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By publishing academic papers from undergraduates, *LURe* opens up a forum for dialogue and discussion within the academic community, provides a medium for recognition of exceptional work, and encourages students to view themselves as vital members of the intellectual community they inhabit.

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Survival is Insufficient: Investigating the Corruption of Art in Modern America and Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*

Kaitlyn Brinkley, University of West Georgia

“**S**urvival is insufficient,” writes Ronald D. Moore in *Star Trek: Voyager*, a quote repurposed by the character Kirsten in Emily St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven*. This sentiment—that true and meaningful living consists of more than mere survival—is especially poignant in Mandel’s novel, where plague has reduced the world to its fundamentals. *Station Eleven* follows the stories of five individuals, jumping between timelines to reveal how the world has changed, both literally and spiritually, due to the events of a pandemic and the subsequent “collapse” of society. The novel is about more than just chilling apocalyptic intrigue; rather, it uses plague as a tool to underscore the ways in which art serves as an integral part of our human existence. In the novel, plague acts as a sort of cleansing agent, where art moves from a state of shallowness and excess into a “purer” form of itself, and plague filters out the worldly corruption that has been so ingrained into art in our present society. Although Mandel’s novel is clearly fictional, its themes of art as corrupt ring true today in the United States. Art for the sake of art has largely lost its value in modern American discourse, and the only art that “matters” is that which can be monetized or glamorized. In *Station Eleven*, Emily St. John Mandel reveals the ways in which money, fame, and excess have corrupted art in our present society, using plague as a purifying agent where a “cleansed” form of art emerges, free from the worldly corruption that has gripped our present society and thrust us into an intellectual epidemic where art cannot be separated from corruption.

Mandel first hints at the corruption of the film industry soon after the on-stage death of Arthur, a film actor and central character in *Station Eleven*, using the circumstances of Arthur's death to showcase his relationship with the separate artforms of film and theater. Near the beginning of the novel, the character Jeevan speaks to the child Kirsten about Arthur, whose sudden death they had just witnessed in the midst of a performance of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Jeevan tries to comfort Kirsten by telling her of an interview he'd read in which Arthur stated, "'I've waited all my life to be old enough to play Lear, and there's nothing I love more than being on stage, the immediacy of it . . .'"—but the words [seem] to hollow in retrospect. Arthur was primarily a film actor, and who in Hollywood longs to be older?" (8). In this passage, Jeevan wonders "who in Hollywood longs to be older," suggesting a sort of expiration date on actors. Hollywood, which in this case is used as a catch-all for the mainstream American film industry, favors the young and attractive. This sentiment underscores much of the corruption of Hollywood, as it suggests that the artform of film acting has been compromised by the glamorization of the film industry. Here, the focus is no longer on the art itself but on the actors and actresses who perform it. The fact that Arthur wants to be older, so that he can play *King Lear*, suggests a separation in his artistic self between film acting and theater acting. Throughout *Station Eleven*, Mandel paints film acting as a corrupted form of art. In contrast, she describes theater acting as separate from this corruption. Notably, it is theater that the Traveling Symphony—a group of musicians and actors who perform Shakespeare in the novel—chooses as their artform after the collapse, and it is theater that Arthur says he loves. Thus, Arthur's true artistic self lives in the world of theater, and his life in Hollywood—although it was his primary artform—fails to fulfill the joy that art is supposed to bring. After sharing this uplifting sentiment with Kirsten, Jeevan considers it retrospectively, in turn realizing that this notion is "hollow" because in reality, Arthur spent most of his time in film, an industry where being older presents a marked disadvantage. Not only is Jeevan's comment hollow, but so is the film industry as a whole in *Station Eleven*. All the glitz and glamour plaguing Hollywood have rendered film as a meaningless and shallow artform. Arthur enjoys theater because it lives in a world separate from the corruption of the film industry, and thus his true art becomes worthwhile once it is disentangled from Hollywood.

At the end of his life, Arthur decides to leave the corrupt world of film acting and devote himself to the things that truly matter, suggesting that Arthur can achieve meaning in his life only when he aban-

dons his corrupted art. Moments before his final performance of *King Lear*, Arthur is struck by a sudden decision to leave his life of money, fame, and excess behind. After offering to pay off his mistress's student loans, Arthur makes a new plan for the remainder of his life, reflecting that "he would be known as the man who gave his fortune away. He would retain only enough money to live on. He would buy an apartment in Jerusalem and see Tyler every day and start over" (322–23). In the final moments of his life, Arthur plans to lose his worldly lifestyle and live peacefully with his wife Elizabeth and son Tyler in Jerusalem. This decision comes just before his fatal performance of a Shakespearean play, suggesting a link between Arthur's personal redemption and Shakespeare. In an article on the role of Shakespeare in *Station Eleven*, Charles Conaway observes that "perhaps the opportunity to play Shakespeare's aging, addled king—to rehearse, understand and perform the mistakes Lear makes, only to come to his senses moments before it's all too late—inspires Arthur to leave it all behind and spend time with *his son* before it's too late *for him*" (7). Where film acting is riddled with corruption, theater offers Arthur a sense of possibility unimaginable in his current life.

Although Mandel marks a clear separation between the world of film acting and the world of theater, the corruption of art is not isolated to Hollywood; it even reaches into artforms that are "supposed" to be free from corruption. Miranda, Arthur's first wife, is characterized throughout the novel as an artist figure. She dedicates the vast majority of her free time to creating the *Station Eleven* comics, the novel's namesake. Before Miranda marries Arthur, she finds herself in a not-so-happy relationship with a painter named Pablo. When Pablo's painting career tanks, Miranda takes up a job in a corporate office. Pablo criticizes her decision, saying, "My poor corporate baby, . . . Lost in the machine" (81). The "machine" in question refers to the metaphorical machine of the corporate world, where people become nothing but mindless cogs in the machine of commerce. Ironically, Miranda finds a sense of peace in the corporate world, saying, "In art school they talked about day jobs in tones of horror. She never would have imagined that her day job would be the calmest and least cluttered part of her life" (82). Here, Miranda insinuates that the corporate world offers her a peace and stability unattainable in the parts of her life that are *supposed* to bring her comfort. Outside of her day job, Miranda's life is filled with artistry; her boyfriend is a painter, and she herself is a trained artist. Where this life is supposed to bring Miranda joy, it instead leaves

her stifled and unfulfilled. Pablo's artistry is corrupted by his pretentiousness and impotence, whereas Miranda's artistry is corrupted by the mess of the "art world" she finds herself in. Ultimately, Miranda can exercise unabridged artistry only within the "machine" of a corporate job, as she spends much of her time at work creating *Station Eleven*.

In the novel, Pablo represents the corruption of "highbrow" art, while Miranda represents art for the sake of art. Pablo moves from criticizing Miranda's job choice to criticizing her *art*, with Mandel writing, "[Pablo] has no interest in comics . . . When sober, he suggests that she's squandering her talent. When drunk, he implies that there isn't much there to squander" (87). In Pablo's mind, "real" art is only valuable if it has some sort of profound meaning that can be analyzed by highly educated art curators. He has no interest in comics because he does not see their value, and thus he deems them worthless and a waste of artistic talent. Miranda goes on to defend herself, saying, "You don't have to understand it, . . . 'It's mine'" (87). Here, Miranda argues against the notion that art is for the sake of anyone else, something that Pablo does not seem to understand in his own artistry. Miranda creates *Station Eleven* because it brings her peace and happiness, and in turn her work is rejected by those around her. After the collapse, however, it is Miranda's comics that Kirsten holds onto in the midst of chaos and tragedy. Pablo's paintings and all his "highbrow" work are rendered meaningless, while Miranda's comics are among the only possessions Kirsten deems valuable enough to hold onto after the collapse of society.

Where Mandel describes Miranda's art as pure, she describes the paparazzi's mere existence within the realm of art as an agent of corruption. After Arthur's death on stage, Jeevan leaves the theater and is greeted by "a half dozen paparazzi" who have gathered outside the stage door, prompting Jeevan to reflect that "Arthur wasn't as famous as he had been, but his pictures still sold, especially now that he was involved in a gladiatorial divorce with a model/actress who'd cheated on him with a director" (9). Mandel writes that when he died, Arthur was not "as famous as he had been," yet he was worthwhile to the paparazzi because of his recent scandal. This suggests a sort of fame that goes beyond the actor's performance itself. Here, Arthur's art is not the reason why his death is important to the general public; instead, what is important to the public is the scandal surrounding his personal life. Arthur's "pictures still sold" largely because of his recent personal drama, suggesting a monetization of both fame and death. Not only do the paparazzi earn

money from other people's notoriety, but they also earn money from other people's deaths. In this respect, the corruption of art in this scenario is twofold: art as acting and art as photography have both been poisoned by money and celebrity. In a sense, paparazzi are artists in their own right, albeit a corrupted form of artistry. Their jobs inherently rely on sensationalism and consumption, with Devan Orr going as far as to call the modern-day paparazzi a "menace to society" (322). The presence of the paparazzi in this scene signals the sensationalization of not only Arthur's life as a film actor, but also of his *death* as a film actor. Where the film industry acts as a corrupted form of theater, the paparazzi's artistry acts as a corrupted form of photography. Arthur's artistic contributions do not matter to the general public, so the paparazzi are not concerned with that. In fact, the paparazzi do not even care that a human life has been lost; all that matters is that they can sensationalize the death of a famous actor for a quick profit.

While Mandel paints a less-than-kind picture of the paparazzi, she layers this contempt with the character Jeevan, a former paparazzo who hates his own work, suggesting that the paparazzi themselves realize the corruption of their art yet do little to correct it. In a conversation with Miranda while Jeevan is still working as a paparazzo, Miranda asks, "'You people live on that kind of gossip, don't you?'" (102). Jeevan responds, saying, "'No,' . . . 'We live *on* that kind of gossip, actually. As in, it pays my rent. What I live *for* is something different'" (102). This revelation suggests that the paparazzi only take part in this business for monetary gain, and to them it is just another job that pays the bills. Where Miranda takes up a corporate job to pay her bills, Jeevan becomes a paparazzo. Both characters contribute to the "machine" that Pablo so hatefully mentions earlier in the novel, but Jeevan's career, unlike Miranda's, brings him guilt rather than peace. Later, Jeevan attempts a career as an entertainment journalist, but he is still unfulfilled, saying, "Interviewing actors [is] better than stalking them, but what kind of a journalism career [is] this? What kind of life? Some people [manage] to do things that actually [matter]" (168). Jeevan realizes that a career in the entertainment industry contributes nothing good to the world, yet he does it anyway.

Although Arthur claims to hate all the cameras and paparazzi, he secretly loves it and caters his real-life actions towards the cameras, suggesting that the corruption of acting transcends the job itself and

permeates the personal lives of Hollywood actors. Throughout *Station Eleven*, we see Arthur date, marry, and subsequently divorce several women in the course of his lifetime as a film actor, with several of these women being “more famous” than him (Mandel 79). Mandel writes of Arthur’s dating life, saying, “Did he actually date those women because he liked them, or was his career in the back of his mind the whole time?” (79). The more we read of Arthur’s actions as he descends further into the world of Hollywood, the more we wonder whether Arthur knows the answer to this question himself. Throughout the novel, Arthur puts on a show in his own life seemingly without fully realizing what he is doing. When Arthur goes out to lunch with his friend Clark, Clark notices a shift in Arthur, thinking to himself, “There had been a time when Arthur would never have faced the dining room of a restaurant . . . but now, Clark realized, Arthur wanted to be seen” (110). No longer does Arthur go out with friends to enjoy their companionship; instead, he does it for the cameras. Fame has twisted Arthur’s life into one of constant spectacle, where he cannot enjoy life’s simple pleasures without first thinking of his career. Even Arthur’s famous wives fall into this trap, with Mandel describing his last wife Elizabeth Colton as putting on a show, writing, “[Elizabeth’s] face is next to Arthur’s on the billboards, flashing a brilliant smile with very red lips, but offscreen she wears no lipstick and seems nervous and shy” (91). The version of Hollywood stars that the public sees is very different from reality, and in truth, as Mandel points out, many of these stars live sad lives of unending performance.

The art performed by the Traveling Symphony, on the other hand, represents both a purity of art as well as a camaraderie through art, free from the corruption of Hollywood and the world “before.” After the collapse, a group of artists called the Traveling Symphony forms to perform plays to what is left of the surrounding population. One of the Symphony members, Kirsten—the girl who had witnessed Arthur’s death at the beginning of the novel—recounts the petty drama and issues present within the group, saying, “But what [makes] it bearable [are] the friendships, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare, the moments of transcendent beauty and joy when it [doesn’t] matter who’d used the last of the rosin on their bow or who anyone had slept with” (47–48). In the Traveling Symphony, art lives free from the shackles of corruption plaguing the world “before,” or, to us, the world present. Thus the group’s members and their audiences are able to truly enjoy the music and the theater for what it is meant to be without all the

muddiness of Hollywood. They can simply bask in the beauty of art, stripped down to its most fundamental form; art acts as an outlet for the characters of the Traveling Symphony. It is a sort of therapy, where its members can escape from their own struggles and find something that makes their existences worthwhile. Kirsten describes these moments as “transcendent,” suggesting an experience that goes beyond typical human experience. This “transcendent beauty” takes Kirsten and the other Symphony members into a supernatural experience through art, something we do not see much of in the world before the collapse. Later in this scene, Kirsten notes that “the Symphony [is] their only home” (48). Mandel suggests a certain camaraderie between artists that goes beyond the art itself. In an article on the permanence of art in *Station Eleven*, Carmen M. Mendez-Garcia writes, “*Station Eleven* is a fantasy mostly about goodness and decency in human nature, and the possibility of communal creation of little cells of camaraderie, a kind of preservation of the best of culture, society, and previous models of civilization” (114). Mendez-Garcia underscores the central message of the novel: when almost all is stripped from the earth, the best of humanity is what remains. Art thus acts both as a form of preservation of “the best” of the world and as a bonding agent.

The Traveling Symphony also represents a hope for humanity in the wake of disaster, where the art and beauty that the group’s members create transcends the horrors happening around them. After arriving in a strange town that appears to have been overtaken by a doomsday “prophet,” the Traveling Symphony performs Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to a small gathered audience. Mandel describes the scene, saying, “What was lost in the collapse: almost everything, almost everyone, but there is still such beauty. Twilight in the altered world, a performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in a parking lot in the mysteriously named town of St. Deborah by the Water, Lake Michigan shining a half mile away” (57). Mandel writes of what was lost in the collapse, saying *almost* everything and *almost* everyone. Even when nearly all is lost, there is still something left worth holding onto. In this case, one of the things that was not lost is art, and that is what binds Kirsten and the Traveling Symphony to their humanity. Even when almost all is lost, there is still beauty through art. In this description we are also momentarily taken out of the image of artistic beauty when we learn of the setting in which the art takes place. Mandel writes imagery of an “altered” world, where the magic of the play becomes set against the realities of a plague-stricken world. The

beauty of the play happens not in a gorgeous set akin to the one in which Arthur performs *King Lear* at the beginning of the novel, but in a parking lot near Lake Michigan. This scene takes place in St. Deborah by the Water, a town we later learn has been overcome by a doomsday cult led by the mysterious “prophet.” Although the townspeople, and in turn the audience members, are clearly separated from reality, they still come together with the Traveling Symphony to enjoy the art of theater. While the setting may not be beautiful, that is not what matters. What matters is the art itself and the beauty that it brings its performers and onlookers.

The Traveling Symphony chooses to perform Shakespeare’s plays intentionally, as his works represent a shared experience through plague that acts as a sort of therapy through art for the characters in the novel. Shakespeare, like the characters in *Station Eleven*, lived through a plague of his own. In the novel, Kirsten looks back at her first night in the Traveling Symphony, reflecting that “she [remembers] Dieter talking to her about Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s works and family, Shakespeare’s plague-haunted life” (308). Kirsten asks Dieter if Shakespeare had the plague himself, and Dieter responds, saying, “‘No,’ . . . ‘I mean he was defined by it’” (308). The characters in *Station Eleven*, at least in part, choose Shakespeare because, like the Traveling Symphony, Shakespeare’s work is rooted in, or defined by, plague. In an article on the influence of the bubonic plague in Shakespeare’s work, Theodore Dalrymple writes, “If, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar John had not been confined in a house that was suspected of harbouring the plague, the all important letter would have reached Friar Laurence, and Romeo would have got his girl.” If not for the plague, the beloved play *Romeo and Juliet* may not have existed with any semblance of its final form. Just as the characters in *Station Eleven* are defined by plague, so too was Shakespeare, and that is a substantial reason why the Traveling Symphony chooses Shakespeare as their focus.

In *Station Eleven*, Mandel also uses Shakespeare’s works not because they are the “best,” but because they reveal something about the good of humanity. Near the beginning of the novel, Dieter provides another reasoning for the Traveling Symphony’s use of Shakespeare, saying, “‘People want what was best about the world’” (38). Here, Dieter suggests that Shakespeare, above all other playwrights in the history of human civilization, is the “best.” However, this idea becomes complicated later in the novel when we find out that “the clarinet hated Shakespeare” (288). The clarinet, a member of the Traveling Sympho-

ny whose real name is never mentioned, admits that in her opinion, Shakespeare is not the “best” of humanity, as Dieter believes. If Mandel does not choose Shakespeare for the quality of his work, then why is his work so prevalent in her novel? Keith Jones posits one reading in his analysis of *Station Eleven*’s relationship with Shakespeare, analyzing the possibility of *Station Eleven* as an adaptation of Shakespeare’s work. Jones writes that *Station Eleven* is not an exact “mirror” of any one of Shakespeare’s plays, but “it does reflect philosophically on the purposes of Shakespeare—and of things like Shakespeare. It may not ask us to re-examine a specific play, but it does ask its readers to consider what they value, and why, and how” (48). Mandel does not use Shakespeare because it is necessarily the “best” or because the events of the novel mirror a Shakespearean play; she uses Shakespeare instead as a tool of reflection on our human experience.

The use of Shakespeare by the Traveling Symphony is further complicated throughout *Station Eleven*; and, rather than returning to a world like that of Shakespeare’s time, some of the characters in the novel seek, instead, to reclaim theater and create something of their own. The clarinet, after admitting that she “hates” Shakespeare, reveals that she wishes to create her own play, saying, “She [wants] to write something modern, something that [addresses] this age in which they’d somehow landed. Survival might be insufficient, . . . but, on the other hand, so [is] Shakespeare” (288). Although Shakespeare undeniably influences the characters in *Station Eleven*, we are not meant to view his works and the time he comes from as some sort of “golden age” of art that humanity should return to. Instead, Mandel suggests that, just as survival is insufficient, so, too, is Shakespeare. The goal of the Traveling Symphony is not to reset the world to what it once was, but to rebuild it into something better that it could be, free from the worldly corruption plaguing our present society.

Conversely, the religious cult leader in *Station Eleven*, who aptly calls himself the “prophet,” claims that the world was reset so that the “light” could emerge (meaning himself and his followers); yet, the true “light” in the “cleansed” world actually comes from the emergence of unfiltered art and beauty. After the Traveling Symphony performs in St. Deborah by the Water, the prophet speaks to the Symphony and the gathered crowd, saying, “‘The great cleansing that we suffered twenty years ago, that flu was our flood. The light we carry within us is the ark that carried Noah and his people over the face of the terrible waters’” (60). The prophet relates the events of the pandemic to that of the

biblical story of Noah and the flood, where all the world was cleansed except for those who were chosen by God to be saved on the ark with Noah; additionally, the prophet suggests that, like Noah and his people, those who did not die from the flu were “saved” for a reason. The prophet continues, saying, “We were saved because we *are* the light. We are the pure” (60). Nearly everyone remaining after the Georgia flu wrestles with making sense of their purpose on the Earth. Most of the Earth’s population has died from the pandemic, and those who remain are left to wonder *why*. Some, like the prophet, turn to divine purpose, albeit, narcissistically. Others, like the Traveling Symphony, find their purpose in art. Where the prophet and his followers believe that they are the light in a darkened world, the true light is found in everything that the Traveling Symphony stands for: art, beauty, and friendship.

The “cleansed world” is complicated by the remaining existence of corruption, even after most of the world’s population has been eradicated. As Kirsten walks in the woods, she ponders to herself, “The beauty of this world where almost everyone [is] gone. If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it? Perhaps soon humanity would simply flicker out, but Kirsten [finds] this thought more peaceful than sad” (148). Kirsten begins to question whether humanity as a whole is even worth preserving at all. She finds peace in the idea of humanity’s end, as it would in turn signal an end to the damage that humanity has caused. Throughout the novel, although the world has been “cleansed,” it is still far from perfect. For instance, the prophet exploits his followers’ religious beliefs so that he can live however he pleases, even attempting to take on a child as his bride. Although Kirsten is jaded by the dark side of human nature, she has not given up hope entirely. Kirsten tattoos herself with the quote, “Survival is insufficient,” as a marker of her purpose (119). To merely survive is to submit oneself to the dark side of humanity; to truly live is to do something that makes humanity worth existing.

Where Kirsten struggles to see the good of human existence, Jeevan points out the beauty of humanity that had already existed even before the collapse. Near the beginning of the Georgia flu, Jeevan isolates himself in an apartment with his brother Frank. One afternoon, Jeevan thinks to himself “about how human the city is, how human everything is,” noting that “we bemoaned the impersonality of the modern world, but that was a lie, . . . There had always been a massive delicate infrastructure of people, all of them working unnoticed around us, and when people stop going to work, the entire operation grinds to

a halt” (178). Earlier in the novel, Pablo describes the corporate world as a “machine,” language that Jeevan repurposes for his own argument about the collective function of humanity (81). Where Pablo sees the mechanics of society as something to be disdained and criticized, Jeevan sees it as something to be celebrated. Jeevan notes that people like Pablo “bemoaned the impersonality of the modern world,” where they saw the modern world as something markedly separate from real humanity. However, Jeevan complicates this notion, suggesting that the modern world might be a machine, but that is not inherently a bad thing. Jeevan finds a certain beauty in the mechanics of human society, where all must contribute to the “machine” in order for society to function properly. The collapse of society that is seen in the novel is not caused by the Georgia flu itself but by the loss of the human cogs holding the machine of society together. Although the pandemic largely cleanses the world of corruption, there is a certain beauty of collective humanity that is lost with it.

Imagery of machinery continues with the role of technology in the novel, which acts as a symbol of hope in the wake of ruin. Vera Benczik discusses the representation of technology in *Station Eleven*, writing, “The dysfunctional object world, while most often viewed with a nostalgic longing for the pre-collapse functionality, is also presented as a world that is reduced to simplicity, decluttered of the excess of technology that complicates our lives today” (26–27). Benczik describes a world viewed through “a nostalgic longing,” suggesting a longing for a “golden age” of humanity that has been lost through, as Benczik argues, an “excess of technology;” however, Mandel rejects the notion that humanity should return to this supposed golden age. Notably, in *Station Eleven*, technology has been all but lost. However, Mandel challenges this notion of technology as the source of social ruin at the end of the novel, as the existence of electricity signals restoration rather than ruin. The reader discovers that Clark has found a distant town glistening with electricity, signaling a hope for the future of humanity. Clark reflects on this discovery, saying, “If there are again towns with streetlights, if there are symphonies and newspapers, then what else might this awakening world contain?” (332). The reemergence of technology does not scare or disappoint the characters of *Station Eleven* but, instead, invigorates them and instills hope for a restored world. Clearly, the issue Mandel takes with current society is not the mere existence and usage of technology but with the issue of excess. In the world before the collapse, there was too much technology, too much glamor, too much of everything. Once the excess has been removed, then, and only then, can the good of humanity reign true.

In *Station Eleven*, Mandel showcases how money has corrupted the film industry through the character Arthur, but these issues go far beyond the novel itself. In an article from USA Today, Charles Stockdale and John Harrington note, “many of the most expensive movies of all time are also the top-grossing movies of all time,” suggesting an undeniable relationship between money and the public reception of film. Generally speaking—though of course there are many exceptions—the bigger the budget, the more popular the film. The issue of money and film permeates even into the world of fairy tales, with Disney creating a near monopoly in the field. Stacey M. Lantagne criticizes Disney’s strict copyright policy, writing that “Disney’s conquering copyrights strip the public domain and deprive the culture of access to creative works, in turn stifling non-Disney-endorsed creativity” (144). Disney’s exploitation of copyright laws is just one example of how money has seeped into the realm of film, twisting even the most innocent children’s stories into a game of commerce.

Similarly, readers see a glimpse of the relationship between “highbrow” art and money through the character Pablo, but what Pablo represents reaches outside the novel as well. In *Station Eleven*, Pablo, who “sold a painting for ten thousand dollars . . . and was poised to be the Next Big Thing, but then his show got canceled and he sold nothing else in the year that followed” (81), represents the world of “highbrow” art and all its monetary ties. In the real world, people see the corruption of this sort of art in several ways, perhaps most prominently in the issue of money laundering. This issue is so prominent, in fact, that many people have proposed more extensive regulation of money laundering through art, to little avail. One such person, Alessandra Dagirmanjian, points out that “there is no existing regulatory scheme that directly targets the use of art for money laundering, and the art market maintains very little self-policing to prevent it” (691). Thus, presently we live in a world where the realm of art, which is supposed to highlight the most raw form of humanity, has become so entangled with money that it is now being used as a tool for crime.

Just as fame has corrupted art in *Station Eleven* through Arthur’s descent into a state of perpetual performance, so too has fame corrupted art in our present society. Oftentimes, movies are sold not for the art of the film itself, but for the actors and actresses within them. We see this phenomenon play out in *Station Eleven* through Arthur, but it remains

true in our society today; actors such as Dwayne Johnson, Ryan Reynolds, and Will Smith are household names, and in turn many of their films are marketed with this fame in mind. Perhaps even more horrifying is the fact that fame often supersedes wrongdoing in the public eye. In an article reviewing the most “in-demand” actors in Hollywood, Hannah Yasharoff criticizes Hollywood’s habit of excusing poor behavior, writing that on the list there are “two men who have been accused of abusive behavior toward women, which doesn’t seem to have diminished their ability to find work” (“We Did the Math: The 10 Most In-Demand Actors in Hollywood”). Yasharoff quickly moves on, but her point remains true. The public, in general, creates a distorted image of celebrities, where fame excuses poor or even dangerous behavior.

Readers also see a corruption of art through excess in Mandel’s novel, an issue mirrored in our current society. Perhaps the greatest example of excess in the realm of art is seen through the annual Met Gala, where the cost for a seat at the 2021 gala “started at \$35,000, and tables went for \$200,000 to \$300,000” (Yuan, “The Met Gala Is Full of Rich People”). The annual gala has historically been home to the nation’s elite, with tickets for the event typically reserved only for the incredibly famous or—though it is often the same thing—for the incredibly rich. The Met Gala, put on by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is a high-dollar fundraiser for the museum’s Costume Institute, filled with the biggest names in Hollywood and beyond (Yuan, “The Met Gala Is Full of Rich People”). The Met Gala’s status as a charitable fundraiser for an art institute is contrasted with the actual contents of the gala, where the most corrupt representations of art come out to play. Attendees wear costumes costing as much as, and often even more than, the tickets themselves. Just as Arthur engages in ridiculously expensive celebrity culture, so, too, do real-life celebrities in our present world.

In *Station Eleven*, Mandel criticizes our present society’s corruption of art through her depiction of a post-apocalyptic world where society has undergone a total deconstruction of what it once was and, for readers, what it currently is. Notably, the novel was written before the events of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, its depiction of a post-pandemic world is especially poignant given society’s current circumstances. In the novel, Mandel uses Arthur and Pablo to point out the ways in which art has become corrupted by money, fame, and excess in our current society. Conversely, Mandel uses the character Jeevan and the members of the Traveling Symphony to showcase what art *could be* if these corrupting agents were removed. *Station Eleven*

is not simply an optimistic imagining of what might happen if plague were to strike, but, instead, the novel seeks to show what humanity is capable of if we would allow humanity to be loosened of the shackles plaguing art and beauty in current society.

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“I don’t believe I’ve ever felt as much love for a woman, as I have for you”: The Tragedy of Homoromantic Modernity in D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*

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D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* centers the exploration of a new type of love that Rupert Birkin, the male protagonist of the novel, idealizes in his relationship with Gerald Crich. While the plot details the struggle of the Brangwen sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, in their individual, circumstantial love affairs with Birkin and Gerald respectively, Lawrence’s attention to the intimate partnership between Birkin and Gerald throughout the novel transforms Gerald into the exemplar of the new, idealistic love that achieves a duality between man and woman that Birkin idolizes. Birkin and Gerald’s relationship challenges heteronormative tradition in how it transcends societal expectations; they engage with each other in an undefined relationship that exposes the novel’s core as inherently Modernist in its subversive uncertainty. Taking into account the mysterious form of new love that Birkin consistently hints towards with Gerald but never fully explores in combination with the subversive nature of Gerald and Birkin’s relationship, Gerald represents to Birkin the possibility of an ideal love that transcends the traditional notion of romance Birkin disapproves of, which is, in actuality, unattainable. Ultimately, the boundless, modern romance that Birkin envisions with Gerald is made unstable due to the influence of traditional romance, reflecting how their new, uncertain relationship is unsustainable, culminating in the physical death of Gerald and the metaphorical death of Birkin’s aspirations.

Birkin details certain requirements for his new form of love throughout the novel, yet Lawrence never fully specifies the exact details of what Birkin's ideal romance entails, leaving Birkin's hopeful wishing forever in a state of uncertainty and instability even as he comes to realize his feelings for Gerald. When reflecting on the past, Birkin considers the old way of love "a dreadful bondage, a sort of conscription" (Lawrence 199), making it abundantly clear that he heavily dislikes the standardized form of romance that is backed by heteronormative tradition. In this sense, Birkin desires a modern conception of companionship, one that moves towards a sense of new, intimate appreciation that he believes to have found with Gerald. By describing old love with terminology such as "bondage" and "conscription," Birkin figures traditional notions of romance as constricting, and in doing so, presents his new form of love as the liberated alternative accordingly. This is largely achieved by contrasting the two figures he has intimate relations with within the novel: Ursula Brangwen as the traditional, heterosexual relationship accompanying the old tradition, and Gerald Crich as the homoromantic, subversive agent with whom Birkin edges towards a new understanding. Barlow describes Birkin's centering of Gerald as the representation of his desire for new love as a "strategic appropriation of primitive masculinity" (Barlow 20), in that Birkin believes Gerald to be the ideal representation of the masculine in a primitive callback to tradition that paradoxically breaks free through Birkin's appropriation of the masculine as a way for him to form a new conception of the romantic. The homoromantic nature of their relationship is what allows Birkin to begin exploring the notion of new love; essentially, it is the aspect of the primitive in the connection between two men that allows for the ensuing uncertainty in the relationship between Birkin and Gerald. Unlike his relationship with Ursula, which is explicitly depicted with romantic gestures such as Birkin's repeated proposals, Birkin and Gerald have no such moments of romance between them, even as their relationship progresses through the stages of attraction, dependency, and conflict. Therefore, Lawrence purposefully subverts expectations to label the connection between them and instead focuses on the depth of their relationship over the explicit acknowledgement of an attraction or desire existent between the two. Successful communication between Birkin and Gerald is never fully accomplished, even as their feelings are explored in the text.

While neither Birkin nor Gerald explicitly make mention of a homoromantic attraction to the other man, neither is able to disregard the notion of romantic desire completely, creating a tension that prevails upon and contributes to the downfall of their relationship. Upon first meeting, “there was a pause of strange enmity between the two men . . . which was either hate or love, or both,” but regardless of the uncertainty found in Birkin and Gerald’s relationship from the beginning, “the heart of each burned for the other” (Lawrence 33). This duality of an inability to place the specificities of what they feel for one another contrasted against a desire for the other man creates what Barlow acknowledges as Lawrence’s “attempts to delineate . . . oxymoronically and anxiously” (Barlow 21) the relationship between Gerald and Birkin; all at once, Lawrence is trying to specify what contributes to the existence of new love between the two men, while also maintaining a sense of uncertainty in their relationship that characterizes the form of new love that is separated from traditional romance. As a result, Gerald and Birkin’s relationship comes across as delightful yet unstable, marked by a lingering sense of uncertainty in not being able to fully confirm the desire they both feel. The recognition of their attraction to one another is accompanied by the negation of the possibility of liking each other, thus simultaneously creating hatred and love.

Gerald and Birkin’s new form of love is also represented physically through their bodies. In the wrestling scene, Birkin is described as “interfus[ing] his body through the body of the other” (Lawrence 270); Rosinberg reads this scene as a “tangible metaphor for . . . [the] idea of a future” (Rosinberg 2). By physically joining their bodies Gerald and Birkin connect as the metaphorical ideal of a future romance where they can accept and indulge in a new form of love that is both impossible to pin down by traditional notions and defined by the connection and duality reflected in combining their bodies and identities. Whereas Birkin’s courtship with Ursula is permeated by specific events, Gerald and Birkin’s relationship comes through bursts of vivid, mysterious connection, where the novel’s narration grows increasingly uncertain as the boundary between what defines Gerald and Birkin’s individual bodies begins to fade. Through these moments of connection that spark between Birkin and Gerald, Lawrence offers glimpses into the new love that Birkin craves desperately, and the possible attainment of that love through his relationship with Gerald as they begin to connect as men and lovers into one physical self.

However, it is the inability to obtain new love that contributes to the steady downfall of Birkin and Gerald's relationship. Rosinberg considers the progression of their homoromantic connection to be ultimately unfortunate, as there is no template for how the relationship can realistically survive. As a result, the new love that Birkin longs for with Gerald — one that embraces modernity in its chaos and newness — is unsustainable beyond existing solely as an unattainable idea (Rosinberg 13). Paradoxically, the abandonment of the old notion of love is what causes the past to haunt their new relationship, as Birkin and Gerald do not have a standard for living and conceiving of their relationship in reality. Therefore, their new connection exists as the idea that motivates Birkin to leave the past behind, but does not define distinctly what the desire for modernity requires. The inability to fully live out this new love is expressed in the aftermath of their wrestling when they hold hands, as Gerald's hand is "sudden and momentaneous," while Birkin's hand contrasts his with "a strong, warm clasp" (Lawrence 272). Birkin and Gerald are unable to establish a standard of hand-holding in the aftermath of their intense passion for one another, but still give into their desires regardless; their movements immediately following their intense engagement with one another are contradictory, as Gerald initiates the touch but does not stay, and Birkin lingers. Both men indulge in the desire of hand-holding, but their actions are uncertain and unstable, and the ways they attempt to physically connect are incompatible. The new romance that Birkin wants with Gerald, while ideal, fails to provide a proper standard of conduct that can allow for the expression of emotions as he would like and therefore contributes to the inability to fully express their feelings for one another, suspending their relationship within a state of eternal uncertainty and delicate instability.

Consequently, Birkin and Gerald's relationship is unsustainable due to their inability to fully define the form of love that has taken shape, and the desire for an uncertain modernity of something new is abandoned as a result. As Birkin's courtship with Ursula progresses, his relationship with Gerald steadily declines; with his death, Birkin reflects on the relationship they shared, but ultimately chooses to turn away: "Either the heart would break, or cease to care. Best cease to care" (Lawrence 478). Birkin is forced to choose between Ursula and Gerald, between tradition and uncertainty, between heteronormativity and homoromanticism: there is no way for him to have both at the same time. By marrying Ursula, the romance that he tentatively approaches with Gerald fails completely. Gerald becomes the representation of an

alternative life and a new possibility of love that Birkin chooses to turn away from; thus, an effect of Birkin's desire is the transformation of Gerald into something both human and nonhuman (Wollaeger 79), representative of both a real relationship and a fantasized ideal. Therefore, Birkin's pursuit of this new form of love has simultaneously idealized and ruined his relationship with Gerald. To Birkin, Gerald will always be more an idea than a person. By making the choice to "cease to care" about Gerald, Birkin chooses metaphorically to stop caring about the new form of love he has idealized, abandoning everything that he has almost achieved with Gerald out of a requirement to compartmentalize their relationship until it means nothing to him.

For Birkin, Gerald represents the new ideal, a relationship in which he can engage in a mutual understanding beyond societal definitions, but which Birkin can never completely have. Gerald is the person to whom Birkin confesses his loss of faith in the old form of love, the one which Birkin joins together with in their wrestling, and his death represents the loss of the possibility of idealistic happiness for Birkin. Wollaeger figures Birkin's perspective of Gerald as "[the] impossible compromise between the human and nonhuman . . . that Birkin permits himself to desire" (Wollaeger 89). Birkin's idealization of Gerald into something beautiful but nonhuman in combination with his desire for Gerald romantically is what contributes to the "impossible compromise" (Wollaeger 89) that they find their relationship in. Birkin, while clearly requiring a relationship with Gerald to complete his idea of new love, moves increasingly away from Gerald's influence in the completion of his relationship with Ursula. In the end, Gerald must die in order for Birkin to embrace his marriage with Ursula, as Birkin is unable to have both relationships at once. Despite this inability, Birkin still insists that he needs Gerald even after his death, as he mourns that he "wanted a man friend, eternal as [Ursula] and [him] are eternal" (Lawrence 481). The contrast between what Birkin hoped to obtain between himself and Gerald and the reality of Gerald's death further signifies the unsustainability of their relationship. Essentially, what Birkin hopes so desperately for in his exploration of new love is, all at once, a subversion of traditional norms towards modernity, and its own self-destruction due to the instability brought on by trying to abandon the past and therefore not having a specific requirement for his creation of a new romance for the future. Birkin desires Gerald passionately, but he is unable to have and keep Gerald as their relationship grows continuously unstable and uncertain, and he ends up marrying Ursula in a form of

traditional romance. Unlike the relationship he has with Ursula, which is supported by the traditional, heterosexual dynamic, Birkin lacks any stable foundation in his desire for Gerald, possessing only a new and uncertain sense of longing that is not enough to sustain his feelings. In attempting to craft his relationships by maintaining new love and engaging in heterosexual tradition, forming a connection with Ursula and Gerald in tandem, Birkin reduces the relationship between himself and Gerald to nothing, thus contributing to its concluding failure.

Lawrence's *Women in Love* is an intimately passionate, albeit tragic, exploration of the forms of love and the connection between two men. Though Gerald and Birkin consistently touch upon the edge of a new romance formulated for them—one that is at once primitive and futuristic—their relationship remains subversive and chaotic in nature so that the new form of love never fully takes shape. Though Gerald represents to Birkin his glorified idea of a future of new love, Birkin's idea cannot escape the influence of the past nor make for itself a new identity in modernity, and his relationship with Gerald fails due to the impossibility of sustaining itself. Birkin chooses to pursue a heteronormative romance with Ursula that is distinctly separate from the boundless, uncertain homoromanticism between himself and Gerald; thereby, Birkin's choice to engage with Ursula over Gerald and Gerald's subsequent death constitutes the end of Birkin's desire for new love, which fails to ever become established in a definitive form. The tension between the past and present in the characters of Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich is best, and most tragically, exemplified through the near-romantic connection they almost share with one another—one that is best defined by its passionate nature which comes close to breaching new parameters of love—and, paradoxically, its inability to solidify into a stable romance as a consequence of the uncertainty and instability of Birkin's undefined desire for modernity.

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“Prepare to Die, Wretched Woman!”: Shining a Light on Stephen King’s Postmodern Female Gothic

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For centuries, society has cultivated the idea that superiority and aggression are natural realms for the male gender and, similarly, that submission and passivity are default territories for the female gender. These ideas are reflected in mainstream media and often perpetuate dangerous ideas of how people must fit into a mold of gender. Within the Gothic literary genre is a correlating gender discourse that reflects societal perceptions of gender roles, and Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977) falls into this often-disputed genre. In a case of intense cabin-fever, the novel follows the Torrance family, Jack, Wendy, and Danny, who are snowbound to the Overlook Hotel. As is common in the Gothic genre, the family becomes increasingly isolated and tense, realizing that they are not only trapped within the confines of the hotel, but also that they are not alone there. The patriarchal ideas codified within society can be observed in Gothic literature through a male or female lens with the male Gothic often voyeuristically exploiting female characters, and the female articulating the particular terrors of the existence within the patriarchy. These gendered fears that are present in the Gothic can be analyzed through the lens of the 1970s feminist psychology, which provides a basis for understanding the ability that Stephen King has to generate horror in readers. By first examining the obscure gender discourse found in the Gothic literary genre, then analyzing the roles of contemporary feminist psychology in the story, and finally moving to how these patriarchal systems facilitate fear and impact society, I argue that King capitalizes on the fears created by a patriarchal society, providing relevant insights on gender with *The Shining*.

PART ONE: DEFINING GOTHIC

“Not every castle is Gothic, and not every Gothic has a castle” (Williams 15).

Defining Gothic is not an easy task. Horror’s subgenre of Gothic literature often goes unrecognized as its own literary genre and is seen as a curio, a skeleton in the literary closet. Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* is largely credited as the beginning of Gothic, and this genre moves in and out of popularity in literary circles as time goes on and society changes. The Gothic has been resurrected as an increasingly popular literary genre, periodically keeping Stephen King on best-seller lists, and its scholarship has grown along with this recognition. Accordingly, a single definition is difficult to define from the myriad of themes, motifs, and symbols found within a genre that spans history, so how does a scholar know that *The Shining* can be placed into the same category as *The Castle of Otranto*, *Bluebeard*, or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*?

Gothic can generally be recognized in historical works and classic literature as many of its texts contain a monster, a castle— or both — and typically exploits women to save their virginity, aligning with the paradigms of patriarchy. In two of the quintessential Gothic pieces of literature there are castles that provide a platform for these underlying sexist themes: Emily is trapped in Castle Udolpho in Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (an example of the restricted female Gothic character) and in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, female vampires are trapped and killed inside Castle Dracula (representations of “ruined” women, a common theme in the male Gothic). As literary history goes on, it becomes more difficult to categorize what can be attributed to this genre as new forms of terrors outside of castles and dungeons arise. Literary scholars must then be able to define Gothic using general terms and choose a definition based on how readers are impacted.

The Gothic can subsequently be defined as a reflection of the current fears repressed within society. As King finds in his writing career, readers are just as afraid of hotels and family as they are of castles and monsters. What we fear is deeply embedded into the Gothic and can be viewed through psychological lenses, often coinciding with societal views of gender. Between the Gothic genders, parallel fears can be found: that of the male fear of diminished power, and the alternative female fear of male oppression. The Gothic, as literary genres tend to do, changes with the current social and cultural environment of its time,

and this genre has continuously developed to fit into social spheres since its creation and will continue to do so as authors find more and more ways to exploit the fears of their readers. *The Shining* fits into the female Gothic tradition because it subverts typical male Gothic themes and characters. All of the characters are harmed by patriarchal systems before they arrive at the Overlook and their lives are destroyed by the spirits that reside in the hotel who embody the patriarchy.

The Male and Female Gothic

Literary works that have been categorized as Gothic can often be viewed through the lens of gender. Male roles in the Gothic typically reflect the patriarchal superiority that men hold in society: an assumption that male is default, normative, and representative of mankind; while female roles and their identities are defined by the male characters around them and often the ones who oppress them. Many of the definitions for the male and female Gothic are opposing and David Punter and Glennis Byron's *The Gothic* advances this notion in that the male Gothic "tends to represent the male protagonist's attempt to penetrate some encompassing interior," while the female Gothic represents the female protagonist's attempt to subvert that oppressive interior (278). Punter and Byron further discuss how suspense is emphasized in the female Gothic as opposed to horror in its counterpart, often generating horror through a narrator's limited understanding of the events surrounding them. Male Gothic also resists ambiguous endings, such as in the end of *The Shining*, and favors happy ones where the women are reintegrated into society through marriage.

The "damsel in distress" trope of the male Gothic is found in much literature, maintaining a demeaning and limited view of men and women that is not shared by its main audience of early Gothic: women. As Eugenia DeLamotte notes in *Perils of the Night*, the female Gothic alternatively spoke to its audience on many levels, showing institutions that were "all too contemporaneous with the lives of the women who wrote and read Gothic romance in the 1700s and early 1800s: "the patriarchal family, marriage, and class system" that women were very familiar with and afraid of, and women could relate to this kind of literature (152). Just as Manfred does in *The Castle of Otranto* by attempting to marry Isabella and enclosing her in a domestic space, the spirits of the Overlook, manifested in Jack, symbolize the patriarchal system by attempting to enclose Wendy within a domestic role. King situates his story and characters well within the female Gothic by carefully out-

lining the horrors that Wendy is subjected to by male characters and showing how she is trapped well before the snow closes her and her family into the Overlook.

Despite these challenges, Wendy's character often undermines that of typical male Gothic characters, such as the wife of Bluebeard. She often wins against the supernatural beings within the hotel that best Jack and fights against them to ultimately escape and destroy the hotel. In Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*, when Bluebeard's unnamed wife is trapped in his château and finds the corpses of Bluebeard's previous wives in a cellar that she was told not to enter, she relies on the help of her brothers to defeat Bluebeard while Wendy is able to defend herself. King uses the story of *Bluebeard* in his novel as a tale that Danny remembers when deciding whether to go into room 217. Danny thinks about the story and what Bluebeard tells his wife once he catches her: "[a]las, in your curiosity you are like the other seven, and though I loved you best of all, your ending shall be as was theirs. Prepare to die, wretched woman!" (King 249). This story foils Wendy's because she undermines patriarchal characters that would otherwise entrap her in domestic spaces.

Once the spirits of the Overlook have mentally defeated Jack, reminding him of his upbringing and convincing him that Wendy has caused all of his problems, he attempts to kill her and sacrifice his son to the hotel. Wendy is strong enough not to fall victim to the psychological manipulation of the hotel that tries to exploit the trauma her mother inflicted: "You've always been jealous, haven't you? Just like your mother," Jack tells her, but Wendy is able to actively fight against the spirits that reside there, unlike Jack (King 546). King demonstrates her particular constraints as well. Even though Wendy is stronger than Jack in these instances, she is still dependent on him to provide for her and Danny.

Home Sweet Hotel

Unlike in the male Gothic tradition, such as when Bluebeard's wife is forbidden from exploring the château, the female Gothic allows the freedom of space in the home or, in this case, the hotel, to women. Though Wendy is later free to roam the Overlook, this is not an immediate liberty. The hotel manager is sure that her husband will "get to know the ins and outs of the Overlook quite well, Mrs. Torrance, but you and your son will doubtless keep more to the lobby level and the first floor. 'Doubtless,' Wendy murmured demurely, and Jack shot her

a private glance” (King 130). The manager assumes she will stay in the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen (traditionally feminine spaces) only for Wendy to instead do the unexpected and use these exact places to her advantage when she defends herself against Jack (the male oppressor). She first defends herself and Danny against Jack in the kitchen, locking Jack in the pantry after knocking him out with a bottle, and later in their bathroom and bedroom using a razor blade, allowing these “feminine” spaces to become places of strength for Wendy.

The home in Gothic is not only the setting of unspeakable horrors, but also the instigator of those horrors, and within a Gothic narrative, a character’s job is to destroy, or be destroyed by, that domestic space. As a representation of the home in *The Shining*, the Overlook becomes the horrific domestic space within which the Torrance family is imprisoned. In *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Kate Ferguson Ellis observes that the intention of the male Gothic within these spaces is to reflect the importance of a well-run household where women can “purify the fallen aristocratic castle and make it into a home worthy of the name,” and where “terror, doubt, and division” cannot enter, but that those households undermine the reality of the world, subduing and convincing women to remain at home (8, 45).

The Overlook is not characterized as a comfortable and inviting home. It is presented to readers as a temporary home that is only meant to serve the Torrances as a means of income for the winter. Once the snow binds the family to the home, the hotel is described as “indifferent to the fact that it was now cut off from the world. Or possibly it was pleased with the prospect. Inside its shell the three of them went about their early evening routine, like microbes trapped in the intestine of a monster;” within the same moment that the family can no longer leave is when the home can unmask itself as the monster (King 310). In accordance with the female Gothic, the Overlook instigates horror in King’s novel by allowing it to be a focal point of the terror that women experience. Charles L. Crow’s book *History of the Gothic: American Gothic* establishes that a pattern of haunting commonly found in the Gothic is a father or mother “turning the refuge of the home into a place of menace” as Jack does to the Overlook (177). Because the male protagonist does this in the case of *The Shining*, the female character must either destroy him or destroy the home. Wendy chooses both options by burying a “kitchen knife in [Jack’s] lower back up to the handle” and distracting the spirits just long enough for Jack to forget to check the boiler pressure and allowing the hotel to explode (King 589).

“Happy Ending”

Demands of the male Gothic include conventional marriages and the integration of an awakened woman back into patriarchal society; a “happy ending.” Anne Williams clarifies in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* that this woman is not virtuous and thrust back into isolation so as to protect her virtue which is

a patriarchal standard: the etymology of the word declares that a good woman is as much like a man (Latin, *vir*) as possible. Thus the Male Gothic plot takes it for granted that a woman’s virtue is her most valuable asset and then places her in a situation where it will be threatened or destroyed. Ultimately she may be (must be?) punished as a ‘fallen woman.’ (105)

Wendy again subverts this trope in *The Shining*; once the Overlook explodes and Jack along with it, she does not marry again and is not able to integrate into society.

The ambiguous ending of *The Shining* is yet another nod to the female Gothic. Punter and Byron conclude that the male Gothic tends to resist this type of ending in “preference for the happy ending; usually, the protagonist is reintegrated into the community and acquires a new identity and a new life through marriage” (279). If an ambiguous ending is female, then a happy one is male, emphasizing how women feel about certain events in the Gothic. Theodore and Isabella marry in the end of *The Castle of Otranto*, but in *The Shining*, Wendy is on her own. However, this is not depicted as bad for Wendy and Danny: “‘The two of you are going to be okay . . . [c] an’t you feel it?’ She looked up at [Halloran] and this time her smile was warmer. ‘Yes . . . [s]ometimes I think I can’” (King 654). Despite being without a husband, Wendy is hopeful and ready for the future. King leaves readers wondering what will become of Wendy and Danny after the events at the Overlook, securing *The Shining* into its place in female Gothic.

PART TWO: THE LAW OF JACK

“[T]he Gothic ‘discovered the unconscious,’ and that its conventions discover the ‘natural’ sexuality—especially female sexuality—repressed by a coercive society” (Williams 94).

Psychology was accepted as an academic discipline in 1879 and, until the 1970s and 80s, was largely a male-dominated field. Many of the theories developed during this time were mainly focused on male

sexuality; and even female sexuality, as Luce Irigaray states in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, “has always been conceptualized on the basis of male parameters” (23). As is common in the Gothic, a psychoanalytic reading of the genre reveals the cultural and historical context of a story. In *The Shining*, Stephen King employs many different psychological ideas that focus on gender-related abjection through his characters and their interactions with each other.

The Oedipus complex and many of Freud’s ideas of psychosexual development were criticized in the 70s for a lack of understanding of female sexuality. According to Kirsten Campbell in *Jacques Lacan and Feminist Epistemology*, feminists of the 1970s like “Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Kate Millett argued that psychoanalysis is a patriarchal institution because of its phallogentric prescription of normative femininity,” and contrastingly, that philosophers like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray argue the opposite: that “psychoanalysis is a potential feminist ally, because of its account of the psychic register of sexual oppression and liberation” (25). Both Kristeva and Irigaray dictate a reconfiguration of Freud’s Oedipus Complex in their respective works, exploring alterity in women and female sexuality.

As Kristeva writes of her theory of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, people experience abjection through the exclusion of the mother, the one that gave life, so that they can establish themselves as individuals. Anne Williams explains that the male psyche privileges the *I*, “creating therefore the basic categories of the ‘male/me’ and the ‘not-male/not-me.’ This first great cognitive division thus splits the world into two unequal categories, ‘I’ and ‘other,’” and because males cannot see beyond what is “I,” anyone outside of that individualistic realm (women), disrupts this notion creating abjection towards the female gender (108). King explores this abjection, outlining that what scares us is often ingrained into our subconscious by the patriarchy.

The M(other)

The man fears the woman because she is thought to hold his identity hostage, because she is Other, and because she limits a man’s otherwise eternal life. In many cases, woman represents life, but in the sense of male abjection, woman can represent death as well. According to Kristeva, the mother has “married beauty and death. She is a condition of writing, for life given without infinity aspires to find its supplement of lacework within words; she is also the black power

who points to the ephemeral nature of sublimation and unrelenting end of life, the death of man” (161). Man resents the mother for not providing eternal life and for holding captive his ability to reproduce and, therefore, his power.

In *The Shining*, the reader learns that Jack is not only haunted by ghosts but also by his abusive father and certain scenes from his childhood as “[l]ove began to curdle at nine, when his father put his mother into the hospital with his cane,” but the spirits of the Overlook influence him to blame his mother instead of his father for his childhood trauma (King 329). He resents his own mother for being weak and ‘letting’ his father abuse her, and he tells Wendy in the process of trying to kill her that “[a]ll you ever think about is ways to drag me down. You’re just like my mother, you milksop *bitch*,” implying that Wendy is selfish for denying him his son (his power), and that his mother is selfish for denying him of his eternal life (King 545). Just as Jack’s father attempts to kill the mother, Jack will attempt to kill his wife to eradicate that horrific Other.

As Luce Irigaray discusses in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Jacques Lacan’s symbolic order brings the psychological scholar’s attention back to the controversy of female sexuality “after the issues had been forgotten (repressed anew?)” in the 1960s (60). This theory illustrates how a child, through the acceptance of the father as the head of society, must align with patriarchal rules to eventually take on this role. Danny is portrayed quite differently in *The Shining*, as he does not want to take his father’s role as the oppressor in patriarchal society, and instead is instrumental in Jack’s death by remembering what his father forgot: “triumph fill[ing] his face; the thing saw it and hesitated, puzzled. ‘*The boiler!*’ Danny screamed. “*It hasn’t been dumped since this morning! . . . It’s going to explode!*’ An expression of grotesque terror and dawning realization swept across the broken features of the thing in front of him” (King 634). By aiding in the death of the male oppressor, Danny avoids this patriarchal role.

Jack fulfills the symbolic order placed upon him by his father, and Jack’s fear of fulfilling this role is made apparent many times in *The Shining* as he often has nightmares about becoming his father. He has a dream where his father is telling him to hurt Wendy and Danny “[b]ecause each man kills the thing he loves. Because they’ll always be conspiring against you. . . . Cane him for it, Jacky, cane him within an inch of his life” (King 335). Once the spirits that symbolize the patriarchy have possessed Jack, he completes the symbolic order of the Torrance family by actually attempting to kill his family.

Jack also fulfills the symbolic order created by the hotel. The Gradys, the previous caretakers of the hotel, are killed by the father who was possessed by the same patriarchal spirits who seem only to haunt families. Grady succumbs to the patriarchal forces of the Overlook, killing his daughters with a hatchet, then shooting his wife, and finally himself. When he appears later in the novel, he explains to Jack that “I corrected them most harshly. And when my wife tried to stop me from doing my duty, I corrected her . . . I find it a sad but true fact that women rarely understand a father’s responsibility to his children . . . You must show them the error of their ways, Mr. Torrance. Do you agree?” and Jack replies, “Yes. I do” (King 518). However, unlike the Grady family, Jack is stopped before he can kill the physical manifestations of his patriarchal-induced fears.

Female Sexuality

Luce Irigaray’s book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, characterizes the male abjection towards female sexuality and the role of this fear in feminist psychology of the 1970s. Irigaray explains that the lack of study of the female mind and psychology’s focus on the male gender, specifically pertaining to the male gaze and focus on “I,” is reflected in the ideas of female sexuality. She further explains that the structuring of the female sexual drive is decided before puberty because a woman’s characteristics are “politically, economically, and culturally . . . linked to maternity and mothering,” meaning that the feminine sexuality is structured in accordance to man and his power, even before a woman has gone through puberty (64).

Female sexuality is also not found within the male “I,” and is subsequently abject to men. When Jack goes to investigate room 217, after Danny was attacked there, he sees the shape of a woman behind the bathtub curtain and tells himself to “step forward boldly and rake the shower curtain back. To expose whatever might be there. Instead, he turned with jerky, marionette strides, his heart whamming frightfully in his chest,” leaving the room and keeping the presence a secret from his family (King 373). Later in the novel, Jack dances with a beautiful woman that the reader understands to be a ghost of the Overlook. As he dances with her, he becomes “more and more sure that she was smooth-and-powdered naked under her dress,” and he was “sporting a regular railspike” (King 512–13). The reader learns that this is the same woman from the bathtub who came to the Overlook to have an affair, but killed herself when the relationship went awry. This is also

the same woman who Danny describes as “having been dead for a long time,” as well as “bloated and purple,” when she chokes Danny in that same bathroom, but despite the fear that Jack feels towards her in the bathtub, he is very much attracted to her during the party (King 319). By playing the roles of both the erotic woman and the rotting corpse, Mrs. Massey reveals Jack’s abjection to female sexuality as something that exists and causes him to experience Kristeva’s form of *jouissance* [enjoyment], where desire and fear are combined.

The Oedipus complex was highly criticized by feminists in the 70s and Luce Irigaray notes that “it would be interesting to know what might become of psychoanalytic notions in a culture that did not repress the feminine. Since the recognition of a “specific” female sexuality would challenge the monopoly on value held by the masculine sex alone,” and she asks, “what meaning could the Oedipus complex have in a symbolic system other than patriarchy?” (73). The lack of psychological research on women and their sexuality produced a limited definition of this gender’s form of pleasure, defaulting it to what most benefited the patriarchy: motherhood. Irigaray states that Freud’s claim that the woman experiences the highest form of sexual pleasure and fulfillment through maternity demeans the complexity of the female sexuality. In reference to Freud’s theory of penis envy, Irigaray explains that “[i]t is understandable that she only appears from then on as ‘lacking in,’ ‘deprived of,’ ‘covetous of,’ and so forth. In a word: castrated,” of the phallus until she is a mother (64). What else could women be but envious of the thing that grants the male power in society?

The psychological and feminist focus on the theory of penis envy centers more on the power that women seek in their relationships and in society. Further aligning the novel with the female Gothic, Wendy takes this power from Jack. She is conflicted in her marriage and loves the man who Jack once was, passively seeking power, from “[*h*er man. She smiled a little in the darkness, his seed still trickling with slow warmth from between her slightly parted thighs,” but as he becomes increasingly more dangerous, Wendy must actively seek power (King 64). In the same moment, she remembers the pain that Jack has caused by abusing alcohol. In a drunken rage, Jack broke Danny’s arm and later assaulted his student, losing his job and causing the family to seek employment at the Overlook. This series of Jack’s shortcomings lead to their experience at the hotel where Wendy must take control to keep herself and her son safe.

Wendy experiences fear towards the oppressive male after Jack becomes a threat to her, content until that moment, and seeks to subvert that oppression. Before then, she is happy to accept her sexual role with her husband as the patriarchy requires her to, but, as Irigaray states: “such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. . . Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants” (25). While never fully content with her marriage, Wendy must still live within these confines as she believes she has no other options. When Wendy finally realizes that the man she knew was gone, she “stared at him, unable to speak now. He was going to kill her, and then he was going to kill Danny” (King 546). With nowhere to go and no way to get there, Wendy decides she and Danny must escape from Jack.

PART THREE: FEMALE AND MALE TERRORS

“You bitch. You killed me” (King 590).

Among some of the most significant understandings of abjection is Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva describes abjection as having one quality of the object which is that “of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (1–2). Kristeva explains in her work that abjection disturbs reason, is found somewhere between object and subject, and often in liminal spaces. In horror, the abject can be experienced by viewing or experiencing physical manifestations of death, such as corpses or bodily fluids, but abjection can also be experienced psychologically by recognizing things that are Other. King’s novel depicts various instances of the abject, especially through the perspective of Danny, Jack and Wendy’s 5-year-old son. The descriptive language throughout the novel gives the reader very precise images of *The Shining*’s horror. When Danny finally enters room 217, he is met by one of the Overlook’s spirits,

The woman in the tub had been dead for a long time. She was bloated and purple, her gas-filled belly rising out of the cold, ice-rimmed water like some fleshy island. Her eyes were fixed

on Danny's, glassy and huge, like marble. She was grinning, her purple lips pulled back in a grimace. Her breasts lolled. Her pubic hair floated. Her hands were frozen on the knurled porcelain sides of the tub like crab claws. (King 319–20)

Descriptive paragraphs like this in the novel generate fear in the reader because these physical manifestations of death collide with the subconscious and reason. Kristeva notes that the corpse is often viewed as remote to God and science, it “is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life,” and we are so fearful of the corpse because it symbolizes our own inevitable deaths as physical manifestations of that which is outside of *I* (4).

What We Fear

As is depicted in the Gothic, what we fear can be attributed to gender. Male characters fear a patriarchal decline and female characters comparatively fear the oppression of that patriarchy. The female Gothic subsequently provides a platform for writers and an outlet for readers with those fears. Anne Williams details this in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* describing the female Gothic as a literary genre that “does not merely protest the conditions and assumptions of patriarchal culture, it unconsciously and spontaneously rewrites them,” while offering an “alternative to the ‘universal’ pattern of the Oedipal structure, the myth that psychoanalysis has privileged as the creator of speaking subjects” (138–39). King’s novel is a reflection of the psychology of the female Gothic in the sense that the main villain symbolizes the patriarchy and outlines the terror of that system.

One of Jack’s biggest fears in *The Shining* is inadequacy. He fears that the mother (Wendy) will deem him unworthy and end his line (taking Danny and leaving) because he has been raised to believe that this is what will happen if he fails. Towards the end of the novel, Wendy explains to Danny that “the hotel is getting stronger. It wants to hurt all of us. But I think . . . I hope . . . that it can only do that through your daddy. He was the only one it could catch,” as Jack only acts on this once the Overlook’s ghosts, which symbolize patriarchal expectations, have amplified these fears, forcing him to attack his family (King 550). Danny juxtaposes Jack’s role in the continuation of the symbolic order as he is the end of the cycle. In *The Uncanny Child in Transnational Cinema: Ghosts of Futurity at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, Jessica Balanzategui indicates that Danny’s shining powers unleash the

“ghostly specters of both his father’s unconscious and the hotel’s grisly past in ways that are inextricably entwined,” amplifying the force of the spirits that ultimately kill Jack and ending the Grady cycle (45).

Jack is often blamed for these events, as his body is the means by which the Overlook uses to enforce the rules of the patriarchy. However, Jack’s fear of inadequacy was created by that system and amplified by the Overlook. Frank Manchel, in his essay “What About Jack? Another Perspective On Family Relationships in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*,” discusses this common misconception about Jack’s character in *The Shining* and Stanley Kubrick’s adaptation of the book. He explains that “*The Shining*’s reception is skewed by a contemporary critical desire to make Jack Torrance—the white, American, middle-class father—the scapegoat for the sins of a patriarchal society. While the surface facts . . . find him guilty as charged”; Manchel argues that a close reading instead finds blame in the system that raised Jack (68). With the feminist movement of the 1970s, King intends to emphasize how this system is outdated and losing momentum by having a woman and the next generation destroy these ideals, manifested within the father.

Manchel reflects on Jack’s childhood with an abusive father and why the spirits are able to choose Jack as their host, writing that: “[c]learly, they see him as the ideal candidate to manipulate because of his traumatic childhood experiences, his substance abuse, and his feelings of inadequacy as a patriarchal figure” (71). There is a crushing pressure on Jack to do everything right in life with the shame of his previous failures and the pressure of keeping this job, and “with no one offering Jack any alternatives to the false standards by which “real men” are being judged, Jack has few choices and is easily seduced by corporate interests” (74). These problems that are brought about by the patriarchy start at birth and create a dangerous idea of what it means to be a man.

PART FOUR: TAKE IT LIKE A MAN

“Everyone’s afraid that their daughters might be hurt. No one seems to be scared that their sons might be the ones to do it” (Ford 11).

Clementine Ford’s *Boys Will Be Boys* (2018) articulates how the patriarchy adapts to a changing society, taking a look into how this age-old system continues to preserve aggression and turmoil between gen-

ders. The title, *Boys Will Be Boys*, denotes the idea that brushing off and inciting violence in young boys (such as telling girls that a boy teases them because he likes you, that boys cannot control themselves, or that they are naturally red-blooded) provides an excuse for their behaviors. Ford stresses that “[t]he kind of boyhood that is codified by mainstream cisnormative society is not an innate state of being. Boys can and will be many things, but what boys in our world are currently conditioned to be *as a rule* is entitled, domineering, sexist, privileged and, in all too many cases, violent,” and that the patriarchy is to blame (17). The male Gothic perpetuates that urgency within society to fit into gender roles while the female Gothic works against this notion, instead outlining patriarchal problems for all genders and subverting those ideas.

Working Men

Jack is desperate for this job at the Overlook, sure that it will satisfy his need to be adequate according to societal standards, noting that “[t]hese days he almost always listened to what his pride told him to do, because along with his wife and son, six hundred dollars in a checking account, and one weary 1968 Volkswagen, his pride was all that was left,” and he must work to feed his family (King 52). Jack cannot escape from these standards any more than he can keep Danny from them, often perpetuating those ideas himself: “[t]hink you’re big enough to carry it upstairs” and Danny replies that he is, “Doc Torrance, the world’s strongest man” (King 49). Jack’s subliminal attempt to coerce Danny into being a strong man and take his place in the symbolic order aligns with a masculinity that is detrimental to men and women alike.

Feminist author bell hooks examines the societal pressure on men to provide for a family in her book *Feminism Is For Everybody*, a feminist manifesto written for the purpose of outlining a brief history of intersectional feminism and hooks’ role in feminism of the 1970s. She writes that:

masses of unemployed and working-class men do not feel powerful on their jobs, within white supremacist patriarchy they are encouraged to feel that the one place where they will have absolute authority and respect is in the home. Men are socialized by ruling-class groups of men to accept domination in the public world of work and to believe that the private world of home and intimate relationships will restore to them the sense of power they equate with masculinity. (65)

Jack is a representation of the unemployed, and later, the working-class man that feels inadequate in life and brings violence to the home. By setting *The Shining* within this context, King creates a form of media that shines a light on the dangers of the patriarchy, as opposed to media that reinforces those dangers.

Conclusive Matters

The oppressive spirits that inhabit the Overlook allow Stephen King to start a larger conversation about the representation of men and women in Gothic horror. He brings attention to how the male gothic creates and maintains unnecessary gender discourse and violence by allowing Wendy to defeat the patriarchy, setting apart King's novel from the voyeuristic texts that exploit women, and instead articulating those particular terrors of the feminine existence.

King fits into the definition of the Gothic that operates within this research by reinforcing the importance of the female Gothic and by providing an exemplary novel that aligns with that Gothic. He accomplishes this by using the female character to subvert an oppressive interior, embracing an ambiguous ending, and emphasizing points of domestic entrapment in the 1970s. Through the characters, King is able to assemble the prime example of a family influenced and threatened by the patriarchy and reflects contemporary fears of the time by emphasizing the Other within a family, turning the home into a prison, and by destroying that family and home. King outlines the psychology of fear through the use of Wendy's character, who represents the male fears of the mother and the female sexuality. Man fears the mother for creating his life in such a way that ends and for holding hostage that power of reproduction so that he cannot control his lineage, and for existing outside of his infatuation with the "I." Man also fears the complexity of female sexuality because she holds that power of reproduction, and can ostensibly experience pleasure during intercourse. Because women hold this "power" over them, men resent women for indulging in this excitement. For particular female terrors, King examines how these theories of the male and female psyches create fear in, and of, the patriarchy.

King represents the current fears of society by formulating a story that has been scaring readers for generations. *The Shining* does this by using the repressed patriarchal fears of reality to generate horror, not only through the monsters and murderers, but through the all-too-real

terrors of inadequacy, domestic hostility, and patriarchy. The descriptive language and liminal scenes create a sense of doom and suspense for readers, allowing authors to capitalize on a market of readers who can recognize that these terrors can, in many ways, be real.

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The Unattainable Sita: Jhumpa Lahiri on Traditional Identity

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“That’s the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet,” Jhumpa Lahiri declares in her critically acclaimed novel *The Namesake*. Perhaps there is no greater lesson in reading than this. However, the *thing* about books is that they also encourage us as readers to travel within the confines of the world in which we live, into the very makeup that creates us as individuals. Our personhood relentlessly ties to the unique cultures we are born and raised in, as well as the many myths, traditions, and expectations associated with each. When looking at South Asian authors and their diasporic writing, the intersectionality between ethnicity, race, and gender is fluid and ever-present. As a daughter of West Bengali immigrant parents—born in London and then raised in the United States—Jhumpa Lahiri’s own lived experiences with intersectionality certainly inspire her writing that challenges the discourse on Indian authenticity and the roles of women within Indian and diasporic spaces. The choices of the female characters in Lahiri’s popular collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, reflect rejection of the *Ramayana*’s cultural narrative that the goddess Sita exemplifies the ideal Indian wife, woman, and citizen, and further assert that there is no perfect definition for these representations of ideal at all.

Despite the age of the text, the *Ramayana* holds incredible influence in Indian society today. With scholars estimating the writing of the original epic to be as early as the 3rd Century CE, the ancient text boasts nearly 300 translations and adaptations to date, with the newest

variety being a film adaptation set to be released in 2022. The epic details the life of Indian prince and god-incarnate Rama. While he and his wife Sita are living in exile, she is abducted and enslaved by the King of Demons, Ravana. During this time, she remains faithful to Rama and even walks through fire as testament when he eventually wages war and rescues her. Sita's ordeal does not end here though, with Rama—whether in personal sacrifice or in doubt of her purity—banishing her while pregnant to live in exile and raise his sons. When her sons grow older and reunite with their father Rama, Sita cries to the earth to swallow her whole.

Though the rise in feminism and women's rights over time would likely counteract praise for the subservient wife Sita, Madhu Kishwar, Indian editor and co-founder of *Manushi: A Journal about Women & Society*, argues otherwise. In her article "Yes to Sita, No to Ram! The Continuing Popularity of Sita in India," published in the aforementioned journal, she estimates that 80–90% of poems submitted to the Hindi *Manushi*, and at least half for the English *Manushi* of modern day "revolved around the mythological Sita, or the writer as a contemporary Sita, with a focus on her steadfast resolve, her suffering, or her rebellion" (Kishwar 20). She says, "The articles and poems that came to us, especially those for the Hindi edition, showed an obsessive involvement with Sita and her fire ordeal" (20). Having been inspired by this phenomenon, Kishwar set out to understand the impact that the *Ramayana*—particularly the relationship between Rama and Sita—has on current culture through a series of surveys and personal interviews. She cites a 1957 survey carried out in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India, stating that Sita was overwhelmingly chosen by 500 boys and 360 girls between the ages of nine and twenty-two years to be "the ideal woman from a list of 24 names of gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines of history" (20). Recognizing that this study had aged by the time of her writing in 1997, Kishwar also states, "Even among my students in the Delhi University College where I teach, Sita invariably crops up as their notion of an ideal woman. She is frequently the first choice if you ask someone to name a symbol of an ideal woman" (21). Kishwar's conclusion remains one to be contested, that "[Rama and Sita] are living role models seen as having set standards so superior that they are hard to emulate for those living in our more 'corrupt age'" (Kishwar 22). Kishwar emphasizes that this characterization of living role models acts as one that can also reject Rama's behavior and defend Sita for having a greater dharma

than her own husband. While this interpretation of Sita is more palatable for the modern day, the fault lines emerge when it concludes that Rama—her husband and more importantly, a reincarnation of the god Vishnu—lacked the kind of wisdom necessary to avoid mistakes within his own household, let alone as a ruler. Within the modernist lens this may be reasonable and expected, but this take is certainly not one that is widely accepted considering Rama’s status then and today. This interpretation may categorize Sita’s fire ordeal and suicide as an act of agency—a defiant act of preserving dignity and challenging her husband’s rejection at a great cost. The ultimate reality is that her only choice was suffering, regardless of how we hope to interpret it.

Though Sita’s influence on Hindu culture and Indian society is certainly indisputable, the interpretation of her character remains constantly analyzed. Sita and her various versions fall into two camps: a traditional, patriarchal Sita, and a divine Sita liberated by her own agency. In her article, “Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man’s Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife,” Linda Hess extensively studies these two Sitas and defines their roles. The greatest clue to understand Sita, she argues, is understanding how these interpretations have fluctuated over time. Though the individuals of the third century CE and many after cannot be interviewed as in Kishwar’s research, their reactions are deduced by looking at literature and how its changes coincide with history. Hess says, “The literary record itself gives evidence of reception; changes in plot and emphasis show changes in comfort levels, values, imaginings of the characters” (4). The changes to Sita explored by Hess range from Valmiki’s 2,000-year-old text to Ramanand Sagar’s televised *Ramayana* of 1987, yet one thing remains constant: a change in Sita reflects a change in culture. Hess notes that older texts are exceptionally crueler to Sita than newer adaptations, mainly emphasizing that “key markers of the woman’s character are purity and extreme devotion to her husband” (7). This is the Sita mainly referred to by middle-class men, who are “likely to construe the fire ordeal literally as a model of how the ideal wife should behave” (Hess 15). With this traditional interpretation, Sita’s willingness to entertain Rama’s fire test is based in loyalty and most importantly, submission. This Sita accepts rejection from her husband despite these trials. She has no outrage, no voice. She bears Rama’s children, raising them in her exile. She represents all of womanhood when finally choosing her death. This Sita’s agency is contingent upon her suffering. Her suffering brings forth liberation, just as it does in the lives of Jhumpa Lahiri’s female characters in *Interpreter of Maladies*.

In more recent texts of the *Ramayana*, Sita may confront and even reject Rama, making her character much more digestible to larger, modern publics. However, this newfound martyrdom status can be just as debilitating to contemporary women. Hess describes it as such: “In appreciating the ‘weapons of the weak,’ we should be careful not to valorize institutionalized weakness” (27). Idealization, regardless of intent, is harmful, especially within the lives of diasporic communities. These idealizations pit women from varying backgrounds and experiences against each other, rather than unifying one another against the patriarchy. Shobhita Jain describes this concept of comparison among Asian women in “Women’s Agency in the Context of Family Networks in Indian Diaspora.” Jain explains the value in recognizing the importance of women in both Indian and diasporic spaces, stating: “Just as diasporic settings of Indians living abroad provide a window to understanding processes of social transformation in India, we may say that looking at diasporic Indian women may give us an insight into situations of our own fast changing social fabric in India” (2314). This discourse on authenticity applies directly to Jhumpa Lahiri and her characters, emphasizing that the identities of women are regularly subject to debate by others.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “The Real Durwan” outlines this phenomenon of female characterization. Protagonist Boori Ma exemplifies the domesticity of womanhood in its most traditional form through her role as the housekeeper of her building. However, she is not praised for her work. Interestingly, since this labor is dedicated to others instead of to her husband, it is disregarded and ignored by those she serves. Within this patriarchal lens of society, a woman’s work—though it has been reiterated as necessary for holiness—is deemed considerably less important than that of a man’s. Nandini Sen studies the role of the domestic in Indian culture, stating that “Correlating men with production and women with reproduction in societies is a way of trying to make women’s work hidden. Women are placed in a domestic environment perceived as less hostile than men can come back to from their harsh world of rigorous labour” (100). Without a husband and children to work for, her labor is entirely overshadowed by the successes of male counterparts like her neighbor Mr. Dalal. After a work promotion, Mr. Dalal brings home two water basins, keeping one for his family’s private use and installing the other for the entire apartment complex. When the shared water basin is stolen, neighbors immediately blame Boori Ma and kick her out in search of a real durwan. Though initially

the gift of the water basin promised a life of luxury for the building's residents, it eventually dominates and controls their traditional lives and leads to the imminent destruction of Boori Ma.

Several factors contribute to Boori Ma's storyline including her age, class, and sex. Though Eastern beauty standards reserve some respect for the elderly that Western culture may not, this respect diminishes when intersecting with her status as a poor, single woman. By all accounts, Boori Ma should exemplify Sita's perfection. She is a proud Indian woman, a dutiful servant, and provides for others. She is strong in her beliefs, but she is respectful and subservient. She asks for nothing, and often she receives nothing. Compared to Sita, the only difference is that Boori Ma is no longer married to a husband. This is exactly what defines her worthiness (or unworthiness) in society. She finds solace in her work—a perceived masculine tendency—yet receives no gratuity, the reality of the feminine. Lahiri's critique in "The Real Durwan" is often interpreted as recognizing the dangers of consumerism that come with modern advances such as the water basins, but it is also of society's degradation of women who do not measure up to modernity's expectations of perfection. As seen in more of Lahiri's work, this constant pattern of female rejection not only threatens the woman's place in society, but also alters the perceptions they have of themselves. Of this phenomenon Sen states: "In other words, woman's consciousness—her membership, as it were, in culture—is evidenced in part by the fact that she accepts her own devaluation and takes culture's point of view" (102). Lahiri's characters specifically show that the forced idealizations on the bodies of women—even if this criticism comes from the woman herself—is yet another product of tradition and patriarchy.

Lahiri's short story "Mrs. Sen's" illustrates another factor of womanhood: domesticity as an extension of culture. Mrs. Sen, an immigrant from India residing in New England, continues Indian traditions in her home instead of immediately adopting Western culture. Eliot, a child she babysits, is enamored by these customs despite his mother's disgust with them. Each day while seated on the newspapered floor of Mrs. Sen's living room, he watches her cut vegetables in preparation of a delicious dinner of new spices and flavors. He grows accustomed to this routine and is fascinated by Mrs. Sen, her beloved fish, her tapestries, and her culture. The dichotomy and connection between this unlikely pair show that women are key components in the immigrant experience not only as preparers of food and household, but also as preservers of culture through this avenue of expression.

Though Mrs. Sen's comfort with her identity as an immigrant wavers, her identity as a woman is established through her cooking and cultural sharing. Martina Caspari's essay "Changing the Dominant Discourse and Culture, One Eater at a Time: Subversive Discourse and Productive Intervention in 'Mrs. Sen's' in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*" interprets the bond between Mrs. Sen, Eliot, and cooking as such: "The narrative deconstructs the notion of America representing the dominant culture, oftentimes associated with the masculine or male, and India representing the minority culture, sometimes associated with the female or even effeminate" (248). This female protagonist illustrates all the characteristics of the traditional Sita by dedicating her life as a wife and caregiver. These roles do not necessarily challenge Mrs. Sen, as she finds comfort and purpose in her cooking, cleaning, and caretaking. What challenges Mrs. Sen is the patriarchal condition to follow her husband to a country she has no interest in and to be forced to adapt to a Western world without voice. When considering how Eliot (and others whom immigrant women connect with) relates to this dynamic, Caspari says, "In other words, Eliot becomes a subversive undercurrent to the story of a first-generation immigrant, a woman suppressed by a dominant culture she does not feel part of or understand as well as by her dominant patriarchal husband" (249). In this way, Mrs. Sen transcends the expectations of a traditional Sita. She uses the skills exemplifying this role to develop a relationship with Eliot, which eventually inspires the confidence necessary to defy her husband's wishes. Mrs. Sen's refusal to drive despite Mr. Sen's commands conflicts with the version of Sita that accepts her husband's direction regardless. Though she is aware of her abilities and still goes against what her husband wants and to put her own needs first. One may argue that because she later crashes the vehicle, she was correct in her decision. This accident with Eliot inside the vehicle symbolizes the discomfort Mrs. Sen feels not only with her husband, but also in a society in which she never wants to assimilate.

Unlike "The Real Durwan" and "Mrs. Sen's," Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter" takes readers beyond the setting of traditional Indian culture. The female protagonist, Shoba, is first introduced by her physical appearance, as most women in literature are. She is disheveled, wearing gym clothes and smeared lipstick. Shoba represents a modern working woman as an employed proofreader. She is married to her husband Shukumar whom she met at a Bengali poetry recital. They have different interpretations of their familial roots to India, though Indian

culture influences both their lives in Massachusetts. Shoba, however, has spent more time in India than Shukumar. She cooks Indian food from her cookbook—fish and spices and canned goods and chutneys on Sundays. Shukumar replicates them, but they are never quite right. Their lives—though now intrinsically separate—remain faintly connected through this heritage.

In Lahiri's work, Shoba is one of the few characters that represent ambiguity when compared to the Sita model. When Shoba and Shukumar were first married, Shoba's potential to perform as a Sita-like wife was promising. She cooked, she cleaned, she cared for Shukumar, and she prepared for motherhood. However, the idealization and reproduction of a Sita-like wife does not account for individual responses to grief. After the death of Shoba's and Shukumar's stillborn child, their marriage dies too. Grief cannot be overcome in a relationship fabricated by home-cooked meals and undoubting servitude, and a healthy marriage does not survive this way. By directing attention away from her husband and onto her own understanding of her child's death, Shoba breaks the traditional Sita mold. When she is expected to fix her marriage like a Sita-like wife, she separates herself and discovers meaning on her own terms. This reversal of marital roles is described by Jain: "It has been pointed out in reviews of literary books commenting on diasporic Indian family that while in India, it is the woman who falls apart after a divorce/separation from her husband or completely breaks down after husband's death, in the diaspora, it is generally a man who falls apart at the dissolution of his marriage" (2315). Had Shukumar's reaction to his child's death been like Shoba's—a distancing of emotions, a desire to work more in order to hide grief, an avoidance of these feelings altogether—he would not be viewed as problematic or insensitive like she was. When Shoba rejects the expectations of a traditional subservient Sita, she exhibits not only characteristics of a modern and independent woman, but also the traditional characteristics of a man. Shoba's future remains undetermined by the end of the story; however, when she finally leaves Shukumar, she has broken the seal stamped upon her life as a woman and given purpose beyond the needs of her husband.

Throughout the *Interpreter of Maladies* collection, Mrs. Das in the short story "Interpreter of Maladies" is understood to be the most destructive of the Sita model. Mrs. Das embodies everything a Sita-like wife is not. After being born and raised in America by Indian parents just like her husband, Mrs. Das returns to India many years later with

her family for vacation. She feels no connection to this culture; instead, she appears vain while taking photographs at ancient ruins and painting her nails throughout the sightseeing tour. She seems entirely uninterested in her three children and husband, defying the societal norm of being “solely responsible for cooking and doing household chores, as well as becoming completely domesticated with the arrival of children” (Jain 2314). This subversion both intrigues and perplexes her tour guide Mr. Kapasi, who revels in daydreams of writing her secret letters of his life and her beauty. However, when Mrs. Das reveals to him that her oldest son is not the child of her husband because of an extramarital affair, his unwanted affection toward her immediately turns to disgust. Mr. Kapasi’s one-sided attraction to Mrs. Das disappears when realizing she has committed what he believes to be the most heinous sin: adultery. This belief coincides with Sita’s accused affair, only further emphasizing the cultural expectation of sexual purity. While many readings of the short story only reserve judgement for Mrs. Das, her character is much more complex than just an uncaring mother and adulterous wife. Her character is one that is directly reminiscent of Sita on the opposite side of the spectrum. Mrs. Das illustrates not only an anti-Sita figure, but also the range of female identities Lahiri explores in *Interpreter of Maladies*.

Lahiri is deliberate in her use of Mrs. Das’s character in “Interpreter of Maladies” as well as she is with every character in the rest of the collection. With all of her faults, Mrs. Das is almost perceived as an antagonist to the storyline. Her existence is a stumbling block to Mr. Kapasi, who is characterized as a good, simple man. Her demeanor, carelessness, and confession cleverly distract readers from Mr. Kapasi’s suspicious behavior. We know that Mrs. Das should not be subject to Mr. Kapasi’s unwanted fantasy with the reasoning that she wears short knee-length skirts and lipstick and cheated on her husband. Perhaps though, we fail to initially notice this perversion because of its normalization in society. Through Mrs. Das’s character, readers themselves are put in a position of judgment. We must consciously determine what makes Mrs. Das a good or bad person, and if she is essentially worthy of our respect. This analysis is usually rooted in her ability—or lack thereof—to properly parent her children with whom she is largely detached, annoyed, and irresponsible. However, a more nuanced approach to this discussion with Mrs. Das and female identity would be to understand that the status of mother must be separated from the status of woman and person. This change in roles, of course, does not align with traditional ideology. Good motherhood is synonymous with good

womanhood, and in turn good motherhood is imperative in the Sita model. The connection between womanhood, motherhood, marriage, and identity are inextricable in each of these stories by Lahiri, and understanding these links is crucial to understanding Lahiri's experiences as a writer as a whole.

Much of Lahiri's life is reflective in the characters she writes about. The writer was born in London but moved to the Rhode Island at a young age with her Bengali parents. Because of this background, the authenticity of her "Indianess" continues to be questioned by those doubting her right to write about Indian culture as she does. In a review of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Sunanda Mongia describes this conflict as such: "We have a strange situation where Lahiri is admired for being culturally authentic in the U.S. and not being culturally sincere in India" (207). Mongia continues, "Since we are not able to talk of 'India' without academic communalism, nor say that a work can be authentic or sincere, nor can we dismiss diasporic literature as unrooted, we are therefore not really in a position to pick cultural or ideological quarrels with Lahiri, or for that matter, with any writer" (208). The reality of this discourse is that India is not a monolith and life experienced by anyone—immigrant or not—is not universal. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is rooted in her experiences as a first-generation American, and this ambiguous space between the two cultures is valid enough to incorporate into the written word. Lahiri is careful not to romanticize or exoticize; she considers herself and Indian-American writer and criticizes the expectations set for a Sita-wife in Indian, American, and Indian-American spaces. These criticisms come with certain risks, but the validity in her work is directly evident in the cultures she shares. Like all writers with stories to tell, their work will incorporate their world in one way or another. Mongia affirms, "One cannot, in fact, get rid of culture even if one wants to and the risk is not that Lahiri will ever stop being 'Indian': You could take her out of the culture, but never the culture out of her, however it may get mutated" (208). Identity is the all-encompassing factor of existence, and expressing this through the lives of the characters Lahiri creates is essential to uplift the challenges she and other individuals occupying this enigmatic space face.

Despite arguments of authenticity, Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* seems to act as precedence for South Asian-American writing now, more than twenty years after its publication. According to Ja-been Akhtar, author of the contested article "Why Am I Brown?: South Asian Fiction and Pandering to Western Audiences," *Interpret-*

er of Maladies represents one of the last authentic works of this genre before the advent of inauthentic writers in the early 2000s. However, Namrata Poddar drags this broad assertion about writers who follow Lahiri to India and back in her response to Akhtar's review, "'Whiny Assholes' or Creative Hustlers?: On Brownness, Diaspora Fiction, and Western Publication." She asserts: "To dismiss dislocation-talk as a stale trope does a huge disservice to the writers exposing marginalized histories of global travel and to the people who actually negotiate the difficult experience, and calls into question Akhtar's critical ability to appraise the creative contribution of her peers" (97). This argument is not one that encourages a storytelling free-for-all; rather, this approach provides agency to authors whose proven experiences correlate, challenge, and empower the individual lived encounters with culture and identity beyond the individual author. This encouragement helps to alleviate the challenges Akhtar and other critics describe, especially when considering the lack of South Asian representation in literature. In fact, Poddar's research concludes that "out of 2,121 literary texts published in the United States in translation in the last five years, only nineteen were from South Asian languages" (103). Choosing to gatekeep a region composed of "more than 2,000 ethnic communities and countless languages, including regional variations in each," is ultimately harmful in an overwhelmingly Westernized world (94). Disapproval and judgment within the spaces Lahiri aims to connect would be familiar to her, however. Similar to the characters theorized in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri defending her identity as an Asian-American intersects with the perpetual defending of identity that comes with womanhood.

If the range of Lahiri's characters has taught us anything, it is that no lifestyle choices will overcome the suffering women inevitably withstand. Lahiri understands the culture of never being enough as a woman, and she conceptualizes it in the lives of Boori Ma, Mrs. Sen, Shoba, Mrs. Das, and many other female characters throughout her work. This perceived inadequacy attacks her from both sides as an intersectional woman, but Lahiri has essentially defied all expectations by completely eradicating them. Instead of becoming debilitated by critique or even praise, Lahiri now rewrites her story by actively learning and writing in an entirely new language—Italian. In a 2016 NPR radio episode of *All Things Considered* with Ari Shapiro, Lahiri talked specifically about this transition:

By writing in Italian, I think I'm escaping both my failures with regard to English and my success. Italian offers me a very different literary path. As a writer, I can demolish myself. I can reconstruct myself. I can join words together and work on sentences without ever being considered an expert. I'm bound to fail when I write in Italian. But unlike my sense of failure in the past, this doesn't torment or grieve me. (Shapiro)

The interpretation of failure as freedom is incredibly progressive, especially if the expectations we have discussed are set not only by others, but also by oneself. These idealizations trickle down through every aspect of society, through everything in individual life, until we realize that nothing is truly attainable after all.

In contrast with Lahiri's personal choice to write in Italian and what *Interpreter of Maladies*' title suggests, none of the characters described experience major language barriers. However, Lahiri's short stories point to another, separate language of cultural competency that goes beyond spoken language. Existence within borders—whether as a woman or immigrant, first-generation or otherwise—develops an understanding of both sides, assimilating when necessary, and lacking the feeling of true belonging in both. Freedom from these boundaries is exactly what Lahiri—and arguably the women in her text—crave. The role of these women within this cultural space is complicated, convoluted, and critiqued; but it is necessary. Women are pillars of these conventions and traditions, and their patriarchal and intercultural suffering within these confines has laid foundations for generations. Martini Caspari says this of the personally sacrificial phenomenon:

Despite the power relationships that often define cultures, living on the fringes of culture always means hybridity, modification, vulnerability on both sides—whether dominant or not, whether intended or not—as long as there is a lively exchange between them. This mutual modification process emphasizes how important and influential new minority members are to a society, even though those members may not yet feel part of that society. (248)

Immigrant women are essential for communities because life with others relies on the cultural bridges they offer. Traditionally, the bridges are built with Sita-like characteristics—caretaking with personal sacrifice. How-

ever, the postmodern woman of today can be dynamic and multi-faceted because there is more than the Sita-wife to aspire to. We must recognize that because of the sharing and bolstering of South Asian and South Asian-diasporic experiences—like those Lahiri writes about—a more cohesive and socially-conscious world can be strived toward.

Though Sita remains a strong influence in Indian society, her postcolonial interpretations and representation in works like Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* have brought forth a new definition of what makes an "ideal" woman. Lahiri's rejection of a traditional Sita is essential in understanding the short stories of *Interpreter of Maladies*, as every character in these works shows that there are multiple interpretations of the ideal. The lives of Boori Ma, Mrs. Sen, Shoba, and Mrs. Das maintain different areas of this spectrum, proving that Lahiri intends to break all expectations set for these women as Indians and Indian-Americans. This revelation comes from none other than Lahiri's own life. Her stories, specifically those told in *Interpreter of Maladies*, represent the lives of ordinary yet significant women whose interpretations will always be discussed.

Every reader wants to find their place in the stories they read, and though no individual story will be entirely synonymous with another, having the ability to explore these worlds is exactly the representation needed for inspiration and change. The ideal woman, the ideal societal member, and the ideal story will never be attainable, and that is okay. Jhumpa Lahiri recognizes and emphasizes this truth in her stories, and it is imperative that each reader interpreting these maladies will do the same.

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A Distorted Family Tree: The Toxicity of King MacLain's Legacy in *The Golden Apples*

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Eudora Welty's collection titled *The Golden Apples* is a richly layered depiction of southern society and humanity. Though each short story is centered around a different character, King MacLain and his legacy are central threads that influence the course of all seven stories in the collection. King is a prominent figure in the tight-knit community of Morgana, Mississippi, notorious for his racism, infidelities, and desertion of his wife and twin boys. The community is acutely aware of the kind of man King is, and they condone his behavior through their complacency. The community even assumes that King fathers many of the town's orphans: "In the meantime children of his growing up in the County Orphans,' so say several, and children known and unknown, scattered-like" (264). The people of Morgana witness King's recurrent abandonment and traumatization, yet, they fail to hold him accountable for his crimes. Instead, the community enables King to be their model of white racial purity and social legitimacy.

The final three stories show the direct impact of King's legacy of toxic southern masculinity through the adulthoods of three of his children. "The Whole World Knows" and "Music From Spain" focus on the grown twins of King, Ran and Eugene, who are his legitimate heirs. The final story, "The Wanderers," is told from the perspective of an adult Virgie Rainey, who is indicated to be one of the illegitimate children of King. These three children of King MacLain are marked by his mythology in ways both varied and similar, with each embodying

a different facet of the King legacy. Ran represents the toxicity of the legacy, as he destroys others; Eugene illustrates the detriment of the legacy, as it destroys himself; and Virgie shows the potential to retool and challenge the legacy. Together, they show the inescapable nature of the problematic, patriarchal legacy that permeates Morgana through King's mythos. Where Ran and Eugene struggle to accept that King is their father due to the severe abandonment issues that define the course of both their stories, Virgie accepts King as her father, gaining a powerful sense of self that leads to ultimate autonomy. By depicting the different outcomes of Ran, Eugene, and Virgie's lives, Welty shows that, in order to stand a chance in combating the legacy of King, his children must first fully accept him as father.

Randall "Ran" MacLain is shown experiencing immense internal conflict in "The Whole World Knows," due to his wife, Jinny Love, having a sensationalized affair and the implications of what this controversy means to his role as the son of King. Welty blends reality with fantasy to underscore Ran's fragile mental state as he struggles to come to terms with his identity. Scholar Allison Scheidegger asserts that Ran's unstable psychological state, where he shifts erratically from the present reality to an internal delusion, reveals "his ongoing failure to find a narrative sufficient to explain his experience" (230). He vividly imagines two different revenge fantasies. In the first, he describes how he brutally murders his wife's lover, Woody, with a croquet mallet: "I went over his whole length . . . beat on him without stopping till every bone, all the way down to the numerous little bones in the foot, was cracked in two" (382). In this fantasy, the killing is specifically executed by splitting every bone in two, fracturing every part of the man in half. This emphasis on splitting "in two" reflects how Ran himself feels divided, being caught in the middle of adhering to or rejecting his father's legacy at this integral point in his life. Ran also describes the sweat on his back as "branching, like an upside down tree" (382). This imagery is reminiscent of a family tree, but of one that is inverted — a distorted image of family that is permeating from the very skin of Ran MacLain, the next King.

Ran's fantasy of murdering Woody is much more intimate than his about Jinny, as his weapon choice requires a proximity that the pistol he wields in his fantasy about Jinny does not. It shares an equal level of brutality, however, as he distinctly pictures mutilating Jinny's breasts specifically: "I was watching Jinny and I saw her pouting childish breasts, excuses for breasts, sprung full of bright holes where my

bullets had gone” (385). Rather than breaking Jinny’s whole body as he does with Woody, Ran targets the part of her body that is markedly feminine: her breasts. Further, he is targeting the area of her body that contains her heart, reflecting how he feels his heart is also riddled with holes in the way Jinny’s is after he repeatedly shoots her. The notion that Ran has gaping spaces in his heart is reinforced by Peter Schmidt’s analysis of the trauma King inflicts on his sons: “. . . Underneath Ran’s idealization of [his] father is a volatile mixture of repressed emotions towards him — guilt for not measuring up to his standards of masculinity and deep anger toward him for abandoning [his family] and making [his] relations with women so troubled” (66). Certainly, this analysis does not excuse Ran, but it does provide a greater insight to the turmoil that leads him to becoming a victim of his father’s legacy.

A striking similarity between both of these fantasies of violence is that, despite the physical brutality wrought upon their bodies, neither Woody or Jinny are killed, nor do they experience any pain. Even in Ran’s darkest fantasy, he cannot annihilate the two subjects of his anguish. Having a chronically absent father in Ran’s formative years robbed him of seeing any form of masculine power modeled — harmful or not. Ran’s power, then, is merely a façade that masks his true weakness. Carey Wall interprets Ran’s inability to kill as being the result of his already-written role as the next King: “Clearly, killing Jinny will not preserve his marriage to her, and that is the other task Ran has been assigned. So when in his mind he ‘kills’ them, they do not die; they are not even hurt” (30). If Ran left Jinny, he would set a precedent that women are allowed to be sexually liberated beyond the confines of marriage. This reasoning is why Perdita Mayo, who functions as the mouthpiece of Morgana to Ran, appeals to him to stay with his wife by reminding him that his own mother did the same for King: “You forgive her, now you hear? That’s no way to do, bear grudges. Your mother never bore your father a single grudge in her life, and he made her life right hard” (Welty 376). The community standard depends on Ran’s return to the wife he sees as having betrayed him. He must stay with Jinny to model the proper domestication of the female body and, by extension, modeling the proper installation of a patriarchal system.

The final scene in this story divulges the extent of Ran’s struggle against his predetermined role as the next King. Ran steals away an innocent young woman named Maideen, taking her far from Morgana to a hotel room where he first points his pistol at her before turning it on himself and pulling the trigger. The gun fails to fire though, a symbol of

Ran's own impotence, exposing the falsehood of his perceived masculine power. With his effort to take his own life thwarted by the impotent gun, one presumably designed to escape his fate as the heir to the legacy of King, Ran turns this violence outwards. Ran then rapes Maideen to claim his status as the new King. In the aftermath of his violation, he asks the imagined version of his father — someone who can be present to his son only in his mind — a series of questions which reveals the true fate of inheriting such a noxious legacy: "How was I to know she would go and hurt herself? She cheated, she cheated too. Father, Eugene! What you went and found, was it better than this? And where's Jinny?" (Welty 392). These few lines express that Ran has not actually accepted his role as the son of King; he is only acting out a front of acceptance. By asking, "how was I supposed to know she would go and hurt herself," Ran is displacing any blame from himself for ruining the life of an innocent girl, who later takes her own life because of this one exploitive act by Ran. A subtle detail that adds an even darker layer to this already tragic story is that Maideen is likely related to Ran; her mother Mattie was one of the rape victims of King in the earlier story "Sir Rabbit." As Peter Schmidt points out, though, the core of the ending is about Ran's defeat by King: "Ran's rape of Maideen Sumrall may or may not be incest, but Oedipal guilt and anger, it certainly is, forever caught in a losing struggle with his father" (77). Whether or not Ran is aware of who Maideen is as his potential sister is left unknown; if he did know, then Welty is texturing her criticism of Southern patriarchy by incorporating an incestuous narrative. Crying out to both his father and brother that if what they found "is better than this," shows how hollow becoming King actually is for Ran. This is why he then asks where Jinny is as he comes to realize that Maideen is, indeed, not Jinny, and he needs to return to his wife to affirm his new role as King. He cannot escape the legacy of King; therefore, he must adhere to all that his new communal role entails.

Ran suffers in "The Whole World Knows" because he is battling against who he is as Snowdie's child and who the community of Morgana predetermines him to be as the son of King. Scholars, such as Scheidegger, have pointed out that the nature of Ran's conflict over inheriting the legacy of King shows that he has potential to be a morally good character: "Left unrestricted by the patriarchal response to infidelity prescribed by his community, Ran's natural sensitivity and faithfulness might have resulted in a less violent and more unified narrative" (231). Ran's fantasies of violence are the reactions he experi-

ences because of the violence that is dictated by being the son of King and, at the same time, his own failure to actually inflict pain in these fantasies reflects how restricted he is within this society. Ran is allowed no other option than to become the next King because, as Welty directly informs the reader in “The Wanderers,” the community loves the scandal of Ran enough to elect him as their Mayor, effectively cementing him as the figurehead of Morgana: “They had voted for him for that — for his glamour and his story, for being a MacLain and the bad twin, for marrying a Stark and then for ruining a girl and the thing she did” (Welty 433). Sally Wolff explains that “the story of his life, which the townsfolk tell and retell, becomes a part of the ‘public domain,’” and this solidifies Ran in the mythos of Morgana as the new King. Yet, Ran’s attempt to take his own life exposes that he is a reluctant King, resigned to the role as a result of his inability to escape it. Ultimately, by codifying Ran as the next King, the community effectively kills the humanity in Ran, condemning him to an empty life as the King.

The other son of Snowdie and King, Eugene, possesses the potential to rewrite the legacy of the MacLain family as evidenced by the self-discovery he embarks on in “Music From Spain.” The catalyst for Eugene’s trek through San Francisco is him slapping his wife, Emma, one morning for reasons unknown to him. Eugene’s sudden and uncharacteristic moment of violence towards his wife and his fleeing immediately after can be understood as “an imitation of his father” (Schmidt 63). Yet, Eugene cannot fathom this, as he spends the majority of this story wrestling with himself in an effort to understand why he hit his wife. While he is wandering through the city he now calls home, Eugene encounters a man he saw play guitar the previous night whom he only knows as “The Spaniard,” since he cannot recall his name and the man does not speak any English. After saving the Spaniard from nearly being hit by a car, the two spend the day together on a journey through the city, though they cannot communicate with words. The two do not need verbal language, though, as Eugene feels a natural connection to the Spaniard, having heard his music. When Eugene heard the Spaniard play his guitar at the recital, he experienced a transcendence from his heteronormative marriage: “A most unexpected music was being struck off the guitar. He felt a lapse of all knowledge of Emma as his wife . . . and it affected him like a secret” (Welty 403). As the story unfolds and the two men find themselves at “Land’s End,” it becomes apparent that Eugene is a homosexual man — a truth that not even Eugene knows until encountering the Spaniard.

In exploring his sexuality with the Spaniard¹, Eugene has the potential to overcome the kind of conventional patriarchy that the legacy of King dictates. Right before giving himself over to his desire for the other man, the Spaniard presents Eugene with an offer conveyed through a flower: “*Mariposa?* He repeated the word encouragingly, even sweetly, making the sound of it beautiful” (421). The mariposa that the Spaniard holds out to Eugene represents the potential to change by embracing homosexuality. This offer for a chance at authenticity for Eugene is presented in the form of a beautiful flower, highlighting the attractiveness of a life lived honestly. Eugene responds to the proposition by stating to himself, “You assaulted your wife” (421). He is both trying to anchor himself to the version of who he believes he is supposed to be while also gaining clarity that he potentially hit his wife as a way to break out of the confines of his heterosexual marriage. After this, Eugene grabs onto the Spaniard at the cliff’s edge they have hiked to and contemplates both the mariposa and their mortality: “Under his watchful eyes the flower went out of the other’s loosening, softening hand: it lay on the wind, and sank. One more move and the man would go too, drop out of sight” (421). It is the visual image of the mariposa drifting away — the loss of the potential for change — that inspires Eugene to take the risk and consummate his connection with the Spaniard. Eugene experiences a closeness to the Spaniard that he has never felt before, describing the man as “a lasting refuge” that he has been “longing” for most of his life (421). Matt Huculak points out that this moment of homosexual intimacy is one of only two depictions of consensual sex in this entire collection²: “This is one rare moment of sexual tenderness in *The Golden Apples*. Most other sexual moments, ranging from those involving Miss Eckhart or Maideen, tend to be rapes or illicit encounters” (324). Huculak’s observation that a homosexual relationship is one of only two consensual sexual encounters in *The Golden Apples* points towards another layer of Welty’s critique of southern culture: the assumption of heterosexuality and the enforced heteronormative expectation. Eugene is able to transcend, if only for a moment, the violation of intimacy that King’s legacy demands by engaging in an alternative, consensual option for relationship, offering a rare depiction of sincere intimacy that happens to occur between two men.

Despite Eugene sharing a moment of authentic tenderness with the Spaniard, he fails to enact any impactful, lasting change and, ultimately, falls victim to the legacy of King. After what Rebecca Mark

describes as Eugene's "real homecoming," which is the "discovery of his own body, [and] his own sexuality," (225) the two men return to the reality of the city, stopping at a diner where Eugene reverses any of the progression he underwent at Land's End. Instead of returning to the city as his genuine self, Eugene leaves the Spaniard behind in two ways. The first way is when he does not help him get the sugar for his coffee, knowing he has no hope to communicate this desire to the waitress: "Eugene, remembering the three lumps the Spaniard used, glanced at him . . . [The Spaniard] gave him another imploring look. But Eugene only sat there" (425). He then flees the diner without paying for their coffee, and the Spaniard is described as being "left waiting, for what one never would know, alone in the night on a dark corner at the edge of the city" (425). The Spaniard, having been the one to propose "mariposa" earlier, is likely waiting for Eugene to accept the change that he knows he yearns for deep down. Eugene, however, returns to a hyper-feminine domain when he goes home to his wife, who is in the kitchen gossiping about the Spaniard with her friend. Critics point out that the end of this story may carry with it the implication that Emma has also had an affair with the Spaniard: "Welty is careful to conflate the color of the Spaniard's lips, which are grape-colored, with the grapes Emma enjoys at the end of 'Music from Spain'" (Huculak 325). If this were to be true, then the partner who has awakened Eugene in his sexual identity has shared an equally intimate moment with his wife. Eugene's experience with the man he deemed as "his Spaniard" becomes deauthorized following this interpretation, thus silencing his narrative as a homosexual man (Welty 423).

Eugene fails to embrace a personal metamorphosis by returning to his wife at the end of "Music From Spain," but it is his return to Morgana in "The Wanderers" that signals his ultimate defeat. Virgie narrates the fate of Eugene, who is already dead at the time of the final story in *The Golden Apples*: "His wife did not even come to the funeral, although a telegram had been sent . . . His light, tubercular body seemed to hesitate on the street of Morgana, hold averted, anticipating questions . . . but he bothered no one" (458). There is a critical divide concerning what Eugene's dying in Morgana means. Huculak stands on the side that sees Eugene's return as a victorious moment: "However, this return will not be a tragedy, for he will experience his true self in San Francisco and bear that knowledge back to Morgana" (Huculak 321). There is no evidence, however, that Eugene "bears the knowledge" of his sexuality upon returning to his birthplace. Further, the ending of

“Music From Spain” shows that Eugene has already failed to embrace his true self; he cannot possibly be authentic in a town as repressive as Morgana if he cannot even be authentic in a much more progressive city. Rebecca Mark represents the other side of this argument: “The Spaniard has tried to show Eugene the symbol of the mariposa, of the butterfly, of gay resurrection, but Eugene has not understood . . . Eugene is not so much defeated by women’s self-sufficiency as by heterosexual conventionality” (227). To further Mark’s argument, Eugene cannot accept his identity as a gay man because he cannot even accept his identity as the son of King MacLain. Virgie reveals that Eugene never reconciled with his estranged father upon his return to Morgana, and Eugene himself thinks of King during his own story only as an “old goat, a black name *he* had” (Welty 407). Eugene outright denies his place in the MacLain legacy; he can never actively reject it because, in order to do so, he must first accept this part of himself in order to move beyond it. His refusal to so much as look at the King that is undeniably within him is what conquers Eugene MacLain, as this denial inhibits his ability to claim any sense of an authentic identity that would provide him with that liberation.

The collection culminates in “The Wanderers,” which centers on a grown Virgie Rainey, who is almost certainly the illegitimate child of King MacLain and Katie Rainey. Evidence for Virgie’s true parentage subtly emerges in the first story in the collection when Katie makes the comment that King “tarried long enough to get him a child somewhere” but that she “wouldn’t say [that] to her husband” (Welty 274). Katie’s resistance to telling her husband, followed by her instruction to the audience to “forget it,” (274) serves as her initial confession that King fathers her newborn. When Katie Rainey is on her death bed in “The Wanderers,” her final thoughts confirm the illegitimacy of her daughter’s birth: “She was thinking. Mistake. Never Virgie at all. It was me, the bride with more than they guessed” (431). Her mistake was staying in Morgana and adhering to the role of wife to Fate Rainey in an effort to conceal her pregnancy. King then indicates that he carried on an intimate relationship with Katie, explaining to Virgie that her mother “was a sight” and that he is the man who “set her on a throne” by gifting her the chair she would always sit on during her life (444). Rebecca Mark reads Virgie as “the symbol of Katie’s rebellion,” stating: “If Virgie is King MacLain’s daughter — and it seems likely that she is, even if only metaphorically — then Katie Rainey protested her marriage and social convention when she gave birth to

Virgie” (Mark 241). Following the thread of Mark’s read, the power and autonomy that Virgie possesses from the moment of her introduction³ in “June Recital,” then later into her life in “The Wanderers,” is inherent to her very conception being the result of a rebellion.

Before Virgie herself learns the truth of her paternity, which further bolsters her sense of self, she already owns who she is as a transgressor of traditional southern womanhood by remaining unmarried and sexually liberated and, thus, undomesticated. Welty depicts a realistic rural southern system by showing that the women are expected to desire men like King and pursue domesticity as their greatest ambition in life⁴. Morgana women may gossip heavily, but they are expected to become obedient wives and dutiful mothers, even if their husbands abandon them, as King did to Snowdie. The contrasting freedom Virgie exercises is perplexing to the women of Morgana, prompting queries such as, “What does Virgie care about housekeeping and china plates without no husband, hm?” (Welty 436). Even as a teenager in “June Recital,” Virgie unashamedly owns her sexuality and her femininity, giving us the only other portrayal of consensual sex, beside Eugene’s, in *The Golden Apples*. Virgie’s authenticity in her self-hood is what protects her from falling victim to the society King’s legacy perpetuates: “In spite of the fact that, in Southern society, she is technically a spinster, not fulfilling women’s ‘natural role,’ Virgie is more at ease with her femininity than those who are trapped in the mold of the Southern lady” (Bulgozdi 168). After losing her mother, who serves as one of the anchor points for her identity, Virgie takes a restorative, nude swim in a river of “reflectionless water” that enables Virgie to start anew in her life (439). As she floats, Welty describes Virgie as being aware only of the “vanishing opacity of her will,” signaling that Virgie is preparing to lay herself bare moving forward (439). Rebecca Mark posits that this swim in yonic water is a way for Virgie to re-embrace the femininity that the matriarchs who invade her home (under the guise of southern hospitality in the wake of Katie’s death) attempt to stifle: “As Virgie swims in the water, she finds her sexuality in the love of her own moving body” (Mark 248). Mark also notes the transformative potential that Virgie accesses while experiencing oneness with the water: “Virgie could turn into something else, know the fiercest secrets; in this state anything is possible” (249). This transformative swim is what braces Virgie for gaining the knowledge that she is a child of King.

The power that Virgie is able to tap into once she figures out the truth of her place in the MacLain legacy is what enables her to potentially retool the long-standing legacy of King. Presumably, Virgie grasps an inkling of her biological father's identity following her conversation with King about her mother. The moment of clarity comes as she watches King from across Katie's home, and he "chooses" her while sucking the marrow from a bone: "Then he cracked the little bone in his teeth. She felt refreshed all of a sudden at the tiny but sharp sound" (446). She then feels an alliance to the MacLain men, though she cannot identify if it is to Ran or King himself that she feels this connection towards. Either way, Virgie undoubtedly sees that she rightfully holds a place in the distorted MacLain family tree. Some critics, such as Joel Peckham, assert that it is Virgie, not Ran nor Eugene, who is the true heir to the MacLain legacy: "Of all the characters in *The Golden Apples* Virgie Rainey seems to be the most obvious heir, masculine or feminine, to King MacLain. Like King, she is a sexual transgressor, like King she has at least once wandered out beyond the borders of the community, and like King she both rejects the communal codes of behavior and serves as a figure of fantasy for community members" (214). The core of Peckham's argument is sound, though King is only one facet of the perpetuation of the "communal codes," as he merely represents a larger southern patriarchy.

Virgie's demigod-like positioning as both the illegitimate child of King and the rebellion of Katie is what grants her unique power that gives her the courage to reject the detrimental tradition of the MacLain legacy. The pivotal moment when Virgie is presented with the rare bloom of the "night blooming cereus" (454) by a stranger, showcases the strength she can hone as the knowing child of King. The flower blooms only during the night and only on occasion, making this bloom a fleeting image of beauty. Though she does not explicitly state why, Welty illustrates that the flower deeply disturbs Virgie: "Virgie was still trembling. The flower troubled her; she threw it down into the weeds" (454). She fears what the flower represents about her identity as a woman in Morgana in that her femininity is a temporary power that can only grow in the cover of darkness; by throwing the flower down she is wholly rejecting this narrative of her womanhood. Jeffrey Folks determines the flower to be a representation of Virgie's place in Morgana as she is "isolated within the community," but rejecting the flower "speak[s] to her strength and triumph in living self-consciously and bravely" (22). Rebecca Mark's reading of what the flower symbolizes

builds out Folk's point: "She does not have to choose the fading cereus because the feminine world encompasses a much greater sphere now . . . Virgie can release everything and leave" (256). The broadening of Virgie's feminine sphere can be attributed to her cleansing swim in the river and, most profoundly, her new-found knowledge of her lineage.

Under the domination of King and Ran, the MacLain legacy has garnered numerous victims. Snowdie herself is a victim of her husband's violence; not just because he abandons her for most of their marriage, but her pregnancy with the twins can be interpreted as the result of rape. After being absent for a stretch of time, King returns, ordering his wife to "meet [him] in woods" where he notoriously violates other women (264). The other woman that he rapes in the woods in "Sir Rabbit," Mattie, is another of King's victims, and the girl who can be inferred as her daughter, Maideen, is then raped by Ran. Even the young orphan girl named Easter in "Moon Lake" can be understood as physically violated under the pretense of having her life saved by Loch Morrison. In this moment of CPR that reads more as a symbolic rape, Ran himself is spectating, ensuring that Loch is executing masculinity in the way that King's legacy dictates. Ran's wife, Jinny Love, becomes a victim of the toxicity of the patriarchal institution of marriage: "She was grimacing out of the iron mask of the married lady" (445). Though Jinny is not physically violated as the other women and girls are, she is stripped of her autonomy and identity, which can be argued as a more invasive form of abuse. The other victims of King's legacy are his twin boys. Both Ran and Eugene are robbed of their sense of self and with the looming shadow of King being ever-present in their lives, they fail to overcome the toxicity of the legacy. Welty shows through Virgie that, in order to effectively defy the legacy, the twins needed to first accept their place in it. Though the MacLain legacy has claimed many victims, Virgie alone has the ability to eradicate this harmful cycle that Morgana's citizens stubbornly reinforce.

The real power that Virgie comes to possess is an unwavering knowledge of who she is, which would enable her to rewrite the future legacy of King. Virgie, if she chooses to do so, has the possibility to retool what it means to be the King. Welty leaves the fate of the legacy in Virgie's hands, though what she does with it is left ambiguous as she listens to "the trumpet of the swan," which has been the constant symbol of King MacLain throughout *The Golden Apples* (461). As with many other facets of this collection, critics debate whether Virgie's ending is a triumph over the legacy or a defeat by King. There is a

consensus among scholars, though, that Virgie has undergone a drastic transformation which grants her the power to potentially retool the legacy of King. Mark says that only in this new space beyond Morgana, without “restriction and separation,” can “creation occur” (Mark 260), and Folks sees Virgie as a “character who can be described in terms of creative self-transformation” (Folks 31). Both critics see Virgie as the artist who can create a new society by taking the mantle as the new version of King. In so doing, Virgie would save future men and women of Morgana from the dire fate so many have suffered under this patriarchal power. Though it is unknown whether Virgie chooses to wield this power, Welty makes it clear that Virgie possesses the potential by knowing who she is, and that is a start in uprooting the MacLain legacy from the community of Morgana.

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NOTES

1 When Eugene and the Spaniard are finally physically intimate, it is at a rocky cliff near a beach outside of the city that Welty dubs “Land’s End,” signifying that their relationship can exist only on the outskirts of their community.

2 The other depiction of consensual sex that Matt Huculak is referring to occurs in the second story in the collection titled “June Recital.” The relationship is between a teenage Virgie Rainey and the man only ever referred to as “her sailor” (283).

3 In “June Recital” Welty makes it immediately apparent that Virgie is a transgressor of southern roles of womanhood. Even as a teenager, she is liberated in her sexuality, and her art as pianist is unconventional, establishing her as a controversial figure in Morgana.

4 In her book *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*, Anne Goodwyn Jones contextualizes the historical southern womanhood that Welty based the women of Morgana on: “. . . it emphasizes fragility and helplessness to the point that protecting the southern lady seems to the southern gentleman both essential and appealing . . . the image of the southern woman meshes profoundly held assumptions about sex with strongly felt class aspirations, beliefs about race, and patriotism for one’s homeland” (5).

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Christopher: The Editors and the Critics

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Perhaps more so than any individual in recent history, Christopher Tolkien was poised from boyhood to become an academic editor and textual scholar. As his father's "chief critic and collaborator" from a young age (*Letters* 136), it came as no surprise that he followed in his father's professional footsteps. He studied English at Trinity College, Oxford, and went on to become a lecturer and tutor in English Language at the New College there for eleven years (Honegger, pgf. 5). Before teaching, he published a critical edition of Icelandic literature in 1960, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise: Translated from the Icelandic with Introduction, Notes and Appendices by Christopher Tolkien*. This scholarly work was merely preparation for what was to come. Upon his father's death, Christopher was named the literary executor of J.R.R. Tolkien's large body of work, published and unpublished. The task before him was Herculean. Not only did he have around seventy years of ephemera, drafts, and letters to sort through, but his was the responsibility to guide the ongoing spirit of his father's work. The first of his father's works in progress to see print was *The Silmarillion*, published in 1977, a work sixty years in the making. According to the foreword of the first edition, the earliest versions of the myths in the text extend back to 1917. *The Silmarillion* "is an account of the Elder Days, or the First Age of the World," serving as the fundamental tradition upon which *The Lord of the Rings* is built (*The Silmarillion*, vii). In the preface to the second edition of *The Silmarillion*, Christopher writes that it had long been Tolkien's intention to publish *The Silmarillion* alongside *The Lord of the Rings*, and he very likely favored it more highly than the popular trilogy (*The Silmarillion*, xi).

Christopher undertook the editing of the bulky source material that formed the fundamental pillars of his father's legendarium, to expand Middle-Earth in the popular imagination in a manner accordant with his father's intentions. While those intentions have been hinted at or explicitly stated in bits of his letters, any discussion of authorial intent is rather shaky, since Christopher, the one closest to knowing that intent, has passed away. With both author and editor gone and work ultimately unfinished, all evaluation of *The Silmarillion* from a critical standpoint must concede that it is an imperfect document. Much Tolkienian scholarship has used *The Silmarillion* to investigate style, narrative structure, and mythology conversant with *The Lord of the Rings*, and there is little in the way of scholarly discussion of the text itself, much less criticism of its creation or form. This paper will humbly attempt to speak to that void in the academic discourse. Christopher Tolkien's editorial work resulting in *The Silmarillion* represents a conservative effort that laudably preserved the spirit of his father's work, but which ultimately did not go far enough to become a creative continuation of the senior Tolkien's legendarium. In order to investigate this claim, I will compare and contrast the elder and younger Tolkiens' editorial styles and goals. Furthermore, I will explore Christopher's process in compiling *The Silmarillion*, and propose an example of how the text could have been treated in a different manner using a comparison to Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur*. Before leaving this staging ground for the main discussion, I present two notes of interest. First, I will refer to the elder and younger Tolkiens as "Tolkien" and "Christopher" respectively, in order to avoid confusion and follow the lead set by other Tolkien scholars. Second, I aim to cast no aspersions upon the critical and editorial work of Christopher Tolkien by entering into this argumentative investigation; his work is more than we Middle-Earth fans deserve, but that fact notwithstanding, it is worth critical discussion. With these considerations noted, we shall begin with a brief discussion of J.R.R. Tolkien's scholarly work.

The stellar example of scholarship set by Tolkien cannot be overstated. He worked on the *Oxford English Dictionary* beginning in 1918, and while a Reader in English Language at the University of Leeds, he lectured on Old English verse, philology, Gothic, Old Icelandic, and Medieval Welsh, among other subjects. At the age of thirty-three, he was given the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College, Oxford. Apart from his creative work, Tolkien is best known as a scholar for producing a critical edition of *Sir Gawain*

and the *Green Knight* (edited with E.V. Gordon) and for his lecture and article, “*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,” referred to by some as the most important article to be written on the poem (Drout 134). Tolkien’s primary perspective on his scholarly work was a philological one. His work on individual words and then dialects of Old and Middle English set the foundation for his later textual scholarship and critical editions (Drout 116). It is well known that this emphasis on philology was what prompted his creation of the several languages used in his legendarium. Less obvious in his scholarship was an emphasis on clarity and “the creation of a good text,” that is, one that was readable, evident especially in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited with E.V. Gordon in 1925 (Drout 124–25). Underneath the readable text is of course a massive body of scholarship, glossaries, notes, and commentaries, and so the interpretation does not suffer for having a spare text. Further emphasizing clarity, a major point of Tolkien’s argument in his seminal *Beowulf* essay is breaking with the weight of the history surrounding the poem to get at the literary piece in and of itself (Drout 135). Tolkien chided the over-handling of the piece, saying that “the air has been clouded . . . by the dust of the quarrying researchers” (*Beowulf* pgf 4). From these examples we can deduce an inclination in Tolkien towards clarity and editorial spareness, founded on great care for the detail of philology and lucid artfulness. Now to investigate his son.

After his father’s death in 1973, Christopher was named literary executor in Tolkien’s will. This role entailed the organization and collation of over a half-century’s worth of unpublished writings which ran the gamut from nearly publishable texts to odd scraps of notes. Christopher was always aware of the magnitude of the job before him, and his own comments about his editorial work often appear in the front matter of the published texts. In particular, in the foreword to the 1977 *Silmarillion*, Christopher refers to his work as a “difficult and doubtful task” (*The Silmarillion* x). When it came down to compiling *The Silmarillion*, Christopher Tolkien wrote that “it became clear to [him] that to attempt to present, within the covers of a single book, the diversity of the materials . . . would in fact lead only to confusion and the submerging of what is essential” (viii). He focused instead on “[working] out a single text, selecting and arranging in such a way as seemed to me to produce the most coherent and internally self-consistent narrative” (vii). The fact that there was so much material to work from was ultimately a handicap to Christopher, and the quality of the text that was produced has been hotly debated by scholars. At first, Christopher says

that he treated the text as a “complete and cohesive entity” instead of “a complex of divergent texts interlinked by commentary” (Wise 101). After publishing *The Silmarillion*, he abandoned this viewpoint and stated his regret at “[attaching] no importance” to his father’s desires about textual presentation, which would have almost certainly favored the aforementioned “divergent texts” format (Wise 101). Following the lead of Christopher himself, many scholars discount *The Silmarillion* in favor of the *History of Middle-Earth*, which follows a more constructive format, linking the various fragments into a history of the texts in question with commentary. Dennis Wilson Wise, in his article entitled “Book of the Lost Narrator: Rereading the 1977 *Silmarillion* as a Unified Text,” argues against Christopher’s later assertion, standing firm on the point that the text is indeed “complete and cohesive.” However, Christopher himself wrote in the foreword to the 1977 edition that “a complete consistency . . . is not to be looked for” (*The Silmarillion* viii). This variation in Christopher’s opinions about his own scholarship is easily understandable. He had to wrestle between strictly honoring his father’s wishes (which may well have been unclear) and creating a work that honored the actual texts as they stood, all while coping with grief from his father’s passing. In order to more fully understand the veracity of the text, I feel it is less important to solely scrutinize *The Silmarillion* in hopes of finding truth about it within its own pages. Instead, I would like to posit an alternate methodology which Christopher could have utilized. In order to do this, I would like to introduce a unique comparison to *The Silmarillion*, J.R.R. Tolkien’s unfinished poem, *The Fall of Arthur*:

Much like his son would do decades later, J.R.R. Tolkien drew upon massive amounts of material in order to create *The Fall of Arthur*. Unlike much of his other scholarly and creative work that was based upon philology, the creation of this epic was based upon literary criticism. In his article “J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Fall of Arthur*: Creation from Literary Criticism,” Leonard Neidorf writes that Tolkien’s creation of the epic poem was greatly informed by his opinions of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, especially in the brevity of the *Gawain* poet: “Tolkien’s high opinion of the *Gawain* poet is revealing” (Neidorf 95). Rather than including many irrelevant elements that honor the whole of Arthurian legend, the poet shaves down the details “in order to tell a compelling story with a clear, moral vision” (95). In his own poem, Tolkien bears in mind this reaction to the contempt for the detail-heavy incoherence of much of Arthurian literature, and takes his story about Arthur in a new

direction, shedding much material that would weigh down the focus of the text. In this process we see Tolkien depart from philology and attempt to bring stricter literary criticism to bear, evaluating the source narratives themselves for evidence and reasoning behind inclusion or exclusion of certain details.

This process of sifting through veritable reams of legend that Tolkien undertook in the creation of the poem in many ways mirrors his son's task in creating *The Silmarillion*. While the tasks are similar, we see two different approaches at work. Tolkien discards details in order to "elevate the coherence, and hence the credibility, of the Arthurian world" (Neidorf 96). Christopher, on the other hand, attempts to honor as much of the extant materials that make up the foundation of his father's legendarium as possible, and in so doing confuses the issue. The key difference in the methods undertaken by Tolkien and Christopher is in commitment. Tolkien was clear in his intention behind the creation of *The Fall of Arthur*. He was clarifying and producing new work. Conversely, Christopher vacillated between producing a cohesive text from his father's prepared drafts and simply publishing an account of the evolution of those texts. In any event, this confusion on Christopher's part is to blame for the debate about the integrity of *The Silmarillion*. I argue that had he followed his father's example set in *The Fall of Arthur*, we would be reading a very different *Silmarillion*. While it may seem a leap in logic for Christopher to borrow his father's methods used on Arthurian epic verse, there is a key point in the foreword of *The Silmarillion* that leads me to believe such a leap would be appropriate. Christopher calls *The Silmarillion* "a fixed tradition, and background to later writings" (*The Silmarillion* vii). The legends that made up the text, which was "far indeed from being fixed" were agreed upon by Tolkien as foundational (vii). Thus, in essence, when he created *The Lord of the Rings* from the basis of the textually disordered but philosophically and philologically concrete *Silmarillion*, he was doing the same work that he did in crafting *The Fall of Arthur* from broad and disparate Arthurian tradition. The timeline of this creation spanned decades rather than centuries, but the parallel in methodology cannot be missed. Therefore, it is within reason that Christopher could have followed such a method in compiling the actual text of *The Silmarillion* mythology.

Such an alternate methodology would produce several key differences from the 1977 *Silmarillion*. First, the often-looked-for consistent narrator could be easily created using Tolkien's framework from his *Fall of Arthur* process. Rather than keeping each section as it was,

Christopher could have taken more liberties and linked the narrative voice to a consistent through line across the entire text, making it a more engaging read from the beginning. Second, Christopher's focus on "what is essential" would have been greatly heightened (*The Silmarillion* viii). With more liberty in cutting variants, Christopher could have produced a more coherent text. Third, using the detached framework could have made it easier to include textual notes and commentary in the 1977 edition. Rather than opting for a largely commentary and note-free volume, taking on the task of creating an essentially new text from the source material would have prompted Christopher to record the editorial process of *The Silmarillion* in a way that would make further "catch up" notes and publications unnecessary. Were he to have gotten more creative with the material, I feel that the variant notes and commentary justifying his choices would have flowed much more easily. In sum, a creative *Silmarillion* using the methods exemplified by Tolkien in *The Fall of Arthur* would be a more legible text with a stronger narrative. Christopher's editorial integrity, which was called into question, prompting *The History of Middle Earth*, would be reinforced by eliciting greater commentary and notation of editorial choices.

Ultimately, the discussion of the integrity of *The Silmarillion* and its editor is all speculative. Wishing that J.R.R. Tolkien had a few more years to complete the text is just a wish, and so is the desire that Christopher emulate his father more. Holistic critical interpretation is difficult when faced with incomplete texts, and so any commentary or criticism is merely a shadow of what could have been. The comparison of *The Silmarillion* to *The Fall of Arthur* is unconventional, but I feel that the emphasis on speculation and methodology makes it valuable. The work that Christopher Tolkien undertook in sorting and publishing his father's legendarium-related ephemera is worthy of praise, regardless of speculation regarding his father's wishes or how Tolkien would have edited his own work. Besides, some flaws have the power to spark greater successes. The underwhelming 1977 *Silmarillion* led to the publication of the *The History of Middle Earth*, which shed much more light upon the evolution of the *Lord of the Rings* and the legendarium as a whole, and for that I am thankful. Christopher Tolkien's work honored the spirit of his father's work, and in that key point *The Silmarillion* is a success.

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Traversing the Postcolonial Divide: A View of the “Other” in Pat Mora’s *My Own True Name*

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In many pieces of literature, authors write both poetry and prose that readers analyze through a series of lenses. Most notably, these lenses aid the reader in determining the tensions behind a particular piece of literature’s subject matter. When employed by students, the postcolonial lens constructs an argument regarding colonization and its effects felt by members of an autochthonous society. In most cases, these groups of submissive peoples are not submissive by choice, but because the conquerors of their homeland force themselves onto natives, dominating their physical land and infiltrating their ideology. Such is the case in Pat Mora’s three-part book of poetry titled *My Own True Name*. Through a series of first-hand accounts from immigrants to America, Mora traverses the hardships that arise because Mexican Americans are viewed as the “Other.” Lisa Onbelet, in her article “Imagining the Other: The Use of Narrative as an Empowering Practice,” defines the “Other” as “those who by virtue of their difference from the dominant group, have been disempowered, robbed of a voice in the social, religious, and political world” (n.p). Unfortunately, the practice of othering immigrants, or those that are unlike the majority, remains deeply ingrained in America’s core as a consequence of colonization. Colonizers utilize their language in order to oppress and suppress these cultures, resulting in what Charles Bressler describes as an “inherent tension” to “those who were raised in non-western cultures but now reside in the West” (203). Mora, writes a variety of poems that draw attention to the

postcolonial animosities faced by Mexican Americans, with particular attention to the impacts they face in daily life. Specifically, one section of the book, titled “Thorns,” exemplifies the challenges that emerge from being viewed as the “Other,” even when one is not.

Repeated references to the “Other” in Mora’s “Bordertown: 1938” demonstrate how Americans discriminate against those who are not like them. Mora’s tertiary poem in the “Thorns” section follows a child as she passes by a group of American girls on her way to school. Although Esperanza is aware of their differences, she longs to be like them: “She counts cement cracks . . . / counts so as not to hear / the little girls in the playground singing . . .” (Mora, lines 1, 3–4). As Mora continues the poem, the inherent tension between Esperanza and the children builds; Esperanza begins walking, but feeling the children stare, she “walks faster / faster . . . away” (lines 13–14). The child in this poem represents many Mexican Americans in today’s society. Mora constructs this character to demonstrate an ongoing animosity between the two groups: those who sing in the playground and those who walk faster to ignore them. Eventually, Esperanza picks up her pace by running “to that other school / for Mexicans” (17–18). Here, Mora literally separates the two groups by forcing Esperanza to attend an exclusively Mexican school, much like Mexican Americans compared to White Americans in daily life. Paul Lautner comments on the separation dilemma in his article for the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*: “Borders is one where Mexican Americans on the border too often are forced to choose one side or the other . . . Struggling to gain a foothold in the land of their ancestors, Chicanas must learn to gain power from a constantly shifting, ambiguous, multiple identity.” Lautner unintentionally sprinkles the word “other” in his commentary; however, his unintentional usage of the term further articulates the main character’s daily experiences as a socially and educationally suppressed individual. Esperanza gains her power by blending in with the cement cracks, shifting into a nonvocal child compared to the loud American children, further establishing her as the “Other.” As a result, these silencing conditions force Esperanza to diminish her future prospects in the United States as she quickly learns that emotional and social silence grant safety.

In conjunction with her emphasis on American discrimination, Mora’s thematic interest in postcolonial animosity offers another critical way to read her unpreserved imagery in “Fences.” Denotatively, a fence separates two areas of land, blocking someone out or keeping someone inside. The fence in this poem serves the same purpose. Mora

describes a Chicano family blocked from the land on which they live, watching the tourists enjoy their work. She initiates the poem by stating, “The *turistas* come to the tall hotel / with suitcases full of dollars” (lines 2–3). From the beginning, Mora positions the tourists in a higher light than those who are not tourists. She continues, “Every morning my brother makes / the cool beach sand new for them” (Mora, lines 4–5). By including the word “them,” Mora creates an internal fence in her poetry, separating the brother and his family from those who come to visit. The denouement in “Fences,” however, acts as a final severance upon the two groups:

Once my little sister
ran barefoot across the hot sand
for a taste.

My mother roared like the ocean,
“No. No. It’s their beach.
It’s their beach.” (Mora, lines 14–19)

Once again, Mora employs the tactic of creating a figurative fence in the poem. Even though the family lives on this beach, they revert into a disappearing shade, hoping not to interrupt the tourists’ fun. By maintaining an unpreserved beach, Mora creates a divide between an uninterrupted area of land and an interrupted culture. In his article “Conserving Natural and Cultural Diversity: The Prose and Poetry of Pat Mora,” Patrick Murphy constructs an argument relating to Mora’s carefully crafted tension: “Just as the ecology movement warns that biological diversity is crucial to biotic survival, Mora warns that cultural diversity is crucial to human survival, since it helps to maintain diversity in general” (n.p). By connecting untouched sand to a touched culture, Murphy argues that Pat Mora’s poem discusses the domination of Chicano culture by tourists. The beach, which represents Chicano culture, can only be traversed by Americans, molding the sand under their footsteps instead of from those who work the land.

The patriotic imagery in Mora’s “Immigrants,” another poem in “Thorns,” symbolizes the pain that accompanies risk-taking for the parents of bicultural children. Arguably the most notable poem in the “Thorns” section, “Immigrants” describes the pressure that Chicano parents face to ensure that their children are not “othered” like them, as they “wrap their babies in the American flag / feed them mashed hot-

dogs and apple pie / name them Bill and Daisy” (Mora, lines 1–3). Mora includes various references to American holidays and culture while contrasting these references with the inclusion of parental attempts to assimilate themselves. For example, these parents force themselves to “speak to them [the children] in thick English” while they “whisper in Spanish” (Mora, lines 7–8). By hiding their true selves and “whisper[ing]” in their true accent, these immigrant parents create a sense of embarrassment when referring to the Spanish language (Mora, line 8). Their children grow up ashamed of their native language, learning only broken English. Along with the feelings of shame and embarrassment, the parents in the poem feel the overwhelming fear of whether or not their efforts to assimilate their children will be in vain: “Will they like/ our boy, our girl, our fine American / boy, our fine American girl?” (Mora, lines 12–14). The day in the life of a parent unarguably accompanies stress; however, Chicano parents struggle with the idea that their children will face a dissonant segregation in which their children are torn between two competing cultures. In a study titled “Mexican Immigrant Women’s Poetry: Voices from a Community Poetry Class,” Nancy Christoph examines the effects of dominating cultures upon the Chicano community: “Dissonant acculturation is considered to be dangerous, as it can cause children to abandon the home culture and distance themselves from their parents without necessarily fully embracing the host country’s culture” (231). Once again, the poet’s inherent tensions come to light as her poetry transitions from a child’s perspective in “Bordertown: 1938” to the contrasting parental perspective in “Immigrants.” The presence of references to national holiday traditions and common Anglo-American names contradicts the hidden whispers that accompany parental conversation in this poem; therefore, Mora presents the pain and heartache associated with Mexican Americans’ internal struggles of effectively assimilating their children into a culture that may inherently cause a familial separation.

An awareness of racist interactions in the United States acts as an additional aspect of the importance of Mexican Americans’ challenges in *My Own True Name*. Within the poem “Two Worlds,” Mora juxtaposes the obstacles those of Chicano culture face in both their personal and professional lives. For example, Mora states, “Bi-lingual, bi-cultural,/ able to slip from ‘How’s life?’ to ‘*M’estan volviendo loca*,’” which translates to “They’re driving me crazy” (lines 1–3). In these lines, Mora creates a direct opposition between an unemotional remark to this person’s true feelings. The author writes with a sense of anxiety

and awareness of the racist interactions that a hyphenated American citizen experiences: “an American to Mexicans / a Mexican to Americans” (lines 14–15). The poem’s subject continually encounters rejection from both Americans and Mexicans, never finding their niche in life, whether in education or business. Mora concludes the poem with the lines “. . . by masking the discomfort / of being pre-judged, Bi-laterally” (lines 20–22). The word “bilateral” refers to the two sides of life to which Mexican Americans try to conform (Mora, line 22).

In order to relate to both sides, these students and workers must remain ambiguous, resulting in feelings of instability and thus affecting their ability to interact with others. In her article “Healing the Affective Anemia of the University: Middle-Class Latina/os, Brown Affect, and the Valorization of Latina Domestic Workers in Pat Mora’s *Nepantla* Poetry,” Georgina Guzmán connects these experiences to the aftermath of racist interactions in the workforce:

Mora delves into the hidden structures of feeling that circulate within Chicana professionals’ experience: the anxiety, discomfort, and alienation some Chicanas may suffer as they are oftentimes judged and rejected by both groups—office co-workers and restaurant staff—with whom they claim kinship. (n.p)

Not only does the alienation and discomfort become apparent in the workforce, but these feelings also develop into an unspoken animosity between two cultures that continues as the worker transitions into personal interactions. Mora provides the reader with insight into these racial experiences, generating sympathetic reactions from those who have yet to encounter them: “the dominant effects produced within this nepantla space can be discomforting; but in-between spaces are also sites of insight. Mora shows that those feelings can also make one keen to the affective experience of living in the margins of society—they can activate a social empathy and solidarity with similarly marginalized folk” (Guzmán). Although Mexican Americans encounter various painful and infuriating challenges while performing their daily activities, these exchanges serve as an educational awareness for a dominating, relentless culture, whether this culture is aware of its lasting effects on Chicanos or not.

This book of poetry also references sweets in order to contrast the bitter reality of how the children of immigrants experience everyday activities. Mora’s poem, “Sugar,” establishes connections

between the former poems' perspectives. This piece presents the reader with a child's view of her working-class, immigrant father while they treat themselves to a bi-weekly snack and trip to the corner store, and illustrates the oppressive reactions of the worker in the store: "Behind the counter, the man watches our / hands, empties our pockets with his eyes. / Why do we come here?" (Mora, lines 9–11). The man behind the counter incorrectly assumes the family will not have enough money to pay for their treats, which accustoms Tonya, the speaker of the poem and a child, to discriminatory treatment. Mora continues, "Without looking, I see / customers shrink from our brown skin" (lines 12–13). The presence of a dominating culture emerges through the judgmental views of the store's workers and customers. Ignoring the overwhelming stares, the speaker's father attempts to bring her back to her own bitter reality: "Peek un cahndee, Tonya, ' my father says, / my name doesn't smell like Iowa, / where I was born" (Mora, lines 19–21). In broken English, the narrator's father relies on the sweetness of candy to soften the harshness of their world; however, Tonya consistently feels the aftermath of this simple trip to the store. Returning home, Tonya "scrub[s] her words away in the shower, scrub, / scrub skin till it burns, let the water run/ down my back and my dark American legs" (Mora, lines 36–38) to cleanse herself of the racism she and her family encounter, both figuratively and literally establishing herself as the derogatory term "wet-back" (though she is never explicitly labeled as one). In "The Influence of Pat Mora: How —and Why— Literacy Becomes Political," Kathleen Dudden Rowland summarizes the speaker's attempt to reclaim her body as a member of American society: "The girl is powerless in the face of humiliation. A shower cannot wash away her pain. Without adequate recourse, the experience is devastating. Oppression, survival, and often triumph commingle in Mora's work. She recognizes the power provided by her heritage culture as she and others like her join the mainstream" (Rowlands 23). Refuting Rowlands's summary, however, the speaker washes away the hatred she feels, renewing herself in the water. By solely recognizing the power she embodies within herself, "provided by her heritage culture," the speaker revokes the judgmental stares felt inside the store, attributing power to the fact that she remains outside of the mainstream (Rowlands 23). On the whole, Pat Mora's allusions to candy in "Sugar" conclude as a sickly-sweet cavity in the life of the speaker.

Pat Mora presents many instances of racial animosity between a dominant American culture and the oppressed Chicano culture within “Thorns” to bring awareness of hardships caused by the “Othering” of Chicanos in America. By providing varying perspectives across five poems, Mora forces the reader to delve deeper into the daily activities of immigrants and their children. Overall, one finds that Chicano children feel the need to fit in with the crowd, as do all children. Working-class families desire to enjoy their work, as do all workers. Immigrant parents worry for their children’s future, as do all parents. Bilingual businessmen and women shift to fit whatever need arises, as do all monolingual salesmen. An immigrant family treats themselves to candy on payday, as do most American families. With these examples in mind, Pat Mora juxtaposes Mexican American’s daily activities to those of Americans; when situated side by side, one concludes that the Chicano culture is not the “Other” in today’s society. Instead, the “Other” exists in intolerant citizens, excluding themselves from the values and desires, which all families covet, no matter their heritage.

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Framing Ambiguity: Unconventional Narrative Structure in *The Turn of the Screw*

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One of the greatest ghost stories of the Victorian era is Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. However, what makes it a *great* ghost story is not necessarily definable by Victorian standards. The narrative devices used in the story are indicative of a more modern approach to storytelling, and, in particular, the framed narrative of the novella breaks all the conventional "rules" of the genre. James's novella is unlike the Gothics of his Victorian contemporaries in that *The Turn of the Screw* is unconcerned with plot, closure, or definitive structure (Orr 23). The governess's story is told by Douglas—a sort of surrogate of the author himself—to a group of friends, including the unnamed "I" narrator, who then relays the story to the reader. Through several degrees of narrative separation, the story becomes increasingly unreliable, especially when the role of the governess becomes more questionable as the events progress. Her motives concerning the children, Miles and Flora, can be seen as an obsessive disorder of the "savior" that ultimately leads to the very thing she supposedly tries to prevent: Miles's death. Furthermore, the odd structure includes an unclosed frame that keeps the reader guessing. This narrative choice is another stark departure from the nineteenth-century Gothics, with James leaving the reader "enwound in an endless spiral of speculation and interpretation"—infusing a sense of instability that "has come to be recognized as one of the salient characteristics of modernism" (Davidson 463). In terms of an effective ghost story, the success of James's *The Turn of the Screw*

is due to the traditional Victorian Gothic literary conventions—such as definitive structure and closer—being substituted for more unconventional, modern narrative techniques in which the unclosed framed narrative, with its four narrators, is used to create ambiguity within the text to provide various interpretations regarding the nature of the uncanny events told.

The underlying complexity of the framing device used in *The Turn of the Screw* creates an ambiguous narrative thread that immediately forces the reader to question the reliability of the story, and Douglas masterfully evokes suspense merely by giving the background of the story to the guests. This approach allows the reader to actively engage in the process, questioning and reacting to the information presented to them, just as Douglas's audience does (Orr 25). Unlike a traditional Gothic structure, the setup allows the reader to identify with stand-in characters within the text. Furthermore, six threads separate the reader from the actual events: 1) the unnamed governess, 2) the manuscript onto which she writes the events, 3) Douglas, 4) the unnamed narrator, and 5) the author, James. In essence, there is a "male character reading a manuscript written by a female character in a text by a male author using a female persona" (Orr 26). Even James himself is a culprit in this entanglement of unreliability. He is ultimately the one who decides, regardless of what actually happens in his story, what information to include and what not to include. The author is embodied in the character of Douglas; he is the great storyteller at this gathering, evoking curiosity in the others. He opens the story by informing his guests that "Nobody but me, till now, has ever heard it" and that "it has not been out for years" (James 154–55). Douglas has given his story a mythical quality before the others know what the story entails. As an added element of mysticism, he reveals that the story has been passed down to him by the governess who "has been dead these twenty years" (James 155). This information is crucial in understanding the story as a "reflection of textual ambiguity" because it denies the governess any agency in her account of it (Jang 13). By separating himself from the truth of the story, Douglas has given an ambiguous precursor of background information in order to set the mood for the listeners.

The character of the governess contributes to the ambiguous tone of the story by providing an unreliable point of view constructed from the other framed narrators. A critical aspect of the governess is that she, like the "I" narrator, is unnamed. Framed by two other characters,

the reader knows little about her and is left to decipher “the credibility of the governess’s narrative . . . because her account is narrated in the first person.” (Jang 13). Thus, the psychic distance between the reader and the governess is expanded because this first-person account is unnamed. The governess’s point of view is complicated further by her relationship with Douglas, who reveals that, at one point in time, there were mutual feelings of affection between one another (James 156). In this case, Douglas’s relationship with the governess can be seen as a conflict of interest concerning the story’s authenticity, since he knew her personally. This information could suggest that the way the story is told, for the sake of effectiveness, is embellished. However, this does not necessarily mean that the events are inaccurate. The visions of the spirits that the governess sees are likely real; however, “the interpretations she infers are by no way definitive, since they are part of the story” (Siota 217). Therefore, the real ambiguity concerning the story is not whether the ghosts are factual but to what purpose they present in the governess’s version of the story. Unlike other Victorian ghost stories, *The Turn of the Screw* “is far more of a contemporary, realistic text . . . because so much remains unknown” (Orr 20). Still, the reader is left with little information about the governess, as “The indeterminacy of ‘I’ is very significant in that the governess also remains almost unidentified” (Jang 21), as “The flickering in and out of focus of various possible interpretations . . . mark it as modernist” (Davidson 471). Traditional novels of the time did not allow for such interpretations, while there was usually “an omniscient narrator . . . to make sure the reader was understanding the moral or social message” (Orr 22–23). In contrast, James’s novella leaves the reader to decide for themselves how to interpret the message. The omniscient third-person narrator was a common device used in James’s earlier stories, but when he wrote *The Turn of the Screw*, he realized that by experimenting with alternative points of view, he could achieve the “question of reliability” (Orr 26). Leonard Orr suggests in his article, aptly titled, “James’s *The Turn of the Screw*,” the first-person narrator “must develop and sustain the readers’ trust in their representation of events” (26). James certainly knew that by departing from his tried-and-true style representative of the Victorian stories of his time, he could better engage with his readers in a new and exciting way. As one of two first-person narrators, the governess helps create more space between the actual events and the reader, purposefully allowing for more ambiguity regarding this Gothic yet very modern story.

Through the characterization of the governess, it becomes more evident as the story progresses that her motives as a governess directly correlate with the nature of the ghosts she perceives. Because the reader is told her own personal account, “the governess can be said to have a kind of ‘authority’” concerning the events at Bly Manor (Jang 14). Being the primary authority of the household, the governess holds an incredible amount of responsibility concerning the health and safety of the children. The text reveals that she is “young, untried, nervous” (James 159). Her anxieties relating to her new position cause her to become overly protective of Miles and Flora, leading to her belief that it is the children who are in danger of the ghosts. “A portentous clearness now possessed me,” she declares. “That’s whom he was looking for,” she goes on to say, referring to Miles (James 182). In this instance, the governess is possessed not by a clear head but by obsession. Shortly before Miles’s death, the governess states, “I just want you to help me to save you!” (James 224). She exhibits characteristics of an obsessive, authoritative caretaker, and because she automatically assumes that Peter Quint is after Miles, *she* is ultimately the danger. Because the story closes unframed immediately after Miles’s death, with “no symmetrical return to the original frame” (Orr 26), the governess likely stopped writing because of the emotional effect it had on her—but why? Because of the governess’s unhinged and unstable savior complex? It is reasonable to conclude that, through her aggressive overprotection of Miles, she unintentionally smothers him. In a twist of dramatic irony, the protector becomes the threat. Instead of ending the story with the typical “fairy tale or saved maiden conclusion the genre hints might have led us to expect,” the story ends with an abrupt tragedy (Orr 27). Miles’ unexpected death at the story’s sudden conclusion subverts the expectations of the frame introduced at the beginning of the story because James successfully prepares the reader for certain interpretations (Orr 25). The final paragraph ends with, “his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped!” (James 250). According to Davidson, “the last words of the novella present a ‘stop’ that is less a moment of closure than a continuation of suspense,” a technique that later modernists would implement (462). The governess is the “textual medium” (Jang 14) by which the reader interprets these events, and because of the way she interprets the events herself, one is left to decide, indeterminately, the true reason behind them. Within the framed narrative, the governess acts as a tool to present to the reader questions pertaining to the authenticity of not only the events which she writes of but also of her motivations and state of mind as well.

One way of perceiving the governess's unnerving actions concerning the ghosts and the children is to consider that she is having some form of a psychological breakdown. In a final act of despair, the governess confesses to Mrs. Gross that she is experiencing uncertainty concerning her mental faculties when she admits, "there are depths, depths! . . . I don't know what I *don't* see—what I *don't* fear" (James 188). In a subversion of the classic Gothic heroine, the governess becomes increasingly paranoid, manic, and threatening as the novella progresses. Her uncertainty pertaining to the nature of the events which have unfolded adds to the Gothic tone of the story by evoking fear of the unknown in the reader. Nevertheless, through the more modern "first-person unreliability" approach to the narrative, she is the conduit through which the reader experiences the events and characters. In a way, she is the gatekeeper who holds the truth the reader seeks. Then, one must ask, what motivates the governess to write her experiences and share them with Douglas? If the governess indeed suffers from a psychological disorder, then her record of events cannot be taken seriously concerning any kind of reliability. However, if the ghosts are real, they must have a purpose. There is no evidence to support that they intend to harm the children, as the governess interprets; she only assumes this due to her belief that she must justify her position as governess to the children and, therefore, must save them. She believes in the purity and innocence of the children, stating, "[there] was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child" (James 168). The governess's concern about being the one who must protect these "divine" children can infer that, in her mind, she has essentially invented a threat; this threat being the ghosts who attempt to prevent her from succeeding.

The story ends abruptly without the closure of the established frame, while the novella emphasizes a unique, modern structure to assure even more uncertainty pertaining to the Gothic nature of events told. The choice to close the story without allowing the reader to see the "true" ending is highly effective in unsettling the reader, as the novella's "uncanny energies remain unleashed rather than being contained," unlike the "conventional Gothic" stories of the period (Davidson 463). In Spooner and McEvoy's book, *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, Andrew Smith suggests that a ghost is "an absent presence" (147). James succeeds in creating an air of uncanniness and terror by only allowing the reader to see the spirits through the governess's point of view and keeping the visitations to a minimum. In addition, the un-

closed frame after the climax leaves the reader eager for the real ending, the ending which somebody—either the governess, Douglas, or the “I” narrator—retains from the reader. Whoever is responsible has a natural ability for compelling storytelling, embodying the author, James, by only allowing the reader to see what is on the page. The accomplished, unnerving effect of this odd choice is why the novella effectively breaks away from the standard Gothic genre and enters the realm of modernist literature. The protagonist is not granted a happy ending, contrasted to other nineteenth-century Gothics that “required that the good would be rewarded and the bad punished in proportion to their acts” (Orr 23); there is no light at the end of the tunnel, no justice to be served, and no closure. Prior to the global modernist shift, “The aesthetic norm was to have strong closure... and often an epigraph indicating what ‘happens’ with all of the characters *after* the plot” (Orr 23). *The Turn of the Screw* differs from this definition in every way. There are several narrators, each ambiguous in their own way, and a frame that does not close but ends only the version of the story we see at the climax.

Over one hundred years after its initial publication, scholars and literary critics alike still debate the nature of the “ghosts” in *The Turn of the Screw*. This indeterminacy is a testament to the strengths of the author himself. His characters—even the minor ones such as Douglas—serve to introduce a modernist approach to the Gothic genre, with the many frames and narrators all working congruently to provide a stylistic, experimental, modernized telling of the traditional ghost story. James manages to encapsulate what it means to be intentionally ambiguous in order to tell an effective ghost story while providing enough information through his characters to keep the reader guessing until well after the story has ended. The frame, tone, and unreliable characters all evoke “an atmosphere of fear and [prevent] the reader from making one-sided readings” (Siota 208). Each character is as unreliable as the last, each frame adds more depth to the deepening plot, and each turn of the screw adds to the ambiguity of the narrative.

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The Parrot and The Ideal Other: Mimicry and *Méconnaissance* in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) serves as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and her famed prisoner Bertha Mason. Set in the Caribbean, Rhys's novella provides glimpses into nineteenth-century Jamaica, Dominica, and England and is a central text for the intersection of colonialism, post-slavery culture, and women's writing. Rhys's reimagining of *The Masons* features both direct and covert lineages to the original Victorian text's gothic features, most notably its use of doubles. Doubles and mirroring within *Wide Sargasso Sea* elicit a discussion of mimicry, the "action, practice, or art of copying or closely imitating," especially referring to "imitation of the speech or mannerisms of another in order to entertain or ridicule" ("Mimicry, n."). The novella features multiple instances of characters copying one another and perceiving specular doubles, and Annette and her daughter Antoinette serve as the most significant of these characters. *Wide Sargasso Sea* attests to the sheer intricacy of imitation through its involuted relationship with its Victorian counterpart. Layered mimicry creates a complex innerweb of relationships where temporal and spatial ambiguities make separating the "copy" from the "real" difficult. Yet this distinction is necessary for realizing the text's assertion that identity construction is inseparable from the surrounding physical and socio-cultural climate and influenced by dominant cultures. Only in the identification and study of the "copy" can we understand the extent of these influences in Annette and Antoinette's identities as well as that of the novel itself.

To analyze these convoluted instances of imitation, I examine parrotting in the text through the nuanced lens of French psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, and philosopher Jacques Lacan. Lacan's Mirror Stage builds from Henri Wallon's 1931 experiment involving an infant viewing themselves in a mirror for the first time (Lacan and Fink). The infant, uncoordinated and dependent in their youth, identifies with the seemingly unified and stable image of the "mirror reflection": "an ontological operation" rather than a Freudian stage with a physical mirror (Lacan and Fink). This self-recognition, Lacan argues, is an instance of *méconnaissance* [misrecognition] because the infant connects with an image that is *not* the infant's actual reality ("Jacques Lacan-The Mirror Stage" 2:00–2:45). After *méconnaissance*, the image becomes the infant's "ideal other" that they will perpetually pursue in vain (Roberts 629). Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette misrecognizes herself in others in her pursuit of an unfragmented identity. She experiences superficial empowerment by mirroring the identities and actions of her "ideal others" ("Jacques Lacan-The Mirror Stage" 2:00–2:45). Even when Antoinette appears to break free from such mimicry, her inescapable connection to *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha ultimately prohibits autonomy.

I. The Example of The Ideal Other

Antoinette seems to associate mimicry with empowerment, as if the only way she can speak or act assertively is by channeling another person. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette attends a convent school where she learns to emulate the female saints and her peers in an effort to look and act like a virtuous woman. Antoinette attempts to copy her classmate Hélène's impeccable hairstyle as well as the beautiful and wealthy saints "all loved by rich and handsome young men" (Rhys 53). Antoinette recognizes her potential for this same preeminence and mirrors this saintly path by marrying a man of consequence.

Antoinette's empowered mimicry allows her to deride and mock her husband once they marry. Post-colonial scholar Graham Huggan in "A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Use of Colonial Mimicry" (1994) discusses the novelette's "parodic imitation of patriarchal discourse" in *Jane Eyre* (654). This parodic imitation lends itself to specific exchanges within the narrative, particularly when Antoinette mocks her husband's attempts to discipline her. When he says, Christophine "won't stay here very much longer," Antoinette mimics her husband for the purpose of undermining his authority. She repeats, "she won't stay here very much longer," followed by "and nor will you, nor

will you” (Rhys 88). Whether or not this repetition stems from Antoinette’s drunken state is unclear, but her speech emulates the rhythms of a curse. Huggan suggests that Antoinette “challenges the original states of patriarchal discourse by replaying it . . . as almost the same, but not quite,” demonstrated in the additive repetition: “nor will you, nor will you” (652–53). The echoes of patriarchal threats spoken with a female tongue empowers Antoinette in a manner that her natural feminine speech cannot. When Antoinette’s husband refuses to let her dispel the rumors surrounding her familial “madness,” she argues, “I might never be able to tell you in any other place at any other time. No other time, now. You frightened?” and her husband notes that “she said [this], imitating a negro’s voice, singing and insolent” (Rhys 77–78). By channeling the voice of a Black Creole person, Rhys equates Antoinette’s marital rebelliousness with the confrontation of racial injustice. Through mimicry, Antoinette appropriates the voice of someone more oppressed than herself, but whom she perceives as more free, all the more demonstrating her *méconnaissance* and incapability to self-advocate with her own resources.

The tragic story of Coco—the parrot of Antoinette’s mother, Annette—provides necessary terminology for conceptualizing the rest of the novella, including the complex relationships between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* and the characters of Antoinette, Annette, Antoinette’s unnamed husband, and Bertha Mason. Coco first appears in a startling scene featuring his own death by immolation and failed flight during the burning of Coulibri, only reappearing in Antoinette’s equally resonant death as “Bertha Mason” at Thornfield Hall. The parrot’s presence urges readers to consider the nature of mimicry and the specific circumstances required for “parroting,” particularly in the context of *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s very existence. Coco, whose very name plays at the concept of mimicry with the repetition of two letters, cannot verbalize independent thoughts and relies upon another being’s spoken words. Parrots symbolize a false intelligence and freedom, as a parrot’s speech automatically implies the existence of a model “other.” While *Wide Sargasso Sea* cannot be reduced to merely a “copy” of *Jane Eyre*, the moments within the novella that only indirectly mirror *Jane Eyre*’s plot nevertheless depend on the former’s very existence. Antoinette and Annette’s curious bond with this parrot, as well as *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s split identity as both an independent work and a parrot of *Jane Eyre*, speaks to the horizons of mirrored plots that imply a discussion of the fragmented self.

Coco and Annette's parallel imprisonment, suffering, and silencing compels us to perceive Coco as a symbol for Annette's ego: the badly constructed pseudo-identity produced in *méconnaissance*. As Antoinette watches her mother's desperation to save Coco, she recalls that when "Mr. Mason clipped [Coco's] wings he grew very bad tempered, and though he would sit quietly on [Annette's] shoulder, he darted at everyone who came near her and pecked their feet" (Rhys 25). Later, Annette fights her husband "silently, twisting like a cat and showing her teeth" in an attempt to break free from his grasp and reenter the blaze (24). Here, Annette imitates her bird's demonstration of sorrow and durance with animalistic violence. Elisabeth Roudinesco in "The Mirror Stage: An Obliterated Archive" states "the ego is built up with the imago of the double as its central element," the mirror image functioning as the masterful "double" for the dependent child (30). To that end, Coco serves as Annette's unfragmented ideal other, or imago, who behaves as Annette's model for mental strength and physical resistance against oppressors. Annette's own silence amidst her parrot's death results in the death of two voices, signaling the end of Annette's freedom as she subsequently becomes Mr. Mason's prisoner. Antoinette later recalls her mother and Coco's story to explain to her husband that "there are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about" (77). The death of the idealized image corresponds to "real death" as it results in an externally visible loss of "selfhood," while the death of the body equals "the death people know about." Coco's death signified Annette's "real death" as she loses external autonomy and selfhood.

II. Antoinette's *Méconnaissance* in Desperation for Identity

Lacan argues that *méconnaissance* can evoke two reactions from an infant. The mirror stage can be characterized by "triumphant jubilation," for it leads to an imaginary sense of mastery (Lacan 91). The moment, however, can also result in dissatisfaction and subordination when the infant compares their own precarious sense of mastery with the omnipotence of their mother (Lacan and Fink 517). Lacan's concepts of *méconnaissance*, the fragmented self, and the omnipotence of the mother arise in Antoinette's reliance on identifying with Tia, Annette, and Jane Eyre's Bertha Mason as "ideal others." Antoinette mimics these characters to create a spurious untethered and complete identity.

In one of these instances of emulation, Antoinette misrecognizes her childhood companion Tia as her own reflection. Tia possesses the independent and whole identity that Antoinette lacks, for Tia exists sep-

arately from *Jane Eyre* and has no Victorian counterpart. As Antoinette evacuates her burning home, she comes face to face with Tia. Antoinette, in reference to their relationship, says:

We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and *I will be like her* . . . When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. *I did not feel it either*, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. *It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.* (Rhys 27, emphasis added)

Wide Sargasso Sea complicates Lacan's Mirror Stage by creating a scenario where the true self and the ideal other are different races and their society makes this difference significant.

Tia serves as Antoinette's ideal other *because* of her darker skin color. Tia's identity as a Black Creole person allows her to "fit in" with a predominantly black, post-slavery community, while Antoinette, a white Creole and daughter of former slave owners, cannot. This is further complicated by Antoinette's inability to see the differences between Tia and herself because of Antoinette's whiteness. Antoinette ignorantly believes that she and Tia are mirror images of one another because they share experiences like bathing, sleeping, and playing together. When Tia later attacks her, Antoinette falsely suggests the two share an identity by claiming she "did not feel" the rock strike her face, but that Tia, the thrower, does as indicated by Tia's "face crumpling" and crying (Rhys 27). Antoinette's equating the trail of blood and with that of tears, however, indicates her inability to grasp the differences between Tia and herself. Antoinette demonstrates her ignorance on the perpetuating damages of slavery and social inequality driven by race through the appropriation of Tia's image.

When it does become apparent that Antoinette cannot pass as Tia's double, she turns to her mother's image. Antoinette copies her mother's fate by marrying a man that she does not love, attempting to murder her husband, and later reenacting Annette's "first death" by fire. A boy from her childhood makes the claim that Antoinette is so similar to her mother Annette that they even have the same eyes, stating that "Annette has "eyes like [a] zombie and you have eyes like [a] zombie too" (Rhys 29–30). She embodies Annette so literally

that she loses a sense of self. When Antoinette moves to England, she describes her distress over not being able to see herself in a mirror. She says, “there is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now . . . What am I doing in this place and who am I?” (Rhys 107). Antoinette admits her own dependency on images for self-identification. She feels disoriented and vulnerable in an English environment that seals off Dominican identities and reflections, preventing her from knowing herself. Antoinette, however, finds another way to see her reflection; the final page of *Wide Sargasso Sea* describes Antoinette’s self-instructive dream about the destruction of Thornfield:

[She] heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* [Who is that? Who is that?] And the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! . . . Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage. (Rhys 112)

Multiple layers of mimicry occur here in the novelette’s final moment. Not only does Antoinette’s death by fire parallel Coco’s, but it most conspicuously mirrors Bertha Mason’s suicide in *Jane Eyre*. Coco and Rochester both speak in doubles, intensifying the scene’s already apparent repetitiveness. As déjà vu accrues, Coco asks “Who is that? Who is that?” [*Qui est là? Qui est là?*] as if the parrot is incapable of distinguishing the deaths of Antoinette, Annette, and Bertha.

As Antoinette witnesses her “dream self” as if she were viewing her reflection in a mirror, she appears to reclaim her narrative by submitting to her own instincts and emulating her dream-self’s immolation. Antoinette believes that pursuing the image of her “dream self” will result in the attainment of a complete identity and the fulfillment of her destiny. Her dream-self, however, is not her “true self,” but her unattainable “ideal self” in Lacanian terms. Lacan argues that we are oblivious to our real selves and that our mirror image provides an “imaginary ‘wholeness’ to the experience of a fragmentary real” (Roberts 628). Antoinette experiences the false sense of mastery that Lacan describes in an infant’s connection with their “ideal image” when she confidently declares “now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (Rhys 112).

Antoinette’s death scene highlights the mother’s preeminence over a daughter’s independent identity. What appears on the surface to be an

act of separation from Annette's character brings her closer to a second "mother's" identity: Bertha Mason's. Lacan argues that the "omnipotence of the mother" can overtake the mirror stage: the infant turns to the caregiver for approval and views the mother's image as the "ideal other" (Lacan and Fink 517). Antoinette's suicide most clearly emulates Bertha's and ends the novella with a scene straight from the pages of *Jane Eyre*, giving the reader little choice but to merge Antoinette and Bertha into a single, unified identity. Antoinette's inseparableness from Bertha upholds Huggan's central argument that *Wide Sargasso Sea* unintentionally perpetuates *Jane Eyre's* legacy—one that advocates for harmful imperial ideology. Yet this perpetuation is not the work of the novelette's plotline alone, but is the result of the reader's engagement with the text's finale.

III. Approaching Textual Lineages

Huggan argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is inadvertently cursed by its inseparable relationship to *Jane Eyre*. He says that the novella "sets out to rewrite a canonical British text only to find itself precipitated back into the very conditions that govern its precursor" (Huggan 651). While it is tempting to conceptualize *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a Caribbean "rewriting" of *Jane Eyre*, given the many occurrences of emulation within the text itself, Olivia Loksing Moy in "Reading in the Aftermath: An Asian American *Jane Eyre*" (2020) warns against this method. She cautions against reading adaptations of Brontë's texts as "simply resistance and 'writing back'" (Moy 410). I agree with Moy's argument that texts like *Wide Sargasso Sea* "present opportunities to conjoin past and present, drawing Brontë's studies into current-day discussions" and that Victorianists "should opt for methods that refuse colonial patterns of urtext and sequel, original and copy" (409). Brontë's work perpetuates a colonial legacy, not singularly because the novel features colonial themes and descriptions (most memorably in the "othering" of non-British people and cultures in the text), but because of the work's continued dominance in Victorian Studies. Moy argues that adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, including *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are often undervalued as unworthy of extensive study, despite their potential to resituate Victorian studies in modern conversations of culture and race. The muddling of Antoinette's and Bertha's identities brings forth a phenomenon that Moy calls "colonialist self-erasure" as the novelette appears to melt into the familiar plotline of *Jane Eyre*. When the two women merge, *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges readers to resist "colonial patterns" by

preserving the work's independent identity, *despite* its inseparability from *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps a way to deal with *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s recurring mirror images, without resorting to methods that perpetuate harmful colonial legacies, is to tap into the metaphysical. Moy characterizes adaptations of *Jane Eyre* as "multicultural afterlives" (406). This term, "afterlife," provides guidance for conceptualizing *Wide Sargasso Sea* as an independent novelette, but one nevertheless framed by its temporal relation to the previous life from which it stems.

We can conceptualize the novel and novella's relationship as one offered by the plotline itself: a mother-daughter tie. Leslie Howsam likens a book's evolution to those of genes, claiming that "both perpetuate themselves and change; they recombine with themselves while altering in response to their environment" (3). Although Howsam describes the timeline of a single book and its various editions and mediums, this framework can be applied to *Wide Sargasso Sea* "re-birthing" *Jane Eyre*'s essential components or "genes." Appearing a century later, replicated genes *recombine* in different ways within *Wide Sargasso Sea* and interact with a unique landscape. The famed "nature vs. nurture" conceptualization of development suggests that although the novelette inevitably possesses much of the same components as *Jane Eyre*, the Caribbean environment in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written and takes place makes it impossible for these texts to be "copies" of one another.

It is essential for readers and critics to strike a balance between recognizing the significance of "the copy" and "the other" in *Wide Sargasso Sea* while not restricting the novelette into a one-dimensional duplicate identity. The significance of emulation and parroting speaks to the difficulties surrounding racial assimilation in a Dominican, post-slavery environment: perhaps the novelette's most enlightening and unique subject matter. To ignore these conspicuous textual recurrences would neglect the sustenance of these understudied themes. Doing so discredits Jean Rhys's own apprehension in completing and publishing the novelette—a text that boldly seizes the framework of a universally renowned novel to investigate the complications of identity formation in a patriarchal, colonial society that suppresses individuality.

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Sula and Nel's “girlgirlgirl” Bond: The Power of Female Friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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“We was girls together.”
- Nel (*Sula* 174)

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is credited with “having created black feminist literary criticism” (Klinkowitz 291). Amid its innovativeness, *Sula* particularly lends itself to a French psychoanalytic feminist reading. The use of psychoanalytic and feminist concepts allows readers to more specifically understand how Sula and Nel as individual women and friends “come into being” (Freud 116). Azhar Mankhi, Rita Bergeholtz, and Claude Pruitt present convincing arguments regarding Sula's nonconformity to patriarchal norms, Nel's trauma leading to a repressed love for Sula, and Morrison's critique of binary oppositions. However, they fail to recognize how Sula and Nel's respective journeys toward womanhood in an oppressive patriarchal society contribute to their unparalleled connection. Sula holistically extricates herself from patriarchal binary confines and Nel subjects herself to them. Yet, it is their polarizing attributes that bond Sula and Nel into a female friendship that ultimately redefines patriarchal binaries and instead offers the possibility of wholeness.

As Azhar Mankhi notes, Sula's seemingly violent demeanor and sexual encounters mimic traditionally masculine behaviors and contradict female norms (45–47). Sula's behavior, particularly her response to male aggression, undercuts societal expectations about gender norms.

For instance, when Sula is a child and she is ridiculed by young boys, she does not submit to their will or retreat in fear, defying the female norm of complacency. Sula even exceeds the aggressiveness directed towards her by using a knife to slash off “only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared openmouthed at the wound and a scrap of flesh” (54). Sula’s violent assertiveness reveals masculine tendencies that defy patriarchal norms. Submissiveness is not part of her nature. Sula also defies patriarchal expectations through her sexual encounters. When she finishes having sex with a man, she “[looks] up at him in wonder trying to recall his name; and he looked down at her, smiling with tender understanding of the state of tearful gratitude to which he believed he had brought her” (123). Sula reverses the power imbalance imbedded within gender norms related to sex when she does not recall the man’s name because heteronormative societies frequently commend men who have sex without knowing the woman’s name. On the other hand, women who have sex outside of marriage are often condemned, even if done in the context of a committed relationship. Names are one of the ways in which we identify ourselves—the very label of our being. As a result, a man not knowing a woman’s name when having sex with her signifies that he is only regarding her body, ultimately deeming her essence worthless. In doing so, he perpetrates the patriarchal oppressiveness that Simone de Beauvoir examines as being that: “He always has ‘other things to do’ with his time; whereas she has time to kill; and he considers much of the time she gives him not as a gift but as a burden” (854). Yet, Sula reverses patriarchal expectations by assuming the role of the sexual conqueror who has sex with men without knowing their name. Morrison also includes a revealing detail: the man *believed* he had brought Sula pleasure. Therefore, the “state of tearful gratitude” that the man credits himself for reflects the patriarchal assumption that women need a man to experience sexual pleasure. However, in reality, Sula does not rely on the man for sexual pleasure. Instead, Sula adopts societal norms of male-privilege as a woman, thus re-claiming rights that only men are usually granted: excessive expressions of dominance and sexuality.

Although Mankhi outlines Sula’s nonconformity convincingly, she ultimately argues that Sula’s particular fondness toward Ajax causes her to fall “into the trap of stereotypes that most women in the Bottom cling to” (47). Yet, Mankhi overlooks how Sula’s fascination with Ajax emphasizes traditionally masculine behaviors. For example, Sula’s relationship with Ajax (who would assume the role of the woman)

mimics “those affairs of jealous and exclusive passion in which the man wants total possession of the woman” (de Beauvoir 854). One of the most powerful instances in which Sula expresses a strong longing to exclusively possess Ajax is when she feels compelled to own him to the point of carving into “*the ledge of [his] cheek bone*” to find underneath “*gold leaf*” (Morrison 130). Like a miner digging deep into the earth for gold, Sula wants to acquire her reward in its entirety: Ajax at the depths of his core. Mankhi argues that Ajax prompts “the first time Sula feels she needs a man” (47); however, it is not *need* that Sula feels, it is *possession*. Morrison describes this dynamic clearly: “Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it” (131). Mankhi also states that “Sula begins to lose her power when Ajax flirts with her” (47), but to possess is to have power. In their sexual interactions Sula also proves to be the dominant one in power, “[mounting] him so he could see her towering above him” (129). Sula ultimately wants *to possess* Ajax, not be *possessed by* him. Sula’s one-sided exertion of possession emulates the hypocritical patriarchal tendency for a man to be unfaithful to a woman (not be *possessed by*) yet become jealous if the woman were to flirt with another man (desire *to possess*).

Similarly, Sula wants *to know* Ajax, not *be known* by him. This one-sided possession of knowledge creates a power imbalance that is revealed when ““the one thing [she] wanted to know was to know his name”” (136). Yet, she realizes she does not know Ajax’s *real* name when she finds his driver’s license, discovering that his name was “Albert Jacks? A. Jacks. She had thought it was Ajax” (135). Ajax is a Greek mythological hero in Homer’s *The Iliad* who is also known as Ajax the Great, son of King Telamon. By ensuring that readers understand that the man Sula consistently engages with sexually is in fact Albert Jacks and *not* Ajax, Morrison implicitly emphasizes that Sula does not allow him to be a hero who “saves” her. In the end, Albert Jacks is merely another nameless man Sula had sex with, never truly knowing his identity, his essence. Because “the name she was screaming and saying was not his at all,” Sula never said his name as “truly meaning *him*” when engaging in sexual intimacy (136). Sula even later admits that it is for the best that Albert Jacks left because ““Soon [she] would have torn the flesh from his face just to see if [she] was right about the gold and nobody would have understood that kind of curiosity”” (136). The way Sula knows and desires to further know Albert Jacks is thus still rooted in power. Sula takes from Albert Jacks without giving in

return, a parasitic form of exchange. Sula's transactional understanding of her relationship with Albert Jacks contradicts Mankhi's assertion that Sula falls prey to female stereotypes and instead undercuts conventional gender roles.

Nel, on the other hand, completely opposes Sula's defiance of female roles in a heteronormative society by embodying traditional patriarchal norms. One way in which Nel does so is by getting married, which is something Sula never does. Furthermore, when Nel is about to marry Jude, she thinks how "greater than her friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly. She didn't even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, or that her smile was anything but the spreading of her lips until he saw it as a small miracle" (84). Nel's unconscious absorption of the patriarchal notion that men hold all the power limits her self-worth to be viewed through the male gaze. In other words, Nel only views herself as valuable if a man classifies her as such. Nel does not even see her body in the simplest and most obvious of ways, such as possessing a neck, until Jude tells her that she has one. Therefore, Nel only understands herself as Jude defines her, ultimately renouncing complete power over her physical and emotional identity.

The way Sula and Nel internalize societal expectations in polarizing manners is also apparent in their childhood imaginations. When Sula is a child, she imagines riding a "gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of someone who shared both the taste and the speed" (52). As opposed to fantasizing about a knight in shining armor coming to save her on a white horse, she instead rides a horse and imagines an other who is equal to her in feeling and strength. The horse itself is even described to be made up of two colors, not just the one. Writing the two colors as combined through dashes ("gray-and-white") ultimately emphasizes the notion of equality. On the contrary, Nel subjects herself to the patriarchal teaching that a woman needs a man to be saved. She pictures "herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for a fiery prince" (51). Nel sees herself as an object of the male gaze even as a child. She overtly feminizes her being and imagines herself to be so incapacitated that she becomes trapped by the inanimateness of her own hair. Nel proves to understand women as delicate and impotent, and men as "fiery," holding all strength and ability. Nel's embrace of societal norms in her imagination echoes Luce Irigaray's metaphor about the male gaze: "*that wife/woman of every man* is thus pledged to the service of the 'philosopher's' 'self' in all

forms” (151–52). Nel fully submits her identity, dignity, and body to be part of the husband/man’s (the ‘philosopher’s’) sense of self as opposed to creating her own. Both Sula and Nel ultimately exhibit an “immersion in the Symbolic Order” as it is carried out by their “parents and influenced by their own responses to the Symbolic Order” (Tyson 31). Sula takes after her mother and grandmother’s refusal to inhabit traditional female roles, and Nel is influenced by her patriarchy-conforming mother to assimilate into these roles.

Although Sula naturally becomes a product of how she was nurtured, throughout the course of the narrative she emerges as a distinct self. She eventually surpasses her mother and grandmother’s defiance of societal norms. This defiance is evident in the way Sula uses language. Three years after Sula has sex with Nel’s husband, Jude, Sula and Nel exchange dialogue that embodies Julia Kristeva’s idea that there is a “signifying process in language, a dynamic process of subjectification/desubjectification” (75). Within the interaction of these two binary linguistic modalities, Nel subjectifies herself while Sula desubjectifies herself. For example, when Sula says “every man I ever knew left his children” and Nel reproaches her with “Some were taken,” Sula retorts, “Wrong, Nellie. The word is ‘left’” (Morrison 143). Sula is careful and observant in her diction, showing how even in language she ensures that men are not given excuses or granted low expectations. On the contrary, Nel’s language of “taken” as opposed to “left” reveals her attempt to justify the unacceptable actions of men. Her diction ultimately implies that men are not responsible for leaving their children. Unlike Nel’s language that subjugates women and elevates men, Sula makes certain that men accept responsibility for their mistakes.

Nel also perpetrates subjectification in her language when she says that Sula can’t be a man if “[she] had children” (142). Through this seemingly innocent comment, Nel defines a woman based on her reproductive capabilities as opposed to her value as a human being, which is how men are defined—by their function in society as providers. Thus, Nel relies on what Kristeva identifies as the *herethical*, which “demands the participation of women, the mothers in them, and among them, women carrying the desire to reproduce” (“Women’s Time” 18). Nel continues to subjectify herself with her language that suggests she is unaware of the male gaze. Her lack of awareness reveals how blinded she is by patriarchal perpetration. For instance, Nel becomes frustrated with the way Sula desubjectifies herself from the patriarchy with her language. After their conversation is almost over Nel thinks, “Sula

was probably showing off, no telling what shape she was probably in” (Morrison 143). Nel insinuates that Sula is not in a proper frame of mind, ultimately underscoring the patriarchal sentiment of *hysteria* that refers to “psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by overemotional, extremely irrational behavior” (Tyson 81). As a result, Nel is so indoctrinated with patriarchal thinking that she unconsciously observes Sula’s behavior through the lens of an appropriated male gaze. Sula describes a world where men do not rule above all, yet Nel perceives this imagined world as both foreign and uncomfortable. By the end of the conversation, Nel tells Sula that she has “‘done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you?’” (Morrison 145). Sula remains unphased: “‘Oh, they’ll love me all right. It will take time, but they’ll love me’” (145). Sula is confident that she is loveable despite her failure to fulfill society’s expectations for women because she knows who she is and understands her intrinsic value as apart from society.

Moreover, Sula’s linguistic desubjectification throughout this same exchange of dialogue reveals how she sees the world without the constraints of binary oppositions. Irigaray describes how humans can become trapped in binary oppositions when she writes, “Day and night are mingled in our gazes. Our gestures. Our bodies” (217). Irigaray also proposes that when caught within the patriarchy, women only have two choices: to either keep quiet or to “imitate patriarchy’s representation of herself” (Tyson 97). However, Sula transcends the binary opposition of choice through her language: she sees beyond binary oppositions. When Nel says that Sula “‘can’t act like a man,’” Sula responds, “‘You say I am a woman and colored. Ain’t that the same as being a man?’” (142). Through this statement Sula critiques how “masculinity and whiteness are treated as displays of professionalism against which other identities are measured” (Rice 534). The concept of a woman being man’s “Other” (de Beauvoir 9) does not exist in Sula’s mind because her sense of self completely surpasses gender and race. Sula hence is similar to Mary Carmichael, the fictitious female writer who Virginia Woolf describes as having forever altered the course of women’s writing because she “wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman” (93). Sula does not consider herself in relation to men or think of gender much at all, ultimately displaying an elevated form of feminism where she sees all *humans* as equals since her “sex is unconscious of itself” (Woolf 93).

While some feminists are aware that they are living within the male gaze, Sula is completely separate from that and does not regard it as reality. Along these lines, Sula presents a new and positive way of seeing loneliness when she says, “‘Show? To who? Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me’” (Morrison 143). To this, Nel asks, “‘Lonely, ain’t it?’” and to which Sula replies, “‘Yes. But my lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else’s. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain’t that something? A second-hand lonely’” (143). In her language Sula acknowledges that even her emotion and frame of mind cannot be controlled by men. She does not allow any part of her—not her mind, not her heart, not her soul—to be evaluated by men because she only views herself in relation to herself. Rather than feeling lonely because she does not have a male partner, she embraces what it means to be lonely in the sense of independence and within the positive connotations of freedom. Additionally, in written language italics function to emphasize the signifying meanings of certain words. As a result, “*mine*” being italicized signifies that Sula lives for herself, by herself, and because of herself. She has achieved the ultimate emancipation from the constraints of the patriarchal world, holistically removing herself from any association to being an “Other.” The notion of Sula being nothing other than simply her independent self is re-emphasized when she confidently states that men “‘ain’t worth more than me. And besides, I never loved no man because he was worth it. Worth didn’t have nothing to do with it . . . My mind did. That’s all’” (143–44). Sula spends so much time living in an imagined world where patriarchy does not exist that she eventually entirely inhabits the “Imaginary Order” and rejects the “Symbolic Order” of patriarchal society. Therefore, Sula exhibits an emerging strength that allows her to move past the trauma of “the Real” because she understands the ideological implications of patriarchal society and ultimately makes them *in* her capacity to control as opposed to them being *beyond*.

Despite Sula and Nel having opposing ways of navigating a binary and male-ruling society, they find comfort in each other due to their unconscious desire for the life they did not have as children. Rita Bergeholtz argues that *Sula* can be read as “an extended satire on binary (reductive, clichéd) thinking” (89). However, Morrison seems to embrace the necessity for a redefining of patriarchal binaries by Sula and Nel bonding through a female-female binary. More specifically, Sula and Nel fulfill the “lack” they each experienced as children. For example, Sula loved Nel’s home and “would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten

to twenty minutes at a time—still as dawn” (29). Sula is fascinated with the opulence of Nel’s red-velvet sofa because she did not see such nice things growing up, nor did she experience the luxury of stillness amidst the “household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices, and slamming of doors” (52). Therefore, Sula revels in what she could not have, longing to have been raised by “the fantasy mother of [her] preverbal experience” (Tyson 29). In contrast, Nel lives in an extremely organized home that embodies the order that society deems necessary. Nel’s household has so much structure that she “regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread” (Morrison 29). Thus, she “preferred Sula’s woolly house” where “all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked on the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink” (29). Moreover, Nel’s mother fulfills the societal expectation to marry and raise kids in a heteronormative household, whereas Sula’s mother rejects monogamy and has affairs with the husbands of other women. Sula was also practically raised by her grandmother, who is a single mother herself. Therefore, Nel’s desire for a less constricting life, one more free of rules and expectations, depicts her unconscious desire to inhabit a world where women are providers and are in control of themselves—a life similar to that of the Peace women. The mutual comfort that Sula and Nel find in the home that directly contradicts the one they grew up in echoes Lacan’s idea that “desire is always the desire of the Other” (*Seminar Bk. XI* 235). In other words, Sula and Nel’s gravitational pull toward their opposite self and life reflects how “unconscious desire is always seeking our lost object of desire” (Tyson 29). After all, “their friendship was as intense as it was sudden” because “They found relief in each other’s personality” that are at odds with one another (Morrison 53).

Sula and Nel’s bond lingering into adulthood illustrates that they themselves are binaries because they both need each other to balance the opposing half of themselves that is missing. For example, Sula criticizes society’s binary oppositions when she states that people from the Bottom will love her ““after all the dogs have fucked all the cats”” (146). Because sex is the act in which two creatures can physically become one, Sula’s analogy suggests that she understands that opposites can become united through balance. This understanding is the very reason she spends her whole life being bonded not to a man, but to her opposing female half, Nel, who is the embodiment of the traditional female. Even still, Nel’s language also exposes her repressed desire to be part of a woman’s world, despite having previously perpetrated

subjectification onto herself. Indeed, Lacan famously states that “the unconscious is structured like a language” and in Nel’s case, she has an unconscious desire to be liberated from patriarchal confines (*Seminar Bk. VII* 12). When Nel grieves over Sula’s death and reflects, ““All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude”” (174), Nel is essentially asking “Where is [the woman]?” (Cixous 91). Following this, Nel cries out for Sula by singing ““girlgirlgirl”” (174). Morrison writing “girlgirlgirl” without any spaces between the words not only suggests an incessant desire for a female-oriented world but it also ends the novel on a note that embraces the female and dismisses the male.

Additionally, “girlgirlgirl” mimics Kristeva’s analysis of the “polyphony of poetic language that precisely attaches to the explicit ‘message’ in a text (poetry or prose), a whole undecidable polyphony that we receive as ‘musicality’ of ‘style’” (75). Polyphony is the combination of two or more tones of melodic lines and though this is a novel, Morrison’s writing mimics the form of poetry. Therefore, each “girl” can be considered a melodic line, of which there are three tones. There being three tones of “girl” defies patriarchal binaries because the number three symbolizes the ultimate transcendence of binary thinking, which exists by the nature of the number two. As a result, readers not only experience a musicality of writing style when reading “girlgirlgirl,” but they also receive an explicit message: Nel innately desires a world absent from patriarchal binaries and male necessity. Along these lines, Claude Pruitt argues that “For Nel, to love Sula is to believe in Sula, as she believed in Nel. For Toni Morrison, to believe in *Sula* is to believe in language” (122). Though compelling, this argument can be taken a step further. To believe in Sula is not merely to believe in language, but to believe in the transcendence of binary choice to a third option the patriarchal world does not give: female liberation from man. A world in which women can live *for* women, *by* women, and *because of* women seems impossible to obtain, yet it is a reality in arms reach in the imaginary world of pure freedom that Sula creates for herself. At the same time, both Sula and Nel “had discovered years before they were neither white nor male and all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them” (Morrison 52). Therefore, together, as complementary female binaries, they are able to “set about creating something else to be” (52).

As much as Sula defies patriarchal expectations, norms, and influence, she unfortunately cannot escape the fact that her identity as a woman is not complete without the traditional female characteristics that society deems worthy (of which are characteristics Nel embodies).

Patriarchal society will not consider a female to *be* a woman unless she adheres to its confines. Because Sula still lives in society, she must be bonded to Nel; she cannot *be* without some sort of acknowledgment from the outside world that she *is*. In Sula's eyes, Nel's adherence to patriarchal gender roles through marriage marks her fall into the trap of subjugation. For Sula, Nel becomes "one of *them*" (120), a subjugated woman, who nevertheless receives societal acceptance. Sula ceases to exist as a woman unless she is also identified as such by "*them*"—gender conforming women who once ostracized Sula for her non-conforming behaviors. Therefore, Sula *needs* Nel to complete her existence as a true female because Nel now "belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them" (120). As a result, Sula craves Nel just as much as Nel craves her, even without her having realized it. The last word Sula utters before she dies is Nel's name. She discovers that no longer receiving oxygen "'didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel'" (149). When something revolutionary or heartbreaking happens, the first person that one looks to tell is the person that means the most and understands them best. Of course, for Sula, that person is Nel, who "was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew, who had seen as she had the slant of life that made it possible to stretch to its limits" (120).

Nel is equally drawn to and completed by Sula through their powerful female bond. Nel's inclination to seek Sula is reinforced when "the loss pressed down on [Nel's] chest and came up into her throat" and she cries, "'We was girls together'" (174). Pruitt argues that "For Nel, 'We was girls together' is an explanation of her own loss and trauma; as her role in Chicken Little's death is moved from the real to the imaginary, Nel's repressed love for her childhood friend and 'other self' moves painfully into consciousness" (122). Pruitt is right in that Sula and Nel's shared childhood trauma lingers into their adulthood because Chicken Little's funeral foreshadows how their trauma-induced bond will transcend time: "they held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth; the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay above ground forever" (Morrison 66). However, the repressed love Pruitt describes is not merely for a friend who shared a traumatic experience, it is a repressed love for the female. Because society has taught Nel to necessitate the man, the "'other self' that moves painfully into consciousness" (Pruitt 122) is in fact the opposing female binary, Sula, that Nel has been lacking. "We was girls together" thus goes beyond an explanation of Nel's loss and trauma to be a pronounce-

ment of the one true, reliable love that can transcend above all else: love between women. At the beginning of the novel Morrison even writes, “they found in each other’s eyes the intimacy they were looking for” (52). The novel grapples with Sula and Nel’s struggle to be women in an oppressing male world. As a result, Nel saying “We was girls together” illustrates why the true “Other” (in a positive sense in this case) she misses is Sula. At this moment, Nel realizes what Sula had already discovered when she accepted that her affair with Jude jeopardized their friendship: “[Sula] had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be—for a woman” (121). The loss that “pressed down on [Nel’s] chest and came up into her throat” (174) is thus not her own loss and trauma, but rather the loss of her other female half. They were girls together. They were female together. Together, in a combining sense that breeds oneness, Sula and Nel achieved true womanhood. Thus, to be a woman is to be both independent from patriarchal constraints (Sula) while also falling into them (Nel): two female binaries that need each other to exist as one complete woman.

Morrison truly blends and blurs the norms of patriarchal binaries by creating Sula and Nel to exist as two opposing halves that together create female wholeness. Bergenholtz explains how “Binary thinking operates on the notion that one term of an opposing pair will be privileged” (91). Although Sula possesses control over herself while Nel subjugates herself to men, by the end of the novel they both share a powerful longing solely for the other female. As a result, no one female is privileged; they are both on equal footing. Morrison illustrating Sula and Nel as two complementing female halves simultaneously critiques and redefines the patriarchal binaries that are present in a heteronormative society. Even still, Sula necessitating a woman who fulfills patriarchal norms to complete her female identity relays that even in the most beautiful and seemingly flawless efforts to completely rid oneself of the patriarchy, women—at least for now—require subjugation to *be* women. A woman cannot completely liberate herself from this reality because she will still be treated in the context of patriarchal binaries no matter how much she mentally separates herself from them. Even in defiance there is still entrapment: “circles and circles of sorrow” have no end, just like Nel’s final “fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top” (Morrison 174). Therefore, Sula and Nel’s undeniable female-female binary bond elucidates that women cannot truly free themselves of patriarchal confines unless Sula’s individual charac-

ter transcends beyond the page. Morrison thus provides a groundbreaking model for redefining patriarchal binaries while also being cautious to not venture outside the realm of reality: the patriarchy still holds too tight of a grip. Yet, this grip must and can be released through the power of female friendships proving that women do not need men, but can thrive independently and with support from one another. Sula and Nel truly understand this in their final moments and are hence unable to fully live out this reality. If female friends follow through in relying on their bond, society will eventually restructure to no longer accept women based on patriarchal submission. The opposing female-female binary will subsequently be eliminated, and binaries altogether will be transcended to instead nurture the unary.

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