ISSUE 18

CALLIOPE

California State University, Bakersfield
Department of English

CALLIOPE

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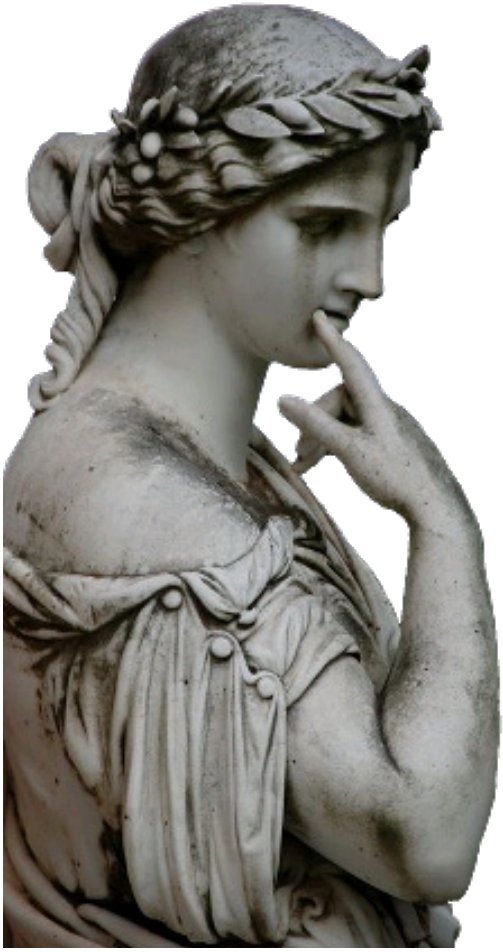
Guidelines for Contributors

Contributions of academic literary analysis and research papers by Arts & Humanities students are greatly appreciated.

Types of essays submissions can address any aspect of literature, art, and culture. We are also accept book reviews submissions on recently published works.

Submission of a paper to this journal will be taken to imply that it represents original work. Essays should conform to the current MLA documentation style. The editors reserve the right to edit submissions as needed for publication.



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All correspondence concerning editorial matters (inquiries regarding suitable topics, length of manuscripts, reviews, etc) should be sent directly to the editor:

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MANAGING EDITOR

It is with great honor that I present to you *Calliope* Issue 18. For years, *Calliope* has become a crowning achievement of the Department of English, showcasing the dynamic scholarship and research produced by undergraduate and graduate students in the College of Arts and Humanities at California State University, Bakersfield. As Managing Editor and *Calliope* Advisor, I can say with confidence that this year's submissions reflect the broad academic interests of CSUB students. Each of the original essays published in Issue 18 went through a rigorous blind review and revision process to ensure the scholarly integrity of *Calliope* as a student-led academic publication in the California State University system.

Issue 18 continues from previous volumes of *Calliope* managed by Dr. Mónica Ayuso, whose leadership helped to maintain the foundation in which this issue would not exist without. Building from Ayuso's work, Issue 18 introduces new elements into the organization of the journal. The issue is organized by historical periods, moving from the present into the past. In addition, student editors have included Prefaces, Concluding Notes, and Editorial Commentaries to help synthesize the material for readers while opening broader conversations about editing and literary scholarship. Lastly, student editors in *Calliope* and in our partner journal, *Orpheus*, collaborated on a display case in the Humanities Office Building that has drawn much attention and praise. In this issue, we provide a photo gallery and dedication to the work that went into producing this magnificent display and the journal itself.

The primary voices that you will find in this journal are from students. All thirteen original essays were developed by CSUB students in the Arts & Humanities. This issue of *Calliope* could not be done without the Spring 2025 students of English 4750 who make up the Editorial Team. Please extend a warm applause to the following editors: Lisa Alvarado-Acosta, Julian Caro, Eduardo Martinez, Amyyah Rogers, and Darci Ross-Smith. This dedicated group of students came into their roles with prior experi-

ence in editing and worked through all stages of production, from reviewing submissions, copy editing, designing, and advertising the journal. I would like to especially thank Darci and Julian for their thoughtful copy edits, Eduardo for his InDesign expertise, and Lisa for her art work and design at all stages of the process.

Thank you to the support of the Department of English, particularly from our past Managing Editor Dr. Ayuso, Department Chair Dr. Emerson Case, *Orpheus* Advisor Dr. Adam Schuster, and to our Academic Support Coordinator Analía Rodriguez. Funding for Issue 18 has been generously provided through an Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) Grant, Extended Education and Global Outreach (EEGO) program funding, and the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Thank you to the Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) Committee and the Division for Student Affairs, Interim Dean Dr. Alicia E. Rodriquez and the College of Arts and Humanities, and Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. James L. Rodríguez. Thank you also to the CSUB Printshop for the physical copies of our journal. Most importantly, thank you to all the students that helped to bring this together, from the Editorial Team, the essay authors, our peers in *Orpheus*, and the display case designers. *Calliope* is and will continue to be a collaborative effort. We hope you enjoy Issue 18.

Dr. David Barrera
Assistant Professor of English
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Past Managing Editor Comments

Dr. Mónica G. Ayuso

Calliope is one of the proudest achievements of the Department of English at CSUB. I had the honor of serving this student-led journal as faculty advisor for six consecutive years. Witnessing the dedication, professionalism, creativity, and collaborative spirit of graduates and undergraduates has been one of the highlights of my teaching career. I had the opportunity to work with extraordinary students from whom I have learned much that has affected my work in the classroom.

It is exciting to welcome the new leadership carrying the torch into the future. Warm greetings and best wishes to the contributors and members of the editorial team responsible for bringing us Issue # 18. Our collective thanks go to them and to Dr. David Barrera, the new faculty advisor. He is readying students for academic and professional success, as the world of student publishing moves towards new and exciting forms of inquiry.

Here's to *Calliope*, a forum for exceptional student research and creativity!

Dr. Mónica G. Ayuso
Professor of English

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INSERT MEDIA : 2000–PRESENT

Perspectives within the scope of media ties to the world of literary anaylsis as it becomes a major outlet for discussing social context.

Introduction to Section: *Insert Media*
By Eduardo Martinez

Although this journal traditionally focuses on literature, it is important to recognize media within the context of critical analysis. Media when compared to literature can come in multiple forms, such as: graphic novels, music, movies, or video games which make use of either: visuals, sound, and audience involvement in order to understand the works themes, characters, and symbolism compared to traditional literature. The essays presented within this edition of *Calliope* go into detail about how each work of media utilizes both visuals and interactions to show greater themes within their respective essays. In the essay "A Look at Community and Belonging in *Persepolis*" the author Brit Melson goes into depth about the comic's visuals, that are used to express the government's power in enforcing a new regime and loss of childhood innocence during the same time. In the essay "Finding Philosophy in Hollow Knight" by Erin Rowley, he not only presents philosophical meditations from Socrates, Aristotle, and Hegel within the Hollow Knight story, but also shows players how these philosophies are present throughout the gameplay and environmental design. Finally, there also exist the modern formation of communities surrounding a piece of media or communal thoughts on types of media that are worth looking into as not only is they are important in analyzing the work the community is centered around, but also in understanding why people come to certain types of interpretations surrounding a piece of me-

dia. In Perrin Swanmorre's essay, "Realitypilled and Evidencemaxxing: Considering the Rhetoric of Incels.is" he looks into incel communities and their skewed view on women and how that belief is present within their interpretation of works done by women. By broadening our analysis into media, we are able to inspect things that are not inherent within the literary scope of critique, especially those concerning people's relationship with the many different forms of media.

Collective Resilience: A Look at Community and Belonging in *Persepolis*
By Brit Melson

Told through the voice of a child, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* explores crucial moments in Iran's history, like life under the Shah's Regime and the Islamic Revolution, depicting how these oppressive moments amplified violence, forced migration, and created loss of individual freedoms for Iranians, and subsequently shifted the meaning of "belonging" for them. Using a vivid black and white color scheme that enhances the meaning and complexity of her comic-style images, paired with her own real, but reimagined memories of her childhood, Satrapi explores the impact of conflict in her homeland on her relationships with family, friends, religion, and authority. Forced to adapt and evolve due to political and religious tensions, the characters in *Persepolis* paint a dual picture of migration, both chosen and forced, showing how it can create a sense of isolation with a fracturing of memory and dissociation from identity that is ultimately overridden by community togetherness, deliberate remembrance of past traumas, and an impressive drive for survival.

From the opening chapter, "The Veil," Satrapi confronts readers with the fraught emotional state of Marji and her peers when a shift in governmental power dynamics occurred and dress code regulations became law (Satrapi 3). The proximity of images that depict children playing and sitting veiled in school adjacent to images of adults protesting during the Islamic Revolution, point with immediacy to the challenges of

fractured identity and collective isolation amidst political religious persecution and rebellion. Importantly, these challenges are not exclusive to Marji but instead point to the shared experience of all Iranians under an oppressive government. She shares the burden of wearing the veil with her peers, but being forced to adopt a new wardrobe against her will leaves Marji feeling alone, symbolized by the depiction of her in a separate frame than her classmates during their class photo (Satrapi 3). Brooke Alyea, of York University, writes, "Satrapi chose to introduce herself to the reader by making this move from something small and private (a class photo) to something large and political in just one frame, drawing a link between the historical and the personal (Alyea 15). Because this text is a graphic novel, many readers tend to view it as being lighthearted or easygoing, but through her skillful, masterful attention to detail, and clever sequencing of images, Satrapi is uninhibited in telling her own story, while attempting to illuminate the communal stories of those around her.

The efficacy of this graphic novel in achieving its purpose of detailing the extremity of life faced by Iranians, and specifically Satrapi's family, lies in the juxtaposition of a child narrator and the explicit violence present in the colorless, yet compelling images. Through this pairing, readers have an immediate sense of the innocence loss endured by Satrapi and children like her, as well as the sheer atrocity with which the government acted when they acted in such violence. Researcher at Duke University, Kimberly Wedeven Segall articulates this effect perfectly, saying:

[T]he stark black and white images of Satrapi's work, with their

> delineated frames that splice one scene to the next, seem more melancholic: unresolved loss is depicted as pictures jump not only from one injury to the next and from one face to the next but also from images of youth to images of death, demonstrating a painful loss of innocence. (39)

The fragmented linearity of time, space, and/or content shown in each frame reflects a fracturing of mind, memory, and identity amidst the changes in government. The rapidly imposed requirements, like forced wearing of the veil, drove wedges in between who Marji, and other Iranians, were as people, and who the government demanded they be.

To compound the issues of personal identity Marji experienced outside of her home, she also found herself questioning all she had ever known. The chapter, "The Bicycle," shows the crumbling of Marji's relationship with God. For her entire life, God had always been there when she was alone to offer conversation and comfort. The day that Marji learned of the government killing innocent people (Satrapi 14), she felt hurt and wanted to take action. She unsuccessfully begged her parents to let her protest (Satrapi 16-17) and when she tried to talk to God, he was not there. Segall highlights how "the indirect transfer of the story of deaths and her changing sense of revolutionary identity lead to a suspension of faith…causing a sense of alienation…or shifting identifications" (40). The chaos of Marji's world causes a total upheaval of her beliefs, leaving a child to navigate the difficult emotions of loneliness coupled with identity loss. This upheaval is reflected in the image panels as groups of homoge-

nized officers are attacking the citizens and burning down buildings, and Marji is shown apparently abandoned by God (Satrapi 14-17).

When it comes to isolation and identity fragmentation, considering belonging and ownership is vital. When one lacks autonomy and is restricted in nearly every way, from attire to activities, location to dislocation, or even life to death, it is hard to imagine the ability to feel belonging. Contributing to this conversation is Duke University's Yalda N. Hamidi, as she adds, "for the communities…who experience exile, immigration, and displacement, the sense of belonging and ownership is fragile and questionable" (241). But fragile and questionable does not mean broken or weak. Marji, her family, and the other characters in the text effectively illustrate how those who experience fragility under the weight of conflict often find strength within their communities to push forward and hold one another up. Satrapi illustrates this well in the chapter "The F-14s" when Marji and her father rush home to check on her mother after Iraqi jets bombed Iran. Upon arrival, the three of them found strength and comfort in one another's arms (Satrapi 81), despite their emotional fragility in that moment. This idea is further expressed through the party in the chapter "The Wine," where the images point to the importance of community as they huddle together in fear, work together to plan, and party together for a brief respite from the world. Marji says "In spite of all the dangers, the parties went on. 'Without them it wouldn't be bearable' some said" (Satrapi 106). In these chapters, readers find reminders that the strength of a resilient community prevails against any antagonistic forces that are against

them.

The power held within the unity-driven resilience of Marji's community is their most effective tool in emotional survival, preservation of history, and collective healing. Goldnar Nabizadeh, Lecturer of Comics and Graphic Novels at the University of Western Australia, points out that the characters "repeatedly emphasize the importance of remembering lost lives, both in the text's present and in retrospect…[and] acts of remembrance ricochet between past, present, and future audiences" (155). In this succinct interpretation, Nabizadeh elucidates the idea that deliberate remembrance of all that has been lost works as an emotional glue that binds the community together despite the fracturing of individual and collective identities.

Within Satrapi's novel, the concurrent chapters "The Water Cell" (18) and "Persepolis" (26) illustrate the value of shared stories and deliberate remembrances. In the former, Marji learns of her family's royal background and her grandfather's removal from the government. Through learning this family history, along with the stories depicting her grandfather's prison stay and the torture he endured, Marji became closer with her father as he shared the story, as well as with her ancestral roots as she began to know her own history. Because she learned what happened to her grandfather, she placed herself as close to his shoes as possible and replicated his torture in her bathtub (Satrapi 25). In the following section, Marji questions her grandmother on the topic of her grandfather. Though her grandmother initially resists, she gives in and tells Marji about the

difficulties that she endured while her husband was imprisoned, like her inability to feed her children and the way she would boil water simply to maintain the image that their family had food (Satrapi 26). In the same chapter, Marji, her mother, and her grandmother are waiting in fear as Marji's father is late home from photographing a protest. While the present financial status of Marji's family starkly contrasts with that of the past, the parallel of fear that runs through the family's minds while their loved ones are away is symbolic of the interconnectedness within their familial community.

The representation of the Satrapi family enduring successfully over the course of history and through each lived-through conflict of government, religion, or society, reflects their unwavering resolve to survive. One specific example of this is Marji's relationship with her uncle Anoosh, who meets his demise in the chapter "The Sheep" (Satrapi 62). In the article, "Persepolis: An Analysis of the Role of Identity during the Iranian Revolution," the author points to Anoosh as being "a revolutionary that fought against the ordeals of the Shah [and] served as a role model for Marjane; embodying hope, strength, and passion" (Shakiba). Their relationship serves fuel to Marji's fire for life. Segall offers further elaboration on this point, observing that *Persepolis* serves as "a small measure of hope, because the protagonist survives, and thus the text becomes a record of survival in the face of adversity… it becomes a testimony of hopefulness, despite its melancholy depictions of intergenerational loss" (42). This hope, found in the reclamation of self and identity and in the collectivist nature

of society within this story, is the foundation which allows communities that are plagued with forced exile, religious persecution, and political conflict, to build and rebuild their lives.

Through Satrapi's powerful depiction of Iran's social and political climate under the Shah and during The Islamic Revolution, she highlights the impact of oppressive forces on community and belonging. Her carefully crafted, yet explicitly visceral, images and memories engage readers in acts of empathy and compassion for Marji and her fellow Iranians. In the context of relationships, whether they are between family members, friends, or a person and their god, this text exemplifies the importance of community strength and bonding in the development of resilience, particularly when faced with adversity.

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The Unavoidable Ties Between Politics and Personal Life
By Dylan Prewett

In "The Dew Breaker," Edwidge Danticat writes a series of short stories that give different perspectives on the extent of the François Duvalier regime's impact on Haitians and Haitian-Americans during, after, in Haiti, and even in immigrating to the United States. Danticat focuses her stories on the regime to shed light on the dark and grim lives that immigrants are fleeing from when politics and personal lives are attempted to be separated in narratives. Her depictions of the different ways the trauma of the regime lingers in these people's lives remind her audience of the complexities within immigration and how American politics have washed out the nuance of their stories – it is because these stories are just as much personal as they are political.

The purpose of Danticat's stories is not to skew the relationship of politics and personal life in one direction over the other but to discuss the grey area the Duvalier regime had created for its victims. Her work illustrates the web of exploitation that Haitians became trapped in: "Danticat's work explores both the personal and the political, so that she personalizes politics and, conversely, politicizes the personal" (Munro 220). When people read of brutal regimes, such as Duvalier's, and wonder why the victims stayed subservient, they often are missing the crucial piece of the puzzle. In "Funeral Singer," Danticat shows how closely Duvalier placed himself in other's lives during his visits that would have bought almost decades of civilian loyalty: "the president chose to get out of the car and walk into our house, to offer us something… As if this sack of rice, this pound of beans, this gallon of cooking oil was the gold, silver, and bronze medals in the poverty Olympics" (Danticat 171). Life becomes indirectly politicized, and the victims must conform to protect themselves from becoming targets, especial-

ly if the dictator himself creates a more personal relationship with his people. His nationalism and strong identity with Haiti and its culture did not falter from his brutality as his connection to the people struggling with poverty was unlike any other Haitian leader (Belleau 949). These visits created the illusion that Duvalier was a leader who could improve the conditions people in poverty were facing by offering necessities such as food that could quell their starvation and positively impact the image of his regime – which it did. His tireless efforts touring Haitian villages would grow his reputation for the poor, changing his identity as a shy doctor and becoming the people's hero (Johnson 429). When Freda, Danticat's character, compares the visits to the 'poverty Olympics' it holds a solid validity, as people would consider these personal interactions with Duvalier to be their ticket to safety: "One would assume that intimacy created solid… political relations based on established social bonds… The opposite was true: intimacy did not prevent hostility; sometimes it even increased the possibility of disgrace" (Belleau 551). Unfortunately for many people, being subservient to his regime never guaranteed their safety, as it was all for appearances and building up Duvalier's reputation. Haitians could not simply reject the regime because they would become another victim of brutality; simultaneously, the personal visits from Duvalier would gain their loyalty and not doubt the regime's actions. How could someone so personable ever have their worst intentions? Danticat's stories will forever blur the lines of personal and political life as the Duvalier regime made it exactly that—where the people of Haiti could not distinguish what was political from charity work to mass brutality.

Danticat writes her stories from the perspective of Haitian women, rather than Haitian men, to uplift their voices and experiences of being a repeatedly overlooked point of view within immigration. Due to the history of Duvalier's

regime, her short stories touch on morality, as "The book's structure, she argues, reflects Danticat's thematic focus on moral issues of silence, concealment, guilt, complicity, witness, redemption displacement, and disconnection" (Bell 117). In "Funeral Singer," Rézia recounts her experience with the inhumanity that Duvalier's regime dished out, as she states, "When I woke up in the morning, my panties were gone. My aunt… on her deathbed she asked for forgiveness… this man had threatened to put her in prison if she didn't let him have me that night" (Danticat 173). As a young girl, Rézia was raped in her sleep while her aunt helplessly allowed it to happen just to protect themselves from the regime's brutality. Her aunt's emotional experience highlights the moral dilemma of silent compliance and the guilt that comes with momentary safety under the authority of the regime. Even though many civilians held a positive image of Duvalier because of his charity to the poverty-stricken, he still had an authority that would make others submit. It is estimated that at least 30,000 people were killed under Francois Duvalier's regime (Belleau 936). These are the statistics that not only frightened Rézia's aunt into allowing someone in Duvalier's inner circle to molest Rézia as a child but also to maintain her silence until she died when Rézia was an adult. While these stories are not discussed openly in American society, Danticat purposely writes them to have people focus "on silenced, abused women, the invisible, unheard victims of largely male violence, and of the ideologies of race and color that perpetuate cycles of social and personal decline in Haiti" (Munro 218). Today people hear the words 'immigration' or 'immigrants' and unfortunately hold negative stereotypes that have become increasingly intense as the United States's political parties become polarized. They are often harmful images of people fleeing their country for 'a better life,' effectively painting them as taking advantage and exploiting the opportunity in the United States. This perspective

of immigration lacks the nuance of the grim realities that occur in countries like Haiti where Danticat reveals shocking stories of women being raped by men from the regime to prove authority and force them to be silent afterward.

Danticat's depictions of Haitian immigrants also discuss the reality that even though these people have fled their home country, the impacts, whether emotional or political, still follow them. In "The Bridal Seamstress," this is the reality for Beatrice, a Haitian seamstress constantly moving because she is being haunted by a (*choukèt Lawoze*, a dew breaker) prison guard. During her interview with Aline, she confesses what had got her in this situation, all because she said no, as she says, "I had a boyfriend, so I said no. That's why he arrested me. He tied me to some type of rack in the prison and whipped the bottom of my feet until they bled. Then he made me walk home, barefoot. On tar roads. In the hot sun. At high noon…wherever I rent or buy a house in this city, I find him, living on my street" (Danticat 132). Whether a reality or part of a traumatic hallucination, Beatrice has been constantly running away from the lingering effects of the regime even as she lives in the United States and not in Haiti anymore. Even though she has become a successful seamstress, often one of the few jobs immigrants can pick up without opposition, she still is reminded of her past. She must cope with the trauma of the regime's violence while pretending it does not occupy the empty spaces in her life. Danticat expresses these frustrations: "Do we not have the right to live elsewhere? Yes, but the hell of Haiti still pursues us every inch of the way" (Munro 206). Immigration is not an experience that is only felt at one time and never again, is the point Danticat makes in her stories. It is a personal experience that is shaped as a negative through political rhetoric. Aline's primary goal during the interview process was to write a brief article for the company she works for, but at the end of the interview, she made a poignant

discovery that changed her perspective of the world. Aline, a sheltered child, now a grown adult, makes the connection: "Aline had never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives…hundreds, even thousands, of people like this… chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others. Maybe Aline herself was one of them" (Danticat 137). People who were able to survive and flee the regime will continue to be haunted by the trauma, like Beatrice. Unfortunately, it largely remains unnoticed in American society as to why Aline had never made the epiphany before. Danticat creates a bridge between Beatrice, a Haitian immigrant, and Aline, an America, to show that even though they are from different places they share a connection despite it, as "Anne and Beatrice become each other's doubles, as they both are imprisoned by society's heteronormative rules and codes of behavior. Beatrice hides her age and marital status, while Aline hides her sexual identity from her parents" (Bell 131). Even though they have different struggles, they are connected by the fact that they feel imprisoned in their lives, whether for political or emotional reasons. Politics shapes and conceals identities and experiences, as everything is influenced by it.

"The Dew Breaker" is a collection of short stories that shed light on the experiences of the unheard in American society. Despite Haiti being geologically close, just south of Florida, the understanding of Haitian immigrants' experiences is more distant than that. Danticat does not skew her stories in one way over the other when discussing the political and personal aspects of the trauma gained from the violence of the regime. Duvalier carefully curated his image to be a hero for the poor while simultaneously doing inhumane actions against his civilians if they stood out of line or did not meet his expectations. Safety was never guaranteed under his watchful eyes. In "Funeral Singer," Danticat expresses how wom-

en were silenced in Duvalier's inner-circle through threats of authority, causing Rézia to be raped as a young girl. In addition, "The Bridal Seamstress" expresses how even when Haitians fled to the United States, the trauma followed and often imprisoned these victims in their own lives. Danticat's overall purpose is to humanize the victims of the regime who are blanketed in a negative light because of their status of being an immigrant. She draws connections to the struggles of society from both sides to make the statement that life is political, and politics are personal no matter how much narratives attempt to separate the two.

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New Horizons: In the Dream House
By Autumn Bohannon

Carmen Maria Machado is a queer, Latina, American author and essayist whose works in science fiction and fantasy have been awarded for their fresh takes on topics relevant to the existing social discourse in the United States. Machado's 2019 memoir, *In the Dream House*, carries the reader alongside her as she describes her experience in an abusive, highly volatile same-sex relationship. Through this journey, Machado's "Dream House" serves as a conduit which connects the reader to the book. There are times that the reader becomes Machado herself as the struggles within the Dream House intensify and narration shifts from first person, then through the reader in the second person. Adjacent to traditional magic realism works, the symbol of the Dream House itself transforms the landscape of the memoir from a tired collection of information into a captivating story that suspends the reader's disbelief as they traverse the disorienting hallways and uneven floor in the Dream House. Ralph Edward Rodriguez, author of *Latinx Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectation* (2018) and Professor of English at Brown University, argues that literature that utilizes experimental point of view, metafictional techniques, and/or magic realism shifts from the traditional horizon of expectation conjured by the term "Latinx." *In the Dream House* epitomizes Rodriguez's argument as Carmen Maria Machado employes the use of metafictional technique, experimental point of view, and magic realism to explore gender, ethnicity,

sexuality, and class in its current and historical contexts, thus disengaging the reader from stereotypical and politicized expectations of "Latinx" works.

Ralph Edward Rodriguez's *Latinx Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectation* examines the expectations historically and currently placed on Latinx works and urges the reader to engage with and develop Latinx texts that shift the horizon of expectation placed on these works. As such, Rodriguez challenges the Latinx identity itself and the way in which it is neatly packaged and presented in mainstream media and existing literature. He describes, "The Latinx community is neither monolithic nor static; rather, it is defined by a range of experiences, identities, and histories that resist any simple categorization" (Rodriguez 26). Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* captures the essence of Rodriguez's call to unbinding what the reader believes they know about Latinx literature and showing them what it truly is. It is not simply a story written by a Latinx individual; it is an authentic experience that makes no attempt to be easily digestible for the masses or easily labeled as Latinx literature. Machado disengages the reader from the traditional horizon of expectations conjured by the term "Latinx" through metafictional technique.

Machado's use of experimental point of view as a metafictional technique helps the work stray from the traditional horizon of expectation of a "Latinx" work. Throughout the memoir, Machado shifts her use of first-person point of view into the second-person point of view once her relationship with the woman in the Dream House begins. Ultimately,

Machado shifts back into first-person point of view by the end of the memoir after she and the woman from the Dream House separate. Through this, Machado accomplishes two things: the first is framing the story to depict Machado's loss of self once she is with the woman from the Dream House and her reclamation of agency once they separate, and the second is to enable the reader to experience the relationship for themselves from Machado's perspective. As the topics of gender and sexuality are addressed from a queer perspective, the shift in point of view aids the reader in understanding a potentially unfamiliar dynamic. Through the narrative of the memoir, the reader is seamlessly placed in the point of view Machado, disabling them from separating their own, heteronormative experiences from the queer ones of Machado. In this, unfamiliarity with queer relationship dynamics is impossible as the reader themselves *becomes* Machado, unknowingly adopting Machado's experiences as their own until Machado shifts the point of view back into first-person. Machado addresses the shift in perspective in the section "*Dream House as* an Exercise in Point of View." She states,

> You were not always just a You. I was whole—a symbiotic relationship between my best and worst parts—and then, in one sense of the definition, I was cleaved: a neat lop that took first person—[…] I thought you died, but writing this, I'm not sure you did. (Machado 22)

This experimental point of view joins together the reader and Machado as one, so as she does not realize she is in the suffocating embrace of the

woman in the Dream House until it is too late, neither does the reader. These techniques envelop the reader within the memoir's major themes and challenges the reader's notions of "Latinx" literature. Her experimental techniques continue to develop as she utilizes the Dream House as vehicle in magic realism to further challenge the reader's understanding of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. The Dream House itself, as Machado asserts at the start of the memoir, is "[…] as real as the book you are holding in your hands, though significantly less terrifying" (17). The Dream House evokes the feelings of familiarity and total estrangement simultaneously. The events that unfold within the Dream House induce a familiar, sickening feeling, such as when bad news is about to be delivered or when a villain unveils themselves in film. The feeling of the unfamiliar, the estrangement that occurs within the narration, is only felt once the woman in the Dream House has already fully constricted Machado. The familiar sense of love and companionship in the Dream House becomes estranged when the warm embrace of the woman in the Dream House is realized to be tortuously suffocating through the evolution of Machado's abuse. The Dream House as a magic realism element is evident as Machado uses it to chronicle her experience, serve as a time-capsule for her darkest moments, and exist as a space that itself is built from the remnants of herself left behind following trauma. The Dream House's occupants are sleepy and translucent during their stay but become lucid and opaque upon their exit. As a queer woman, Machado's understanding of her own role in an abusive relationship and the villainy of her partner is not recog-

nized within the blurry, disorienting walls of the Dream House. Machado's applications of magic realism and metafictional technique transcend that of its historical and expected use. In this, *In the Dream House* shifts the reader's expectation of this Latinx work. Additionally, the component of gender and sexuality contributes to the story's estrangement from traditional Latinx works.

The queer, abusive relationships addressed in the memoir are not only new territory for the reader, but it is also new territory for Machado, who had no experience with same-sex relationships prior to the woman in the Dream House. The lack of queer representation in literature and the judicial system blurs the lines of what queer relationships can and should be. Heterosexual relationships that have turned abusive have long been represented in the judicial system and media, making identifying these relationships as such a more linear process for victims. Queer people in these relationships, however, do not have a guide to reference in determining their own victimhood. Ruthann Robson, an American professor of law at CUNY School of Law in New York City, elaborates on the historical blurriness of lesbianism in the judicial system in her essay "Lavender Bruises: Intra-Lesbian Violence, Law and Lesbian Legal Theory." Intra-lesbian violence is not a new concept, but it has been misunderstood and inappropriately addressed in the judicial system since the objective recognition of lesbianism. Robson expands upon the misdirected focus of sexuality in abusive relationships between two women, stating,

The legal sanctions in cases of intra-lesbian violence have often

> been directed more at the "lesbian" sexual component than at the act(s) of violence. The punishment of sexuality may be explicit, as it was in the *Linck* case in which a lesbian was executed. (Robson 6)

Historically, lesbians have been able to escape formal persecution through the law in the United States because lesbian partnership could not be imagined without penetrative sex. How can these women be charged with a crime if it is not possible for them to have a traditional form of intercourse? The seeming ambiguity of how two women could be together was beneficial for lesbian couples in a sense, but being unable to define lesbian relationships or validate them as relationships at all also meant that when a woman *was* in an abusive relationship with another woman, the law could not comprehend how abuse could occur. This issue, resulting in Machado's own misunderstandings regarding her victimhood, is addressed in the memoir's section titled "*Dream House as* Ambiguity," in which Machado recalls historical cases of queer women in abusive relationships that have been wronged by the legal system. In the case of Anette Green, a Black woman who killed her abusive girlfriend, the judge hearing her case challenged her plea to be viewed as a battered woman in her case. Machado describes, "The baffled judge eventually allowed Green's defense, but only after insisting on renaming it 'battered person syndrome,' […] Regardless, it was not successful; Green was convicted of second-degree murder" (154). Green's attorney later commented that had Green been a battered woman in a heterosexual relationship, she would not have been

charged with murder. Liegh Goodmark, Marjorie Cook Professor of Law at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, provides clarity on the judge's bafflement in the Green case. She states,

> The early battered women's movement talked about "wife abuse" rather than "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence," underscoring the assumption that violence between partners happened only within marriages. (Goodmark 90)

Moreover, battered women who are charged with murder are more likely to be acquitted after sentencing if they are heterosexual and white. The issue of gender, race, and sexuality intersect in the judicial system both currently and historically. Machado's experience as an abused, Latina, queer woman challenges traditional Latinx narratives, highlighting *In the Dream House* as a work that perfectly aligns with Rodriguez's argument in *Latinx Unbound.* In Latinx works that do not shift the reader's horizon of expectations, same-sex relationships, specifically those of an abusive nature, are not highlighted. Machado brings this narrative to the forefront of this Latinx work, challenging the expectations of its inner contents and demanding its recognition in the Latinx canon as it *is* a Latinx experience. Machado's experiences as a queer Latina lends understanding to the historical contexts for which Latinx, LGBTQ identifying individuals experience marginalization and prejudice socially and within the judicial system.

Machado's experiences in the Dream House offers an unfamiliar narrative in Latinx literature. While this narrative is unique to Latinx literature and strays from the traditional horizons of the genre, queer Latinx

individuals in abusive relationships is all too common. From *The Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* authors Laura E. T. Swan et al. document qualitative research identifying estimated incidences and reasons for high levels of abuse between same-sex, Latinx couples. The research findings indicate high levels of violence between lesbian partners, a 61% experience rate compared to the 48% rate of their heterosexual counterparts, and that these incidences often result from minority-based stresses (Swan et al. 5). The topics of gender, race, and class interlock as this study harkens to the added stress of being a minority of multiple groups. When Machado first encounters the woman in the Dream House, she comments on the woman's Anglo features and highly Americanized upbringing (Machado 31, 60). This sharply contrasts from Machado's experience as a Latina, contributing to the added pressures of being queer.

Carmen Maria Machado combines metafictional technique, shifting point of view, and magic realism to embody her experiences as a Latina and queer victim of domestic abuse. The Dream House holds record of Machado's time with the woman from the Dream House and serves as a symbol of the familiar and the estranged. Journeying through her memoir, the reader becomes Machado. Lost within the winding hallways of the Dream House, the reader comes to understand the complexities of abusive same-sex relationships. The woman in the Dream House, who strives to entrap Machado and the reader within, fails as both the reader and Machado emerge from the Dream House once again lucid and in possession of their agency. Machado's *In the Dream House* is a unique example of

Latinx literature that transcends the expectations of the genre. Her experimentalism and techniques within the memoir epitomize Ralph Edward Rodriguez's argument that works that employ the use of these techniques are able to challenge the reader's assumptions of the Latinx genre and disengage from the traditional horizons of Latinx literature. Machado's narration of her life contributes to the existing body of Latinx literature in a way that enriches the reader's understanding and expectations of the genre. Her raw narrative, capturing the turbulent and ugly nature of abusive relationships as a queer, Latinx woman, is a performance of truths that enrich the genre. As Rodriguez explains, "this performance, this narrating of a life, is important because it is through our stories that we 'sustain' ourselves" (44). Machado's *In the Dream House* is an enriching contribution to the existing body of Latinx literature and serves as an opportunity for its reader to disengage from the existing expectations placed on Latinx works and see the genre beyond the term *Latinx*.

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Finding Philosophy in *Hollow Knight*
By Erin Rowley

Recently, I began a brand-new journey, starting a game, I had never played before and knew nothing about before trying it. I had owned this game since 2023, a newly minted philosophy major in my first semester at California State University Bakersfield, but only, in 2025, did I have the opportunity to really sit down and play it. After hearing incredible reviews of the game, about it being difficult but rewarding to play, and how it changed the lives of several of my friends forever, in more ways than one, I quickly grew addicted to Team Cherry's *Hollow Knight*, having plunged headfirst into a world in which I was wholly unfamiliar but wholeheartedly enraptured and engaged with. Leaping and battling my way through the crumbling vestiges of a once-glorious kingdom now in ruins proved to be riveting gameplay. Beyond this, though, in fighting my way through difficult bosses, challenging platforming, and understanding the lore and my place in this magical bug-infested world, I picked up on the silken spider-threads of our world's philosophy woven together in a way that is fascinating. I am all abuzz like a cicada thinking about how Socrates, Aristotle, Hegel, and Haslanger roll up into this game and make it such a treat for philosophy-minded players. [1]

The player starts the game for the first time knowing absolutely nothing about the world around them, —no awareness of what lies behind, what lies ahead, or what lies within—only that there's the small empty town of Dirtmouth around with a sprawling network of tunnels beneath

it; starting at the Forgotten Crossroad. The more the player explores, the more key items, people, and places the player discovers, the more lore they learn—all of it serves one final realization, that the player didn't know anything at all. Enemies become strong allies, weak townsfolk are revealed to be literal gods, and the protagonist transforms from a powerless whelp to an incredible warrior and a vessel to contain the plague brought upon Hallownest. In taking this mindset of knowing nothing and keeping an open mind throughout the game, the embodiment of Socrates' greatest wisdom is embodied, that the players is wise in knowing that they know nothing, or as Plato put it, "whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know" (Plato 5). Having this mindset allows the player to experience the game in a way that is lovely, because it makes the player open to learning the layout of Hallownest by actually taking the time to explore it and come to know it. One should not want to go into this game assuming that they know everything about it, and they will be grateful that they went into it with a blank slate. The battles and reveals and triumphs are not nearly as satisfying to witness for the first time had a player gone in assuming that they knew what was going to happen in the game. In musing on the base endings, though, the player may come to wonder if the Knight, the playable character and protagonist of the game, ever pondered its higher purpose as the player does, and whether Hornet, the Knight's sister and a fellow vessel to contain the plague, questioned the path she and the Knight were both on. This idea correlates to another one of Socrates' famous teachings: again, in Plato's words, "the unexamined life is not worth

living" (Plato 20). The player will always be left to wonder just how much the Knight wondered about their own life the way they wondered about theirs. In some endings of the game, after obtaining an item called the Void Heart, the Knight learns of their intended purpose before it is too late to divert it and, with Hornet's help, finds another way to control the infection and save what remains of Hallownest. The game studio Team Cherry may never provide a direct answer to that inquiry, so instead it is left up to the players to put themselves into the Knight's shoes. Socrates' teachings seemed to show through mostly in experience and in the connection between the player and the game itself, not necessarily in the gameplay mechanics.

One philosopher that does appear in the gameplay mechanics of *Hollow Knight*, though, is Aristotle, especially his virtue ethics. *Hollow Knight* falls under the subgenre of video game called a *Metroidvania*, or an action-based platformer with a non-linear structure and exploration limited by the player character's abilities in that present moment (named for Nintendo's *Metroid* series and Konami's *Castlevania* series). On top of that, *Hollow Knight* was also purposely designed to be difficult, making it feel rewarding when players finally beat a boss after challenging them over and over again, slowly picking up on each boss' attack patterns so that they can dodge and attack accordingly to survive the encounter. Aristotle may consider learning these boss fights to be a virtue, which is a characteristic or art in which excellence can be actively strived toward; of this he says, "excellences we get first by exercising them, as also happens

in the case of the arts" (Aristotle 19). I remember feeling as if I was flourishing when I defeated incredibly difficult bosses like Nightmare King Grimm and the Mantis Lords after upwards of 50 attempts at each, I could feel my skill at the game growing with each attempt. I was striving toward excellence at the art of surviving each battle, and now I can manage these battles with ease, sometimes even without sustaining any damage. By consciously practicing, the player is closing in on embodying Aristotle's golden mean–they are not too poorly practiced so as to suffer and die within the first few seconds of the battle, but they are also not too well practiced so as to hurt their health from playing constantly. With even more time spent playing, taking little to no damage to each boss may even become second nature to them; only time and practice will tell.

Hegel is another philosopher that is relevant to the experience in playing *Hollow Knight*, both from the player-to-game connection perspective and the lore perspective. As the player explores the world of Hallownest, there are times where they may be deadly afraid of the things around them, wondering if something is going to jump out and send them back to their nearest checkpoint, or if they are going to fall into a trap that they hadn't previously seen. The player is supposed to be so afraid of making a mistake at times that they will avoid going to certain places for a while or try to get through without exploring the area thoroughly enough and missing things in the process. What they are really afraid of, though, is seeing the truth. The player is afraid of either falling into the spike pit or being embarrassed by their fear if there is no spike pit, and as silly as it

sounds, they have to get over that fear to keep playing. If the player is too scared of messing up, then it is as Hegel puts it, "fear of error reveals itself rather as fear of the truth" (Hegel 47). However, players must eventually get over this fear so that they can keep playing, but they may be so nervous about knowing the truth about what was at the end of every corridor that it makes them tense at certain parts, wondering what came next. Now, they should no longer fear what's to come next. From a lore perspective, though, Hegel has peculiar applications, too. Traveling alone through Hallownest alone, the player has nothing to compare themselves against and are simply another one of the animals crawling around without a purpose, not really conscious of themselves. Around various non-player characters (or NPCs) though, such as Hornet, Leg Eater, or The Last Stag, the player may feel aware of themselves which has something to define themselves against. As Hegel describes it, my "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (Hegel 110). Without other conscious and self-conscious characters, the player couldn't understand themselves or the things that they needed to do. The player does not have any of the context that is required to put themselves into place alongside everyone else and figure out everything that is going on. Being reminded of Hegel is a particular treat that a player with a background in philosophy would not otherwise expect to find in a game about sapient bugs swinging around weapons.

Haslanger was another philosopher that may come to mind during a playthrough of the game. The Knight bears many names, each with a

different social meaning–names such as *Little Ghost*, *Little Traveler*, *The White Saviour* [2], *White Wanderer*, *discarded vessel*, and *beast*. Each of these titles carries a different social meaning, which Haslanger explains "depends on our actions and interactions" (Haslanger 9). Each of these terms for the Knight and even the name of the Knight carries with it some implicit meaning, depending on the way it is used both broadly and particularly. Terms like *Little Ghost* imply something unnatural and dead about the Knight, *Little Traveler* and *White Wanderer* imply someone that doesn't like to stay in the same place for very long or someone who has seen the breadth of the world, *White Saviour* implies someone noble who goes about rescuing people in need, *discarded vessel* implies a certain hollowness that is meant to be filled and a feeling of being scrapped and unneeded or even defective, and *beast* implies something mindless and uncontrollable, untamed and unsuitable to be around. The term Knight gives the impression of someone who runs around swinging a weapon in service of someone and doing something noble. In every instance, the social meaning tells the player something important about the world around them, the people using the epithets, and the people they are applied to. These social meanings, when examined, unpack a whole new layer of context and immersion, in what it means to be in the world of Hallownest.

While this is by no means the full extent of the philosophy that can be pulled from such a game as this, many may find it intriguing to examine it from numerous broad angles to see what one can uncover, leaving no stone unturned and no button unpressed. Such a beautifully crafted game

with this much thought and intention deserves at least as much effort of thought put back into it on the part of the audience, as its players do their part in pondering what Team Cherry has placed before them, especially with the ongoing development of *Hollow Knight's* sequel, *Silksong*.

Notes

[1] It should be noted that this essay will contain spoilers for *Hollow Knight.*

[2] Not to be confused with human white saviors, this is meant to be a noble title from someone who idolizes the Knight.

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Realitypilled and Evidencemaxxing:
Considering the Rhetoric of Incels.is
By Perrin Swanmorre

Incels.is was created in 2017, using the domain name *Incels.me* ("Incels.is"). Created in response to the ban of the subreddit r/Incels ("Incels.is"), the forum has continuously functioned as a community space for involuntarily celibate—incel—men. The forum's self-reported statistics display over 622,000 threads, over 14,000,000 posts, and over 28,000 members (*Incels.is*)—all of whom must at least claim the incel identity to join ("Rules and FAQ"). As a community, users vent their romantic and sexual frustrations filtered through the *Redpill* worldview, its *Blackpill* derivative, and a unique set of slang typified by "racism and sexism" ("Introduction to Incels"). This discourse is actively moderated, with restrictions on the people who can engage—barring known children, women, queer, and non-incel individuals from participation ("Rules and FAQ")—and restrictions on the topics and claims that can be discussed: users cannot positively describe their own physical appearance, can only reference queer content when criticizing it, and most notably, cannot "post Bluepilled content of any kind" ("Rules and FAQ").

The discursive community that has developed on *Incels.is* has, despite its relatively small size and marginal identity, the potential for significant impacts on the larger culture. Each time I have opened *Incels.is* for this project, self-reported statistics on the forum's main page have shown many more unregistered guests observing the website than regis-

tered members. Incel slang has grown increasingly common outside the incel community. In the most shocking circumstances, this discursive community has the potential for violent eruptions in physical space. On March 12th, 2020, the mother of Tres Genco called Ohio sheriffs to report "erratic and violent" (Painter 10) behavior by her son, an action that lead to Genco's arrest and the discovery of Genco's "Hideous Symphony," in which Genco declared his intention to "slaughter [women] out of hatred, jealousy, and revenge" (Genco 1). The prosecutor in Genco's case documents frequent activity by Genco using the profile "Oedipus" on *Incels.co* (Painter 2), a previous domain name used by *Incels.is*, where he frequently discussed Elliot Rodger, the self-described incel who notoriously targeted a sorority house at UC, Santa Barbara in 2014 (Painter 2). The case of Genco/Oedipus exemplifies the continued potential for violence produced even by relatively small discursive communities like *Incels.is*. Together, these moments of overlap between the forum community and the wider world establishes the value of scholarly attention to the rhetorical context of *Incels.is*.

The following rhetorical analysis of *Incels.is* is split into two parts. In Part I: "Digital Rhetoric and Dystopian Collectivity," I utilize the work of Trent Kays, Zeynep Tufekci, and Jeff Rice to develop a concept of *Incels.is* as a *dystopian collectivity*, the unfortunate flipside of Stephen Doheny-Farina's vision of online spaces as *utopian collectivities*. I go on to consider how *Incels.is* exploits human urges to entangle its users, and how participation in the dystopian collectivity can influence how users

of *Incels.is* interpret *technical images*. In Part II: "The Blackpill and the Rhetoric of Epistemology," I use the work of Jenny Rice and Dana Cloud to consider the ways in which *Incels.is* rhetorically exploits aesthetics of science and truth and argue that the cultivation of the "scientific" Blackpill within the dystopian collectivity produces a reactionary equivalent to Cloud's *rhetorical realism*.

Part I: Digital Rhetoric and Dystopian Collectivity

In his contribution to *The Routledge Handbook of Queer Rhetoric*, Trent M. Kays provides a reading of Stephen Doheny-Farina's *The Wired Neighborhood* as part of a larger project arguing for the "conflation" (Kays 436) of queer and digital rhetoric. In Kays' excerpts, Doheny-Farina observes that the nature of the Internet allows users to "wrest control from elite opinion makers and entrenched policy makers" (Kays 435), enabling the creation of online communities in opposition to "the dominant idea of what should be and should not be in the contemporary world," and organized around niches "of interest, education, tastes, beliefs, and skills" (Kays 434). Doheny-Farina describes these online communities as "utopian collectivities," while Kays' reading offers up the critical addendum that "rhetoric exists to create both utopian and dystopian worlds" (Kays 434). Whether or not one accepts Kays' conflation of queer and digital rhetorics, his engagement with Doheny-Farina's theory of digital collectivities offers up a useful angle for considering *Incels.is*.

In the context of Kays, I propose an understanding of *Incels.is* as a *dystopian collectivity*. The forum's main page defines it as "a community

for men that struggle with or are unable to get into romantic relationships with women despite trying" (*Incels.is*), suggesting organization around a sort of anti-skill, and its banner message, "Join our forum and talk to people just like you" (*Incels.is*), suggests an additional layer of organization around an interest in discussing that anti-skill. The forum situates itself in opposition to dominant ideas through its conceptualization of the *Bluepill*, described in one section of "Must-Read Content" as "the rosy lies unattractive men are told as children to make them feel better," opposed primarily via Blackpill ideology, described as "a comprehensive, science-based perspective" attempting to "describe the objective truth about what men and women truly value most, even when it is not polite to discuss publicly" ("Introduction to Incels"). Remarkably, this dystopian collectivity in many ways functions to rhetorically *dis*empower its participants.

In his second chapter surveying contemporary rhetoric, James Herrick introduces his readers to Zeynep Tufekci's analysis of YouTube. Although focused on the mechanisms of algorithmic content curation, her observation "that people are drawn…to incendiary content" (Herrick 249) is relevant to content curation on *Incels.is* as well. Tufekci argues that in YouTube's algorithm, "What we are witnessing is the computational exploitation of a natural human desire: to look 'behind the curtain,' to dig deeper into something that engages us" (Herrick 249). *Incels.is* exploits the same natural urge, promising users access to impolite truths obscured by rosy lies. Just as Tufekci argues the algorithm carries us along "by the

exciting sensation of uncovering more secrets and deeper truths" (Herrick 249), the users of *Incels.is* are provided an active forum to expand their Blackpill knowledge. Observation of the category "Must-Read Content" on *Incels.is* showcases a digital space specialized in looks behind the curtain, offering a proliferation of threads discussing and expanding on Redpill and Blackpill ideas. At the time of writing, a user might click on a thread titled "Serious: Music is used to control the sheeple," another titled "Blackpill: Mothers Abuse & Kill Children -Mainly Males- More," or another titled "Blackpill: [STUDY] 10% of children are the result of cuckoldry, males penises and semen have evolved with that in mind, women desire chad more during ovulation" (*Incels.is*). Whatever thread the user selects uncovers more secrets—perhaps that "semen coagulation time is yet an other indication of women's propensity to cheat" (Gymcelled 1)—and scrolling down a thread will expose the user to a slew of affirming responses and links to texts other users considered relevant. Regardless of the thread, *Incels.is* provides further looks behind the curtain at the bottom of every thread page, suggesting "Similar Posts" to keep users active and engaged within the dystopian collectivity.

In *The Rhetoric of Outrage*, Jeff Rice builds on the work of Vilém Flusser to describe the function of *technical images* within social media contexts. Flusser observes that "Information is a synthesis of prior information" (Jeff Rice 11), and as a result of this quality, Rice proposes that we interpret digital media not via analysis of an individual text, but instead through "computations…based on past interactions with the image, related

imagery, associations with the image, and so on" (Jeff Rice 12). Because our interpretation of technical images is built on prior information rather than isolated analysis, Rice points out that different individuals can approach these images with different interpretive computations produced by distinct sets of prior information (24-5). Considering Rice's theory in relation to *Incels.is* suggests that the incel forum should produce substantially different interpretive computations from the mainstream.

Indeed, as a dystopian collectivity defined in opposition to mainstream knowledge and continuously engaged by incendiary content, an examination of threads on *Incels.is* provides evidence of unique programmatic responses to technical images. In the thread "Music is used to control the sheeple," a user identified as RegularManlet presents his response to Miley Cyrus's song "Flowers." RegularManlet embeds a full lyric video for Cyrus's song and quotes lyrics from the song directly in his post:

> "I can buy myself flowers." "Write my name in the sand." "Talk to myself for hours." "I can take myself dancing." "And I can hold my own hand" "Yeah I can love me better than you can." (RegularManlet 1)

These features suggest that RegularManlet is attempting to produce a close, textual reading of "Flowers" when he offers the interpretive claim, "Clearly this song is pushing that sort of 'girlboss' propaganda 'You don't need no man girl!'" (RegularManlet 1) and characterizes "Flowers" as "single woman/mother propaganda" encouraging women to "enter the workforce where they are not happy and outearn men leaving men sex-

less" (RegularManlet 1). Elizabeth Logan offers a contrasting reading in her article "The Real Meaning of Miley Cyrus' 'Flowers' and Its Connection to Virginia Woolf" for *NBC*. There, Logan provides similar textual evidence, embedding the official music video for "Flowers" and quoting a similar section of Cyrus's lyrics:

> "*Started to cry, but then remembered I / I can buy myself flowers / Write my name in the sand / Talk to myself for hours / Say things you don't understand / I can take myself dancing/ And I can hold my own hand / Yeah, I can love me better than you can,*" Cyrus sings. (Logan)

Logan's excerpt differs from RegularManlet's only in formatting and the inclusion of two additional lyrics, one of which immediately precedes RegularManlet's quoted lines and one of which RegularManlet arbitrarily excludes from the middle of his excerpt. Where RegularManlet reads "Flowers" as propaganda to make women feel "they are worth more than a man they outearn" (RegularManlet 1), Logan reads the song as a personal narrative, "POV of someone who didn't want their relationship to end, but realizes that she can make the best of it by taking all the good parts of the relationship with her" (Logan). While both analyses recognize the song's interest in independent women, Logan's reading makes no mention of the workforce, sexless men, or music's ability to manipulate the human mind—and RegularManlet's reading makes no mention of the possibility that the speaker in "Flowers" might have preferred to stay in her relationship. Perhaps isolated textual analysis could explain why RegularManlet's

reading excludes Logan's observation of the singer's regret—the preceding lyric "*Started to cry*" is arguably crucial to Logan's reading—but it cannot provide an adequate explanation for the interpretive elements unique to RegularManlet's post. What evidence we do have to explain their interpretive distinctions is in line with Jeff Rice's work; examination of Logan's work for NBC shows frequent professional engagement with pop culture since at least January 2023 ("Elizabeth Logan") and her citations within her analysis of "Flowers" suggests past interactions with primary interviews with Cyrus and the literary work of Virginia Woolf (Logan). In contrast, responses from other users in RegularManlet's thread document that, at the time of the thread's creation, RegularManlet had made 1,660 posts on *Incels.is* in less than two months on the forum (RegularManlet 1), suggesting a remarkable magnitude of past interaction with the dystopian collectivity.

Together, these frameworks of digital rhetoric suggest that *Incels.is* functions as a dystopian collectivity organized around the anti-skill of involuntary celibacy and an opposition to mainstream expressions of "objective truth," maintained by exploitation of the natural human interest in "incendiary content" and the desire to uncover secrets. As a result of interaction with this dystopian collectivity, users of *Incels.is* present interpretive computations distinct from mainstream interpretive computations, resulting in analyses of technical images entangled in users' past interactions with the incel forum collectivity. With this analytical foundation established, it is worth attending to the rhetorical means through which

Incels.is exploits the aesthetics of scientific evidence, weaponizes evidentiary proliferations, and shapes its users' senses of truth and reality.

Part II: The Blackpill and the Rhetoric of Epistemology

Already, I have noted that the Blackpill is defined within *Incels.is* as "a comprehensive, science-based perspective" attempting to "describe the objective truth" ("Introduction to Incels"), and this rhetorical emphasis on scientific knowledge appears frequently in discourse within the collectivity. In the thread "Music is used to control the sheeple," RegularManlet supports his titular claim by citing "a study on the effects of visualization" (1) and embedding a video about the "aztec death whistle" (1) produced by the YouTube channel The Action Lab, which describes its creator's credentials "as a PhD in Chemical Engineering" and its mission to "share how awesome science and experimentation can be" (The Action Lab). The thread "[STUDY] 10% of children are the result of cuckoldry, males penises and semen have evolved with that in mind, women desire chad more during ovulation" presents an even more focused reliance on scientific rhetoric, emphasizing the scholarly quality of its source material with the emphatic *[STUDY]* tag, alongside connections to evolutionary theory and the medical/biological language of *ovulation*. The thread's creator, identified as Gymcelled, links to a conference paper written by a professor and a lecturer from the Federal University of Technology, Akure, and a peer-reviewed article published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology*, both available in full on the platform *ResearchGate* (1). It is outside the scope of this paper to assess the legitimacy of these citations as scientific texts—

what I seek to highlight is the way both RegularManlet and Gymcelled use these texts to provide an aesthetic sense of scientific and factual legitimacy to their claims.

In "What Is This Evidence Of?", Jenny Rice describes the discourse of conspiracists as "a pretender to true evidentiary processes… passing off narrative as true evidence" (5), citing work by Marilyn Young and Michael Launer describing such rhetoric as "a symbiosis of poetics and argumentation" (Jenny Rice 5). In this framework, "it is not the case… that the technical details are authentic forms of evidence. Rather, what is cited by the conspiracist is simply 'adduced as evidence'" (Jenny Rice 5). Consideration of the preceding example threads from *Incels.is* exemplifies this conspiracist symbiosis. In "[STUDY] 10% of children are the result of cuckoldry…", Gymcelled mixes technical details with paraphrase and interpretive claims emblematic of the programmatic responses cultivated within the *Incels.is* collectivity. In one quote discussing "fairly high rates of extra-marital affairs in both men and women," specific portions of the text citing surveys of infidelity among women are quoted using a significantly larger font size from other portions of the text (Gymcelled 1), physically emphasizing portions of the text relevant to the worldview of the collectivity. In paraphrase and summary, Gymcelled eliminates discussion of male infidelity entirely. In "Music is used to control the sheeple," RegularManlet's technical details lean even heavier on poetics, as his "study on the effects of visualization" provides minimal citation information, including neither a title nor a publication date, and equally minimal

textual evidence—limited to a paraphrased seven-sentence summary of methods and results. These narratives of scientific evidence work in a way evocative of Jenny Rice's description of evidence as "concerned with palpability" (7); blended with the computations of the dystopian collectivity, these scientific texts can make the personal challenges of an *Incels.is* user feel like a concrete and proven problem with the world.

My analysis in this part has so far focused on two example threads, but an analysis of the rhetoric of epistemology within the *Incels.is* collectivity would be incomplete without recognition of its aesthetic scope. Scanning the threads in the category "Must-Read Content" on *Incels.is* reveals a high frequency of threads focused on palpable proof of the dystopian collectivity's worldview. Threads tagged *[Study]* or *Analysis* abound, and nearly half of the first page of threads is labelled with the prefix *Blackpill*, denoting threads specifically concerned with that "comprehensive, science-based perspective" ("Introduction to Incels") on inceldom. The forum's introductory thread concludes with a link to the "Scientific Blackpill" article on their affiliated wiki, which claims to present "scientific findings without judgment" while maintaining "a neutral tone" ("Scientific Blackpill"). There, the dystopian collectivity has compiled a massive list of "systemic and genetic factors" contributing to their members' incel status. The page is massive—requiring 223 pages to print in full—and contains frequent hyperlinks and references for further reading. This wiki page, and arguably the entire *Incels.is* forum, exhibits what Jenny Rice describes in "Prolific Archives: Notes from Trutherworld" as "hyperevi-

dentia" (69), accumulations of evidence that "bounce between aesthetic and epistemic borders of comprehension" (Jenny Rice 69) and become rhetorically effective more by their magnitude than by their content. Consider the thread "Music is used to control the sheeple," where the very first response reads, "Good post. I didnt read a word but I appreciate the images" (RegularManlet 1)—such a user self-reports an aesthetic experience of the collectivity's so-called science-based perspective.

In the introduction to *Reality Bites*, Dana Cloud argues that left-wing rhetoric must use rhetorical mediation to convert facts into common sense (2), arguing that the rhetorical success of the political right comes out of integrating argumentation with "compelling stories about our origins and destinies that foster deep identification and commitment" (Cloud 3). In my view, the analysis I have presented thus far provides a particularly perverse example of the ways in which reactionary rhetoric can blend the rhetorical language of *fact* with storytelling. On *Incels.is*, the Scientific Blackpill presents a reality "subject to rhetorical constitution" (Cloud 6) through interpretive readings of nominally-scientific technical images by its dystopian collectivity. This rhetorically-constituted reality blends with stories of the incel's origin and destiny to produce user identification with the *incel* description and commitment to the dystopian collectivity. As such, *Incels.is* arguably presents the reactionary flipside of Cloud's "rhetorical realism," producing a "common sense" unbound from any fidelity to "the interests of the exploited and oppressed" (Cloud 6).

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have presented an analysis of the digital forum *Incels.is* through the theoretical frameworks of digital rhetoric and the rhetorics of truth. Through the work of Trent Kays, I have argued for considering *Incels.is* a dystopian collectivity. Informed by James Herrick's discussion of Zeynep Tufekci, I analyzed the way *Incels.is*'s structure exploits the human urge to dig deeper to retain a vulnerable userbase. Contextualized by Jeff Rice's work in *The Rhetoric of Outrage*, I explored the way the *Incels.is* dystopian collectivity influences its users' interpretive computations through a comparative analysis of two readings of Miley Cyrus's "Flowers," showcasing how participation in the dystopian collectivity estranges *Incels.is*'s users from mainstream interpretive computations of technical images. Supported by two chapters in Jenny Rice's *Awful Archives*, I discussed how the aesthetics and rhetorical strategies involved in the dystopian collectivity's use of the Scientific Blackpill produces an aesthetic of a fact-based worldview and discourse, and argued that the features of both *Incels.is* and its connected wiki produce an evidential proliferation more persuasive via its aesthetics than the particulars of its content. Reading *Incels.is* alongside Dana Cloud, I argue that the rhetoric of truth used within the dystopian collectivity produces a reactionary counterpart to Cloud's rhetorical realism, blending narrative with a rhetorically-constituted reality unbound to progressive principles or mainstream notions of truth.

In the aftermath of this analysis, what is to be done? If we study rhetoric for the sake of knowledge, let the above stand on its merits, either

a useful lens for understanding an unusual, sometimes-violent corner of our digital/physical world, or an inadequate analysis to be condemned and discarded. If, on the other hand, we study rhetoric for the sake of strategy or persuasion, perhaps the question emerges: *what should be done about it?* Certainly, there are those who, witnessing the antisocial and violent potential in *Incels.is*, might propose suppression as a necessary response, either through governmental limitations on freedom of speech, or through the private interventions of companies responsible for hosting the forum. But the dystopian collectivity has been suppressed before—the various changes in domain name noted in this paper document a history of private domain owners dropping the collectivity, only for it to reemerge with a new host—and all iterations of the *Incels* forum exist in the aftermath of incel collectivities being suppressed, whether on Reddit or elsewhere. Stamp out *Incels.is* by force, and the dystopian collectivity will surely emerge again, whether under the *Incels* name or otherwise. Perhaps, instead, the rhetorician at odds with *Incels.is* would be better off considering the implications of rhetorics of truth for combatting dystopian collectivities of its ilk. If the status quo of factual discourse is really more aesthetic than epistemic, if our current theories of the real are necessarily rhetorically-constituted, perhaps the only reasonable response to the dystopian collectivity is a reinvigorated ontology.

Notes

[1] It's worthwhile to note that, in the scope of this rhetorical analysis, a clear picture of real and active individuals using Incels.is is unavailable.

[2] In incel terms, "typically defined as recognizing that most males are seen as disposable, modern society is inherently gynocentric, that women are hypergamous maters who are also generally highly deceptive towards men" ("Redpill").

[3] Typified by the belief that "ugly, 'genetically inferior' men have no chance of getting laid in an unconstrained mating context" ("Blackpill").

[4] The Bluepill is described in one section of the forum as "the rosy lies unattractive men are told as children to make them feel better" ("Must-Read Content").

[5] In one recent example, the incel slang term "looksmaxxing" was shortlisted for Collins Dictionary's 2024 Word of the Year ("Word of the Year").

[6] "High effort and brutal IQ"; "brutal water is wet pill"; "good thread" (Gymcelled 1).

[7] In "[STUDY] 10% of children…" one user recommends the book Sperm Wars, another links to a thread on the forum Looksmax.org, and a third links to another Incels.is thread, "RageFuel: StOp SaYiNg mY pEniS iS SmAlL" (Gymcelled 1).

[8] "a person who wants to be in a loving relationship but is unable to find a partner despite his best effort" ("Introduction to Incels")

[9] "Without relationships, mental health suffers, childbirths drop, and men

drop out of society altogether" ("Introduction to Incels").

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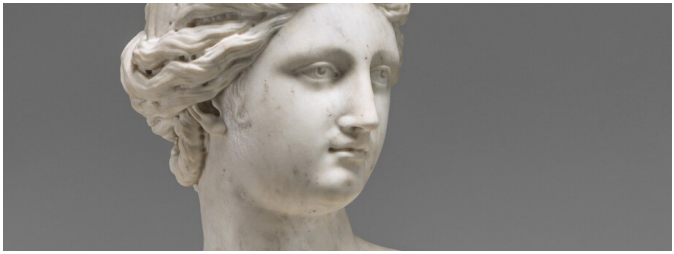

ROLE PLAY: 1900s–2000

Within the interest of gender roles and race, literary analysis uncovers the issues of their construct and the masks at play.

Introduction to *Role Play*
By Julian Caro

While not all of the essays featured within *Role Play* explicitly focus on gender, the collection is certainly meant to work together in taking the reader through different depictions and effects of gender, across multiple contexts. The mixture of both male and female perspectives within the section serve to depict experiences faced by the other gender, through what is explicitly said and imposed, in addition to what has been left unsaid or unimposed.

In particular, Esmeralda Ochoa's essay provides insight into a female experience. "Undoing the Marianismo and Malinche Binary: Sandra Cisneros' Third Way" invokes a traditional look at *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and how this view works in conversation against *La Malinche*, presenting a damaging binary for women. This essay in particular was included within the journal to showcase specifically how symbols of traditional femininity can change over time. The view offered of *La Virgen* by Ochoa is rather traditional and tied to the Catholic church, where *La Virgen* is often seen as "submissive" and "self-sacrificial" while being the 'gold-standard' for how a good Catholic woman should behave. This "pure" and possibly reductive view of *La Virgen* is a prominent belief today; however, *La Virgen* is not limited to this single perspective, and not even within the Catholic church itself. Within a biblical context, *La Virgen* can also be viewed as a figure of reverence due to her being chosen to carry God's son, signifying a great honor and responsibility, reflecting her

own characteristics and thus proving her distinct worthiness.[1]

While *La Virgen* can be seen as a figure of deep religious devotion or religious celebration, she has also been made out to be a figure of resistance. Within historical context, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* signified resistance in the 1850s when Mexico fought against the Spanish in the Mexican War of Independence, and later in the United States in the 1940s and 1960s with the birth of the Chicano Movement and Farm Workers strikes. Furthermore, she has also been prayed to for safety while crossing the Mexico-United States border. *La Virgen* is a paradox who over the years has been used to symbolize religious piety and resistance in the face of oppression and therefore fans a debate about what she signifies that still continues today.

Therefore, the views about gender expressed within this essay stamps a hyper-specific moment of thought, which is constantly shifting and being re-established, which is what the other essays within the section can be seen doing as well. Whether that is through Michelle Aquino's essay, "Motherhood, Survival, and Identity in Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*,'" where a clear critique of the female farmworker experience calls for change in the patriarchal-shaped system, or within "Epistemology and Cognitive Estrangement in Simon Ortiz's 'Men on the Moon'" by Jolie Medeiros, where a re-evaluation of men's unchecked pursuit for expansion, knowledge, and power is called for due to the potential consequences. This constant re-negotiating of gender is seen in Anna Rinaldi's "Metatextual Amplifications and Critiques of Prescribed

Gender Roles in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*," which underlines how the ideas of predetermined gender roles can lead to inescapable harm, and finally within AGB's "Jasmine and Inescapable Patriarchy," which depicts how patriarchy is omnipresent and influences all things. This collection of essays speaks on the forces of gender which constitute so much of the world around, and the critical act of questioning and recognizing these influences.

Notes

[1] It is important to note that *La Virgen* serves as a role-model for Catholics, similar to Jesus. They can both be seen as oppressive and impossible ideals due to the lives that they lived, which Catholics are meant to aspire to; however, by universal Catholic understanding, humans are imperfect and can never fully achieve the standards which *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and Jesus set and instead can only be strived for.

Motherhood, Survival, and Identity in Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*
By Michelle Aquino

Mexican-American migrants often come to the United States seeking better opportunities despite the significant risks they face. For undocumented migrant mothers, survival is particularly difficult, as they are expected to balance the emotional labor of motherhood with the physically demanding work required to sustain a family financially. In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Helena María Viramontes uses Petra's character to examine how systemic exploitation, patriarchal forces, and cultural expectations shape the identity of Mexican-American migrant women, illustrating how Petra's quiet resilience challenges the oppressive systems that seek to define her.

Petra's deteriorated physical condition is a direct reflection of years of grueling labor. However, it also highlights the ways systemic exploitation targets women uniquely, compounding the burdens placed on their bodies and identities. For example, Estrella observes that her mother "would sit outside the tarpaulin tent with aching varicose veins" (Viramontes 36). This image vividly illustrates how Petra's labor, tied to her role as a single mother, has taken a physical toll on her body, aging her prematurely. As a woman, Petra's suffering is magnified by the expectations placed on her to provide for her children while remaining invisible within a system that exploits her labor and limits her options. Viramontes draws attention to how Petra's dual roles as a laborer and mother intersect to shape her identity. For instance, even while pregnant, Petra is described

as hauling "pounds and pounds of cotton by the pull of her back" (Viramontes 51). This moment underscores the heightened vulnerability of migrant women, who are often forced to endure extreme physical hardship while also fulfilling traditional caregiving roles. Petra's ability to persist despite these challenges reflects economic necessity and the cultural expectations tied to her role as a mother. Critic Dennis López highlights how *Under the Feet of Jesus* critiques these conditions, noting that the novel "calls attention to the racialized laboring body to undercut the invisibility and marginalization cast upon workers by the abstracting forces of capitalist commodification and reification" (Lopez 47). For Petra, this critique extends to the ways patriarchal and economic systems work together to dehumanize women, reducing them to their physical output while placing the weight of family survival on their shoulders. Her suffering becomes a symbol of the intersecting pressures of labor, gender, and motherhood, exposing the unique forms of exploitation faced by immigrant women. Viramontes uses Petra's story to reveal how these intersecting forces suppress women's individuality while showcasing their resilience.

In addition to being confined to a physically demanding job that takes advantage of Petra's duties as a single mother, patriarchal gender norms significantly influence how her personality often emerges as passive and shapes her strategies for asserting her agency. Petra internalizes her role as a mother and nothing about her identity before that role is revealed. Throughout the novel, she is often referred to simply as "the mother," a term that, as Dennis Lopez observes, reflects "the conventional domestic

gender role for women, and the dominant projection of female sexuality" (Lopez 58). This omission of Petra's name mirrors the broader societal tendency to erase the identities of women of color, reducing them to roles of utility— "mother," "laborer," or "caretaker"—with little regard for their individual humanity. By reducing her identity to "the mother," the novel critiques patriarchal forces that render women invisible unless they fulfill these traditional roles while examining the intersection of these forces with economic and racial pressures that conflate womanhood with sacrificial caregiving.

Adding to the challenges Petra faces, her identity as a Mexican immigrant mother further compounds her marginalization. Viramontes highlights how Petra became a single mother when her children's father suddenly abandoned the family and returned to Mexico (Viramontes 13–17). This traumatic experience made Petra susceptible to stereotypes surrounding women of color. Women like Petra often face criticism for having children. They are expected to support multiple children without consideration of the challenges that hinder migrant women of color from attaining the financial resources necessary to support a family. As the novel notes, "if [Petra] fell apart, the whole thing would fall apart" (Viramontes 52), emphasizing the immense burden placed on Petra to be a pillar of stability for her family, even at the expense of her own well-being. Lopez explains that Chicano culture often relegates women to one of three archetypes: "the self-renounced female, the passive virgin, or the embodiment of female treachery and sexual promiscuity" (Lopez 58). Throughout the

novel, Petra embraces the identity of a passive mother, as seen in her devout faith in La Virgen de Guadalupe—the "caring and nurturing blessed mother" (Lopez 58). However, this devotion is not an overt acceptance of the passive mother role but rather a survival strategy deeply rooted in her cultural identity. Petra turns to La Virgen for strength, a need that becomes especially clear after the father of her children leaves her and the weight of her circumstances begins to settle in. In this moment, she "rolled the beads of the rosary between her fingers" (Viramontes 17), using her faith as a way to cope with her new reality. Viramontes enriches Petra's role in the traditional Chicano cultural context by portraying her as a layered and intricate female character who defies simple categorization.

Despite her seemingly passive role, Petra asserts agency in quiet but impactful ways. For example, she remains in a partnership with Perfecto, balancing emotional sacrifices with the stability he provides for her family. Petra muses, "Love… came and went. But it was loyalty that kept them… from seeing the void beneath their feet," highlighting her understanding of the emotional cost involved if it leads to a stable, loyal partner who supports her family (Viramontes 118). Her decision to stay with a partner she might not love romantically reveals her ability to navigate systemic constraints to protect her children's futures. While Petra's identity as "the mother" reflects cultural norms of self-sacrifice, her actions resist total erasure, demonstrating her resilience and determination to carve out small spaces of autonomy within an oppressive system.

Petra's character in *Under the Feet of Jesus,* by Helena Maria Vira-

montes, exemplifies the systemic exploitation of migrant labor alongside patriarchal expectations, particularly concerning the implications for women. Through Petra's emotional and physical sacrifices to endure and support her family, Viramontes offers a critique of the frameworks that undermine women, predominantly representing them as laborers and caretakers, while their individuality is frequently disregarded. Nonetheless, Petra's journey highlights the resilience and the intricate manners in which women assert their agency, even amid oppressive conditions and within the context of Chicano/Mexican culture.

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Epistemology and Cognitive Estrangement in Simon Ortiz's "Men on the Moon"
By Jolie Medeiros

That the moon landing was "one giant leap for mankind," as Neil Armstrong declared in 1969, is not questioned in Simon Ortiz's "Men on the Moon." Rather, "Men on the Moon" acknowledges the significance of the moon landing, but raises questions about its purpose and potential consequences through the perspective of an elderly Indigenous man, Faustin, watching the *Apollo 11* mission on television. Writing in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, in which "Men on the Moon" appears, editor Grace Dillon notes that "Darko Suvin's concept of 'cognitive estrangement' … guides the story" (86). This is true both for Faustin, unfamiliar as he is with the *Apollo 11* mission, and for the reader, who re-experiences the moon landing through Faustin's eyes. In particular, Faustin's theory of knowledge is likely to differ from a Western reader's, coloring his interpretation of the moon landing. Altogether, Ortiz's "Men on the Moon" employs cognitive estrangement through Faustin's unfamiliarity with the technology and epistemology undergirding the *Apollo 11* mission, recontextualizing the moon landing not as an unquestioned triumph of American technological prowess but as a portent of the potential horrors of the unchecked pursuit of knowledge.

To understand how cognitive estrangement is created, it is first necessary to understand what it is. Darko Suvin, former professor of English at McGill University, Montreal, coined the term "cognitive estrangement"

in the first edition (1979) of his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre.* Though Suvin never defines "cognitive estrangement" directly—the term only appears when he calls science fiction "*the literature of cognitive estrangement*"—its meaning is substantially expressed in the section "Poetics: Estrangement and Cognition" (4). Cognitive estrangement is "the factual reporting of fictions," which enables readers to confront "a set normative system … with a point of view … implying a new set of norms; in literary theory this is known as the attitude of *estrangement*" (6). An estranged representation "allows us to recognize its subject" while simultaneously making "it seem unfamiliar." The exercise of looking at the familiar from an unfamiliar perspective provides an opportunity to "come at the rules by which" the known world "is governed" and thereby grasp concepts that would not have been obvious otherwise. In Ortiz's "Men on the Moon," the "new set of norms" is Faustin's epistemology and his unfamiliarity with 1960s American technology (6). Faustin's perspective estranges the reader from the historical moon landing and recontextualizes it so that new implications and meanings can be drawn from the event.

For example, Faustin's unfamiliarity with and skepticism of the *Apollo 11* mission's purpose renders the mission absurd rather than impressive. Unaware of why people are going to the moon, Faustin asks his grandson, Amarosho, about it. Amarosho responds that "[s]cientist men don't believe there is any life on the moon. The men are looking for knowledge," at which Faustin wonders "if the men had run out of places

to look for knowledge on the earth" (Ortiz 88). While the Western reader may take it for granted that *Apollo 11* sought knowledge, Faustin's skepticism, suggesting that there are many other places to look for knowledge on the earth, does make going to the moon seem silly. This absurdity is deepened when Faustin finds out that the "American scientist men" have already been to the moon and have brought back rocks: "[they] went to search for knowledge on the moon and they brought back rocks. He kind of thought that perhaps Amarosho was joking with him" (Ortiz 89). Decontextualized from its sociopolitical and historical import, and even in that context, it does seem ridiculous to leave Earth, a monumental feat, and only bring back rocks, even extraterrestrial rocks. In this way, Faustin's unfamiliarity estranges the reader from the American cultural memory of the *Apollo 11* mission as an exalted triumph; instead, it seems almost ridiculous.

Moreover, Faustin's epistemology, which holds that knowledge comes from life, estranges the reader from a Western epistemological paradigm and makes the *Apollo 11* mission's search for knowledge seem not only absurd but futile. Faustin's epistemology was hinted at in his incredulity about the "scientist men … search[ing] for knowledge on the moon and [bringing] back rocks" (Ortiz 89); his incredulity suggests he finds the idea of rocks containing knowledge absurd. His epistemology is more clearly shown later, after *Apollo 11* has landed. Faustin thinks, "Amarosho had told him that men on earth—scientists—believed there was no life on the moon. Yet those men were trying to find knowledge on the moon.

Faustin wondered if perhaps they had special tools with which they could find knowledge even if they believed there was no life on the moon" (Ortiz 93). The wording of the passage above suggests a contradiction between there being "no life on the moon" and there being "knowledge on the moon," which suggests Faustin believes that life is necessary, or usually necessary, for there to be knowledge. This idea is strengthened by Faustin wondering if the astronauts have special tools to extract knowledge "even if … there [is] no life on the moon," since they would not need special tools to find knowledge without life if it were typical to gain knowledge from nonliving things. Faustin's epistemology estranges the reader from a Western scientific epistemology, which explicitly searches nonliving things for knowledge, such as in geology. However, from Faustin's perspective, looking for knowledge on the lifeless moon is most likely a futile project, and the Americans' willingness to pursue a futile project even to the extent of leaving the earth suggests a dangerous and rather horrifying hubris.

Further, it is this frightening hubris that drives Faustin's dream of the Skquuyuh mahkina (SM), which prompts the reader to contemplate the horrors of an unchecked pursuit of knowledge and technological advancement. The SM is a mechanical monstrosity: "It splashed through a stream of clear water. The water boiled and streaks of oil flowed downstream. It split a juniper tree in half with a terrible crash. It crushed a boulder into dust with a sound of heavy metal" (Ortiz 91). The SM is capable of effortlessly destroying large natural features like trees and boulders; its power

is “awesome” and awful, in the sense of being both awe-inspiring and frightening (Ortiz 91). The SM, as a mahkina (a machine), represents technology. It reflects Faustin’s fear that the Americans will not stop until they find knowledge, a pursuit that under Faustin’s epistemology is likely futile, and thus their technological ambitions will result in massive destruction. Faustin specifically characterizes this dream as a portent when he tells Amarosho that “[i]t’s a dream, but it’s the truth” (Ortiz 94). That Faustin’s concern was the Americans not stopping until they found knowledge is corroborated by his reaction to hearing that the astronauts are quarantined: “[W]hen they found even the tiniest bit of life, even if it was harmful, they would believe they had found knowledge. Yes, that must be the way it was … [Faustin] remembered his dream clearly now. The old man was relieved” (Ortiz 95). Faustin’s relief implies that he now believes the “Mericano men” will stop because they believe they have found knowledge (Ortiz 95). His perspective prompts the reader to ponder the implications of an unchecked search for knowledge, especially one that will not stop at interplanetary boundaries. Indeed, his dream characterizes that unchecked ambition as having apocalyptic implications, especially for the natural world. In this way, Faustin’s estranging point of view casts American technological ambition as not only frightening but monstrous.

Ultimately, “Men on the Moon” uses Faustin’s perspective and unique epistemology to create cognitive estrangement that grapples with the absurdity and potential horrors of unchecked scientific ambition evoked by the *Apollo 11* mission’s moon landing. Ortiz presents a view-

point of knowledge very different from a typical Western epistemology, and in doing so, opens the way for the Western reader to re-analyze a known historical event. This re-analysis raises critical questions that all pursuers of knowledge and science must answer: what is being looked for, and at what potential cost?

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Metatextual Amplifications and Critiques of Prescribed Gender Roles in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

By Anna Rinaldi

"There's no way out of this - it is as if it has already happened"—Pablo Vicario ominously instructs his brother, dragging him toward their seemingly predestined task of murdering Santiago Nasar (García Márquez 61). Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* creates an unsettling atmosphere of dissonance and absurdity, as its characters display a clear reluctance to carry out or prevent easily avoidable actions, yet are, inexplicably, unable to deviate from fulfilling what has already been "foretold" within the novel's circular, obfuscating narrative. This metatextual framing, through which characters are rendered to seem aware of and reluctant to fulfill or alter their own implicated, predetermined roles within a narrative, amplifies and calls attention to the similarly prescriptive, constructed nature of binary gender roles imposed on some of the novel's major characters—specifically, the Vicario siblings.

Vague and hollow invocations of honor and duty pull Pablo and Pedro Vicario forward in the narrative, as they make haphazard attempts at satisfying their designated script for performing masculinity, which demands them to exact vengeance on Santiago in order to restore their family's social standing. Edward Said, Lisa Flores, and Alexandra Fitts offer useful frameworks for articulating the contingent and ontologically unstable nature of the twins' masculinity. The potency and dominance of their own performed masculinities is dependent on the regulation of their sister Angela Vicario's sexuality, as well as the racialization of and vio-

lence against Santiago, who is perceived as a disposable other in the community's eyes. While the twins reluctantly execute the demands of their gendered script, Angela resists upholding her prescribed, gendered role as a virginal bride, and through creative acts of writing, she engages in what Helene Cixous defines as subversive, self-making forms of expression that enable alternative performances of femininity. In the process, she revises her gendered script to better fit her own desires; however, the cost of this divergence and subsequent liberation is Santiago's life. Thus, the novel effectively uses metanarrative techniques to expose the arbitrary, destructive gender codes that shape the Vicario siblings' narrative roles; because these codes rely on violence against racialized others and the strict regulation of women's sexuality, they ultimately fail to offer a just, productive model for resolving community conflict.

Enforcing Masculine Honor Codes through Racialized Violence: Spanish Colonial Legacies and Orientalism

Understanding the destructive effects of the cultural forces that culminate in Santiago's death requires examining how constructed gender codes, as well as their associations with fear and repudiation of a gendered or racialized other, overly determine the Vicario siblings' respective roles within the narrative. Judith Butler exposes the constructedness of gender and sexual identities, redefining them—not as stable, internally consistent identities—but as resulting from a series of repeated performances that imitate a seemingly natural, accepted image of true femininity or masculinity. However, this "true," idealized essence of the feminine or masculine

is itself a constructed product of accumulated discourse, social practice, and performance. Raised in a household and cultural environment where "the brothers were brought up to be men, [and] the girls had been reared to get married" (García Márquez 31), Pedro and Pablo are conditioned to abide by constructed notions of masculinity. The contours of these unstable and contingent masculine performances are marked by their adherence to cultural honor codes that activate in relation to the regulation of women's sexuality, as well as their endorsement of violence against racialized, disposable others.

After Angela accuses Santiago of taking her virginity prior to her marriage, Pedro and Pablo are compelled to "prove" their masculinity by seeking vengeance for this violation against their sister and their family's honor. This expectation is reinforced, both implicitly and explicitly, through their various interactions with townspeople during the hours leading up to Santiago's death. Clotilde Armenta pities the brothers due to "the horrible duty that's fallen on them" (García Márquez 57), while Pablo's fiancé emboldens him with vague platitudes like "honor doesn't wait." She later reflects that she "never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do" (62). Alexandra Fitts traces repeated manifestations of this symbiotic relationship between constructions of masculinity and honor within Spanish literature dating back to the Golden Age of Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries. Some of the most consistent challenges to masculine honor in these texts "involved the adultery or rape of a female relative" (Fitts 133). Such preoccupations with regulating women's

sexuality through public spectacle were not only shaped by misogynistic reductions of women's agency but were also linked to women's reproductive roles in maintaining "racial and religious homogeneity" within lines of descent (134). This desire to maintain racial and religious purity within Spanish bloodlines was increasingly focalized during the aftermath of Spain's violent conflicts with the Moors and Jews during the Reconquista. *Chronicle* thus emerges from a legacy of complex, colonial entanglements between Spain and Latin American countries, including their repeated and varied points of contact with the Arabo-Muslim world, as well as the racial fears and conflicts emergent from these points of contact; however, the novel's cultural mediation of masculine honor codes, while influenced by Spanish literature from prior centuries, is still distinct from it.

In order to understand Santiago Nasar's nuanced and complicated role in the twins' fulfillment of masculine honor codes, Christina E. Civantos excavates the novel's representations of cultural tensions following repeated contact between Latin Americans and Arab Mediterranean immigrants who arrived in South America following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (167). She argues that many Latin Americans viewed newly-arrived Arab immigrants through a "homogenizing Orientalist lens" labeling them as *turcos* (Turks) despite their varied religious and ethnic backgrounds (168). García Márquez both critiques and perpetuates the Orientalist legacies of Spain's violent encounters with the Moors, as well as Latin Americans' subsequent xenophobia towards Arab immigrants, by framing Santiago Nasar—a character of Arab and Colombian descent—as

the disposable pawn in the Vicario twins' enactment of honor codes meant to render convincing masculine performances.

Extrapolating the complex and contradictory representations and misrepresentations of Santiago that ultimately seal his fate requires a close examination of both the town's and narrator's racializing rhetoric that repeatedly mark him as other. As Civantos emphasizes, this othering is not incidental but is the historically and culturally situated product of Spain and Latin America's entwined, colonial forms of contact with the Arabo-Muslim world spanning centuries. The cultural context and destructive effects of Santiago's othering become even more apparent when applying Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Said argues that Orientalism does not only connote the exotic fantasies that Western art conjures about the East, but also serves as a pervasive, cultural, and political accumulation of discourse that the West uses as a malleable, ideological tool "for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1785). While Said examines how Orientalism operates within Britain, France, and America, its foundations in colonial othering and domination can extend to Latin American political and cultural consciousnesses since the racialization and othering of Arab immigrants carry some roots in Spain's colonial encounters with Arab and Muslim groups.

Throughout the novel, the townspeople articulate racialized markers of difference in Santiago's appearance and behavior, which are further reinforced and complicated with references to his upper class status. One of the narrator's first descriptions of Santiago uses physical features to

distinguish him as other: “he had his father’s Arab eyelids and curly hair” (García Márquez 7). On the morning of his murder, townspeople try to decipher Santiago’s actions and demeanor, either as indicators of his guilt or his innocence. While Meme Loiza interprets his contented stroll alongside Cristo Bedoya as a sign of peaceful resolution to the matter, Polo Carillo “thought that [Santiago’s] serenity wasn’t innocence but cynicism”—a silent boast about his wealth granting him impunity and “ma[king] him untouchable…Just like all the Turks” (101). Polo’s comment, while presented as an afterthought, surfaces an underlying resentment for members of the Arab immigrant community achieving economic success. Thus, “Santiago is at once privileged and rejected: in the text, he is perceived by blacks as white, but by *criollos*… (those of Spanish, indigenous, and/or African descent whose families have been in the region since the colonial period)... at large as a *turco*” (Civantos 172). These contingent, intersecting axes of othering are also evident when Victoria Guzman, the Nasar family’s cook, fends off Santiago’s advances toward her daughter, warning him, “Let go of her, white man” (García Márquez 9). Santiago’s socioeconomic class seems to afford him the privileges commonly ascribed to a white man; however, this class advantage is ultimately overshadowed by the perceived threat of his racial and ethnic difference as the descendant of Arab immigrants. Thus, the townspeoples’ active othering of Santiago and passive complicitness as bystanders in his murder points to an Orientalist, masculine hegemony at work. The combined influence of predominating ideas, institutions, and cultural practices, such as the honor codes the Vi-

cario brothers attempt to fulfill, work to uphold the West's claimed "superiority over Oriental backwardness,"—a bias that is not sustained forcefully "through domination," but through the town's implicit "consent" (Said 1788).

These Orientalist-tinged cultural anxieties over "signs of Otherness"—whether racial, cultural, or religious—lead Santiago's racialized body and Angela's sexualized body to become sites for negotiating and codifying masculine honor codes (Fitts 134). Lisa Flores discusses how race and racialized fear is constructed through othering rhetoric that endorses violence and perpetuates a system of "malign neglect" (60). Because of its "ontological insecurity" and resulting adaptability when invoked, the threat of otherness takes on a "chaotic and untamed" nature that "threatens to move too close, to invade and pollute" a dominant social group (in this case, the *criollos*), thus inviting an immediate, violent response (Flores 61). The impulse to distance "the racial, ethnic, or religious other" (Fitts 136) makes Santiago a particularly vulnerable target during the Vicario twins' public exhibition of masculinity, due to preexisting fears of his perceived racial and ethnic otherness as someone of Arab descent and resentment towards his upper-class position. Not only does Santiago's murder render his body as a spectacle made "symbolically heavy with otherness" and as a tool for shoring up Pablo and Pedro's masculinity, but the lack of serious legal consequences for the twins' actions, as well as the town's underwhelming or altogether absent attempts at intervention, reveal a system of malign neglect that causes "some bodies, even as spectacle [to

be made] (in)visible, neither worth knowing nor worth seeing" (Flores 60). While his body was initially made to be hypervisible and weighted with otherness, Santiago lacked any effective protections from the practice of honor killing, ultimately rendering him disposable. This paradox of visibility and invisibility becomes even more apparent when the bewildered magistrate assigned to the case struggles to make sense of the resounding lack of evidence against Santiago, causing him to resort to ominous expressions of disillusionment in his case notes: "Give me a prejudice and I will move the world" (García Márquez 100).

Feminine Resistance to Destructive Honor Codes: Rewriting Gendered Scripts and Asserting Sexual Agency

While the violent racialization of Santiago factors into the Vicario twins' enactment of masculine honor codes, so does the regulation and scrutiny of Angela's sexual behavior. As noted previously, Fitts identifies a pattern within Golden Age Spanish literature that links a woman's expected reproductive roles to their responsibility to maintain racial and religious purity in lines of descent. Any sexual relationships outside of those that are culturally sanctioned thus threaten this ideal of purity and homogeneity. In addition to their use as a tool for violent rejection of a racialized other, masculine demonstrations of honor are also used to perpetuate systems of gender oppression, since their logics of violence and male-to-male revenge assume that women are "incapable of controlling their own desires" (Fitts 137). Thus, masculine honor codes are not only dependent on dispelling the threat of contact with the Other, but they are also dependent on main-

taining possessive control of feminine sexuality, an urge arising from essentialist views of women being instinctual and nonautonomous. Thus, the masculinity practiced by the Vicario brothers in relation to honor codes is dependent on "the need to repudiate the feminine" (Fitts 141), further revealing its contingent and constructed nature. Moreover, the fact that Santiago, rather than Angela herself, is held accountable for violating cultural codes that prize an unmarried woman's virginity implies that women do not possess enough agency to be held solely responsible for a lack of restraint, and the power to resist sexual temptation lies primarily with men. However, this assumption does not spare Angela from any experience of pain and humiliation. While masculine honor codes are performed almost exclusively by men and against men, women are still complicit in perpetuating and enforcing the sentiments behind it. This is especially true for Angela's mother, Pura Vicario, who physically abuses and scorns Angela immediately after she is discovered and shames her for many years following. Recalling her wedding night, Angela confesses, "the only thing I can remember is that [Pura] was holding me by the hair with one hand and beating me with the other with such a rage that I thought she was going to kill me" (García Márquez 46).

Prior to her ill-fated wedding night, Angela also begrudgingly adheres to an imposed script for gendered expectations. Where she diverges is in her refusal to maintain the illusion that she is a virgin, even though her boldness to still "put on the veil and the orange blossoms…would be interpreted afterwards as a profanation of the symbols of purity" (García

Márquez 41). In this context, a woman's eligibility for marriage and, in turn, her social value is determined by her sexual status, with virginity being arbitrarily attached to notions of sexual and cultural purity, prudence, and virtue. However, Angela ignores advice from her friends on how to deceive Bayardo, as doing so would only perpetuate this standard and commit her to, at the time, a loveless marriage. At this turning point in her story, Angela rejects her culturally-bounded script and instead carves a space for herself in the margins, a self-actualizing movement that is dramatized during later recollections of her wedding night: "she let herself get undressed openly…safe from all the acquired fears that had ruined her life" (García Márquez 91). Angela characterizes this moment as the liberating, ritualized death of her former self—a self which was previously governed by the "acquired" (not intrinsic) fears of failing to adhere to culturally constructed models of femininity. Jorge Olivares extends this metaphor of Angela as a text in revision by placing her complex relationships with Santiago and Bayardo—the unwitting co-author and reader of her reinvented, embodied script—within Roland Barthes' "death of the author" framework.

While Santiago's guilt is never confirmed, his purpose in Angela's self-reflexive act of textual revision is clear. Olivares draws metaphorical connections between Santiago's alleged sexual act of penetration and the authorial act of inscription or penetration of the page. In this sense, Angela appoints Santiago as her "*autor*"—an ambiguous yet fitting description she chooses when questioned by the magistrate, as its possible translations

include both perpetrator and author. Turning to Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" can further illuminate the metaphorical significance of this author-text relationship between Santiago and Angela. Barthes argues that the origins of a piece of literature or any piece of writing cannot be traced to a singular author; instead, a text has no clear origin, as it is the product of many intersecting cultural forces and citations of what came before. A literary work's meaning, therefore, is constantly constructed, deconstructed, and renegotiated every time it is read. Transferring the authority of interpretation from the author to the reader necessitates the figurative death of the author and their perceived originality, as they are merely a vessel or imitator, forever opposing or echoing texts that came before. Like Barthes' demotion of the author's primacy, Santiago is reduced to a catalyst for Angela's rebirth and liberation from a position of shame and sexual deviation. The "intertexts" to his narrative role are the cultural precedents for violently repudiating a racialized other as a masculine rite of initiation and for restoring the honor of a family who failed to regulate the sexuality of a female relative. Thus, Santiago's death enables Angela-as-text to be newly interpreted, free from the restraints of the gendered codes that previously reduced her to a woman dishonored.

Following the death of her *autor*, Angela assumes authorial control of her own narrative by engaging in creative acts of self-formation, specifically through the uninterrupted series of letters she sends to Bayardo in the years following Santiago's death. The potential cathartic and liberating effect of this continuous, uninhibited form of writing are further elaborated

in Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa." Cixous illuminates how this type of distinctly feminine writing departs from structuralist binary oppositions, especially binaries between masculinity and femininity, which characterize femininity as a state of lacking. This form of writing embraces unrestricted expressions of feminine sexuality and promotes multiplicity and heterogeneity in its articulation of feminine desires, rather than conforming to binaries that privilege masculine ideals of unity, reason, and violent differentiation. Angela's digressive, spontaneous, and impassioned letter-writing is "inexhaustible" in form, a free-flowing "stream of phantasms" that "not only 'realize[s]' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality…but tear[s] her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty" (Cixous 1869, 1873). The direction of Angela's life was previously dictated by cultural codes that rendered her "guilty" of sexual impropriety and thus incapable of adequately performing her prescribed gender role; however, she finds a new outlet for self-reclamation and free articulation of sexual desire in her obsessive writings to Bayardo, through which she becomes the "lucid, overbearing, mistress of her own free will…recogniz[ing] no authority than her own" (García Márquez 93).

Like the countless possible forms in which Cixous's feminine writing could emerge, the exact content and range of genres that Angela's letters assumed can never be truly encompassed. However, the novel does fluidly trace some of the unexpected shifts and turns that Angela's writing takes over the 17 years she agonizingly sought Bayardo: "At first

[the letters] were a fiancee's notes, then they were little messages from a secret lover, perfumed cards from a furtive sweetheart, business papers, love documents, and lastly they were indignant letters of an abandoned wife who invented cruel illnesses to make him return" (García Márquez 94). The urgent, unrestrained tenor implied by this description of Angela's writing also mirrors the fluid, poetic, and joyously eruptive prose of Cixous's own writing, which both instructs on and embodies the feminine writing she encourages: "Write! And your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients" (1882). Similar to Olivares' more general metaphors linking sexual acts to creative acts, Cixous notes parallels between the intimate, physical exchange involved in sexual acts and the mutual exchange of desires (not originating from a lack however) that can occur between writers who engage in feminine writing and their readers: "Why should I deprive myself of a part of us?...I don't want a penis to decorate my body with. But I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female" (1884). The sexual dimensions to this joint and mutual writer/reader dynamic are further explored in one of Angela's letters during her tenth year of writing. She writes feverishly to Bayardo, lamenting "the eternal scars he had left on her body, the salt of his tongue, the fiery furrow of his African tool" (García Márquez 94). Upon Bayardo's return after 17 years, he becomes Angela's "reader," not by reading the series of 2,000 letters she wrote, as they remained sealed, but by reading Angela's body-as-text.

Using Metatextual Techniques to Amplify a Critical Lens on Arbitrary Gender Codes

In addition to the novel's framing of Angela's letter-writing as a claim to a more autonomous, authorial role in her own narrative, *Chronicle* employs multiple metanarrative techniques that allude to its own limits as a narrativized reconstruction of past events. Most notably, the story presents a fragmented, non-chronological ordering of the events surrounding Santiago Nasar's murder, as the narrator charts his own efforts at trying to reconstruct a mystifying tragedy that continues to haunt the Colombian community of his birth. This self-conscious critique of the novel's inability to construct a cohesive narrative using the genre conventions of a chronicle also extends to the inability of the prescriptive cultural forces steering the novel's plot to provide adequate models for ensuring justice and resolving community conflict. Thus, a "narcissistic" text's tendency to allude to or outright embrace its own fictiveness does not detract from the work's overall usefulness in engaging with real social experiences.

In order to further illuminate the metanarrative techniques that *Chronicle* employs—especially as they relate to commentary on the prescriptions associated with traditional, binary gender roles—it is useful to reference Linda Hutcheon's revised version of Jean Richardou's system for classifying different types of auto-representation, or relationships between fiction and narrative mode. Under this system of classification, *Chronicle* can be interpreted as a covert form of metafiction that is self-conscious about its narrative process. Its covertness lies in the narra-

tor's own self-proclaimed yet subtle involvement in constructing the story, as he does not bombastically announce his central role in trying to piece together the narrative surrounding Santiago's death, but more so hints at the frustrations he encounters in building an accurate, cohesive account of the event.

This covert awareness of the flaws inherent to the construction of narratives is not only experienced by the narrator, but by the characters themselves, especially Pedro and Pablo Vicario who are forced to contend with flawed, destructive models for affirming their own masculinity. This frustration becomes most apparent in Pedro and Pablo's haphazard, reluctant attempts to fulfill their own narrative roles by adhering to the masculine honor codes which demand Santiago's murder. On the fateful morning they set out to kill Santiago, the brothers display an apparent lack of conviction and discretion as they announce their intentions to dozens of townspeople, even as their words imply a spiraling, solemn sense of inevitability. When the twins express their violent intentions to Clotilda Armenta, she advises Indalecio Pardo, who shares close bonds with Santiago, to warn him about the imminent danger to his life. However, Pedro interjects, "Don't bother…No matter what, he's as good as dead already" (García Márquez 102). While Pedro's words appear to issue a bold challenge to any delays, the narrator's unaccountable insight into the Vicario twins' thoughts show that this posturing was not sincere. In actuality, it was a plea to Indalecio, whom Pedro thought to "be just the right person to stop the crime without bringing any shame on them" (102). This disso-

nance between their implied reluctance and their expressed, unfaltering commitment to carry out the deed shrouds the whole sequence of events in a hollow, aimless absurdity rather than a reckless, willful vengeance.

Through this dissonance, the novel seems to invoke another common feature of metafiction: parody. Hutcheon defines parody as "the result of a conflict between realistic motivation and an aesthetic motivation which has become weak and has been made obvious. The consequence is the unmasking of the system or of the creative process whose function has given way to mechanical convention" (24). In this case, the twins' aesthetic motivation is the masculine honor codes that dictate their actions and determine the level of social respect they deserve. The novel's drawn out, lingering fixation on the Vicario twins' repeated delays and attempts to avoid a seemingly predestined event "unmask" the antiquated and destructive nature of the cultural systems that entangle masculinity, threat of the other, sexual control, violence, and honor and offer no other alternatives for seeking truth or justice. Accordingly, because these honor codes are not only tied to their own social position and ability to perform masculinity, but are also tied to the restoration of their family's name, the twins "[cease] to be…individual[s] acting of [their] own volition. [They are] now the representative of [their] family's honor, and its power is greater than [their] own" (Fitts 140). Thus, rather than a resolute, internal impetus driving them forward, empty invocations of honor and duty that, unfortunately, bear real social consequence, swirl around their reluctant, contrived hunt for Santiago. The novel's metanarrative techniques exaggerate the

bewildering contradiction between the brothers' multiple opportunities to avoid the murder and the seemingly inevitable and compulsory nature of their allotted task. This contradiction further exposes how the murder is not carried out for the sake of meaningful retribution, but out of a contrived necessity to follow a predetermined script for performing masculinity and restoring honor.

Conclusion

Interpreting *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* through the lens of gender performativity reveals the destructive effects of contrived, unquestioned cultural codes that only accept narrowly defined, binary conceptions of gendered roles. The contingent nature and ontological instability of the masculine honor codes prescribed to the Vicario brothers becomes apparent when their successful enactment solely relies on the violent othering of Santiago and the strict regulation of Angela's sexuality. While the Vicario brothers reluctantly perform their prescribed gendered roles, Angela, through her refusal to conceal the fact that she is not a virgin and Santiago's subsequent death, is granted a degree of authorial control over her narrative. Following these turning points, she uses liberating acts of self-formation through writing to articulate her sexual desires and escape the stifling confines of the gendered script prescribed to her prior to marriage. The inherent constructedness of these prescribed gender roles is further amplified through the text's metanarrative techniques, which parody and critique the culturally inscribed, external, and hollow motivations behind the Vicario brothers' public performances of masculinity.

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Undoing the Marianismo Malinche Binary
Sandra Cisneros' Third Way
By Esmeralda Ochoa

The Mexican culture has historically been seen as a people that values its conservative and traditional customs, especially roles for women. The preservation of traditional gender roles within the culture is seen to have great harm to Mexican and Chicana women. They are burdened with the expectation of maintaining traits such as being a figure of maternity, obedience, saintly submissiveness, and passivity. Additionally, these gender expectations are seen to have no middle ground because of certain cultural figures that are seen to be examples of what a woman ought and ought not to be. The first of these figures is *La Malinche*, the indigenous, malicious, and betraying Aztec princess who went against her tribe and people to help the white Spaniard conquistador, Hernan Cortez, colonize the indigenous population in Mexico. She is conjured to keep women in line and has connotations of sexual impropriety; in other words, she is a whore-like figure. In contrast, the figure of *Guadalupe,* or the Virgin Mary, is the ideal feminine figure for Mexican women and Chicanas as the culture expects women to remain submissive, self-sacrificial, maternal, and saint-like. These two figures have made up the historical and mythological imagery for women within the Mexican culture for centuries and present an overpowering binary for Mexican and Chicana women. The author, Sandra Cisneros, brings up the conversation of these narrow and contrasting teachings in her multiple stories and poetry. Certain characters of hers

are seen to battle with the figures' power and Cisneros shows the way beyond this overpowering binary that affects Mexican and Chicana women both emotionally and psychologically. Looking at the variety of works of Cisneros, such as *The House on Mango Street* (1983), *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), and *Women Without Shame* (2022), her characters experience the contrast that comes with these cultural traditions, but Cisneros suggests a third way beyond them: the rejection of these cultural inculcations to liberate Mexican and Chicana women from this binary that is instilled in the patriarchal Mexican culture.

In Cisneros's short story, "Eyes of Zapata," from her short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek,* the protagonist Inés is seen to battle this binary of the two cultural figures. Inés is the lover of Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican revolutionist, and struggles with the complexities of being his lover in a traditionalist Mexican society during the Mexican Revolution. For example, her father does not approve of the affair that she has with Zapata and says to her, "*Well then . . . God help you. You've turned out just like that perra* (whore*) that bore you*" (Cisneros 89). The comparison to her whore-like mother that Inés's father implies associates her with the figure of *La Malinche* of being a rebellious and malicious woman who does not adhere to the cultural expectation of celibacy before marriage and innocence. Sandra Messinger Cypress elaborates on the scandalous traits that come with *La Malinche* figure as she says in, *La* Malinche *in Mexican Literature From History to Myth,* that "La Malinche . . . embodies both negative national identity and sexuality in its most irrational form, a

sexuality without regard to moral law or cultural values" (7). Under Inés's father, she possesses these *Malinchista* traits of transgressing against cultural morality because she is the mistress of Zapata and bore two children with him without marriage.

Gloria Anzaldúa speaks more to Inés's situation in her work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* in the chapter, "*Movimientos de Rebeldía y las Culturas que Traicion,"* and mentions the connotations that come with *La Malinche* figure. She says that this figure has become "the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitutes, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards" (Anzaldúa 44). In other words, the comparison to *La Malinche* figure is meant to bring guilt to Chicana and Mexican women for going against cultural standards that were created by men. This guilt of being a woman who goes against her culture and presents immorality is evident with Inés when she says after her father condemns her: "I never felt so alone as that night. . . I wanted to turn around, call out, '*apa*, beg his forgiveness"" (Cisneros 90). The *Malinche* figure is seen to be a significant inculcation that affects Mexican and Chicana women and limits them to liberation in traditional and patriarchal culture. This lack of independence from the *Malinche* figure in the patriarchal system is evident in Inés as she has a moment of shame. The morality of the Mexican culture infiltrates her consciousness and makes her assume that she is a shameful woman and unworthy of liberation from *Malinche* because of her affair with Zapata. Anzaldúa expands on these cultural customs and guilt when she says, "the culture

expects women to show greater acceptance [to] the value system [of] men . . . [i]f a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala* (bad woman) (Anzaldúa 39; italics in original). The image of the bad woman heavily affects Inés and Cisneros shows the unjust social conventions of the Mexican culture and its flaws with following traditionalist views of women being the inferior gender.

In the same short story, "Eyes of Zapata," Inés's mother is seen as *La Malinche* and suffers a tragic consequence for going against the patriarchal expectation of feminine traits. The unnamed mother of Inés is implied to embrace her sexuality and rebel against the saintly and maternal traits of *Guadalupe*. This is evident as Inés says that one day her mother was in a "field of cempoaxúchitl flowers with a man who [was] not [her] father" (Cisneros 111). This action of Inés's mother embracing her sexuality leads to her horrific death by patriarchal men for not following the cultural norms of maintaining innocence and maternal traits. Inés reminisces about the death of her mother as she says that "at a signal from her lover, the others descend . . . [h]ow the men gather my mother like a bundle of corn. Her sharp cry against the infinity of sky when the cane stake pierces her" (Cisneros 111). This murder and betrayal by the lover are a consequence of the patriarchal standards of the Mexican culture and this binary. Inés's mother is seen as a *Malinche* because she portrays selfishness for not holding a maternal essence, such as *Guadalupe* is seen as the figure of maternity. *Guadalupe*'s maternal traits of selflessness and protection are evident when Cypress says that 'the virgin [*Guadalupe*] transcends

pure religiosity and [is] equated with a sense of unselfish motherhood" (Cypress 6-7). Gloria Anzaldúa further elaborates on *Guadalup*e's traits as she says in the chapter, *Entering Into the Serpent*, that *Guadalupe* is the "symbol of hope and faith [and] she sustains and insures our survival" (Andzaldúa 52) The lack of maternal feature to protect and be a symbol of sustainment is evident with Inés's mother. Her non-maternal characteristic is symbolized as Inés describes the corpse of her mother with braids undone and with a cigar in her mouth. This position of her corpse was a message by the murderous Mexican men to say: "this is what [they] do to women who try to act like men" (Cisneros 11). This want of independence from the binary figures has a consequence for Inés's mother. She fails to achieve her independence because liberation is seen as non-feminine, and independence is only achievable for the masculine. Inés's mother is further implied to lack femininity and maternity as she does not raise Inés and situates Inés's father to be the sole parental figure. This lack of maternity in connection to the figure of *La Malinche* is mentioned with Norma Alarcón and her critique, *Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism*. She says, "Malintzin (Malinche) . . . is viewed in such a society as a sign of catastrophe. . . she is a woman who has betrayed her primary cultural function- maternity" (62-63). This passage of describing *La Malinche* as non-maternal and selfish associates with Inés's mother as she possesses the same traits of being viewed as selfish and rebellious against the culture.

Yet, the undoing of the malicious versus good woman binary that

Cisneros works into her writing can be seen in the chapter, "My Name," in the novella, *The House on Mango Street*, with the character, Esperanza. Esperanza's grandmother, from whom Esperanza has inherited her name, is seen to conform to the *Guadalupe* side of the cultural binary. Esperanza explains that her grandfather abducted her grandmother and forced her into marriage, which converted her into a submissive wife to her husband. This obedient and submissive side of *Guadalupe* is evident as Anzaldúa says, "*Guadalupe* [is] to make [women] docile and enduring" with having to conform to the traits of maternity and faithfulness (53). We see how the elder Esperanza became a resigned woman in the following thoughts of the young Esperanza: "she [the elder Esperanza] looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow . . . I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Cisneros 11). In her thoughts of her grandmother, Esperanza shows a sense of rejection of these teachings that the Mexican culture forces among women. In fact, the young Esperanza even thinks, "I would like to be baptized myself under a new name, a name more like the real me" (Cisneros 11). This wish for baptism under a new name suggests Esperanza's declaration of rejection of the teachings of the *Malinche* versus *Guadalupe* within the Mexican culture. She wishes to be independent from these traumatic figures, as she sees the trauma that her grandmother had endured with the conformity of *Guadalupe.* Thus, this character, Esperanza, is Cisneros's third way of beyond these figures.

The undoing of these two figures in Cisneros's work can be addition-

ally seen in her book of poetry, *Woman Without Shame*. For example, in her poem, "Creed," the narrator is implied to be Cisneros herself and can be analyzed as rejecting the Mexican traditional inculcations and embracing the ambiguity that comes with these two figures. She says in the poem, "I believe in las *madres*,/ *Las madres de las madres*,/ *Y la santísima madre*/ *La Diosa Guadalupe*/ Because the universe is large enough/ To encompass contradictions,/ I believe these mothers sometimes,/ Create monsters—*los machos"* (Cisneros 25-35). Cisneros lays out her rooted beliefs that have guided her throughout her life, such as the figure of *Guadalupe* but embraces the flaws and contradictions that come with this binary. She has come to a point where she moves on from letting these beliefs define her as a woman and sees an irony. The irony is that a holy and maternal woman, such as *Guadalupe*, can also create malicious objects, such as patriarchal men. This contradiction connects with Anzaldúa as she says, "*La Virgin de Guadalupe* is the symbol . . . of the tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos* . . . by necessity possess. (Anzaldúa 52). In other words, she is the "synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races" (Anzaldúa 52). *Guadalupe*'s contrast of indigeneity and Europeanness is the ambiguity and contradiction that resembles Cisneros's rejection of the Mexican patriarchal teachings, and she learns to tolerate these figures. Cisneros's character of Inés mother and her poem connect to show the limitations and costs that Mexican and Chicana women have when having these figures define femininity.

In Cisneros's other short story, "Woman Hollering Creek," the pro-

tagonist, Cleófilas, is the representation of the *Guadalupe* side of the binary as she suffers from an abusive marriage but practices the saint-like characteristic of maternity and tolerance in her marriage. She represents the tolerant and saintly woman who follows her cultural teachings when her father, Don Serafín, gives her away to marriage to Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez and moves from her home in Mexico to the state of Texas. Along with this arranged marriage, Cleófilas maintains the cultural expectations of selfless maternity and connects with *Guadalupe* when she mentions her fondness for Mexican *telenovelas.* This Mexican piece of media is seen to be influenced by the *Guadalupe* traits since the women protagonists in the *telenovelas* are portrayed as self-sacrificial, virgin-like, and obedient, similar to the *Guadalupe* ideals. These *Guadalupe*-like *telenovela* women influence Cleófilas when she speaks of the current favorite *telenovela* and says: "[t]he beautiful Lucía Méndez having to put up with all kinds of hardships of the heart, separation and betrayal, and loving, always loving no matter what, because *that* is the most important thing" (Cisneros 44; italics in original). This influential trait of the tolerant *Guadalupe* as seen in the t*elenovelas* has harmful effects on Mexican and Chicana women as "*Guadalupe* is capable of alternately [and] evoking the . . . meek Virgin Mary" (Alarcón 60). This harmful side of the meek *Guadalupe* is seen with Cleófilas in her acceptance of her husband's abuse. Cleófilas allows the abuse because to contradict her husband would be rebellious and lack submissiveness. This is evident when the narrator says, "[b]ut when the moment came, and he slapped her once, and then again, and again; until

the lip split and bled an orchid of blood, she didn't fight back, she didn't break into tears, she didn't run away" (Cisneros 47). Cleóflias remains passive in this moment of domestic abuse because she has been taught by the *Guadalupe* teachings that women are supposed to practice the trait of saint-like forgiveness and tolerance. These teachings connect to Anzaldúa as she says that *Guadalupe* is "the virgin mother who has not abandoned us" (52). Thus, Cleófilas does not want to abandon her maternal role in her marriage and does not want to associate with the rebellious, whore-like figure of *La Malinche*, so she accepts abuse as implied in the hospital scene.

Cleófilas is silent about her domestic abuse during the doctor's appointment because she fears transgressing her teachings of *Guadalupe*. This fear is further elaborated by Norma Alarcón in the same article when she says, "Anyone who has transgressed the boundaries of perceived groups interest and values often has been called a *malinche* or *malinchista*" (60). Cleófilas's silence and passivity due to the fear of being associated with *Malinche* is implied when her physician calls Felice to tell her, "I was going to do this sonogram on her [Cleófilas]—she's pregnant, right—and she just starts crying on me. Hijole, Felice! This poor's lady's got black-and-blue marks all over. I'm not kidding. From her husband. Who else?" (Cisneros 54). Cleófilas remains this tolerant and submissive woman who does not transgress against her cultural inculcations and so allows her husband to abuse her even while pregnant. Anzaldúa further speaks on these cultural expectations as she says that "[l]a cultura chicana

[the Chicana culture] identifies with the mother" (52). This identification with *Guadalupe* as the ideal mother figure in the Mexican culture is seen with Cleófilas because the *Guadalupe* figure has taught her to accept pain for the sake of peace and not be a woman willing to break up a family.

Cisneros undoes this binary in the same short story with the character, Felice. She is a character who rejects the Mexican cultural teachings as she is a character who has independent traits and rejects the cultural binary. This is evident as Felice helps Celófilas escape her abusive relationship and says, "[e]verything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Celófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup. A pickup. Mind you, but when Celófilas asked if it was her husband's, she said she didn't have a husband" (Cisneros 55). This independent state from a marriage that Felice has explained of herself shows her cultural rejections as she does not adhere to the womanly expectation of submissiveness in marriage. Her independence from marriage and rejected cultural inculcations have helped her realize the severe influence of patriarchy that the Mexican culture possesses. She elaborates on this influence of the Mexican patriarchy and the *Guadalupe* figure as she despises the influence it had in the then-Mexican-sovereign state of Texas. This disdain is seen when Felice says to Celófilas, "did you ever notice, Felice, . . . how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really, Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin" (Cisneros 55). Felice references the symbol of *Guadalupe* and suggests the dislike of the traditional influence that this figure has had within the Mexican culture. Anzaldúa speaks more of this influence of the

Guadalupe figure when she says in the chapter, "Entering into the Serpent," that "*La Virgin de Guadalupe* is the single most potent religious and cultural image of the Chicano/*mexicano"* (52). Thus, the strong impact of *Guadalupe* within the Mexican culture is shown by Felice's dislike of the figure and suggests liberation from the teaching.

Cisneros further undoes this binary between the *Malinche* and the *Guadalupe* figure with another of her poems, "My Mother and Sex." The narrator is implied again to herself and speaks of her mother who has been influenced by the cultural expectations of the *Guadalupe* side of the binary. She says in the poem:

Eight live births
How many dead?
Who knew? Not us
Her seven survivors
When a bedroom
Scene flashed on TV
She'd shriek and
Scamper to her room,
As is she'd seen
A rat.
It made us laugh. What
Were we? Immaculate
Conceptions? Could be
Sex for her was dead. (Cisneros 1-14)

She shows her cultural rejection of the binary when describing her mother and her fearful reaction to the implied inappropriate sex scene on the television. Cisneros's mother gives this affected moment as her *Guadalupe* teachings have taught her to be abashed about sexual intercourse and maintain an innocent image as a woman. This melodramatic moment that Cisneros's mother gives can connect to Anzaldúa as she says, "*Guadalupe* took upon herself the psychological and physical devastation of the conquered and oppressed" (52). Cisneros's mother is seen to have this effect of the psychological influence that comes with this binary with the side of *Guadalupe*. This is evident as her mother is implied to be a conquered woman with devoted Catholic traditions who adheres to the psychological influence of the *Guadalupe* figure and customs. Thus, her mother's cultural expectations are to teach the same Catholic and *Guadalupe* teachings she received to her children of maintaining innocence. Cisneros's rejection of this binary is further seen with the superior-like tone she gives when she internally suggests that she and her siblings are 'immaculate.' Cisneros's poem suggests her rejection of Mexican cultural expectations and teaching for a woman to maintain innocence in society. She liberates herself by rejecting the cultural expectations as she does not want to be influenced by the same inculcations and teaching as shown by her mother and this moment.

Overall, Cisneros's variety of work and her characters demonstrate the trauma and battle that comes with the cultural traditions and expectations associated with the *Malinche* and *Guadalupe* figures and symbols.

This is evident with certain characters from her work, such as Felice, Esperanza, and herself as indicated in the poetry, suggesting her third way beyond these teachings which is the rejection of cultural inculcations to liberate Chicana and Mexican women. Cisneros's stories and characters suggest the tragic effect that happens when Mexican and Chicana women do not reject these discriminatory standards for women. This tragic effect is evident with Inés as she feels much guilt and shame for being the lover of Emilio Zapata and is portrayed as a whore by her father. Also, Inés's mother is another example, as her attempt at feminine independence from the cultural teachings is not achievable in a patriarchal Mexican society. Lastly, Cleófilas had to endure various moments of domestic abuse by her husband to remain a submissive, "good" wife, as exemplified by the *Guadalupe* figure. Furthermore, these cultural figures of *Guadalupe* and *Malinche* create a narrow standard for women, since the patriarchal Mexican culture does not embrace ambiguity when it comes to standards of femininity. Mexican women can only either be obedient and quiet or scorned and promiscuous under these cultural standards and so the lack of space for nuance can end up causing harm to these women when they need help due to abuse or oppression. Therefore, Cisneros's third method of cultural rejection can also be taken as a call for ambiguity with these cultural teachings and symbols. The strict lack of ambiguity that can be allowed with these expectations and figures in place is what Cisneros is trying to suggest causes harm to Mexican and Chicana women.

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"Jasmine" and Inescapable Patriarchy

By AGB

Bharati Mukherjee's short story, "Jasmine," follows a young Indian woman on her journey to a life filled with opportunity. Originally from Port-of-Spain, the titular character has moved to Detroit and lives working for the Daboo family motel, certainly earning her keep with her diligent cleaning and easygoing personality. Eventually, she finds her way to Ann Arbor, a place that Jasmine assumes to be a land of wealth and possibility where she can flourish. She begins work for the Moffitts, a white, upper-middle class family that treats her well, often encouraging her to find her way in life. The hope embedded in Jasmine's new life path is often contrasted with her views of her home and the men there, not showcasing any love or sentimentality for Port-of-Spain outside of missing her family unit. Jasmine seems to be hyper aware of the patriarchal culture that she happily left behind, only to encounter more of the same in Detroit, the only difference being the way it is presented to her. Through a feminist reading of Mukherjee's "Jasmine," the reader can recognize the ways in which patriarchy displays itself in many forms and is, consequentially, inescapable.

Jasmine is a woman that is aware of the intentions of men when it comes to her past in Port-of-Spain, but within her newfound sense of self in Ann Arbor, she no longer scrutinizes them as she once did. In the beginning, even after living with the Daboos for a while (before Ann Arbor), Jasmine is wary of men that flirt. After a man blatantly compliments

her, Mukherjee states, “Jasmine knew he was just talking. They sounded like Port-of-Spain boys of three years ago. It didn’t surprise her that these Trinidad country boys in Detroit were still behind the times, even of Port-of-Spain” (130). Carrying the knowledge of the ways in which patriarchal culture dominated interactions between men and women back home has aided her in making connections of that behavior to the culture in this new place as well. Additionally, it seems that at this point, she is entirely underwhelmed and desensitized to it. There are many instances throughout the story in which Jasmine voices her distaste for the way that men conduct themselves: the men at the bar and the matchmaking clients (considered liars). The tone of these sentiments points the reader to the conclusion that cultural norms within patriarchal structures are the perpetrators.

However, Jasmine develops a soft spot for Bill Moffitt, who has broken down some of her barriers by subverting her expectations of a patriarchal man, yet he still holds power over her all the same. Bill strikes Jasmine as different from other men that she has encountered, from how he dresses to how he acts: “He made the Sunday brunch from new recipes in *Gourmet* and *Cuisine*. Jasmine hadn’t seen a man cook who didn’t have to or wasn’t getting paid to do it” (Mukherjee 133). It is important to note that Bill fixing a meal simply because he wants to is an example of his privilege, as many women have been forced into the role of family cook due to patriarchal structure, of which Jasmine herself had been subjected to. A man doing a stereotypically feminine task does not take away from his power as a man within society, nor does it mean that this culture is not

as patriarchal as the culture of Jasmine's birthplace. Tyson states, "Perhaps the difficulty in theorizing our way out of patriarchal ideology arises when we think of our immersion in it as an all or nothing situation..." (78). An individual's relationship with patriarchy can be very dynamic. It does not seem that Bill actively and consciously uses his standing within patriarchy as a tool to manipulate or overpower women, but he still does possess power, especially through the intersectional lens, as he is a straight, white, middle-class man. This concept is fully realized in the end of the story when Bill initiates sex with Jasmine. Her immediate response is no, but he coaxes her into it. While she does enjoy it and the moment awakens something in Jasmine (it can be read as empowering her), Bill uses his power as a man and her employer to gain sexual favors, even ignoring her pleas to stop. Through Bill's character, the reader may realize the many different ways patriarchy can look, as well as how impossible it can be to escape.

Ultimately, "Jasmine" suggests that no matter how it is presented or how autonomous a woman may feel, patriarchy and power imbalances will always be prevalent within society. For an individual, it can be dynamic, as Bill, while making questionable choices in the end and establishing his power, is not a villain. He is just a man that has benefited due to his status as a man, whether he is conscious of it or not. Additionally, Jasmine, once hyper aware of men's behavior within this structure, found Bill to seemingly exist outside of patriarchy, only to be somewhat objectified and overpowered by him in the end, displaying that patriarchal ideology can be found embedded within even the most unassuming places.

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Concluding Notes from Amyyah Rogers

The essays of this category were written for an understanding of the dynamics of gender. Nearly all authors define the different stereotypes of women specifically, and how it frames the work's characters.

TIME WILL TELL: 1800–1900s

Touchstones of the literary canon invite new analysis and interpretations of what once was and/or will be.

Time Well Tell
By Amyyah Rogers

These essays include analysis of commonly read material. Although what is cited can be considered older, the points made by the authors of these essays include writing that helps modernize them.

A Survey of *Little Women*'s Feminist-Adjacent Criticism

By Sarah Mendez-Jimenez

The story of *Little Women* holds a soft spot in the hearts of many audience members for a variety of reasons. Recognized as one of the biggest coming-of-age stories from the nineteenth century, Louisa May Alcott's portrayal of the transition from childhood to adulthood—specifically that of four complex sisters—is undeniably moving, authentic, but also controversial all at once. Many critics disagree on what type of message Alcott was trying to send with her story, particularly through the decisions that the March sisters had to make in order to mature and successfully become part of society. Alongside topics like gender, identity, and feminism, the character marriages in this novel have been the source of much discourse throughout the years, with many particularly disdaining the union between Jo March and Friedrich Bhaer. As part of this discussion, some critics argue that Alcott promotes a traditional course for women to follow, while others contend that her ambiguity is instead a progressive attempt to flourish during what is otherwise an oppressive time period for women. In an attempt to clarify these scholarly takes, this paper will highlight the most dominant perspectives and give an insight to how opinion on *Little Women* varies.

Part I: Tomboy Jo and Other Queer Readings

For a long time, Jo March's character has stood as one of the main tomboys in American literature. What many are unaware of, however, is

that this character type has a deep link to the historical time period from which Alcott was writing. The Civil War completely uprooted not just the political and economic standing of the United States but also the societal system. With men fighting on the battlefield and away from the home, women were allowed higher levels of control, including over their family's finances and also in their governmental and personal protection. The war severely inverted expectations for the female gender, with women actively going against what tradition dictated they should do.

To be clear, the surge of tomboyish behaviors was not entirely the result of the Civil War, as traces of it can certainly be led back to the antebellum period of the 1830s to 1860s. However, the rise in popularity unequivocally skyrocketed during the Civil War, becoming both a "cultural phenomenon" and a "literary convention" (Abate 25). Characterizing Jo March as a tomboy was Louisa May Alcott's way of contributing to the gender-bending movement, as tomboy girls were essential to the nation's survival. However, while Jo herself aches to be part of the war from the very opening scene of *Little Women*, her personal battle is not reminiscent to that between the North and the South, but more like the one between masculine and feminine archetypes (Abate 28). Her story is one of a woman struggling to fit into either side of the gender spectrum and finding that she cannot do so without significant trouble. Her masculine dreams of providing for her family through her work as a famous author are upset by the calls from society that ask her to settle and marry. This "taming," as many critics call it, is two-fold: first, Jo noticeably begins to abandon her

tomboyish activities after her sister dies, all as part of her transition into the docile and orderly role that Beth once held—as a way of honoring her, Jo is made to mirror the behavior of her dear sister and is narratively shifted away from rebellion and towards feminine gentility; second, Jo's career aspirations are negated by her relationship with Professor Friedrich Bhaer, who convinces her that the stories she writes to make money for her family are part of a corrupt and sensationalist genre. Both of these factors cut short Jo's dream of fame and instead set her on the path to marriage not too long after.

Effectively tamed, Michelle Ann Abate also argues that Jo's decision to open a school with her husband is a way of ensuring the success of the next generation beyond her own, notably occurring after so much of the white male population has been ravaged by the bloody Civil War. Abate gives a detailed analysis likening Jo to Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and though that topic is beyond the scope of this paper, her conclusion on Jo's role is one that affirms the connection to typical standards for women. As a mother and teacher at Plumfield, Jo becomes a distinct model and tool that will both birth and educate the next (Caucasian) American minds, helping them to assert their power.

While the taming of tomboys is a natural response that parallels the closing of the Civil War, it is also a consequence of society's fears of their impact. After all, the tomboy character—and her real-life existence outside of literature—upends many of the patriarchal and heterosexual values that were crucial to the time. In allowing a woman to adopt masculine traits

and leave behind her role as a female, the entire foundation on which gender is constructed is thus wrecked and destroyed: "By refusing to learn and enact femininity, the tomboy destabilizes gender as a 'natural' construct" (Quimby 2). Without this basis, such strict gender categories as a whole are rendered useless. Tomboys threaten the safety of heteronormativity and must therefore be tamed with a variety of methods. The tomboy strength can instead be linked to strength in motherhood, forcibly eradicating her power over the patriarchy, or she can be encouraged to give up her overalls and pants for a dress and a skirt, all as part of an overdue transformation.

Moreover, Jo's identity as a tomboy has a direct link to queer interpretations, critics argue, which is equally as dangerous as her impact on oppressive values. Quimby writes, "the tomboy's 'perverse' detours away from the marriage plot—and the attachment of some readers to such emplotted figures—signify the presence of other significant forms of desire and identification that, for many girls and women, are ends in themselves" (5). Indeed, a tomboy's refusal to participate in a heterosexual marriage can be translated into queer desires because she innately denies the necessity of a status quo. Jo rejects the role she was meant to play and "gives voice to transgender desire" (Schweitzer 21) in the process. This once again reaffirms the need to tame the tomboy and her rebellion—if women are allowed to adopt masculine behaviors to provide for themselves, then men are rendered useless, as is the base on which gender stands.

Part II: The Message in Marriage

Before diving into the specifics of how the little women of the novel are neglected and forced into specific classifications, it is essential to analyze different interpretations of the marital choices that Alcott makes for her characters. Generally, there are two opposing perspectives on this. The first argues that the marriages are Alcott's eventual capitulation to society's expectations—and even demands from her readers—to pair her characters up in romantic partnerships. Meanwhile, the second perspective contends that the novel's plot actually seeks to revolutionize typical marriages by presenting couples that are mutually beneficial, if not always the epitome of progressive ideals.

For the former viewpoint, an article by Hisham Muhamad Ismail on the lessons and messages of Alcott's story clarifies this popular interpretation. This author declares that while Alcott dabbles in a lot of ambiguity regarding her messages, there is an unfortunate but undeniable acquiescence to the standards of her time. All of the girls struggle to find a reasonable balance between their domestic responsibilities and their artistic dreams; they ultimately concede their attachments to the latter by accepting their duties as wives and mothers. The marriages, Ismail believes, are Alcott's indirect confirmation "that a woman could not find her independence away from the family and her husband's support" (869). It is worth noting that Alcott does not always reject feminist acts in her story and the marriages, according to critics, are merely an understandable result after a series of rejections of the patriarchy. Because Alcott cannot end her story by completely dismantling oppressive systems, she finds herself having to

submit to the desire for her characters to marry, even if it means sacrificing her original intentions for them.

By contrast, other critics argue that marriages like Jo and Bhaer's are Alcott's way of simultaneously accepting the restrictions set on women and breaking free of them at the same time. This is achieved through a marriage of compromise as opposed to the aforementioned surrender to domesticity. Ninčetović reasons that marriage is a stepping stone that is necessary for the women to reach maturity—it allows them to grow into the best version of themselves given what is practical in their society. Mrs. March is the leading champion for this, as she encourages her daughters to marry not for convenience, but for love. In a speech to Meg and Jo, Mrs. March declares, "I'd rather see you poor men's wives, if you were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace" (Alcott 98). It's a lesson that the girls take to heart: their marriages are sound, logical choices, with every partnership being advantageous to each party. For example, Daniel Shealy insists that Alcott has taken into account the personalities and temperaments of her characters before pairing them off. Shealy recognizes that Alcott has established what he calls "egalitarian relationships" between the married couples of the novel. Of course, he acknowledges that the marriages are not always perfect—over time, however, Meg and Brooke, Amy and Laurie, and especially Jo and Bhaer, eventually learn to suit each other well. Their marriages are not made hastily for material reasons, but rather, are the result of Alcott's deeply pondered choices. Just as Meg and Brooke learn to let each other

into their respective domestic and labor fields, so do Jo and Bhaer enter into marriage with the understanding that they will equally provide for their family's livelihood and success. Each marriage in the story has its compromises—something that is essential to the progressive view of marriage that Alcott may have been trying to uplift. While the sisters had to make sacrifices, those same sacrifices are made in the name of offering a new take on marriage for young readers in the nineteenth century who may not have realized that better prospects were an option.

Part III: Suppression, Submission, and Artistic Ambitions

It would be incredibly remiss if this paper also failed to point out the many ways that *Little Women* falls short of setting its female characters up for success. While there are natural explanations for Alcott's succumbence to patriarchal principles, there are just as many—if not more—criticisms of the ways that the sisters are forced to suppress their emotions and ambitions in favor of a life of domesticity.

There are an abundance of instances where the four sisters are made to quash their emotions. Their feelings of anger, resentment, and envy throughout the novel are consistently frowned upon and are eliminated by reshaping them into positive ones. In a related piece, Stephanie Foote argues that transforming such emotions is necessary for the girls to fit in not just into their social environments, but also their economic and class statuses. They do this by using the home as a way to practice the appropriate skills and behaviors that society requires of them, changing their negative experiences into the correct gender performance. While Foote

does not go as far as to say that the novel *always* suppresses the emotions of the women, she does posit that this altering of feelings is one that the girls must go through in some way to adapt to their social level and the gendered domestic sphere.

It is Elizabeth Karpen's article that makes the strongest and most striking claims about suppression. Karpen points out that the four sisters are forced to give up their career goals, undergoing severe emotional repression on their paths to happy marriages. In doing so, Alcott is suggesting that suppression is "a universal experience of womanhood" (Karpen 2), as women cannot have everything that would make them happy at once and instead must make sacrifices for the good of their household. A prime example of this is Meg March: throughout the first volume of the novel, Meg frequently complains about her job working for the wealthy Kings family and bemoans her family's lack of luxuries. Yet, in order to live what the novel considers to be her perfect ending, Meg marries and struggles not just in her domestic life, but especially in living up to the expectations of her husband. When she fails to please him and does not match the goals that she has set for herself as a wife—such as by failing to make jelly for Brooke—Meg is put into a position where she must suppress whatever negative feelings she experienced in order to try and make the situation right. Meanwhile, Brooke is able to continuously express his anger, frustration, and disappointment at his wife's shortcomings. Karpen concludes, "In the first half of *Little Women*, Meg's actions are determined by the yearnings of the rich, while in the latter half, they are decided by

her husband. She never demonstrates the autonomy to control her experiences" (9). Because of this double standard, Meg and Brooke will always be on unequal footing, with Meg abandoning her dream of luxury for constant and tiresome labor for an unsupportive husband.

As another example of the suppression of negative emotions for women, other scholars redirect us to Jo March's famous temperament flaw. Not only is Jo subjected to a lesson from her mother after the near-fatal ice-skating incident with Amy—a speech that has since been highly criticized—, but she is also implicitly punished for her characteristic quick temper because it is seen as dangerous to the family system. Instead of siding with Jo and her distress over having her work burned in a fit by Amy, the narrative encourages her to let go of her anger and learn to control it. Ilana Larkin thus links female rage to symbolic or unconscious infanticide, proposing that Jo's anger is a violent emotion that runs the risk of turning young women into dangerous mothers if the feeling is allowed to continue. Because her transition into a domesticated woman and mother is a requirement for the end of the novel—and in fact is celebrated when it occurs—, it also requires Jo to conquer her temper and remove the trait that connects her with violence. In agreeing to marry Professor Bhaer, Jo has guaranteed a happy home that is distanced from her vicious anger as a woman. It promotes self-denial as the solution to unfavorable morals and, once again, Jo is tamed for the sake of social safety.

Critics that focus on suppression themes in *Little Women* also note that it is important to bring attention to Laurie's situation. For example,

Karpen asserts that while Laurie is similarly made to give up his ambition of musical prowess and fame for the sake of his family's success, his sacrifice is not nearly as negatively portrayed, as he does not have as much to lose as the women. He is not forced to suppress his emotions in the process; as a wealthy man, he is readily able to abandon his chosen pursuit to take care of his family, presenting a stark contrast to the women who never had a different realistic option.

At the same time, author Ken Parille indicates that Laurie's submission is not entirely painless. He argues that the self-denial and sacrifices that the women make are portrayed in alternate ways for Laurie, as such concepts are not exclusive to the female gender. Primarily, Laurie's reluctance to enter the labor sphere as a merchant—as his grandfather wished for him to do—stems out of the fact that he does not want to participate in the typical behaviors associated with masculinity out of a fear of being unable to live up to what men should be capable of (Parille 39-40). Laurie yields only after significant meddling from characters like his grandfather and Amy, the latter of which Parille argues is set up as an "agent" (36) to remind Laurie of his role as an industrious man. There are several moments where Laurie is made to feel shame for refusing to perform to standards of masculinity, resulting in his eventual agreement to work as a businessman. With this in mind, some critics believe that Alcott's *Little Women* is an exploration of the cultural restrictions that both boys and girls face in their maturation from adolescence to full adulthood. One may be more highly prioritized than the other, but both stories of submission

are essential to a reader's understanding of gender in the novel because they show how patriarchal and heteronormative standards join together to enforce a strict life plan.

Part IV: Feminist or Not?

Understandably, there is considerable controversy over whether or not *Little Women* can truly be regarded as a feminist text. With such dominant themes of repression and submission as the ones previously described, it is no surprise that this question tears critics apart. As a means of getting closer to an answer for this, we will now consider how different scholars believe—or not—that Alcott develops a progressive feminist vision.

Plainly, critics for this novel have emphasized that Alcott's subtlety and ambivalence are crucial to its feminist reputation. The key lies, they proclaim, in recognizing that Alcott's novel is not meant to be an explicitly feminist text. In other words, while it certainly has many progressive elements, a nineteenth century author such as Louisa May Alcott would never have been able to completely abide by an idea of female independence without severe backlash. As such, Alcott's strategy to navigate these oppressive waters is to tone down her messages in ways that allow for revolutionary readings while still making her stories palatable for opposing audiences, like the publishers and readers that demanded happy marital endings. Her unruly characters and story messages are Alcott's method of slowly beginning to loosen the bonds that hold women back—Jo, Meg, and Amy may not be able to enjoy the freedoms that Alcott wished for

them, but they are part of the movement to make those freedoms more accessible, and as a result, they are just as important as any other characters.

This is made clear by Frances Armstrong's piece on what she calls a "deferral of greatness," which is a strategy rooted in Alcott's history as part of the American transcendentalist movement. Her contemporaries, which include her own father, Bronson Alcott, were prone to believe that greatness could be achieved even if one was not the strongest person or in the best position. Accordingly, this is also the case for Alcott's abilities as a female author in her time period: the best way to reach success with her rebellious ideals would be to adopt a policy of "subversion without disruption" (Armstrong 462).

Julie Wilhelm, in an article on the ways in which comedy hides the girls' inadequacies, would likely agree. She asks readers to consider the fact that humorous moments follow the women as they mature, "[sustaining] the novel's rebellion" by exposing faults in society (Wilhelm 64) and subtly asking us to laugh at them. One of the most memorable examples of this is Meg's doll-like transformation for Annie Moffat's party. Though the average reader would write off Meg's distinct new personality and looks as the result of a poor girl getting to indulge in uncommon luxuries, a closer reading allows us to see that Alcott is actually bringing deep concerns to the surface. The narrative tells us that Meg feels awkward and uncomfortable in her presentation, but it is the humor and absurdity associated with the event that displays some of the pressures put on women to conform to standards of femininity. By doing this, Alcott, "reveals rigidity, a scripted

repetition that serves a cultural function" (Wilhelm 78) and asks readers to question why such standards exist in the first place. Moreover, this event, along with others scattered throughout the novel, shows us how the girls fight to discover their place in society and how they personally want to adjust to fit their own desires (May 23). Meg's social misstep may have been an embarrassing moment, but it also reveals the expectations that her community has for her and helps her realize how she will fulfill them to her own liking, not theirs.

A similar analysis of absurd expectations can be applied to Jo's match with Professor Bhaer. Rather than seeing their union as Jo's submission to expectations of femininity, marriage, and motherhood, the relationship between the two can actually be indicative of compromise. However, rather than this being used to describe the character's interactions with each other, this compromise is entirely Alcott's, independent of her story. By denying the requests of her readers to see Jo married to Laurie, Alcott makes the controversial choice to unite her with Bhaer as a way to commit to her original purpose and refuse societal desires for silly romances. Admittedly, Jo had to make sacrifices in her own life to be able to accept Bhaer, but the decision "offers a fictional rendering of female choice that demands that we question its trade-offs and protest its price" (Murphy 569). It is a subtle, covert rebellion on Alcott's part, but a rebellion nonetheless.

Finally, a joint article produced by Karen Hollinger and Teresa Winterhalter tells us that modern feminist readings, adaptations, and criticisms

are working to turn what was once an oppressive message into a progressive one, highlighting women's potential instead of keeping them in firm boxes. Hollinger and Winterhalter are clear that these attempts may not be true to the original novel due to its aforementioned ambiguity, but they are nevertheless prevailing; such efforts are an attempt to rewrite restrictive stories and hold a lot of appeal for present-day audiences that wish to see higher levels of agency and autonomy in female characters.

Section V: The Literary Criticism of *Little Women*

At its core, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is a timeless story about four sisters as they grow up in a world that does not always favor them. Rife with mistakes, laughter, grief, and love, the novel provides no shortage of content to be analyzed by feminist scholars. Most popular amongst its literary criticism are the topics of gender and marriage, along with emotional and artistic suppression. Throughout this paper, these themes have been outlined and explained, and though no concrete answer may exist to account for Alcott's controversial choices, the novel remains a classic female bildungsroman.

When it comes to their arguments, the scholars addressed here generally fall into two sides of a spectrum. One side affirms that the female characters, most notably Jo March, are brought down and subjugated as part of an effort to maintain a patriarchal and heteronormative world. Through concepts like marriage and motherhood, the girls are pushed into relinquishing their ambitions and making unsatisfying compromises for the sake of fitting into society. By contrast, the other party counters that

while they do make sacrifices, they do so as part of Alcott's vision of a slowly growing progressive future that has begun to prioritize women's preferences.

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Legality and Morality: The Conflicting Duo
By Dallas Hensley

> The division of mental life into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premise on which psychoanalysis is based.
>
> — Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*

Those who use psychoanalysis to analyze literature believe that the characters in a text are driven by psychological factors, many of which reside below the surface phenomena that is being presented directly in the stories. As Freud puts it, "We are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces" (14). Characters in tales are a product of human experience and interpretation, so in theory, they share an abundance of the same psychological drives and influences as those who are reading or drafting their stories. Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" uses the internal conflicts of its characters, each of which are influenced by the Freudian concept of the id, ego, and superego, to comment on the psychological tension between societal expectations and individual morality.

Sigmund Freud coined the terms "id," "ego," and "super-ego" and details them extensively in his book *The Ego and the Id*. Each is a driving force that influences, both consciously and subconsciously, the behavior of humans. The id is classified as an individual's primal or animalistic instinct. Two particular aspects of the id he explores are called "Eros," the "love-drive," and "Thanatos," the "death-drive." He believes that the

feud between the two can be explained in some ways biologically, stating that the task of the "death-instinct" is to "lead organic matter back into the inorganic state" (Freud 33-34). The opposition to Thanatos, Eros, is trying to do the exact opposite: the drive wants to keep biological matter alive and reproducing. There are rare cases where the two opposing sides join forces, such as in the art of creation, which at times needs destruction to be enacted. The "super-ego" is essentially an amalgam of outside variables that try to regulate and place rules to limit the indulgences of the id. Key forces mentioned are societal pressure, morality, and religion, each of which are different depending on the society, culture, and groups that the individual is a part of or exposed to. The ego is constantly trying to keep the id and the super-ego in check by being the intermediary between the two. It gets the last say when it comes to what actions are allowed to manifest after thoughtful consideration of the wishes presented by the id and the super-ego (Freud 52). These three instincts are waging war inside of individuals consistently, with the id and super-ego in constant competition to win favor with their king, the ego, in order to bring their wishes to life through action.

In "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," Doyle does a spectacular job of presenting a character who has given into the desires of the id too often and in doing so is subconsciously letting Thanatos get the upper hand over Eros; that character is Charles Augustus Milverton. He is a wealthy individual who has made blackmailing and the destruction of others' lives a hobby. Milverton gets two things from this choice of pro-

fession: monetary gain and power in the form of influence and control. As someone who is already well-established, this type of behavior is seemingly unnecessary and downright cruel. When Sherlock describes Milverton, he says, "I've had to do with fifty murders in my career, but none of them gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow" (Doyle 1). His behavior is so despicable that he casts a shadow over murders in Sherlock's eyes. Why would he get involved in this trade, if it is so grimy and he is already very wealthy? Perhaps it is Thanatos gaining dominion over his ego. Freud explains, "...the ego constantly carries into action the wishes of the id as if they were its own" (16). Milverton's self-destructive tendencies eventually lead to his demise, and in turn, the death-instinct fulfills its wishes. Seeing that the occupation of slander and destruction of others' lives is one that would obviously lead to him making enemies who plan to meet his cruel intent with murderous action, it begins to become clear that his id is dominating his ego and winning the battle over the super-ego, which could have guided him towards developing a better sense of morality and helped him to steer clear of this type of work as a whole. Milverton could have abstained from his self-destructive tendencies by embracing and not shutting out the super-ego, but "[The] death instincts... [are] dealt with in various ways... in part they are diverted towards the external world in the form of aggression" (Freud 50).

Watson is illustrated as a direct foil to Milverton. Milverton's ego is allowing him to be consumed by the destructive side of the id, but Watson is trying to defy the pressure put on his character by the super-ego

Watson's reasoning is skewed by the conflict between legality and morality, both imposed upon him by the super-ego. When Sherlock details his plans to break into Milverton's mansion and steal the slanderous notes, Watson finds himself struggling to properly justify the action. Immediately, his mind is running in circles, littered by anxious thoughts about "the detection, the capture, the honored career ending in irreparable failure and disgrace" (Doyle 5). His fears are warranted, and the potential outcomes are real, but what he fears the most, subconsciously, is giving into his impulses and potentially defying the wishes of the super-ego in the process. Much like how the two aspects of the id, Thanatos and Eros, conflict, the reader sees morality and legality competing for adherence in Watson's super-ego.

For Sherlock, this case is a personal vendetta to establish dominance over Milverton; a result of the id controlling his actions from the background. If it is accepted that the urge to position oneself in a social hierarchy and aim for elevation of status is a natural humanistic instinct, then it becomes clear that the id is partially to blame for Sherlock's intense fixation on besting Milverton. Sherlock's focus is not on the typical resource hierarchy, however. He is more invested in this strange intellectual one that he has conjured up. Being more cunning and intellectually superior than Milverton is extremely important to him, and while he does seem to care about the wellbeing of his client, this endeavor is dominating his motives. Sherlock's care for his client could be a small glimpse of his super-ego's influence shining through. His intellectual complex could also

be the reason for his choice of work, and why he interprets potential assistants as hinderances. He is in service to the people as a vigilante, operating separately from the police because he places himself high on a pedestal, seeing them as inferior and as obstacles to his freedom and efficiency. The super-ego is guiding his sense of morality, which is why he puts himself in service to society, but he also displays an apparent fear of intimacy throughout. He is a workaholic who is absorbed by his profession, he lacks remorse for Milverton's housemaid, and he chooses not to cooperate with the police and even Watson at times. Fear of intimacy, according to Lois Tyson's description, is "the chronic and overpowering feeling that emotional closeness will seriously hurt or destroy us and that we can remain emotionally safe only by remaining at an emotional distance from others at all times" (13). Sherlock shuts out Watson frequently throughout the tale, going out on his own solo missions and only filling Watson in when it will further his goals. When it is finally time to take down Milverton, he tries to go solo and only takes Watson along because he is threatened.

With regards to Sherlock and Watson, it is also worth noting a scene where they are both excited about the criminality of their endeavor. At this point, they have both accepted that the act of robbing Milverton to save their client is their only viable option. They both get giddy after coming to an agreement, and Sherlock acknowledges his own inclination for criminality. Sherlock thinks that he "would have made a highly efficient criminal" and tells Watson, "I can see that you have a strong, natural turn for this sort of thing" (Doyle 5). Both have been capable of being crim-

inals throughout the extent of their careers, but the pressure to conform to their society's sense of morality put on their egos by the super-ego has kept them in check. Had that not been the case, by ignoring the demands of their super-egos, they both could have easily been on par with Milverton.

There are also other influences at play in the story, such as the super-ego's push for Sherlock and Watson to live up to the gender norms that are customary in their society. At one point, Sherlock is quoted saying to Watson, "Since it is morally justifiable, I have only to consider the question of personal risk. Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this, when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?" (Doyle 5) They know the potential danger of the situation they are getting themselves into and the legality, but the noble act of sacrificing themselves for the sake of a woman justifies the action to their egos. Had society not laid these pressures upon their egos, there is a chance that they would have taken another course of action. Another theory is that the id's death-drive is taking advantage of the super-ego's urge to be helpful and urging the ego to allow the action because of the personal danger it invites.

By using the psychological conflicts that the characters are struggling with in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," Doyle successfully highlights the tension between individual morality and societal expectations. Taking a psychoanalytical approach to the short story gives the reader a chance to empathize with each character and an opportunity to better understand their motives. This style of critique lifts the shroud of

uncertainty and reveals the repressed forces that are at work. The different avenues that control and influence action are wide-ranging and often lurk in the shadows. Freud states, "[T]he ego tries to mediate between the world and the id, to make the id comply with the world's demands," but that is only half the battle (53). The ego has to pander to both the id and the super-ego, and it is bound to make mistakes along the way. With so many voices trying to speak the loudest, who should the ego listen to, and how does it know when it is being misguided?

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Dickinson's Pursuit of Divinity Through Nature
By Destinee Sims

Introduction

During the 19th century, the United States was notably dictated by the Christian doctrine and faced the reality of the brewing Civil War that would divide the nation in its later years. Throughout this period, the discourse of transcendentalist writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau continued to grow; these writers and philosophers found themselves trying to answer some of humanity's most pressing questions as they navigated the tensions that would later spark the bloody war. However, as the 1850s approached, one Amherst poet was quietly accumulating a portfolio that would forever stand out from the rest after her death– a young woman who was known merely as Emily by most. Today, the name Emily Dickinson is almost synonymous with 19th-century American poetry and transcendentalism. Dickinson's iconic poems have inspired the creation of literary journals and have been the backbone of many researchers' scholarly pursuits.

Like Emerson and Thoreau, Dickinson often wrote about the relationship between nature, man, and the divine. Unlike the writing of her predecessors, Dickinson's poetry frequently left readers speculating what she meant; this very opaqueness makes Dickinson's writing a frequent focus of debate among American literature scholars. Dickinson's writings often address the same core topics as the other transcendentalists

of her time; however, she portrayed matters of the divine in a significantly controversial light. Dickinson's poetry left readers unsure of her faith, as her poems fluctuate between observations of nature, worship of the divine, and critiques of God and the Christian church. Dickinson's opposing attitudes toward religion leave scholars debating whether she is Christian, agnostic, or an atheist; yet no scholar denies Dickinson's fascination with nature. Despite the conflict of Dickinson's faith or lack thereof, it is clear that she often links her beliefs and nature together. With writing abundant in symbolism and created in the style of hymns, Dickinson's works depict nature as her sanctuary and as a lens through which she can reflect upon her spirituality.

Rejecting Organized Religion

Although scholars debate whether Dickinson believed in God or Christianity, few can deny her disapproval of organized religion and the church as she knew it; instead, Dickinson appears to embrace a broader spirituality through nature. It was impossible for Dickinson not to be familiar with the Christian doctrine since Amherst was distinctly Calvinist during her lifetime (1830-1886). During her young adulthood, Dickinson witnessed "four major religious revivals" and the confirmation of her family, friends, and peers within the Congregational church (Zapedowska 380). Dickinson's exposure to the Calvinist church left her with disbelief in God's supposed love and a distaste for the orthodox practices associated with Christianity as a whole. Like a true transcendentalist, Dickinson uses her writing and interest in nature to guide her through her spiritual strug-

gles rather than the church.

Dickinson's rejection of belief in organized religion and the rules associated with it is displayed in her poems and letters– both explicitly and implicitly. In one rare moment, Dickinson acknowledges her disconnect from the Calvinist church directly in a letter to Thomas Higginson. In her own words, Dickinson tells him that "[father] buys me many Books - but begs me not to read them- because he fears they joggle the Mind. They are religious- except me- and address an Eclipse, every morning- whom they call their 'Father'" (L 261). It was considered improper for young women to read most texts besides the Bible, so it comes as no surprise to scholars that Edward Dickinson opposed her literary interests. However, it *is* unusual for Emily to openly declare herself as non-religious with her Puritan background; her choice to refer to God as an "eclipse" is also noteworthy. An eclipse is a natural phenomenon wherein the moon positions itself in front of the sun, shielding all else from view, and creates a blinding light; it can be inferred that Dickinson is saying that *God* blocks out everything else in her family's life but not in hers. Within the Christian doctrine, followers are told to "Be care for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understandings, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (*Protestant Edition*, Phil. 4.6-7). Despite the frequent encouragement to turn to God through prayer, Dickinson appears to have felt forgotten or uncared for by God. Dickinson's disconnect from Calvinism and lack of faith, in God particularly, is also

reflected in her portrayal of Him within her poetry. Notably, depictions "[of] God the Father, images of emptiness, absence, distance, and indifference abound in the poetry" (Lundin 153). This sense of distrust and use of nature to explain it can be seen in poems such as "Of Course– I prayed." Dickinson critically writes, "Of Course– I prayed– / And did God Care? / He cared as much as on the Air / A Bird – had stamped her foot –" (376). A bird stomping its foot creates no concern for the personified air; the very act of the bird's stomping would have changed nothing. By comparing God's concern for her problems to the stomping bird, Dickinson expresses a certainty that her prayers are also of no concern to God. Dickinson uses 376 as an acknowledgment of her frustration with God's unresponsiveness to mankind's suffering and to criticize the Christian church's belief that followers will find solutions to all problems through prayer.

Although Dickinson indicates her negative impression of God in poems, such as 376, she often indicates that she is unsure if she believes in Him at all. According to Merriam-Webster, faith can be defined as the "firm belief in something for which there is no proof;" Dickinson routinely expresses her difficulties with accepting the intangible. Readers must recognize that while Dickinson's beliefs as a Calvinist are questionable, there is little room to doubt that she was spiritual; her poetry serves as a means for her to determine what she believes in. Dickinson scholar Carol Cook states, "Although she has been viewed as primarily a rebel against her Puritan-Calvinist-Evangelical-Christian upbringing by many Dickinson scholars, some fine recent scholarship has provided a nuanced view of her

poetry and the elusive line she walked between belief and doubt" (Cook 426). When scholars analyze poem 376 with this in mind, it begs the question: was Dickinson upset that her prayers went unanswered, or does she doubt that there was ever anyone there to hear them at all? Dickinson's attitude towards God in 376 greatly differs from that of 365, as the earlier poem addresses her belief that He *does* exist. Dickinson's speaker proclaims, "I know that He exists. / Somewhere – in silence – / He has hid his rare life / From our gross eyes" (365). The speaker is both acknowledging that God does exist and noting His unwillingness to reveal Himself to them in the way they had hoped; while the passage indicates that Dickinson believes in a god, she still struggles with her inability to see Him and confirm this wavering belief. Within the boundaries of 365, readers can reasonably conclude that Dickinson believed there was *something* divine out there– she just appeared less certain about what form that divinity may take.

Nature as Divine Connection

With Dickinson's steady rejection of organized religion, she demonstrates throughout her writing that she found the divine connection she sought. It is through nature that Dickinson shows the most faith in a Christian God; within her poetry, Dickinson displays the outdoors as her church and the wildlife she encounters as her clergy. "Some keep the Sabbath going to church" and "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" are two of Dickinson's most iconic poems highlighting the connection she draws between nature and her spirituality.

Within poem 236, Dickinson explicitly acknowledges her spirituality by describing her way of respecting the Sabbath. Dickinson writes, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church – / I keep it, staying at Home – / With a Bobolink for a Chorister – / And an Orchard, for a Dome –" (236). In the first stanza of 236, Dickinson communicates that *her* church is in nature rather than in a building with a cross inside. The speaker describes replacing the dome of a church with a roof of tree limbs, and animals to greet them instead of an impersonal congregation. Continuing, Dickinson writes "Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice – / I, just wear my Wings, – / And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church, / Our little Sexton – sings" (236). Readers can infer at this point that Dickinson not only objected to the orthodox requirement of spending the Sabbath inside a "Holy" building, but she also disagreed with the wardrobe and clergy's duties prescribed by Calvinism. The speaker opts to listen to the singing of the birds instead of the hymns sung by the church choir, and all the while they are dressed how they please rather than in the formal drab expected within traditional churches. However, the final stanza of 236 drives home Dickinson's spirituality and connection with the divine through nature. She writes, "God preaches, a noted Clergyman – / And the sermon is never long, / So instead of getting to Heaven, at last – / I'm going, all along" (236). While the clergy of most churches deliver unnecessarily long sermons and tell the congregation that their goal is to be accepted into Heaven at the end of their life, the speaker can embrace the divine and experience a small piece of Heaven while they are still alive. This reflects

Dickinson's awareness that she does not need a clergy member to speak for God or on her behalf; He can speak to her through nature, and she can pray if she chooses. Not only does 236 reinforce the previously stated position of Dickinson's spirituality, but this illuminates the idea that she sees the nature created by God Himself as a valid way to connect with Him.

While Dickinson uses 236 to communicate her spiritual practices, 314 illustrates her recognition of the importance of hope– one of several key theological concepts of the Christian faith– and how nature helps her maintain it during the darkest moments. Dickinson notably describes hope as "[...] the thing with feathers – / That perches in the soul – / And sings the tune without the words – / And never stops – at all –" (314). Although maintaining hope is not exclusively Christian, Dickinson was likely introduced to the idea of "hope" through the church due to the numerous instances in which followers are told of its importance in the Bible. It has been observed that "[Dickinson] uses the language of Calvinism to display her understanding of how the spirit manifests itself in art and nature, whether she writes in conformity with a Christian perspective or in rebellion against it" (McIntosh 145). Dickinson may not have approved of the practices of organized religion, but she did seem to appreciate biblical passages that connected the divine and nature. For example, Psalm 62:5-6 states, "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken" (*Protestant Edition*, Ps. 62.5-6). Similarly, Isaiah 40:31 states, "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount

up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (*Protestant Edition*, Is. 40.31). The reference to the feathered creature as the "little Bird" in stanza two gives reason to believe that she wrote 314 as an intentional extension of the biblical passages. Dickinson essentially connects both Psalm 62:5-6 and Isaiah 40:31 within the poem, as she depicts hope as a bird that any storm or struggle cannot shake; this shows both the resilience of nature and her God-given strength to persevere. Once again, Dickinson is turning to something tangible (nature) to help her grapple with the intangible (hope) and to form connections with the divine.

Nature as Sanctuary

Just as Dickinson uses nature to critique organized religion and make her connections with divinity, she often uses it within her writing to serve as a sanctuary. Numerous events occurred in the U.S. to overwhelm Dickinson in her lifetime; this includes multiple religious revivals, the Civil War (1861- 1865), and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln (1865). With the battles Americans were forced to witness during the 19th century, it is apparent why Dickinson would choose to turn to nature as a source of solace and spiritual reinforcement. It is known that "[...] the peak years of her output (1862-65) proved to be the bloodiest years of the Civil War, and while the conflict preserved the union and emancipated the slaves, it also transformed the religious landscape of the United States almost beyond recognition" (Lundin 151). The transparency of Dickinson's treatment of nature as a sanctuary from religious and political conflicts

varies from poem to poem, but it is prominent in works such as "It will be Summer – eventually," "If I should die," and "We grow accustomed to the Dark–."

Dickinson's use of nature for solace and spiritual reinforcement varies throughout her work; several of her poems, including 54, utilize nature as a source of hope as she addresses her struggles and macabre questions. Often the unsettling questions Dickinson navigates include death, uncontrollable change, and grief; these topics are considered taboo by many, but they undeniably hold a significant place in her writing. Notably, "In her search for infinitude, Emily Dickinson embraced those darknesses that troubled her contemporaries and found the faces of God in Nature, Death, and the Mind" (Kirkby 67). Within 54, Dickinson appears to be grappling with her mortality and how her death would impact nature. Dickinson starts the poem by indicating she is addressing a reality in which she is deceased and writes that "'Tis sweet to know that stocks will stand / When we with Daisies lie – / That Commerce will continue – / And Trades as briskly fly – / It makes the parting tranquil / And keeps the soul serene –" (54). After the speaker's passing, the plants will continue to grow and business will continue as usual for the masses; nothing has changed for mankind or nature in a broader sense. The speaker is explicitly telling readers that they are aware that the world will continue without them, and that is what makes it so they are at peace with their mortality. Through 54, it can be inferred that Dickinson is conscious of her minuscule existence in a vast universe and that the end of *her* life is not the end

of *all* life.

Although poem 54 demonstrates that Dickinson was seemingly at peace with her impending death, poem 419 highlights that she could use natural phenomena to overcome any struggle. Channeling the same positive energy, Dickinson addresses the dark and unsettling with hope. Within this poem of hope, Dickinson writes, "We grow accustomed to the Dark – / When Light is put away–" and that "The Bravest – grope a little – / And sometimes hit a Tree / Directly in the Forehead – / But as they learn to see – / Either the Darkness alters – / Or something in the sight / Adjusts itself to Midnight – / And Life steps almost straight" (419). Within the poem, the speaker is experiencing an environmentally-induced loss of sight, physical pains resulting from the loss, and the eventual regaining of sight as their eyes learn to see in the new darkness. The natural phenomena of the eyes adapting to the darkest of nights is undoubtedly a metaphor for man's ability to adapt and overcome difficult situations. Dickinson shows that she truly believes that when times get tough, she just has to keep going until things improve; it is the familiarity of the process of her sight adjusting to the darkness that serves as her reminder she *will* overcome. Like 314, poem 419 communicates a message of hope and resilience during some of the darkest times in U.S. history.

A similar sense of hope can be detected in 342; while the speaker awaits the much-anticipated summertime, they reflect upon the beauties that nature will bring with the season. Dickinson describes the people that:

Will tint the pallid landscape – / As 'twere a bright Bouquet–,"

how “The Lilacs – bending many a year – / Will sway with purple load – / The Bees – will not despise the tune” and “The Wild Rose – redden in the Bog – / The Aster on the Hill / Her everlasting fashion [...]. (342)

The intentional use of “eventually” after noting the upcoming summer, along with the wistful romanticized descriptions of flora and fauna, indicates that the speaker is eager for the season to arrive. It is possible that Dickinson was trying to communicate her happiness for the return of summer in a literal sense, but her writing style is rich in metaphors and 342 is likely an extended metaphor. Just as hope was conveyed in 419 through the natural process of eyes adapting to darkness, 342 conveys hope by passing the colder and darker months (symbols of bad times) to days of sunshine and warmth (symbols of good times). Once again, Dickinson uses nature to echo the biblical teachings of hope and faith within her writing.

Learning Spiritual Truths Through Nature

One of the most fascinating connections between nature and spirituality within Dickinson’s writing is her poetry’s emphasis on lessons learned. As Dickinson was raised within the Calvinist church, she would have been repeatedly exposed to the orthodox belief that all of nature is God’s creation; it is known that Dickinson also took a personal interest in transcendentalist texts that would have reinforced her belief that there is divinity within all nature and that there are lessons to learn from it. It is currently known that:

> [d]uring the two years between attending Mount Holyoke and turning twenty, Dickinson's unusual mind was occupied by wide, eclectic reading (including Emerson's poems and essays, Carlyle, DeQuincy, and Richter), new friendships (among them the Unitarian lawyer Benjamin Franklin Newton, who taught of a 'faith in things unseen' and encouraged her writing), and a growing correspondence in which she exercised her wit and imagination. (Longsworth 339)

This belief in nature as a spiritual teacher is reflected in the poems "A Bird, came down the Walk –," "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune," and "A Drop fell on the Apple Tree."

While poems 342 and 419 reflect Dickinson's hope, 359 takes a more neutral tone as the speaker observes the natural behaviors of a bird. The speaker describes curiously watching as the bird "[...] bit an Angle Worm in halves / And ate the fellow, raw / And then, he drank a Dew / From a convenient Grass – / And then hopped sidewise to the Wall / To let a Beetle pass –" (359). By watching the seemingly unaware bird, the speaker observes the complexity of nature; the bird blatantly disproves the human misconception that brutality and delicacy are mutually exclusive. The bird demonstrates the violence of nature as it kills and eats the worm, but it also displays gentleness as it drinks dew drops and gives way to a beetle. Through the reflections in 359, Dickinson creates the opportunity to consider not only the complexities of nature but also the complexities of man. While Calvinism preaches pre-destination, the church did acknowl-

edge God's gift of free will; like the bird, mankind could choose violence or delicacy in any given scenario. By considering the bird's actions with a neutral outlook, Dickinson provides a lens to contemplate how humans choose between "eating their worm" or "sparing their beetle" as those opportunities arise. The bird of 359 is not the only small-winged creature to teach and reinforce a spiritual lesson to Dickinson either; she describes in a letter to Abiah Root, a fellow philosopher, the lessons of materialistic greed she learned from a moth. Dickinson writes to Root:

> [...] it taught me dear Abiah to have no treasure here, or rather it tried to tell me in its little mothy way of enduring treasure, the robber cannot steal which, nor time waste away. How many a lesson learned from lips of such tiny teachers – don't it make you think of the Bible – 'not many mighty - not wise'? (L 50)

The moth was described as doing what moths do– eating away fabric. Dickinson does not grow angered because of the moth's actions, instead, she focuses on the chance to reflect on the lack of control man has over material possessions and that they do not truly matter. Through the letter, Dickinson's connection between the moth and the Bible explicitly reinforces the belief that she saw nature as a source for divine lessons.

Dickinson's use of winged creatures as spiritual teachers continues in poem 285 with the use of robins and cuckoo birds. While 359 displays the lessons Dickinson learned about the complexities of man and nature, the birds of 285 inspire reflection on one of the most commonly known biblical teachings: the importance of not judging others. With her Christian

background and education, Dickinson would have been very familiar with the lines, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (*Protestant Edition*, Matt. 7.1-2). Although the verse is typically used to refer to refraining from judging others for their sins, the Bible never specifies that sin is the only thing God's ruling applies to; Dickinson may have been taught during her time at Mount Holyoke that man should refrain from passing judgment of others on essentially any topic. The speaker of 285 becomes conscious of the harm that can be done by judging others when they realize they have unfairly placed value on others based upon their own experiences. The speaker observes, "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune – / Because I grow – where Robins do – / But, were I Cuckoo born – / I'd swear by him –" as well as that "The Buttercup's, my Whim for Bloom – / Because, we're Orchard sprung – / But, were I Britain born, / I'd Daisies spurn –" (285). The poem follows as the speaker realizes that they have been judging the world based on their own experiences and biased opinions. It is easy for the speaker to prefer the robins and daises they grew up with, but that does not mean that there is anything wrong with another preferring cuckoos and nut trees; it is unlikely that the speaker would have appreciated being judged in the same way they realized they had been judging. While the harm of judging someone for their preference for birds may be small, Dickinson would have recognized that the judgments occurring in 285 reflect the larger judgments people make every day. It is visible through the speaker's bird-induced

epiphany that Dickinson was processing the importance of withholding judgment and why God instructed humanity to do so.

In poem 794, Dickinson ditches her winged teachers and instead turns to lessons given by some of the inanimate aspects of nature. With an in-depth knowledge of scripture, Dickinson reflects the interconnectedness described in the Bible in 794. On the divine connection tying all things, the Bible states, "But ask the beasts and they will teach you; [...] or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you [...]. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind" (*Protestant Edition*, Job 12.7-10). Poem 794 describes the speaker watching as the rain falls and continues through the water cycle while the birds sing with joy, ultimately highlighting the interconnectedness and joy described in Job 12:7-10. The speaker watches as "A Drop fell on the Apple Tree" and "A few went out to help the Brook / That went to help the Sea –" as the rest of nature celebrates the rain's journey (794). Rather than focusing on the benefits rain provides to its immediate surroundings, the speaker is happily describing the rain's journey as it covers the speaker's home, and enters the larger water system by traveling from the brook to the sea; within the span of one poem, the rain is playfully traveling a miraculous distance to the benefit of all while the rest of nature rejoices. Had the poem exclusively been written to show Dickinson's love of rain or her interest in the water cycle, the descriptions of the reactions from the other creatures and plants would be irrelevant; including the personification of the different

creations highlights that *all* parts of nature are connected. This connection formed between the sky, land, ocean, and the living creatures among them by the rainfall is one example of the interconnectedness of nature. While Dickinson's belief in God himself has remained uncertain, she *does* show that she recognizes this interconnectedness of all divine creation.

Conclusion

Despite her numerous references to biblical passages and Calvinism's teachings, it is impossible to conclude with certainty Dickinson's beliefs as a Christian, agnostic believer, or even potential pagan. There is still much that can be learned about the interconnectedness of nature and spirituality within Dickinson's life from the approximately 1,790 poems not included in this analysis; still, scholars can definitively conclude that she was at the very least spiritual. Readers are met with an abundance of poetry using nature to help Dickinson as she sought answers to the questions that often plagued her, and an opportunity to see how she used them to reject orthodox religion and find sanctuary during life's trials. Dickinson's pursuit of divine connection, along with her struggles with faith and doubt, is ultimately representative of humanity's difficulty believing in the intangible and need to understand things unseen.

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Additional Commentaries

Dante's *Purgatory*, Canto I:

> Here let death's poetry arise to life,
>
> O Muses sacrosanct whose liege I am!
>
> And let Calliope rise up and play
>
> Her sweet accompaniment in the same strain
>
> That pierced the wretched magpies with truth
>
> Of unforgiveable presumptuousness.(I.7-12)

Dante Alighieri. *Dante's Purgatory*. Translated by Mark Musa. Indiana UPI, 1981.

Preserving a Writer's Art: A Look at Copyediting in *Calliope* 18
By Darci Ross-Smith

As the editors have read, evaluated, and edited pieces for *Calliope* 18, I have emphasized writing, grammar, and punctuation rules. I have also been very conscious of preserving each individual author's style, tone, and ideas. Pyscholinguist Steven Pinker quotes Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* in his novel, *The Language Instinct*, explaining one may observe that "language is an art, like brewing or baking; but writing would have been a better simile" (20). Pinker agrees with Darwin, stating that language is an instinct every human has, while writing is an art that must be taught. Language, often naturally informal when spoken in American culture, must be transformed into a more formal diction for academic writing, and part of the editor's job is to ensure the academic tone is in each accepted essay. When Erin Rowley chose to use the first-person pronoun throughout their essay, or inserted contractions instead of spelling out the full word, it was important to assess whether this was a part of their art. Rowley's impressive essay draws parallels between different aspects of gameplay in *Hollow Knight* to philosophers and their concepts. In the context of "Finding Philosophy in *Hollow Knight*," which could be interpreted as a kind of reader-response paper, the editors felt that the first-person pronoun use was important to the rhetoric/ exposition of the essay. In describing their own experience playing *Hollow Knight*, Rowley used "I" and "me" to draw connections between their experiences in the game and the specific philosophers they were learning about. The contractions,

however, could be changed to reflect a more academic style appropriate for this journal without changing the meaning of the piece.

There were other cases of grammar and punctuation unconventionality the editors came across that had to beassessed as well. Sarah Mendez-Jimenez wrote a wonderful essay, titled "A Survey of *Little Women*'s Feminist-Adjacent Criticism," assessing popular feminist and queer theory arguments regarding *Little Women*. Mendez-Jimenez has an endearing preference for em-dashes in their writing—where is the line between preference, overuse, and incorrect usage? Pinker explains that ungrammaticality occurs whenthe reader "lacks the confidence that the speaker has used the same code in producing the sentence as [the reader] used in interpreting it" (88). The inundation of em-dashes in "A Survey of *Little Women*'s Feminist-Adjacent Criticism" did not affect the readability of the piece, so the editors decided not to change them—they are simply a part of Mendez-Jimenez's writing art. In another case, however, Dylan Prewett's small mistakes in comma usage had to be edited to ensure that the information was being conveyed effectively. "The Unavoidable Ties Between Politics and Personal Life," a powerful postcolonial/ feminist paper, evaluates different short stories of Haitians and Haitian Americans in *The Dew Breaker* to highlight the nuance of these stories that America has overlooked. In this case, small errors in punctuation were simple to fix and enhanced the text itself, creating an appropriate opportunity for editors to step in.

Dallas Hensley's punctuation conventions, on the other hand, came from a place of hyper-correctness. Hensley wrote an excellent psychoanalytic paper analyzing societal expectations and personal morality within

the context of the id, ego, and superego. In order to concisely explain Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Hensley used brackets and ellipses to convey their information while avoiding block quotes. Unfortunately, this extra punctuation cluttered the quotes to the point that it became challenging to read. Fowler and Fowler, in their well-known grammar handbook *The King's English*, suggest before becoming entangled in "more showy qualities, to be direct, simple, brief, vigorous, and lucid" (11). The editors agreed the author themselves should fix this to preserve the intent of the essay and the meaning in the quotes, while also creating an essay with improved flow and readability. Hensley remedied this issue by paraphrasing some quotes, as opposed to using a highly edited version of the original phrase.

In this edition of *Calliope*, 13 amazing essays have been published. Each has gone through copyediting to ensure the highest level of quality, but authorial intent and personal writing style have been preserved to appreciate the individual art of writing.

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“I” of the Beholder
By Lisa Acosta-Alvarado

As readers become writers,

Writing for future readers,

The ability to take the wheel

Becomes an estimation of skill,

How much experience or knowledge,

A gage of assumption over the audience.

A jerk turn or abrupt halt can be the effect of over-correction,

or negligence to a fault.

As an editor of future writers and readers in the call,

Here is the pause...

Am “I” who you speak for, or do you not see me here at all?

Notes From the Archive
Christopher Livingston

Preserving and archiving *Calliope*, California State University, Bakersfield's literary and arts journal, is vital for maintaining the university's cultural and creative history. As a publication that showcases the voices of students, faculty, and the broader campus community, *Calliope* serves as a historical record of artistic expression, intellectual thought, and evolving campus identity. Archiving these works ensures future generations can access and study the creative contributions that have shaped the university's literary and artistic legacy. Furthermore, preservation supports research in literature, visual arts, and local history while reinforcing CSUB's commitment to fostering a vibrant creative community.

Christopher Livingston
Director, Historical Research Center
Department Chair, Walter W. Stiern Library
California State University, Bakersfield

Notes from the Department Chair

Much has changed since the first issue of *Calliope* rolled off the presses more than thirty years ago. In 1993, the internet was in its infancy, no one had yet heard of Facebook or YouTube or TikTok, and smartphones and tablets were still two decades away. CSUB, which had only gained university status five years before, had less than 5000 students and the Department of English was still known as the Department of English and Communications. The look and feel of *Calliope* has also changed quite a bit during this time. The covers have become more colorful, the fonts sharper, and the paper glossier.

But some things have not changed. *Calliope* continues to highlight, as founding editor Dr. Glenda Hudson wrote in the introduction to that first volume, "the best work in literary history and criticism by undergraduates and graduates at CSUB." And one thing for sure hasn't changed – how proud the faculty of the Department of English are of the incredible and excellent work that has gone into producing the newest edition of *Calliope* – a journal written, compiled, edited, and designed, from start to finish, by the best students anyone could ask for. I look forward to seeing what the next thirty-two years brings!

Emerson Case
Professor/Chair of English

Thank you to Rebecca St. Croix Martinez, Arts and Humanities Administrative Support Coordinator, for all her encouragement and assistance during the process of creating our window display that showcases both *Orpheus* and *Calliope*. Her enthusiactic support helped us promote both journals by capturing the eyes of our peers and the administration.