EXCLAMAT!ON:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

NETWORKS
AND
CONNECTIONS

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EDITORIAL

'Networks and Connections' – the theme of this, the third volume of *Exclamat!on: An Interdisciplinary Journal* – is highly topical both within and outside of academia. As the world becomes increasingly networked through technology, the ways in which we are connected to one another is more comprehensive than ever before, and yet simultaneously more fraught and contested. Networks and connections are also of vital importance in an increasingly competitive and uncertain job market. And our research hubs are working in ever-more interdisciplinary and diverse ways, creating innovative and exciting connections across multiple boundaries.

To facilitate engagement with this theme and the journal more broadly, *Exclamat!on* held its inaugural conference at the University of Exeter in June 2018. The conference intentionally sought to provide contributors with an opportunity to present their work and receive constructive feedback ahead of submitting it for this volume. I am therefore thrilled that a number of the articles published in this volume were ultimately borne out of that conference. The success, too, of both the conference and this volume is further epitomised by the diversity of submissions received. This pertains not just to interpretations of the theme, which range from hereditary succession in the early modern period to networks of appropriated myths and cultural memory in the twenty-first century, but to the fact that the submissions are from MA and PhD students based at institutions from across the UK. The conference and this resulting volume thus met its other objective of provoking numerous, stimulating conversions about the heterogeneous ways networks and connections intersect both within and beyond the disciplines of English, Film and Creative Writing, as well as created new networks between research and taught postgraduate communities from across the UK. This is something that I hope will continue through this volume and beyond.

As with the first and second volume, the publication of this volume would not have been possible without support. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial team for their exceptionally hard work over the course of this year, as they oversaw

The production of this volume exemplifies the extent to which the journal has not only continued to grow in reputation and scope, but has become a fully-fledged and nationally- established postgraduate journal. As the Editor and co-founder, I am immensely proud of all that *Exclamat!on* has achieved from its inception in 2017 to the present day. With the publication of this volume, I have now come to the end of my tenure as Editor. I am delighted, however, to be handing the journal over for the fourth volume to Ash Gannicott and Joe Holloway, both of whom have worked as Deputy Editors this year. I am confident that *Exclamat!on* will continue to flourish with Ash and Joe at its helm; and, as they, in turn, pass it on to future editors, that *Exclamat!on: An Interdisciplinary Journal* will continue to foster discussions, collaborations and intellectual development amongst and between research and taught postgraduates for many years to come.

Teresa Sanders

Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl', Harry Hay, and the Expansion of Homosexual Communities in Post-War America

Dawn Amber Harvey

Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl' (1956) supplies a united voice for disenfranchised people who were unable to find their place in post-war American society. As America tried to restructure itself after World War II, the government promoted conformity to American family values, which resulted in alienation for minority groups including homosexuals, women's groups and black communities. Ginsberg's poem begins by addressing the experience of excluded individuals and exposing the ways in which the abuse they encountered could manifest in the form of mental illness, material deprivation and wasted talent. The piece then continues by putting emphasis on the importance of connection as it shifts towards a sense of empowerment and encourages the formation of a network of bodies that will work together to reclaim power for minority groups, dissenting against power structures that are implemented to control people. In this article, I discuss the resonance of the message of 'Howl' to the expansion of homosexual communities in post-war America. I draw parallels between Ginsberg's writing and the work of Harry Hay, a prominent gay rights activist referred to as 'the founder of gay liberation', who, in 1950, established the first sustained gay rights organization in America - The Mattachine Society.[1] I make this comparison to highlight common lines of thought and the considerable contributions both men made to help improve the lives of homosexuals in post-war America.[2]

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[1] Anne-Marie Cusak, 'Meet Pioneer of Gay Rights, Harry Hay' *Progressive Magazine*, 9 August 2016, n.p.
<http://progressive.org/magazine/meet-pioneer-gay-rights-harry-hay>.
[2] Note: the use the word 'homosexual' and the avoidance of contemporary terminology throughout this article is a conscious decision made to avoid anachronistic readings of the work.

The post-war period of 1945 to 1955 played an important part in the development of homosexual communities in America by slowly starting to reduce some of the stigma around homosexuality that had previously led to many homosexuals, especially those living in small towns, to experience isolation, persecution, and self-loathing. The intervention of the Second World War, which America entered in 1941, was significant in beginning to change the face of America in terms of homosexual identities and gender roles. The Second World War altered the social landscape for homosexuals by bringing isolated gay people from small towns together to serve in the army, allowing them to meet and begin to understand their sense of shared experience. Following the war, many homosexual veterans chose not to return to their home towns, but to move to large cities where they could live independently, form community, and start to explore an understanding of themselves as homosexual citizens. This led to the preliminary stages of the formation of a sense of homosexual identity. On a cultural level, part of this exploration of identity included the emergence of young homosexual writers who used their works to share ideas and analyse their own experience of stigma and its consequences. In his book *A Queer History of the United States* (2011), Michael Bronski refers to 'an unparalleled outpouring of representation and discussion about homosexuals' from mainstream publishing houses during the 1950s.[3] This included writers such as Gore Vidal, Truman Capote and James Baldwin. Bronski also notes the relaxing of censorship on the Broadway stage which allowed for the presentation and success of works by writers such as Tennessee Williams, who won two Pulitzer prizes for *A Streetcar Named Desire (1947)* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955)*, two plays that feature overt references to homosexuality. Bronski identifies this acknowledgement of gay culture as proof that 'open homosexuality was clearly now a staple of mass entertainment'.[4] However, the content of these works, with their focus on loneliness, isolation and self-doubt, exposes the cognitive dissonance between lived experience and cultural representation. They indicate the fact that

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[3] Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Massachusetts: Beacon 2011), p. 183.
[4] Ibid., p. 198.

cultural visibility is not an indication of inclusive citizenship, instead it presents an idealized image of homosexual life for a society that is not prepared to accept the realities of homosexual and lesbian lifestyles but will consume images of gay life for entertainment value. The reality of the lived experience of homosexuals in the 1950s was far from ideal. Homosexuality was still illegal, and psychoanalysts and sexologists continued to disseminate the idea that homosexuality was a disease. Bars where homosexuals were known to meet were being raided; homosexuals were at the risk of police entrapment, and being exposed as homosexual was grounds to be terminated from employment.

By the mid-1950s, excluded minorities in America were becoming frustrated with the post-war focus on conformity, and political advancements were being made as homosexuals, along with black communities and women's groups, campaigned for civil rights. The seeds of social and cultural rebellion that formed had an impact on a small countercultural literary group in San Francisco who became known as the Beat Generation, the most famous of whom are Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. Each writer produced quite different work but there was a shared ideology born out of a contempt for contemporary American life and its emphasis on conformity and social control. The Beat writers shared a desire for freedom and an alternative way of life; their motivation was to open up new pathways of communication to provide a release from destructive symptoms of alienation and to be the voice of the outsider. The Beats took examples from their own lives, the lives of their peer group and circumstances from their everyday surroundings to present a context for an extended criticism of the restrictive nature of dominant social culture. The term Beat was devised by Kerouac and in his 1952 *New York Times* article 'This Is the Beat Generation', John Clellon Holmes claims that, while the definitive meaning is a little obscure, it concerns 'more than a mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw'.[5] Ginsberg's biographer, Barry Miles, expands on this, identifying in the Beats a 'youthful

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[5] John Clellon Holmes, 'This is the Beat Generation', *New York Times Magazine*, 16 November 1952, [reproduced on *Literary Kicks* website, 1994] <http://www.litkicks.com/ThisIsTheBeatGeneration>.

desire to rid the world of hypocrisy by revealing the tearful sensitivity and awareness that Allen and Jack recognised in themselves and their friends'.[6] Counterculture can be viewed as the cultural equivalent of political opposition and Bronski points out that 'the Beat movement and homosexual culture were inextricably intertwined'.[7]

A howl of protest

Ginsberg's long poem is divided into four sections, with the conclusion presented as 'Footnote to Howl'. The first section establishes the purpose of the work, which is to provide a platform of shared experience. 'Howl' is a poem that was written to be performed, it was first read at a small gathering of six then-unknown poets in San Francisco in 1955. The strength of a polemic performance that is based on lived experience is that it creates a bond of empathy with the listener by illuminating on circumstances they recognise, and expressing the thoughts they already hold within them, but have perhaps been unable to articulate. In her book *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), Susan Bennett notes that 'live performance has an often uncanny ability to touch those very stories by and through which we understand ourselves'.[8] Ginsberg uses the opening line of 'Howl' to reach out and draw the audience in. 'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness' not only introduces the subject of the poem, but many of the bohemian, artistic people who would be likely to attend underground poetry readings would see themselves and their contemporaries reflected in this image.[9] After the introductory lines describing 'angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night', what follows is an experimental writing form of juxtaposed images that catalogues the 'great minds' who have had their human potential

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[6] Barry Miles, *Allen Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Virgin 2000), p. 50.

[7] Bronski, p. 200.

[8] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997), p. iii.

[9] Allen Ginsberg, *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems* (London: Penguin, [1956] 1961), p. 1.

wasted, with the use of the past tense reinforcing the fact that the damage has already been done.[10] The poem is an example of the power of language to motivate, unify and inspire. The anaphoric repetition of 'who' at the beginning of each line takes the form of a litany and lends the poem a musical quality, it provides the beat that is integral to a repeated musical phrase to drive energy and give the sound a compelling form. Beat writing had its roots in jazz and Barry Miles defines each line as consisting of 'a single breath, like blowing an extended cadenza on a saxophone'.[11] Ginsberg uses a triadic verse form along with a characteristic aspect of his work, which is the use of ellipsis and unconventional word order to condense his messages:

> who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking
>   in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating
>   across the tops of cities contemplating jazz.[12]

Most of the 'who's are followed by a verb, an action that has taken place that is then embellished with an end result or a succeeding action. This provides a sense of movement and intensity as the action moves from one character and location to another, like those:

> who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to
>   Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,
> a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the
>   stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out
>   of the moon.[13]

Amidst the movement there is an over-whelming sense of feeling lost, as people move around from place to place, for example those:

> who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz
>   or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to
>   converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Miles, p. 184.
[12] Ginsberg, p. 1.
[13] Ibid., p. 2.

took a ship to Africa.[14]

These people are looking for a place they can find a home and a sense of connection, an escape from their outsider status. Harry Hay expressed a similar concern and spoke about homosexuals not feeling they are a part of society, particularly if they avoid the pressure to marry. The focus on social conformity in post-war America meant that many homosexuals entered into sham marriages and Hay, who was married himself for thirteen years, stated that matrimony seemed 'the casting couch for society'.[15] The homosexual, he observed, is 'pressure driven by home, church, college and community requirements to marry and multiply in order to place (let alone compete) in any profession'.[16] Ginsberg employs images from Greek mythology to illustrate the hegemonic pressure upon gay men to marry, 'Howl' describes those:

> Who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftman's loom.[17]

This line is a reference to 'the Moirai or Fates', three sister goddesses who were said to control the destiny of man.[18] The Fates were often described in misogynist terms as being old and ugly, and a shortfall of Ginsberg's work is his inclination to blame women for the fate of men rather than the societal expectation that dictates the roles of both sexes. 'The one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar' is an attack on

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[14] Ibid., p. 3.

[15] Harry Hay qtd. in Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay* (New York: White Crane, 2012), p. 96.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ginsberg, p. 4.

[18] Gabi Ancarola, 'The Moirai, the Fates of Greek Mythology', *Greek Reporter,* 7 March 2018, n.p. <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/03/17/the-moirai-the-fates-of-greek-mythology>.

the nuclear family structure that not only places the man in the role of the financial provider, but controls his ability to find work and sustain a living. 'The one eyed shrew who winks out of the womb' is the children the man must provide for and 'the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftman's loom' is a caustic reference to the gender construct defining a woman's place as being in the home with a man at the head of the household looking after her. Ginsberg seems to imply that this bond of responsibility terminates the male's potential for artistic or intellectual development, which he relates to the story of the Fate Atropos, who would choose the time a man would die by cutting the thread of his life with her shears. Hay's concern for the homosexual being excluded from society if he refuses marriage centres around the risk of him becoming isolated in the same way as Ginsberg's 'hungry and homeless'. The homosexual may choose to avoid the responsibility of traditional marriage, he said, but 'as a result he sinks into degeneration and frustration. He chooses no ethical responsibility, and therefore he simultaneously chooses, by implication, not to belong to society'.[19]

Ginsberg's desire to reflect displacement is not limited to his experiment with speech and unconventional word order, he also defies constructs of punctuation. The first section of 'Howl' is one seventy-nine line-long sentence of piled up clauses. The long, unrhymed lines are of uneven length as Ginsberg's concern was to get his ideas across rather than to conform to a fixed pattern. When read aloud the deferment of the ending acts as a crowd-rousing device that drives energy as the continuous rant vents pent up frustration into a howl of disillusionment and fury. By doing this it cements a bond of community: we are all part of the same sentence, we are all part of the same world, we are all in this together and must unite to find a resolution. This sense of community was integral to the work of Harry Hay, who was inspired into attempting to organise a homosexual action group by the 1948 publication of the Kinsey Report, a study of male sexual behaviour in the U.S.A. Bronski explains that Kinsey collected 'data from twelve thousand men, then

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[19] Harry Hay, 'Social Directions of the Homosexual' [1951], in *Radically Gay*, ed. by Will Roscoe (Massachusetts: Beacon, 1996), pp. 81-83 (p. 81).

used the data from 5,300 of them to produce preliminary conclusions about male sexual behaviour'.[20] The findings included statistics which revealed that:

> 37 percent of all males had some form of homosexual contact between their teen years and old age; 50 percent of males who remained single until the age of thirty-five had overt sexual experiences to orgasm; 10 percent of males were more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five; 4 percent of males were exclusively homosexual throughout their lives.[21]

The report's revelations on the number of men who had engaged in same-sex sexual activity suggested, what Stuart Timmons refers to in his biography *The Trouble with Harry Hay* (2012) as, 'the dimensions of an organizable minority'.[22] Homosexuals, Hay stated, 'were the one group of disenfranchised people who did not even know they were a group because they had never formed as a group. They - we - had to get started. It was high time'.[23] Hay found his mission frustrating and his first attempt to assemble what he referred to as a movement for 'batchelors' in 1948 was hindered by the fact that, while his friends expressed interest, none were brave enough to work with him and risk the exposure that could result in legal action or loss of employment.[24] In 1950, Hay finally found a collaborator in Rudi Gernreich and, having enlisted a small number of other helpers, they launched what would become known as the Mattachine movement – named after a masked French dance troupe who used performance to point out social injustices. The initial launch of the movement took the form of a discussion group on homosexuality devised, for respectability's sake, around an objective exploration of the Kinsey Report. The purpose of the movement was to develop a programme to fight oppression with education, and to hit back against the

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[20] Bronski, p. 178.

[21] Ibid., p. 178.

[22] Timmons, p. 134.

[23] Ibid., p. 135.

[24] Ibid.

dominant prejudices that were prevalent in mainstream culture. The vision was to define homosexuals as a distinct minority group with its own shared sense of identity, history and culture. At the first discussion group, Hay spoke of the 'objective of liberating one of our largest minorities from the solitary confinement of social persecution and civil insecurity'.[25] Hay's hunch regarding the need for gay community proved to be correct and the first discussion group grew to be a regular event, debating topics such as the homosexual personality and the homosexual in society. The popularity of these groups grew fast and soon a network of Mattachine chapters opened across the United States, hosting not only discussion groups but social events and fundraisers. Bronski notes that 'by 1953 it had over two thousand members and sponsored over a hundred discussion groups'.[26] The growth of Mattachine brought about political diversity within the ranks as new members brought in new ideas and the radical stance of the original group, with its ideas of forming a distinct homosexual culture, were challenged by a more conservative faction who felt that the only way to achieve homosexual equality was through integration. Hay regarded this as 'the middle-class mentality more concerned with respectability than self-respect', but this division of ideals came at a time when the country was under the grip of McCarthyism, and Mattachine inevitably came under the radar due to its 'deviant' nature and also because of Hay's background, which was as an active member of the Communist Party.[27] Others started to call for a move away from radical policy in order to save the movement and, faced with the prospect of a split, Hay realised that 'the unanimity was over, the dream was gone'.[28] As a result, in the spring of 1953, he resigned from the movement. The new leaders, in the words of Will Roscoe, 'repudiated the principles, goals, and methods of the original movement'.[29] Instead, '[i]nformal discussion

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[25] Harry Hay, 'Slogan "Children and Fools Speak the Truth": Les Matachines (The Society of Fools)' [1950], in *Radically Gay*, ed. by Will Roscoe (Massachusetts: Beacon, 1996), pp. 78 – 79 (p. 79).

[26] Bronski, p. 180.

[27] Timmons, p. 176.

[28] Ibid., p. 178.

[29] Will Roscoe, ed., *Radically Gay* (Massachusetts: Beacon, 1996), p. 139.

groups, which had served to foster self-esteem and build identity, were replaced with educational forums in which heterosexual psychiatrists expounded their theories on the cause and cure of homosexuality while well-dressed queers nodded in approval'.[30]

The move away from a radical stance in political groups points to the significance of the timing of Ginsberg's 'Howl', which could be seen as a cultural continuation of the early principles of Mattachine. Ginsberg was a follower of Hay's work and recalls reading Mattachine's magazine publication *ONE* in his interview for the documentary film *Before Stonewall* (1984).[31] Poetry readings held a similar function to discussion groups in getting like-minded people together in a room to create a shared experience and to unite and form groups. Like Hay's principles, 'Howl' is not concerned with respectability but with self-acceptance and self-respect. It does not make excuses for homosexuality and it is uncompromising in its use of graphic sexual imagery, Ginsberg's gay men 'who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy' are not simply an attempt to shock, but an attempt to open up a frank and honest dialogue about gay sex.[32]

Moloch

After introducing the symptoms of madness and wasted potential in society in section one of 'Howl' Ginsberg goes on, in section two, to offer a diagnosis, by giving an all-encompassing word to the invisible power that controls and constricts his minorities: Moloch. In the Old Testament, Moloch was a cruel god 'to whom live children were sacrificed by fire', and here it is a representative of everything in civilisation that kills the spirit.[33] Like the word 'who' in the first section of the poem, 'Moloch' provides the base that Ginsberg returns to, forming the pulse that drives the force of the verse. 'Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!' is the industrialised, capitalist world that

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[30] Ibid.

[31] *Before Stonewall*, dir., by Greta Schiller (Peccadillo, [1984] 2009).

[32] Ginsberg, p. 4.

[33] "Moloch", *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide* (Helicon: 2018), n.p. eBook.

consumes imagination and produces models of conformity.[34] 'Moloch the incomprehensible prison!' could be said to reflect Harry Hay's description of the homosexual world as one in which 'each person considers himself terribly maladjusted and peculiar'.[35] In turn, 'Moloch whose name is the Mind!' highlights the mental distress caused through internalisation and abjection.[36] The audience would again connect with the sentiments expressed as they recognised the symptoms of mental illness present within themselves and their friends. Harry Hay wrote of the homosexual's attempt to 'exorcise ghosts of presumed guilts unscientifically imposed by heterosexual prejudice and ignorance, we tilt at the windmills of collectively contracted values, not socially evolved by us, which we cannot fulfil'.[37] Having finally been given a voice with which to challenge authority, Miles remembers that at 'the first public reading of 'Howl' Part II […] the audience booed and hissed at each mention of 'Moloch!' The excitement was tremendous'.[38] The key line is 'Moloch whom I abandon!', but Ginsberg is not rejecting America or the American lifestyle, he is instead searching for a way in.[39] This is not a reflection of the integrationist ideology that split the Mattachine Society, but rather an illustration of Ginsberg's quest to bring down barriers in an attempt to disarm power rather than to assimilate. In his 1982 essay, 'The Subject and Power', Michel Foucault identifies ways in which the state employs a 'system of differentiation' and 'processes of domination' to exclude minority groups, asserting their own template as the 'correct' model.[40] This process ties minorities to their own identity in a way that constricts and contains them, meaning that minority identities are actually the product of dominant power

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[34] Ginsberg, p. 8.

[35] Ibid.; Hay, 'Social Directions of the Homosexual', p. 83.

[36] Ginsberg, p. 9.

[37] Harry Hay, '[Untitled]' [1952], in *Radically Gay*, ed. by in Will Roscoe (Massachusetts: Beacon, 1996), pp. 88 – 91 (p. 90).

[38] Miles, p. 200.

[39] Ginsberg, p. 9.

[40] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) pp. 208 – 226.

structures. Dominant power structures rely on this procedure taking place as they need an adversary in order to survive. Foucault notes that, 'it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination'.[41] A direct challenge to power therefore asserts the boundaries that power has created and so, like Hay, who was trying to open doors for homosexual minorities, Ginsberg seeks not to destroy the state, but to remove the boundaries that give the state the power to exclude.

In section three of 'Howl,' Ginsberg identifies with Carl Solomon, to whom the poem is dedicated. Solomon was an old friend of Ginsberg's who was locked in a psychiatric institution referred to as 'Rockland'. Ginsberg met Solomon when he was institutionalised himself for a brief period in 1949. Aspects of Solomon's condition and the effects of the treatment he receives at the hospital are catalogued line after line and Solomon's suffering becomes the symbol for all those whose lives have been unfairly destroyed and who have been driven to madness by a society that rejects anything other than its own pre-determined image of conformity. Ginsberg's intention with this is to evoke a spirit of unity. In the third line he draws a parallel between Solomon and his own mother, who also suffered mental illness and was lobotomised. 'I'm with you in Rockland where you imitate the shade of my mother' highlights how these two, separate people, who likely never met, can be bonded through one significant issue.[42] This is of particular importance to the homosexual world, where much energy and potential for alliance is wasted through focusing on differences instead of similarities. We have already seen evidence of this with the split within The Mattachine Society and gay rights activist, Cleve Jones, remarks in his book *When We Rise* (2016) that 'in the gay community, trying to achieve consensus is like trying to herd cats'.[43] Jones cites early German homosexual rights advocate Magnus Hirschfield who, in 1927, complained that 'with the exception of a few minor groups, homosexuals have almost no feeling of solidarity; in fact, it would be difficult to find another class of humanity that was so unable to

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[41] Ibid., p. 225.
[42] Ginsberg, p. 10.
[43] Cleve Jones, *When We Rise* (New York: Hatchette 2016), p. 51.

organise itself to ensure its elementary rights'.[44] Ginsberg's message to the homosexual community is, as Harry Hay once stated, 'ghetto walls can be knocked down, but cooperation is essential'.[45] Ginsberg uses the repeated phrase of 'I'm with you in Rockland' to form a rallying cry, encouraging people to join forces. Section three starts with isolated examples of Solomon's condition and uses the singular 'you' but, as the stanzas move forward, this changes to 'we' until:

> I'm with you in Rockland
>   where there are twentyfive-thousand mad comrades all
>   together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale.[46]

Unity starts small, but it gets bigger and liberates the tortured, solitary mind to achieve Ginsberg's concluding vision of liberty:

> I'm with you in Rockland
>   where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own
>   souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop
>   angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary
>   walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-
>   spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory
>   forget your underwear we're free.[47]

In 'Footnote to Howl', Ginsberg centres upon the religious trope which has already been established through much of the poem through the use of litany and metaphors, such as gay men being described as 'saintly motorcyclists' and 'those human seraphim, the sailors'.[48] 'Footnote' opens with the word 'Holy!', which is repeated fifteen times.[49] This is a reaction against the historic use of religion to control people and the reliance on the teachings of religious texts to establish and inform political controls. William Burroughs

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[44] Magnus Hirschfield cited in Jones, p. 51.

[45] Hay, 'Social Directions of the Homosexual', p. 82.

[46] Ginsberg, p. 11.

[47] Ibid., p. 11.

[48] Ibid., p. 4.

[49] Ibid., p. 12.

approaches this idea in his essay 'Sexual Conditioning' (1973) when he notes that:

> people who do not think of themselves as religious – doctors, sociologists, psychiatrists – are still thinking in terms laid down by the Christian church. The church assumes that any sexual activity except intercourse with a legal spouse is absolutely wrong because the Bible says so. They condemn so-called deviant behaviour in the strongest terms. Psychiatrists, substituting the word "sick" for "wrong," follow the old Christian line.[50]

As a reaction to this, 'Footnote' reveals the moral impetus of 'Howl,' which is to reclaim a respected status for all that the dominant culture has used religion to disparage. He invests every aspect of the world of his friends and the abandoned, broken people he has populated his text with in holiness:

> Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac
> holy Hunke holy Burroughs holy Cassady holy the unknown
> buggered and suffering beggars holy the hideous human
> angels![51]

As with Ginsberg's disinclination to reject America, this section is not an attack on religion, it is an attempt to dissolve power structures that use religion as a tool to divide, opening barriers up so that religion now embraces all. It allows those who have been excluded by religious teachings to now find themselves accepted within religious language and offered the same respect as the mainstream culture. In the face of stifling oppression, Ginsberg identifies the need for unity, faith and a positive outlook.

While the political stance of homosexuals has changed and Harry Hay's work has lost much of its relevance in contemporary society, the lasting popularity of Ginsberg's poem means that it still speaks to

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[50] William Burroughs, 'Sexual Conditioning' (1973), in *Queer Beats: How the Beats Turned America On to Sex*, ed. by Regina Marler (San Francisco: Cleiss Press, 2004), pp. 137- 140 (p. 137).

[51] Ginsberg, p. 13.

those who have a passion for social change and those who seek inspiration as they struggle to establish their own identity.

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Family Trees

Cassandra Passarelli

> Here are the roots of trees, here are the empty places ~
> Samyutta Nikay.[1]

One of my earliest memories is of Uncle Luke pulling up outside JFK in his pick-up. My parents in the cab up front. Me crouching in the wagon; hair wind-whisked, soul soaring beyond the cedars, chestnuts, and elms overhead. Raised in a Georgian Pimlico house with an oblong of cement for a back yard, I revered the one London plane that grew there. In summer, its foliage filtered the sunlight into my bedroom window; at night I fell asleep listening to the wind rake its leaves. In winter, its branches formed a lattice between me and the mews to which grey skies clung. As I floundered through adolescence, I observed it reaching the middle pane and overshoot the lintel. We buried my dog between its roots.

'These trees are less than a century old; the pilgrims chopped their antecedents down as they moved West,' Uncle Luke told me.

This is my parents' homeland from which they left. Not as refugees, nor economic migrants, but as deserters of fifties' consumption, saccharin family ideals, and intellectual insularity. But in vacation morsels it wasn't so bad. Much of its flavour was attributable to my Uncle, a handsome leviathan. He had an outcrop of Peloponnese curls, olive skin, garlic-bulb nose, and ample beard. Lifted in one of his bear hugs, he enveloped me in resinous scent. In suede work boots, chinos, white t-shirt, and checked wool shirt, he strode like Hercules, axe in hand, chopping down the firs he sold in New York City's Christmas streets. Humour and kindliness ran

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[1] Samyutta Nikay quoted in Andrew Olendzki, trans, 'Directed and Undirected Meditation: *Bhikkhunivasako Sutta*, *Tricycle*, 13 March 2019, para. 6 <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/directed-undirected-meditation/>.

through his speech, characterised by its distinctive flat A-ed New Hampshire drawl.

Train 54, the Vermonter, leaves New York on an overcast midday. The skyscrapers are a receding clump, fading from sight. Beyond the glass, yellow sunspots of the baseball court sand lie in clean-cut lawns. The train glides over a bridge, passing a few stray swans and the skeleton of a barge, and chugs into the forest. I gaze out the window at the leaf patchwork filling the panes.

At New Haven there's an announcement that we're about to change to diesel and the cafeteria will close. The stewardess serves me a coffee, warning those queuing behind me that the electricity will cut out and slams the till shut decisively. We hear the clanging bell of the cab approaching, the locomotive reversing, the rising sound of its approach and the hiss of latching on.

'Ladies and gentlemen, we're coming into Claremont, New Hampshire. The doors open on just one side.'

Uncle Luke is waiting for us, exactly at the spot we get down, in front of his ex-wife's silver Ford. He gives my daughter and I Sampson hugs.

'You don't have your licence? Damn! You were supposed to drive, and me in the back.' He opens his arms like boughs, as if pinned to a cross.

We pull into the crescent drive in front of his brick house, a ramshackle A-frame colonial, with a sloping porch, wood-fire, gables, dark parlour, and creaking stairs up to several bedrooms. And behind it, his cherished woods. The wives and biological-, step- and foster-kids had come. And gone. The spruce, aspen, and hornbeam remain.

I rise from an immersed sleep. From the front gable I watch cars race past the clapboard house in the rush hour. In the sixties, they chugged past, accelerating over the decades as Uncle Luke slowed. Their swish shrouds the house like cobwebs swathe an antique. Uncle Luke is already up. He makes his ritual thermos of diluted, sweet coffee, toasts home-made bread and slathers it with peanut butter and jam. The kitchen, designed for the last ex-wife and four foster children, is super-sized. It boasts two double sinks with waste disposals, a hefty electric oven matched by a gas twin, two L-shaped counters piled up with string, green Velcro ties, empty plastic bags,

and rigid clamshell boxes. The godforsaken fridge has declined into riotous wilderness. A fallen potato has sprouted anaemic leaves that have climbed to the middle shelf. Uncle Luke sets mice-traps with smears of peanut butter in a drawer and puts the victims out on the steps to the lawn for the ants to devour. He calls it the Tower of Silence.

Two sofas with a rocking-chair feature frame the wood stove. A yellow chainsaw sits on the floor. A door leads to the old house's vacated rooms and its oak floors, open brick fireplaces, mercury light switches, and peeling paint. A home, once generous for its half dozen occupants, is now swallowed up by its own emptiness. From the porch, the view onto the front yard is mowed, as neat as a pin, but for five tomato plants and several sapling walnuts (planted by squirrels). Crickets chirrup and, occasionally, a groundhog chomps timidly. Beyond, a forest of maple, oak, pine, walnut, and cherry trees sweep the sky from a spongy bed of needles. A brook froths into the culvert that runs beneath Unity Road.

Once we appear, Uncle Luke switches off public radio and holds forth in his maple-syrup cadence. My delighted daughter listens to tales that bubble from a wellspring of nine decades, many spent in solitude. Each tree has its anecdote: one struck in a storm, another recovered from a disease, a third grown sixty feet in thirty years. He bakes bread every morning. Walks to the library in town twice a week. His days are like his backwoods trees, a blur of forest or infinitude of discrete specimens, depending on how carefully you look.

He agrees to call on Martie as if it never crossed his mind. His first wife was a gregarious drinker. My mother had her down as a bad egg ever since her impromptu pregnancy forced Uncle Luke to drop out of Harvard. The visit begins innocuously enough with us rattling the door. The red Lab barks the house down (Finnegan once; these days it's Loomis, after a fly rod). Just when we're sure no one's home, Martie appears at the screen door. A small rugged woman, she has that Irish ease of manner that saw her through two divorces, four children, and small-town life. Uncle Luke and Martie behave as though the visit is normal. But afterwards, each tells me they haven't spoken to each other in years. She chews her words like the granite girl she is, puts the kettle on the burner and offers us Irish tea. She

telephones Luke Junior even though he's just upstairs 'coz she can't be shoutin all over the place'. He comes down and gives me a mighty hug. The same age as me, he has his father's build and his mother's fair looks.

Martie invites us to stay for a dinner of traditional Irish stew and a tablet of stringy brisket. Uncle Luke throws me a glance and I nod. Sitting back from the table, legs too long, he relates a story or two in considerable detail with Martie chomping at the bit to throw in her dime's worth. Giving up, she disappears into a back room and rummages, returning with some black and white photos of cousin Lukie and me circa 1968. The two of us in a steel-rimmed, hooded pram with me in a bonnet, he a bobble hat. Another of me, sitting on my Uncle's living room floor, pumpkin face grinning and fit to bust. Fast forward ten years, a psychedelic seventies shot; the three cousins on a Cycladic ferry, me flat-chested in a rainbow bikini with my puppy, Spike, in my lap. Lukie bare-chested in jeans and a leather belt. His older sister, Becca, pouting.

It surprises them how simple conversation is, never that way when they're alone. Lukie talks about trappers.

'Finnegan got caught in one of them traps, didn't he? I rang Fish n Game and had an agument with the guy. He passed me onto his soopavisa, and we had another frickin agument. He darn hung up on me. So, I took things into my own hands, took a walk along the banks, found half a dozen and threw them into the river.'

My cousin drives us home. On his father's front porch, he asks, 'Watchyoodoing?'

'Hanging out.'

'Wanna go for a drive?'

'When?'

'Now.'

He shoos Loomis off the front seat and we head for the wild. In winter, he builds snow paths with diggers and in summer he repairs covered wooden bridges. He knows this state like his own Ford. We cruise along the A-roads, slipping onto B-roads and deeper into lanes until we're off-road, in the wooded depths—a city girl and country boy. From his burnt freckled brow down to his LL Bean sandals, he's solid hick. His breakneck idiom burbles as the clapboard farmhouses thin and disappear. I drink in towering trees, the shadows, mud so

fresh I can smell it, the biting skeeters and deer-flies. He points out loons, wild turkeys, and the ducks he'll be shooting in a couple of weeks. He references bald eagles and peregrines like Londoners do lattes and apps. Yonder deer are hunted. Here, he saw a bobcat. There, he found a stag's shed horns.

He pulls into a clearing where logs are piled up ready for transport.

'Still smoke?'

'Did I ever?'

'You sho did last time you were here!' He jogs a slip of memory.

As he fills a colourful glass pipe he tells me, 'Sour Cream's an indigenous crossbreed between Chem and Mass Superskunk. Five seeds cost me two hundred and fifty bucks.'

'You kidding?'

'No, I frickin ain't.'

Refusing it'd be like turning down Mart's Irish stew, so I take a few tokes.

'Wanna drive?'

'Nah.'

'C'mon, what's the worse you can do, hit a few trees?' Suddenly we're kids and he's daring me to dive from the highest rock again.

He starts a rambling stoner's tale about parachuting, going up 10,000 feet in a helicopter with an instructor. Jumping out in tandem, the fear and wonder of it, dropping, dropping, seeing mountains and rivers just like a bird, till they deploy a ram-air parachute and sink down to the earth. I sense my own rush, a calming sweep of air, lifting and disconcerting. His dope-loosened tongue non-sequiturs to a family falling out.

'My sista shows up two frickin hours late at the library, like she always does. I lose it, shouting six-mile and stormin out. Never seen either since. Till tonight, when my father sits down at the same table as Martie. Mom's unstable, you know it. Had a box with my pipe, credit cads and four thousand bucks insurance money to buy a new bike. Next mornin, bucks were gone.

'She ain't that friendly face she puts on. Been a restrainin order on her before. Can't help herself, frickin klepto. I got a padlock; no other way to keep her out. My sister Sandy ain't right neither. Can't keep a job down. Had one at Sturm Ruger but pulled sick leave. After two

months Martie told her, ''Either you get out of bed or I'm buryin you in the back yad myself.'

'As for the old man, forever lecturin us as kids about saving. Where'd all his bones go? Into that bitch's pocket, I warrant. Don't blame her for leavin; he weren't no piece of cake to live with. It was lonely up there, I remember. Sometimes no food in the house and he'd be doin headstands and all that shit. He's a thinker. Bout all he does is think.'

Lukie pulls into a gas station, picks up an eight-pack of Harpoon and a bottle of water for me. He drives us to the other side of town. I follow him through the open front door of a tumble-down house to a huge log fire burning out back. A silver German shepherd does disconcerting killer-dog circles around me. Randy, a goofy, blond guy, tells me about mint he's growing that tastes of chocolate. Jo, short and plump, delivers a story about the Hell's Angel, ohmygod, that zoomed straight into her headlights that morning. Jo says she hates Starbucks because they don't support the US military. They run out of things to say.

They suggest going upstairs. My eyes adjust slowly to their bedroom's white lights. Behind black plastic sheeting are some DIY Formica shelves with marijuana plants in pots. On the carpet are jars filled with furry dried buds. Randy throws Lukie a Harpoon from the mini-fridge. They talk state taxes, drug legislation, guns and about their 'nigger' president. Jo describes a barbeque ohmygod, going into detail about clams with sweet sauce. Randy had a plate of chicken, spare ribs, pork chops and sausages with hand-cut (hand-cut, ohmygod) French fries.

Apropos of nothing, Randy pulls a gun from under the bed, with a cylinder the size of a salad bowl, and asks me if I know what it is.

'A gun,' I answer stupidly.

'Sixty rounds' he squints his red-rimmed, bug-eyes. He hands me a heavy, copper-tipped silver bullet, which I roll in my palm.

'See them ridges? They break up inside someone's body and cause maximum damage, lodging bits in their ribcage.'

I nod.

'Take the gun,' he says.

I shake my head.

'Go on,' he insists in that same dare tone of Lukie's, only his is harder. There's a silence in the room and I can feel Jo and Lukie willing me to take the gun. I take the moulded metal hunk, that's like something out of a sci-fi movie, turn it around and hand it back.

In the lull that follows, Jo asks softly, 'Do you have kids?'

'Yes.'

'So do I. Two boys. My eldest is in the US navy in Eye-rack.' She finds a photo of him, broad and expressionless, on her phone and her eyes water up.

'See that pin on his chest? That was ohmygod hammered into him to draw blood,' she says beaming with pride.

'What about your other son?' I ask, hopeful.

'Skateboard crazy,' Randy says.

The third time I mention I'm jet-lagged, Lukie gets the hint. I thank Randy and Jo for their hospitality. Lukie hangs a U-ey. In his headlights we catch a mouse running from one cat into the jaws of another. We laugh. Lukie Junior talks about the barn cats of his childhood that got run over on Unity Road.

'Dad can't look after anything,' he says as he pulls into his drive, 'not even a lousy cat. Thinks I'm a libertarian. At least I work, eighteen years, for the state, never a day's vacation, not a day sick. From seven dollars an hour I've upped it to fourteen.'

When I get in, Uncle Luke is waiting up for me. He asks how the evening went. I tell him fine. It was the wrong thing to say.

'Why is he still living with his mother?' he asks. 'Why doesn't he use his faculties of reason? Lukie has all these notions based on thin air. When we talk he gets all wound up and we get into deep water. He thinks poor folk on welfare are just milking the state. Doesn't he realise the only thing between him and welfare is the union, which he doesn't support?'

'Uncle Luke, why did you study Sanskrit?'

'I started with philosophy then I got interested in eastern thought. Lived in Pune for three years, working in a translation house.' I picture a younger Uncle Luke in a white dhoti, fan whirring, ashok rustling at the open window, hunched over his typewriter translating Hindu texts. Outside, against a margosa, leans the dusty bicycle that took him half-way across the continent.

A few hours later we stop talking about the past. But the future is meagre to a man of his years.

'When I'm ready to burn my bridge, I don't want to go to hospital.' He looks out of the kitchen window to the yard outside.

'See that cherry tree and that maple, there? They'd make a beautiful little house. My kids aren't interested in this place. I'd like to find a struggling family with young kids who want to take it on. They could make maple sugar or turn the place into a bed and breakfast. And when they're ready to move, they could pass it on.' He stops.

'You could live here. Think it over. Lakes, rivers, forests. In Hanover, Cambridge, or Boston there are concerts, plays, and good bookshops. Interesting people from different places … with ideas.'

I love him so much the suggestion sounds plausible. But the fustiness of weed on my clothes, the Ruger's cold metal funk, and the sinister image of Jo's deadpan son in navy crackerjacks and white Dixie cup cap are still too fresh.

Uncle Luke changes into his boots. I follow him onto the porch. He takes me around the back. Shows me blackberry bushes and the walnut trees he planted thirty years ago. Walking into the woods, he points out an ash that pinned him to the ground last year. Flourishing oak saplings. Further up, a larch that survived lightening. A sycamore that keeled over and died. The towering firs, overgrown remnants of his years selling Christmas trees, span upward like spires.

'Why bastard? Wherefore base?': The Reduction of Monarchy to 'Nothing' in *King Lear*

Emily Naish

The monarchy relies on a network of legitimate bloodlines as a means of succession. Therefore, when it became apparent at the end of the sixteenth century that Elizabeth I would produce no heirs of her own, there was a rising anxiety surrounding the issue of who should succeed. Because of the biological nature of monarchical succession, it might seem only natural that James VI of Scotland would inherit the throne upon her death; Elizabeth herself had no children and her cousin James was thus her 'nearest royal relative'.[1] Furthermore, he was also 'a direct descendant of Henry VII of England', and therefore had firm associations with the Tudor lineage.[2] But, in reality, the matter was not so simple, and James's appointment as king required careful work prior to Elizabeth's death. Despite his royal blood, his claim to the throne was by no means secure: there were multiple rivals for the position, and James was, of course, Scottish, complicating his claim due to a legal bar on foreigners inheriting the English throne.[3] However, despite the complicated issue of James's legitimacy within contemporary politics, much of the succession literature, that is the body of literature produced to celebrate the new king, highlighted that he was appropriate by his blood, and indeed that his blood was the source of his suitability. Hereditary succession held a deep authority that transcended politics, and James's new subjects were keen to uphold this system. This support of hereditary succession is a reflection of James's own views, which he had published in 1598 within his political treatise, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*. The central metaphor of the treatise is that of the king as father to his subjects, with James writing that -

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[1] Andrew McRae and John West, *Literature of the Stuart Successions: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 29.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

> [b]y the Law of Nature the King becomes a naturall Father to all
> his Lieges at his Coronation; And as the Father of his fatherly duty
> is bound to care for the nourishing, education, and vertuous
> gouernment of his children; euen so is the king bound is care for
> all his subiects.[4]

Not only does a hereditary monarchy benefit the subjects, as the monarch is 'bound to care' for his subjects as a father is for his children, but it is depicted as 'naturall' and dictated by 'Nature'. These words echo through this tract, and thus the system of hereditary monarchy is depicted as the 'naturall' order of things.

James's writings were of interest to his new subjects, and his works sold 'briskly' in England 'to subjects curious about their new king as well as to courtiers and would-be courtiers anxious to know how to tailor their addresses to him'.[5] It is unsurprising, then, that William Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, a play obsessed with legitimacy, also makes continued use of the word 'nature'.[6] In this article, I will discuss the play in relation to James's writing and his status as king. However, whilst James built his political theory upon this 'naturall' biological foundation, I will argue that Shakespeare undermines the system of hereditary monarchy at every turn, representing it as not only repeatedly failing, but ultimately as irrelevant. This irrelevance is expressed by Lear himself, but the strongest complaint comes from bastard Edmund, who reduces the connection of 'bastardy' and 'baseness' to a matter of mere wordplay. Far from hereditary succession being 'naturall', Shakespeare represents it as something fragile and fallible.

Without a blood-related heir, the empty throne towards the end of *King Lear* creates room for a discussion about effective monarchy

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[4] James VI and I, 'The Trew Law of Free Monarchies', in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. by Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 62-84 (p. 65).

[5] Curtis Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

[6] William Shakespeare, *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition* [1623], ed. by René Weis (London: Longman, 1993).

outside of hereditary succession. Edgar is given the final lines that suggest the speaker will accede the throne: '[t]he oldest hath borne most; we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long'.[7] Edgar's final accession completes his arc: first he is reduced by his bastard brother to 'nothing', but he rises again, working to regain his original position, and finally becoming king.[8] This is a position he has not inherited but arguably earned, suggesting a meritocratic monarchy could provide more stability. Yet I will argue this is equally insecure in Shakespeare's depiction. Whilst Edgar is suitable by his virtue, his closing thoughts suggest a meritocratic succession is hardly more promising than succession by blood. As the word 'nature' echoes through *King Lear*, so does Cordelia's 'nothing', suggesting the enduring cynicism of the drama; ultimately, all comes to nothing.

Celebrating James's 'naturall' succession

The Trew Law of Free Monarchies was a work concerned primarily with the question of whether the monarch should have absolute rule over his or her subjects. But it is also a work that advocates a system of succession through legitimate bloodlines. Furthermore, hereditary monarchy underpins James's arguments for his theory of government. Jane Rickard describes *The Trew Law* as 'bold and controversial', stating that it, along with *Basilikon Doron*, allowed James to 'respond explicitly to all the opposition he faced by asserting that a king is chosen by God and accountable only to God, and that the deposition of a king is never lawful'.[9] The importance of the familial nature of

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[7] Ibid., V. 3. 299-302. Edgar is given the final lines in the 1623 Folio edition of the play, however it is Albany who receives these lines in the 1608 Quarto edition. All quotations in this essay have been taken from the 1623 Folio.

[8] Ibid., II. 3. 21.

[9] Jane Rickard, *Authorship and Authority: the Writings of James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 38. The political theory that James advocates in *The Trew Law* has often been described as absolutist, in which the monarch holds supreme power and authority. Glenn Burgess, however, questions the applicability of this term to the Stuart period, arguing that it was 'a much rarer thing than sometimes assumed'; indeed, Rickard draws an important distinction between written 'propagandistic accounts of Jacobean absolutist power' and 'the actuality of Jacobean state'. See Glenn

monarchy is emphasised in the central metaphor of the treatise, that '[b]y the Law of Nature the King becomes a naturall Father to all his Lieges at his Coronation'.[10] The familial metaphor is intended to enforce James's authority over his subjects. James's subjects are his children, and therefore they should not resist him because the authority of the father cannot be ignored. Yet the metaphor also recalls a hereditary monarchy: not only is the country a family, but so is its ruling elite. The familial metaphor was also used in a tract by Sir Thomas Craig, prepared for publication the year before James's accession to the English throne, although this was not translated and printed for another century.[11] In this tract, Craig asks the reader, '[w]as ever this Father chosen by his Children, or is there place for Election in Families?'.[12] Craig makes explicit the connection of the familial metaphor to the issue of hereditary succession; as the country is a family, there is 'no place for Election' of their rulers. This is, as James emphasises through its repetition, authorised by 'the Law of Nature'; an elective monarchy would contend with the very workings of the world.

James further justifies hereditary monarchy by turning to Scottish history:

> For as our Chronicles beare witnesse, this Ile, and especially our part of it, being scantly inhabited, but by very few, and they as barbarous and scant of ciuilitie, as number, there comes our first King *Fergus*, with a great number with him, out of *Ireland*, which was long inhabited before vs, and making himselfe master of the countrey, by his owne friendship, and force, as well of the *Ireland-men* that came with him, as of the countrey-men that willingly fell to him, hee made himselfe King and Lord, as well of the whole landes, as of the whole inhabitants within the same. Thereafter he

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Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 18; Rickard, p. 5.

[10] James, p. 65.

[11] John W. Cairns, 'Craig, Thomas (1538?-1608), lawyer and jurist', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6580>.

[12] Sir Thomas Craig, *The Right of Succession to the Kingdom of England in Two Books* (London, 1703), p. 15.

and his successours, a long while after their being Kinges, made and established their lawes from time to time, and as the occasion required.[13]

Whilst James speaks of 'successours', he is careful to make clear that these are blood descendants, proudly boasting that 'although diuers changes haue beene in other countries of the blood Royall, and kingly house, the kingdome being reft by conquest from one to another, as in our neighbour countrey in England', this was not the case in Scotland.[14] It is strange then that King Fergus was a foreigner who took the country by 'friendship and force' rather than being born into his position, yet his arrival is not depicted as an invasion but rather a welcome relief to the land without kings, which is 'barbarous and scant of ciuilitie'.[15] The tale is reminiscent of the Brutus myth, popularised by Geoffrey of Monmouth: there is a land without civility which is brought to heel by a foreign king, who comes to be the very founder of that country, despite his foreign status.[16] The foreign status of both kings is forgiven because they bring a sense of order and civility to their kingdoms, and then over the course of history, their bloodlines become accepted as natural and as the very source of order.

James's preoccupation with the history of the bloodlines was an important trope that was reflected in celebratory poetry written following his accession to the English throne in 1603. Within the body of celebratory poetry, this was used as a means of drawing a genealogical connection between James and Henry VII, the first Tudor king. This can be observed in the anonymous *A New Song to the Great Comfort and Rejoicing of All True English Harts*: 'Of King Henry's linage is he / Princely born by degree'.[17] Another anonymous

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[13] James, p. 73.

[14] Ibid., p. 74.

[15] Ibid., p. 73.

[16] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth*, trans. and ed. by Michael A. Faletra (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2008), p. 56.

[17] Anon. *A New Song to the Great Comfort and Rejoicing of All True English Harts* (n.p., 1603), fol. 1ʳ, in *EEBO*

poem suggests the importance of James's genealogy in its very title, *An excellent now Ballad, shewing the Petigree of our Royall King IAMES, the first of that name in England;* the very intention of the poem is to 'shew' James's 'Petigree'. The poet elaborates on this by drawing an explicit connection between '[t]his Elizabeth of famous worth' and:

> olde Brittaines hope, & Iames our king
> As next of Henries line, 'boue other,
> comming both by father and mother.[18]

Again, James's worthiness, that he is 'olde Brittaines hope', is entangled with his biological heritage, that he is 'next of Henries line'. Michael Drayton's poem *To the Maiestie of King James* again traces James's lineage back to 'thy Grandsire *Henry*', giving a detailed history of his bloodlines and running through his familial history before declaring James '[t]his Brittaine hope', like the second anonymous poet, and 'our vndoubted King / In true succesion, as the first of other / Of *Henries* line by Father and by Mother'.[19] The point is emphasised further, for any reader who might miss it, through the inclusion of an accompanying genealogical chart tracing James's ancestry.

James was equally keen to assert his connection to Henry VII, naming his eldest son Henry Frederick. The establishment and reassurance of his connection to his Tudor lineage brought with it an associated Englishness that was fundamental in 'establishing the authenticity of his claim to the throne of England'; he may have been foreign but he had a tangible relationship to the Tudor household.[20] Indeed, even the proclamation that declared James's 'undoubted right

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<https://eebo.chadwyck.com> [accessed 25 November 2018].

[18] Anon. *An excellent now Ballad, shewing the Petigree of our Royall King IAMES, the first of that name in England* (n.p., 1603), fol. 1^r, in *EEBO* <https://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

[19] Michael Drayton, *To The Maiestie of King James* (London, 1603), fol. 6^v.2^r, in *EEBO* <https://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

[20] Graham Parry, *The Golden Age restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 64.

[…] to the crowne of the realms of England, Fraunce and Ireland' still asserted his right to rule 'by Law, by Lineall succession, and undoubted Right', despite the complications of James's foreign status.[21] This Tudor connection also, when traced back further, gave a rather more shaky authenticity to James's depiction of himself as 'the reunifier of all Britain'; as Graham Parry observes, '[t]he traditional genealogy of the Tudors, making much use of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History, traced the line back to Cadwallader, the last king of British blood, then to King Arthur, and ultimately to the Trojan Brutus, the legendary founder of Britain'.[22] Establishing this link to Brutus could have been important not only for James's plans to officially unite, or reunite, England and Scotland, but also for deepening this sense that he was not so foreign as might have been assumed. In highlighting his Tudor associations, he wrote himself into a much longer English history. After all, as Drayton suggests in his poem written for James's succession, 'Scotch and English without difference be'.[23]

Therefore, within James's own writing and literature produced to celebrate his succession, there is a tendency to repeatedly legitimise his right to rule through his blood. The succession literature asserts that James's succession was indeed in line with the system of hereditary monarchy. This concern is perhaps indicative of some lingering anxieties about the new king. Curtis Perry observes that:

> it is critical commonplace to note marked differences between cultural artifacts surrounding Queen Elizabeth I and those produced under her successor […] After all, the contrasts between the two monarchs are particularly sharp. The transition from Elizabeth to James was also the transition from a woman ruler to a man, from a Tudor to a Stuart, from charismatic performer to a

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[21] *Stuart Royal Proclamations, Vol 1: Royal Proclamations of King James I 1603-1625*, ed. by James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 1-2.

[22] Parry, p. 64.

[23] Drayton, fol. 7[v].

more public personality, from a revered national heroine to a foreigner, and so on.[24]

This makes it all the clearer why writers might be keen to relate James to Henry VII: not only would this provide him with biological authority, and an associated Englishness, but perhaps it drew from a reassurance of what was known in the face of so many differences. However, the continued assertion of James's rightful bloodlines is also indicative of how deeply the authority of hereditary monarchy ran. In spite of the political concerns about James's succession and the hard work James had expended to ease these political concerns prior to Elizabeth's death, it was still his royal blood that his new subjects celebrated in asserting his rightfulness as the new king. Moreover, unlike Elizabeth, James was a monarch who came with children, and therefore carried with him an assurance of a continuation of a hereditary monarchy. There was all the more cause to celebrate his bloodline; in James, there was reassurance from the past and into the future.

'Nothing' provides security in *King Lear*

Contrary to this contemporary celebration of hereditary monarchy, *King Lear* does not uphold its authority, despite James's financial support of Shakespeare's playing company. Just one year after his English accession, the new king had taken 'the significant step of assuming patronage'.[25] There has been some debate in recent criticism over the cause of the tragedy in the play, which has often been thought to be caused by the division of the country.[26] This reading of the play accounts for James's patronage. As king of both

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[24] Perry, p. 1.

[25] Rickard, p. 24.

[26] John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics 1603–1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 16; Cyndia Susan Clegg, '*King Lear* and Early Seventeenth-Century Print Culture', in *'King Lear': New Critical Essays*, ed. by Jeffrey Kahan (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 155–83 (p. 172); Christopher Wortham, 'Shakespeare, James I and the Matter of Britain', *English*, 45 (1996), pp. 97–122 (p. 111).

England and Scotland, he tried to officially unite the two countries twice during his reign, though he was unsuccessful both times. However, whilst *King Lear* is a play that can be read as supportive of James's plans for unity, it also presents a challenge to James's support of hereditary monarchy.

The story of King Lear was familiar. As well as having been told and retold in chronicles of the island, it had in fact been earlier dramatised in the anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*.[27] It was also a drama set in Britain, albeit an ancient Britain. Yet despite this familiarity of story and setting, the world of *King Lear* is unsettled. Stanley Cavell describes a world that is 'not obviously unlike ours (as Racine's is, whose terrain we could not occupy) nor obviously like ours (as Ibsen's is, in whose rooms and rhythms we are, or recently were, at home)'.[28] The unsettled nature of the world of *King Lear* is visually represented in the divided map; following Lear's command to '[g]ive me the map there' and his subsequent division of his kingdom, Cordelia is disowned, Kent is banished, the king falls into madness and the country into civil war.[29]

That the tragedy of the play falls apart as the map is divided draws upon James's own belief in body politic theory.[30] It is this metaphor which James deploys in his 1603 speech before Parliament as a means of introducing his plans for the unity of England and Scotland:

> I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body; I am the Shepherd, and it is my

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[27] Whilst this was not published until 1605, not long before the first performance of Shakespeare's *Lear*, the title page announces the play is '[a]s it hath bene diuers and sundry times lately acted', suggesting that it was not only an older play but also well-known. Anon., *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordell*a (London, 1605), in *EEBO* <https://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

[28] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 326.

[29] Shakespeare, *Lear*, I. 1. 36.

[30] In this theory, the king has two bodies; the body natural, or his mortal body, and the body politic, that of his country.

flocke; I hope therefore no man will be so vnreasonable as to thinke that I that am a Christian King vnder the Gospel, should be a Polygamist and husband to two wiues; that I being the Head, should haue a diuided and monstrous Body; or that being the Shepheard to so faire a Flocke (whose fold hath no wall to hedge it but the foure Seas) should haue my Flocke parted in two.[31]

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare represents this 'diuided and monstrous Body', a country that is torn by civil war, and in which death is so prevalent that it becomes apocalyptic, leading Kent to ask in the final scene, '[i]s this the promised end?'.[32] Rebecca Munson suggests there is a connection between Lear and his country that is as intimate as the connection between king and country that James depicts in his speech.[33] This connection, in Munson's reading, is the cause of the island's descent into monstrosity. The king and state are intrinsically wound up together, as in James's own imagination, and, therefore, when the king goes mad, so does his country. The world of *King Lear* is a world divided and consequently upturned, and this can be read as a support of James's own plans for unity. However, it is also a world in which concepts that seem to hold such a deep authority, such as the system of hereditary monarchy, can be questioned and even undermined.

There are many ways in which the final failure of hereditary succession in *King Lear* is anticipated throughout the drama. Familial bonds between characters are depicted as continually failing, and at no point do they provide security of any sort. Their blood relation fails to provide security of love between Lear and Cordelia. Whilst Cordelia loves her father according to her 'bond', that of her filial obligation to her father, 'no more nor less', this is not deemed enough by her father.[34] Lear even severs that bond on account of this

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[31] James, p. 136.

[32] Shakespeare, *Lear*, V. 3. 237.

[33] Rebecca Munson, '"The Marks of Sovereignty": The Division of the Kingdom and the Division of the Mind in *King Lear*', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 46 (2011), pp. 13–27 (p. 13).

[34] Shakespeare, *Lear*, I. 1. 92.

defiance, making Cordelia his 'sometime daughter'.[35] The loss of their familial tie is made literal in Cordelia's marriage to the King of France, complicating the French invasion towards the close of the play; Cordelia's homecoming becomes openly hostile instead.[36] Edgar similarly suffers the fate of a severed familial bond. Having been betrayed by Edmund and disowned by his father, he loses himself completely, becoming instead Tom o'Bedlam: 'Edgar I nothing am'.[37] Moreover, royal blood provides no guarantee of an individual's fitness to rule as Goneril and Regan are arguably the villains of the play, quickly turning against their aged father.[38] Unlike the line of kings in *Trew Law*, Goneril has no respect for the laws of the land, and when confronted by Albany about her scheming, she declares that 'the laws are mine, not thine. / Who can arraign me for't?'.[39] The repeated failure of the characters' royal blood culminates in the play's conclusion, where the bloodlines are broken, as is the parallel between Lear and James. Lear begins the drama by mirroring James, a king with three legitimate heirs to inherit his throne upon his death. However, by the close of the play, the parallel shifts; Lear is left momentarily on the stage childless, like Elizabeth, before he too dies, leaving the throne empty without any blood heirs to succeed him.

Something which has often been noted about these broken bloodlines is that they are a diversion from Shakespeare's source materials. Whilst Nahum Tate was often mocked for giving the Lear story a happy ending, this was actually a restoration of the tale's original outcome. In both Geoffrey of Monmouth's account and the earlier anonymous Leir play, Cordelia's fall is later than in Shakespeare's dramatisation. Holderness and Carter observe that the '"King Lear" story is a historical romance of restoration in all examples but those exemplified by the Shakespearean version […]

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[35] Ibid., I. 1. 118.

[36] Derek Cohen, 'The Malignant Scapegoats of *King Lear*', *Studies in English Literature*, 49 (2009), pp. 371–89 (p. 380).

[37] Shakespeare, *Lear*, II. 3. 21.

[38] However, there is room for a more sympathetic reading, as demonstrated in an older essay by Stephen Reid, 'In Defense of Goneril and Regan', *American Imago*, 27 (1970), pp. 226-244 (p. 226).

[39] Shakespeare, *Lear*, V. 3. 157-8.

Tate was, if anything, actually "restoring" the "Lear" story's original shape and generic character after its "distortion" by Shakespeare'.[40] In Geoffrey's account of the Lear story, Cordelia not only survived, but 'reigned tranquilly' for fifteen years following her father's death, whereas Holinshed was far less optimistic, allowing her only five years on the throne.[41] But what is crucial here is Cordelia's survival. In changing the narrative, Shakespeare leaves an empty throne that cannot be filled by hereditary succession, and thus bloodlines are shown to be a fragile basis for a system of succession. The death of just four characters can end the enterprise of a hereditary monarchy.

However, hereditary succession had recently been shown to fail in England as Elizabeth had died without immediate heirs, just like Lear. Yet the monarchy still survived through royal blood, even if this required a new branch of the same tree. But in the world of *King Lear* there is a suggestion that this form of succession not only fails but becomes irrelevant. Lear is the character who, as a man with royal blood, most benefits from the heralding of hereditary succession. Yet even he questions the prioritisation of legitimate children over illegitimate children:

> Let copulation thrive, for Gloucester's bastard son
> Was kinder to his father than my daughters
> Got 'tween the lawful sheets.[42]

Of course, Lear is, at this point, not in his right mind, which calls his judgement into question, and he is also wrong. The audience is fully aware that Edmund was just as vile to Gloucester as Goneril and Regan were to Lear.

However, whilst Lear's complaint against legitimacy loses some authority on account of his madness, it is a complaint also made by Edmund earlier. He begins his speech, in which he rails against legitimacy: 'Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law / My services

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[40] Graham Holderness and Naomi Carter, 'The King's Two Bodies: Text and Genre in King Lear', *English*, 45 (1996), pp. 1-31 (pp. 3-4).

[41] Geoffrey, p. 67; Raphael Holinshed, *THE First and Second volumes of Chronicles* (n.p., 1586), p. 13, in *EEBO* <https://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

[42] Shakespeare, *Lear*, IV. 5. 111-3.

are bound'.[43] The speech is addressed to 'nature' herself, the word so prevalent in James's political theory; Edmund's speech is built upon the idea that legitimate biology is part of 'the Law of Nature'.[44] Curiously, Edmund is 'bound' to this 'law' in a way that other characters simply do not seem to be. Leah Marcus observes a 'repeated motif of the casting off of good, "legitimate" offspring' as, despite their legitimacy, both Cordelia and Edgar lose their familial connection to their fathers when they are disowned.[45] Meanwhile, despite his status as a bastard, there are ways in which Edmund is presented as equal to his brother. Gloucester asserts at the very beginning of the drama that whilst he has:

> a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily to the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.[46]

Whilst there is an acknowledgment of and a respectable conservatism about his illegitimacy, legitimate Edgar is deemed 'no dearer' than bastard Edmund. Yet Edmund is still obsessed with his own illegitimacy. His scheming turns to an attempt of usurpation, promising to marry both Goneril and Regan in an attempt to become king by taking on their legitimacy through marriage. Edmund is painfully aware of his status and the potential for prejudice on account of the nature of his birth. He even deceives his father into believing that Edgar used his illegitimacy against him:

                              He replied,
    'Thou unpossessing bastard, dost thou think
    If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
    Of any trust, virtue or worth in thee

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[43] Ibid., I. 2. 1.

[44] James, p. 65.

[45] Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 152-3.

[46] Shakespeare, *Lear*, I. 1. 18-23.

Make thy words faithed?'.[47]

Gloucester declares that he loves his sons equally. However, Edmund understands his illegitimacy as an insult, and this is indicative of his insecurity about his status as the bastard son.

The anger at his illegitimacy becomes most clear and sustained in that first speech:

> Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base,
> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
> As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
> With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?[48]

The speech highlights the arbitrary nature of the conflation of legitimacy and virtue, which boils down to the question of 'why' Edmund's 'shape', indeed, is 'as true' as his brother, and his 'mind as generous', yet he is branded with his bastard status, which leads to an assumption that he is 'base'. Yet, in Edmund's speech, the connection between the two ideas is reduced to mere wordplay between 'baseness' and 'bastardy'. The answer to Edmund's 'why' relies only on the similarity of sound in the two words, rather than a real argument. Edmund is left to howl 'base, base' against a country that upholds legitimacy as authoritative, without acknowledging its arbitrariness.

By the close of the play, Shakespeare's depiction of monarchy is so cynical that it is only natural to wonder why he might participate in such a negative scheme, particularly in light of James's patronage. The empty throne at the close of the play is a void that must be filled by someone, and, in the Folio edition, it is offered to Edgar. Thus, in light of the failure of hereditary succession throughout the play,

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[47] Ibid., II. 1. 64-6.
[48] Ibid., I. 2. 2-10.

Shakespeare begins to offer a solution that might work to stabilise the monarchy. Edgar is depicted as virtuous but not of royal blood, and through his arc Shakespeare seems to suggest a meritocratic succession could offer a solution. Russell Peck and Meredith Skura both highlight the importance of Edgar in Shakespeare's telling of the Lear story. Skura observes that with Cordelia's banishment in Shakespeare's rendition, compared with the anonymous play, the balance of the play is disrupted and must be restored through the addition of Edgar's sub-plot. Here, Skura highlights the full title of the Quarto publication: HIS *True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King LEAR and his three Daughters. With the vnfortunate life of Edgar,* sonne *and heire to the Earle of Gloster.*[49] Peck also claims him as 'the more important figure in the subplot, perhaps even the second most central figure in the play'.[50] Edgar's importance is of course highlighted by the close of the Folio edition of the play, when Albany offers him and Kent the crown. It is Edgar whom the audience should watch, because it is he who quietly works through the play to be given the ultimate power at the close. Whilst his appointment as monarch might seem surprising, the offer of the crown in fact completes Edgar's arc throughout the play of first falling quickly to the depths, becoming Tom o'Bedlam, before rising again to defeat his scheming brother, and finally accepting a new position greater than his original place.

Edgar's fall occurs very quickly at the beginning of the play, and he is soon reduced to assuming the disguise of Tom o'Bedlam. Whilst this disguise might seem sympathetic to a modern audience, William Carroll describes how disturbing this particular disguise would have been to a contemporary audience:

> To understand how nasty and repulsive Tom o'Bedlam might have seemed to Shakespeare's audience, and to see at least one reason why Shakespeare chose this particular disguise for Edgar rather

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[49] Meredith Skura, 'Dragon Fathers and Unnatural Children: Warring Generations in *King Lear* and Its Sources', *Comparative Drama*, 42 (2008), pp. 121–48 (p. 122).

[50] Russell A. Peck, 'Edgar's Pilgrimage: High Comedy in *King Lear'*, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 7 (1967), pp. 219-237 (p. 219).

than some other, we need to separate Poor Tom from Edgar. For most of Shakespeare's audience, Tom o'Bedlam would not have been a figure to pity, but one to flee; not a Dickensian figure reduced in circumstances by an unjust social order, but something of a charlatan. That Tom *becomes* pitiable and a figure eliciting our sympathy is more the result of our seeing Edgar within Tom.[51]

In fact, Edgar describes how he plans to 'take the basest and most poorest shape'.[52] The word 'shape' echoes Edmund's speech, but whereas Edmund highlighted the similarity between the brothers on account of a shared 'shape', Edgar's misfortune causes him to transmute, and to take on his brother's baseness. The roles are therefore reversed, so that Edgar is now the bastard. The speech culminates in Edgar declaring his 'nothingness': 'Edgar I nothing am'.[53]

Yet he, of course, does not remain as Tom o'Bedlam, and he quietly works throughout the play to regain his position as Edgar. When he meets Edmund again in the final scene, he is asked his name, to which he replies, 'Know my name is lost'.[54] Yet having struck his brother down, Edgar is finally able to assume his true identity:

> I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
> If more, the more th'hast wronged me.
> My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.[55]

The appointment as king by Albany at the close of the Folio edition provides Edgar with a reward, acknowledging the hardships he has suffered and the work he has expended to vindicate himself. But his words are hardly stirring:

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[51] William C. Carroll, '"The Base Shall Top Th'Legitimate": The Bedlam Beggar and the Role of Edgar in "King Lear"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 38 (1987), pp. 426–44 (p. 431).

[52] Shakespeare, *Lear*, II. 3. 7.

[53] Ibid., II. 3. 21.

[54] Ibid., V. 3. 112.

[55] Ibid., V. 3. 159-61.

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long.[56]

The situation at the end of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is strikingly similar to that at the end of *King Lear*; with the royal bloodline severed, the monarchy must turn to a new source. Richard McCoy observes that *Hamlet* was first performed during the final crisis of Elizabeth's reign, that of Essex's Rebellion in 1601.[57] Both are plays that can be read within the context of succession anxiety. However, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare represents a more decisive close. Fortinbras first pays his respects to the dead:

>   Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have proved most royal. And for his passage
> The soldiers' music and the rite of war
> Speak loudly for him.[58]

Fortinbras, as the new monarch, demonstrates a respect for the dead first, but the ending of *Hamlet* also provides a small insight into the new monarchy, as Shakespeare allows time for this to begin; there is action being taken following the tragic events of the drama. The final line of the play is a decisive command: 'Go, bid the soldiers shoot'.[59] Whereas Edgar is left reflecting the weight of the past and the horrors that have occurred within the confines of the play, Fortinbras is seen in action, as is required to bring together a country torn apart by the events within *Hamlet*.

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[56] Ibid., V. 3. 299-302.

[57] Richard C. McCoy, *Alterations of State: Sacred Kingship in the English Reformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 59-60.

[58] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* [1604], ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), V. 2. 379-84.

[59] Ibid., V. 2. 387.

Furthermore, Hamlet himself names Fortinbras as the new king: 'But I do prophesy th'election lights, / On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice'.[60] Fortinbras is not only endorsed by the old king, but his election follows the laws of the Danish land as the Danish monarchy was elective until the seventeenth century. That Fortinbras makes for an appropriate monarch, despite his foreign status, is only made clearer when he states that he has 'rights of memory in this kingdom'.[61] Fortinbras is also appropriate on account of his own ancestral claims to the land, as his 'father was slain by old Hamlet in single combat thirty years earlier' and his intent was recovering the lands lost by his father.[62] The audience is left with the assurance that he would be a good and rightful monarch for a country that has been devastated throughout the play. In contrast, Edgar's appointment in *King Lear* seems as arbitrary as hereditary succession. Carroll suggests that Edgar has earned this position on account of his struggle through the play.[63] However, Edgar, unlike the bastard Edmund, has not had any ambitions of kingship. His arc, whilst it results in his appointment as king, is an arc that is primarily concerned with his own personal journey, and his ambitions do not seem to go beyond restoring his identity. In the speech in which this loss of identity is first mourned, which culminates in Edgar declaring, 'Edgar I nothing am', his ambition is outlined as nothing more than self-preservation through disguise: 'Whiles I may 'scape / I will preserve myself'.[64] These intentions are achieved before the close of the play in the moment Edgar strikes down his brother and reclaims his true identity: 'My name is Edgar, and thy father's son'.[65] Therefore, whilst he may have earned kingship on account of struggle and his commitment to remaining virtuous, his connection to the political situation of the drama seems incidental rather than instrumental. A meritocratic monarchy, as demonstrated through Edgar's subplot, does not seem to provide a much better solution to the problems of hereditary

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[60] Ibid., V. 2. 339-40.

[61] Ibid., V. 2. 373.

[62] McCoy, p. 74.

[63] Carroll, p. 441.

[64] Shakespeare, *Lear*, II. 3. 21; ibid., II. 3. 5-6.

[65] Ibid., V. 3. 161.

succession that are raised within *King Lear*. Indeed, the play is cynical about both of these systems and everything seems to come to nothing.

Despite the future assurance for the monarchy in the final scene of *Hamlet*, Andrew Hadfield suggests that *King Lear* is actually more optimistic. Regardless of the insecurity at the close of the play, there is advice to be taken; that government should be 'conducted with the consent of the people', something that James disavowed in his writing.[66] McCoy also suggests the underlying anxiety in *Hamlet*, observing the play 'reflects many of the political anxieties of an unsettled succession as well as the religious ambiguities of the Elizabethan era'.[67] The anxiety at the end of Elizabeth's reign was indeed considerable enough to erupt into an attempted coup in 1601. However, whilst Hadfield suggests that there is advice that James could take from *King Lear* regarding political counsel, the only characters left on the stage at the disheartening final lines are the ambivalent Edgar, and Kent, who announces he is dying: 'I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no'.[68] If the play was intended to advise the new king to take political counsel, as Hadfield suggests, Shakespeare seems to question whether the advice will be taken; the new king Edgar is left alone in his rule, without any character to advise him.

James's accession in 1603 was 'peaceful', on account of the work completed to resolve 'legal and constitutional ambiguities of his title'.[69] However, in *King Lear*, anxiety about monarchy lingers. The ambivalent Edgar and dying Kent at the close of the play provide a poignant finish; James's succession was not an end to the trouble for all. In the mad world of *King Lear*, Shakespeare depicts hereditary succession as mutable and fragile, despite its societal authority. Yet, by *King Lear*'s conclusion, the monarchy itself is also shown to be

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[66] Andrew Hadfield, 'The Power and Rights of the Crown in "Hamlet" and "King Lear": "The King: The King's to Blame"', *Review of English Studies*, 54 (2003), pp. 566–86 (p. 585).

[67] McCoy, p. 61.

[68] Shakespeare, *Lear*, V. 3. 297-8.

[69] Rei Kanemura, 'Kingship by Descent or Kingship by Election? The Contested Tide of James VI and I', *Journal of British Studies*, 52 (2013), pp. 317-42 (p. 323).

equally mutable and fragile, without any solution to the failings of hereditary succession. That is, everything in the play's depiction of monarchy comes to Cordelia's 'nothing'. The representation of monarchy in *King Lear* is so insecure and cynical that it is almost prophetic of the ensuing chaos of the mid-seventeenth century when the question of the appropriate monarch loomed larger than ever.

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'The only exemplar of a species': Community and Authenticity in *The Baron in the Trees*

Lucia Toman

Italo Calvino's 1957 novel *The Baron in the Trees* (*Il Barone Rampante*) portrays the peculiar life of an Italian aristocrat Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò the eldest son of the baron of Ombrosa.[1] In a youthful act of rebellion against the society and his own family, Cosimo submits to a lifelong determination never to set foot on the ground again and to live in the treetops for the rest of his life. The story follows Cosimo in his adventures and activities, depicted in meticulous detail, seemingly ambitious to convince of its absurdly fantastic verisimilitude. Separating himself from his community; from an ordinary way of life, Cosimo attempts to rewrite his own human experience, as well as his connection to the rest of humankind, to achieve a more authentic life according to his ideals. Yet he strives to remain part of his community: he offers help and services to townspeople, communicates with friends, relatives as well as famous philosophers, tries to keep Ombrosa safe from pirates, even enjoys love affairs every so often.

Cosimo is a man of paradoxes. His unconventional and solitary lifestyle is in contradiction with his apparent sense of responsibility to and connectedness with humankind, especially his own community. The very decision to live in treetops is self-contradictory in that Cosimo decides to leave, yet he stays, as though stuck in-between the flawed human existence on earth and an ideal state of being – above earth. Claiming an almost borderless unclaimed space, he seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time – thanks to his intricate network of treetop paths. What is Cosimo up to? And what was Calvino up to when he created Cosimo? In addressing these

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[1] Italo Calvino, *Il Barone Rampante* (Milan: Palomar & Mondadori, 1993). In this article, I primarily cite the English translation of the novel: Italo Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees,* trans. by Ann Goldstein (Boston: Mariner Books, 2017). The Italian original, referenced above, is used only occasionally where a quotation in Italian is more apposite or necessary.

questions, this article seeks to analyse the conceptual and narrative self-contradictions in the novel in order to explore the moral dilemma which it enacts, as well as its wider background and possible autobiographical links.

At the heart of the novel lies an inquiry which touched not only Cosimo's fictional life, but originated in Calvino's own life, which he tackled continuously in different contexts and variations over his writerly career. Is it possible to remain an active and devoted member of a community while living up to one's ideals? The fact is that human co-existence requires a multitude of compromises. Life in any community implies accepting the shortcomings and vices of human behaviour, pressing one to give up on their idealism for the sake of realism and pragmatism. Yet humans are naturally predisposed toward sociability and can hardly do without a community to be part of – an idea that has been formulated by thinkers over centuries, most famously by Aristotle in his concept of *zoon politikon*[2] resonating with the modern Heideggerian concept of *Mitsein* or Being-with, deemed crucial to human being.[3] Therefore, compromises are necessary and one can easily find reality lingering in a state of inconsistency with their deeply held personal values and principles.

Theoretically speaking, living relentlessly up to one's ideals, despite being a noble determination and, in many cases, indispensable to preserve a sense of inner integrity, leads one to isolation. Unwilling to compromise or yield, at times, to the will of the majority, one finds life in a community impossible. A steadfast devotion to ideals, they might soon find, is possible only at the expense of the connections to the rest of humanity. However, to borrow the words of David Hume, perfectly exemplified by Cosimo: 'A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can

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[2] Aristotle states that 'man is by nature a political animal, and that man who is by nature not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it' (Aristotle, 1253a). See Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by H. Rackam (Perseus Digital Library, n.d) <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,035:1:1253a>.

[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 156.

suffer'.[4] Ideals are what pressures us to seek constant improvement not only of ourselves, but of the community we are part of as well. Insisting on them is, in a sense, an expression of love and care toward our neighbour. In other words, it is an insistence on a better world. Losing our ideals would throw us in a state of passive complacency, compelling us to abandon an important part of self.

Simplifying to the utmost, life in a community and holding strictly to one's ideals seem to be in a complicated kind of mutual opposition. One cannot be a valuable member of a community, striving for a better life and mutual understanding, without holding to one's ideals and without a firm belief in them. But holding to them without a community to apply them to simply makes no sense. Therefore, the urgency as well as relatability of the moral dilemma enacted by *The Baron* can hardly be denied. Moreover, as there seems to be no once-and-for-all solution to it, the question requires to be constantly asked and revisited. It seems that the ideal solution is to be both – a responsible, kind and caring member of the society while remaining true to one's ideals and values – yet, such an arrangement would be self-contradictory.

In the same year as *The Baron* was first published, Calvino decided to leave the Communist party of Italy, which, as he wrote in *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings*, was due to his rude awakening by the violent Soviet invasion of Hungary of the previous year and the revelation of Stalin's crimes.[5] This decision was followed by Calvino's withdrawal from writing, to borrow Joseph Francese's words, in order to 'rethink his role as a public intellectual'.[6] In a letter addressed to historian and essayist Paolo Spriano, Calvino writes:

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[4] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2005), II. II. V. Ebook.
<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hume/david/treatise-of-human-nature/B2.2.5.html>.
[5] Italo Calvino, *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings,* trans. by Martin McLaughlin (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 196 –197.
[6] Joseph Francese, 'The Refashioning Italo Calvino's Public Self-Image in the 1950s and the 1960s', *The Italianist*, 27 (2007), pp. 125–150 (p. 127).

> It is difficult being a Communist on your own. But I am and remain
> a Communist. If I can manage to prove that to you, I will also have
> proven that *Il barone rampante* (*The Baron in the Trees*) is a book
> that is not too far from the things that we are really interested in.[7]

Political denotations strictly aside, should we understand the word
'communist' in its most literal sense? The fundamental characteristic
that arises is that the individual thus characterised is part of a
community: they are actively involved in it, and contribute, by
various means, to its well-being with care and responsibility. Being
'a Communist on [one's] own' is therefore self-contradictory; yet,
perhaps, the only possible way for an idealist like Calvino. Being part
of a community includes being aware, even accepting to an extent,
of its intrinsic imperfections, while striving for a betterment which is
not always attainable. In a way, Calvino and Cosimo share the same
mission.

The story of *The Baron in the Trees* begins with the twelve-year-
old Cosimo refusing to share his parents' dinner table. They were
served platters of decapitated snails, a gruesome masterpiece of his
sister Battista's strange fascination with the mortality of flesh in the
realm of gastronomy. In young Cosimo, the dish inspired feelings of
disgust and pity for the tortured creatures. Moreover, it seemed to
embody the accumulation of injustices inflicted on him by his father's
authority. In what initially seems like a headlong fit of fury, the heir
to the barony takes to the treetops and determines never to set foot
on the ground again for the rest of his life. But Cosimo demonstrates
an extraordinary steadfastness of his resolution to which he sticks
even once the initial anger peters out. His singular treetop lifestyle
suits him well and his determination reveals itself to be a thoughtful
refusal of the degradations of the human society while trying to
nurture his connection to it.

One of the most obvious things he rejects are the empty social
rules and expectations he is subjected to from the side of his family.
Being required to attend dinners together with his family despite the
lack of interest on his part and the disgust he feels at his sister's ghastly

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[7] Italo Calvino, *Italo Calvino: Letters, 1941–1985,* ed. by Michael Wood,
trans. by Martin McLaughlin (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013), p. 139.

cooking does not make sense to him. Human cruelty toward nature is also what he rebels against. This is shown on the example of his sister's odd cruelty toward snails she always prepares for family dinners and toward insects on which she models the mass executions of the French revolution. As Giulia Pacini observes, the novel can also be read as a reflection on environmental ethics and the concern for the preservation of nature and natural resources is strongly emphasised.[8]

Cosimo defies feudal rights and property ownership. In the moment of his ascension to the treetops, he renounces the barony he would otherwise inherit from his father, and claims a hitherto unclaimed territory. He claims to own the whole 'treetop realm', meaning the whole area he can get to by climbing trees, yet he shares it with animals and plants and with anybody who can climb up there. He remains true to his modesty and hardly ever mentions being a baron, having spurned his father's fancy for his barony and his hankering after the title of a duke of Ombrosa. For instance, when he climbs in the trees over the estates of the Ondariva family and meets the young Viola, later to become his love interest, for the first time, they quarrel playfully about their territories. When she insists that he is trespassing in her garden, he says: '"Where I am isn't land and isn't yours! […] [B]ecause yours is the ground and if I put a foot there then I would be sneaking in. But not up here, no, and I go anywhere I like"'.[9] It becomes clear, then, that Cosimo's unique treetop perspective and his treetop network creates connections between estates, territories and even countries. When Viola asks where his property reaches, he answers:

> "As far as you can go if you move through the trees – this way, that way, beyond the wall, into the olive grove, up the hill, the other side of the hill, into the woods, into the bishop's lands […]".
> "Even as far as France?" "As far as Poland and Saxony".[10]

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[8] Giulia Pacini, 'Arboreal and Historical Perspectives from Calvino's Il barone rampante', *Romance Studies*, 31.1 (2014), pp. 57–68 (p. 57).

[9] Calvino, *The Baron,* pp. 22 – 23.

[10] Ibid., p. 23.

Needless to say, by committing to live exclusively on trees, Cosimo does something unconventional and unprecedented. As already mentioned in the introduction, he attempts to rewrite his human experience in a way that would be more in line with his desired way of life, according to his inner convictions and values. In this way, he shuns the culture in which he was brought up in order to reconstruct his own culture. His perspective, his way of life and, in fact, his very experience of his humanity would deviate from what it was pre-programmed by his social environment to look like and he forges it into something new. In his radical decision, Cosimo becomes the author of his own human experience and structures it according to himself.

This radical change begins with his 'journey', strangely, upwards. Cosimo rewrites even the direction of his own journey and becomes, as it were, a vertical traveller. Verticality defines not only Cosimo's lifestyle, but also his, so to say, intellectual journey. In the effort to live up to his ideals, he progresses from bottom to top. Starting with gathering empirical knowledge of the human society, he forms his own moral stances and, consequently, departs from the society in search of a better one to no avail. In the same vein, the name of Cosimo's estate, Ombrosa, is also telling. Meaning 'shadowy' in translation, the town bears an allusion to Cosimo's intellectual journey. The malcontent baron departs from the place of shadows and rises to enlightenment.[11]

In a sense, Cosimo departs yet he keeps on nurturing his connection to Ombrosa and spends almost his entire lifetime there, albeit in its trees.[12] Having rewritten his journey – both physical and intellectual – he manages to leave and remain at the same time. This could be interpreted as a metaphor for the incompletability of one's journey to enlightenment. Also, this seems to relate to Cosimo's inability to live without a community despite his departure. Equally,

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[11]The word 'enlightenment' can be taken to mean both Cosimo's personal enlightenment and the Age of Enlightenment, in which the story takes place. The narrator also claims that Cosimo met and corresponded with some of the famous philosophers of the Enlightenment.

[12] With the exception of his brief stay in Olivabassa with a tribe of Spaniards living on trees.

Cosimo's epitaph in the family tomb ('He lived in the trees – He always loved the earth – He ascended into the sky') expresses the verticality of his existence and is a metaphor made literal.[13]

By residing in treetops, Cosimo finds a completely new perspective of his town and its inhabitants, which seems crucial for an intellectual seeking to better understand and improve life in the society. Cosimo's younger brother Biagio, who is also the narrator of the story, describes his meeting with Voltaire who, aware of Cosimo's case, which had by then become famous, enquires about his motivations for this lifestyle. Evoking general approval, Biagio gives the following answer: '"My brother maintains […] that those who wish to look carefully at the earth should stay at the necessary distance"'.[14] While the reasons for Cosimo's odd change of lifestyle are multiple, his choice of refuge seems fairly apparent. Disappointed with the society, Cosimo leaves in search for a better one. Trees, in this case, can be understood as an ideal non-human life form – peaceful, selfless and serene – providing Cosimo with everything he needs, most importantly with company to look up to in his ruminations about the improvement of the society. Critics have stressed the importance of trees in the novel; for instance, Shelley Saguaro observes that trees are often used in literature as a 'utopian locus of liberty and individual authenticity'.[15] In a similar vein, Ruth Levitas holds that the tree has a symbolic aspect which is a 'prefiguration of wholeness or a better way of being'.[16] In fact, trees, in their unmoving selflessness, represent a perfect antithesis to the human greed, which, in the form of excessive deforestation and rapid

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[13] Calvino, *The Baron*, p. 305. The metaphorical sense is more conspicuous in the Italian original, particularly in the last part of the epitaph: 'Salì in cielo.' (*Il Barone Rampante*, p. 435). This is used as a euphemism for dying, only in this case, the metaphor is very literal – a tendency which is repeatedly demonstrated in the novel, as this article discusses below.

[14] Calvino, *The Baron*, p. 203.

[15] Shelley Saguaro, 'The Republic of Arborea: Trees and the Perfect Society', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 17.3 (2013), pp. 236 – 250 (p. 236). See also Giulia Pacini.

[16] Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as a Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 5.

urban development, poses a threat to their existence. Human cruelty to nature being one of the reasons for Cosimo's leaving for the treetops, his close connection with its antithesis seems like a natural solution.

But resorting into this 'arboreal paradise' and largely shunning the imperfect human company has an obvious disadvantage.[17] In Biagio's own words: 'Cosimo […] was the only exemplar of a species'.[18] Cosimo separates himself from the rest of humankind and, as mentioned above, finds a place 'in-between' the earth and the sky – the starting and ending point, respectively, of his life journey. Being the only one of his kind, Cosimo sentences himself to isolation despite his intense longing for company, closeness and for love. By separating himself from the earth, while not departing entirely, the narrative places Cosimo into a role of a guardian angel of Ombrosa – a supernatural being who appears unexpectedly in a place or situation where his help is needed or which piques his interest. This, again, resonates with Aristotle's concept of *zoon politikon*: 'man who is by nature not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it'.[19] Despite wanting to be part of society and never disconnecting completely, Cosimo's isolation and unusual lifestyle give his character a supernatural aspect.

The Baron is narrated by Biagio, who did not witness most of the events of the story. Over the course of the novel, it becomes increasingly conspicuous that he recounts mere versions of versions of events, sometimes only speculation or hearsay. Biagio is a narrator several times removed from the actual witness of the narrated events. The narrative overturns its own narrativity in that, instead of telling the story, it leaves us with references to a hierarchy of narrators, in descending order of proximity to the narrated events, each repeating a version of a story they heard. Thus, the narrative tells the telling of a story.

Furthermore, the narrative sabotages itself through the self-contradiction of the narrator's remove from the narrated events paired

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[17] Jill Margo Carlton, 'The Genesis of Il Barone Rampante', *Italica*, 61.3 (Autumn 1984), pp. 195 – 206 (p. 206).
[18] Calvino, *The Baron,* p. 174.
[19] Aristotle, 1253a.

with his claim of the narrative's accuracy appears as a self-sabotage of the narration. Biagio did not witness many of the narrated events, yet he does not hesitate to insist repeatedly on the story's accuracy. Moreover, the self-sabotage takes place rather ostentatiously and thus hints at its own intentionality. In a way, the narrative undermines its own truth claims and renders the boundary between truth and fiction fluid and pervious. In a quintessential postmodern move, the narrator waits until the end of the story before he expresses doubt about the very existence of the story's physical setting: 'Ombrosa is no longer there. Looking at the empty sky, I wonder if it really existed'.[20] With this sentence, Biagio casts a shade of doubt over the whole story and all the truth claims he repeatedly stressed. If the physical setting never existed, then it is 'no place' (*ou topos)*, therefore utopia, and equally utopian is Cosimo and the rest of the novel. However, if we characterise utopia as '[a]n imagined form of ideal or superior (usually communistic) human society; or a written work of fiction or philosophical speculation describing such a society', then *The Baron* represents an unsuccessful attempt at finding an ideal society or living up to one's ideals – its protagonist never ceases to feel oppressive solitude.[21] The novel is, therefore, an anti-utopia or a twisted utopia in that it shows the futility of such efforts and the absurdity of a situation in which one would be compelled to make such efforts.

There is a peculiar tendency in the novel to take common metaphorical statements and narrate them in their literal sense. For instance, Cosimo's escape on a hot air balloon is a very literal description of metaphor 'He ascended into the sky', which would normally be understood as a euphemism for dying.[22] The metaphorical aspect is perhaps more readily noticed in the original Italian 'Salì in cielo'.[23] Another play on words occurs, as Jill Margo Carlton notes, when Cosimo allies himself with the French and drops pines cones and porcupines on the marching Austrian troops.[24]

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[20] Calvino, *The Baron*, p. 306.
[21] Chris Baldick, 'Utopia', in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 348.
[22] Calvino, *The Baron,* p. 305.
[23] Calvino, *Il Barone Rampante*, p. 435.
[24] Carlton, p. 203.

Marching through the forest, they get entangled in juniper bushes. In the Italian original, the passage reads: 'La pattuglia, come se lo facesse apposta, andava a impelagarsi nei più fitti gineprai di tutto il bosco'.[25] The Italian idiom *impelagarsi in un ginepraio* (literally to get entangled in a juniper bush) means figuratively to get in trouble. Through these 'metaphors made literal', the novel achieves the absurd combination of being metaphorical and literal simultaneously.[26]

As this article has shown, *The Baron in the Trees* is a work of fiction full of paradoxes and self-contradictions. There is a recurrent theme in the novel of embracing self-contradictory dualities. As this article explores and reasons, the novel is metaphorical yet literal. Its narrative claims to be trustworthy, yet it doubts itself and reveals its own unreliability. Its protagonist, Cosimo di Rondò, engages in a behaviour, entertains attitudes and makes decisions that strike with their paradoxicality. All of these self-contradictions stem from the moral dilemma at the heart of the novel, and point at its own self-contradictory nature: is it possible to be a valuable member of a community while living relentlessly up to one's ideals? Or is it possible, as Calvino wrote in his letter, to be a *communist* on one's own? Self-contradictory at core, the ideal solution is to be both – which is an absurd arrangement. Cosimo enacted Calvino's dilemma and the story of *The Baron* succeeds in embracing self-contradictory dualities with absurd outcomes. Thus, the novel became a virtual playground for Calvino to freely contemplate the absurdity and the insolvability of the patently insolvable dilemma.

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[25] *Il Barone Rampante*, p. 404. The Italian original is cited to better illustrate both the literal and the metaphorical aspect of the event, which was, unfortunately, lost in the cited translation. My own translation of the cited passage is: 'The troops, as if they were doing it on purpose, went to get entangled in the thickest juniper bushes in the whole woods'.

[26] On the contrary, Carlton holds that the novel '"unmakes" metaphor[s] by representing [their] concrete meaning' (Carlton, p. 203). While many of the metaphors in *The Baron* are enacted in their literal sense, they do not lose their metaphorical sense, either. Therefore, Carlton's argument seems like an overstatement.

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Reporting a Stain

Or a century changes, frames
adapting as I look at the colour
of the corpse on my doorstep, still blood-
stained. I pay taxes, someone says,
and I never learnt to listen, but all they
spend the money on is more
boots. There are all kinds
of knee-high boots out there,
black leather strapping ankles
in a branded uniform, history's logo
cracked over pavements where
graffiti was, an absence marked
in paint. Colour the wound. I pay
taxes, duties, vote in the rain, they
all confess, and I never learnt to look.
Red and brown go
together, that's what magazines
in the waiting room say, but *black*
and brown are clashing colours.
Everything else on the pavement
is grey and quickly disappears.

Elliot C. Mason

Connecting Object Histories: Making the Links Between Widescreen Technologies

Dr Phil Wickham, Steven Roberts, Amelia Seely

Exclamat!on's Assistant Editor for Film, Amelia Seely, interviewed Dr Phil Wickham, the Curator of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter, and Steven Roberts, a PhD student in Film at the University of Bristol and the University of Exeter, about the fascinating histories of just a small number of items held in the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter. In this interview, they highlight the connections between widescreen technologies, ranging from seventeenth-century panoramas to VistaVision and IMAX.

Interviewer: Firstly, Phil, can you tell me about the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum and the collections you hold here?

Phil Wickham: The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter is the leading moving image museum in the UK. We have a collection of over 80,000 artefacts on the long history of the moving image from the seventeenth century through to the present day, so cinema and its antecedents. We have a whole range of all kinds of artefacts. The link through the collection - which is very diverse - is that really they are about cinema audiences and how people have responded to moving images; how moving images have informed an important part of people's lives, both reflecting and informing society for over three to four hundred years. The museum is both an accredited public museum, open to everybody, free every day, and it is also a research and teaching facility. We use it in over a hundred classes a year. Obviously, it is very central to film studies at the University, but we also use it in English, History, Drama, Art History, Sociology, Languages, and even Physics have had a look in, occasionally, so it is a very versatile resource used by a lot of people. We also have researchers coming from all over the world. This year they have come from Japan, America, Australia, Canada, Germany, and Czech Republic to use the collection because it is a unique resource – you cannot get these kind of materials anywhere else.

Interviewer: It is my understanding that the museum has a vast collection of Panorama. Can you say a bit more about this?

Phil Wickham: Yes, we have an amazing collection on panorama – by far the biggest collection in the UK. This consists of original material from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – so materials produced for people who went to go see the panoramas – and we also have a huge research collection about the panorama.

On his death, we inherited the research papers of Ralph Hyde. Ralph was the acknowledged, international expert on the panorama and its linked attractions. We have all his papers, detailing his research about the panorama, the people who painted them, the people who saw them and the venues in which they were shown.

Starting in the late eighteenth century, panoramas were enormous canvases that were usually displayed in 360 degrees and exhibited to the public. People would walk into the venue and be surrounded by the pictures. There might also be light shows and sounds; there might be commentary. There were all sorts of different ways in which the show was mediated, but it is primarily based on these enormous images. They were very large venues, and, in those days, they were lit primarily by natural light.

Interviewer: What objects would you like to talk about today?

Phil Wickham: The objects I am going to concentrate on today are from the very beginning of this period. They are the prints we hold in the museum on the Albion Mills panorama, which was the first panorama in England and shows London in 1792 (see figure 1, across pages 62-65). We have an associated print which shows a cross-section of the rotunda in Leicester Square which is the venue that the Albion Mills was shown in which gives a sense of scale of the enterprise.

Figure 1: London from the roof of the Albion Mills: panels 1 – 6 (across pages 62-65), Bill Douglas Cinema Museum (BDCM), EXEBD 70176-70181
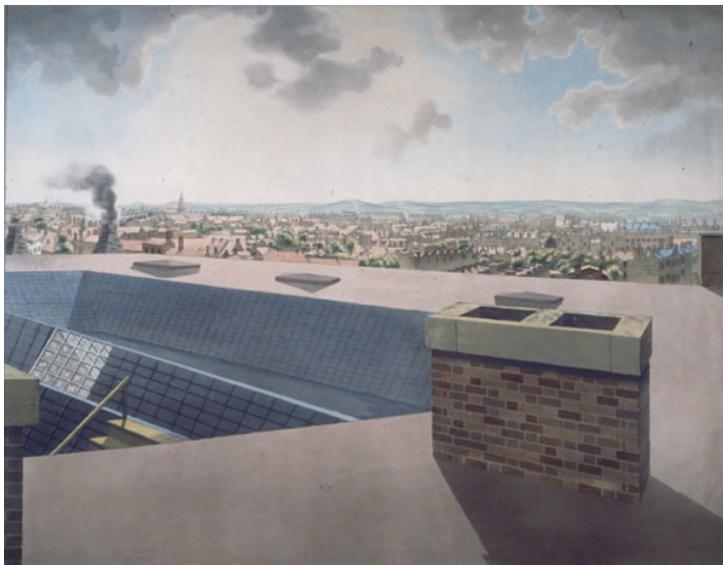
These are the first panoramas shown in England but there had already been some in Edinburgh, Scotland. Robert Barker, who was the showman who had put this on in Edinburgh, moved to London and put the Albion Mills display on to the public. As you can see, we have an original set of prints. Obviously, the panoramas themselves were vast and they would have been painted over at the time. Unfortunately, original panoramas themselves do not usually survive. These were very upscale, fashionable entertainments and so they typically sold souvenirs of the panorama, including a full set of the original prints. So, unusually, we have a full set of prints showing the panorama, that you could then display in your home. There are six pictures which show the view of London that would have been shown in the panorama. Obviously, we can only show it flat, but it would have been 360 degrees.

It is called the Albion Mills panorama because the pivot of the 360 degrees was the Albion Mills factory which was on the southern edge of Blackfriars Bridge. The factory formed the centre of the picture and you can see the panoramic view from there, which takes in all of

London, when south London was mainly fields and then there is the Thames line, then you can see Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral and so on. There are remarkably few buildings that are still there.

This cross-section print on the next page (see figure 2 on page 66) shows how this was seen. The venue was the rotunda in Leicester Square where there would have been two panoramic views. The top one is the Albion Mills one which is from a little later in 1801, so it has already been in place for a few years. The bottom one is a picture of the navy fleet. From this cross-section, you can get a sense of the scale and vastness of the panorama because there are figures and it is about ten to twenty times life size. So, these really are vast forms of entertainments.
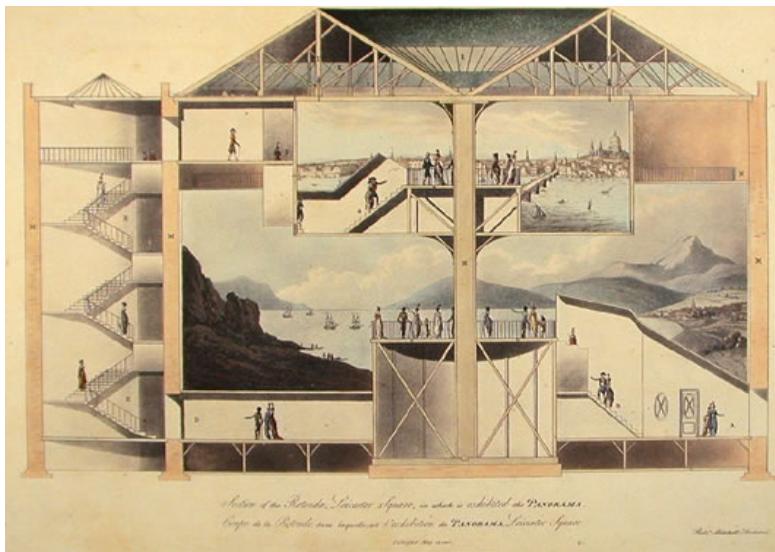
Figure 2: A cross-section of the Rotunda, Leicester Square, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, EXEBD 85143

Panorama continued to be popular for the early part of the nineteenth century. Although in Albion Mills' case they gave a new view on your own city, what they often did was bring the world to you. Panoramas were often of exotic locations for the British audience. You might have the wonders of Japan, for example, or the wonders of the Americas; even if you were never likely to go there, you would get a sense of what it might be like, and a feeling that you understood it. These are important as technologies because this is the beginning of globalisation, if you like; the understanding that we can experience things that are not actually from our own life and you can see them on an enormous, immersive scale.

Interviewer: so, panoramas are like cinema in the way that they are immersive entertainments?

Phil Wickham: Yes, immersive entertainments make you feel like you are there, and they are experiential. Panoramas often bring scenes from other places, but they also bring versions of world events. For example, we also have a lot of items from the Battle of Waterloo

panorama, which was in 1816, just a year after the battle. Again, Barker was involved, and it was displayed at the rotunda. We have a number of keys which are printed maps of the panorama, explaining what the pictures are, which you could buy at the show, as well as handbills advertising them. The panorama recreated scenes from the battle so you felt you understood what it might have been like to have been involved in the fighting, only without the risk. This was obviously enormously popular and went on for a number of years.

The panoramas would often be in place for a long time. They took a long time to paint and so they could not be changed very easily. Some very well-known painters were often involved, so they often involved an artist as well as a showman. This included people like John Martin, David Roberts and other well-known nineteenth-century artists.

By the 1850–60s they were becoming less popular. Not only were they difficult to change, but people were looking for more sensations. They were always quite expensive, unlike lots of optical media, like magic lanterns, so they were really for an upscale audience. As they had been there for several years, you were unlikely to get many repeat visits. There was, however, a slight revival when a showman named Albert Smith did a number of very popular panorama shows in the late 1850s. Albert Smith did a famous show on climbing Mont Blanc. Smith would appear in front of the panorama and would do a showbiz routine about his adventures with these enormous images illustrating that. This also led the way to the possibility of having a different kind of panorama, instead of being fixed or 360 degrees, you can have different panels, smaller portable panels showing different events. So, the fixed venues went out about the 1860s and then you get moving panoramas that can be transported to different places and to new audiences. The most popular group of showmen involved in this were the Poole family. We have a number of their programmes for their panorama shows which they rather confusingly called the *miriam amas*, which is a form of optical entertainment. Effectively, these were panorama shows. They performed in Exeter and in other regional towns, and, again, they might be of popular events or places around the world. We have a very late example of this: we have a set

of photographs showing their moving panorama of the Titanic in 1913, which was very late for the panorama.

When moving pictures arrived in the 1890s, one of the early films shows in the early 1900s were Hale's Tours which were very similarly to the panoramas. These were films of places from around the world and they would often do it in a railway carriage so you would feel like you were literally travelling around the world.

If you think of the 1950s and 1960s, with the widescreen entertainments of Cinerama and cinemascope, a lot of those were round-the-world travelogues. They used huge images that could be produced using this technology, to make people feel that they were immersed in this space. Of course, the panorama in its immersive 360 degree qualities has a lot in common with virtual reality, and other forms of modern technology. They really do look back to this two hundred year old experience for the impact, the way that they work with the audience is very much the same. There are no longer any surviving original panoramas in Britain but there are a number in Europe, such as one in The Hague in Holland, Germany, Poland, and there are some in the United States as well, so the panorama still exists around the world. There have been some modern recreations as well, but the panorama idea and the word 'panorama' was invented for this entertainment; it is part of everyday parlance and is used for anything that is a surrounding view, but it comes from this technology. So, the panorama really set a course for the way in which audiences discovered the world around them through having this immersive, optical experience.

Interviewer: Steve, you recently curated the 'Widescreen South West' interactive display as part of a placement at the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. Today, you wanted to talk about an item that you were unable to include as part of that display. Can you tell me what it is?

Steven Roberts: When assembling the new display for the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter, a number of

interesting items were shortlisted and ultimately omitted by myself and my diligent collaborator, Harmony Lau.

The handbill of the Cinemeccanica film projector (figure 3 on page 71) is one such orphaned item. It was excluded from our display because the backstory was simply too complex to convey in a two-line summary on an A6 sign. Film technologies can appear alien to the non-expert. I was concerned that it would not be immediately obvious what the above image contributed to the 'narrative' of our display, which was all about widescreen film production and exhibition in South West England from the post-war period.

Interviewer: Given more space, what can you tell us about the Cinemeccanica film projector?

Steven Roberts: To explain, we need to return to the 1950s, when cinema attendance sharply declined due to the rise of competing consumer goods and suburbanisation. The rise of television has been blamed for distracting cinemagoers, and one contemporary study even found that British theatres suffered more in areas with a strong television signal. In response, the film industry introduced various widescreen technologies, many of them mentioned in our Museum display, in order to provide an immersive cinema experience. By the mid-1950s, Paramount Pictures became the only Hollywood studio to introduce its own system – VistaVision – rather than adopt CinemaScope, the most broadly used widescreen format.

Paramount managed to convince the Rank Organisation in Britain to adopt VistaVision in 1954. As a 'vertically-integrated' organisation with the means to both make and present films in Odeon cinemas, Rank relied heavily on Paramount's technology. A special feature of VistaVision was its use of large format film to capture high resolution images (similar to IMAX today), which could then be projected full-scale or downsized and printed onto standard 35mm film; Rank instructed its subsidiary, the Kalee company, to begin construction of special film projectors for full-scale VistaVision projection – the most luxurious presentation option. However, only two of Kalee's VistaVision projectors were ultimately used. According to film historian Leo Enticknap, this over-investment was a major factor in
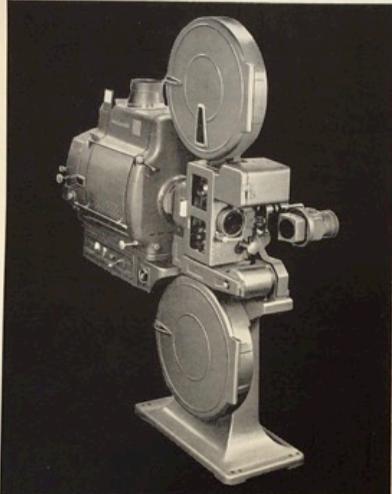
the collapse of Kalee, one of the largest projector manufacturers in the world.

Fast-forward to 1966 and a major film industry conference is taking place not far from Exeter, in Torquay. In the programme, there is an advert inviting delegates to view a multi-format projector which Rank has imported via the Italian firm Cinemeccanica, the successor to Kalee. Like a film star, the projector is glamorously lit so that the metal surface gleams. Rank's bold logo underlines the advert. The text states that Cinemeccanica projectors have been installed at 'premiere cinemas' including the Odeon Leicester Square cinema, thereby replacing the two VistaVision projectors installed by Kalee. Only now, Rank has ensured that its film projectors can take both standard 35mm and large format film (70mm), unlike the VistaVision projectors of the previous decade.

The Cinemeccanica projector has a complex backstory. Sadly, a whole micro-history of transatlantic trade, technological obsolesce and the forced unemployment of Kalee technicians was excluded from the 'narrative' of our display. I am pleased to be able to share it here.

Figure 3: Cinemeccanica projector advert from a Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association of Great Britain and Ireland Conference programme, 23-25 May 1966, Torquay. Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, EXEBD 55701

Interviewer: one of the most well-known wide-screen technologies is probably IMAX. Would you be able to tell us a bit more about the history of IMAX?

Steven Roberts: As a technological format and company, IMAX has undergone several changes between 1970 and the digital era. The

Bill Douglas Cinema Museum's collection of promotional materials highlight milestones in the development of IMAX, including the pictured promotional leaflet for the Printworks multiplex in Manchester, which is advertised as carrying 'the Northwest's first and only IMAX screen' with 'the clearest view, the sharpest sound and the most comfortable seats' (figure 4 on page 73). The tagline, 'the world's biggest screens', glamourizes both the city and cinema as sites of touristic interest.

Arriving at the tail end of the post-war widescreen revolution, IMAX was initially a museum and science centre-only format. IMAX technology was designed to produce and exhibit documentary films for education and entertainment purposes. Its high resolution, large format negative allowed filmmakers to immerse audiences in the natural world when shown on screens in the tall aspect ratio of 1.43:1, for example. The leaflet's text, '[b]igger than you can imagine', underlines IMAX technology's revelatory potential.

Interviewer: the object you have advertises the first IMAX screen in Manchester's Printworks. What can you tell us about it?

Steven Roberts: The Printworks leaflet dates from the turn of the millennium and, while bearing enduring IMAX marketing tropes, captures the company and its technology in a moment of transition. Here, IMAX has expanded from the specialist institution to a Manchester multiplex cinema, and yet still bears the traces of the old Museum format in its iconography: dinosaurs, Egyptian pyramids, and sports images, alongside a snapshot of two absorbed schoolchildren, speak to the once more didactic programme of IMAX. In the 2000s, these images would be overwritten by scenes and characters from the latest features as major distributors took an interest in IMAX venues and the format came to be downscaled and 'Hollywoodized'.

IMAX has diversified. As a production format, it is rarely used, while its cinemas are equipped for digital sound (as described in the leaflet), 'blow-ups' of 35mm films and, more commonly, digital features not originally shot in the IMAX large negative format. The cinema at

Printworks, operated by Vue since 2017, remains one of a decreasing number of venues able to show IMAX in its native 70mm format on what is reported to be Europe's second largest cinema screen. However, Vue's heavy investment in laser projection in 2018, installed just before the premiere of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (David Yates, 2018)*,* shows that the creation of niche digital benchmarks to sell mainstream features remains the order of the day.

Figure 4: 'Bigger than you can imagine': Manchester IMAX: The Printworks Handbill, BDCM, EXEBD 44363

Deconstructing 'the anthropological machine' in the writing of Franz Kafka, Peter Dickinson, and J. M Coetzee

Trang Dang

In his book *The Open* (2002), Giorgio Agamben defines the anthropological machine of humanism as 'an ironic apparatus that verifies the absence of a nature proper to Homo, holding him suspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human – and, thus, his being always more and less than himself'.[1] Inferably, since this machine confirms the lack of 'a nature proper to Homo', all human beings are free to find whatever nature they see fit to represent themselves.[2] But ironically, humanity already has 'a nature proper' to them. This nature has its roots in animality in that humans suffer 'natural disasters and natural laws like any other species', and for this reason, they and the animals are, in this respect, of equal rank.[3] In denying humanity both their origin and equality with animals, the anthropological machine stops man from becoming human, making 'his being always more and less than himself'.[4] This is because, to become human, the human race must acknowledge its animality; as Jacques Derrida puts it, 'the animal therefore I am'.[5]

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[1] Giorgio Agamben, 'Without Rank', in *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. by Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 29-32 (p. 29).

[2] In the same book, Agamben asserts that 'as the free and extraordinary maker and moulder of [himself], [man] may shape [him]self in whatever form [he] prefer[s]' (p. 29).

[3] Holly Wilson, 'Kant and Ecofeminism', in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature,* ed. by Karen J. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 390-411 (p. 396).

[4] Agamben argues that, because man can mould himself in whatever form he prefers, he 'can degenerate into the lower things, which are brutes; [he] can regenerate, in accordance with [his] soul's decision, into the higher things, which are divine' (pp. 29-30).

[5] Anat Pick also observes that 'humanity must be self-knowingly claimed via animality. [...] Failure to see the animal in the human is, then, necessarily

Additionally, as the anthropological machine puts humans in between an earthly and a heavenly space, it always sets them above animals to the point where all attempts to find a nature proper to them will only move them farther away from their animality. The anthropological machine of humanism therefore is an 'ironic apparatus' because, rather than confirming the nature of human as animal, it distances the former from the latter, and at worst enables the former to develop an anthropocentric way of thinking that underpins human subjectivity, and justifies (to humans at least) their domination over animals.

In fact, the anthropological machine makes anthropocentrism so central to humanity that, however much one attempts to escape from it, one inevitably fails to do so. Prominent examples can be seen in literature that focuses on the figure of the animal, such as Franz Kafka's 'The Transformation' (1915) and 'A Report to an Academy' (1917), Peter Dickinson's *Eva* (1988), and J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999).[6] Specifically, in 'The Transformation', Kafka uses animals as a metaphor to discuss social issues in human society and to convey his own personal problems. In the rest of the texts, animals serve as vehicles to stress the importance of human knowledge and intelligence. Nevertheless, this is not to claim that these texts advocate a human-centred viewpoint. Examining these short stories and novels, this article argues that they establish human subjectivity only to deconstruct it and particularly to unsettle the supposition of human superiority in reason, rationality, and morality. While analysing the rhetoric of allegory employed in the texts, this essay

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also a failure to claim human subjectivity and identity, since one remains blind to the very nature of the human as an act of self-recognition' (p. 6). See: Anat Pick, 'Review of Giorgio Agamben, The Open: Man and Animal, trans. by Kevin Attell', *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature,* 5.2 (2006), pp. 1-13.

[6] Franz Kafka, 'The Transformation', in *The Transformation and Other Stories*, trans. and ed. by Malcolm Pasley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 76-126; Franz Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', in *The Transformation and Other Stories*, trans., and ed. by Malcolm Pasley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 187-195; Peter Dickinson, *Eva* (London: Macmillan Children's Books: 2001); J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (London: Profile Books, 2000), p. 86.

examines how the authors utilise elements of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and sympathetic imagination, not only to demonstrate the intrinsic interconnection between humans and animals, but also to promote the power of human imagination that gives animals voices and agency, raises questions about animal advocacy, and that helps save them from human violence. The first part of this article explores how the four texts use the imagery of the animal as a tool for human subjectivity, while the second part analyses how they break down the very human subjectivity that they establish. Finally, this essay examines the texts' solutions for delegitimising the central position of humanity among other species.

Animals in Kafka's stories have frequently been read by literary scholars as allegories for humans being treated as the other in different social contexts, and in 'The Transformation' the insect that Gregor transforms into is not an exception.[7] Many literary critics, such as Stanley Corngold, Ronald Speirs, and Beatrice Sandberg, contend that 'The Transformation' is used to convey and reflect the state of both Kafka's and Gregor's family estrangement, which is a fact Kafka himself admits in his *Letter to the Father* (1952): '[father] you do charge me with coldness, estrangement, and ingratitude'.[8] Before his transformation into an insect, Gregor works diligently for five years to pay off his father's bankruptcy debt, and takes nothing for himself.[9] Meanwhile, his family feeds shamelessly upon his labour and expresses little gratitude.[10] This dynamic in the relationship between Gregor and his family suggests that they see him as nothing but a working machine that provides them with money. Put differently, he

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[7] Matthew T. Powell, 'Bestial Representations of Otherness: Kafka's Animal Stories', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32.1 (2008), pp. 129-142 (p. 131).

[8] Franz Kafka, *Letter to the Father* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013), p. 1; Stanley Corngold, 'The Metamorphosis: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor', in *Franz Kafka* (New York: Cornell University Press: 1988), pp. 47-89; Ronald Speirs and Beatrice Sandberg, 'Reading Kafka', in *Franz Kafka* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 17-28; Johannes Pfeiffer, 'The Metamorphosis', in *Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Donald Grey (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 53-59.

[9] Franz Kafka, 'The Transformation', pp. 77, 98.

[10] Ibid., p. 97.

is detached from and alienated by them, which importantly points to Kafka's own estrangement from his family. During his childhood, Kafka's parents' care was absent, and he never developed a close relationship with his family.[11] Using the figure of the insect, which is often avoided and othered by humans, allows Kafka to further emphasise this sense of family estrangement that he and Gregor experience. In other words, the image of the insect serves as what Corngold calls 'an extended metaphor' for Gregor and Kafka's already existing isolation from their families.[12] In this case, the insect is used as a vehicle to portray not animal but human feelings and experiences, thus stressing the presence of alienated human subjectivity throughout the short story.

This inescapability of human subjectivity is also evidenced in Kafka's short story 'A Report to an Academy', an anthropomorphic fable. According to Derrida, fables, as often written from a human-centred (if not necessarily human) viewpoint, only 'preserve' the human subject and reassert the anthropological machine.[13] Reflecting this, 'A Report to an Academy' portrays an ape named Red Peter giving a report about his 'past life as an ape' to the learned members of the Academy.[14] However, Red Peter claims that he is 'unable to comply with [the audience's] request as thus formulated' because, in the process of 'reach[ing] the cultural level of an average European', his memories of being an ape 'closed themselves off' from him.[15] That is, he can no longer see himself as an ape and is only able to deliver his report 'in human terms'.[16]This demonstrates the preservation of human subjectivity because, rather than being an animal with animal subjectivity, Red Peter becomes a human in the physical form of an

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[11] Max Brod, 'Parents and Childhood', in *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, trans. by G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston, 2nd edn (New York: Da Capo, 1995), pp. 3-38 (pp. 9,15).

[12] Corngold, p. 84.

[13] Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That There I Am (More to Follow)', in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 1-51 (p. 41).

[14] Franz Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', p. 187.

[15] Ibid., pp. 187, 195, 190.

[16] Ibid., p. 189.

ape and importantly with human subjectivity. Taking Red Peter's transformation further, one can read the short story as an allegory of human evolution offering insight into the passage from ape to man, whereby man, like Red Peter, relinquishes his animality. Seen in this way, the image of the ape is exploited to represent a brief account of human – rather than animal – evolution, which again emphasises the subordinate roles of animals and the unavoidability of anthropocentrism in the short story.

Similarly, animals function as vehicles for human subjectivity in Dickinson's *Eva*. Eva is a thirteen-year-old girl whose neuron memory is transplanted into the brain of a young female chimp called Kelly after a car accident. After being exposed to how the chimps are abused for scientific research and commercial purposes, she uses her human knowledge to help restore the animals to their natural habitat. Many literary critics such as Betty Carter and Kathryn V. Graham praise this rescue of the chimps as Eva's departure from anthropocentrism.[17] That is, the fact that Eva chooses to leave human civilisation and save the chimps shows that she no longer sees humanity as holding the important position among non-human species. Such observations overlook the contradiction inherent in the narrative, that which underpins the anthropocentric thought. The animal rights advocate in the novel, Grog, argues that humans cannot 'teach chimps to live wild' because 'they were human'.[18] At the same time, Eva reasons that the chimps cannot be let loose in 'wild jungle' because, like humans, they have not experienced living there.[19] But it is eventually Eva who brings the chimps back to the wild and trains them to live here, though neither Eva nor Kelly has experienced life in this environment. When Eva senses that death is approaching, her concern is that '[t]he structure of the groups' of the chimps would fall apart 'without [her] prestige to bind them'.[20] This emphasis on 'Eva's prestige' can be read as reinforcing the assumption of superior human

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[17] Betty Carter, 'A Second Look', *Horn Book Magazine*, 77.5 (2001), pp. 541-548 (p. 546); Kathryn V. Graham, 'Exodus from the City: Peter Dickinson's *Eva*', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 23.1 (1999), pp. 79-85 (p. 83).

[18] Dickinson, *Eva*, p. 129.

[19] Ibid., p. 141.

[20] Ibid., p. 246.

knowledge and intellect, contradicting the idea that the animals are themselves primary to the narrative's message, since Dickinson chooses a human rather than an animal to be the leader guiding and teaching the chimps. This primacy of human subjectivity is further demonstrated when Dickinson regards the chimps as 'the Inheritors [of] the human future'.[21] This raises the question why the chimps cannot remain chimps but have to become in some sense human. Dickinson's stress on the 'human future' risks indicating that humans as a species are more important than non-human species and so their generations should be sustained and preserved. These narratives not only prove the unavoidability of foregrounding human subjectivity in some literature, but also risk strengthening the hierarchy that places humans above animals.

Although Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* centres on an acclaimed writer, Costello, who expresses her genuine concern about the violence inflicted on animals, the content of her second lecture in the narrative, 'The Poets and the Animals', contains examples where she openly reasserts the superiority of human subjectivity in artistic production and appreciation. For instance, while answering an audience member's question, Costello claims that '[poetry] falls within an entirely human economy in which the animal has no share'.[22] This denial of animals' ability to create and value art is first of all invalid because objectively speaking animals do possess such capabilities.[23] For example, humans often consider the dance moves of male birds of paradise innate to these animals. That is to say, it is completely natural for these birds to put on a dance performance because the performance is essential for attracting a female mate; hence there is nothing artistic about it.[24] However, this is distinctively a humanly subjective viewpoint because, from the perspectives of the male birds of paradise and especially female ones, the dance moves are a form of art. In fact, owing to these very artistic dance moves,

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[21] Ibid., p. 244.

[22] Coetzee, p. 86.

[23] Robert John Young, 'Can animals ever be artists?', *The Conversation,* 25 March 2015, n.p. <http://theconversation.com/can-animals-ever-be-artists-39296>.

[24] Ibid.

the development and reproduction of this species are sustained and preserved, in the same way that human art and culture help sustain and preserve human civilisation. Secondly, the claim is contradictory since, in her previous statement, Costello emphasises that poetry is an imaginative tool that allows humans to inhabit the animal's body and so 'the record of an engagement with [the animal]'.[25] In denying animals the artistic ability that humans use to connect with them, Costello not only places her human subjectivity into that of animals but also reinforces the human-animal gap that she tries to bridge. For, as philosopher Vinciane Despret observes, a bodily connection is only possible when it comes from two sides.[26]

While these four texts all use animals as vehicles for human subjectivity, they also strive to deconstruct the figure of the human, and to reveal the violent (for both humans and animals) realities of the human-animal binary. Considering Kafka's short stories, Norris observes that 'one can trace the progressive deconstruction of the human in the interest of recuperating an imagined animal sensibility that in turn reflects back a subversive and problematic image of the human as seen through animal eyes'.[27] Indeed, by using zoomorphism, that is, by giving Gregor the physical attributes of an insect, Kafka allows the animal the ability and subjectivity to describe its experience of being treated coldly by humans. Although Gregor's sister gives him food, after he finishes his meals, he notices that she 'took a broom and swept up not only the remains of what he had eaten, but also the foods which he had not even touched, as if there were no longer any good either'.[28] This treatment indicates that there can be no interaction or sharing of any kind between the insect and

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[25] Coetzee, p. 86.

[26] Vinciane Despret, 'The body we care for. Figures of anthropo-zoo-genesis', *Vinciane Despret*, 28 April 2010, n.p. <http://www.vincianedespret.be/2010/04/the-body-we-care-for-figures-of-anthropo-zoo-genesis/>.

[27] Margot Norris, 'Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans', in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), pp. 17-32 (p. 19).

[28] Kafka, 'The Transformation', p. 95.

the human, thus giving evidence of the boundary between humans and animals. This boundary is further highlighted in Gregor's family's violent attempts to confine him to his room. The first time, Gregor's father 'deal[s] him a mighty blow from behind'.[29] On the second occasion, he throws apples at Gregor and injures him severely.[30] The third time, Gregor's sister pushes him into his room and locks it 'with all speed'.[31] These violent acts against the insect reveal not only humans' constant effort to maintain distance and draw borders between themselves and the animal, but also their continuing need for the 'insect to be eradicated', as demonstrated by Gregor's death.[32] Gregor's life as a bug illustrates Kafka's attempt to give the animal a voice and agency so that it can expose to the human reader what it means to be an insect and the brutal treatment they receive from humans.

Gregor's metamorphosis also serves as a metaphor for the invasion of animals into human space, destabilising constructs of human dominance over the animal world. In the first instance, the idea of animals intruding into human space can be explained by Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. She defines the abject as 'ha[ving] only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I', and 'from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master'.[33] In this light, the insect in 'The Transformation' can be seen as the abject, not only 'being opposed' to the chief clerk, but also invading his space and challenging him when he comes to Gregor's house to query why he is late for work. The chief clerk represents a figure of authority because he acquires a higher status than Gregor within their workplace, and in turn, Gregor is required to treat him

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[29] Ibid., p. 91.

[30] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[31] Ibid., p. 121.

[32] Melissa De Bruyker, 'Who Identified the Animal? Hybridity and Body Politics in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)', in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), pp. 191-209 (p. 204); Kafka, 'The Transformation', p. 122.

[33] Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection', in *Power of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1-31 (pp. 1-2).

with great respect.[34] However, when Gregor the insect crawls out of his room and calmly presents himself to the clerk, the clerk 'utter[s] a loud "Oh!"' and runs away, unable to confront Gregor.[35] The irony in Gregor's total calmness and the clerk's flight indicates the reversal of the role of the authority figure between the two. Rather than being under the clerk's control, Gregor achieves his subjective status, in which he shows his formidable presence and scares the clerk away. Put differently, he as the insect challenges the clerk's dominance and unsettles his authoritative power over him. Gregor's metamorphosis therefore exposes human vulnerability, denouncing and deconstructing the hierarchy that considers animals exploitable and expendable.

The deconstruction of human subjectivity is further highlighted in 'A Report to an Academy'. By giving Red Peter human mental attributes, Kafka undermines and ironises human superiority in intelligence and moral thought. To paraphrase, if the Enlightenment praises human knowledge and morality as qualities unique to humanity and superior to non-human species, the author sets out to deconstruct, subvert, and challenge this view.[36] This subversion is vividly demonstrated by the relationship between Red Peter and his teacher. Feeling exhausted from his teacher's lessons and becoming his subject of fun, Red Peter decides to mock him by mimicking his teacher when he is not told to do so.[37] Consequently, in the same way that the role of authority between Gregor and the chief clerk is reversed, so too is the relationship between Red Peter and his teacher, in that the teacher's authority is undermined, and it is he, rather than the ape, who is aped, objectified and mocked. This both highlights Red Peter's wits and subverts assumptions of human intellectual superiority. Nevertheless, as the teacher is consistently mocked by Red Peter, he attempts to re-establish his control by inflicting physical harm on his student's body: he 'held his burning pipe against [Red Peter's] fur, until it began to smoulder in some place that [he] found

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[34] Kafka, 'The Transformation', p. 84.

[35] Ibid., p. 87.

[36] John M. Ellis, 'How to read Kafka: part I', *New Criterion*, 37.2 (2018), pp. 4-12 (pp. 6-7).

[37] Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', p. 193.

hard to reach'.[38] Rather than resorting to violence and taking revenge like his teacher, Red Peter holds no grudges against him. In fact, he defends him: '[H]e was not angry with me, he perceived that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the more difficult task'.[39] The absence of accusation and anger in the ape, together with his forgiveness, places Red Peter on a much higher moral ground than his teacher. This points to the teacher's pettiness and derides humans' pride in their capacities for moral thought and intelligence.

Human morality is exposed as a fallacy by the treatment of animals as the scapegoat. Chris Danta conceives the scapegoat as 'the sacrificial animal whose body the human community first appropriates and then expels into the desert in order to expiate its sense of guilt'.[40] In this light, Red Peter represents the scapegoat whose suffering body is subjected to the human sin of inflicting violence on non-human animals, and whose sacrificial origins help humans evolve and understand themselves. Although being shot twice and seriously wounded, Red Peter is confined to a cage that 'was too low to stand up in and too narrow to sit down'.[41] The injury and confinement demonstrate the total lack of desire in Red Peter's captors to take responsibility for the wounds they cause him. The ape has to endure the pain by himself and to accept that as an animal he is bound to suffering. This draws attention to his role as the scapegoat, and presents cruelty as unique to humans, thereby satirising the version of human evolution that prides itself on humans' capacities for moral virtues. Red Peter's pain and captivity also force him to find 'a way out'; to do so, he decides to succumb to human authority and mimic their ways of being.[42] He 'cease[s] to be an ape', relinquishing his animality that testifies to the captors' violence against him.[43] Accordingly, as the ape sacrifices his apeness to become human, he

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Chris Danta, '"Like a Dog...like a Lamb": Becoming Sacrificial Animal in Kafka and Coetzee', *New Literary History*, 38.4 (2007), pp. 721-737 (p. 725).

[41] Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', p. 189.

[42] Ibid., p. 190.

[43] Ibid.

sets his captors free from their sin. Red Peter's transformation into a human is a parody of human evolution. It mocks the anthropological machine that makes humanity 'fight against the[ir] nature of apes'.[44] Meanwhile, the ape's generosity in expiating his captors' feelings of guilt embodies the heroic and sacrificial role of animals in giving humans moral lessons and helping them realise their cruelty, thus stressing animals' moral superiority.

While Kafka's 'The Transformation' and 'A Report to an Academy' attempt to deconstruct human subjectivity and claims on morality, and to subvert human-animal power relations, Dickinson's *Eva* sets out to promote the positive aspects of the human. According to ecofeminist Holly Wilson, these aspects consist of humanity's capacity to 'conceive of ends through reason and propose the means towards achieving those ends through judgment'.[45] She explains that, far from reinforcing human superiority and rationality, these aspects call forth 'a special responsibility' from humans because only through their narratives can animal and environmental narratives be accessed and cultivated.[46] Indeed, it is through Eva's narrative that the reality of what it means to be a chimp, and the brutal exploitation humans have performed on chimpanzees, are exposed to the human reader. When Eva is filmed in a hospital, she notices 'a camera trained on her as though she were some kind of *thing* you didn't have to say Do-you-mind to'.[47] This treatment makes Eva realise that, being a chimp, she is no longer considered 'an individual with inherent right' over herself, but rather an object that can be used by humans whenever and however they like.[48] This sense is further highlighted in the two experiments that strive to replicate the successful transplantation of Eva's 'neuron memory' into Kelly. In these experiments, the bodies of the chimps Caesar and Angel are used without their consent to serve the human thirst for knowledge. As Eva asserts in a press conference,

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Wilson, p. 396.

[46] Ibid., p. 397.

[47] Dickinson, *Eva*, p. 55.

[48] Cat Yampell, 'When Science Blurs the Boundaries: The Commodification of the Animal in Young Adult Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 35.2 (2008), pp. 207-222 (p. 211).

the experiments are 'not to save life. Just to know'.[49] Witnessing these cruel experiments helps open Eva's eyes, enables her to see and experience how chimps are treated as mere tools to serve human ends, and ultimately drives her to save these animals. Consequently, the aforementioned scene where Eva leads the chimps with her human knowledge cannot simply be seen as strengthening the hierarchy that legitimises the central position of humans among non-human species. Rather, it highlights Eva's responsibility towards other living beings, and her making use of – rather than abusing – her human knowledge and reason to protect animals.

If in 'A Report to an Academy' Red Peter has an animal body and a human mind, *Eva* goes a step further, describing Eva the human as having an animal's body with both human and animal consciousness. The hybrid of Eva and Kelly's consciousness gives Dickinson an advantage in that, as Melissa de Bruyker puts it, the hybrid signals 'a crisis situation in which distinctions between human and animal, notions like subjectivity and humanity and modes of observation are at stake'.[50] Given a human consciousness, the chimp Kelly asserts her subjectivity, and rejects the ways her body is treated by humans. This is vividly illustrated in the scene where, under the pressure of the audience's 'shouts and arguments' about what to do with the chimps and how to treat them, Kelly 'let[s] the bubble of [frustration and anger] burst out in one bark' and rips off her overalls: 'the yellow cloth crumped round her ankles. She stepped out of the mess and knuckled away naked'.[51] Kelly's eruption of anger shows that the animal's feelings are conveyed and given voice rather than being repressed. Her act of tearing off her clothes asserts Kelly's power of choice and ownership of herself, and accordingly serves as a protest against the human's control over her body. Indeed, clothes are often

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[49] Dickinson, *Eva*, p. 162.

[50] Melissa de Bruyker, 'Who Identified the Animal? Hybridity and Body Politics in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)', in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), pp. 191-209 (p. 191).

[51] Dickinson, *Eva*, p. 164.

used to distinguish humans from animals.[52] By stepping 'out of the mess', Kelly not only compares positively with and reduces humanity to a state of chaos, but also, like Gregor and Red Peter, reverses the role of authority, making her own decision to break away from the human world. Due to the use of the hybrid form, Kelly's decision to leave humanity is also Eva's. This both indicates Eva's return to her true human nature – one that acknowledges her animality – and acts as a reminder to humans of their animal nature. As Eva puts it, 'you're just another monkey, remember'.[53] While Dickinson's creation of the hybrid of Kelly and Eva's consciousness allows Kelly to claim back her animal subjectivity, Eva's choice to remain with animals rather than humans signals a collapse of the border between humans and animals.

Coetzee's attempt to break down this border in *The Lives of Animals* is sharply criticised by literary scholar Louis Tremaine, whose article 'The Embodied Soul' claims that the novel 'bears more importantly on *human* experience'.[54] In the same vein, ecocritic Harold Fromm accuses Costello of imposing on the audience her choice to be a vegetarian.[55] That is, instead of focusing primarily on animals as the novel's title claims, Costello centres her speech on her ways of living and being a vegetarian, thus putting forwards views that are egocentric rather than ecocentric. Tremaine and Fromm's insistence on the novel's human-centredness limits them to seeing Costello in light of what Jones Ward calls a 'moral persuader'.[56] Far from focusing on '*human* experience' and forcing the audience to follow her vegetarian diet, Costello persuades them to defy the

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[52] Irene Pepperberg, 'The differences between humans and nonhumans are quantitative, not qualitative', *Edge* (2006), n.p. <https://www.edge.org/response-detail/10632>.

[53] Dickinson, *Eva*, p. 161.

[54] Louis Tremaine, 'The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee', *Contemporary Literature*, 44.4 (2003), pp. 587-612 (p. 598).

[55] Harold Fromm, 'Coetzee's Postmodern Animals', *The Hudson Review*, 53.2 (2000), pp. 336-344 (p. 343).

[56] Jones Ward, 'Elizabeth Costello and the Biography of the Moral Philosopher', *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, 69.2 (2011), pp. 209-220 (p. 214).

human-animal divide and the belief that humans have superior reasoning abilities to animals by appealing to ethos. At the beginning of her first lecture 'The Philosophers and the Animals', Costello declares that she is 'just an ordinary person, neither a god nor a beast', and as 'an ordinary person', she 'feel[s] like Red Peter', the ape in 'A Report to an Academy'.[57] This statement, which compares Costello to an ape and blurs the boundary between humans and non-humans, critiques the anthropological machine and – like Eva's assertion that 'you're just another monkey' – reminds her audience of human evolutionary kinship with apes.

Another truth that Costello uncovers emerges out of her deconstruction of humanist views on the uniqueness of human rationality. Challenging the fathers of philosophy, Plato, Descartes, and Kant, who believe reason to be 'the being of the universe [or] the being of God', Costello argues that it is in fact 'the being of one tendency in human thought'.[58] She further explains that this 'certain spectrum of human thinking' consists of the notion that 'man is godlike, animals thinglike'.[59] This enables humans to see animals as objects to which they can do whatever they like. In highlighting this very hierarchical and exclusionary way of thinking about and comparing animals to humans, Costello even goes as far as to compare the treatment of animals in slaughterhouses to the treatment of animalised Jewish people during the Holocaust.[60] Since this controversial comparison strongly condemns traditional conceptions of reason such as 'the being of the universe' for causing immoral acts like mass killings and torture, it greatly undermines and ridicules human pride in morality and rationality. Costello's attack against the human-animal divide and anthropocentrism reveals the human-centred conception of human origins, morality, and reason, and rejects the anthropological machine that posits humans as superior to animals, and that justifies their violence against animals.

Costello's attack against human reason, however, seems ridiculous to her daughter-in-law Nora. Nora contends that 'there is

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[57] Coetzee, pp. 16, 15.

[58] Ibid., p. 25.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 20.

no position outside of reason where [Costello] can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason'.[61] Nora's point, in other words, is that Costello's deconstruction of human reason is made possible only by her very ability to reason. As Anthony Vital puts it, 'however much [Costello] might want to stand outside of reason she is nonetheless drawn into its compass'.[62] But rather than proposing a contradiction, I argue, Costello deconstructs the Enlightenment/humanist view of reason in an attempt to redefine it. To do so, she problematises Descartes's famous saying, 'I think, therefore I am':

> It implies that [...] to thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being – not a consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation – a heavily affective sensation – of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world.[63]

Put simply, to Descartes reason is devoid of any kind of embodied sensations, and this is what Costello declares invalid in his statement. To her, these qualities, and empathy, are central to reason. Costello supports her statement by drawing once more on her comparison of the Holocaust with brutal killings of mass animals in slaughterhouses.[64] While, according to Costello's audience member, Abraham Stern, this provocative comparison confirms the animalisation of Jewish people and trivialises the historical event, what Costello tries to get across is not the likeness between the deaths of the Jews and those of animals.[65] Rather, both events show the catastrophic consequences of human reason when it is totally empty of empathy and emotions. That is, reason without feelings can easily

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[61] Ibid., p. 80.

[62] Anthony Vital, 'Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction: J. M. Coetzee's "The Lives of Animals" and Zakes Mda's "The Heart of Redness"', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31.2 (2005), pp. 297-313 (p. 303).

[63] Coetzee, pp. 45-46.

[64] Ibid., p. 47.

[65] Ibid., p. 82.

lead to cruelty and fatality. Costello proposes that reason should therefore be guided by the acts of 'sympathetic imagination' and 'embodiment', and that 'there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another [and that] there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination'.[66] Once one imagines one's way into 'the being of another' and embodies it, one is able to feel the 'embodied vulnerability' of animals and sympathise with them when they experience pain and death to serve commercial purposes, laboratory experiments, and meat production.[67] Costello's advocacy of the acts of 'sympathetic imagination' and 'embodiment' disturbs the long-established definition of human reason, one that isolates humans from non-human animals and that defines the former as more superior and more important than the latter, and, significantly, devises a way for humanity to rethink their brutality against animals.

Agamben's definition of the anthropological machine of humanism has provided a fundamental framework for this article, and enabling new insight into the works I have discussed. I have demonstrated that man does not have 'a nature proper to him', and how this lack allows him to go on a constant search for a nature that eventually separates him from animals and his origin. This lasting impact of the anthropological machine on humanity has shown that it is impossible for any piece of literature about animal subjectivity to escape from the trappings of human subjectivity, as seen in Kafka's 'The Transformation' and 'A Report to an Academy', Dickinson's *Eva,* and Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*. In other words, because humans have long been shaped by the anthropological machine and hence restricted to the human world view, their ability to fully imagine animal perspectives is necessarily limited. Any animal literature will therefore have elements of anthropomorphism. However, as Wilson argues, only through human narratives can animal and environmental narratives be accessed and nurtured. Consequently, Kafka, Dickinson, and Coetzee draw attention to the anthropological machine only to deconstruct it, and break away from it. They utilise

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[66] Ibid., pp. 49, 91.

[67] Kelly Oliver, 'The Right to Remain Silent', in *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia Press, 2009), pp. 25-48 (p. 46).

zoomorphism, anthropomorphism, and sympathetic imagination to bridge the human-animal gap and remind the former of their animality, thus stressing our inherent interconnectedness with non-human animals. These techniques also enable the authors to uncover the consequences of the anthropological machine: it legitimises the dominant position of humans among other species and permits them to abuse their intellectual capacities to exploit non-human beings. Given that humanity is involved in, as Coetzee puts it, 'an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, [...] in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing [all animals] ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them', animal literature plays a vital role in making the human reader realise that, by carrying out mass slaughters of animals, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction.[68] But at the same time this literature invites readers to engage in sympathetic imagination, offering them new ways out of the anthropological machine that can help ensure the thriving of both humans and non-human animals.

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[68] Coetzee, p. 22.

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Waiting For You

Julie Lockwood

You were the one I had been waiting for.

You stepped into the beige light of the café and pushed a straggle of hair behind your ear. Almost immediately it fell back across your cheek. You ignored it. You looked almost like all the other middle aged, middle class women in coffee shops across the country. You know the types – chunky necklace, pretty but sensible shoes, relatively new layer of fat seeping out from over the waist band of a pair of cropped trousers. But you had something else, something I'd been looking for.

You knocked into a table and your frothy latte thing slopped onto the tray. You sat down and dabbed at the spill with a balled up tissue. Your surprisingly stubby fingers were ring free. I lifted my cup to my lips and flexed my shoulder muscles under the pressed whiteness of my shirt. You noticed me. You got a book out of your bag and started reading. You held it high, in both hands, and you seemed to be speaking to it, mouthing the words, like you were talking to a dear friend. I was pleased – if you had to talk to books, I thought, you probably didn't have any real friends. No one to warn you.

You let out a snort of laughter.

"Sorry!" you apologised to no one in particular.

I smiled my best, genial smile and your eyes met mine. Blue on blue, almost matching.

"Must be good?" I said.

There was a smudge of froth on your upper lip.

"It is," you said. "*Vanity Fair*. Have you read it?"

"No, do you recommend it?"

"Yes," you said. "I do."

I typed meaningless sentences into my MacBook. I knew you were aware of me. Eventually, I looked at my expensive watch and sighed. I snapped everything into my briefcase, scraped back my chair and walked slowly past you.

"Goodbye," I nodded politely. "Enjoy the book."

I swung out of the door and walked down the street, looking intently at my mobile.

And then, of course, you appeared.

"You forgot this."

"Oh!" I said, "Thank you so much."

I took the sweater – palest grey, soft as a dove – from you and pressed it to my face.

"My mother gave me this for my birthday. She'd kill me if I lost it."

Mothers, always a good topic – safe, respectable, dependable. Although mine had never been anything but unsafe and entirely unrespectable and the only thing I could depend on was that she was long dead, having choked on her own vomit.

You bowed your head slightly at me. You still had the book in your hand, like a shield.

"I will be able to take her out for Sunday lunch correctly dressed now. Next time, you must let me buy you a coffee to show my gratitude."

The next week, same time, same place, we both knew where we would be. When you came in I sipped my tea until you had placed your order. Then I was at your side.

"Please," I said, proffering a new twenty. "This is on me. And two granola bars. If you like granola bars?"

I beamed in the most platonic way that I could, which was hard as your mouth is really quite erotic. I carried the tray back to my table.

"I would be delighted if you would join me. But if you'd rather not, or you're busy, that's fine. No pressure. Obviously."

I stopped and looked awkwardly at the back of my hands, fingers spread.

"Goodness, I'm sorry, I sound like an idiot!"

You smiled at my bumbling.

"That would be lovely. Thank you."

"Oh good. I was hoping you'd be here. I realised we hadn't arranged anything but I did want to see you." I paused. "So I could say thank you properly. My mother was very pleased I was wearing the jumper on Sunday. She's not so well and little things matter a lot."

I poured myself more tea.

"I owe her so much. She spent such a lot of time looking after my children when they were young so I could carry on working. Anyway, we haven't even been introduced. Francis Bartholomew. How do you do?"

We shook hands across the table. Yours was tiny. Tiny and soft and warm.

"Rebecca," you said. Rebecca, it suits you, you know. Sensible, cute.

"Well, lovely to meet you, Rebecca." I rolled her name off my tongue. "Do you live locally?"

"Fairly," you said. "Do you?"

You sipped at the bubbly mixture in your overpriced, over sweetened drink and looked me straight in the eye. I watched the liquid move down your throat and then you licked your lips with your pale tongue.

"I'm just here temporarily. Designing the new shopping complex."

There was a silence that I knew you would fill.

"I'm glad about the jumper. It must be nice, having a normal mother. For my birthday, mine gave me four cans of Special Brew. Then drank them herself."

Oh dear, I thought. I had got you wrong. I had made a mistake. And I hardly ever make mistakes. You weren't a newly single posh woman, ripe for fleecing. You didn't deserve me. I knew I should leave. But I looked at those eyes of yours and couldn't quite make myself go.

Special Brew was my mother's drink of choice too. She'd send me to the shop to buy it when she was too drunk to get to the pub.

"'It's for me mam,'" I would mumble, looking down at the greasy shop floor. The bloke behind the counter would wipe his hands on his brown overall and say "Yes son, we know," as he counted out the fistfuls of change I had given him. Sometimes, in the summer, he'd give me an Ice Pop. Just one of the cheap ones, usually green or yellow, never a Fab or a Zoom or the one I really wanted, a Feast. One day, I would say to myself, as I trotted home sucking the chemicals from the ice, I would make sure that I could buy a Feast every day.

"So where are they now?" you asked. "Your children?"

"Well," I said, smooth as milk. "Gabriella's a GP in London. Though I think she's planning a family soon. Johnny, well, he was only six when his mum died. He's had a few ropey years. But he's ok now. He's off travelling at the moment."

It was a good set up that had served me well for some time now. Lots of potential for prolonged emergency disappearances to hold their hands through miscarriages and accidents in far flung locations.

"Here they are!"

I flicked open my wallet, fat with fresh bank notes and platinum cards and pointed at the photograph of two handsome twenty somethings that I had stolen several years ago.

You didn't seem in the least bit interested.

"Do you have any?"

"No," you said, chewing at the granola bar.

"Good, aren't they?" I nodded at the clumps of oats.

"Your wife. How did she die?"

I was surprised. People didn't normally go for that one straight away. They usually circle around it, snuffling like pigs after truffles for hours and hours and when they can no longer stand not being part of the drama they poke at the reason until they'd had their fill of my tragedy and can turn the conversation back to themselves.

"Cervical cancer," I said. "We didn't know until it was quite advanced. It was all quite quick. There was a diagnosis then a couple of weeks later she was gone."

I held out my hands, palms up. I'd read that this was a sign of openness and submission. I don't like doing it, to be honest, always makes me feel like a man off a detective programme on the telly denying a crime he's obviously committed.

"Shit isn't it?" you said, "being left behind."

They don't normally say that either. They usually tell me how brave I am or pat my arm whilst making cooing noises, or squeeze their fingers into my thigh and push their tits up against my chest.

"My husband killed himself," you said.

"It was suicide," you added in case I wasn't quite clear.

"Oh," I said. I'd heard many stories before but not this one. Usually, and helpfully, the husband had been a bastard and legged it with a secretary or a friend of the family, leaving their distraught exes to be flattered by me into handing over their divorce settlements. I

put my hand out to comfort you but I couldn't quite do it and it hovered impotently in the air.

I wasn't good with suicide. I found my father. I was seven. He hanged himself in what we called the wash house. I sometimes wonder if anyone still has one. It wasn't used for washing, even then. Dad's tools were in there and the lawnmower. It smelt of rotting potatoes and mice droppings. It was where I kept my bike. I was very proud of that bike. It wasn't a chopper like some of the other boys had and was actually far too big for me but I loved it and looked after it well. I went into the wash house with a tin of Brasso and a bit of Brillo pad to get some of the rust off the mud guards and give it a bit of a polish. I thought at first that dad was playing a game, hanging from the ceiling like that. I laughed and went to spin him around but then I saw his face. I dropped the tin of Brasso. It clattered across the floor. Then I ran all the way to the Red Lion to tell my mam. She was sitting at the bar. My mouth opened and closed but there were no words. Then I wet myself, the pee hissed out of the bottom of my trousers, spilled over my shoes and hit the wooden floor. My mam climbed off her stool, swayed towards me and thumped me round the ear.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Goodness, I have to fly."

"Thanks for the coffee," you said. "I'll get it next time."

"Yes," I said. "Of course, next time."

I almost bent to kiss you.

In the street my chest was tight. I wouldn't come again. You were getting to me and that would never do. I didn't need you. There were two others at the moment. Both going well and proving fruitful. I'd been thinking about concluding on the pair of them. Then I might have a holiday. A proper holiday where I could talk to people for fun and get drunk without fear of letting something slip. Things had been getting hard recently. I hadn't been able to sleep and when I did I often dreamed of Gabriella and Johnny, their fictional disasters becoming vividly real in my head. I closed my eyes and thought of a nice hotel, a twinkling sea, a cold beer in the evening. I pictured a waitress, smart and chic in her tight black skirt and a white blouse with one too many buttons undone bringing me my drink on a silver tray. She smiled at me with your eyes.

The next week I didn't come. I kept myself busy, working hard, proposing to one woman and draining the bank account of another. I planned for my mother to die again very soon and due to problems with the inheritance my fiancée would have to loan me a huge sum to pay for our splendid wedding which I couldn't wait to arrange for us. Then I'd be gone, another day, another identity.

I've done this job since leaving school. Before actually, if you count the art teacher who started it off. She felt sorry for me. Everyone knew I was the boy with the dead dad and the drunk mother. She'd get me to wash the paintbrushes in break time and she'd talk to me. Sometimes I said stuff about how hard things were to keep her quiet and then she'd be all sad eyed and concerned and then the next week she would turn up with things for me, decent clothes her sons had grown out of or sometimes a new pair of shoes or a school bag. The sadder and braver my stories were the bigger the presents. Once, when she was busy hanging some pictures on the art room wall, I slipped my hand into her messy handbag and hooked my fingers around some loose change in the bottom. On the way home I bought a Feast. Nothing's ever tasted like the first cold chocolatey bite of that ice cream. It was all mine and it was all for free.

Of course, the stories have changed over the years but the basic principles have been the same – life has dealt me a number of tragic blows that would have floored a lesser man but I have struggled on in the face of adversity to be a decent and respectful person with an impeccable moral code. And apart from the lies and the stealing I generally treat the people I meet very well.

I didn't mean to come to the café today. I persuaded myself I was going somewhere else entirely but then, before I really realised it, there I was. I was both relieved and annoyed at your absence. I bought a cup of tea and sat in a window seat and waited. I didn't try to look busy. I just stared out onto the street and thought about retiring. I really would like to stop working but I don't know what else to do. I've never done anything but this and I don't have any hobbies or family. Or friends.

A young waiter cleaned the table next to me with a cloth that reeked of multiplying bacteria.

"There's a woman," I said to him. "Her name's Rebecca, she's often here. Do you know her?"

He shrugged, chewed on the end of his pony tail and wiped a few more smears onto the table top.

"Do you mean her?"

And there you were. You walked to the counter, a bit flustered. I waved awkwardly.

You came towards me carrying your coffee and two granola bars like a prize.

"How have you been?" you said as if I was your oldest friend.

"Okay," I said. "Look, this is a bit difficult but I just wanted to say…"

I stopped. You looked so bloody hopeful and I was about to make your little face crumple. You thought I was going to ask you out. You thought I was going to suggest dinner or the theatre or something nice to stave off your loneliness. I still could have. I really could. I didn't have to fleece you, we could just go on dates, be normal. But I know it wouldn't work, I don't have a normal. I'm not normal. I put my hands, tightly clasped, in my lap and looked straight at you.

"My mother," I said. "She drank Special Brew too. Just like yours. She's dead. Has been for a long time. The jumper, it's just a thing I do, a ploy, a ruse to get women to chase after me. I've never told anyone this. I've also never been married. I don't have children. The ones in the photo are the grandchildren of a woman I pretended to like even though I really didn't. I don't even know their real names. I'm so sorry about your husband. I ran away when you mentioned suicide. I find it hard to deal with. I found my dad. He hanged himself. In our wash house. It's a room, a bit like a utility room, I'd gone in to clean my bike."

You didn't speak for quite a time; you just broke the granola bar into hundreds of tiny pieces. Then you licked the tip of your finger and picked up some crumbs with it and held it out to me. I didn't know what I was supposed to do so I opened my mouth slightly and you brushed the crumbs against my lip. You wiped your finger on your sleeve.

I swallowed hard and hoped you might do it again but you didn't.

"What I wanted to say really," I said, "is please, please don't believe stuff that men you meet in coffee shops tell you. It's not safe. They'll break you. There are a lot of bad people out there. You

mustn't be so trusting. I'm going to leave now, but please remember. Please be careful."

"I'm sorry," I said as I stood up to go. "Truly sorry."

"I have one," you said. "A wash house. My freezer's in it. And a lot of old junk, half used paint pots mostly. And however hard I try to clean it, it always smells of decaying vegetables."

Then you handed me the book you were reading when we first met. I took it from you without thinking and walked slowly out into the street. It had got very cold and I had no idea where I was going to go. I knew I shouldn't but I couldn't resist turning around for one last look at you. You smiled and winked at me through the big glass window and pointed at the book. *Vanity Fair*.

The first page shone with your address.

'Death Infecting Life'- Personal Agency and Conjoined Twins

Joe Holloway

Given their low incidence in life, depictions of conjoined twins are a far more common occurrence in the popular media of the nineteenth and twentieth century than we might expect.[1] Frequently, these portrayals in poetry and prose associate conjoined twins with a loss of personal identity. This article analyses various such representations, examining them through a Kristevan/Lacanian lens of abjection and connecting them to underpinning anxieties throughout the period examined (1830-2012). It will situate these portrayals as part of a widespread stigmatization of the disabled body as primarily passive, docile, and lacking in personal agency. It will also show how these fictional representations of conjoined twins have assumed the disabled body as a means of exploring related concerns of the able-bodied. Finally, this article will conclude with some suggestions towards counter-narratives for texts that utilise depictions of conjoined twins and/or engage with issues related to personal agency.

An extended time period has been deliberately chosen for analysis as this demonstrates the longevity of these associations and concerns. Although the 'prehistory' of conjoined twins and personal agency can be traced beyond the period considered,[2] this article looks no earlier than 1832 and responses to the first exhibition of the falsely

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[1] Pregnancies with conjoined twins carried successfully to term being estimated as approximately 1 in 200,000. Asma Mian, Nader Gabra, Tanuj Sharma, Nitsa Topale, Jerzy Gielecki, Shane Tubbs, Marios Loukas, 'Conjoined Twins: From Conception to Separation, A Review'. *Journal of Clinical Anatomy*, 30. 3 (2017), pp. 385-396 (p. 385).

[2] See for example, the 'conjoined twins marriage plot' episode in Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot, Jonathan Swift, *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* [1741] (Surrey: Alma Classics, 2018), pp. 65-78.

eponymous 'Siamese Twins' Eng and Chang Bunker.[3] This period spawned the American Freak Show tradition and was part of the First Industrial Revolution, thus greatly increasing visibility of disabled people and individual (consumer) agency.[4]

The Kristevan understanding of abjection employed in this article is understood as a visceral reaction of revulsion to a perceived transgression of entrenched mental categories. It is the 'breaking down of a world that has erased its borders'.[5] These borders are binary categories formed early in the psychodevelopment of an individual and fundamental to their understandings of reality. To transgress such mental categorization is to question the structure of existence, a shock that is directly and automatically experienced through the body. This corporeal component of abjection is described by Kristeva as various physical responses such as '[a] gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly […] all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, caus[ing my] forehead and hands to perspire'.[6] Interestingly, many of these responses are concerned with the digestive system, a process which itself is a constant negotiation of boundaries. Butler agrees, arguing that abjection is most directly experienced by the body at 'the boundary between the inner and outer [which] is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer'.[7] Representations of conjoined

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[3] Arguably the most famous conjoined twins, 'discovered' in Siam (Thailand) by British Merchant Abel Coffin, they were Chinese by birth. See John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture 1776-1882* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p.134.

[4] On the coincidence between the freak show and modernity see Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, 'From Wonder to Error- A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity', in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body,* ed. by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, (London: New York University Press, 1996), pp 1-19.

[5] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon Rudis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

[6] Kristeva, p. 3.

[7] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 182.

twins bring this engagement to the foreground, often focusing on not just the 'surface' connection of skin and ligature between conjoined twins, but also on more intimate physical connections. This enhances the blurred boundary between them and makes it even harder to demarcate one twin from the other, enhancing the abjection as the presumed hard boundary between self and other is shown to be porous.

Kristeva describes literature as the 'catharsis par excellence'.[8] In her examination of the works of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, she recognises that much of his affective power comes from when the reader is forced to confront the abject, manifesting as disgusting and revolting transgressions of entrenched binary categories. Such prose is simultaneously fascinating and abhorrent, 'a vortex of summon and repulsion' that draws in the reader through the presence of filth and transgression and the hope that this will be purged.[9] Literature can provide a mental 'testing area' where readers are presented with their own entrenched binaries, and transgressions of them. It can also be used to 'purify' these experiences, as the transgressive element is removed, the binaries are reinstated, and the world is realigned with the schemas of the reader. It is worth noting that the physical responses to abjection that Kristeva lists are all consistent with physical sickness (vomiting), and the artistic 'purification' referred to here can be interpreted as a mirroring of the automatic purging action of the body. This article will read the extracts as gaining affective power from the activation and/or purification of abjection through explorations of conjoined twins and transgressed mind-body connections, shared digestion, and signification of death.

One of the earliest, and thus one of the most fundamental, distinctions commonly identified as part of traditional psychodevelopment is between the individual and everything else, or the 'self and other'.[10] Corresponding to the Lacanian 'Mirror Stage', this marks when an infant is able to perceive itself as a 'whole' and

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[8] Kristeva, p. 17.
[9] Ibid., p. 1.
[10] Ibid., p. 7.

'Real' thing separate from everything else.[11] This is 'the fundamental opposition [...] between I and Other or, in more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside'.[12] This awareness, that the self is connected to but not the same as the image of the self, is a model for the relation between language and reality. It provides knowledge of a hierarchy of representations, some closer to 'The Real', than others.[13] Fiedler argues that portrayals of conjoined twins traumatically return the reader to this moment of psychodevelopment. Such representations are a 'confusion of self and other, substance and shadow, ego and other, [that] is more terrifyingly confounded than it is when the child first perceives face to face in the mirror an image moving as he moves, though clearly in another world'.[14] In seeing a seemingly mirror image in front of them that is not a reflection of the observer, the relation between image and reality is additionally complicated, unconsciously reminding them of the previous trauma of this experience.

Disabilities scholar Couser has identified a related norm of 'one person, one body' that is seriously complicated when considered alongside conjoined twins.[15] In common experience, all people are understood to use (just) one body, and all bodies are understood to contain (just) one person. Conjoined twins belong to a short list of 'troubling bodies' that problematize a sharp distinction along these lines. Unlike the other members of this troubling category (pregnant mothers, people with multiple personality disorders, and those believed to be possessed), conjoined twins provide unavoidable

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[11] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English,* trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 75-81.

[12] Kristeva, p. 7.

[13] See Jacques Lacan, 'The Topic of the Imaginary', in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 1: Freud's Papers on Techniques,* ed. and trans. by J. A. Miller, (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 73-88.

[14] Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 34.

[15] George Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Harvard: University Michigan Press, 2009), p. 52.

visual reminders of their transgression.[16] Both connected persons are constantly and directly observable; one person is not contained within the other, as with pregnancy or possession. This provokes abjection in the observer, as the hard boundary between self and other is transgressed. A related fundamental binary is that of 'subject and object' which is crossed when we find evidence of the corporeality of either ourselves or others. As we shall see, depictions of conjoined twins often engage with these and particularly emphasise the ways in which they violate these binaries.

That representations of conjoined twins have been successfully used to engage with transgressive themes at various points in history is of greater significance when we appreciate the conventional 'othering' of the disabled by abled-bodied people. Martin Sullivan, in his explorations of narratives surrounding paraplegia, argues that disabled people in life and in literature are expected to merge their identities with their disability. He equates physical rehabilitation as a result of an accident as a 'ritual of truth' that establishes the disabled body 'in a highly medicalized way, and for whom the possible ways to be a subject are constrained by the disciplinary techniques that knowledge imposes'.[17] The so called 'medical gaze' perspective on the disabled is widely resisted by disability studies scholars. Nevertheless popular and academic discourse frequently continues to present people with disabilities solely in terms of their disability. In his analysis of World Health Organization (WHO) statements, Allen shows how this 'others' the disabled body, as impairment is presented as 'an individual's deviation from a biomedical norm'.[18]

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[16] For a detailed analysis of the abjection of pregnant mothers see Elizabeth Gross, 'The Body of Signification', in *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Works of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 80-103.

[17] Martin Sullivan, 'Subjected Bodies: Paraplegia, Rehabilitation, and the Politics of Movement', in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, rev., 10th anniversary edn, ed. by Shelley Tremain (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2018), pp. 27-44.

[18] Barry Allen, 'Foucault's Nominalism', in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, rev., 10th anniversary edn, ed. by Shelley Tremain (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2018), pp. 93-107 (p. 94).

This understanding of the abled body as the default norm is important to recognise as a construction: 'it is as impossible for a person to be "impaired" without reference to a statistically constructed "normal case" as for a person to be a criminal except by reference to the law'.[19] The disabled body is unconsciously othered in such representations, constructed as the negative counterpart to the abled body. In doing so, representations of the disabled can show them as unfairly disempowered, as 'passive recipients of charity and pity'.[20] Such depictions rob disabled people of their personal agency. As argued by Drew Leder, this is perhaps due to the powerfully inhibitory effect of pain/illness that the abled has (temporarily) experienced.[21] These occasional moments experienced by the abled are assumed to be the 'default state' of the disabled. Disability is thus constructed by the abled as a non-cooperative mind/body relation, as a body that constantly thwarts the commands of the individual.

Related to these constructions of the disabled as both 'othered' and disempowered is the notion of 'supercrip' narratives. These are seemingly inspiring stories surrounding individually disabled people that are celebrated for their ability to perform mundane tasks, as 'overcoming' their disability, functioning as 'inspiration porn' for the abled.[22] These narratives emphasize the importance of a positive attitude whilst ignoring the societal and physical obstacles that disabled people face. Danielle Peer argues that this reinforces the expectations that 'disabled people should each individually overcome their tragic and inferior embodiment in order to become

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[19] Ibid, p. 94.

[20] Bill Hughes, 'What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?', in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, rev., 10th anniversary edn, ed. by Shelley Tremain (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2018), pp. 78-92 (p. 80).

[21] See, for example, Drew Leder, 'The Dysappearing Body', in *The Absent Body* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990), pp. 69-99.

[22] 'Inspiration Porn' is a term coined in Stella Young, 'We're Not Here For Your Inspiration', *The Drum*, 3 July 2012, n. p. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-07-03/young-inspiration-porn/4107006>.

productive members of normative society'.[23] This 'overcoming' reflects negatively on disabled people that are not able to function as supercrips, as 'by default, all disabled people who cannot perform well in their daily endeavours seem to be lacking in willpower and self-discipline'.[24] These harmful connotations surrounding disability are deeply entwined in conjoined twin narratives, many of which utilise the supercrip narrative, yet simultaneously show conjoined twins as lacking in personal agency, all the while framing the twins as 'freakish', disabled 'others'.

In her poem dedicated to her contemporaries, Eng and Chang Bunker, Hannah Gould represents the conjoined twins in a way that engages with related anxieties surrounding personal agency and transgressions. Her poem is not particularly negative in tone and does not evidence a reaction of abjection, yet explores the same themes that the poets examined later use to provoke a negative effect on the reader. For this reason it is a useful baseline to compare the other poems to. In 'To the Siamese Twins' (1832), the speaker contemplates the potential emotional synergy that may arise from the shared biochemistry of Eng and Chang. The speaker introduces the physiological connection between the twins by focusing on the nature of their circulatory system: 'The stream that empurples the veins of each/ Through the breast of his brother flows!'.[25] The shared blood between the twins is taken to imply shared emotions and feelings, as 'One grief must be felt by this two-fold', but that also that the 'joy lit up by a single spark/ Is sunshine in either heart'.[26] This speculative exploration of their shared feelings (both physical and

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[23] Danielle Peers, 'From Inhalation to Inspiration: A Genealogical Auto-Ethnography of a Supercrip', in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, rev., 10th anniversary edn, ed. by Shelley Tremain (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2018), pp. 331-49 (p. 331).

[24] Kama Amit, 'Supercrips versus the pitiful handicapped: Reception of disabling images by disabled audience members', *Communications*, 29 (2004), pp. 447-466 (p. 450).

[25] Hannah Gould, 'To The Siamese Twins', in *Poems by Miss H. F. Gould* (Boston: Hillard, Grey & co., 1839), p. 54. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007659325>.

[26] Gould, p. 54.

emotional) is intuitive and intriguing. The embodied nature of emotions requires a corresponding change in the body for a change in the mood; when we are excited our heart speeds up and we blush when we are embarrassed. This does not rely on us knowing what stimulated a certain mood. How strange it must be, Gould encourages us to wonder, to have your pulse suddenly quicken, to feel an emotional response stirring within you even when you are unaware of the stimuli for these changes. This shows the body as 'othered', as the everyday operating (feeling grief/joy) is shown to be automatic, and not under the control of the will. In examining the 'Mysterious tie' between the twins, Gould points out their unconventional mind-body connection, which leads the reader to consider how othered our own bodies are in their uncontrolled emotional reactions. Gould frames this complicated encounter through a potential emotional vulnerability, as the grief in one twin may be enough to evoke feelings of grief automatically in the other. The lack of a hard boundary between self and other is a challenge to personal agency. Transgressing this crucial border is linked by the author to senses of vulnerability and threat. If emotions can be induced directly from an external source, (from the shared body 'belonging to' their twin), neither twin can ever be solely in control of their own feelings. In accordance with the tradition of presenting disabled people as passive and weak subjects, conjoined twins are presented as by definition vulnerable to the (emotive) influence of each other.

This emotional jeopardy and this lack of a hard boundary and assumed decreased agency, is also explored in Lee-Hamilton's 'Siamese Twins' (1894), Graves' 'Twins' (1968), Hong's 'Ontology of Eng and Chang' (2002), and Gowdy's 'The Two Headed Man' (2002).[27] Whilst the cultural context for these texts is widely disparate,

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[27] Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 'Siamese Twins', in *Selected Poems of Eugene Lee-Hamilton (1845-1907): A Victorian Craftsman Rediscovered,* ed. by Macdonald P. Jackson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 172; Robert Graves, 'Twins', in *A Body of Work: An Anthology of Poetry and Medicine*, ed. by Corinna Wagner and Andy Brown (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 406; Cathy Hong, 'Ontology of Eng and Chang', in *Translating Mo'um,* ed. by Cathy Hong (Brooklyn: Hanging Loose Press, 2002), p. 15; Barbara

in all four portrayals of conjoined twins the lack of agency and control is nominally caused by alcohol. This is, however, a cipher for the transgressed boundary between self and other, embodied through the state of conjoinment. As we have seen, the representation of the connection between conjoined twins often goes beyond a 'superficial', skin-only attachment. A deeper, more corporeal connection of shared neural networks, visceral organs and ingestive and digestive processes is often focused on, in such depictions, emphasising the blurred border between two individuals and enhancing the affective power of the abjection. This focus is not contradicting the medical realities of conjoined twins, which always share more than skin, but the deliberate attention given to this aspect of conjoinment shows that the authors often have other goals then medical accuracy.[28] Alcohol is absorbed through ingestion, and the effect that it has on one or both conjoined twins is a way of 'mapping' the connection between twins with greater detail, as the effect moves from one to the other. The repeated use of alcohol in conjoined twin narratives also reinforce connotations of helplessness surrounding the disabled. Alcohol reduces mental capability and bodily coordination, and has negative implications on long and short-term health. Combining these associations with the increased visibility of the connection between conjoined twins presents them as both transgressive and as vulnerable to the digestion of each other.

The first three of these texts (Lee-Hamilton, Graves, and Hong) articulate these aspects through a biographical allusion to the Bunker twins who physically shared a liver yet (only) one of which was

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Gowdy, 'The Two Headed Man', in *We So Seldom Look on Love,* ed. by Barbara Gowdy (London: Flamingo Press, 2002), pp. 101-115.

[28] The 'fission' theory is widely accepted in medical circles to have replaced the 'fusion' theory of conjoined twins. Fission theory argues that conjoined twins result from one egg that does not fully divide after fertilisation. Fusion theory argues that conjoined twins are formed by two separately fertilised eggs that then become connected. For further details see Rowena Spenser, 'Theoretical and Analytical Embryology of Conjoined Twins. Part 1: Embryogenesis', *Clinical Anatomy*, 13.1, (2000), pp. 36-53.

known to be a heavy drinker.[29] The reader is asked to consider the additional loss of control through having such intoxication imposed upon oneself involuntarily and unavoidably. Hong adds additional connotations of alcohol-fuelled violence and aggression to this suggested power imbalance between the Bunker twins. She writes: 'Chang became drunk, [and] knocked Eng out with a whiskey bottle', playing on the potential double meaning of 'knocked out' to highlight the potential of both passive abuse (through sharing a liver) and active abuse in the form of physical assault.[30]

Lee-Hamilton also focuses on this dynamic between the twins, describing them as friends that would 'share at last one bier'.[31] The double meaning around the word 'share' initially seems more genial than Hong's allusion above, but the wordplay on 'bier' as both funerary equipment and alcoholic drink is a clear reminder of the physical threat that the habits of one conjoined twin present to the other. Graves is more direct in his 'memento mori' and states that Chang 'Resolved at length to misbehave / And drink them both into the grave'.[32] For all three of these texts then, the liver, as site of the physical connection between the two twins, is also the shared site of consumption and distribution of poison (alcohol) from one twin to the other, representing the connection between the conjoined twins as both corrupting and deadly. This shows how representations of the twins are twice as vulnerable to each other, as their behaviour is depicted as holding potential negative implications from both the outside and from the inside.

Gowdy's short story, written almost a century after Lee-Hamilton's poem, continues to represent the connection between conjoined twins in this way. Here, one of the conjoined twins reports that 'Everything I eat or drink, he siphons off. I used to have the old lady spike my coffee. It was hilarious. I'm guzzling gin and coffee, feeling nothing except maybe a nice sweet shimmer, and Samuel's sliding

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[29] Yunte Huang, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and Their Rendezvous with American History* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), p. 315.

[30] Hong, p. 15.

[31] Lee-Hamilton, p. 172.

[32] Graves, p. 406.

off a chair'.[33] Here, the shared consumption has moved from negligence and passive intoxication, to a deliberate act of drugging their twin ('spike'). The drugged conjoined twin character describes 'Drinking in excess, damaging my liver' as a leading grievance against his twin, showing that he is fully aware of these actions, but unable to resist them.[34] This contrasts with the self-serving 'guzzling' of the gin, as Simon wilfully ignores the health implications on his twin, and dismisses the gravity of the situation as 'hilarious'. Samuel asserts his claim to the organ ('my liver') whilst at the same time admitting to a lack of agency over his bodily affairs, evoking vulnerability. It is the actions of another (his twin) that violate his innermost organs, normally protected and hidden by the body itself. The abject transgression of self and other represented here also violates the boundary between surface and internal, harmfully exposing the viscera to the wilful manipulations of another. It is thus precisely the disability of the twins, their conjoinment, which makes them most vulnerable. This vulnerability, and the impossibility of escaping from such a situation, reinforces the portrayal of disabled people as both weak and passive. At the same time it evokes sensations of defilement and contamination, activated by the focus on blurred viscera, digestion, and an increasingly blurred boundary between self and other.

The reverse aspect of this shared consumption of conjoined twins is also explored in the Gowdy and Lifshin texts. As well as being depicted as an additional mind-body connection, Gowdy portrays the relation between conjoined twins in terms of an interrupted or blocked mind-body connection.[35] The conjoined character Simon complains that, '[m]y brain messages aren't getting through. My brain works like anybody else's, it sends out messages to the body. But in my case the messages hit a roadblock at Samuel's collarbone'.[36] (This episode may also be a biographical reference to the Bunker twins, as

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[33] Gowdy, p. 103.

[34] Ibid., p. 105.

[35] By an 'additional mind-body connection', I mean that conjoined twins are represented as a 'normal' self that also receives emotional and intoxicating inputs directly from another body as in the texts above.

[36] Gowdy, p. 101.

in later life Chang suffered a severe stroke, and remained partially paralyzed for the rest of his life, and Eng had to support his body at all times.)[37] The 'roadblock' metaphor is an interesting employment of imagery by Gowdy, evoking a deliberate barrier 'policed' and guarded by his twin. Simon emphasises his helplessness, describing what should be part of their shared body as 'Samuel's collarbone'. The site of connection between the two, where, superficially/externally speaking, one twin seems to be demarcated from the 'shared' body, is marked by a hard physical, border of bone. This is a border which nothing, even neural synapses, can penetrate. This site of connection is a fitting contrast to the permeable networks that allow the twins to share nutrients and intoxicants. Gowdy is providing something different to what the previously examined poems have contributed. In addition to the threatening, porous connection between conjoined twins, there is a further hard and firm boundary. This is just as threatening for Simon (the story ends with Samuel 'cutting off' Simon's head whilst Simon goads him on) and articulates a different kind of vulnerability. The terrifying situation of being attached to yet trapped within a body that you have no control over is reinforced through Simon's later dream of 'growing limbs that turn out to be tree limbs, useless', evoking a paralytic vision of zero agency, and portraying the body as simultaneously natural and organic whilst being entirely alien.[38]

Similar fears around the connection of conjoined twins are evoked in Lifshin's poem. As with the Gowdy short story, we see here that the relationship between conjoined twins is framed as an unequal power relation between the twins where the agency of one can only be achieved through the disempowerment of the other. This 'interrupted' mind-body connection and the resulting lucid bodily paralysis, is just as effective a confrontation of the abject as an 'additional', interloping mind-body connection. Both understand the conjoined body as exhibiting a fundamental lack of agency and, again, it is specifically their disability that makes them more vulnerable to the unwanted advances of both their other twin and the general public. This intrusion examined in Lifshin's poem suggests that one conjoined twin is at least

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[37] Huang, p. xxv.
[38] Gowdy, p. 101.

complicit in the sexual assault of her twin. Despite the title ´The Man Who is Married to Siamese Twins´ the twins are separately referred to as 'my wife' and 'her sister'.[39] The speaker does not understand the conjoined twins as either being two different wives or one wife that has two bodies. Instead he presents the pair as two different people, (only) one of which he is married to. This allows for the seemingly harmless joke that 'Her sister threatens to run off and I kiss her soundly'.[40] On a closer reading, however, this demonstrates sexual assault, especially when combined with the fact that the sister is forced to 'shut us out when I get to rutting loud in her'.[41] Despite the speaker's insistence that the three are united 'like a three petaled flower', and that 'we're happy, the three of us' it is clear that 'the sister' has no choice in the matter.[42] The organic imagery of the three as one flower, and the 'rutting' provides an understanding of these bodies and their relations as in accordance with nature. As with Gowdy's paralytic tree vision, however, these connotations are coupled with a sense of being trapped in a distinctly unnatural state. Like a flower, 'the sister' is rooted to the spot, unable to escape the sexual advances of her brother-in-law.

If the lives of conjoined twins provoke abjection, their deaths provide an experience that is far more chilling. Eng Bunker died in his sleep, and Chang later awoke to find himself attached to the corpse of his twin.[43] This moment contains within it strong affective power, driven by abjection stimulated by a transgression between subject and object. The poems discussed above have all also explored this moment, and we will now analyse their later focus on this trauma as an assumption of the disabled body. This is often used to explore able-bodied concerns of death, as the conjoined body is simultaneously utilised as a reminder and signifier of death in general, an omen and predictor of the surviving twin's death, and as a final cause of death itself.

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[39] Lifshin, p. 189.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Huange, p. 315.

A corpse is a naturally repellent object. The interaction of forces that causes this reaction is complex, especially for a conjoined twin and for readers voyeuristically engaging in this moment through literature. Kristeva argues that 'corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live'.[44] A corpse is a reminder that one day the person viewing it will also be a corpse, a dead object. It unavoidably transgresses the binary of subject and object, showing how a person (especially the viewer) will eventually cease to be a subject and be just an object. In perceiving a corpse, the viewer is confronted with their mortality and the transience of their life. Literary portrayals of conjoined twins engage with this in two different ways. Firstly, they emphasise the special bond between the twins, and the additional emotional impact that this added grief must cause. Secondly, they explore the ramifications of this on the physical health of the surviving twin. Taken together, the duplicate image of the surviving twin is transformed from that of a loved subject into a lifeless object, and becomes a signifier of their own rapidly approaching death. This combined trauma is heavily emphasised in most literary presentations of conjoined twins.

Instinctive aversion to death is evoked through any representation of a corpse, but if the corpse is that of a family member or loved one the revulsion is greatly enhanced. In addition to the physical reminder of one's own death, the corpse also signifies the loss of a loved one. The corpse is at the same time both the person loved, and something else entirely, something unlovable and horrifying. Such a corpse abjectly transcends the distinction between subject and object, stimulating sensations of attachment whilst rendering them taboo.

Taking such emotional progressions to their natural conclusion, the death of one's conjoined twin is a deeply distressing prospect. A common presentation of conjoined twins is that they have the closest bond of any possible family connection. In Gould's poem the bond between Eng and Chang Bunker is described as a 'Visible image of faithful love / Firm union of heart and heart' or 'the union of souls'.[45] Here, the language deliberately evokes matrimonial bonds ('faithful love'), echoing vows ('union of souls') as the Christian product of

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[44] Kristeva, p. 3, italics original.
[45] Gould, p. 307.

marriage. The 'union of heart and heart' both continues the joining cipher and references biblical scripture ('bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh') describing the archetypal marital relationship between Adam and Eve.[46] In Lee-Hamilton's poem the twins are described in terms of the link between body and mind, evoking a still deeper connection, 'Body and mind have link of like dread kind',[47] whereas in Lifshin's poem the craniopagus twins are portrayed as two halves of the same person, 'She can't imagine what it would be like to be separated, to have half of her sliced away'.[48] In this poem the theme of severance is reflected in the punctuation, as the final full stop is missing, giving a sense of interruption and that part of the narrative has been removed. The brutal, unnatural image of 'sliced' is deliberately clinical, evoking surgical separation, and exposing visceral vulnerabilities. This language encourages a non-conjoined person to sympathise with the maiming that separation represented. The termination of such a close bond, these poets imagine, is thus far more significant than that of a parent or a close friend. This would logically make the corpse of a conjoined twin the most repellent item possible, especially when the signifier of death in general bears an uncanny visual resemblance to you. In these poems then, general anxieties surrounding mortality have been overlaid onto the disabled body, using conjoined twins to produce a heightened emotional response and as vehicles to explore the abjection of death. The texts also potentially gather affective power from the readers' individual experiences of bereavement, drawing on these emotions to amplify an empathic response from the reader. As we see with Lifshin, and the use of visceral terms such as 'sliced', such a trauma transgresses the distinction between self and object, and also the boundary between reader and presentation. The disabled subject is used to explore and to purge the anxieties of the abled reader, as the reader assumes the place of the subject and experiences some of their trauma.

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[46] Genesis 2.23. See Genesis, *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-65 (p. 3).

[47] Lee-Hamilton, p. 172.

[48] Lifshin, p. 189.

Kristeva says that 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life'.[49] I highlight this quote particularly because of the additional terror that the corpse of a conjoined twin must present to the remaining twin. As well as being a reminder of mortality and a signifier of loss, the unique symbiotic relationship of conjoined twins adds an extra dimension to the repulsion of the corpse as an object. The shared biochemistry of conjoined twins means that the death of one twin will shortly result in the other unless they are immediately surgically separated. The blood that the living twin pumps into the arteries of the other is no longer returned. Worse, the blood is obstructed by the solidifying, clotting, residue trapped within the veins of the dead twin, and with each heartbeat the remaining twin slowly bleeds to death. This problem is compounded by those enzymes responsible for decomposition after death. The enzymes are present in our bodies whilst alive, but it is only when we die that they are 'activated', 'released', or 'engaged', depending on the metaphor of choice. When the dead twin starts to decompose, the process spreads unchecked to the remaining twin, leading to internal necrosis. Whilst essentially bleeding to death, the remaining twin starts to rot from the inside out. The death of one twin is a 'death sentence' for the other, due to the lack of a hard physical boundary between the living and the dead.[50] This is what Graves refers to with the final line of his poem where he states that one twin resolved to 'drink them both into the grave'.[51] As with the opening line of Lee-Hamilton, 'Know you how died those twins' the (temporally distinct) events of Eng dying, and then later Chang dying is described as one single event. The inevitable conclusion of Chang's death after that of Eng evokes a deep sense of terror: the 'unutterable fear' that Lee-Hamilton uses to describe Chang's moment of awakening.[52] Lee-Hamilton refers to this terrifying moment as: 'ten times woe to the surviving Mind' in recognition of how much worse it must be for the twin that

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[49] Kristeva, p. 4.
[50] Couser, p. 56.
[51] Graves, p. 406.
[52] Lee-Hamilton, p. 172.

temporarily survives.[53] From the perspective of Lee-Hamilton, when Eng died, Chang's body was transformed from that of his twin to whom he was tethered 'with Fate's strong thread' to a repelling object he was tied to ('Bound to a corpse'). The language used to describe the connection between conjoined twins here moves from 'tethered' to 'bound'. The former suggest safety and security, as you would 'tether' a ship *to* the wharf to prevent it from drifting away. On the other hand 'bound' is negative, implying non-consensual restraint, and something to escape *from*.

Representations of conjoined twins in literature have consistently portrayed them in terms that are intimately connected to personal agency, disability, and the mind-body connection. Conjoined twins present a physical example of a transgression between the binaries of 'self' and 'other' and 'subject' and 'object'. Both of these binaries are formed early in the psychodevelopment of the non-conjoined. Depictions of conjoined twins have built on this, exaggerating and highlighting transgressive elements as a means of activating and processing sensations of defilement and abjection. As such, this treatment is an assumption of the disabled body as a vehicle to explore able-bodied anxieties. Mentioning disabled people whilst also activating connotations of filth, otherness, and transgression shows the disabled in a very negative light. As part of this process, conjoined twins have been presented as vulnerable, and at risk of being taken advantage of by themselves and by others, with their incredible connection presented as the cause. This kind of representation perpetuates a variety of harmful myths that disabled people are nothing more than their disabilities, that they are passive and docile subjects with no personal agency, and that they are the existential 'other'.

A counter-narrative could potentially be employed to help address this damage and to further positive associations of disabled people. When depicting conjoined twins, instead of emphasizing the transgressive aspects of conjoinment, such representations could emphasize the active synergy between them. Instead of focusing on what conjoined twins are *unable* to do as a result of their state, portrayals could focus on what they *can* do. Instead of depicting

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[53] Ibid.

conjoined twins as achieving limited personal agency through disempowering the other, effort could be made to represent them in agreement, as a model of cooperation. Instead of showing conjoined twins as 'freakish' 'others', they could be humanised. These counter-narratives would resist such negative assumptions by the abled and help further more helpful understandings of disabled people.

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'Valhalla Anew!': Ragnarök, Cultural Networks, and National Identity in *American Gods*

Jorunn Joiner

In Neil Gaiman's fantasy novel *American Gods* (first published in 2001), the Norse myth of Ragnarök and the mythology's gods have survived for centuries, and immigrated to the United States.[1] Battling against the destructive forces of digital media and globalisation, Odin teams up with an Irish leprechaun, the Akan and Caribbean god Anansi, and the Slavic god of darkness, Czernobog. The novel sets out to tell 'the immigrant experience, about what people believed in when they came to America', and in this process, much like the country itself, it becomes a melting pot for a multitude of mythologies and beliefs, all brought together under the umbrella of impending doom.[2] In both the novel and the 2017 television series adaptation of the same name,[3] the narrative of Ragnarök ties together a vast intertextual network of influences which presents a vision of 'American myths and the American soul'.[4] Simultaneously, the narrative showcases a very self-aware commentary on how the idea of cultural identity and memory is fabricated and mediated, and how the past can cease to exist as soon as it is forgotten.

   In this article, I will discuss both the novel and the television adaptation. The television series crystalizes concepts found in the novel, based upon its engagement with the narrative's intertextual network of myths and cultural memory. Many of the book's most potent scenes on this topic are incorporated into the series, where visual symbolism helps to further convey the thematic concerns of the source text. The series is not a word-for-word adaptation of the novel, and as its approach to the threat that Ragnarök poses takes a different angle, so does its commentary on myth and memory's

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[1] Neil Gaiman, *American Gods,* revised edn (London: Headline, 2013).

[2] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 354.

[3] *American Gods,* Starz, 30 April 2017 - present.

[4] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 352.

potential to survive in a digitally connected world. Where the series and novel part ways, I will compare their differences to discuss the nuances in how the narrative engages with its adaptation of mythology. It is worth noting that, at the time of writing, only season one of the series has aired, so the television adaptation has thus not yet reached the final battle, and subsequently some revelations of the plot remain obscured.

The myth of Ragnarök is the Norse apocalypse, and can be found in both of the two oldest texts describing the Old Norse religion: the anonymous *Poetic Edda* and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*. The myth foretells of a great winter – the 'Fimbulvetr' – that will drive the world into a 'wind age, wolf age / until the world falls into ruin', where '[b]rothers will kill brothers for the sake of greed'.[5] The sun and the moon will be eaten by wolves, and the gods – led by Odin – will battle Loki. The trickster god, who has escaped his imprisonment after killing the good god and son of Odin, Balder, is in the apocalypse leading an army of his monstrous children, frost giants, and the dead.[6] Both sides will die, and from this carnage a new world will rise, one led by the resurrected Balder and the sons of Odin and Thor.[7] It is a myth of cyclical time, of the brutal and inevitable end of one era, and the beginning of another, with the unusual addition that gods can die too, and never come back.

To unpack the re-imagination of Ragnarök in *American Gods,* I will begin by discussing how Gaiman's narrative and the subsequent television adaptation both place the myth as the binding agent in a broad intertextual network of stories and inspirations, thereby releasing it from its historical place in ancient Viking culture, and imbuing it with new meaning. This creative playfulness with adaptation and appropriation continues into a commentary on American national identity, and on the constructed nature of culture and memory, where the myth of the end of the world is turned into a fear not of death, but of the lack of memory. Used in this narrative,

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[5] Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda,* trans. by Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 71.

[6] Ibid.

[7] 'Völuspá', in *The Poetic Edda,* trans. by Jackson Crawford (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 15-16.

Ragnarök allows for a commentary on American 'sites of memory', to use the term Pierre Nora introduced in his *Realms of Memory*, and on how memory is something which is always constructed in the present, through faith and commemoration.[8] Odin and his fellow gods are materialised and brought into the twenty-first century, where they are given space to reflect on their own statuses as figments of belief. Lastly, this article will conclude by discussing how *American Gods* portrays the ability for cultural memory, myth, and faith to exist in a globally connected, digital, and consumerist world.

Broadly speaking, the book and television versions of *American Gods* follow the same narrative. Shadow Moon is released early from prison due to his wife's untimely death, and on his way back home he meets the mysterious Mr Wednesday, who offers him the job of being his assistant and bodyguard. Shadow is dragged into the strange world of the gods on the periphery of reality, who are preparing for a battle 'behind the scenes of the real world'.[9] Wednesday and Shadow drive around the country recruiting gods from various pantheons and visiting 'places of power' – primarily roadside attractions – which are the United States' answer to spaces 'where [people] would recognize that part of themselves that is truly transcendent'.[10] The battle is set against the new gods of the modern era: 'Technical Boy' (a personification of the internet and other technology), 'Media', and the ambiguous 'Mr World', whose role is as indeterminate as his name. These new gods are progressively erasing older gods by filling both the time and the minds of humanity with their presence, removing any need for commemorating the ancient gods and practices of their cultural heritage. Both the novel and the series are interspersed with 'Coming to America' segments, stories of how the gods arrived on the American continent, beginning with the first Viking explorers and moving onto the Slave trade, Irish immigration, and contemporary Mexican immigration, to name a few.

As evident from this short attempt at a summary of *American Gods'* complex narrative, this is not a straightforward adaptation of

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[8] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* ed. and trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, 6 vols (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), I.

[9] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 373.

[10] Ibid., p. 130.

the Norse myth. In fact, during my research I have not found an explicit statement by Gaiman that acknowledges the novel to be a version of Ragnarök. If we are to follow Linda Hutcheon's popular definition from her *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Gaiman's novel is then not strictly speaking an adaptation of the Ragnarök myth at all; whilst it does have '[a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work', it is not 'an acknowledged transposition'.[11]Nevertheless, the similarities between the myth and the plot are too striking to be coincidental. As in Ragnarök, which begins with the long and deadly winter 'Fimbulvetr', the battle of the gods in *American Gods* takes place in wintertime – in the series Mr Wednesday even specifically asks the goddess of spring, Ostara, to kill nature.[12] Mr Wednesday is revealed to be Odin, and, in the novel, we learn that Loki, who bunked with Shadow in prison under the name of 'Low Key Lyesmith', is actually Mr World, transforming the plot into a battle between himself and Odin, as it is in Ragnarök.[13] Shadow realises he is Odin's son, and in an epilogical novella we learn that his true name is Balder.[14] Like Balder in Ragnarök, Shadow sacrifices and dies before the final battle, and leads the way for the gods in the new world.[15] As in the Norse myth 'Baldrs draumar' from *The Poetic Edda,* Shadow has prophetic dreams of the end to come, and of his own significance in the narrative. [16] Whilst there is a plethora of mythologies present in the story, the Norse pantheon creates and drives the plot, controlling the narrative and its associations.

Rather than an adaptation, this approach to the myth is more akin to appropriation. Using Julie Sanders' definition, appropriation is a mode of adaptation where a text uses a source text but does not

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[11] Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 8.

[12] 'Come to Jesus', *American Gods,* Starz, 18 June 2017.

[13] Gaiman, *American Gods*, p. 547.

[14] Neil Gaiman*,* 'The Monarch of the Glen', in *American Gods,* revised edn (London: Headline, 2013), n. p.

[15] Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 509, 584.

[16] 'Baldrs draumar', in *The Poetic Edda,* trans. by Jackson Crawford (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 141-44.

depend on it; it is a 'more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain'.[17] As such, an appropriation does not necessarily acknowledge its source or sources, and can stand alone as a text in itself.[18] However, an 'intertextual awareness' of the appropriation's influences often 'deepens and enriches the range of possible responses'.[19] This is certainly true for *American Gods,* where 'much of the fun [...] lies in identifying individual deities from Gaiman's often witty Americanization of their names'.[20]

In fact, the experience of the narrative can change drastically depending on the reader's or viewer's awareness of Norse mythology. It is not revealed until quite late in both the novel and series who Mr Wednesday really is (in the series this is left until the final episode of season one) but it is alluded to throughout.[21] Wednesday confers with ravens, and his name refers to the Old English *Wōdnesdæg*, the 'day of Woden' – another name for Odin. Throughout the narrative, he is referred to by other nicknames or titles: Wotan, Grimnir, Glad-O-War. Further, depending on how early the audience deduces Shadow to be Balder, the more prominent the appropriation of Ragnarök becomes.

To continue discussing the effects this mode of appropriation has on the representation of Ragnarök in *American Gods*, it is worth spending some time defining the term 'intertextuality'. I base my understanding of the term on Gérard Genette's definition, as described by both him and by Graham Allen in his comprehensive study on the subject, *Intertextuality* (2000).[22] Intertextuality is what happens in the threshold of a text, and describes the bond in between two texts; Genette's version focuses in particular on 'quotations,

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[17] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 26.

[18] Ibid., p. 28.

[19] Ibid., p. 28.

[20] Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p. 182.

[21] 'Come to Jesus', *American Gods*.

[22] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 95-115.

plagiarism and allusion'.[23] In his book *Palimpsests* (1997), he defines the use of the term further: it is 'a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another'.[24] His work brings many ideas of intertextuality under the umbrella-term of 'transtextuality', one of which being 'hypertextuality'. This describes the dynamic relationship between the hypertext and the hypotext: the latter being an earlier text to which the hypertext connects to 'in a manner that is not that of commentary'.[25] These terms, along with the idea of a 'copresence' between two or more works, corresponds well with the intertextual structure of an appropriation such as *American Gods*. As a hypertext, *American Gods* is connected to, but not entirely dependent on, its mythological hypotexts. There is a copresence between the hypertext and the hypotexts, where traces and allusions to the latter can enrich or alter the experience of the former. As mentioned earlier, this is particularly evident in the use of Ragnarök, which can almost be completely obscured for someone who is unfamiliar with the myth.

The prominent use of a broad intertextual network and the mode of appropriation changes the premises of how Ragnarök, and myths in general, are presented. *American Gods* picks out themes or certain iconography from Ragnarök, and reimagines them in a plot that is apocalyptic, but which treats the apocalyptic as a theme rather than a specific narrative. Ragnarök's broad narrative of the final battle remains, with a certain amount of myth-specific iconography to guide the intertextually-aware viewer or reader. It is a mode of representation that fits well with what Sanders notes as a contemporary perspective on mythology: as narratives containing universal themes and archetypes, but which are also filled with 'familiar reference points' that an adaptation can use as an 'instructive shorthand, while simultaneously exploiting, twisting, and relocating

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[23] Ibid., pp. 103, 101.

[24] Gèrard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree,* trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1-2.

[25] Ibid., p. 5.

them in newly creative ways, and in newly resonant contexts'.[26] For example, the sacrifice of Balder is still there in the shape of Shadow, but the archetype of sacrifice shines through and connects this moment to the sacrifice of Jesus; and, as the series cast Ricky Whittle, an actor of British-Jamaican descent, so is the myth infused with iconography of lynching and racism in the United States. In this mode of representation, Ragnarök can be imbued with new iconography and themes, and is released from being an artefact of the ancient past. There is a certain enjoyment in this 'tension of expectation and surprise, the relied-upon similarities and unforeseen differences between new re-imagined visions of past literature'.[27] Odin can interact with gods from entirely different cultures as he is brought into life in the twenty-first century.

The use of intertextual relations in *American Gods* does not only provide a certain amount of satisfaction for the knowledgeable audience, it also creates something entirely new when combining previously separate sources. In her structuralist reading of the novel, Irina Rață aptly calls Gaiman an *'author-bricoleur'* – one who reconstructs signs into new structures.[28] The term is also found in Genette's work, where the *bricoleur* is one who creates a structure by rearranging already existing structures, and who in the process creates something new that simultaneously is 'a description and explanation of the original structure'.[29] In the role of the *bricoleur*, Gaiman reimagines and connects his mythological influences in a creative way to fit them into contemporary American discourse on heritage, that only by the sheer breadth of the intertextual network shows how pluralistic American identity is. As Rut Blomqvist notes, the totality of *American Gods'* 'intertextual system' builds a

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[26] Sanders, pp. 71, 81.

[27] Alexander Leighton, 'Re-discovering mythology: adaptation and appropriation in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* saga', *Mousaion* 32. 2 (2014), pp. 60-73 (p. 67).

[28] Irina Rață, '"Only the Gods are Real": The Mythopoeic Dimension of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods'*, *Romanian Journal of English Studies* 13.1 (2016), pp. 35-44 (p. 36).

[29] Allen, p. 96.

kaleidoscopic image of American culture.[30] By incorporating a network of influences into the driving narrative – an appropriation of a Norse myth – Gaiman's work creates a complex construction of cultural memory and identity in the United States, integrating centuries of stories and expression into one modern story that showcases where the United States is today, and where it culturally came from. Here, the intertextual network of hypotexts reveal the diversity of origin and culture that exists within the country, yet simultaneously brings them all together in one narrative.

The television adaptation picks out cultures meeting and merging as a vital theme from the novel, as evidenced by the show's main titles. In his research on paratextuality and its significance in film and television, Jonathan Gray notes how a television series' title sequence functions as an 'entryway' to the main text.[31] The title sequence is often made to guide the viewer as to what themes and genres the series will engage with, and through repetition in each episode the sequence comes to 'reaffirm what a show is about'.[32] The title sequence of *American Gods* is highly abstract and thematic, and does not feature any main actors. Instead, bathed in a neon-noir lighting scheme various mythological symbols are merged with iconography of the modern United States. In close-ups and extreme close-ups, we see, among others, a medusa-head with LED-lights in her snakes, cyclops with cameras for eyes, a menorah cast in stark neon blue and purple light, a Buddha surrounded by pills, an Egyptian pyramid built in steel and light, a neon cowboy, an angel with night-vision goggles and guns, a statue of cars and electronics, and a crucified astronaut. As the camera zooms out, we see that all of these mergers between mythology and 'Americana' are collected into a totem pole, topped by a giant statue of a bald eagle with its wings spread wide.

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[30] Rut Blomqvist, 'The Road of Our Senses: Search for Personal Meaning and the Limitations of Myth in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods'*, *Mythlore: A Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature,* 30.3/4 (2012), pp. 5-26 (p. 7).

[31] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York UP, 2010), p. 73.

[32] Ibid., p. 73.

Despite being present in the narrative, symbols of Norse mythology are remarkably absent in this sequence. However, the statue of the eagle is abstracted enough to draw the mind towards other predatory birds – Odin's ravens, which are emphasised in the show's promotional material of Mr Wednesday. One poster features a full-body portrait of Mr Wednesday, dressed in neutral colours against a neutral backdrop, with two eye-catching ravens perched on his arm and shoulder.[33] The title sequence stresses the theme of *bricoleuring* and intertextual networks that together build an image of American culture, enveloped by the Native American totem pole, as well as the country's national bird and most well- known symbol. It is a vivid articulation of the narrative's process of bringing mythologies into the twenty-first century, reimagined for a modern American context. In this explicit treatment of these themes, the series displays a high level of self-awareness in how this hypertext transforms its hypotexts, and reinterprets their place in a vision of American cultural memory.

When Odin gathers these disparate mythologies in preparation for the end, they are brought together but not merged into one. Instead, each mythological being remains as a representation of their particular culture – Odin from the Norse, 'Mad Sweeney' from Irish folklore, and Czernobog from Slavic culture, to give only a few examples. They are intrinsically tied to particular cultural heritages and ethnic identities, and in a way function as immaterial cultural artefacts made material, and brought into the contemporary world. In the novel, the gods are described as 'a meme: something that lives forever in people's minds'.[34] With these characters, the plot 'becomes a springboard for the author's exploration of the role of literature and space in the construction of national identity'.[35] Odin himself comments on his place in America's cultural identity. In a dialogue-heavy scene from episode three, to which I will return shortly, Wednesday talks to Shadow and reiterates lines from the novel; '[t]his

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[33] James Dimmock and B O N D, *American Gods Poster (#8 of 25),* 27 March 2017, poster, <http://www.impawards.com/tv/american_gods_ver8.html>.

[34] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 504.

[35] Siobhan Carroll, 'Imagined Nation: Place and National Identity in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods', Extrapolation,* 53.3 (2012), pp. 307-326 (p. 308).

is the only country in the world that wonders what it is … no one wonders about the heart of Norway or goes searching for the soul of Mozambique'.[36] The United States is a famously multicultural society, 'a nation uniquely plagued by a lack of cohesive identity'; and as Wednesday gathers together his team, the battle he prepares for suggests that the United States' national identity 'is not something that is located safely in the past, but must be struggled over in the present'.[37] It presents 'a social constructivist view of culture, meaning that myth is what we speak, think, act, breathe with'.[38] Our idea of a nation's identity, cultural memory, or which myths constitute its heritage is entirely dependent on reconstructions and commemorations of past cultures in the present, of networks of expressions of cultural memory. Odin's struggle is to argue for his place within this cultural memory, his relevancy as a cultural artefact for the American nation. Ragnarök, then, becomes a battle against being forgotten, a battle for peoples' will to remember.

As forms of cultural artefacts that represent a nation's memory, Odin and his fellow gods visualise what Pierre Nora describes as *lieux de mémoire*. In his seminal study on commemoration and French national identity, Nora identifies a practice of rendering places, practices, material, 'cultural myths' – symbolic sites, in essence – into *lieux de mémoire* (often translated into 'sites of memory'), 'sites' perceived to hold particular value for a community's identity.[39] History and memory, he writes, are in opposition – memory is 'life', 'a phenomenon of the present' consisting of 'emotion and magic', whereas history is a 'reconstruction' and 'representation of the past', no longer experienced in practice.[40] *Lieux de mémoire* is what happens when the two opposing forces meet, in historicized memory;

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[36] 'Head Full of Snow', *American Gods,* Starz, 14 May 2017.

[37] Carroll, p. 317.

[38] Blomqvist, p. 16.

[39] Lawrence D. Kritzman, 'Foreword', in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* by Pierre Nora, ed. and trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), I, pp. ix-xiv (pp. ix-x).

[40] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* ed. and trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), I, p. 3.

'sites' which were previously lived are now are approached in a historical, but simultaneously nostalgic manner.[41] These sites 'are fundamentally vestiges, the ultimate embodiments of a commemorative consciousness that survives in a history which, having renounced memory, cries out for it'.[42] Nora's description corresponds well with the approach to mythology and mythological beings in *American Gods*. The gods' very existence is dependent on being in-between history and memory. To be considered part of the history of the United States and to survive in the country they now live, they have to be remembered as belonging to that history. As soon as they are forgotten, their relevancy in contemporary society and ideas of a national identity is gone, and they are discarded into the obscure and obsolete past.

The 'will to remember' is essential in the construction of *lieux de mémoire*. Nora states that a 'site of memory' can only be created if there is a 'will' or 'intent' to remember it; the object must be seen as both historical as well as able to contain shifting arguments of why it is valuable to commemorate it in the present.[43] Whilst the 'fundamental purpose' of creating the site is to fix its state and establish its historical significance, the site can only work if it is 'capable for change' and able to encompass new interpretations of its value and meaning for a community's identity.[44] The object, myth, or ritual must be seen as something worth remembering, or else it fades out of the intersection of memory and history and into history alone. In *American Gods*, Odin and his like are materialised out of this intersection between memory and history – they come from the past but have survived into the present because of peoples' will to remember them. These walking, talking 'sites' are no longer 'faded symbols of the past' – they can fight for their right to remain in peoples' minds.[45]

As Shadow is progressively introduced to the world of the gods, he learns how much their existence depends on just memory. In the

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[41] Ibid., pp. 14, 4.

[42] Ibid., p. 6.

[43] Nora, pp. 14-15.

[44] Ibid., p.15.

[45] Ibid., p. 20.

novel, Shadow is told in a prophetic dream that '[g]ods die. And when they truly die they are unmourned and unremembered. Ideas are more difficult to kill than people, but they can be killed, in the end'.[46] In the series, the same concern is voiced by Odin in the scene from the third episode, 'Head Full of Snow', where he muses on the soul of America.[47] After Shadow manages to create snow from thin air, he confronts Wednesday about the power of belief. Wednesday asks him if he believes in love, to which Shadow responds that he had not until he met his wife; '[s]o you didn't believe till you did, and then the world changed because you believed', Wednesday responds. He continues: '[b]elief is only a product of the company we keep and how easily we scare ... The only thing that scares me is being forgotten. I can survive most things but not that', and Shadow retorts that '[v]ery best part of memory is it's mostly about forgetting'. Wednesday concludes the conversation by stating that '|w]e remember what's important to us'.[48] The scene is a vocal expression of the precarious situation of myth and memory within people's minds. Wednesday is only alive because enough people want to believe in him, thus creating him into the world. Death, for him, is to be forgotten.

American Gods enforces this sentiment even more strongly with a 'Coming to America' segment in episode five of the television adaptation, titled 'Lemon Scented You'. Here, we are introduced to a Pangean people whose mammoth god Nunyunnini fades out of memory.[49] 'The gods are great', the narrator of the segment begins, 'but people are greater. For it is in their hearts that gods are born, and to their hearts that they return. Gods live and gods die. And, soon enough, Nunyunnini was entirely forgotten'.[50] Nunyunnini ceased to be a *lieu de mémoire,* faded out of memory and into the lifeless pages of *American Gods'* fictional history books. Odin and the Norse belief system are of course recorded in history, but he is ancient enough not to have many believers, as are the folklore characters and ancient

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[46] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 65.

[47] 'Head Full of Snow', *American Gods.*

[48] Ibid.

[49] 'Lemon Scented You', *American Gods,* Starz, 28 May 2017.

[50] Ibid.

gods he teams up with. Only with the loss of a few wills to remember, they too can fade out of America's cultural memory.

The emphasis placed by *American Gods* on the relation to American cultural memory of Norse mythology, through the use of Norse gods and the myth of Ragnarök as the driving narrative, is worth exploring further. Whilst critics such as Rut Blomqvist, Heather O'Donoghue, and Siobhan Carroll bring up the intertextual network of multiculturalism the narrative creates, the overriding Norse theme often falls to the side.[51] *American Gods* does not argue for Norse mythology's place in American cultural identity based on the over two million immigrants from Scandinavia around the turn of the last century, as they would in all likelihood have been Christian.[52] Instead, it focuses on the idea of ancient Viking explorers, evidenced by the narrative's first 'Coming to America' segment.[53] However, *American Gods* makes no claim that any heritage of these explorers has survived into contemporary Americans. Odin, as an immigrated 'site of memory', is a guest who has overstayed his welcome, and is now clawing to remain. Yet his case for remaining in the United States is not dependent on the existence of Vikings or on ethnic Scandinavians. This is illustrated in episode three, as the Egyptian god Anubis comes to take a newly deceased Muslim woman up to the scales, only because she carried the old myths with her in her heart.[54] The power of mythology is only dependent on the will to remember, not necessarily on ethnic or religious belonging. Again, this expresses the relativity of national and cultural memory; if enough people believe in the myths, the gods, and the Viking explorers, Odin remains relevant as part of the cultural foundation of the United States' immigrant experience. What matters is not what ethnic identity people have, but what they believe, and that they believe.

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[51] Blomqvist, p. 7; O'Donoghue, p. 181; Carroll, p. 308.

[52] 'Scandinavian Immigration', *Aspiration, Acculturation, and Impact: Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930* <https://library.harvard.edu/collections/immigration-united-states-1789-1930>.

[53] 'The Bone Orchard', *American Gods,* Starz, 30 April 2017.

[54] 'Head Full of Snow', *American Gods*.

With the rise of digital media to occupy peoples' thoughts, this belief is at risk. Against Odin in the war on memory stand the new gods of media, digitalisation, and Mr World – seemingly commercialisation and globalisation materialised in one entity. This interpretation of Ragnarök's two battling sides articulates anxieties regarding the destructive potential new media and the globalised world can have on cultural identity and memory; a fear which Nora articulates as the end of '[s]ocieties based on memory' through 'globalization, democratization, and the advent of mass culture'.[55] In a less 'Ragnarök-ian' formulation, Andrew Hoskins articulates the anxiety as concerning the way digital media transforms how we think about and access memory and the past – that we might see a 'digital hi-jacking' of the past in a medium of 'insatiable appetite'.[56] The 'hyperconnectivity of the digital present' has 'no containment', and it makes the act of archiving 'restless, even speculative' as anything and everything can be saved for eternity.[57] The selective process of establishing culturally valuable 'sites of memory' can be swallowed into a hole of endless archived history. However, Ragnarök is not what it seems to be, and as *American Gods* subverts expectations of how the myth should play out, it presents alternative solutions to this anxiety.

In the novel, Shadow learns during his sacrifice to Odin's cause that the whole doomsday narrative was a 'two-man con' all along, constructed by Odin and by Loki in the guise of Mr World.[58] The two Norse gods had rallied the new and the old gods against each other in order to reconstruct a war in the Norse spirit, so as to give blood-sacrifices to themselves.[59] Any apparent impossibility of the old and the new gods' ability to co-exist in peoples' memory and minds is thus revealed to be a fabrication by two old gods from a war-happy mythology who are losing their foothold in the nation in which they

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[55] Nora, pp. 1-2.

[56] Andrew Hoskins, 'The Restless Past: An Introduction to Digital Memory and Media', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition,* ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-24 (p. 6).

[57] Ibid., p. 6.

[58] Gaiman, *American Gods,* p. 472.

[59] Ibid., pp. 575-7.

have settled. Instead, the truth is that the new gods will merge with the old – as Shadow tells one of them, they will become 'tomorrow's yesterday' – another site of memory of the past in the future. In the spirit of Ragnarök, Shadow/Balder becomes the new leader of the world post-battle, where mythology and digital media co-exist.[60] The novel's subversion of the Ragnarök myth embraces the idea of the malleability and fluidity of cultural memory; that 'national identity [is a] communal fiction, and one that is constantly under renovation. Identity does not inhere in place; rather, fiction, place and nation mutually construct each other, and this construction is never stable, never complete'.[61] It also points to a more liberal take on the concept of mythology – 'gods' that do not belong to any ancient religious system or folklore can become mythological concepts. A recollection of what the Internet was like at the beginning of the twenty-first century can itself become a 'site of memory', that constitutes an idea of where future American technological advancements have evolved from. Much like the myth of the American Dream, the novel suggests that any American cultural identity is what the country's people make it to be, what they choose to remember and mythologise, and that this process is not deterred by the advance of the digitally connected, globalised world.

As the television adaptation updates the new gods to fit the rapidly evolving technology that has occurred since the book was written, it also updates the terms and conditions of the impeding war. To reaffirm, only one season has been aired so far, and the series is still building up to the final battle; Odin's untrustworthiness has only been alluded to. However, the series discusses the role of mediated memory and the digital potential for mythologies in a much more substantial way, and offers an alternative solution to the battle at hand: a merger. In various episodes, it is revealed that old gods have been approached by the new with an offer to take their rituals and sacrifices into the digital realm. The goddess of spring, Ostara, is helped by Media to sell the memory and ritual of Easter;[62] the goddess of love and queen of Sheeba, Bilquis, joins forces with Technical Boy

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[60] Ibid., p. 584.

[61] Carroll, p. 323.

[62] 'Come to Jesus', *American Gods*.

to turn her powers towards a 'Tinder'-type mobile application through which she can meet many more devotees;[63] the Roman god of fire, Vulcan, gets help with 'franchising' faith into producing and selling bullets and fire-arms, transforming a city into a cult for him, and a gun-filled vision of American culture.[64] Together, the gods reconstruct mythology and artefacts of cultural memory into something commercial, ready to be packaged, sold, and delivered – turning their recipients into both customers and devotees. In episode five, Odin is approached with the same offer.[65]

Odin and Shadow get caught for swindling money from a bank, and are stuck in an interrogation room. The interrogation ends, and suddenly the new gods appear. Technical Boy gives the old Norse god an offer: 'technology's evolving, we're all evolving. It would be an honour, sir, to evolve with you. I can help you. I wanna help you, influence opinions, behaviours, beliefs like never before'. A 'merger', suggests Media and Mr World – 'an upgrade', 'a brand-new, lemon-scented you'.[66] Odin remains unappeased, to which Mr World retorts:

> I get it. I do. You're an individualist. Rugged, individualist. That simply doesn't work anymore. Brands, sure. A useful heuristic. But ultimately everything is all systems interlaced. A single product, manufactured by a single company, for a single, global market.[67]

What they suggest, to the god that also goes under the name of Glad-O-War, is a set of missiles bearing his name to be launched over North Korea. 'Just imagine', Media says, 'lighting raining over the sky in the form of precision guiding missiles. Could you imagine? 24.9 million people. They will know your name – lickety-kite ... Valhalla anew! Doesn't that sound swell?'.[68] The new gods offer, in essence,

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[63] Ibid.

[64] 'A Murder of Gods', *American Gods,* Starz, 4 June 2017.

[65] 'Lemon Scented You', *American Gods.*

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

a commercialisation of Odin's power, through which he can make his name heard in the global, capitalist, and digital market.

If myths, artefacts of cultural memory, and other 'sites of memory' are incorporated into the corporate machine Mr World describes, the global digital commercialism would gain new significance for the consumer. In the same scene from episode five, Wednesday calls the new gods meaningless distractions to the human mind: '[i]t's all you do, occupy their time. We gave back – we gave them meaning'. To this, Mr World replies, '[t]hen give it to them again'.[69] In his offer of merging the old with the new stands hope of mutual benefit: the old gods get a channel through which to reach more believers that can affirm their value in cultural memory and national identity; in return, the new gods get the opportunity to infuse their products with more transcendent values of faith and that sense of the 'spiritual potentialities of the human life' that myth can bring.[70] It could, in the best of worlds, allow myths to expand beyond borders and into a global belief system. At worst, it could reduce all spiritual significance and fill the myths with earthly consumerist values. Ragnarök, here, is only an apocalypse in the eye of the beholder.

What the offer does not include, but which is implied during the course of the series, is the impossibility to fight the new place of cultural memory in a digital, global world. In contemporary scholarship on memory, media is inescapable: 'memory on the collective level – that is, the construction and circulation of knowledge and versions of a common past in sociocultural context – is only possible with the aid of media', as Astrid Erll points out.[71] The only idea we have of a collective past, or a cultural memory, is one that is channelled through any form of media, and because of this, media representations are dominating in reconstructing any idea of a shared past or identity. Erll continues: '[w]hatever we know about the world, we know through media and in dependence on media. The images of the past which circulate in memory culture are thus not

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: MJF Books, 1988), p. 5.

[71] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture,* trans. by Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 113.

extrinsic to media'.[72] Or, as Media tells Odin once war is imminent in the final episode: '[w]e are the distributors. The platform and the delivery mechanism. We control the story, we control the flow'.[73] Ragnarök, the end of the old way of rituals and sacrifices, is almost inevitable, and the gods will be renewed in digitally mediated commemoration whether they want to or not.

The version of Ragnarök represented here is one that self-consciously comments on the status of mythology in the modern world. This is also the permeating question throughout both versions of *American Gods*. In an act of appropriation rather than adaptation, the narrative releases the myth from its historical bonds and brings it, through the genre of fantasy, into the modern United States. There, it is opened up and deconstructed to reveal universal themes of doom and dying gods, and then reconstructed to contain enough iconography to make the myth recognisable in a new format. The story is put in a vast intertextual network of mythological references, stretching far beyond Norse mythology, that together bring about a vision of contemporary American culture and identity. However, in a narrative that deals with the final days of the gods, it also discusses the role of Norse mythology as a *lieux de mémoire* of American heritage, and has Odin fight for his right to remain in the country, rather than to be passed away from lively memory into inanimate history. The battle of Ragnarök is transformed into a battle for peoples' will to remember, as Odin and the gods of immigrant cultural heritage stand in opposition against the new gods that occupy people's thoughts: digital media and global consumerism. However, the stark line between these two sides are revealed to be false: in the novel as a con by the Norse gods, in the series as the inevitability of mediated memory, and the potential to combine mythological meaning with new digital technology and commercialism. Read through the lens of its appropriation of Ragnarök as a myth, *American Gods* showcases a vibrant use of intertextuality, that creates a network of mythologies that battle against a fear of a forgetful, digitally connected, globalized world.

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[72] Ibid., p. 114.
[73] 'Come to Jesus', *American Gods*.

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Emily Naish recently completed an MA at the University of Exeter, studying English Literature with a focus on the early modern period. She previously studied Fine Art at Falmouth University, graduating in 2014. After three years in Bristol, she returned to academia with a view to working towards a PhD. Her current research interests are focused on the vision of Britain portrayed in chorographies of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, with a particular focus on Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*.

Bradley Osborne (Assistant Editor, English) is a second-year PhD candidate in English at the University of Exeter and recipient of the William Golding PhD Studentship, which is jointly supported by the College of Humanities and William Golding Ltd. His thesis examines the

idea of nature in Golding's work. His research draws on the unpublished materials held in Special Collections, including drafts and notebooks, and on the journal which Golding wrote in daily over two decades. He previously studied for a BA and MA in English Literature at Exeter.

Cassandra Passarelli has wandered from Guatemala to Burma, between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. She has published stories in *Cold Mountain Review, Ambit, Chicago Quarterly Review and The Cost of Paper*. Last year, five were included in 'Five by Five', an Arachne Press anthology. Her novella, *Greybill,* won the Books for Borges Prize, she won the Traverse Theatre's Debut Author Prize and has been short-listed for Eyewear's Beverly Prize. She studied literature at Birkbeck, University of London, a masters at University of Edinburgh and is doing a creative writing PhD at the University of Exeter on enlightenment in the everyday in short stories from a Zen perspective. She lives with her daughter in Devon.

Steven Roberts is currently writing up his PhD thesis on the innovation and transnational flow of VistaVision technology, film production and style from 1953-61 at the University of Bristol, where he has also taught Film History to 1960. In October 2018, the AHRC extended his doctoral award to work for the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at his second Doctoral Training Partnership institution, the University of Exeter, the outputs for which included the 'Widescreen South West' interactive display.

Teresa Sanders (Editor) is a third-year PhD candidate funded by the South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (AHRC). Her current research explores educational and pedagogical models and methods in an eclectic range of fiction and non-fiction by the understudied British female author, Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978). Her research is particularly interested in exploring Warner's engagement with and responses to the socio-cultural, political, ideological and gendered educational debates of the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, as well as incorporates a broader consideration of the history of education and educational philosophy from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Her other research interests include interwar culture and politics, Critical Pedagogy, theories of feminism, gender and sexuality, and the historical novel.

Amelia Seely (Assistant Editor, Film) is a second-year PhD student in Film at the University of Exeter. She is currently working on her thesis – 'Creativity and Constraint in the British Film Industry in the 1970s and 1980s'. She completed her MSc Film Curation with Distinction at the University of Glasgow and her BA in Film and History at the University of Southampton.

Lucia Toman earned her MA in Comparative Literature and Literary Criticism from Goldsmiths University of London and her BA in English and French from the University of Economics in Slovakia, where she comes from. She is currently looking for PhD research opportunities in unreliable narration in postmodern literature and the relationship of truth and narrative fiction.

Dr Phil Wickham is the Curator of The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum and also teaches on the University of Exeter's film programme. He has written and lectured extensively on film ephemera and on British film and television.

End

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