the *relingo*'s capacity to generate space through shared practices. There are provocative examinations of the intersection between Luiselli's and Massey's conceptualisations of space that currently lie beyond the scope of this article's relatively narrow focus on O'Hara and Schuyler.

Even within the small selection of work considered here, these practices operate in a myriad of different ways, often overlapping to produce complex constructions of space which defy the ideological constraints of the proper place. However, they all exemplify a relationship between place and creativity that draws upon elements of everyday life and imbues them with new resonances which make them specific to the poet's experience of them. To transform the everyday in this way is not an act of transcendence but one of re(-)cognition: seeing and thinking in terms of practice and social relations rather than the confines of the built environment. In a literal sense, the stylistic properties of these poems leave quotidian detail untransformed, but they also make it their primary focus. Through this focus, they transform how we see everyday life, unveiling the layered practices and associations within.

[41] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 33.

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'Trees to Flesh': Human-Arboreal Trans-Corporeality and Dendromorphosis in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*

Paula van Eenennaam Sánchez

> As he cut, the wilderness of the world receded, the vast invisible web of filaments that connected human life to animals, trees to flesh and bones to grass shivered as each tree fell and one by one the web strands snapped.[1]
>
> – Annie Proulx, *Barkskins*

Introduction

The portrayal of the natural world and the consequences of human interventionism on ecological biodiversity are at the heart of much of Annie Proulx's literary works. As Mark Asquith notes, 'Proulx is a rural woman and happy to project herself as such, bringing the same degree of care and attention to her creation of her literary persona as to her fictional characters.'[2] Her most recent novel, *Barkskins*, published in 2016, builds on this reading of Proulx's trajectory as a writer as it engages in an intimate exploration of environmental degradation of the North American forests and the consequent loss of biodiversity, as well as its repercussions on the humans and other natural beings that inhabit them. The novel ambitiously traces the impact of colonialism in ecosystem degradation through a historical narrative of logging in the New World and the formation of the North American identity from the colonial settlement of New France in the seventeenth century to the present day. It does so by following the intersecting lives of two different families across generations and their complicated relationships with colonisation, deforestation, cultural hegemony, and indigeneity.

Proulx's interest in this novel lies implicitly in the entanglement of human and arboreal life and the fragility of this interconnection as 'the vast invisible web of filaments' that connect them shivers and is severed, 'the web strands snapped', by the felling of trees.[3] This is exemplified in the epigraph above. This ominously introduces the first instance of tree chopping at the beginning of the novel as the characters of René Sel and Charles Duquet make it to New France and are employed to clear a piece of land for a new building. It serves as a warning to the reader of what is to come.

Proulx's attention to the material interconnection between the human and the arboreal, 'trees to flesh and bones to grass', points towards the recognition of a trans-corporeal relationship between both and the 'vast invisible web of filaments' that connect them.[4] In this essay, I am interested in pursuing a closer examination of instances of trans-

[1] Annie Proulx, *Barkskins* (London: 4th Estate, 2016), p. 12.
[2] Mark Asquith, *Annie Proulx's Brokeback Mountain and Postcard* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), p. 2.
[3] Proulx, p. 12.
[4] Ibid.

corporeality between human and arboreal bodies within the novel and, in particular, her use of *dendromorphosis*. Throughout the paper, I use Berthold Schoene's conception of dendromorphosis from his recent paper 'Arborealism, or do novels do trees?' (2021) as a full mind-and-body transformation into treehood.[5] It is my contention that, by bringing attention to the proximity or gaps between human and arboreal bodies and areas of physical contact or separation, Proulx challenges and blurs the boundaries upheld by the traditional dichotomy between what has been defined as human and nature. Through her use of dendromorphosis, she repositions the human as being within the ecosystem of interspecies relations that is nature.

'Trees to Flesh and Bones to Grass': Human and Arboreal Trans-corporealities

Trans-corporeality is a term coined by Stacy Alaimo in her seminal work *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010) which emphasises the 'interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and non-human natures'.[6] In recognising and bringing to the front the fluid dynamics and interdependencies of human and non-human natural bodies, trans-corporeality operates on the rejection of any concept of externality. Indeed, Alaimo's trans-corporeality is predicated on the notion that the human is already intermeshed within the natural world and is therefore inseparable from the more-than-human natural world. Consequently, 'conceptions of the human self are profoundly altered by the recognition that "the environment" is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves.'[7] In the epigraph, Proulx echoes some of Alaimo's ideas of trans-corporeality as she notes not only the interconnectedness of the natural world – which she refers to as a 'vast invisible web of filaments that connect human life to animals' – but also emphasises the materiality on which these relationships rely on or through which they are negotiated and mediated: 'trees to flesh and bones to grass.'[8]

However, this holistic view of the natural world is undercut within the same sentence through the imagery of cutting, felling, and snapping of the natural world and the filaments that connect and hold the whole together. This points to the complicated dynamics that emerge within an ecosystem of interspecies reliance. For, as Timothy Morton points out in *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017), 'relying-on is the uneasy fuel of' what he terms as 'the symbiotic real': the entangled networks of human and non-human interspecies interactions that sustain ecosystems.[9] 'This relying-on', he notes, 'always has its haunted aspect, so that a symbiont can become toxic or strange-seeming relationships can form, which is how evolution works.'[10] This brings attention to the co-existence of symbiosis or parasitism that complicates human and non-human trans-corporeal encounters and builds

[5] Berthold Schoene, 'Arborealism, or do novels do trees?', *Textual Practice*, 36.9 (2021), pp. 1-24.
[6] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 2.
[7] Ibid., p. 4.
[8] Proulx, p. 12.
[9] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2017), p. 2.
[10] Ibid.

on Alaimo's conceptualisation of the latter. This dual potential of interspecies kinship and toxicity is masterfully implied within the isolated ecosystem of this sentence as the imagery of connectedness and interlinkage is contrasted with the haunting threat of destruction and degradation.

This ambivalent view of interspecies relying-on is replicated throughout the novel in the way in which colonisers, or people from European descent, and indigenous peoples approach their relationship to trees in the ecosystems they inhabit. As the colonial settlers and missionaries arrive on the continent, the Mi'kmaq population of New France is viewed to relate to their surrounding natural world in the following way:

> He saw that they were so tightly knitted into the natural world that their language could only reflect the union and that neither could be separated from the other. They seemed to believe they had grown from this place as trees grow from the soil, as new stones emerge aboveground in spring.[11]

The Mi'kmaq are represented here as 'tightly knitted into the natural world' and therefore indivisible from it, 'neither could be separated from the other.'[12] Even their creation stories position them within this natural web of interspecies connections as their identity is tied to place and they position themselves as equal or symbiont to trees, believing 'they had grown from this place as trees grow from the soil.'[13] The substance of the human, then, is rendered as indistinguishable from that of a tree.

This is contrasted with the male missionary's perspective of himself and his own identity in relation to place. He positions himself as a distant observer, removed from the dynamic web of human and non-human kinship and relying-on, even though he inhabits the same place even if only temporarily. This self-imposed removal from the invisible web of life is echoed in the next paragraph as he claims, 'he was not of this place, he had not sprouted here and so to him the ground was hard.'[14] Emphasis is put here on the missionary's feeling of estrangement from the Mi'kmaq's way of life and their fertile relationship to the land. He views the ground under his feet as 'hard' and rejects his sprouting there, consequently rejecting any potential symbiotic relationship with trees. This feeling of estrangement is already evident in the previous paragraph as the pronouns 'he' and 'them' are contrasted throughout the two sentences. 'He' is only mentioned once and remains at the beginning of the sentence, syntactically severed, 'separated from the other' at the end of the sentence and removed from the dynamics of co-habitation and reliance between the Mi'kmaq 'they' and the natural world.[15] This extract reveals the complex interplay of personal distance and proximity to nature and trees, exhibited by the colonial missionary and the Mi'kmaq

[11] Proulx, p. 149.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

respectively, which is then replicated across the following generations of the Sel and Duquet family lines and informs their position as a symbiont or parasite to trees.

Touching as Meaning Making

This intimacy, or lack thereof, is dictated by the character's physical distance or proximity to trees and the land; their conscious intellectual engagement with other natural beings is mediated through touch. Touch is 'immediate, proximal, and bodily' and it implies 'an intuitive, interior, and bodily way of knowing' which is 'conventionally construed as a non-objective way of making meaning.'[16] In this passage, the colonial missionary rejects the notion of touching-as-knowing in favour of his position as an uninvolved observer as he maintains his separation from the Mi'kmaq and dismisses their creation stories that connect them to the land as mere 'beliefs'. In this way, he draws on the traditional hierarchical structures that disregard touch as a 'non-objective way of making meaning' and uphold sight, 'equated with reason and the mind', as the dominant way of meaning making in the sensorium hierarchy.[17]

This struggle between different meaning-making systems – between sight and touch as a way to navigate the world – is poignantly felt as Beatrix Duquet and Kuntaw Sel battle to understand each other's ways of understanding and relating to the natural world around them. Beatrix, 'a half-Indian woman who had been brought up as a whiteman girl', understands the world through reading and distanced observation.[18] Kuntaw, on the other hand, is versed in the immersive Mi'kmaq experience of touching as a meaning-making medium and unsuccessfully tries to translate that to Beatrix. Both knowledge-making systems clash against each other as each struggles to understand the world through the other's perspective and upbringing:

> "And now do you understand that the forest and the ocean shore are tied together with countless strings as fine as spiderweb silks? Do you begin to glimpse Indian ways of learning? I would not wish an ignorant wife."
>
> "Yes," Beatrix said. "But it is too much to remember."
>
> "Not to remember like a lesson," he said, "but to know, *to feel*." [my emphasis][19]

Kuntaw reiterates the holistic perspective that ecosystems are 'tied together with countless strings' of interspecies dependencies and emphasises the materiality of tactile sense as a

[16] Stephanie Springgay, '"How to Write as Felt" Touching Transmaterialities and More-Than-Human Intimacies', in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 38 (2018), 57-69 (p. 63).
[17] Ibid.
[18] Proulx, p. 278.
[19] Ibid.

way through which this knowledge can be 'felt'.[20] Through touch, then, he 'threatens bodily boundaries opening up different corporeal ontologies' as he embeds the human within this entangled system of relationships.[21] By bringing attention to the trans-material ties between the human and the non-human and recentring the human body as already in nature, he uncovers the limitations of sight as the sole tool for meaning-making.

By considering the felt experience that ties the human to the surrounding natural environment, he breaks down the illusion of the human/nature divide and rejects the notion of an environmental externality that sight and Beatrix's physical separation from nature afford her perspective and that of the colonial missionary. The existence of an environmental 'outside' as separate from a human 'inside' is, thus, contested, as the boundaries delimiting the corporeal inside/outside become muddled in Kuntaw's experiencing of the natural world. The elimination of the concept of externality, then, makes Kuntaw's experience – and, by extension, that of the Mi'kmaq – of trans-corporeality the 'ultimate disenchanter attesting to the fact that the human body cannot occupy any outside position', and calls into question any existence of a disengaged observer.[22]

Touch, then, uncovers all the ways in which the human body is already engaged within the entangled web of nature. Moreover, 'to touch is the opening of one body to another' and carries with it the potential for affective ties to form between the two, as one cannot but be influenced by that which they are in contact with.[23] In Erin Manning's *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007), she conceptualises touch as a form of reaching out. 'We reach toward that which is in-formation or trans-formation,' she indicates, which can only result in 'altering us'.[24] Donna Haraway carries this forward in her book *When Species Meet* (2008) by pondering on how the act of touching or reaching out might world us in different ways: 'How does this touch make us more worldly […]?'[25]

'He touched the bark': Dendromorphosis and Encountering the Arboreal Other

The transformative or altering potential of touch and interspecies material connection is perhaps best explored by Proulx through the character of Jinot Sel. In chapter 49 of *Barkskins*, Jinot is working in a pine forest cutting down trees when an accidental fire starts and spreads rapidly. The wind contributes to the rapidly spreading fire, transforming the forest into 'a concert of combustion'.[26] He manages to narrowly escape the fire by running into the river and making himself '[S]ubmerge, rise, submerge again' in its waters.[27] He survives the ordeal but suffers critical burns to his legs. He later describes this as a physically transformative

[20] Ibid.
[21] Springgay, p. 63.
[22] Monika Rogowska-Stangret, 'Corpor(e)al Cartographies of New Materialism: Meeting the *Elsewhere* Halfway', *Minnesota Review*, 88 (2017), 59-68 (p. 64).
[23] Springgay, p. 63.
[24] Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 85.
[25] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 6.
[26] Proulx, p. 385.
[27] Ibid., p. 386.

experience for him as it turns him into a 'burned people', a 'walking dead man.'[28] One of his legs is left scarred and is frozen 'in an unnatural position', affecting his mobility and ability where there is 'not a chance [he] can do woods work now', as he had been up until that point.[29]

In this way, Jinot seems to undergo a process of *dendromorphosis* in which the burned state of his leg and his reduced mobility render him more tree-like. The process is described as a traumatic and painful one: 'Jinot understood his legs had been burned. His charred pants had mostly disappeared and in places the wool cloth baked into the flesh.'[30] His flesh burns away, and the wool of his trousers and the ash of the burning trees are 'baked into his flesh', leaving behind the rigidity and scarring that is usually characteristic of a tree's bark.[31] Mirroring Jinot's participation in the act of limbing trees – removing a tree's branches – now the trees have claimed one of his limbs. In this violent, trans-material encounter, and ultimate fusion between the human and arboreal bodies, Jinot comes to embody and materialises the novel's evocative title, *Barkskins*.

This dendromorphosis is not merely a physical one, confined to the material, but goes further to infiltrate the character's behaviour and desires. Recalling Manning, he has been altered by his physical, trans-material exchange with the trees; he has shed the skin of his old self to become something else. Just like the forest of burning pyrophiles in which this transformation occurs, he comes 'out of the year of trial by fire wanting children'.[32] Therefore, the forest of white pines – which requires some fire to clear the underwood and help with pinecone bursting and seed dispersion – imprints itself not only on Jinot's flesh, but also influences his reproductive desires. Through contact with the arboreal, then, Jinot's material and immaterial self is opened up to the transformative influence of encountering the arboreal other. In this way, he becomes 'more worldly' as he is worlded by trees and, as a result, inhabits the world differently.[33]

Moreover, this trans-material infiltration of the arboreal into human reveals the latent potential of the affective bonds that emerge from the physical contact between the two. Jinot exemplifies this potential for interspecies affect in a later passage in the novel. After he is healed from his injuries, he pursues axe-making to make money for him and his family and embarks on a voyage to New Zealand with his new employer. There he is stunned by the appearance of the forest which 'moved him powerfully'.[34] Accustomed to the deforestation and increasing decline of 'the pine forests of Maine, New Brunswick and Ontario', the forests of New Zealand seem to him 'a fresh world pulsing with life and color'.[35] During his exploration of the forest and its trees, he encounters some kauri trees to which he experiences an emotional, affective bond:

[28] Ibid., p. 389; p. 390.
[29] Ibid., p. 390; p. 392.
[30] Ibid., p. 387.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 393.
[33] Haraway, p. 5.
[34] Proulx, p. 426.
[35] Proulx, p. 426.

> When he came on a secluded stand of kauri, their great grey trunks like monster elephant legs, he touched bark, looked up into the bunched limbs at the tops of the sheer and monstrous stems. He imagined he felt the tree flinch and drew back his hand.[36]

Despite the initially monstrous descriptions of the trees, 'their great grey trunks like monster elephant legs,' Jinot is not deterred in reaching out towards the tree and placing his hand on one of the trunks.[37] Despite the initial alterity of the trees, there is a sense of familiar recognition as he notices the 'legs' and 'limbs' that compose the trees' body, not unlike that of the human. 'He touched the bark,' initiating physical contact with the tree, bark to skin and skin to bark.[38] This accentuates the sense of familiarity and recognition in the vegetal-other as it is evocative of Randy Laist's observation that 'the shape of our hands and fingers are reverse-molds of millions of years of tree branches', when considering the pivotal role of arboreal corporeality in the evolution of human anatomy.[39] Thus, both human and arboreal bodies are examined, mirrored and refracted in this passage as Jinot's experience of the encounter is informed by the melding of both familiarity and alterity embodied by the tree. This trans-corporeal encounter between Jinot and the kauri tree, along with his previous dendromorphosis as a result of his traumatic experience in the forest fire, allows him a more nuanced and bodily connection with the tree – whether real or not – as he imagines himself feeling 'the tree flinch.'[40] In a trans-corporeal response, he reacts to the tree's flinching by mirroring that same action and drawing his hand back.

Jinot returns to this sense of connection to and inscrutability of kauri trees at a later point in the novel as he fatally injures himself in the task of trying to cut down a tree. As he pants, he leans against the maimed kauri and accepts his fate, 'he put his head against the old tree's grey bark and whispered, "You got me this time."'[41] Again, his sense of connection in this passage is mediated through physical contact with the tree whilst it maintains a sense of arboreal alterity as Jinot's verbal communication remains unilateral and unanswered by the tree. The human-arboreal corporeal mirroring found in the previous passage is also furthered here as the maiming of the kauri results in Jinot's injury that will later lead to a deadly infection. Both of these instances reveal the trans-material ties that emerge from the trans-corporeal contact between human and arboreal bodies and reinforces the transformational potential of touch to alter the self and create affective ties with the arboreal other.

Moreover, Annie Proulx's depiction of dendromorphosis and her focus on corporeal mirroring in the previously discussed passages might be read as a challenge to the notion

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[36] Ibid., p. 427.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Randy Laist, 'Introduction', in *Plants and Literature: Essays in Critical Plant Studies,* ed. by Randy Laist (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013), 9-18 (p. 9).
[40] Proulx, p. 427.
[41] Ibid., p. 440.

that plants 'appear to be nothing like us'.[42] By imagining the material impact of touching between trees and human bodies, she rejects their traditional western distancing and allows for an intimate and affective proximity of the two. Pulling from the human-biased gravitation towards non-human animals, 'which appeal to our imagination and conscience by virtue of their creaturely similitude,' Proulx familiarises trees to our imagination by positioning them vis-à-vis the human body.[43]

Anthropomorphism has been contested during the past decades in academic criticism as prioritising the human perception above that of other non-human natural beings, and, consequently affording more value to those beings who appear more human-like. As a result, plants are 'expected to exhibit animal-*like* qualities in order to be acknowledged as sensitive living organisms, rather than being appreciated in their own right and on their own terms [authors' emphasis]'.[44] In this way, *Barkskins* might be criticised for perpetuating an anthropocentric point of view as it attempts to familiarise the human and the arboreal through corporeal mirroring. Jinot's projection of his own limbs onto the kauri trees might then be read as an imposition of his own human bodily experience to that of the trees. Proulx has been criticised by Schoene for falling short of achieving full *arborealism* and for not achieving to 'install a viewpoint beyond the human'.[45]

However, rather than falling into the shortcomings of anthropomorphism, it is my contention that she turns the latter on its head by maintaining a degree of arboreal alterity and by defamiliarising the human from itself through her use of dendromorphism. Where anthropomorphosis would require the imposition of human qualities onto the trees, Proulx's dendromorphosis explores the opposite and experiments with the influence of tree-like qualities on the human through trans-corporeal exchanges and interactions. In this way, she displaces humanity from its anthropocentrism and places it in mutual conversation with the arboreal. To use Schoene's own interpretation of arborealism, it is my opinion that, in her use of dendromorphism, Proulx effects 'an interrogation of our ways of doing trees (and indeed our ways of doing the entire world) by inviting trees to have a say and 'do the human' in turn'.[46] This has been briefly explored in my previous analysis of Jinot's trial by fire and the effects this trans-corporeal encounter with trees infiltrates his desire to reproduce and father children and the interspecies affective ties he forms later in life. However, this dendromorphosis is expanded beyond the characters' interactions with trees within the novel and is also narratively present at a larger scale in the way that *Barkskins* is framed and structured.

[42] Schoene, p. 4.
[43] Schoene, p. 4.
[44] Monica Gagliano, John R. Ryan, and Patricia Vieira, 'Introduction', in *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*, eds. Monica Gagliano, John R. Ryan, and Patricia Vieira (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), vii-xxxiii (p. xii).
[45] Schoene, p. 10.
[46] Ibid., p. 2.

Family Lines, Arboreal Corporeality and Textual Dendromorphosis

The novel is structured in fragmented chapters that follow the lives of the different generations of Sels and Duquets throughout several centuries up until the present day. Nevertheless, the timeline in which the narration takes place is far from linear as the chapters jump from one perspective to another, often turning back on itself and skipping over several years entirely, almost imitating the circular, dendrochronological structure of tree-rings. In this way, Proulx challenges the linearity of an anthropocentric perspective as the novel's 'focus on humanity appears torn, fragmented, distracted, incidental, unable to identify or concentrate on the main events due to the gravitational pull of a larger, indifferent, decidedly non-anthropocentric order', and instead takes on a more biocentric approach.[47] The presence of the arboreal is thus experienced at a structural level as it engages not only the characters within the novel, but also the narrative direction of the novel itself. Its fragmentation and non-linearity might then be read as symptomatic of a textual dendromorphosis in which human experience is entirely framed by arboreality, 'the unfolding of its human drama from start to finish embedded wholly in treeness.'[48]

This textual dendromorphosis and its narrative consequences seem to be dictated by arboreal corporeality as the human is stretched to fit into elaborate genealogical trees which can be found in the final appendages of the novel. This is impactful in the way the novel is narrated as Proulx gives more focus to certain perspectives, like that of René, Charles, Jinot and Lavinia, among others, imitating the stretching of the central branches of a tree around which other sub-narratives will sprout. On the other hand, other less prevalent perspectives are disrupted and cut short as if trimmed or pruned off the central family trees. This contributes to the fragmentation of chronical linearity and diminishes the relevance of the human within the novel's biocentric perspective. 'Bodies' in *Barkskins*, as Ben de Bruyn notes, are 'fragile, mortal, and open to their environments, family members recycle features and behaviours'.[49]

This reminder of the fragility of human bodies and the recycling of features within the members of the same family is introduced from the very beginning of the novel – in what turns out to be a recurrent narrative feature of Proulx – as the reader is introduced to Achille, René Sel's brother, in the second page of the book to then be killed off in the next paragraph. After the fact, René takes on 'his brother's underwear and wool trousers and his short coat', and proceeds to work within the woods as his brother had.[50] It is no coincidence that he dies at the end of the first part of the novel in a similar manner to his brother; Achilles pierced by 'a log with a broken limb, sharpened and polished to a spear by the friction of its travels' through the water, and René 'dead at forty from a chop to his neck', 'his knotted hands clenched on the axe handle, the bit sunk into a cedar' that he had been trying to cut down.[51] In this way, the events in these characters' lives echo the circularity of tree-rings as René's

[47] Ibid., p. 12.
[48] Schoene, p. 11.
[49] Ben de Buryn, 'Learning to Be a Species in the Anthropocene: On Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*', *Frame*, 29.2 (2016), 71-90 (p. 84).
[50] Proulx, p. 4.
[51] Ibid.; Ibid., p. 58.

narrative, which comprises the whole first part of the novel, is built on the recycled fragments of his brother's life, which spans the totality of three paragraphs, and is then pruned off the central narrative. The contrast of their lifespans and their sudden deaths are a reminder of their corporeal fragility against that of the genealogical tree their lives begin to construct. This narrative effect results in 'the perspective of the individual creature' often being 'discarded for a panoramic view of larger populations' and the ecosystem as a cohesive whole.[52]

Indeed, if one takes a moment to consider arboreal bodies, one would realise that trees are 'extensive, distributed, and entangling'.[53] As opposed to the limitations that compose the boundaries to human bodies, to be able to trace the arboreal, 'one must dive into the soil, mingle with symbiotic fungi and microbes, converse with the insects, and be lured along with other plant cultivators, only some of whom are humans.'[54] In this way, Proulx's stretching of the human onto an arboreal body, a family tree that traces the generations of the Sels and Duquets, defamiliarises the former and repositions it within the vast entangled web of beings that comprises natural ecosystems and brings attention to the invisible filaments that connect different species.

On the other hand, in what might seem a contradictory turn, Proulx also uses the genealogical tree structure of the families, and by extension the novel's narrative, to bring attention to the human artifice that underlies it. She recognises the limitations of the tree as a framing structure for linear human experience as the characters' interactions among each other are complicated and take a rhizomatic turn, resulting in the distinctive family trees being muddled and the characters escaping the organised encasing of the genealogical tree diagram. This is perhaps best represented by the Sel family tree line as it expands in complexity and produces many unnamed descendants, several sets of twins and an added family tree for 'Other Miuses', all 'as if to further demonstrate the family's wild, unruly fecundity'.[55] The Duquet/Duke family tree does not escape this unruliness even as it attempts to visually conceal it. A closer look reveals it to be as disrupted as that of the Sels as it uncovers the Americanisation of the original family name, as well as the many adoptions and illegitimate descendants. Perhaps most tellingly, it trims off an entire branch of the family tree as it conceals Beatrix Duquet's descendants with the addendum 'see Sel family tree'.[56] Proulx's family trees, then, despite their orderly, tree-like appearance, 'disperse into a rhizosphere of freely intersecting familial clumps – a representational move,' according to Berthold Schoene, 'that effectively deconstructs our preconception of how reproduction is supposed to work' and how genealogical lines should be represented.[57] Therefore, by depicting the genealogical trees, Proulx represents the anthropogenic impulse and struggle to maintain order and the ultimate failings of that attempt.

[52] de Buryn, p. 84.
[53] Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, 'Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 23.3 (2012), 74-118 (p. 81).
[54] Ibid.
[55] Proulx, p. 719; Schoene, p. 12-3.
[56] Proulx, p. 721.
[57] Schoene, p. 13.

Conclusion: Interspecies Kinship and Alterity

What I infer from my overall analysis of the novel is that, by bringing attention to the human mediation or intentional pruning in the family trees, Proulx hints at the impossibility of a fully-fledged dendromorphosis where the human is mapped out onto the arboreal seamlessly. Thus, the human can never fully inhabit the arboreal – to access trees 'in their full undistorted plantness' – consequently highlighting an arboreal alterity that is beyond reach to the human but which, nevertheless, finds itself materially tied to.[58] By depicting the limitations of the human in accessing treeness and her nuanced use of dendromorphosis, Proulx engages with Schoene's crucial questioning of 'how much plant difference can narrative accommodate without lapsing into injurious capture and distortion'.[59] Through her experimentation in defamiliarising and stretching the human to fit the arboreal, both within the text and through its narrative structure, Proulx achieves the balance that Schoene's question poses of challenging the shortcomings of anthropomorphism by turning it on its head whilst still introducing a narratively sustainable amount of alterity to signal at a different mode of existence beyond that of the human. Therefore, the novel does, in my opinion, succeed at installing a viewpoint beyond the anthropogenic and, by extension, accomplishes Schoene's conception of arborealism, that of 'putting human life in perspective by framing our existence – and co-existence with trees and other lifeforms – within a grander scheme of spatial and temporal scales'.[60]

Through dendromorphosis, Proulx explores the affective ties that link the human with non-human nature as it highlights interspecies interactions between human and arboreal bodies and embeds the human into treeness, as well as contending with different modes of existing in the world that challenge the prevalent anthropogenic perspective. In this way, *Barkskins* engages the reader in releasing 'the anthropocentric copyright control' on reality and 'allow[ing] everything else in the universe to have it'.[61] As Timothy Morton remarks, 'dropping the idea that (human) thought is the top access mode and holding that brushing against, licking or irradiating are also access modes as valid (or invalid) as thinking.'[62] Or, in the case of *Barkskins*, coming to terms with the arboreal other whilst recognising the invisible filaments that tie humans and trees together. A focus on trans-corporeality, then, reveals Proulx's intentional use of proximity and distance as she conceives of the boundaries between human and arboreal bodies as vibrant and full of significance, and calls for an understanding of interspecies kinship and alterity.

[58] Ibid., p. 6.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 10.
[61] Morton, pp. 10-11.
[62] Ibid.

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Belonging by Not Belonging: Nomadism in Maeve Brennan's *The Long-Winded Lady*

Mai Hoang Nguyen

Born in Ireland in 1917, Maeve Brennan left for Washington with her family at the age of seventeen, and afterwards settled in the heart of New York for the rest of her life. Here she worked as a copywriter for *Harper's Bazaar* and later joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1949. Her contributions to the publication encompassed various forms of literature, including book reviews, fashion notes, essays, and short stories. From 1954 to 1981, Brennan adopted the pseudonym 'The Long-Winded Lady' for *The New Yorker*'s weekly column 'Talk of the Town', in which she depicted scenes from daily life in Times Square and the Village. A considerable number of these sketches were subsequently compiled in *The Long-Winded Lady* collection, first published in 1969. These pieces immerse the reader in an extensive walking tour, with Brennan serving as the tour guide. However, her tour is not intended for mere sightseers, but rather for those intimately acquainted with the city. The purpose of this literary journey is not to discover, but rather to appreciate the everyday with the lens of fresh, attentive eyes. In these writings, Brennan 'revealed herself as a 'traveler in residence', a flaneur of daily life in mid-century New York, who had, in the words of John Updike, 'put New York back into *The New Yorker*'.[1]

> Reflecting on her own writing in *The Long-Winded Lady*, Brennan remarked:
>
> When she [The Long-Winded Lady] looks about her, it is not the strange or exotic ways of people that interests her, but the ordinary ways, when something that is familiar to her shows. She is drawn to what she recognises, or half-recognises, and these forty-seven pieces are the record of forty-seven moments of recognition. … I think the Long-Winded Lady is real when she writes, here, about some of the sights she saw in the city she loves.[2]

By emphasising the importance of the 'ordinary', the 'familiar', and 'moments of recognition' to The Long-Winded Lady, Brennan subtly implies the significance of autobiography in her writings. Her multiple relocations in the past and self-reflexive resistance to the traditional trope of 'exile' within the Irish context have played a pivotal role in shaping the nomadic lifestyle that she actively chooses. I further suggest that the city of New York, with its specific geography and populace also serves as an ideal place to

[1] John Updike, 'Talk of a Sad Town', *The Atlantic* (October 1696) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/10/talk-of-a-sad-town/659287/>.
[2] Maeve Brennan, 'Author's Note', *The Long-Winded Lady: Notes from The New Yorker* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1998), p. 13.

accommodate this particular mode of living. This city epitomises what I call 'a place of not belonging' where the pressure of feeling attached or engaged is eschewed. Furthermore, Brennan's choice of short-story genre and her writing style that bears the indelible imprint of her previous experiences as a magazine writer for prestigious publications such as *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Irish Press* and *The New York Times* also contributes to the success of embracing her nomadism.

As previously mentioned, the role of autobiography holds significant importance when engaging with Brennan's works, comparable to its significance in understanding Joyce's Dublin.[3] Brennan's childhood and teenage years were characterised by a sense of constant movement, likely influencing the nomadic lifestyle she actively embraced while writing under the persona of The Long-Winded Lady. Born on 6 January 1917, Brennan was the second daughter of highly politically active parents, Bob and Una Brennan[4]. Both were involved in the Easter Rising, in which Bob was named 'brigade quartermaster in Wexford, with the rank of captain',[5] while Una 'organised food kitchens and first-aid posts' and together with two other women raised the tricolour above the building of Athenæum in Enniscorthy.[6] The Rising was ultimately suppressed, leading to Bob's arrest on 1 May 1916, along with five other officers.[7] When Brennan was born, Bob was being kept in Lewes Prison in Sussex, and was not released until June 1917.[8]

Growing up during a time of displacement and danger, Brennan's childhood was punctuated by raids from 'unfriendly men dressed in civilian clothes carrying revolvers' looking for her father, who always had to be on the run due to his political involvement.[9] The Brennans had hardly ever lived together as a family, undergoing multiple relocations between Wexford and Dublin. In 1921, when Brennan was six years old, her mother purchased a house on Cherryfield Avenue, Dublin – their first owned residence after years of perpetual movement. Upon completing her primary education at a school near their house, at the age of twelve, Brennan moved to Kilcullen to enter a boarding-school that 'laid great emphasis on religion and on sin'.[10] She seems to have experienced an unhappy time there, as she was nearly expelled once due to organising a secret society with a group of girls to teach each other Irish,[11] and the nuns explained to her in public that she was 'damned, damned, damned!'[12]

[3] Ellen McWilliams, 'Maeve Brennan and James Joyce', *Irish Studies Review*, 26.1 (2018) pp.11-123, p.119.
[4] Angela Bourke, *Maeve Brennan: Homesick at the New Yorker* (New York: Counterpoint, 2004), p. 43.
[5] Ibid., p. 39.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p. 40.
[9] Joanne O'Leary, 'What makes a waif?', *London Review of Books*, 40.17 (2018), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n17/joanne-o-leary/what-makes-a-waif>, qtd. in Bourke, *Maeve Brennan: Homesick at the New Yorker,* p. 67.
[10] Bourke, p. 97.
[11] Ibid., p. 102.
[12] Ibid., qtd. in *Maeve Brennan to William Maxwell* (Illinois: University of Illinois Library, Rare Book and Special Collections Library, Urbana-Champaign Campus, 1957), William Maxwell Papers, pp. 1-37/38.

In her secondary education, she spent four years at Scoil Bhríghde where her gifts for English and literature were cultivated. Her language was sophisticated in the letters she sent to her father, and at the age of sixteen, her essay about 'a 200-year-old collection of pamphlets on Irish economics that she had discovered in Coolnaboy'[13] was published in the *Irish Press*. At that time, Maeve did not know that only one year later, she would be preparing for her biggest relocation when her family was about to leave for Washington as Bob was elected the first Dominion ambassador in 1934.[14]

In her sister's recollections, Maeve at the time 'was excited, eager to know about where they were going, and reading avidly about America in the newspapers'.[15] When their family arrived in Washington, they first stayed at the Fairfax Hotel on Massachusetts Avenue, and soon moved into a house rented for them by the Legation.[16] Maeve's primary education continued as she enrolled in Immaculata Seminary – 'a high school and junior college for women only' which was 'once again, controlled by nuns'.[17] There, she experienced what Bourke regards as 'culture shock' upon her encounter with American beauty culture in which women's appearance is of utmost importance.[18] Maeve graduated from her high school in 1936 and moved to American University for the last two years of her Bachelor's degree[19]. The co-educational environment provided her with a novel experience, distinct from her upbringing, allowing her greater freedom to live according to her own desires., and was highly active in her social life. Maeve actively engaged in her social life, assuming various roles such as an English major, yearbook editor, copy reader for the student newspaper, member of both the French Club and the German Club, and also a member of the all-female Phi Mu 'fraternity'.[20] In her father's account, Maeve seemed to have pursued two degrees at the same time: 'She took a degree in Arts at the American University, Washington and another in Library Science at the Catholic University of America', yet there was no record of her graduation from the latter.[21] On 16 June 1942, she was reported by the *Irish Times* to be working as a librarian at the University of America's Catholic School of Social Service, but the paper did not know that she had already left Washington for New York by June 1942.[22] 'Maeve had always been more like Bob than Una in personality: where Emer and Derry [her sisters] were quiet, she was volatile'.[23] 'Popular, witty and wickedly clever'[24] and also seeming to be 'the least domesticated',[25] Maeve was determined to make her own way in the world.

[13] Bourke, p. 113.
[14] Ibid., p. 117.
[15] Ibid., p. 126.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 127.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 128.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 134.
[22] Ibid., p. 136.
[23] Ibid., p. 133.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., p. 135.

The experience of exile, coupled with Maeve Brennan's active and volatile personality, may provide insight into the nomadic lifestyle depicted in her collection of *The Long-Winded Lady: Notes from the New Yorker*. She frequently transitions from one hotel to another, commencing her essays with statements like: 'I am living at the moment on Washington Place',[26] 'I have temporary residence in one of those small old houses on Tenth Street',[27] 'From the windows I have on the eleventh floor of this old Broadway hotel',[28] or introducing eagerly: 'I am staying in the [Greenwich] Village',[29] 'I am at the Beaux Arts Hotel, on East Forty-fourth Street',[30] and 'Another summer, I was living in the Hotel Earle in the Village'.[31] She leaves her cats at various kennels and her suitcases unpacked in storage while always seeming to be on the hunt for 'the right apartment'.[32] She has resided at a multitude of locations, including 'the Hotel Earle, the Royalton, the Iroquois, the Prince Edward, the Algonquin, the Westbury, the Lombardy, and the Holley Hotel on Washington Square'.[33] Gardner Botsford, a distinguished editor at The New Yorker from the late 1940s and also a good friend of Brennan, describes her in his memoir: 'When she moved, as she did so often, she could transport her entire household – all her possessions and her cats – in a taxi'.[34] This nomadic state of Brennan, often regarded as 'exile', might be illuminated by her Irish background. McWilliams explains that the concept of exile is 'especially pervasive' in the Irish context: 'Seamus Deane describes it as a "fetish" (58) of the Irish literary tradition', in which Irish immigrants are always expected to feel nostalgic to the supposedly only place that they could call 'home' – Ireland. [35] Rather than embracing this heritage, Brennan resists the traditional national idea of 'exile' by introducing herself as a "traveler in residence" with no strong attachments to any specific places:

> Dublin is a spectacle to me now, not home, not anything. No place is home – it is as it should be, & I am getting – it is really what I want – perspective.[36]

Through her assertion that 'No place is home – it is as it should be', Brennan adamantly rejects any attempts to impose expectations upon Irish immigrants regarding their behaviour, emotions, or attachment to a specific place as home. She consciously distances herself from Dublin and any romanticised notions of nostalgia in order to embrace her new identity as a 'traveler in residence.' For Brennan, the state of not belonging is to be normalised, and she believes that refusing to designate any place as 'home' and actively seeking out change in her surroundings is the most effective means of maintaining this state.

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[26] Brennan, 'The Flower Children', p. 49.
[27] Brennan, 'Jobs', p. 59.
[28] Brennan, 'I Look Down from the Windows of This Old Broadway Hotel', p. 95.
[29] Brennan, 'The Farmhouse That Moved Downtown', p. 43.
[30] Brennan, 'The Traveler', p. 92.
[31] Brennan, 'Faraway Places Near Here', p. 88.
[32] Brennan, 'From the Hotel Earle', p. 39.
[33] Ann Peters, 'A Traveler in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York', *Women's Studies Quarterly,* 33.3/4 (2005), pp.66–89, p.68 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004419>.
[34] Gardner Botsford, *A Life of Privilege, Mostly* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), p. 318.
[35] Ellen McWilliams, '"No Place Is Home—It Is as It Should Be": Exile in the Writing of Maeve Brennan', *Éire-Ireland*, 49.3 (2014), pp. 95-111, p. 96 <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2014.0015>.
[36] Williams, p. 98, qtd. in Maeve Brennan, *Letter to Howard Moss*, n.d. Item 8, Brennan Folder, Howard Moss Coll. Berg Collection (New York: New York Public Library).

The Long-Winded Lady explores this sense of not belonging in the essay 'Howard's Apartment,' wherein Brennan describes how any place can become foreign and indifferent to its occupant when left unattended for a period of time. The house itself seems to inquire: 'Who has been at my kitchen? Who has been reading my books? Who has been touching my things?'.[37] By repeating the possessive pronouns 'my' [the house's], The Lady suggests that even in a place that she pays for and therefore owns (even temporarily), nothing is really hers. It always belongs to the place itself when she permanently remains as a tenant, or an occupant rather than an owner. This is the point where I disagree with Bourke's perspective that 'not belonging' to Brennan is 'a way of explaining, even excusing, a failure to develop a rooted grown-up life'.[38] I believe that Brennan is not so much making excuses as merely acting on a valid personal preference, which therefore should not be considered a 'failure'. As a daughter of a social activist and a renowned politician in Ireland, Brennan had experienced numerous relocations with her family. If there is someone who understands both the struggles and excitement that comes with moving places, it must be Brennan. Given all this, she still chooses to lead a nomadic life. Therefore, her choice is not driven by an attempt to make sense of a displaced adulthood, but rather by an awareness of the positive value inherent in the state of not belonging. Brennan once writes in 'A Daydream' (1976):

> The daydream was, after all, only a mild attack of homesickness. The reason it was a mild attack instead of a fierce one is that there are a number of places I am homesick for. East Hampton is only one of them.[39]

Brennan has always been against the idea of being tied to one specific place. She is homesick for many places, which also means that there is no such place as the one and only 'home'. The Long-Winded Lady might live in New York, but she will always be a 'traveler in residence', an outsider looking in, as how she wishes to be.

While it is undeniable that Brennan actively chooses a nomadic lifestyle for herself, it is important to acknowledge the significant role played by the specific geography and population of New York during that period, particularly in the abundance of hotels catering to the growing number of travellers passing through the city. In fact, during the latter half of the twentieth century, hotels were considered 'the perfect apartment, at least in New York', offering various benefits and conveniences including prestigious addresses, time-saving proximity to workplaces, snob appeal, breath-taking views, and impeccable service without the burden of managing household staff. [40]

[37] Brennan, 'Howard's Apartment', p. 146.
[38] Bourke, p. 218.
[39] Brennan, 'Daydream', p. 179.
[40] Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (University of California Press, 1994) <https://archive.org/details/livingdowntownhi0000grot/page/n7/mode/2up>, p. 2-3, qtd. in Paul Goldberger, 'Seeking the Ideal', *New York Times* (16 September 1984) <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/16/magazine/architecture-seeking-the-ideal.html>.

The introduction of hotels in New York dates back to the 1790s with the construction of the City Hotel.[41] The hotel soon became an important political space, hosting rallies, party caucuses, and similar meetings while also serving nonpartisan civic functions to welcome public figures.[42] The momentum of the New York hotel industry continued throughout the following century. However, *Putnam's Monthly* reported that until the 1850s, luxury and splendour were the prevailing characteristics of available hotels for New Yorkers.[43] As a result, it was hoped that a wider range of hotels catering to families with moderate incomes would be established in the coming years, diversifying the options for accommodation. As anticipated, during the Civil War years, New York experienced a surge in hotel construction to accommodate the influx of travellers. 'By 1869 there were 700 to 800 hotels in town according to a contemporary guidebook, which assessed only fifty or sixty as well known, and only twenty-five or thirty as really "first class"'[44], leaving the rest of the hotels more affordable for most people.

A report in 1873 by *The Times* highlighted that hotels were particularly favoured by women, as they reduced the burden of household tasks and allowed for lavish surroundings on a moderate budget.[45] This trend continued into the first half of the twentieth century, with census reports indicating that 'for the first time in American history women made up almost half of its long-term inhabitants'.[46] The modern hotel was seen as a liberating force for urban working women, relieving them of domestic responsibilities and the societal pressures of interior decoration.[47] In the twentieth century residential hotels symbolised respectability and provided a safe haven for downtown artists, single working women, widows, divorcees, and those seeking affordable housing[48]. Rosalind Rosenberg points out that '[a]side from these residences, living on your own in New York was impossible to afford… because even women who were college graduates were limited to low-paying jobs'[49]. Hotels not only offered a sense of safety but also formed a network that created a familiar and secure urban landscape. Peters argues, 'Maeve Brennan's hotels, for example, signify a connect-the-dots red line that maps a city delimited by the hotel world of three neighborhoods'.[50] Or in other words, to Brennan, the significance of New York lay within these hotel-saturated areas. Therefore, her New York is a narrow one, because she 'has

[41] A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, 'A Public House for a New Republic: Inventing the American Hotel, 1789–1815', *Hotel: An American History* (Yale University Press, 2007).
[42] Ibid., p. 24.
[43] New-York Daguerreotyped: Business-Streets, Mercantile Blocks, Stores, and Banks, *Putnam's Monthly*, I.IV (April 1853), pp. 353-368, p. 368.
[44] Elizabeth C. Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 18.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ann Peters, 'A Traveler in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 33.3/4 (2005), pp. 66–89, p. 70 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004419>.
[47] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, 1898 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 187.
[48] Ibid., p. 77.
[49] Ellen Byron, 'Rooms for Rent: Maid Service, Hot Meals, no Men; at the Webster in New York, Values Date to 1923; Chats in the 'Beau Parlor'', *Wall Street Journal* (31 August 2004) <https://uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/rooms-rent-maid-service-hot-meals-no-men-at/docview/398900575/se-2>.
[50] Peters, 'A Traveler in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York', p. 78.

never felt the urge that drives people to investigate the city from top to bottom. Large areas of city living are a blank to her.'[51] For Brennan, hotels epitomise a 'shelter without being shut away'[52] – places that are both secure and private enough to reside in, while also flexible enough to allow engagement in the social activities down below on the street, or in a restaurant, café, or bar. Her essays often capture moments where The Long-Winded Lady stands near the window in her hotel room, observing the surrounding buildings or observing people on the street. Once, from her hotel on Broadway Street, she notices a trombonist on the opposite roof where the Broadway lights do not reach him, yet he plays devotedly as though 'he had the world at his feet'.[53] Another time, from the eighth floor of an old hotel, she examines a man around her neighbourhood who always seems to comb his hair and look at other people' faces when he does so as if they were his mirrors.[54] Brennan's fondness for rooms with magnificent views might explain why she never chooses to reside too close to the ground floor, despite her frequent changes of location.

Brennan's active choice of a nomadic lifestyle is not only facilitated by the unique characteristics of hotels in New York but also by the city's ever-changing urban landscape, which serves to accommodate her wandering life. Change and the endless tearing down of the familiar seem to be permanent qualities of Manhattan, to which Brennan is particularly attentive. She keenly observes the constant cycle of transformation in Manhattan, noting the demolition of buildings, the replacement of residential spaces with office structures, and the disappearance of familiar streets to make room for towering skyscrapers. She even ventures out at night, searching for a two-hundred-year-old wooden farmhouse recently moved from Seventy-first Street and York Avenue to the Village; [55] remarking how quickly 'the brownstones, the handsomest houses' on Broadway side streets come down, or another strip of common ground has been lost for the construction of another Rockefeller office building.[56] Nevertheless, she appears to accept these changes as an integral part of New York's essence, as she muses, 'Those words "The building is coming down" occur so often in New York conversation, and they have such finality, and are so unanswerable, that once they have been said there is nothing more to say'.[57] Urban historian Max Page argues that 'the central dynamic of urban development in New York city is the relentless cycle of what-goes-up-must-come-down.'[58]

However, during the fifties and sixties during which Brennan wrote *The Long-Winded Lady* essays, the city underwent a particularly transformative phase with regard to its landscape. Following World War II, New York experienced a surge in the service industry and witnessed a dramatic escalation in office construction. [59] *Time* magazine labeled the

[51] Brennan, 'Author's Note', p. 13.
[52] Maeve Brennan, 'I See You, Bianca', *The Rose Garden: Short Stories* (Washington, DC.: Counterpoint, 2000), p. 256.
[53] Brennan, 'I Look Down from the Windows of This Old Broadway Hotel', p. 95.
[54] Brennan, 'The Man Who Combed His Hair', p. 75.
[55] Brennan, 'The Farmhouse That Moved Downtown', p. 43.
[56] Brennan, 'The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree', p. 103.
[57] Brennan, 'The New Girls on West Forty-ninth Street', p. 114.
[58] Peters, 'A Traveler in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York', p. 70.
[59] Ibid.

commercial building fever of the 1950s 'The Great Manhattan Boom': 'Manhattan, written off long ago by city planners as a dying city because of its jammed-in skyscrapers and canyonlike streets, has defied and amazed critics with a phenomenal postwar building boom.'[60] This era saw the construction of large-scale, high-density housing projects for low- and middle-income residents, while older structures crumbled to make way not only for public housing complexes and office buildings but also for expressways and civic centers.[61] In 'Mr. Sam Bidner and His Saxophone', Brennan writes of the foreseeable demolition of Forty-eight street as 'a number of houses are already down, and on weekdays the street is filled with that choking white wreckers' dust. Forty-eight Street is going, going', she continues, 'Office Space must be served'.[62] This phenomenon is also reflected in 'The Last Days of New York' when Brennan acknowledges 'the narrow gap – surprisingly narrow' where a hotel used to couch between the surrounding apartment buildings.[63] She recalls how only several years ago, she used to long for a residence in one of those beautiful and romantic studio buildings that stretched across all over the south side of the Square. 'Now they are gone', she explains, 'to make way for a set of brand-new, drearily uniform apartments, and most of the rest have been turned into offices'[64]. Later, from the window of her hotel room on the eighth floor, Brennan looks down to Washington Square to capture its beautiful sidewalks and flowing paths, the ice cream cart with its bright-coloured umbrella, and a solitary woman feeding pigeons. Then suddenly, she alludes to the rumour she heard recently about the plan to build a new expressway: 'I suppose that means that part of the square, anyway, will be dug up. It will hardly look the same after that.'[65] Unable to help herself from tracking the changing face of the city landscape, The Long-Winded Lady is immersed in the act of looking closely 'and attempt[ing] to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them'.[66] She attentively observes the houses, the buildings, and even her residences as if the threat of their vanishing is already hovering around. 'The hotel in which I now live is elderly, and last night I wondered, not for the first time, whether its last days might not be approaching. The pleasant side entrance has been sealed off, which is a discouraging sign.'[67] Living in a city defined by perpetual change, Brennan's nomadic lifestyle may be viewed as her 'coping mechanism', enabling her to harmonise with and exist with and within the dynamic realm of New York. In a city where anything can transform at any given moment, she finds solace in perpetual transit, devoid of attachments: 'It is in daily life, looking around for restaurants and shops and for a place to live, that we find our way about the city. And it is necessary to find one's own way in New York.'[68] The nomadic lifestyle, therefore, is Brennan's own way in New York.

[60] Ibid., p. 71, qtd. in Leonard Wallock, ed. *New York: Culture Capital of the World, 1940-1965* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p. 89.
[61] Peters, 'A Traveler in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York', p. 71.
[62] Brennan, 'Mr. Sam Bidner and His Saxophone', p. 101.
[63] Brennan, 'The Last Days of New York', p. 150.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 13.
[67] Brennan, 'The Last Days of New York', p. 151.
[68] Brennan, 'The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree', p. 104.

Brennan's nomadic lifestyle is effectively reflected in the writing style she employs in her essays for *The Long-Winded Lady*. Most of her writings are concise and condensed, often spanning just a few pages. This short-story genre, as opposed to novels which tend to be more settled, might be most suitable to Brennan as it allows her to capture quick inscriptions of moments, or 'snapshots' as in her own words.[69] This writing style might be the fruit of her years of experience as a writer at the most prestigious magazines at the time, including *Harper's Bazaar,* the *Irish Press* and *The New Yorker*.

After leaving Washington for New York in June 1942, Brennan first worked for a short time at the New York Public Library before securing a position as a fashion copywriter on 'New York's most exciting magazine for women, *Harper's Bazaar*'.[70] She was working under the editor Carmel Snow, who was one of the most influential people in Brennan's lifestyle and writing style. At the time, the magazine was pioneering in providing careful descriptions and sketches to their female readers who made their own clothes, or who instructed dressmakers on how they wanted their clothes to be.[71] Even before the war, 'Carmel Snow had published Christian Dior's first sketches' and launched his revolutionary collection, the New Look, in America.[72] By doing that, the magazine had been promoting 'feminine fashions' that used extravagant amounts of fabric, 'with longer, full skirts (sometimes with padded hips), tight waists and a soft, feminine shoulder line'.[73] At *Harper's Bazaar*, Brennan was at the heart of the fashion revolution. By the late 1940s, she began to dress 'with immense care […] , always with a fresh flower, usually a rose, in her left lapel. Her hair shone, and she wore it drawn tightly back from her face. Her waist was tiny, her clothes expertly tailored, and … her shoes always had high heels'.[74] Her keen interest in fashion inspired her descriptions of the clothing worn by the people she encountered on the streets of New York. Whether she was walking around the city, standing in a drugstore, or sitting in a restaurant, she pays attention to those little moments of people around her, and cannot help describing their clothes. For example, observing an old man walking on Seventh Avenue from a taxi, she writes: 'Yesterday he had left his jacket at home, and he wore no tie. He wore a white shirt that was buttoned up at the neck and wrists, and his trousers, which were roomy, especially around the waist, were held up by dark striped suspenders. His hat was made of cream-coloured straw, he wore big black boots'.[75] Another time she catches sight of a girl sitting alone on a park bench, waiting for her lover: 'She was holding her handbag in her lap, and she wore short black gloves. She was dressed as though she were going to her office – in a narrow green linen dress and high-heeled shoes. She had an enormous mop of black hair, and her head was slightly bent'.[76] In an interview with *Time* in 1974, Brennan confirms: 'If you are writing about people in the street, you have to describe their clothes, all of them. Clothes tell a lot'.[77] She once expressed her wish to write 'as though the camera had never

[69] Brennan, 'Author's Note', p. 13.
[70] Ibid., p. 138.
[71] Ibid., p. 140.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., p. 158-59.
[74] Ibid., p. 159.
[75] Brennan, 'The Solitude of Their Expression', p. 18.
[76] Brennan, 'Lovers in Washington Square', p. 45.
[77] Bourke, p. 240.

been invented',[78] and here she seems to do exactly that. Brennan's attention to people's clothes seems to come naturally to her as an instinct.

Her concise and succinct approach to writing can also be attributed to her experience working for the *Irish Press* and *The New Yorker*. During the time that Brennan worked for *Harper's Bazaar*, she also contributed to the *Irish Press* by writing 'News from New York':

> With all the skill she had learned at Harper's Bazaar, Maeve supplied a deft, condensed, sometimes sardonic, overview of Manhattan's latest trends, especially in theatre, with details of the kind she would later develop in her 'Long-Winded Lady' essays for The New Yorker.[79]

Brennan joined the staff of The New Yorker in 1949.[80] With an elegant appearance, an admirably succinct speech and writing and 'a longshoreman's mouth' with 'a tongue that could clip a hedge',[81] Maeve received all the recognition she deserved and soon became the star of the magazine. She was included in the 'Talk of the Town' column which was believed to be the aspiration of every *New Yorker* writer as 'here appeared the writing that caught the heartbeat of the time'.[82] 'Talk of the Town' was the first item of text in each week's magazine, writing about the vignettes of life in New York, often in a humorous, impersonal, senior-common-room register. This sheds light on the writing style found in *The Long-Winded Lady* collection.

Years of working as a magazine writer for prestigious publications, with a focus on delivering captivating, concise weekly columns, honed Brennan's attention to detail and sensitivity to changes. She had a keen eye for capturing the city's evolving landscape and the small nuances of people, including their clothing, expressions, and actions. However, in both cases, she established herself as an outsider looking in – an observer who never fully engages, physically present but mentally detached. Maeve Brennan is one of those people who love New York 'because the chances for being invisible are so much greater'.[83] Her favourite camouflage is an open book and she is pleased to believe that nobody ever notices that she never turns the page.[84] It is the same pleasure she draws from recognising a celebrity as 'just by being where I am they make me invisible'.[85] While she observed the city's transformation day by day, Brennan rarely expressed nostalgia for what was lost. Even when buildings were demolished, she struggled to recall their exact appearances, except for a vague recollection of their colour.[86] 'But more and more the architecture of this city has nothing to do with our daily life', she remarks.[87] She asserts herself firmly as an outsider casting her passively

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p. 160.
[80] Ibid., p. 162-63.
[81] Ibid., p. 166.
[82] Ibid., p. 189.
[83] O'Neill, Alistair, 'A Young Woman, N.Y.C.', *Photography and Culture*, 1.1 (2008), pp. 7-26, p. 23 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004419>, qtd. in Helen Rogan, 'Moments of Recognition', *Time* (1 July 1974), p. 62.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Brennan, 'Movies Stars at Large', p. 83.
[86] Brennan, 'The Last Days of New York', p. 151.
[87] Brennan, 'The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree', p. 105.

observing eyes on the city without forming strong attachments. This silent and seemingly disengaged mode of observation is also applied to The Long-Winded Lady's account of people. While paying careful attention to their appearance and emotions, she refrained from delving into their stories. There was one time when she was in her favourite restaurant, Le Steak de Paris, and the man that she had been observing for a while suddenly came to her and asked her to join him for a drink. Yet, to our surprise (or not), she refused by saying that she was waiting for someone, while remaining at a table for one. Even given a chance to be an 'insider' of a story that she seemed to be interested in, she still chose not to. In any case, she was determined to secure her place as an outsider looking in: 'She is interested in what she sees, but […] not very curious, not even inquisitive'[88]. To The Long-Winded Lady, being an outsider, or a 'traveler in residence', not belonging to any place brings a sense of satisfaction, and New York – the city where 'the chances for being invisible are so much greater' – seems like a perfect place to be just that.

Brennan's nomadic lifestyle is not solely determined by her childhood experiences of relocations, and her active resistance to the traditional trope of 'exile' in Irish imagination but is also influenced by the qualities of New York itself. The city's hotels and ever-changing landscape contribute to Brennan's ability to embrace and thrive in a state of not belonging. As readers follow The Long-Winded Lady through her journey in New York City, they witness her firm assertion as an outsider who finds a sense of belonging in a city that celebrates non-belonging. Maeve Brennan, or The Long-Winded Lady, seems to have found her own way, in being an outsider, a 'traveler in residence' as she is. Reflecting on why she thinks 'we are homesick for New York' – 'because the city holds us and we don't know why',[89] a presumably more detailed explanation might lie in the word 'hold'. Holding is embracing, but never trapping. Whilst nowhere in New York does she feel fully comfortable or like she belongs, the city also never demands or expects her to do so. 'New York is not hospitable' in the traditional sense, but it also never shuts her out.[90] It neither includes nor excludes anyone or anything. In that sense, New York becomes 'a place of not belonging' that allows someone to be within it without being confined by it. By identifying herself as a 'traveler in residence' – someone who does not belong to New York – Brennan paradoxically becomes a part of the city. In essence, Brennan belongs to New York by embracing her non-belonging.

[88] Brennan, 'Author's Note', p. 13.
[89] Brennan, 'The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree', p. 104.
[90] Ibid.

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'Ni vivant, ni mort':[1] Evading the boundaries of life and death in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*

Ella Geraghty

> 'Most of us have a distinct aversion to being dead. We have great difficulty imagining ourselves as simply not existing any more: even the sentence "I will be dead" contains an "I". So where will the "I" be when the "dead" phase kicks in?'[2]

Here lies the soul of the ontological crisis haunting Neil Gaiman's 2008 novel *The Graveyard Book*, put forward by Margaret Atwood in her review of the novel. How can one be dead while being alive? Nobody will show us. Not quite alive but not quite dead, Nobody Owens, Gaiman's protagonist, exists on peripheries. Following Nobody's childhood, the novel depicts a mortal boy given sanctuary by the ghostly inhabitants of a graveyard after his family are murdered. Nobody is raised, taught and helped by ghosts and various other supernatural creatures as he grows up and faces the complex reality of his existence. The liminality of his situation prompts questions about living and dying.

> 'You were given the Freedom of the Graveyard after all,' Silas would tell him. 'So the graveyard is taking care of you. While you are here, you can see in the darkness. You can walk some of the ways that the living should not travel. The eyes of the living will slip from you.'[3]

Nobody is thus a living boy, granted the existence of the dead. It is this subversion of life and death's boundaries that links Gaiman's novel to Derridean hauntology theory. 'Derrida's spectre,' writes Colin Davis, 'is a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate.'[4] I will put forward the idea that this spectre is embodied, ghostly and corporeally, by Nobody. Nobody hovers between life and death, he is a present-while-absent transgressor of established certainties. Nobody's Freedom of the Graveyard and Derrida's *Gift of Death* mirror each other – the graveyard gifts Nobody death. Yet, it is ultimately impossible for him to fully receive the freedom without actually dying. This is echoed in *The Gift of Death:*

> Because I cannot take death away from the other who can no more take it from me in return, it remains for everyone to take his own death *upon himself.* Everyone

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of The Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* 1st edn. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 51.
[2] Margaret Atwood, 'Ghosts, Ghouls and Graveyards: Margaret Atwood on the Magic of Neil Gaiman', *The Guardian*, 12 October 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/12/neil-gaiman-margaret-atwoodgraveyard-book>.
[3] Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, 1st edn. (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 32.
[4] Colin Davis, 'États Présents: Hauntology, Spectres And Phantoms', *French Studies*, 59.3 (2005), p. 376 <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143>.

> must assume their own death, that is to say, the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take*: therein resides freedom and responsibility.[5]

For Derrida, freedom is only attained in the finality of actual death, and we see this unreachable freedom explored in *The Graveyard Book.* Gaiman subverts tropes of the bildungsroman form to investigate responsibility in death; Nobody travels from life, to death, to life again in his journey of maturation. This study will track Nobody's haunting of linguistic, physical, mortal and spiritual norms, and discuss how and why Gaiman deconstructs established binaries of selfhood. To do this, I am subjecting my own work to a haunting of sorts, by inviting in the voices of Derrida and his critics. I will borrow and develop the phrase 'ontological quivering' from Elisabeth M. Loevlie's essay, 'Faith in the Ghosts of Literature. Poetic Hauntology in Derrida, Blanchot and Morrison's *Beloved*'. Loevlie writes, 'Writing performs and releases an ontological quivering, an instance of hauntology'.[6] Who, and what, quivers in *The Graveyard Book*? I will explore the quivering of the novel's characters, its settings and its very words, to explore how it distinguishes itself from solid boundaries not simply of life and death, but of writing itself. 'Quivering' is 'To shake, tremble, or vibrate with a slight rapid motion', [7] and here Derrida glides back towards us, writing, 'I tremble because I am still afraid of what already makes me afraid and which I can either see nor foresee. I tremble before what exceeds my seeing and my knowing.'[8] The experience of death exceeds our seeing and knowing, and it is this ultimate alienness that Gaiman toys with in the novel. Nobody's existence is situated beyond our seeing and knowing, and thus he and his spectral family are used to challenge Gaiman's young audience's preconceived ideas of death.

I will explore three major quiverings in Gaiman's graveyard: ontological, textual and territorial. How are meanings of selves, words and places deconstructed, deferred and reimagined through death in this novel? I am playing with Derrida's theory of différance in this investigation. To paraphrase Derrida (always a risky venture), différance works against the authority of meaning and autonomy of history, opting instead for a deferral of meaning. A rejection of reductive definitions, Derrida argues that, owing to the fluctuating mental state and social context of the reader, a single reading of a text is unachievable. Neither gothic nor children's, neither horror nor bildungsroman, neither living nor dead, Gaiman's novel transcends singular definition and autonomous categorisation, and thus, quivers.

I: 'What kind of borders?'[9]

I first return to Atwood's query of 'where will the "I" be when the "dead" phase kicks in?'. This question encapsulates the paradoxical axis on which Gaiman's novel turns – how can Nobody learn to live when he exists as one of the dead? Nobody's identity is defined by his relation to his mortality and his family's lack thereof. 'Even before the death of the other,'

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[5] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret*, 2nd edn., trans. By David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.45.

[6] Elisabeth Loevlie, 'Faith in The Ghosts of Literature. Poetic Hauntology in Derrida, Blanchot and Morrison's Beloved', *Religions*, 4.3 (2013), p. 340 <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel4030336>.

[7] 'Quiver, v.: Oxford English Dictionary', *Oed.Com*, 2021 <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156819?rskey=QUgNnF&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

[8] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 55.

[9] Gaiman, p. 284.

writes Derrida, 'the inscription of her or his mortality constitutes me.'[10] This crisis is true of Nobody as he attempts to comprehend that he must eventually live as a mortal while simultaneously developing the powers and immateriality of the dead. Moreover, the murder of his family defines his very existence in the graveyard – he is fundamentally constituted by their mortality as without it, he would never be in the graveyard in the first place. Nobody's being is made to quiver, as he learns skills and lessons from his companions in the graveyard:

> 'What do you do, when you try to Fade?'
> 'What Mr Pennyworth told me. "*I am an empty doorway, I am a vacant alley, I am nothing.*
> *Eyes will not see me, glances will slip over me."* But it never works.'
> 'It's because you're alive,' said Liza, with a sniff. 'There's stuff as works for us, the dead, who have to fight to be noticed at the best of times, that won't never work for you people.'[11]

This interaction between Nobody and the graveyard's witch, Liza, embodies the conflict of Nobody's existence, and demonstrates the innate impossibility of his freedom of the graveyard. Nobody's attempts to become 'nothing' are doomed to fail, precisely because he is not nothing, despite his name – a name which I will return to later on. Nobody attempts to become a conduit for darkness, aiming to literally dematerialise himself. Gaiman echoes Silas's words from earlier in the text, in which he promised Nobody that 'The eyes of the living will slip from you'. Probing Gaiman's language here, we can ask whether these eyes are slipping from Nobody's possession, so that he can no longer see as a living person sees, or whether they are slipping from the eyes of living society, preventing *them* from perceiving *him*. Perhaps both. Regardless, it is key to acknowledge the innate spectrality of Silas's promise. In granting Nobody the freedom of the graveyard, he is given an impossible existence. The eyes of the living cannot leave him, because he *is* the living. Derrida writes: 'Death's dative (dying *for* the other, giving one's life *to* the other) does not signify a substitution'.[12] Here again, we see the impossibility which recurs throughout Derrida's Hauntology work – this idea of giving a death in place of a life cannot ever be realised while we are mortal. In this sense, it mirrors the quivering status of Nobody's existence; he is essentially given death in place of life, yet he cannot truly embody that gift until he actually dies.

Such ontological crisis is undermined by Liza's honest, essentialist voice in this extract, simplifying the complex spectrality of Nobody's existence. Gaiman plays with deconstruction in Liza's Othering language of Nobody. Typically, the dead and the supernatural are alienated and out of the ordinary, yet in this interaction, it is Nobody – a normal, living boy – who has become the Othered 'you people'. And yet, we see this language of division repurposed later in the novel, when Nobody arrives back at the graveyard after he frightens the bullies at his mortal school: 'Dreamwalking is all very well,' says Portunia Persson, a ghost in the graveyard, 'but might I suggest a good Visitation? That's the only language that these people understand.'[13] Now, Nobody is one of the dead and the living are the alien: 'these people'. It

[10] Michael Naas, 'When It Comes To Mourning', in *Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts*, 1st edn, ed. by Claire Colebrook (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 119.
[11] Gaiman, pp. 120-121.
[12] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 43.
[13] Gaiman, p. 176.

shifts again towards the end of the novel, after Nobody uses the powers of the graveyard to defeat the man Jack, and Nobody's human friend Scarlett begins to fear him: '"You aren't a person. People don't behave like you"'.[14] Nobody's existence is constantly in flux, shifting from human to ghost, included to excluded.

Colin Davis writes, 'Hauntology is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought.'[15] Gaiman's Nobody lives as multiple, elusive identities in the world of the dead – highlighted in his attempts to Fade, where he literally tries to transcend the boundaries of thought and unthought.

Derrida writes of mourning as 'the attempt, always doomed to fail (thus a constitutive failure, precisely), to incorporate, interiorise, introject, subjectivise the other in me.'[16] If we interpret this 'other' to be Davis's elusive identities, then Nobody is, in this way, mourning. He repeatedly tries to incorporate his doubled self into one, and repeatedly fails. He is also in a more literal state of mourning throughout the novel, as he gradually comes to terms with the murder of his family – in this way, mourning defines his character, as the reason for his arrival in the graveyard was his escape from Jack, his family's killer. Despite this, Gaiman states that *The Graveyard Book* is 'a book fundamentally about life', but perhaps it is even more – about *lives,* echoing the plurality in Davis's notion of the elusive identities of the living.[17] Gaiman plays into Derridean plurality of identity:

> 'You are ignorant, boy,' said Miss Lupescu. 'This is bad. And you are content to be ignorant, which is worse. Repeat after me, there are the living and the dead, there are day-folk and night-folk, there are ghouls and mist-walkers, there are the high hunters and the Hounds of God. Also, there are solitary types.'[18]

The juxtaposition of Nobody as an 'ignorant' human 'boy' with the list of fantastical creatures serves to distinguish him from his spectral counterparts in the graveyard; yet, at the same time, the dedication in assimilating him into the realm of the supernatural distances him from his mortal life. Moreover, the concept of 'the living and the dead' is repeatedly questioned throughout the novel, with Nobody embodying that it is not as simple or binary as Miss Lupescu has described it here. Once again, Nobody's education in the graveyard deconstructs the accepted distinction between living and dead. Gaiman sets established certainties of ontology aquiver again, challenging the ignorance of the living population and expanding Nobody's comprehension of existence. Where we were previously dealing with a crisis of doubleness, we are now introduced to the concept of supernatural existence, a transgression of the boundaries of human and inhuman, night and day, mortal and divine. There is also a sense of didactic deconstruction, with Gaiman using the voice of a teacher in a children's

[14] Ibid., p. 268.
[15] Davis, p. 375.
[16] Naas, p. 119.
[17] Bloomsbury Publishing, *Neil Gaiman - On Writing The Graveyard Book*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 June 2010 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eJW63DiZh4>.
[18] Gaiman, p. 63.

novel to discourage blind acceptance of socially constructed binaries. The role of teaching is central to the novel, especially when it comes to Nobody's guardian, Silas. Where Nobody is grappling with being dead while alive, Silas is literally ni vivant ni mort (neither living nor dead):

> His guardian looked at him with eyes like black pools and said, 'I do not know. I know many things Bod, for I have been walking this earth at night for a very long time, but I do not know what it is like to dance the Macabray. You must be alive or you must be dead to dance it - and I am neither.'[19]

The motif of eyes reappears, concentrating the importance of sight in this novel. The description of Silas's eyes, like 'black pools', harks back to the all-encompassing darkness Nobody was attempting to inhabit as he Faded. Silas exists antithetically to humanity, in darkness and in defiance of any real form: 'Now his face was a book written in a language long forgotten, in an alphabet unimagined. Silas wrapped the shadows around him like a blanket'. [20] Silas defies linguistic, temporal and corporeal boundaries; he cannot be comprehended by any human means, just as he cannot be defined in any binary way as either alive or dead.

It is in this immaterial way that Silas is first properly introduced, as he 'reluctantly stepped out of the shadows, detaching from them like a patch of darkness.'[21] Silas *is* the dark mass Nobody attempts to become. Silas, however, is stable in his instability, unlike Nobody. Where Nobody's sense of self is quivering, Silas's is clear, as his simple statement, 'I am neither', reflects. Silas's neitherness is reiterated by his role as a member of the Honour Guard, tasked with protecting 'the borders of things', while he himself exists on the peripheries of ontological and corporeal borders.[22]

II: How Nobody Came to the Graveyard[23]

Staying with this idea of peripheries, I want to put forward the idea that this novel itself is a ghost. Ghosts 'exceed any single narrative modality, genre or textual manifestation', and I argue that not only do the characters exceed expectations of ontological singularity, but the text as a whole does too.[24] Gaiman puts language and the process of novelistic construction into a state of quivering, and this begins right from the point of conception, with Gaiman saying he 'began in the middle', and that 'every five or six years I'd sit down and I'd write a page or two'.[25] In exploring the novel's deconstructive assembly process, Gaiman establishes its inherent transgression from any single 'manifestation'. So, if the book itself is a ghost, then its contents do not have to abide by any single rule, and that includes its linguistic form. In

[19] Gaiman, p. 139.
[20] Ibid., p. 180.
[21] Ibid., p. 17.
[22] Ibid., p. 284.
[23] Ibid., p. 3.
[24] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*, 1st edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 1.
[25] Bloomsbury Publishing, *Neil Gaiman - On Writing The Graveyard Book* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eJW63DiZh4>

21st Century Gothic, Richard Bleiler writes that *The Graveyard Book* is 'a literary hybrid that literary critics and genre historians do not yet appear to have identified, perhaps because it is among the first of its kind: it is Gothic bildungsroman.'[26] This hybridity then mirrors what I will call the novel's textual quivering. Through his interactions with the gothic genre, Gaiman allows certain tropes to meander through his graveyard while also undermining or redesigning them. Vampires, werewolves, witches and ghouls all feature in *The Graveyard Book*, but they do not perform the roles we expect of them. It is frequently alluded to that Silas is a vampire; he sleeps in a 'steamer trunk' filled with 'dried earth', and yet he plays the role of guardian to Nobody.[27] Miss Lupescu, Nobody's teacher, emerges as a Hound of God – a werewolf – who dies protecting Nobody, and Liza Hempstock, the witch of the graveyard, rescues Nobody from capture when he ventures into the human world. These figures, who would usually play villainous roles in a gothic novel, particularly a children's gothic novel, are deconstructed and reworked in a way that showcases Gaiman's experimentation with genre.

In resurrecting these classic figures of the gothic genre, Gaiman invites not just the characters, but the canon of gothic literature that precedes *The Graveyard Book*, to haunt his text. 'Ghosts return via narratives, and come back again, and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded,' writes Wolfreys in *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, The Uncanny And Literature*, so in this way, we can see the recurring characters of Gothic fiction as ghosts within and without the confines of the text.[28] Pushing the boundaries of character interpretation thus, though, puts this essay at odds with Bleiler's quest to categorise and label Gaiman's novel. Bleiler writes, 'The focus on character and the concurrent lack of sustained sensation do much to mitigate against *The Graveyard Book* being considered a Gothic work.'[29] This is a reductive method of interpretation and I think it jars with the Derridean theory of différance I discussed earlier; moreover, if we take Wolfreys' view that ghosts 'exceed any single narrative modality, genre or textual manifestation', then the fact that it transgresses singular categorisation affirms the text's intricate connection with its ghostly contents. Bleiler, although accepting the novel's hybridity, seeks to locate the novel within recognised boundaries; boundaries which are uprooted by the interrogative presence of Derrida's spectre, who 'does not belong to the order of knowledge'.[30] If ghosts, and ghost stories, defy ordered knowledge, then it seems inappropriate to attempt to allocate them to specific categories defined by the very structures of literary criticism and thought that Derrida seeks to dismantle. Gaiman continues his deconstructive work in the textual quivering that pervades the actual wording of the novel too. The first chapter's title, 'How Nobody Came to the Graveyard', exemplifies the deconstruction of textual norms at work in the novel.[31] Gaiman undermines linguistic establishment in setting up expectations for Nobody to arrive when, in fact, Nobody, the boy, does. In opening the novel with this playful language, Gaiman sets the novel's precedent for taking our expectations of the use of language and reimagining them, or simply defying them completely. Wolfreys writes, 'Names, conventionally applied,

[26] Richard Bleiler, 'Raised by the Dead: The Maturational Gothic of Neil Gaiman's 'The Graveyard Book'', in *21st Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels Since 2000*, 1st edn., ed. by Danel Olson (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 277.
[27] Gaiman, p. 283.
[28] Wolfreys, p. 3.

[29] Bleiler, p. 276.
[30] Davis, p. 376.
[31] Gaiman, p. 3.

fix the limits of an identity,' and thus, we can see how this kind of linguistic experimentation ties into Nobody's ontological quivering – his name suggests a non-being, and its disruptive placement in a sentence reiterates his liminal space within the novel.[32]

Gaiman continues to use names to set identities quivering through his depiction of the ghouls who have named themselves after established figures in human society: 'Duke of Westminster', 'Bishop of Bath and Wells', 'Honourable Archibald Fitzhugh', 'Thirty Third President of the United States', and 'Emperor of China' are just a few of the ghouls Nobody meets when he descends into Ghûlheim.[33] In naming supernatural creatures after figures of power in archetypal human hierarchies, Gaiman continues to undermine his audience's idea of established certainties. Furthermore, he returns to Atwood's idea of the self in death – where does the 'I', the self, go when we die? In having the ghouls reappropriate names of previously living people, Gaiman explores that idea of self-possession in death. This brings us back to Derrida, and a particular element of *The Work of Mourning*,

> Roland Barthes is the name of someone who can no longer hear or bear it. And he will receive nothing of what I say here of him, for him, to him, beyond the name but still within it, as I pronounce his name that is no longer his…But if his name is longer his, was it ever? I mean simply, uniquely?[34]

Just as with Barthes, the real Dukes, Bishops and Emperors from whom the ghouls have taken names are no longer alive to claim them. So, in this way, Gaiman is once again playing into Derridean theory of death, in that the experience of death doubles and reappropriates. As this study has demonstrated, death in the novel is an unfathomable state, pushing the characters into liminal spaces of quivering. The crisis of name ownership, and therefore identity ownership, underlines this further. However, I think there's also scope to investigate how Gaiman contradicts Derrida here, in the core idea that Barthes 'can no longer hear or bear' his name. The very premise of *The Graveyard Book* opposes it, as the characters in the graveyard *do* still bear their names and their personalities from when they were living. So much so in fact, that each new character is introduced with their dates of life and tombstone epigraph in brackets, for instance, 'Digby Poole, (1785-1860, *As I Am So Shall You Be*)'.[35] They still exist as themselves, just in an Othered space. As Miss Lupescu showed in her lesson to Nobody about the different types of beings, Gaiman shows different experiences of death in his experiments with possession of identity after death.

This idea of identity after death is interesting too when considering the novel's initial conception. Gaiman describes watching his son playing in a graveyard and imagining a story about a human boy who is raised by the dead: 'it would be kind of like *The Jungle Book*'.[36] Gaiman repurposes Kipling's title and reinvents the iconic characters: Mowgli and Nobody are both human boys whose families are killed and are claimed as prey by ruthless killers (Shere Khan and the man Jack), they are raised by the non-human, exist outside the borders of

[32] Wolfreys, p. xi.
[33] Gaiman, pp. 66-72.
[34] Jacques Derrida, 'The Deaths Of Roland Barthes', in *The Work of Mourning*, 1st edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 45.
[35] Gaiman, p. 152.
[36] Bloomsbury Publishing, *Neil Gaiman - On Writing The Graveyard Book* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eJW63DiZh4>

normal human society and are protected by guardians sheathed in shadows, who would typically be predators – Bagheera the black panther and Silas the vampire. Thus, *The Graveyard Book* operates like a resurrection, with Gaiman reanimating Kipling's novel through his own spectral, Gothicised lens. If 'ghosts return via narratives', then *The Graveyard Book*, a reworking of a classic narrative, is itself ghostlike, becoming a quasi-palimpsestic hybrid of genres haunted by works past.

III: 'as if a huge graveyard had been upended'[37]

Let's allow the ghouls to take us further away from normality, into what I will call territorial quivering. Gaiman's ghouls plunge us deeper into deconstruction, as their homeland expands on Davis's idea of 'hovering between life and death'.[38] For the majority of the novel, Nobody has existed between two spaces: the land of the living and the land of the dead. His ontological quivering is rooted in his physical positioning within the graveyard, in his literal entry through the gates of the graveyard when he was a toddler. But what happens when another place is introduced? When the 'space through which something returns' shifts from being a way of describing a story, to an actual location?[39] When Nobody descends into Ghûlheim, his identities are disarranged: 'Bod had not experienced total darkness for many years. In the graveyard, he saw as the dead see, and no tomb or grave or crypt was truly dark to him. Now he was in utter darkness.'[40] The recurring motif of sight reappears, and down in Ghûlheim, Nobody is blind. In entering Ghûlheim, Nobody's ontology is sent into deeper instability, this is an unknowable darkness beyond death, and Nobody's sense of place begins to quiver. Gaiman has already disrupted our idea of normal boundaries in the portrayal of the graveyard, and here he continues to push those boundaries by deconstructing our notion of Earth itself. The graveyard, although a place of the dead, is firmly located within our recognisable world, yet now we move beyond the realms of identifiable place.

> Tombstones and statues jutted out of the side of the wall, as if a huge graveyard had been upended…[Nobody] wondered if each of the graves they were swinging past was a door for the kind of people who were carrying him.[41]
>
> Bod could see that all of the angles were wrong – that the walls sloped crazily, that it was every nightmare he had ever endured made into a place, like a huge mouth of jutting teeth.[42]

Gaiman literalises what has previously only been imagined; he literally flips the world on its head and destabilises solidity, psychologically by bringing Nobody's nightmares to life, physically by taking a wall and distorting its angles 'crazily'. We're returning to Derrida's

[37] Gaiman, p. 71.
[38] Davis, p. 376.
[39] Wolfreys, p. 3.
[40] Gaiman, p. 70.
[41] Ibid., p. 71.
[42] Ibid., p. 74.

trembling before 'what exceeds my seeing and my knowing'. Ghûlheim exceeds our understandings of death, earth, realms, and knowledge itself. With the 'upended' graveyard, we see the established, familiar setting of Nobody's childhood made 'wrong'; with 'tombstones' jutting out the walls, we see death itself distorted, actualising the hauntological experimentation at work in Gaiman's novel. Nobody departs the graveyard in two other major moments – when he attends a living school, and when he leaves permanently at the end of the novel.

In these departures, Gaiman underlines his exploration of the bildungsroman narrative structure, as each departure represents Nobody's endeavours to establish a true sense of identity. Nobody's maturation is marked by his adventures to new territories. The failed experiment of his attendance at a human school exacerbates his ontological quivering, as 'he was becoming a presence, rather than an absence, and that made him uncomfortable'.[43] Nobody's inability to exist successfully in either space, living school or dead graveyard, highlights his identity crisis, and establishes him as an echo of Derrida's spectre, who also exists between presence and absence. The failed attempt at school does play into Gaiman's interaction with the bildungsroman form, as Nobody's experience of life as a living boy triggers a desire to leave the graveyard, as he remarks: 'how nice it is to be in a room filled with people and for all of them to be breathing.'[44] This desire continues throughout the novel and results in Nobody's eventual departure from the graveyard.

This notion of exiting the space of the dead permanently subtly undermines the bildungsroman form, as Nobody transitions from life (with his murdered family) to death (with his ghost family) to life (at living school) back to death (forbidden from leaving the graveyard again) to life at last (his maturation and final departure from the graveyard). The significance of belonging to a place within the novel closes the narrative, as Nobody finally comprehends his future, 'If I come back, it will be a place, but it won't be home any longer.'[45] In this way, as with a typical bildungsroman, the young protagonist grows up and accepts that he must forge his own path. But continuing Gaiman's experimentation with deconstructive narratology, Nobody's moment of maturation also represents his understanding of himself with relation to his death. Thus, Nobody's arc of maturation mirrors the crux of hauntology itself. Hauntology, as Davis writes, 'is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead', and this is exactly what Gaiman's depictions of Nobody's various departures from the graveyard do – they interrogate the plethora of relations to the dead in this novel: Nobody's, Silas's, the book's own, and ours.[46]

IV: 'Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place'[47]

Nobody. A concept for Derrida, a protagonist for Gaiman. In the Derrida quotation above, he reiterates his core idea that death is truly unique, that it can only be experienced by oneself. Death cannot be given to Nobody, despite the efforts of the graveyard. Despite its

[43] Gaiman, p. 179.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., p. 286.
[46] Davis, p. 379.
[47] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 42.

reanimation and characterisation, death remain a final state that Nobody cannot know until he actually dies. Silas's inability to die forces him into a liminal space of existing on the border between life and death. The Order to which the man Jack belongs defies time and mortality in its attempt to outsmart death, while Nobody's existence flits between human and non-human. The novel depicts a grappling with our comprehensions of self in relation to death, and how that relation undermines our sense of ontology despite our attempts to locate ourselves within an identity. It is this incomprehension of the self, an inability to define oneself in relation to death, that first prompted me to put the novel in conversation with Derridean hauntology theory. Death constitutes the self in Derridean theory, and Gaiman's novel queries our ideas of what it means to have a self at all. Gaiman uses expectations of established language, genre and character norms to upend his audience's ideas of certainty, he entertains his audience by reanimating popular tropes and placing them in unexpected roles. The novel is a ghost itself, haunted by spectres of preexisting texts, genres and people: '"I don't remember anything about the days before I was a ghoul," said the famous writer Victor Hugo.'[48] Gaiman's experimentation with boundaries of life and death, human and non-human, allow children to interact with concepts that may at first seem too morbid to comprehend. In telling the spectral story of a boy ni vivant ni mort, cared for and loved by ghosts, vampires, witches, and werewolves, Gaiman's novel imagines the unimaginable: death.

[48] Gaiman, p. 77.

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Transcending the Nation in Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Coleridge

Matt Jones

This essay examines how the Genevan-born writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau imagines a republic that transcends national boundaries to overcome hierarchies that restrict the freedom of individuals. Rousseau's desire to transcend the nation had a profound influence on the English lake poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who also sought to overcome hierarchies within the nation by surrounding themselves with nature and focusing on subjective narratives of ordinary working persons, within the changing political context of the long eighteenth century. To begin with, this essay will place all three writers within a critical context that will suggest the significance of Rousseau's political views regarding the supremacy of the individual citizen as independent of, and superior to, the nation on the later Romantic writers Wordsworth and Coleridge.[1] Next, a consideration of Rousseau will demonstrate how these unapologetic political writings, including the political treatise *The Social Contract* and the philosophical novel *Emile*, both published in 1762*,* argued for the supremacy of the individual above that of the nation which has 'no natural authority over his fellow man'.[2] These political views will be seen to have influenced Rousseau's posthumously published life writing *Confessions* which has subsequently been identified as one of the earliest autobiographies.[3] Further, within Rousseau's life writing, qualities of Romanticism including 'the primacy of the individual' are present.[4] This Romantic emphasis on the individual's thoughts and feelings through the first-person narrative of *Confessions* seeks to transcend the narrator's persecution in exile by portraying the importance of the individual in natural settings beyond the boundaries of any single nation. Following analysis of Rousseau, this essay will examine the canonical Romantic text *Lyrical Ballads*. First published anonymously in 1798, this poetry collection would become a 'manifesto not only for its authors, but for the entire Romantic movement'.[5] The 1802 edition has been chosen as it is within this edition's preface that the political views of Wordsworth and Coleridge are made manifest as seeking to transcend the boundaries of a nation through imagining the individual as a citizen beyond the boundaries of any single nation. However, Coleridge's subsequent 1817 *Biographia Literaria* would argue against earlier views regarding the equality of all individuals. Finally, this essay will consider how

[1] By emphasising the importance of the individual above that of the nation, Rousseau seeks to undermine the nation's importance. The nation is defined as 'a people or group of peoples; a political state'; 'Nation', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 49.

[3] A Dictionary of World History, 'Rousseau, Jean-Jacques', in *Oxford Reference*, ed. by Anne Kerr and Edmund Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4] The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 'Romanticism', in *Oxford Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[5] Fiona Stafford, 'Introduction', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802,* ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xiii.

Wordsworth's autobiography *The Prelude*, posthumously published in 1850 during the Victorian period, portrays the horror in France following the French Revolution that began in 1789.

Previous critical analyses of Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Coleridge have argued for the significance of the role of the imagination within the setting of Romantic writing. For example, Margery Sabin argues for the imaginative faculty within Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and how this may have been influenced by Rousseau as a poet and not just a philosophical writer in the *Confessions*.[6] The relationship between Rousseau and Wordsworth as 'self-representing' men was considered by WJT Mitchell in 1990 within the context of autobiography.[7] However, these analyses do not consider the significance of the nation in relation to the imagination of both Romantic writers. More recently, Michelle Levy and Mark Perry argued that an evaluation of the Romantic canon over the last fifty years is still dominated by the Big Six male poets, including Wordsworth and Coleridge.[8] What can be added to Levy and Perry's discussion is the significance of Rousseau's political views on the later Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge.

In 2020, Susan Manly argued for the political influence of philosopher John Locke on the early Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth.[9] Supplementary to Manly's argument is Rousseau's influence on Wordsworth during his time touring Europe. Rousseau's influence has been considered within Nicola J. Watson's analysis of the tourist draw of the Republic of Switzerland within the 1790s, which articulates the importance of Rousseau on eighteenth-century tourism and Romantic writers.[10] Building on Watson's argument, Wordsworth himself visited a number of tourist sites in France that were connected with Rousseau, such as the grave of Rousseau at the Pantheon in Paris.[11] In addition, Rousseau's use of the life-writing genre to transcend the limitations of the nation, both in Europe and the UK, influenced the early Romantic writers Wordsworth and Coleridge.

This transcendence is achieved through portraying the supremacy of the individual's thoughts and emotions amongst a natural setting, which imagine a world beyond the political limitations of a single nation. As an example, through the re-imagining of Rousseau's childhood memories, the narrative foreshadows the persecutions to come, facilitated by the French monarchy and Swiss Republic, in *Confessions*: 'I could have spent, in the bosom of my religion, my fatherland, my family and friends, a peaceful and pleasant life.'[12] The use of the past tense evokes sympathy, and invites a reflection on the idyllic life that might have been. Similarly, use of the first-person narrative within the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads* portrays the importance of the feelings of the individual. Within the 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (hereafter 'Lines'), the narrator responds to the horror experienced in France following the French Revolution: '[a]nd so I dare to hope, though changed, no doubt from

[6] Margery Sabin, 'Imagination in Rousseau and Wordsworth', in *Comparative Literature*, 22.4 (1970), 328-345.
[7] WJT Mitchell, 'Influence, Autobiography, and Literary History: Rousseau's Confessions and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*', in *ELH,* 57.3 (1990), 643-664 (p. 644).
[8] Michelle Levy and Mark Perry, 'Distantly Reading the Romantic Canon: Quantifying Gender in Current Anthologies', in *Women's Writing*, 22.2 (2015), 132-55 (p. 134).
[9] Susan Manly, *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s* (Routledge, 2020).
[10] Nicola J. Watson, 'Rousseau on the tourist trail', in *Romanticism, Rousseau, Switzerland: New Prospects*, ed. by A. Esterhammer and others (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 85-99.
[11] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 52.
[12] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. by Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 42.

what I was, when first I came among these hills; […] like a roe'.[13] The simile comparing the younger narrator to a young deer conveys the previously natural state of being that the narrator held, which has subsequently been corrupted by the nation.

Within the political writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, these negative portrayals convey an oppressive nation that can be transcended through emphasising the importance of the male individual and the inferiority of women. The opening of *The Social Contract* portrays a nation of repression: 'man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains'.[14] Rousseau argues that the role of the individual is the most significant characteristic within the state. Even the hierarchy of the nation must be considered within the context of the individual: 'each individual can have, as a man, a personal will that is contrary or dissimilar to the general will'.[15] Rousseau argues that an individual can have contrary intentions to that of the nation. However, women are considered suitable only for the role of serving men: 'men will philosophise about the human heart better than she does'.[16] Rousseau creates a hierarchy of male domination over women, but both are considered as more significant than the nation itself. This supremacy of the individual is explored further in *Emile*. The fictional character of Emile is used to discuss the philosophical ideas surrounding the education of children whereby the natural state of humankind is corrupted by the nation which 'stifle[s] [the] nature in him'.[17]As a result, the nation is seen as an oppressive and unhelpful burden on children. The ideal is a return to a natural state as children can only learn 'from nature'.[18] Rousseau goes so far as to describe the academy of Geneva and University of Paris as 'laughable establishments […] only fit for making double-men'.[19] The education provided by the nation is portrayed in a highly pessimistic manner that only succeeds in making men corrupt. Rousseau builds on this argument by attacking the nation itself. For example, a patriot is identified by Rousseau as 'harsh to foreigners'.[20] The nation becomes negatively identified as being home to citizens who are xenophobic and hostile to outsiders. The solution is offered through individual autonomy where 'natural man is entirely himself'.[21] It is only by moving away from the influences of the nation that a child can be raised as nature intended.

Rousseau builds upon this natural ideal for mankind by portraying the limitations of the nation in the autobiographical *Confessions*. The *Confessions* portrays the oppression encountered by the narrator at the hands of several nations. Rousseau was writing in exile after being forced to flee both Switzerland and France and take refuge in the United Kingdom. Beginning with a return to childhood, the first-person narrative opens by imagining a nation of citizens acting in 'constancy and fortitude'.[22] This idealised nation of honourable citizens is framed within a subjective narrative that allows for immediate responses to the narrator's 'tender and sensitive' feelings.[23] These immediate responses to memories and

[13] William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 193-198 (p. 195).
[14] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 45.
[15] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 58.
[16] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. by Alan Bloom (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 387.
[17] Ibid., p. 38.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[20] Ibid., p. 39.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 6.
[23] Ibid.

nature seek to emphasise the importance of the individual. Further, the narrative creates an Edenic childhood filled with song: 'beneath the sturdy oak […] a shepherd's vows/his repose/allows/for always the thorn lies under the rose'.[24] This repetition of natural imagery creates an Edenic scene that seeks to emphasise the importance of nature. Despite this optimistic portrayal of the natural setting, the song ends with the more fatalistic image of a thorn under the rose that foreshadows the violence to come. The narrative uses the foreshadowing following the innocent and Edenic scenes of childhood to juxtapose the gloomy realities of the isolated narrator in exile following the publications of *Emile* and the *Social Contract*. Within the forced isolation amongst Lac De Bienne in Switzerland, the natural setting is amongst the 'lovely lake whose shores, with the mountains that border it, enchanted my gaze'.[25] This use of alliteration recreates the sound of water moving, creating a calm and idyllic image. The country people themselves, who are significantly without a university education that Rousseau argued against in *Emile*, have souls that should 'leap up in ecstasy, a hundred times a day'.[26] This positive portrayal of those who live amongst nature, who can transcend their conditioning, reveals the significance of the common working individual. However, within this peaceful setting, the nation imposes fear: 'I received a letter from the bailiff of Nidau […] to leave the island and their estates. Reading it, I thought I must be dreaming.'[27] The immediate response of dreaming conveys the shock and surprise that the institutions of the nation have left in the narrator. This encroachment of the nation results in the ultimate irony for Rousseau. Whilst born in the Republic of Geneva and espousing Republican ideals of classical 'Athens and Rome', Rousseau must take refuge for his political ideals within the constitutional monarchy of 'England'.[28] Further, within the final page of *Confessions*, the narrator conveys uncertainty: 'while believing that I was leaving for Berlin, I was in fact leaving for England.'[29] This uncertainty creates a sense of foreboding, offering a highly pessimistic representation of the nation. The final image is a hostile one, whereby the narrator confesses they wish their enemies to have 'choked'.[30] It is through such confessional portrayals of the nation that Watson's views surrounding the importance of imagination create parallels with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

This idealisation of the individual amongst nature appears also within *Lyrical Ballads*. The collection was described within its original 1798 advertisement as 'experiments' that are designed to 'ascertain how far the language of conversation in the […] lower classes […] is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.'[31] This explanation of the importance of the lower classes seeks to demonstrate the significance of all classes of persons within the nation. The 1802 preface frames the poetry within a political narrative that seeks to transcend national boundaries and focus instead on the importance of the individual. As an example, the preface identifies the purpose of the poems as 'to chuse incidents […] from common life, and to relate or describe them […] in a selection of language really used by

[24] Ibid., p. 11.
[25] Ibid., p. 628.
[26] Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 629.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 642.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] William Wordsworth, 'Advertisement', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3-4 (p. 3).

men.'[32] This demonstration of the importance and equality of the individual, in a manner resonant with the emphasis of the individual seen in Rousseau's political and autobiographical writings, reveals political imperatives. In Wordsworth's 'Lines', the blank verse begins: '[f]ive years have passed; five summers, with the length/[o]f five long winters!'[33] The declarative sentence juxtaposes the natural imagery of the abundance and beauty of summer with the coldness of winter, which reveals a dark and conflicting image that subsequently frames the entire poem. This invitation back to 1793 creates an emphatic reminder of the images of the Reign of Terror in France. Further, the iambic-pentameter of the blank verse is interrupted by the use of commas: 'or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire/the Hermit sits alone'.[34] Capitalisation of the hermit suggests a desire in the first-person narrator to be alone and to reflect on a solitary life. This representation of the isolated hermit lifestyle is contrasted with the 'lonely rooms, and mid the din/[o]f towns and cities'.[35] Within the city, the narrator is isolated and surrounded by incessant noise, which reveals a desire to break ties with metropolitan life. It is significant to notice within the final stanza of the poem how the individual feelings and responses to nature are regarded as fundamental: 'thy memory be as a dwelling-place/[f]or all sweet sounds and harmonies'.[36] It is the subjective memories of the individual narrator that will be a safe refuge. Further, the sombre beginning of the poem that reflects on the harmful aspects of the French Revolution is contrasted within the final lines amongst the 'steep woods and lofty cliffs,/[a]nd this green pastoral landscape, were to me/[m]ore dear'.[37] Ending the poem on the favourable image amongst a natural setting suggests that the negative aspects of the city and nation can be overcome by the individual amongst nature.

This emphasis on the individual amongst nature also occurs in Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner', which would be subsequently challenged in Coleridge's later writing. Within the 1798 edition, there is the significant spelling of 'marinere'.[38] Whilst amended in the 1802 edition, what is noteworthy is how the Middle-English archaic spelling 'marinere' derives from the fourteenth century, a century that saw the 1381 Peasants' Revolt in England.[39] This evocation of archaic language invites a reflection on a period of the nation that was politically turbulent and witnessed the unsuccessful challenge of the monarchy. Even within the 1802 edition of the poem, the political views of Coleridge are conveyed through the characterisation of the 'bright-eyed mariner.'[40] The protagonist is a common man who is argued to be worthy of the narrator's attention. Further, the first-person narrative creates a clear introduction to the individual: 'I am next of kin,' with thoughts and feelings which are portrayed as significant.[41] In addition, the narrator is surrounded by

[32] William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Preface', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 95-115 (pp. 96-97).
[33] William Wordsworth, 'Lines', *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 193, l. 1-2.
[34] Ibid., p. 194, l. 23-24.
[35] Ibid., l. 26-27.
[36] William Wordsworth, 'Lines', *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 197, l. 142-143.
[37] Ibid., p. 198, l. 158-160.
[38] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 5-24.
[39] Oxford English Dictionary, 'mariner (noun)', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* < https://www-oed-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/Entry/114125?redirectedFrom=marinere#eid>.
[40] Coleridge, 'The Ancient Mariner', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 175-193 (p. 175), l. 24.
[41] Ibid., l. 6.

nature: '[b]ut now the Northwind came more fierce//[t]here came a Tempest strong!'[42] The exclamatory sentence and capitalisation emphasise the significance of the natural setting and the power of nature. Further, it is important that the narrator does not belong to a specific nation, as the sailor's curse creates an individual who keeps roaming. This repetition of movement is emphasised through the aural qualities of the poem: 'swiftly, swiftly, flew the ship./[y]et she sailed softly too:/[s]weetly, sweetly blew the breeze-/[o]n me alone it blew'.[43] The incantation-like quality of sibilance portrays the favourable aspects of an itinerant lifestyle beyond the scope of one single nation. So strong is the pull of nature that the interrogative question 'is this my own country?' articulates the protagonist's loss of identity and relationship with their homeland.[44] Even whilst on land, the protagonist encounters solitary individuals: '[s]trange by my faith! The Hermit said.'[45] The capitalisation of the proper noun 'hermit' creates an emphasis on the importance of the hermit's identity, in the same way that God may be capitalised. The result is to express the importance of individuals living lives of solitude. It is also significant how the image of the hermit appeared in Wordsworth's 'Lines' which emphasise the importance of solitary life away from the trappings of the world and nation. Further, whilst cursed by the killing of the albatross, the protagonist describes their solitary lifestyle: 'I pass, like night, from land to land'.[46] The poem concludes with the narrator's declaration of constant movement. However, this emphasis on the subjective experiences of the common man would be subsequently challenged in Coleridge's critical autobiography *Biographia Literaria*. The more mature Coleridge identifies poetry as emerging from the individual 'poetic genius […] of the poetic mind.'[47] The poet is no longer part of an equal collective of individuals seeking to transcend a nation but is portrayed as a solitary genius. This genius is identified as someone who 'brings the whole soul of man into activity' which emphasises the significant role of the poet.[48] This emphasis creates a hierarchy whereby the poet is to be venerated above others within the nation.

Like Coleridge, Wordsworth's autobiographical *The Prelude* would subsequently undermine his previously enthusiastic political imaginings of the nation. This change in attitude towards the nation reveals parallels with Rousseau's own changing beliefs. Removed from the published 1850 edition, Book IX of the 1805 edition describes the harmful realities of Revolutionary France: 'the youth, cut off from all intelligence with man, and shunning even the light of common day.'[49] The image is violent and significantly moves away from the natural imagery of light and leaves only darkness. Shortly before the French Revolution, the first-person narrator describes themselves as 'an Englishman/[b]orn in a land the name of which appeared/[t]o license some unruliness of mind'.[50] This portrays the narrator's awareness of the politically charged atmosphere in England and European countries following the French Revolution in 1789. Further, Book X articulates the horrors within

[42] Ibid., p. 176, l. 45-46.
[43] Ibid., p. 188, l. 454-457.
[44] Ibid., p. 189, l. 462.
[45] Ibid., p. 190, l. 521.
[46] Ibid., p. 192, l. 585.
[47] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions* (London: 1817), p. 11.
[48] Ibid.
[49] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: the four texts 1798, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 396, l. 928-930.
[50] Ibid., p. 356, l. 192-194.

France in a manner comparable to Rousseau's experiences of the nation. The opening of Book X creates an encouraging and natural image: '[i]t was a beautiful and silent day' that is juxtaposed with the '[d]esolation and dismay/[r]emained for those who had grown rank/[w]ith evil expectations'.[51] The use of alliteration with the alveolar 'd' creates a sound reminiscent of gunfire which results in an atmosphere of fear and violence. Further, the Republican state of France is identified as a hostile nation, and the constitutional monarchy of England the only safe refuge: 'homeward way to England. From his throne/[t]he King had fallen; the congregated host/[d]ire cloud'.[52] Whilst the French state descends into anarchy, the capitalisation of the king signifies the importance of the monarchy. In addition, the natural image of the 'dire cloud' suggests how even nature objects to the overthrowing of the king.[53] By contrast, on return to Britain, the narrator portrays the 'virtuous feeling through the heart/[o]f the English people'.[54] This positive image of the English people, as opposed to those in Revolutionary France, articulates the narrator's relief at returning to the hierarchical constitutional monarchy.

In conclusion, Rousseau's negative portrayals of the nation as oppressing the individual show clear parallels with the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The political uncertainty leading up to the French Revolution in 1789 created an imaginative faculty within Rousseau that would subsequently influence Wordsworth, as identified by WJT Mitchell. Rousseau's imaginings have revealed how his unapologetic political and philosophical writings have created pessimistic portrayals of the nation. He argues for the importance of the individual, a key concept of Romantic writers, and the role of nature in transcending the limitations of the nation. In detailing the influence of Rousseau on subsequent canonical Romantic writers Wordsworth and Coleridge, this article has departed from the conventional focus on the Big Six emphasised by Michelle Levy and Mark Perry. However, the role of women within the nation is limited by Rousseau to subordinate roles. Further, Watson's views regarding the significance of Rousseau on later Romantic writers has been added to through an analysis of how all three writers portray the nation in similarly negative ways and instead emphasise the importance of the individual through subjective narratives. Rousseau imagines how the corrupting influences of the nation can be transcended by being amongst nature. However, the exile of Rousseau into the hierarchical constitutional monarchy of England reveals the irony of how the imaginings of the individual transcending the nation are met with the reality of a nation attacking the individual. Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* portray political views that emphasise the importance of the common individual amongst nature through solitary figures such as hermits and sailors. However, Coleridge's subsequent *Biographia Literaria* seeks to overcome the ideals of all persons being equal by creating a hierarchy whereby the poet becomes a literary genius. Further, the portrayals of the French Revolution in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* convey the horrors of France descending into violence, which contrast with the portrayal of England as a safe refuge. Like Rousseau, England becomes a refuge for Wordsworth, free from the tyranny that the individual was supposed to transcend. In future research, Rousseau's influence on Wordsworth's early political writings could be explored further through other early writings such as Wordsworth's unpublished 1793 *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*.

[51] Ibid., p. 398, l. 1; 20-22.
[52] Ibid., l. 8-10.
[53] Ibid., l. 8.
[54] Ibid., p. 412, l. 209-210.

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Queen Cécile

Imogen Dobson

Haiti, 1791

Before

When Cécile had first escaped from Guerin's clutches, the first place she ran to was Bois Caïman – the notorious alligator forest. Much to Boukman's dismay she did not make sufficient use of the contacts and network of safe houses he had arranged for her. Cécile could not bring herself to trust them fully, and besides, she did not feel half as safe in town houses or village huts as she did in the forest. It was not until she had run up the remote northern mountains and found herself in the thickest part of Bois Caïman, salty tears clinging to her face and her brown skin marked by slashes from some of the more unforgiving branches, that she finally felt unexposed and protected.

On that first night two years ago, Cécile had shimmied up one of the towering cedar palm trees like her mother had taught her when they used to collect coconuts. She sat in its centre, where all the branches sprouted from, fearfully scanning the ground for rattlesnakes. Having ran for leagues, she eventually fell from the palm's grasp in her slumber and landed in some soft soil that was partially obscured by a black mangrove shrub. Oddly, the soil had kept her comfortable, almost like a bed, and by some strange stroke of luck, the worst that had happened to her was that she was dirty, her back was a little sore, and her limbs bore a few mosquito bites.

Since that night Cécile had made Bois Caïman her home. Within six months she had fashioned a treehouse, with boards of branches tied together with rope that Boukman, having finally located her whereabouts, brought her. She also used branches to fashion a roof which she then covered with an animal pelt. Gradually, her fear of the flora and fauna weakened.

Unfortunately, her fear of slave catchers returned. The forest was not exclusive to animals, for people still occasionally ventured inside. Frenchmen never visited alone, as they were terrified of the supposed black magic that lurked within its depths. Once Cécile recognised some of the slavecatchers, which meant that Guerin had sent them out specifically to search for her. The last lumbering group came by six months ago, and one of men got spooked by a hog plum that fell from a tree nearby, and in his panic to get away he dropped his spear, which Cécile had gratefully picked up once he was out of eyesight.

An ordinary slaveowner would have stopped searching for her by now, but Guerin was obsessed. Indeed, Cécile had been one of Guerin's most prized slaves due to her jade-coloured eyes which are rare amongst her people (to avoid detection she had contemplated turning herself into another one of Bois Caïman's rich tapestry of animals by stabbing her eyes out). Besides, it was rare for house-slaves to escape, especially for one owned by such a wealthy and powerful Frenchman. It meant danger. Such a defiant act could inspire other bolts for freedom.

Thankfully, even if a slavecatcher did come close to Cécile's hideout, her makeshift home resided high in the trees and the night-time mists usually kept her completely hidden from any passer-by, friend or foe.

Today the mist hung especially low, its silky wisps encircling the dark-green forest in a veil of grey. Barefoot and grasping the slave catcher's spear, Cécile picked her way over some fallen branches that were submerged in a little stream. She bent down, scanning the little ripples, as if hoping the caiman would be there, as small as a hammer frog and therefore, a lot easier to kill. No luck there, unfortunately. She had to find him just before nightfall, when the mist would cover the whole forest and obscure her vision for good. The mist has been growing stronger, arriving not long after the sun had risen. Cécile knew it was a warning. To whom, of course, would be decided later.

Cécile stepped out of the stream, wiggling her toes in the earth. She had been searching for the caiman for the last month, after having a prophetic dream about him. She told Boukman that hunting this caiman and acquiring one of his teeth was the final piece of the puzzle, and necessary for the ceremony. The sought-after tooth would be brown, brown like skin, brown like the earth. So brown that it would seem an extension of her hand, not like she was holding a tooth at all. Nature supporting nature.

Cécile continued to hunt for the next few hours, but the waters seemed empty and the one trail she did pick up vanished into the mist. With a groan she knelt and held her head in her hands, grasping her flesh a little too tightly so that her eyes began to see colours.

Letting go after a couple of minutes, she looked up at the flecks of sky between trees and with a start, saw a growing shadow. Indeed, rain would prove a problem. Perhaps it was time to give up for now and try again tomorrow if the wet season did not continue to ruin her hunt. With a sigh, she turned north and headed back home, just as the rain began to fall. Some of the younger and more impulsive insurgents Cécile had met would not be pleased when Boukman reported to them that the ceremony would still not take place because his priestess was busy chasing a caiman tooth.

Once Cécile began her ascent, she tried to concentrate on possible whereabouts of the tooth, but her mind kept wandering back to the insurgents. They knew that the Revolution could not begin until the vodou ceremony, and while they too believed in the religion, they did not understand it as Cécile and Boukman did. For rebels like the rash and reckless Henri, another of Guerin's former slaves, it was all about exacting aggressive revenge on individuals and vigorously gathering men and supplies. In contrast, Cécile had isolated herself and been slowly learning to master her abilities. Boukman visited her once every few months and had taught her about *Bondye*, the supreme source of power; the sensitive spirits called the *Lwa*, who they could ask for help; and how Vodou priests and priestesses, or *oungan* or *manbo* respectively, like her and Boukman, conducted rituals and sacrifices.

Of course, Cécile could not blame rebels like Henri entirely. She did not have complete faith in the religion when she was first told about it either. Before, Cécile had found her prophetic feelings and dreams troubling, and consequently kept them hidden. She could not quite believe it when the new slave, Boukman, arranged to meet her in the barn of the big house three years prior and told her he had been searching for her for years, and that she hailed from a long line of Vodou queens.

That night in the dimly lit barn, Cécile had told Boukman that she did not want to take part in his Revolution and that she just wanted to escape the big house. She promptly ignored him when he told her that she would never be free of the big house – not without a Revolution. However, they continued to meet under the cover of darkness. He had offered to teach her how to read, and not only did Cécile want to learn, but she liked knowing that when Guerin was holding her down and sullying her body, she was resisting him, even if it was only in her mind.

Things changed when Boukman witnessed one of Guerin's friends, Dupont, mercilessly whip a six-year-old slave boy to a bloody pulp. In the chaos of the beating, and perhaps with the help of some mysterious *Lwa*, Boukman had stormed onto some nearby land and broken into a chicken coop. He had ripped a chicken's wings, feet and head off with his bare hands, before placing the organs in a calabash dish and uttering some kind of chant. The next day, Dupont was plagued with some malady that had since kept him bed-bound, unable to speak, and his eyes permanently wide with terror. This inspired Cécile: she had never seen a slave punish a white man without relying on the strength of the physical body and walking away unnoticed and unscathed.

The slow and steady pattering of rain brought Cécile back to this plane. Unfortunately, it also silenced the excited scrabbling of a caiman that had eyed her when she had first approached the stream, but had remained hidden, biding his chances. His low, dark green body, around fifteen feet long, was well hidden by the rain and pine, and the scales provided welcome protection from the now hard-hitting water droplets. He eyed Cécile beadily, who had stopped to inspect a nearby tree, and like her, paused momentarily.

Fortunately, Cécile's heart quickened, as she could feel his presence. *Finally*, she thought, and tried to turn before realising her spear was stuck amongst some thick barrel vines overhead. With some force she tugged the weapon out, only to notice that one of the vines had woven itself tightly around the spear. Not wanting to waste any time, Cécile left it and turned around slowly. She bent down and scanned the underbrush, where she spotted two watchful eyes, bright as a loquat, and covered her mouth from gasping so as not to startle the beast.

As the rain continued to fall, the caiman approached her, now doing so in the open as he knew Cécile had already spotted him. He was braver than most alligators in his approach, and as he emerged from the underbrush, Cécile could see why. He was far bigger than an ordinary caiman, with scales as tough as armour, and pointed teeth as sharp and as large as a knife. A worthy soldier indeed.

Animal and woman paused, looking at one another intently. Cécile could not help noticing that they had the same piercing eye colour.

A few more seconds passed, and then the caiman lurched forward, lightning-fast, with his teeth bared and his eyes flashing with vigour. Too frightened to strike, Cécile leapt sideways, just out of his reach, and instinctively jumped on top of him instead. The spear fell from her grasp, so she pummelled him with her hands with all her might until the caiman threw her off his body.

Cécile fell into the mud, gasping at the pain. Her mind still fuzzy, she pushed her now-unbound hair away from her face and the sludge from around her eyes. Spitting out some of

the mud from her mouth, she searched frantically for the spear, finally spotting it a few feet away from her. Like a crab spider Cécile crawled forward and clawed at the weapon, just as the caiman whipped around and darted towards her. His jaw was opened wide, ready to swallow her whole.

Mustering all the strength she had, Cécile stuck the spear straight through the roof of his mouth. In the beast's final moments, she watched her reflection, a grotesque mix of the earth's mud and leaves, leave the caiman's pupils as they rolled back and his eyes went cloudy.

Still shocked that she had accomplished what she set out to do, Cécile reached forwards and grasped his brown tooth. Unfortunately, while her hand wrenched the tooth out, the spear shattered from the weight of the caiman's head, and his jaw had snapped shut.

Cécile sat still for a moment before letting out a blood-curdling scream, startling some nearby parakeets.

Eventually, she pulled away from the mouth and gobbets of her flesh strained, broke, and dripped from her hand until it was ripped entirely from her wrist. She stared at her stump in bewilderment before finally passing out. Her body lay buried amongst the dirt and blood as the parakeets returned to the trees, the rain continued to fall, and the mist formed a shroud over both animal and woman.

After

"Are you ready?"

Boukman and Cécile stood amongst the trees, a few paces away from the clearing which was filled with a tense atmosphere and fellow insurgents.

"Yes," Cécile replied, about to tie the wrap around her head in a feeble attempt to tame her thick curls, before deciding it was better to leave her hair undone.

Boukman appraised her gently. He was not worried about the ceremony. Everything had gone smoothly so far, even the difficult operation of acquiring what he termed the 'violent beast'. What came after, including his own fate, was more troubling, but he was slowly coming to terms with it.

Boukman cast a pitiful eye towards Cécile's right stump. "I'm sorry about your hand," he said.

As if by some blessed twist of fate, Boukman had arrived less than half an hour after Cécile's battle with the caiman. Learned in the medical field, he had hacked what little remained of her hand off and stitched it up with the help of rum and rubbing back in the treehouse. Cécile was mostly unconscious during this, but it remained the worst physical distress she had ever suffered.

Perhaps Cécile should have waited until she came to her senses before extracting the tooth, as Boukman had unhelpfully informed her after, but she did not think it mattered. She knew that the spirits would have had her lose the hand regardless. She could not murder such a beast without some sacrifice of her own.

Cécile reached inside the front of her dress and drew out the brown tooth, which she had attached to a metal chain that hung around her neck.

"A worthy exchange," she said, patting down her red dress and turning away from him.

Boukman nodded. Cécile had grown so wise he often forgot the sceptical, unsure girl she used to be, back in the big house.

"Before we go, I just want to say something," he said, and Cécile turned back around.

Boukman placed his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes, which were as green as the cacti behind her.

"I have always told you that the Revolution was bigger than yourself. There are many of us out there right now, from plantations you may not have even heard of, and it is true that it is for them that we are sacrificing our lives... But it is also for you. Do you understand?"

Cécile nodded solemnly.

"Good. Then let us begin."

The night air was warm and full of anticipation as Cécile followed Boukman into the clearing, which was crowded with slaves and insurgents. They were two-hundred strong – more than she had expected. How perilous their journeys must have been! It was no easy feat for a slave to plan an escape to the next few villages or towns, what with the forging of papers and unreliable safehouses, let alone the length of time to venture to these distant northern mountains.

As she and Boukman made their way through the crowd to the middle of the clearing – where a pyre lay – Cécile steadied her breathing and cast her eyes above her fellow people, concentrating on the unruly mosaic of dewy green leaves and flecks of shiny bark. That, and the deep black soil that mingled between her toes below comforted her and kept her focused on the task at hand.

"Welcome," Boukman turned to address the crowd in his deep, gravelly voice. "Let us light the fire."

Henri was at the front of the crowd, carrying a lantern. He nodded at Boukman and Cécile before throwing it onto the pyre. Flames sprouted from the wood like plants from the earth.

"Bring our guest and the beast forward."

Another Revolution leader, Gabriel, motioned to someone else carrying a black pig in their arms to approach. He then pulled a large bound and gagged lump from the floor and onto his feet. With a start Cécile realised it was Guerin, but a more ragged and tattered Guerin than she remembered, with his clothing stained and ripped, red slashes all over his body, and his eyes wild like an animal.

His eyes glittering, Boukman took the black pig, muttered something, and turned to Cécile. "Go on, *manbo*."

The slaves began a chant, softly at first, but it gradually grew louder, and more resounding with a quickened beating of drums. Guerin had now been brought to the front of the crowd.

Cécile stepped closer, and with one slick and sure movement, she slit the pig's throat, its blood staining her hands. In the peripheries of her vision, she saw Gabriel's face wrench into one of disgust at Guerin who had promptly wet himself with fear.

Boukman cast the pig's body onto the fire, and Cécile's eyes went white.

She could no longer see the ceremony. She could not see anything except a dark-skinned wizened woman with a colourful headscarf and baby at her breast who now materialised in front of her.

Ezili Dantò, mother of the oppressed! As the spirit approached her Cécile could see two red scars on her face, burning a furious red like the sun. But her eyes looked over Cécile softly, with what seemed to be a combination of pity and determination. Cécile closed her eyes when the *Lwa* reached out to her, not out of fear, but respect, and felt a brush of wind. When she opened them, she could see the ceremony and hear the drums again. The spirit had disappeared, but Cécile felt the spirit inside of her, boiling her blood.

The chant became even louder, so thunderous that Cécile could feel it echoing in her veins.

"Throw away the image of the God of the whites who thirsts for our tears. Listen to the liberty that speaks in all our hearts."

Boukman turned to Gabriel. "Bring him closer to the *manbo*."

Gabriel brought Guerin to Cécile and signalled to two other members of the crowd to help him hold the still struggling captive in place.

Cécile paused, and regarded Guerin carefully for a few moments, while his eyes grew wide with fear. Cécile had lived in the big house for eleven years, from the tender age of eight, and in all that time she had never seen her former Master afraid of anything.

"You never did *own* me," she whispered to him calmly, so only he and *Ezili Dantò*, who Cécile could still feel pulsating within her, could hear.

With that, Cécile's hand, and the translucent hand of the *Lwa*, pulled the tooth from around her neck once more and dragged it across Guerin's throat in one seamless, sweeping movement. A river of crimson began to pour from his neck, and onto her dress, her hands, even her face, but she did not mind.

She spat out some of his blood, and together with Gabriel and the two others, they tossed his body onto the fire.

Bonfires continued to rage all over the country that night, as well as in the hearts of slaves, who took up arms against their white oppressors on the plantations. Many died, including slaves, but it was too raging an inferno for the French to contain. Guerin's blood was only the beginning.

Critical Commentary

The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which overturned French colonial rule and liberated slaves, is often thought to have begun at Bois Caïman. In this forest a Vodou ceremony took place, and the first major insurrection of the Revolution was planned. The character of Cécile is based off Vodou priestess Cécile Fatiman, who was present at the ceremony and was said to have cut the throat of a pig and offered its blood to the spectators. A week later, plantations were destroyed, and uprisings began in Haiti.

Female slaves are often neglected during slave rebellion discourse, including the real-life Cécile, who, as anthropologist Kate Kingsbury observes, makes a 'fleeting appearance in some accounts, whilst is discredited in others […] [yet] played a vital role in providing "superhuman courage" and spiritual strength to insurgents.'[1] While she may not have physically taken up arms against white oppressors, her importance as a *manbo* (Vodou priestess) should not be understated. Vodou originated in Africa and was seen as an affront to Christianity and other Western religions. For instance, vodou is elemental and closely aligned with nature. Fire, water, trees, and stones are central to many rituals, but as Rachel Stein states, 'in Western theological tradition worshippers must forswear the natural world and carnal existence', and indeed, during the eighteenth century, anyone apprehended at a Vodou gathering would be sentenced to death.[2] Consequently, as journalists Kim Wall and Caterina Clerici reflect, Haitian Vodou 'became a religion with rebellion and freedom at its heart', almost synonymous with the Revolution itself, which Cécile harnesses against her oppressors.[3]

Moreover, the spirit that Cécile encounters, both in this story and from folklore, is the *Lwa* Ezili Dantò. As examined by A.S. Weber, Vodou often falls victim to tired stereotypes, 'such as the view that it is a form of Satanism and that its practices are wholly rooted in natural magic, for example, the control of zombies and casting spells and curses.'[4] But Ezili Dantò is not a juvenile and banal spirit but believed to be, as Kingsbury claims, a 'compassionate mother of the oppressed and abused, protector of women and children [and] victims of sexual assault'[5] as well as being 'known for her uncontrollable wrath and her vindictive nature.'[6] This is depicted in the story as the spirit is a manifestation of the pain and strength of oppressed slave women that Cécile draws upon and channels against Guerin. Ezili Dantò is suggestive of Cécile's situation but the fact that Vodou naturally incorporates other cultures (as an example, the slave trade's transportation of the religion meant it blended with Roman Catholicism) also marks the universal pain and power of oppressed women in different time periods and cultures. Invoking such a *feminine* divine being, evocative of the black woman's experience, renders the religion and the killing of Guerin more effective and stresses that slave women can never be truly owned or tamed.

Feminine defiance is also depicted through Cécile's hair, as media and communications expert Brenda A. Randle claims that 'black hair in its natural state is often negatively marked for its' difference' because it reflects African ancestry and a low social status.[7] Cécile's choice to leave her hair untied during the ceremony references the contemporary movement to prioritise natural hair and blackness. It also symbolises her

[1] Kate Kingsbury, 'In Her Own Image: Slave Women and the Re-imagining of the Polish Black Madonna as Ezili Dantò, the Fierce Female Lwa of Haitian Vodou', *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, 3.1 (2019), 212- 232, p. 214.

[2] Rachel Stein, 'Remembering the Sacred Tree: Black Women, Nature and Voodoo in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', *Women's Studies*, 25.5 (1996) 465-482, p. 470.

[3] Kim Wall and Caterina Clerici, 'Vodou is elusive and endangered, but it remains the soul of Haitian people', *The Guardian*, 7 November 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/07/vodou-haiti-endangered-faith-soul-of-haitian-people>.

[4] A.S. Weber, 'Haitian Vodou and Ecotheology', *The Ecumenical Review*, 70 (2018), pp.679-694, p. 680.

[5] Kingsbury, p. 212.

[6] Ibid, p. 213.

[7] Brenda A. Randle, 'I Am Not My Hair: African American Women and Their Struggles with Embracing Natural Hair!', *Race, Gender & Class*, 22 (2015), pp.114–121, p. 117.

complete freedom from Guerin's ownership, as recently captured slaves often had the hair chopped off while female house slaves mostly covered their hair because they were too busy with work to comb it properly. Therefore, Cécile is what Kingsbury deems 'the obverse of the stereotypes of passive and simplistic Black women' because she resists her white oppressors and proves that she is 'untamed', but in an unconventional and unique way.[8]

Resistance to slavery is intertwined with the concept of 'wilderness', because, as Erik Nielson claims, wilderness provides 'a natural retreat and place of camouflage.'[9] As an example, Nat Turner, who led the deadliest slave revolt in US history in 1831, escaped his overseer and took shelter in the woods for a month and spent his final days there before he was eventually captured and killed. Colonialist ideas of civilisation are based on the disruption, domination, and destruction of nature, but in Cécile's story, the natural world remains untamed by oppressors and serves as a sanctuary for her and the other insurgents. But it was not just a place of safety, as Turner 'began reading and interpreting his natural surroundings for signs about when and how to conduct his rebellion', which he would refer to as a 'wilderness moment'.[10] Hidden spots in the woods were used as meeting places to plan the attack, and Cécile's story also troubles conventional notions of wilderness as empty, passive spaces separate from society as it serves as a space of alternative social organisation where the slaves begin the Haitian Revolution.

Likewise, former American slave Harriet Jacobs reflects in her slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) that she finds her determination to escape imprisonment renewed when she enters the woods. Neilson observes that she is 'moved by her natural surroundings, she recalls Nat Turner […] her resolve to act is steeled.'[11] Similarly, it is only in Bois Caïman that Cécile's faith in Boukman, Vodou and the Revolution is truly understood and ignited. Furthermore, while the wilderness may traditionally connote an uninhabited, lonely area, enslavement was like being a prisoner in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, so to be completely alone with no onlookers would be an emancipating experience. It would be particularly liberating for women, as Carla L. Peterson reflects, as a 'black woman's body was always envisioned as public and exposed' due to frequent whippings and sexual assault, which is akin to Cécile's experience as she was constantly visible to Guerin.[12] Thus, not only does wilderness offer physical and emotional protection for Nat Turner, Harriet Jacobs, and Cécile, it is also a form of resistance against the control of white oppressors.

To summarise, *Queen Cécile* encapsulates a predominantly female resistance against white tormentors where a spiritual, natural, and wholly rebellious religion embodies black women's distinctive strength and resilience. As a mixed-race woman of Caribbean descent, I find what little is known about Cécile Fatiman exceptionally powerful, so I hope I have done her justice in these pages.

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[8] Kingsbury, p. 215.

[9] Erik Nielson, '"Go in de wilderness": Evading the "Eyes of Others" in the Slave Songs', *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 35.2 (2011), pp.106-117, p. 106.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Nielson, p. 110.

[12] Carla L. Peterson, 'Secular and Sacred Space in the Spiritual Autobiographies of Jarena Lee', in *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 37-59 (p. 41).

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The Breakdown

Suzanne von Engelhardt

That morning Lisandra's mother had borrowed the neighbour's car and told Lisandra to get in – on a school day! They were heading to Lübars to see the water buffalo her mother had heard about on Radio Paradiso. Their battered car skipped along between apartment blocks grey as chalk boards wiped with a dirty rag. Fat railings along the balconies beamed white like the handles old people needed to get in and out of the bathtub. The black October trees had shucked off their leaves that now stuck to the road in yellow splotches. The crowns of the trees bowed overhead as Lisandra's kindly teachers did when they only wanted to help. What her teachers didn't get was that the work of pulling her mother back down to the ground had become Lisandra's job after her father left.

The pair of them were barrelling toward the edge of the city, the boundary where people stopped turning the outdoors to indoors, where wild animals climbed and flew, ate and pooed, screeched and had nests with naked, whining babies. Without the walls or school hours, without the teachers' rules or doctor's instructions, Lisandra was on her own. Maybe if they found a few squirrels, her mother would be satisfied with their adventure and agree to head back home. But squirrels would never be exotic enough. Lisandra steeled herself to quietly take over should things get out of control. Cooling her mother's rage, out here in the wilderness, might take extra skills.

Did her mother have to chase after every idiotic thing people mentioned? Missing school would mean Lisandra had to make up an excuse and write it in her mother's looping letters, so unlike German writing. Her story would have to be convincing, make her teachers take pity. Because the truth of Lisandra's life was beyond her teachers' explanations. It didn't make much sense to Lisandra either. Like seeing a dumb water buffalo in Berlin would make her mother less of a foreigner. But that's what this sudden flight to the countryside must be. Her mother had come to Berlin from Canada, and her mother's mother had moved to Canada from Estonia. Lisandra couldn't wait for her chance to move to another country and escape all this frantic nonsense.

Where the city street ended, their car spilled onto a cobblestone lane and rumbled through the village. The car jerked past the churchyard, around the town hall and left at the market until the road narrowed and potholes came as often as paving. Where the tall grass started, the cobblestones disappeared into packed dirt. Two plank paths encouraged her mother deeper into the uncut field. Her mother teetered along them like Lisandra in PE on the parallel bars that were always too far apart. The car slapped through leaves of stinging nettles. Where the wild grasses thinned, she could see a pale surface widening out in the distance reflecting a soapy sky.

From the moment they had set out from Friedenau, she wanted to shout, *Mom, you can't believe a thing you hear on Radio Paradiso!* The janitor at school listened to the station

from a portable he pushed around on his cart. Kids would huddle close during break to catch the latest outlandish claims from the DJ whose announcements of UFO sightings slipped into their ears like the voice of a god. But she knew how her mother would react if she tried to reason with her. Her mother didn't like it when eleven-year-old Lissie got all uppity, thinking she knew more about the workings of the world than a grownup. Lisandra hated being Lissie. It sounded like Sissie.

And she did know how to operate in the city beyond their flat, how to take down the nasty kids and blend in to avoid prying grownups. Yet Lisandra's greatest task, the worry that took up the most space in her mind, was to make sure the outside world never met her mother's inside world: that spooky place where this sturdy-looking woman wandered lost for days, and easily went off the rails.

Lisandra knew, for instance, if you went to school with uncombed hair, dirty clothes and no snack, the school would call the parents to ask what the problem was. Even if the clothes were clean, they also had to be dry, not clinging damp or smelling like a sandwich forgotten at the bottom of her school bag. So, the first thing she did every afternoon when she got home was make sure she had fresh clothes and crackers or an apple for the next day.

There was also the issue of her mother not having too much contact with the school. If the director didn't accept Lisandra's excuses, and she couldn't prevent her mother from attending a conference, Lisandra had to quietly remind her mother to agree with whatever the director demanded and nod no matter what her teachers believed. If her mother did not accept their word, she would go silent. In the silence, her mother bounced on an internal trampoline, jumping higher and higher until she exploded in a boiled plastic outburst of rage.

That kind of attack should be avoided inside the cramped space of their car. Lisandra pulled her eyes off the lake to study her mother. Her upper body leaned into her mission. Her fierce hands gripped the wheel. Her face burned with serious intentions.

They raced along the planks buried in dead summer weeds as though ghosts were after them. The lake grew to fill the whole windscreen with tall, stiff swords. Is that what rushes were? Shortly before their car plunged into the thicket, the path veered left. Her mother ripped the wheel to the side in pursuit. The force smashed Lisandra into the door. Her cheek crushed the damp window. Barely had they righted themselves when the parallel tracks stopped tracking. Two cut-off ends poked the air – which made no sense. Roads, even ones this simple, didn't just end. Roads continued with exits and intersections until you turned into a driveway or came up against a house. The planks ended at a mini cliff where the car shot out and separated from the ground.

For an instant she thrilled at her lightness. Her bottom hovered above her seat. In an instant, her mother was in charge and had launched them into orbit through sheer determination. Maybe her mother's imagination had conjured a space where heavy objects could grow buoyant and fly. But the sensation only lasted a heartbeat before the car lurched downward. The underside collided with rock, scraping the dry metal. The force of their momentum propelled them sideways until they skidded into a bed of mud. Lisandra flew hard into her seatbelt. Their heads snapped back into the rests.

The tyres stopped. The motor died. Her mother, as though anticipating this hurdle, threw the shift into first gear and revved the engine. But the rear wheels, instead of engaging, churned up spigots of muck that pelted onto the roof. Then all fell dead – but not quite.

Her mother expelled air in gasps whose rhythm was accelerating. The mud was having the same effect as Lisandra's comment about dumb stories on Radio Paradiso would have had. Her mother's hands gripped the steering wheel. Some cursing or a bang on the dashboard would have been a relief, but her solid mother sat still, gaining speed, gaining height on her internal trampoline.

Counting to ten is how Lisandra calmed herself, but her mother might not understand the comfort of numbers. If she stroked her mother's arm, the arm might inadvertently lash out and catch Lisandra in the face. Not that her mother intended it to. It was just a reflex her mother had no control over. She could suggest her mother take deep breaths and think what to do next, but that advice had been known to lead to the involuntary arm reflex too.

And then it came to her. Lisandra knew just the remedy. She parted her lips and softly, so as not to cause alarm, sang the lullaby her mother had always crooned to her. The notes quavered then landed on her true pitch, and her confidence grew. The foreign words, carried on the melody, blended into a soothing stream. She sneaked a glimpse of the shape next to her.

While her mother's foot had stopped pumping the pedal, her arms were working the steering wheel, kneading the leather cover. Her face was rapidly taking on a vibrant pink from chin to forehead. Her ears glowed like newborn mice.

Lisandra struggled to keep her lullaby soft, punched down the urge to take the grownup's line and tell her mother: *Knock it off already. We'll figure a way out of this mess*.

She reached the end of the verse and was about started over from the beginning when a knuckle rapped on the back of the car. It rang hollow around them like an announcer testing the microphone.

'Get out of the damn car,' a scratchy voice commanded.

Lisandra looked around to see their rescuer, but the windows were spattered the brown-orange of vomit.

Her mother obeyed like a well-trained pup: She reached down and released her seatbelt. She pulled on the door handle but had to shove her shoulder into it to get the door to open. She swivelled in her seat, and her feet squelched twice as they penetrated the mud.

'Hello, mother,' came from her mother's mouth.

This was a whole new level of spooky and off the rails.

Lisandra *knew* her grandmother was dead.

They had missed her grandmother's funeral because they didn't have the money to fly to Toronto from Berlin. She quickly flicked through the other things she knew about her grandmother: Lisandra was to call her grandmother *Vanaema*, the Estonian way to say granny. At the time she learned this, she was staring at a photo of a thin woman tied tight with a belt and staring hate at the world. Lisandra had only managed to say *Vanni*. Missing the funeral was okay, went the reasoning, because Vanaema wouldn't have wanted her daughter spending money on such a damn fool thing as flying. Her mother explained this as though Vanaema had returned to instruct people on how to deal with her dying.

'Typical,' the scratchy voice outside spat out. 'Always damaging your in-com-pe-ti-tant self. How you tink you get out of dis punch? You got money for a tow truck?'

Lisandra watched her mother through the open door, sunk halfway up her shins in the grey slop, her head cut off by the roof of the car.

'I can handle it, mother,' her mother said.

But she said it in that low growl she used when she was expending her energy on the internal trampoline. It probably sounded sinister, or dead, to people who didn't know her mother. That was pretty much everyone. Only Lisandra knew the rippling currents of her mother's moods.

'Stupid, stupid girl. You out here at nowhere, doing what?' Vanaema egged Lisandra's mother on. 'You chasing a boy?' A wind blew her mocking words into the car where they swirled in a gathering storm.

'Mind your mouth, mother.' Lisandra's mother's voice barely qualified as a whisper. She could almost see her inside person bouncing near the ceiling that kept her contained. And in that same moment, Lisandra also saw that her mother was her grandmother's daughter. This trunk of woman rooted in the wet ground was a daughter who had had to learn to adapt to her own mother's ways.

'Such a pity you turn out like your deadbeat father,' Vanaema said in that *accent* that sliced right to your core.

Lisandra could hear her mother's breathing grow huskier. She knew the signals. It wasn't good.

'Come, be sweet to your *ema*.'

That would be the Estonian way to say mother.

'Your ema loves you, wants only paradise for her *tütar*.'

That must mean daughter.

The strange words had a calming effect on her mother because she reached out and whispered 'tütar' with a tenderness so unlike her mother it could have come from a bird or an otter. Lisandra's mother pulled up her right leg to take a step towards her ema, but her foot stayed behind. Lisandra watched the towering form of her mighty mother wobble. Her mother jerked herself up in a painful move. But there was no helping her. She teetered sideways and slumped to her knees in the sludge with a nasty sucking noise followed by a whimper.

Vanaema shrieked. At first Lisandra thought they were sounds of shock, but the next chuckles left no doubt. The old woman was laughing like a whining horse.

'You finally down in the mud where you belong,' she rubbed it in further:

Now Lisandra could see her mother's face and dirt-gloved hands framed by the opening in the side of the car. Her mother's cheeks fevered, and her eyes bulged. She lashed out with her claws, but that only coated her jumper in thick paste.

Sniggering and snorting carried on somewhere behind the car.

Her mother stopped to wipe away hair, smearing herself chin to temple. It looked like poo.

Her mother dropped her head. The low autumn sun made the grass and her mother's hair glow gold. Her upper body throbbed with spasms: chug, chug, chug up – chug, chug, chug down. This was something new. Her mother was sobbing. Lisandra knew this because she did it too, at night in her room when the rest of the world was at peace.

Lisandra scooted her bottom from the passenger seat, up over the handbrake, and plopped herself into the driver's seat, pulling her legs over the gearshift into the well. She reached a thin arm out the door and offered her mother a hand.

Her mother glanced at the small palm and fingers, but instead of taking the help, she used the back of her wrist to push a cascade of hair out of Lisandra's face.

Gently, Lisandra planted her mother's hand on the car frame where it clamped down.

A shadow moved in, hovering over the long grass near the nose of the car.

Vanaema, in the meantime, had caught her breath. 'You see? You in the dirt water where I said you land if you don't take care of me. So petulant, never grateful for what I do for YOU!'

The shadow moved in closer.

'Jeez, she's awful,' Lisandra said.

A water buffalo stepped into view. He was so near she could have hit him with a stone. His clunky body looked like the soggy paper strips they had pasted onto a balloon to make ugly lanterns for school. Its legs were so skinny, she couldn't figure out why he didn't sink into the mud. Two wide horns sat on its head like a silly lunch tray. But there it was.

Lisandra kneeled on the seat, grabbed her mother under the arm and guided her up. Now stable on her feet, her mother reached down to fill her hand and hurled a clump of muck at the old woman.

This was getting good.

Lisandra stepped from the car and felt the cold slurp into her shoes around her ankles. At her mother's side, she could see it all: Vanaema, standing behind the car, a shocked expression on her face and a dark sash dripping from her blouse onto her skirt.

The water buffalo held the third point of their triangle, tearing off grass, working its jaw like it might have something to say in a minute.

Lisandra slung her arm around her mother's hips.

Vanaema peered at them. 'Who's dis?' she asked.

Her mother looked down and laid a sodden arm around her daughter.

Lisandra smiled and said, 'I'm Lissie.'

Vanaema fell silent, and as she did, her body grew thinner. Not like losing weight. Her body became a little see-through. Vanaema let out an indignant grunt.

The water buffalo chewed and watched.

Her mother squeezed Lisandra's shoulder, then set about pulling herself from the slick onto dry ground.

Vanaema walked to the open car door, passed through Lisandra like a chill wind and sat herself down in the back seat.

Her mother matted enough dry branches around the tyres to give the car traction, returned to the driver's seat and reversed out of there.

The water buffalo sneezed and wandered into the waning sun.

The sun's last rays warmed the car through the windscreen; the haze lifted.

The two women appeared to have reached an understanding. Maybe truce was a way of accepting each other. The pair seemed as though they now held two ends of a rope strung taut between them. It was the guide her mother had needed to tether her to the ground.

That rope relieved Lisandra of that work. As her mother steered the three of them back to Friedenau, they sang along with Radio Paradiso's favourite song of the month: 'House at the Lake'.

The note for today would be a breeze because her mother could write the truth, and Lissie's teachers would understand: *Please excuse Lissie's absence from school yesterday. Her cantankerous grandmother arrived from abroad, and I needed Lissie's help to collect her.*

With any luck, her Vanaema would know how to do laundry.

Critical Commentary on 'The Breakdown'

Trauma – whether slight or profound, solitary or repeated – is inescapable for all humans. The challenge of dramatising trauma begins with choice of character, conflict and setting, all of which must draw from the knowledge that self-awareness is rooted in 'physical sensations connected to emotions'.[1] If readers are to connect with a story about trauma, the prose must dramatise the trauma's landscape and progression such that readers can experience the state of heightened nervousness. In 'The Breakdown', the movements of a racing car provide the initial physical sensations for readers to identify with the main character Lisandra. The story unfolds as a comparison between eleven-year-old Lisandra's previous knowledge of the world and her new physical sensations. The sensations enable the reader to vicariously experience the shift that takes place in her world and learn from those events.

At the age of eleven, a child can both accept the world as it is and have an awareness of critical views from others and conflicting societal expectations. Lisandra – as the mediator between her unstable mother and her disapproving teachers – must contend with a conflict over which she has little control. The novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch observes that a function of the human psyche is to look after itself, which it achieves by denying some realities: 'Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain.'[2] This is the state in which we find Lisandra at the outset of 'The Breakdown': She stands by her mother by joining her on a wild goose chase to find water buffalo, empathising with her mother's internal states, and yet she denies the advanced decline of her mother's mental health. The story uses Murdoch's insight to create dramatic irony: the reader recognises what Lisandra cannot, that her mother's condition is more responsibility than Lisandra can handle. The reader knows her mother needs help from other adults.

Will Storr argues that our evolutionary development has led the human brain to strive for control over its environment, even if the control is an imaginary one.[3] Indeed, Lisandra endeavours to control her mother's volatile behaviour through a reversal of the parent-child relationship. While the girl understands that her mother's behaviour is unacceptable to

[1] Robert P. Hyatt, 'Michael Polanyi and Bessel A. van der Kolk on the Healing Power of Metaphor', *Tradition & Discovery: The Journal of the Polanyi Society,* 48.1 (2022), p. 31 <http://polanyisociety.org/TAD%20WEB%20ARCHIVE/TAD48-1/TAD48-1-basic-pg.html>.

[2] Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p. 293.

[3] Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling* (London: William Collins, 2019), p. 12.

others, Lisandra's compassion leads her 'to make sure the outside world never met her mother's inside world'. Though she has learned to maintain a veneer of orderliness, the reader can surmise that Lisandra's attempts will be inadequate, her capacity to parent her mother limited, and her prospect of coping with this overwhelming situation destined to fail. Indeed, there are indications that Lisandra's emotional resources have already reached their breaking point: as their car dashes off the cobblestone lane into a field, her mother 'teetered along [the planks] like Lisandra in PE on the parallel bars that were always too far apart.'

There is a further indication of Lisandra's protective reverie when she imagines herself one day escaping to another country. On the face of it, Lisandra has made a simple observation: her grandmother moved from Estonia to Canada and her mother moved from Canada to Germany, therefore Lisandra, too, will one day leave for a foreign country. However, the reader will suspect that the mother's erratic behaviour is the manifestation of a deeper trauma. Escape has become a mechanism for coping with a trauma experienced in the family decades earlier which is being passed down from mother to daughter, perpetuated as transgenerational trauma.[4] This trauma is the hidden conflict in need of resolution within the story.

A shift must take place for Lisandra's untenable position to be resolved, either in the external circumstances or within Lisandra's understanding of her world. Joseph Campbell, in his much-cited 'hero's journey' or what he terms the 'monomyth', foresees the protagonist as having to leave the community, enter another world, overcome either an internal or external obstacle and return to the community having learned self-sacrifice.[5] Yet as Kim Hudson determines, the feminine narrative arc takes a much different path, one Hudson terms 'the virgin's promise'.[6] Women, Hudson argues, do not need to learn self-sacrifice. They are biologically designed to gestate, birth and nurture children. Nor do women need to leave their community to reach maturity. Instead, Hudson argues, the feminine tale demands that a young woman (the virgin) learns to 'embrace who she knows herself to be' if she is to reach her inner potential.[7] In 'The Breakdown', Lisandra's mother is driving Lisandra, both physically and metaphorically, to the boundary between civilisation and the natural world, where borders dissolve and fantasies of seeing a water buffalo can come true. During the frightening adventure, Lisandra comes to see, through the vision of her dead grandmother, that her own mother is also a daughter. Lisandra gains an acceptance of her mother and, in doing so, of herself. The grandmother appears in a ghostly form who moves in with them, but the actual appearance of the water buffalo, previously believed to be no more substantial than a UFO sighting, lends credence to her mother's understanding of the world. Lisandra learns her mother is not crazy, indeed her mother has been chasing after the formative relationship which anchors her own existence. This shift in understanding has the effect of

[4] Transgenerational trauma is defined as trauma passed from parents to children either in larger social groups or within individual families. See Elizabeth Mohn, 'Transgenerational Trauma', *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (2020) <https://search-ebscohost-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=121772933&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

[5] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2008), p. 24 for the 'hero-task' illustrated by the Great Struggle of the Buddha.

[6] Kim Hudson, *The Virgin's Promise* (Studio City, California: Michael Wiese, 2010), p. xxii.

[7] Ibid, p. xxiv.

reversing the parent-child relationship back to a healthier basis, one in which Lisandra can become the child Lissie.

The encounter with 'her Vanaema', her grandmother, is a physical manifestation of the therapeutic process. When the memory of the deceased grandmother turns into a tangible ghost in the story, Lisandra directly experiences her mother's confrontation with her past. Readers too are able to bypass the long process of recognition and reconciliation that otherwise would take place in a therapist's practise and vicariously experience two dimensions of coming to terms with family trauma: through the mother's physical attack of her own mother and Lisandra's conscious processing of the conflict passed down to her through her matrilineal line.

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