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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Editorial Board, it is my pleasure to introduce the 2008 issue of *IDIOM: English Undergraduate Academic Journal.*

The written work of English undergraduate students rarely meets the eyes of those other than professors, teaching assistants, and perhaps a few friends who kindly serve as last-minute proofreaders. Herein lies a perfect niche for *IDIOM*, the only academic publication for English undergraduate students at the University of Toronto. Our hope is that this journal will act as a medium through which students can exchange intellectual observations and different perspectives on the literature they read.

IDIOM showcases the extraordinary talent of students ranging from their first year to fourth year of study. The authors in this issue discuss poetry and prose from a variety of time periods. We thank all those who submitted an essay for their support in establishing literary critical discourse at the undergraduate level.

This issue could not have been produced without a diligent Editorial Board and generous sponsors. To the aesthetic appeal of this journal, we are indebted to Macy Siu. Many thanks to Professor John Baird, our Academic Advisor, and Provost Andy Orchard, our Editorial Advisor, who have graciously lent their time and expertise throughout this journal's publication process.

Finally, thank you for engaging in our academic idiom by partaking in one of the favourite activities of an English student: reading.

Sincerely,

SARAH YUN
Editor-in-Chief

The Inescapability of Imagination in *Old Mortality*

VICTORIA WANG

Victoria Wang is a first-year English student at Trinity College. Her favourite reads include *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Jane Eyre*, and anything by Salinger. Her current favourite writer is Milan Kundera. Victoria also loves the theatre and enjoys writing poetry in her spare time; anything by e. e. cummings is guaranteed to make her sigh or smile. As of now, Victoria's plans for the future include spending an unreasonable amount of time backpacking around the world. She hopes her adventures will be exciting enough to be committed brilliantly to paper.

FIRST YEAR

At its simplest, *Old Mortality* can be described as a story about a story. Katherine Anne Porter's short novel is not so much about the life of Amy as it is about its resurrection by other people and Miranda's consequent perception of this recreation which dwells in the memory. The story revolves around questions about the division between and mixing of reality and imagination as well as how illusions are created by words and the mind. Broken into three chronological time periods in Miranda's life, the story traces her changing acuity and attitude towards the story of her aunt and life in general. In particular, Miranda develops an understanding of the misleading nature of her own and others' illusions. Yet, despite the numerous insights and consequent disappointments which push Miranda towards a harder reality, she is never able to dispel elements of illusion in her perceptions. Porter thus demonstrates the inescapability of imagination and how it is ultimately not independent of reality but part of it.

The role of imagination is central in Miranda's and Maria's conception of the past and their Aunt Amy. The two sisters have, of course, never met their dead aunt, so any knowledge they have about her is purely secondary, gathered from "floating ends of narration" and "fragments of tales" (420). Already, connotations of the fictional are evoked, and it is implied that accounts of Amy's life are actually skewed memories and elaborations. It is these very "breathing words" (420), however, that the girls' young minds devour and use to shape their own visualization of Amy, leading to the conflict that arises when they see an actual photograph of her. Instead of accepting this material evidence, they wonder "why everyone who had known her thought her so beautiful" (419). The inability to distinguish properly between reality and illusion is, therefore, highlighted as a dominant quality in childhood as well as the fact that imagination takes precedence. Faced with the disparity between the "photographs, portraits" and the "living beings created in their minds," the sisters conclude that "visible remains were nothing" and instead "living memory enchanted" (420). This

conclusion offers insight into why the illusions of Maria and Miranda are maintained: as children, their imaginations are reality because the "living beings created in their minds" are more alive compared to the deadness of the reality before them, a "dowdy" and "moth-eaten" concrete existence (420). From the very beginning then, Porter emphasizes this natural, childlike inclination towards imagination which is also manifest in adulthood.

The sisters' illusions about Amy and their innate penchant for imagination is connected to their attraction to the romantic. To them, "Aunt Amy belonged to the world of poetry," and the persistence of their illusions rests on the contents of Amy's life story (422). With notions of "early death" and "unrewarded love," they immediately identify her life as "a story…in old books" (422). The girls' love for poetry and literature fuels their romantic perceptions and provides further evidence of the integration of fiction and fact. Moreover, this constant blurring between fantasy and reality permeates other rosy outlooks such as Miranda's notions of beauty as a "tall, cream-coloured brunette" and her dream that "some miracle" will transform her (421). Again, there is a rift between her internal visualization and the reality presented by her sister that "[w]e'll never be beautiful" (421). Although Miranda acknowledges the "truth and injustice in this unkindness," she nevertheless allows her imagination to supersede the material evidence of her physical appearance, much like her dismissal of the old photographs (421). Her idealistic tendency is further illustrated in her imaginative conception of her uncle Gabriel. Without having met her uncle, her mind creates its own idyllic image of Gabriel and his race horses. She believes "there could not possibly be a more brilliant career," foreshadowing her own career aspirations to be a jockey which is another idealistic venture in itself (423). Part I thus introduces the incorporation of real life with Miranda's childlike perceptions, establishing the underlying theme of the relation between reality and imagination as well as the role of idealism in this relationship.

Of course, the natural ignorance and naïveté of the young Miranda does not last forever. As she grows older, Miranda is confronted with events that challenge and shatter her illusions. Even in Part I, she experiences a minor revelation about theatre when she learns that "the real Queen had died long ago" (422). More important is the fact that she is "pained" by the discovery; the intensity of her emotions is once again testament to her deep involvement in her beliefs and foreshadows the greater disappointments to come (422). One particularly serious occasion of disillusionment characterizes Part II: Miranda's visit to the race tracks and the experience of finally meeting Gabriel. A symbolic shift occurs in the story here as it moves away from imagination and memory in Part I to real life and the present. This is Miranda's most direct encounter with the Amy legend, and her subsequent transition into reality – from imagining her uncle to seeing him in the flesh – proves to be severely disappointing. The "handsome romantic beau" that resided in the realms of her mind turns out to be "a shabby fat man" who is an alcoholic (433). This time, however, Miranda is unable to override the harsh reality with her imagination because the confrontation is much more direct. Her confusion can be felt when she wonders, "Oh, what did the grown-up people mean when they talked," a comment that mirrors her reaction to Amy's photograph (433). A contrast between the two reactions, however, is evident, for this exclamation moves beyond the simple childish perplexity of Part I. Her language reflects a stronger sense of frustration, even despair, highlighting her growing awareness of the disparity between imagination and reality as well as the deceptive nature of the former.

Miranda's disenchantment with her uncle is accompanied by that of her dream career as a jockey. The experience of watching the horse race is an episode of dramatic contrast with extreme emotions of elation and revulsion felt within the space of a few paragraphs. Her disheartened mood after meeting Gabriel is completely lifted by

the victory of "their darling, their lovely" Miss Lucy (433). Adopting the sisters' consciousness, the narrative of the victory verges on melodrama with the repetitions of "oh" and "had won, had won" (433). This sudden burst of sentiment shows how ten-year-old Miranda still possesses strong romantic perceptions, but her ecstasy also serves the further purpose of increasing the dramatic effect of yet another substitution of fantasy for reality. Indeed, the extreme shock of seeing Miss Lucy "bleeding at the nose" is emphasized by the short sentence: "Miranda stood staring" (434). The abruptness of the sentence halts the previous fast-flowing pace of the text, as reality once again sinks in. There is a sense of sudden clarity in her realization: "That was winning, too" (434). This moment can almost be seen as a turning point wherein Miranda feels "ashamed" about her mistaken feelings (434). Her development as a character is reflected in the way she now disposes of her mind's previous romantic interpretations.

The incident with Miss Lucy goes beyond destroying Miranda's career aspirations, for it has symbolic relevance in its connection with the story of Amy. The rapid change in Miranda's attitude towards Miss Lucy's victory serves as a microcosm of how her perception of the story of Amy will also change, foreshadowing her ultimate rejection of it in Part III which contains an epiphany in the face of Eva's radically different version of events. In particular, a direct association can be made between Miss Lucy's "bleeding nose" and Eva's declaration that Amy "coughed blood" (443). Both are unromantic images that shatter ideals of victory and beauty, respectively. Given this comparison, it appears that Eva's story is the last reality Miranda confronts which finally causes her to dispel the romantic story of her aunt. By further delving into the nature of illusions and ideals, however, Porter instils a more profound insight into both Miranda and the reader. Eva's scandalous depiction of a "sex-ridden" Amy, with hints of suicide and abortion, does not, unlike previous unpleasant discoveries, produce feelings of disappointment in Miranda (444). It does not exemplify the

disconnection between truth and its enhancement, for now Miranda realizes that "[t]his is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic" (444). The real epiphany is thus an acute awareness that even the negative can be romanticized and that characterizations of Amy from all viewpoints and memories – as "a singing angel" (423) or "a devil" (441) – are equally illusionary and unreliable.

These revelations in the final part of the story are marked by the narrative perspective which, for the most part, displays Miranda's stream of consciousness. The narration highlights her fierce inner rebellion against not only stories of Amy, but all ties with her family, their memories, and their pasts: "*I will be free of them. I shall not even remember them*" (446). The long closing paragraph culminates in a cascade of similar statements about rejecting the memories of others and instead living her own life and finding truth on her own. Yet, just as it seems Miranda has liberated herself from the "distorted images and misconceptions" of imagination, illusion, and romanticizing, this resolution is shattered (446). Ironically, the story ends with the word "ignorance" as a comment on Miranda and her rebellion (447). This distinction between Miranda as focalizer and as external verbalizer creates a double vision for the reader and provides additional insight about Miranda of which she is unaware. Despite realizing that imagination permeates everything and that others' perceptions are inevitably skewed, Miranda fails to see how this realization must also be true of herself and ignorantly believes that she has broken free from all illusions. The final sentences of the story, coated with irony, idenitfy a direct parallel between Miranda's thoughts and the narrator's description of her thinking: "I don't want any promises, I won't have false hopes" (447). She is oblivious to the irony that this statement is "making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness" (447). Similarly, her assertion "I won't be romantic about myself" participates in the romanic act of thinking that her rebellion is original (447). Hence, Porter reveals the inescapability of imagination in the paradox that the rejection of imagination is a fantasy itself.

This inextricability of imagination from reality is in fact present in all three parts of the story. Even as Miranda grows older and as a result of experience and disappointment, appears to become more practical in her outlook, illusions are subtly inserted between the layers of her thoughts. In Part II, Maria and Miranda supposedly realize, "It was no good trying to fit the stories to life" (430), suggesting a progression in their mentality from Part I when they "tried to fit" their imagined version of Amy with the version found in the lacklustre photograph (420). However, the inclination to fantasize is far from dead, as they ironically story-tell their own life in the convent. This is shown in their obsession with the word "Immured," which describes their dull and static conditions in a romantic manner, disguising the bleak reality of their situation (430). The fact that Part II also ends with "Immured for another week" is significant (438). This repetition reveals a cyclical structure of the girls' self-indulgent tendency towards feeling victimized in "their world of poverty, chastity, and obedience" (438). For all the shock, disappointment, and anger resulting from witnessing Miss Lucy's ordeal, this too only serves as an additional contribution to the sisters' self-narrating reflections at the convent. The way Miranda "so instantly and completely" rejects her jockey aspirations is every bit as overdramatic as her initial desire for it (434). Porter thus demonstrates how imagination is exercised even towards unpleasant realities to make them seem more elegant and thus more bearable.

It is this depth and extent of imagination that Miranda fails to appreciate in her final epiphany. She is so certain that "[a]t least I can know the truth about myself," not realizing that illusion is not just limited to memories and the past, but that living in and perceiving the present is similarly subject to distortion (447). Porter highlights this subtle pervasiveness of imagination in Part III by inserting nuances of similarity between Miranda and Amy. Despite resolving to no longer be influenced by her tainted childhood conceptions of her aunt, Miranda

has in some sense already given in to them. Her life can almost be seen as a subconscious re-enactment of Amy's life, as parallels can be found between the "unreal" and story-like experiences of both women (442). In particular, Miranda's own elopement strikingly mirrors the love story of Amy and Gabriel in its romantic chivalry and fairy-tale grandeur; similarly, her strained relationship with her father as a result of this rebellion can be seen alongside Amy's unruly manner of dress that angered her own father. It is certainly no coincidence that Porter incorporates such resemblances that underscore the ubiquitous and all-encompassing nature of imagination and illusion. By showing how Miranda's life reflects the fantastical memories of Amy's past, Porter emphasizes the complex amalgamation of imagination and reality.

Miranda's personal journey through the multiple layers of Amy's story – from her childhood idealizations, to the disappointing realities she confronts, to her final belief of being able to dispel notions of illusion – may fall short of reaching the wider perspective of the reader, but it embodies the essence of Porter's exploration of the imagination. The present moment itself immediately becomes part of the past, and so the act of narration, of remembering and describing in a kind of hindsight, is a constant process that Miranda will never be able to avoid. *Old Mortality*, as a piece of fiction itself, explores the many dimensions of reality as it is evoked and distorted through words and perceptions, illuminating how imagination is ultimately part of the creation of reality itself and, therefore, inseparable from it.

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A Collison of Traditions in Robert Burns

DAVID BOWDEN

David Bowden is a third-year English specialist at Trinity College. He was born and raised just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, where he developed his life-long love of non-standard English, colloquialisms, and bar-room verse. In addition to the works of Robert Burns, he enjoys the plays of Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, and the poetry and sermons of John Donne. The following essay discusses Burns's ability to straddle divides of languages and culture, an impressive feat that is more important now than ever, as mass media, long distance communication, and other factors associated with the digital age threaten many regional idiosyncrasies with extinction.

UPPER YEAR

Discovery, in the poem "Address to the De'il" by Robert Burns, is a process by which the unfamiliar and terrifying become familiar and predictable. The poem begins by positioning the Devil just beyond the limits of comfortable experience, existing beneath the surfaces of the known world and capitalizing on moments of uncertainty by transforming them into moments of fear. Bounds of certainty are demarcated through what a person sees, as discovery predominantly operates on a visual level; the importance of sight in discovery is self-evident, as topography (the primary means by which people lay claim to places) is the science that shows how things *look*. Through this process of discovery, light is shed on the darker corners of experience, and through the presentation of established, literary narratives, superstition is intended to yield to understanding. Like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Burns reconfigures a story in the oral tradition as a story in the literary tradition and in so doing, removes some of the strangeness and discomfort contemporarily associated with hearing an oral narrative, replacing that anxiety with the satisfaction of physically viewing a work of literature. Therefore, the process of discovery in "Address to the De'il" is made manifest through a discernible shift between the two traditions of narrative.

Fear in this poem has a physical location, usually in places just beyond the boundaries of normal comfort and daily life which must be explored in order to lessen the terror that they evoke. The poem begins by locating the Devil in a strange and supernatural place "in yon cavern grim an' sooty / Closed under hatches" (3–4), a place that implies both blackness (in "grim an' sooty") and the quality of being hidden below the surface (in "Closed under hatches"). This setting is quickly expanded upon in the lines "tho' yon lowan heugh's thy hame, / Thou [the Devil] travels far" (15–16), an expository statement that describes the Devil himself as a traveler in order to relocate the threat that he poses closer to home. The places to which the Devil travels are not exactly the readers' homes, but instead, nearby desolate and

unpopulated locales. His minions, in the forms of "warlocks grim, an' wither'd hags, /…skim the muirs an' dizzy crags" (49–51), place them beyond the borders of society, but only *just* beyond those borders – the presence of these "muirs" firmly locating the witches in Scotland and pointing towards unknown and sinister places which, although quite close to home, reflect the vision of Hell with which the poem starts. The grandmother's story emphasizes this comparison, since the places that she describes the Devil traveling to and visiting are similar to his home: "In lanely glens ye like to stray; / Or where auld, ruined castles, gray, / Nod to the moon, / Ye fright the nightly wand'rers way, Wi' eldritch croon" (26–30). These lines present an isolated setting with a pervading sense of loneliness and through the ruined castles, foreground the absence of human community in a place where it once existed. The wanderer is outside the comforts of human community and is, therefore, faced with unfamiliar territory that he or she must explore in order to gain some semblance of familiarity and subsequently, understanding. The importance of such exploration is effectively illustrated in an examination of what frightens the wanderer. Notably, the "eldritch croon" is *heard*, and, therefore, that which is frightening exists beyond the boundaries of clear and definite sight, making it impossible for one to be certain about what is happening. The source of the wanderer's fright may not be the presence of the Devil, but, rather, not knowing what is out there at all. In order to eliminate this fear, the poem must move to a setting in which readers are familiar, one in which there is nothing left to see that has not been seen before.

The episode of the duck continues to establish these motifs of isolation and fear. Once again, the speaker brings the reader to a setting just beyond the bounds of everyday experience, as he has traveled on "Ae dreary, windy, winter night…Ayont the lough" (37–40), providing the two typical characteristics of fright in this poem: distance from home and deprivation of sight. The moment of terror, when he hears the "eldritch, stoor, quaick, quaick" (45), is a moment when the

sense of hearing undeniably carries with it a quality of uncertainty. This anecdote may end in comic bathos, but it deliberately reflects the "eldritch croon" that frightens the wanderer and in this way, uses sound to misdirect the reader (or listener). The effect of suspense at this part of the poem hinges on the speaker's ability to deliver the lines in a manner both sinister and unfamiliar enough to conjure up fear, yet, familiar and ridiculous enough to sound like a duck once its source is revealed – the lines must *sound* like these two things at once. However, this double effect is not a pun, as both interpretations have nothing to do with the variable meanings of "quaick." The word is mimetic and without meaning; it can be interpreted as a meaningless word, but this understanding inevitably turns out to be a misinterpretation, resulting from an assumption of danger in the absence of certainty. Sight reveals the source of the sound (the duck) and renders it innocuous by eroding the mystery surrounding the incident, allowing for an interpretation that is more congruent with everyday experience.

This interplay between sight and sound is particularly interesting in a poem that seems caught between two traditions, the oral and the literary. The poem, as we encounter it today, seems obviously literary: it appears in an anthology and is accompanied by footnotes and translations. Even beyond modern-day editorial assistance, the poem's epigraph from John Milton associates it with a written, literary, English canon. However, the poem is simultaneously a blatantly oral artifact. One of the most immediately evident aspects of this text is its use of non-standard English, placing it strangely outside the written canon with which it is first associated. In a sense, Robert Burns, by releasing his poems in a Lowland dialect while intending at least some English readership, attempts to do what this poem attempts to do: incorporate "the fringe." Taking that which is slightly beyond the usual literary experience (the Lowland dialect) and inserting it into the larger literary canon familiarizes readers with what first appears to be a foreign culture.

The shift that Burns makes between these two traditions occurs in a strange manner. The poem begins, largely, with superstition. The grandmother is an important figure in this superstitious beginning, as the speaker indicates by prefacing his descriptions of the Devil's whereabouts with "I've heard my rev'rend Graunie say" (25). In this line, at least two levels of meaning are at work. First, the sense of hearing moves to the forefront, as oral traditions are ones based not on sight but on sound. Second, the reverence the speaker expresses towards his grandmother indicates the respect felt towards familial ties and lineage associated with such traditions. The content of the grandmother's anecdote also reflects both this fascination with sound and this reverence for the family: "When twilight did my Graunie summon, / To say her pray'rs, douse, honest woman, / Aft 'yont the dyke she's heard you bumman / Wi' eerie drone" (31–34). Not only does this passage reinforce the uncertainty of hearing and the presence of evil that lurks just beyond the space of everyday experience, it also intimately relates the scene to the household. The grandmother hears something of uncertain origin, but she hears it while performing the traditional duties of prayer in a familiar, domestic setting. The source of conflict is the Unknown, which penetrates the safe space of familiarity.

Although this poem initially aligns itself with the oral tradition by exploring oral superstitions about the Devil, the speaker makes a sudden shift to literary traditions at line 85. While the grandmother labels her uncertainties as supernatural and leaves the unexplainable incidents within the realm of the unexplainable, the speaker is not so easily satisfied. From lines 55–114 the poem is divided into ten stanzas of which five relate to orally passed-down superstitions while the remaining five relate to the established, written stories of the Bible. The transition from one to the other is anything but smooth – the stanza from lines 79–84 is the last of the five "superstitious" stanzas, and in its last three lines, the oral tradition crashes full-force against the written tradition. The line "strange to tell!" (84) is set up against the rhyme "Aff straught to H-ll" (86), and the obvious missing letter is an "e" (which, of course, yields "Hell"). This self-censorship deliberately exposes the gap between the two traditions, for in the oral tradition the missing word is obvious – the clue that fills in the missing piece is a clue of *sound*. At this moment, hearing appears to become the sense of certainty, indicating the one and only time in which it does so during the entire course of the poem. While it would be unreasonable to doubt that "Hell" is the intended word, the text only gives enough evidence to make an assumption and does not give the word explicitly. Readers can reasonably fill in the gap, but they cannot do so with one hundred percent written certainty. Instead, at this line, the reader sees a few objects, hears the poem's rhyme scheme, and from these clues, fills in the missing letter. In this poem, it cannot be seen as insignificant that what the reader believes he or she sees is "Hell." Like the incident with the duck, one assumes a supernatural and malevolent object exists without explicit and visual proof to the contrary.

The five stanzas that follow are biblical stories that are central to the canon of English literature, but it is difficult to get past the messiness of the transition into these stories. The poem itself restarts with "Lang syne in Eden's bonie yard" (85), a forced and clichéd beginning that resembles a fairy tale. It seems almost as if the poem itself knows it is moving into more familiar, better established territory, but cannot find a way to neatly incorporate the uncertainty of the oral tradition on which it has previously focused. Even at the end of the five biblical stanzas, the speaker reasserts his distance from established literature and claims that to list all of these long-known exploits of the Devil "Wad ding a' Lallan tongue, or Erse, / In prose or rhyme" (113–114). In once again foregrounding the use of Scottish dialect, the speaker reasserts the incongruity of the two traditions he seems so desperate to force together at times. The Scottish tongue seems incapable of effectively working in this canon and the literary canon seems unreceptive to the types of stories passed down through the

Scottish tongue. In a way, the content of the biblical stanzas helps familiarize the readers with the Devil in order to achieve the poet's goal of ridicule and pity at the closing two stanzas, but some of the feelings of foreignness remain. The oral tradition refuses to be smoothly incorporated into the literary tradition and so parts of the poem necessarily remain in darkness and uncertainty, resisting discovery and refusing to become a neat part of the larger literary map.

Yet, the poem's ending is still effective, despite the insurmountable limits encountered in this process of discovery. By presenting the Devil in terms of more recognizable literature, the speaker represents him in more familiar and accessible terms. Even when the Devil "cam to Paradise incog" (92), there is no real mystery – what is widely known about the story of Eden is that the Devil is there in disguise, and, therefore, both the disguise and the person whom it conceals are known with certainty. Despite the fact that there is no real transition between the Devil as an uncertain figure acknowledged by superstition and the Devil as a well-known biblical character, in this new discourse he seems to lose his strangeness and, therefore, warrants the speaker's pity (125–26). Consequently, a strange form of discovery takes place in this poem: the oral tradition is probed and brought to a head to be replaced by a more comfortable and more familiar literary tradition, one that contains no uncertainty and, therefore, no fear. But the new representation of the Devil fails to encapsulate the old and the problems of uncertainty in the oral tradition are not fully resolved through this translation. At the conclusion of the poem, the oral tradition still occupies a place that the literary tradition is unable to adequately express, resisting the impulse towards the comfortable, written world of standard English literature.

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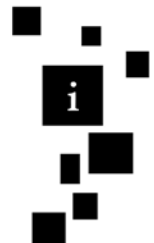
Performative Metonymy:
The Temporal Force of Speech-Acts
in W. B. Yeats's "The Tower"

TIM HARRISON

        Tim Harrison is a fourth-year English specialist who maintains an active extracurricular interest in philosophy. A Woodsworth College student, Tim has enjoyed his time as an undergraduate, but is happy to be finishing this spring. He is addicted to traveling, and lived abroad for six years before returning to university. Although he spent prolonged periods of time in many countries, Tim was most affected by his stays in South Africa, China, and Cambodia. In the future, he plans to pursue graduate studies in the field of early modern literature and to keep traveling.

UPPER YEAR

W. B. Yeats's "The Tower" is structured upon a complex commingling of temporalities. Past and future enter the present by virtue of a metonymic logic that simultaneously undergirds and undermines the poet's claim to imaginative power. Through the use of performative imperatives, Yeats summons "[f]rom the ruin or from ancient trees" the "[i]mages and memories" (22–23) of figures that historically inhabited the place where he now dwells. With similar power, in this, his poetic testament and "will," Yeats is able to "choose" perfromatively the "upstanding young men" he wishes to "inherit his pride" (121–27). In both instances, Yeats employs performative language to invoke "presence," what the Dutch philosopher Eelco Runia has recently described as the "unrepresented way the past" – and, in this case, the future – "is present in the present" (1). This performative summoning of both past and future "presence" is fundamentally metonymic. In "The Tower," metonymy, conceived in a broad sense as the trope wherein presence infiltrates absence, functions as a tropological gateway between temporalities: Yeats uses the performative power of language metonymically to pull presence from absence. Yet, at the same time, this commingling of temporalities highlights the conspicuous state of absence from which Yeats, in the present, issues his performatives. In order for a performative, in J. L. Austin's sense of the term, to be felicitous, it must be issued from a subject that is fully present to himself or herself. Divided between three temporalities, Yeats is anything but. Thus, the very same performative speech-acts that allow Yeats metonymically to command temporality are paradoxically why his performative power falters.

        In the opening pages of *How To Do Things With Words*, J. L. Austin coins the term "performative" to describe language wherein "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (6). Performative utterances, such as "I promise," "I bet," or the "I do" of the marriage ceremony are speech-acts: they "accomplish the action to which [they] appear to refer" (Culler, *Literary* 137). Such utterances are

commonplace in literary works.[1] Indeed, the performative aspect of language is integral to literature in two senses: first, because literature "achieves something *in* the saying" by virtue of the way it uses language "within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects in the reader" (Eagleton 103); and second, because literature is full of performative utterances that, within the context of a given work, quite literally do something with words. The poetry of W. B. Yeats makes use of the performative dimension of language in both senses, but I will first focus upon the second sense.

Yeats makes abundant use of performative language in his poetry. Moreover, he utilizes performative imperatives in ways that far exceed the banal purposes – capturing of the "right tone," the retaining of "audience attention," and the attribution of "authority and force to his speakers" – catalogued by critics such as Roberts (71). "The Tower," in particular, features Yeats employing the performative to remarkable ends: in a bid to demonstrate the "Excited, passionate, fantastical / Imagination" that still exists in him despite the onset of "Decrepit age" (3, 5–6), Yeats uses performative language to conjure past and future. Speaking from the present – "I pace upon the battlements" (17) – Yeats "call[s]" forth the ghosts of the past, for he "would ask a question of them all" (21, 24). Here, the modal verb "would," by pairing its state of pure possibility with the imperative force of "ask," reinforces the audacity of Yeats's conjuring act. The modal "would" suggests that Yeats always possesses the potential to summon the past successfully.

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[1] Of course, Austin famously excludes literature from his speech-act theory. He derides it as "parasitic upon [language's] normal use," and claims that a "performative utterance will … be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void" if "introduced in a poem" (22). In this sense, the use of Austin's concept of the performative to examine the poetry of Yeats may seem a strange proposal. However, Austin's exclusion of the literary is logically inconsistent and has been powerfully refuted by a variety of theorists. In fact, as Jonathan Culler has recently noted, the notion of the performative is now, rather ironically, being used in the "characterizing of literary discourse" (*Literary* 144). For detailed discussions and rebuttals of Austin's exclusion of the literary from his theory of speech-acts, see Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988). See also Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 110—33 and J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) 6—111. The insights of these authors will be considered below.

Indeed, after having conjured various visions of the past, Yeats repeats his performative invocation. Reiterating his desire to question the past, he twice commands those "who can" to "come," and orders them to "bring beauty's blind rambling celebrant" (89–91). Then, his answer gleaned, Yeats reverses his imperative, telling his guests to "Go," but to "leave Hanrahan" (103). Fully in control of the past, Yeats then turns to the future, where he "choose[s]" his poetic descendents and "declare[s]" that "they shall inherit [his] pride" (122–26). In "The Tower," Yeats commands the past and then controls the future, and in so doing demonstrates his performative ability, again, in the present to "declare [his] faith" and "mock" Plotinus and Plato (145–47) – those symbols of the senility he wishes to defy by virtue of his tremendous imaginative power.

How is such a performance possible? What logic permits Yeats to command the commingling of temporalities and remain convincing? How, in short, is Yeats able to rhetorically collapse time? The answer to these questions lies in the tropological force of metonymy. Yeats's performative handling of temporality depends upon a metonymical structure that underlies the whole of his poem: without the logic of metonymy, "The Tower" could not succeed. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines metonymy as "a figure in which the name of an attribute or adjunct is substituted for that of the thing meant." Metonymy is the trope of "positional similarity": it operates along what Roman Jakobson calls the "combination axis" of language and uses "semantic contiguity" to linguistically rearrange various elements in space and time (56–57). Tying together a disparate "web of associations," metonymy commonly imports an absent element into the present (Ankersmit 178). For example, if I say, "I am reading Yeats," I am using metonymy to substitute the poet (or maker) who is absent, for the poetry (or product) which is present. In Runia's helpful definition, metonymy is "the willfully inappropriate transposition of a word that belongs to a [given] context" into another context, "where it

subsequently stands just 'out of place' " (15–16). Metonymy, however, is not simply a rhetorical trope: it also, to a large extent, governs the ways in which we relate to time and, by extension, the ways in which Yeats manipulates temporality.

When thinking through the complex relations between metonymy and time, Runia's recent work is invaluable. Indeed, by highlighting the metonymical connection between the places of everyday life and historical time,[2] Runia offers a new lens through which to examine old questions. For Runia, a metonymical object "might be visualized as a 'fistula' – an 'abnormal passageway' – between two different *topoi*." In this way, "*all* fossils and relics are metonymies, and *all* monuments have at least a metonymic strand" in the sense that they "make past events present on the plane of the present" (16–17). All objects presently existing in a given place are to some extent "fistulae that connect and juxtapose [past] events to the here and now" (17). This metonymic structure transforms aspects of place into time and reveals the presence of what is not in what is. In Runia's words, "Metonymy is a 'presence in absence' not just in the sense that it presents something that isn't there, but also in the sense that in the absence … that is there, the thing that isn't there is still present" (20). If such a spatial and temporal understanding of metonymy is applied to "The Tower," the structure that undergirds Yeats's commingling of temporalities becomes visible.

In the opening lines of section II, for example, Yeats describes his surroundings: "the foundations of a house" and a "Tree, like a sooty finger, start[ing] from the earth" (18–19). Staring down upon these objects from "the battlements" (17), Yeats proceeds to "call / Images and memories / From ruin or from ancient trees" (21–23).

Using his elevated position in the present, Yeats is able to bring out the metonymical qualities of the objects that surround him: the "foundation," an "ancient" tree, and the dilapidated "ruin" are all fistulae that grant Yeats access to the past. He "falls through" these "metonymical connections down to the epiphanic moment in which historical reality stops being *absently* present in words and phrases and stands before [him]" (Runia 27).[3] Yeats relies upon the logic of metonymy in order to interact with the presences of Mrs. French, Mary Hynes, Anthony Raftery, and the rest. Yet, this logic is not activated in and of itself, for the past is only present by virtue of Yeats's performatives. Indeed, his use of imperatives – "call," "come," and "bring"– adds a further level of complexity to the metonymic relationship between past and present. If one follows the logic of metonymy back from the realms of time and place to its original rhetorical residence, it becomes clear that Yeats's performatives are themselves metonymical. They too act as fistulae connecting past and present insofar as these performatives conjure the presence of other temporalities. Yeats's performative imperatives are rhetorical conduits through which the presence of the past emerges from the absence of the past. Hence, Yeats's performatives work according to the logic of metonymy.

The same analysis holds true of Yeats's performative command over the future. In section III, Yeats writes, "I choose upstanding men" and "declare / They shall inherit my pride" (122–27). Such a statement is convincing for two reasons, both of which are related in fundamental ways to metonymy. First, the imperative creates the future: when Yeats chooses, the verb performatively brings forth from absence the thing chosen. The "upstanding men" exist only by virtue of a metonymic transposition, wherein what is future (and

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[2] Runia's ongoing project, *Committing History*, deals extensively with these issues. In addition to his article on "Presence," see also "Spots of Time," *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 305-316 and "Burying the Dead, Creating the Past," *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 313-325.

[3] Translated into Yeatsean terms, this "epiphanic" moment is surely related to what, in "The Tower," he calls "the Great Memory" (85), which Allison describes as "a storehouse of images from the past where the historical is palpable to those in the present who seek it" (61).

therefore absent) becomes present. The performatives "choose" and "declare" are fistulous conduits of presence. Second, Yeats builds an environment for the "upstanding men," a world of "streams" and leaping "fountains" where "at dawn" the men drop their "cast at the side of dripping stone" (123–26). The details of this future world are metonymies insofar as these details are only details: they substitute for the future world Yeats is imagining and to which they are undoubtedly contiguous. Thus, Yeats's performative summoning of both past and future is undergirded by a logic of metonymy that serves to showcase the power of the poet's imagination.

Paradoxically, this metonymic structure, without which Yeats would be unable to efficaciously issue his performatives, is simultaneously responsible for a certain emptying of the present. By using metonymy to move between and commingle three temporalities, Yeats divides himself from himself. In this regard, the use of performatives in section III is particularly illuminating. The section begins with the way in which, as aforementioned, Yeats performatively creates the future. It then moves back into the present, where Yeats displays his strength through repeated imperatives: "I declare my faith: / I mock Plotinus' thought / And cry in Plato's teeth" (145–47). The temporal focus of the section switches again, when Yeats looks backwards into the past, claiming, "I have prepared my peace / With … memories of love, / [and] memories of the words of women" (157–65). Here, Yeats uses the past perfect "have prepared" in a performative sense, for only after he has uttered (or written) those words has he "prepared [his] peace." Moreover, the repeated reference to memory is indicative of where the poet's attention has drifted. Finally, at the end of section III, Yeats returns to the present, performatively stating, "I leave both faith and pride" and "Now shall I make my soul" (173, 181). In less than sixty lines of poetry, Yeats's imperatives move from the future to the present, back to the past, and then forward again to the present.

This temporal shifting corresponds to the movement that J. Hillis Miller suggests structures all of consciously perceived time. "Temporality," Miller writes, "is made up of different relations in which the present moment is hollowed out by reaching back to a past that was never present and forward toward a future anterior that is always about to be" (109). The structure of temporality, emphasized by the metonymic movements of Yeats's poetry, renders complete self-presence impossible. Yeats cannot be in three temporalities at once and also be fully present. Ironically, by conjuring past and future presence, Yeats creates a state of absence in the present. Of course, such an absence is implicit in the metonymic structure that allows Yeats to shift through time with such ease. Here, it is helpful to recall Runia's formulation: "Metonymy is a 'presence in absence' not just in the sense that it presents something that isn't there, but also in the sense that in the absence … that is there, the thing that isn't there is still present" (20). According to the logic of metonymy, an absence filled with presence never ceases to be an absence. Thus, the tropological structure that allows Yeats to access other temporalities allows, of necessity, only a strenuously qualified access.

Moreover, this state of present absence, created by Yeats's metonymic dalliances with other temporalities, undermines the very performative power through which the poet summons the past and future. One of Austin's rules for a felicitous performative reads as follows: "a person participating in and so invoking the [conventional, performative] procedure must in fact have those thoughts and feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves" (15). Indeed, Austin's speech-act theory is, as Culler notes, "ultimately determined by or grounded in a consciousness whose intention is fully present to itself" (*Deconstruction* 115). Yeats is unable to meet Austin's criteria, then, on two counts. First, he is temporally divided. Second, Yeats's understanding of the self, outlined in *A Vision*, is conditional upon the impossibility of a unified subject. Yeats conceives of consciousness

as a place of "violent oscillation[s]," where a given "being becomes conscious of itself as a separate being [only] because of certain facts of Opposition and Discord" (*Vision* 89, 93). Indeed, the Yeatsian subject is a locus of antithetical forces. "[H]uman life," he avers, "is impossible without strife between the *tinctures*." Thus, what Yeats describes as "unity of being" is not attainable in "human incarnations" (*Vision* 79). Not only is Yeats temporally split, but he also presupposes a theory of selfhood that brackets earthly unity of consciousness as an impossibility.

From this conclusion flow a series of consequences. Without a centered, self-present subject, without recourse to what Derrida describes as the "teleological lure of consciousness" (18), intention can no longer ground the force of a given performative. In the absence of a controlling intention produced by self-presence, performative utterances (or, for that matter, all utterances) become unstable insofar as their meanings are no longer subject to the rulings of a guarantor (Derrida 8). Unmoored from the protective semantic harbor of Yeats's intentions, the performatives of "The Tower" float free. They are open to any number of interpretations. Yeats seems to have been aware of this possibility.

"The Tower" is laced with scenarios depicting the disconnection of intention and interpretation. For instance, the tale of Mrs. French, whose serving man "clipped an insolent farmer's ears / And brought them in a little covered dish" (31–32), depends upon the severing of intention and interpretation. In his description of the historical event in question, Sir Jonah Barrington claims that Mrs. French's statement – "I wish the fellow's ears were cut off!" – "could not have been literally meant." Nevertheless, the servant interprets her request quite seriously. After he has had the offending farmer's ears removed and has presented them at the dinner table, the servant claims, "Sure, my lady, you wished Dennis Bodkin's ears were cut off" (Jeffares 218). By including this piece of local history in "The Tower," Yeats is drawing attention to

the ways in which a given utterance can be infelicitously construed. A similar logic is at work in Yeats's relating of the "certain men" who were "maddened by [the] rhymes" (41) of Raftery's song and tried to find Mary Hynes in the night. Raftery's "rhymes" were most likely not meant to inspire the drowning of one of these men "in the great bog of Cloone" (48), but nonetheless, his words had the power to do precisely that.

By including these anecdotes in the "The Tower," Yeats is implicitly acknowledging the disconnect that exists in all language between intention and interpretation. This disconnect is underlined by the state of absence from which Yeats delivers his utterances. Thus, because Yeats's performatives find their source in a speaker who is temporally divided and absent, these utterances, which allow the poet to commingle temporalities, are bereft of any fixative properties capable of fastening their meanings to the poet's intentions. In "The Tower," Yeats's performatives are capable of summoning temporalities and structuring the poem. They metonymically conjure past and future presence, but are ultimately unable to secure a given meaning through this act of conjuring. Of course, such a conclusion is only fitting: the performatives of "The Tower" are profoundly metonymic and as such, they bring presence from absence, but are incapable of eradicating the absence that lurks within them.

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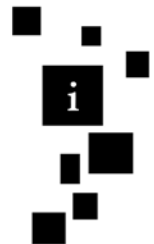Roberts, Barbara. "Yeats's Rhetorical Imperative." *Yeats Eliot Review* 8
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Dealing with Difference:
Depictions of the Orphan Figure
in *David Copperfield* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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UPPER YEAR

The widespread arrival of railways, factories, and new forms of communication not only revolutionized Victorian life, but also led to an overhauling of the concept of the family. One facet of this change was a shift away from the larger familial units predominant in the previous century, and towards smaller, more isolated groups, comprised only of parents and children, and generally excluding networks of extended kin (Mintz 14). This transformation led to the emergence of an influx of literature designed to influence the creation of a universally accepted idea of what the family (as a bourgeois construct) should be. This new model of the ideal family was inevitably riddled with problems, but few were more disruptive than the ever present Victorian orphan. The epitome of contrast to the middle class conception of the home, the orphan flew in the face of everything that the nineteenth-century family wanted to be. Turning to a pair of novels written by two of the nineteenth-century's most prominent writers, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, we can see this societal conflict played out in two very distinct ways. As a work written by the pre-eminent keeper of family values, Dickens's novel may be read as an effort to reconcile fears about lack of familial identity with the reality of the orphan by systematically deemphasizing David's orphan status, effectively tying him into middle class society in such a way as to allay fears about difference (Waters 15). Hardy, writing forty years later, does exactly the opposite, presenting Tess, a character with both father and mother, as an outsider, a stranger, and an orphan in her own home, and thus playing into fears of foreignness present in the middle class community. In this way, as historical and cultural products of their era, the two novels may be seen as opposing examples of the clash between the desire for familial normalcy and the reality of a desperate orphan condition. With Dickens's presentation of David as what may be described as "the insider without," and Hardy's use of Tess as "the outsider within," the two novels engage in a meaningful discourse about the identity of the family in the Victorian age.

In order to understand how the two novels use the orphan figure to assess the nature of the family, we must first examine the phenomenon of the Victorian orphan itself. By 1852, the year after Dickens wrote *David Copperfield*, there were 52,125 children in workhouses in England and Wales, 11,385 of whom were orphans (Peters 7). The orphan figure, therefore, was an unavoidable presence at a time when the family was defining itself along lines of legitimacy, race and national belonging, ideas that were being simultaneously challenged by the hectic pace of contemporary society (Waters 1). If the Victorian family was defined by its sense of belonging, the orphan must, antithetically, be seen as an, or even *the*, outsider. It is important to note exactly what defined an orphan in the time of Dickens and Hardy. Unlike the contemporary term, the nineteenth-century definition implied, at best, a child with one parent, and, at worst, one "bereft of protection, advantages, benefits, or happiness, previously enjoyed"(Waters 1 citing *OED*).

Keeping this definition in mind allows for a new reading of the fact that Dickens depicts David in a manner that deemphasizes his orphan status, giving him a living mother, a domestic paradise, and, in contrast to most fictional orphans, a keen sense of the loss of his father. Indeed, more than simply having a living parent, David also seems to have the perfect home, complete with literal hearthside pleasures. He is blessed with both a "mother with…pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty" (Dickens 18), his childhood servant who arguably fills the role of second parent in David's life. It is this removal from the conventions of the Victorian novel that works to significantly reduce the sense of David as an "other" or an outsider within the family. These early depictions of David as living the middle class ideal locate him within the structures of family life advanced by the Victorian press despite his orphan status. Furthermore, David expresses a fascination for his missing father, an interest in lineage that is almost unknown in other Victorian novels (Carmichael 653). David directs his feelings

of inexpressible loss towards his father's grave, "feel[ing] for it lying out alone…in the dark night, when our little parlor was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were – almost cruelly… – bolted and locked against it" (Dickens 10). This statement, with its emphasis on the happy hearth, strongly suggests David's sense that something is missing from his life. By emphasizing these aspects of David's life and character, Dickens effectively ties David into both the middle class ideal and the value of demonstrable lineage that was so central to it. David, although technically an orphan, is repeatedly separated from the poor, identity-less stereotype, and instead is continually reaffirmed as being a person who belongs.

In contrast to Dickens's David, who is endlessly being linked to family, identity, and the middle class, Hardy's Tess is presented as out of place and almost alien to her family. The first clear distinction the novel makes between daughter and parents is one of class. "Mrs. Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect," writes Hardy of Tess's mother, while her daughter, "who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home…ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality" (Hardy 14). The language Hardy employs here shows Tess as superior to her mother in both education and, at least in appearance, in social rank. The description of Tess's second tongue as "ordinary English," and the fact that she speaks it "abroad and to persons of quality" suggests a clash between the world within and the world without the home, as well as between home and "quality." Likewise, Hardy draws a marked distinction between Mr. and Mrs. Durbeyfield's visits to Rolliver's inn, a black hole that draws in even Tess's younger brother, and Tess herself who "[e]ven to her mother's gaze…looked sadly out of place amid the alcoholic vapours which floated [there]" (Hardy 21). These examples demonstrate not only the "orphaning" of Tess from her family, but also the family's role in this displacement.

An 1854 report to the Committee of Education remarked that parents of poor children were likely to "either neglect their children entirely, or endeavour to lead them in the paths of dishonesty and vice" (qtd. in Peters 9), and the fulfillment of this prophecy can be seen in the Durbeyfields' efforts to coerce Tess into establishing ties with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, an action that she has no interest in taking. Even her young siblings conspire in this effort to force her into Alec's clutches, condemning her for her "reluctance and teas[ing] and reproach[ing] her for hesitating" over a decision that will ultimately leave her a symbolic orphan, "bereft of protection…[and] happiness" (Hardy 39). Using the explicit wording of the nineteenth-century definition of the orphan, Hardy, like Dickens, works his protagonist into the discourse on the subject of the parentless.

The importance of underemphasizing David's orphanhood and overemphasizing Tess's as demonstrated by Dickens's and Hardy's respective uses of the contemporary definition of the orphan point to a fascination with demonstrable lineage. This issue of identity was central to the Victorian depiction of the family unit. If the model family was centralized, totally connected, and intrinsically together, the orphan was not only isolated, but also representative of the unknown. The difficulty of demonstrating a provable lineage for the orphan bred suspicions about illegitimacy (Peters 23), which persisted among the middle classes. In order to further neutralize or inspire the anxieties about orphans, the two novels turn to issues of blood and heredity to more powerfully assert their arguments. The issue of genetic inheritance, although not termed as such, was a major concern throughout the Victorian era, particularly when regarded through the lens of emerging scientific perspectives (Morgantaler 1). Despite this interest, understandings of heredity failed to become widely disseminated for at least a decade after Darwin published his *The Origin of Species* in 1859 (Morgantaler 1). But although Darwin's work failed to gain universal acceptance straight away (Hardy himself was aware of, but somewhat

sceptical of the work), it contributed to a widespread fascination with blood. Living in a society with a hereditary monarch at the top of the social ladder (Morgantaler 23), the value of blood to the Victorians and to their ideas about orphan identity cannot be underestimated. To Victorian readers, blood ties gave a sense of essential origin, a point of community and loyalty, particularly important in an age of such radical change (Peters 5). We see this idea advanced even in Darwin's groundbreaking study. "All true classification is genealogical," he writes, asserting that "[c]ommunity of descent is the hidden bond which naturalists have been unconsciously seeking" (qtd. in Morgantaler xvi). Using this argument, Dickens and Hardy place a significant focus on the role of blood as a means of demonstrating or repressing the family ties of their orphans.

Looking at *David Copperfield*, we see how Dickens uses blood and lineage to reinforce his efforts to deemphasize David's orphaned condition. With the departure from London of the Micawbers, who act as David's temporary foster family, he immediately decides that the degrading working class life that he is living is one of "shame and misery," a constant destroyer of his "sensitive feelings" (Dickens 153). He is fearful that it will never be "anything else [other than] the common drudge into which [he] was fast settling down" (Dickens 153) and is, therefore, "unendurable" (Dickens 153) for such a self-respecting middle class young man as himself. Upon arriving at this realization, David immediately decides that in order to escape this affront to his class-based dignity, he must follow up on his one blood tie and travel to visit his estranged great-aunt, Betsey Trotwood. The force with which this determination enters David's mind suggests a belief in the inherent ties of blood present in the Dickensian world. The idea comes to him unbidden, but once in his mind "harden[s] into a purpose than which [he had] never entertained a more determined purpose in [his] life" (Dickens 155). This description suggests the natural and inalienable bonds of blood.

As Alec d'Urberville astutely notes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "[t]he little finger of the sham d'Urberville can do more for you than the whole dynasty of the real" (Hardy 338), suggesting that the validity of blood as a legitimizing force is systematically undermined throughout the novel. Unlike David, the Durbeyfields have no inherent sense of their lineage, believing themselves to be just "plain… Durbeyfield" (Hardy 1), and, as if to emphasize the insignificance of the discovery of their heritage, even offer to "sell [Alec] the title…at no unreasonable figure" (Hardy 42). This criticism of the power of blood to fashion identity is taken further, of course, by the fact that the ties of kin that the Durbeyfields claim with Alec and his mother are entirely fictitious, as the Stoke-d'Urbervilles are not really d'Urbervilles at all. The failure of blood ties to provide a true sense of belonging is further emphasized by the fact that Tess is only one of several humble dairymaids at Talbothays to be descended from great ancestors.

This devaluing of demonstrable blood relations relates more explicitly to Tess's orphan condition. While David's blood is what allows him to re-enter the middle class family, this is not the case for Tess. By producing a child with Alec, she is effectively soldering the two (alleged) branches of the d'Urberville tree (Gordan 4); yet, unlike David, the result is her utter ruin and almost permanent isolation. By following her blood ties, Tess achieves a union with Alec that produces a child that both symbolizes reaffirmation and leads to Tess's shaming. When Angel, her true love and new husband, discovers the truth about her past, he is "embittered by the conviction that all this desolation had been brought about by the accident of her being a d'Urberville" (Hardy 241). Angel using Tess's blood line as a precedent for her actions, weaving together the idea of old blood, which he so despises and which the novel challenges, with the personal belief that he should have "stoically abandoned her" (Hardy 241) the moment he knew the truth. Angel's argument about blood traits being inevitable and unalterable, therefore, plays a significant role in driving him away from Tess. As such, the knowledge of Tess's blood ostracizes her from the middle class family ideal she had hoped to find with Angel.

If blood ties were the ultimate sign of legitimacy and identity in the Victorian era, marriage was the symbolic representation of integration. Although ideas about marriage as a mere social arrangement were changing in the nineteenth-century, the institution was still frequently seen as a means of establishing and solidifying links and status (Kertzer 292). To this end, the major roles of marriage were to bring families together in lasting and formal ways and to improve social status (Kertzer 292, 294). An essential element of both marriage and intermarriage, therefore, was the reinforcement of ties between and within the family, a fact that both Dickens and Hardy respond to in regards to the orphan's search for the ideal family.

Looking first at David, we see that despite his return to the family structure and a subsequent return to middle class life through the means of a formal education, David continues to feel "the old unhappy loss or want of something" (Dickens 688). This "something" can be interpreted as the sense of his orphan status that has troubled him throughout his life (Carmichael 14). By marrying Agnes, David symbolically reintegrates himself into the middle class ideal of family life. Viewed in light of an age where significant attention was placed on blood and when marriage within the extended families of the elite, including the children of Queen Victoria to their first cousins, was not unknown (Gordan 369), the marriage of David and Agnes may be seen as a reassertion of David's place in the middle class. Even apart from this symbolic "incest," David's realization of his true love for such a "domestic angel" as Agnes firmly ties his story to a search for the bourgeois dream. Agnes is not so much a wife as a replacement parent. David insists that he has feelings for her "not at all in that way" (Dickens 199), but, instead, frequently connects her to a motherly role. Her sensual aspects are consistently underemphasized, while her caring,

compassionate, and endlessly giving nature is played up. Throughout the novel, she is a force of council and guidance in David's life, his "guardian angel" (Dickens 611), and in many ways an embodiment of the ideal mother that David has never had. As such, Dickens uses marriage, and particularly intermarriage, to normalize further David's position in the world despite his orphan status.

In some ways, Hardy's depictions of marriage as a form of familial cementing and an end to "outsiderism" appear almost as a mockery of the message that Dickens is trying to express. The issue of marrying Tess into the Stoke-d'Urberville family in order to give both her and her family a sense of identity is one of the chief concerns of the Durbeyfields. But instead of reaffirming some inherent nobility in Tess, her eventual rejection of marriage instead only serves to further isolate Tess from family and society, making her even more of an orphan. Tess's "union" with Alec is almost a direct response to Dickens's idyllic image of the coming together of kin in David. Although never officially married to her, as Angel notes, Alec can be seen as Tess's "husband in nature" (Hardy 224). In itself, the fact that a marriage between the two alleged cousins never takes place makes an effective mockery of Dickens's happy endings (O'Toole 78). Furthermore, the reader is well aware throughout the narrative that the Durbeyfields' pursuit of familial reinstatement through intermarriage is inherently absurd, as the Stoke-d'Urbervilles have not a drop of blood in common with their supposed relatives.

At the same time as he critiques the Dickensian ideal, Hardy uses marriage to further tie Tess into her role as an emerging orphan. In her "legal" marriage to Angel, Tess expresses a desire to escape both her ties to her d'Urberville past and to her heritage as a Durbeyfield. She rejects Angel's request that she become "Mistress Teresa d'Urberville" (Hardy 175), claiming that she "like[s] the other way rather best" (Hardy 175). She is, however, eminently satisfied with his argument that she

"[t]ake [his] name and so escape [hers]" (Hardy 175). It is only with this promise of escaping from her family, and effectively orphaning herself from both d'Urbervilles and Durbeyfields, that Tess finally agrees to take Angel as her husband. This idea of self-orphaning is demonstrated far more forcefully later in the novel in the form of her murder of Alec d'Urberville. By killing off the only living – albeit phoney – d'Urberville, Tess frees herself from the ties of family and lineage, orphaning herself from her genealogical history. Explaining what she has done to Angel, she claims that d'Urberville "has come between us and ruined us" (Hardy 357), but it is not so much Alec as an *individual*, as the *self-consciousness of lineage*, which Parson Tringham reveals to Mr. Durbeyfield, that leads to Tess's undoing (O'Toole 3). In this way, by killing Alec, Tess is finally free not just of a noxious individual, but also of her sense of belonging to a family structure.

Tess's execution demonstrates a significant and troubling aspect of the "orphan question" within Victorian society. The symbolic killing of Alec d'Urberville as a means of setting Tess free from the ties of family, and, therefore, as an illustration of her confirmed status as an orphan, is followed by the seemingly inevitable fact of her destruction. The "justice" (Hardy 369) which is done upon her may be read not only as a response to her literal crime, but also as an effort on the part of the middle class to respond to the issues raised by Tess *as* an orphan. As we have seen, the orphan figure was regarded with considerable fear during the nineteenth-century, and Hardy's heroine as a self-made example flies in the face of literarily-imposed ideas about the value of the family. As an orphan, Tess is subject to all the prejudices and alarm directed at those of her station, and must, quite literally, be removed.

Published in 1850, *David Copperfield* came at a time when Dickens and others were taking the initiative in trying to construct a family identity and were attempting to reconcile the orphan presence through literature. By 1891, when Hardy began publishing *Tess of the*

d'Urbervilles, four decades of constant change had radically altered the country, making the sustenance of unrealistic ideals increasingly difficult (although by no means impossible). Viewed in this light, David Copperfield, as a character and a novel, can be seen as a concerted effort to resolve a significant part of the angst that the Victorians focused on the family identity and on the home. Tess, in striking contrast, may be seen as a rejection of these efforts and a representation of the real anxiety felt by families throughout the century.

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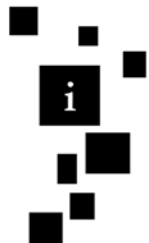
"Seed Catalogue":
The Problem of the Past and the Postmodern Long Poem

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UPPER YEAR

The postmodern psyche is plagued by its obligation to negotiate with the past. The genre is named, and often defined, on the basis that it comes "after" Modernism ("Post-"; Abrams 168). Specifically troubling is the question of whether or not it is possible to represent the past without changing it: can the artist create a novel work in the present about the past while maintaining an objective distance from those past events and without altering them? Robert Kroetsch, in his postmodern long poem "Seed Catalogue," confronts the past not only in how it relates to the content of his narrative, but also in how the content affects the structure of the poem itself. An anthologist of Kroetsch, Garry Geddes, describes Kroetsch's "pursuit of the long poem…[as involving] a struggle against the presumed systems and grids of inherited story" (421). In his struggle, Kroetsch assumes an offensive position and manipulates the form of the long poem through the catalogue structure to reveal to the reader both the inherent problems of narrating the past and that the past is ultimately as malleable as the poem's form.

The type of poetry and narrative that challenges conventions concerned with the past is defined by Linda Hutcheon as "historiographic metafiction" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 61), which:

> refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 93)

By using the seed catalogue captions and other rhetorical constructs to undermine its own claims to truth, the narrative of "Seed Catalogue" flourishes in the "historiographic metafictional" mode and exposes the

adaptability of history through its fundamental relation to perspective. In his smaller poems, "Poem of Albert Johnson" and "Meditation on Tom Thomson," Kroetsch conceives personal revelations about histories that he could not possibly have experienced. He is re-writing those histories from a different point of view, not as related to fact, but as related to a distinct perspective. In "Seed Catalogue," Kroetsch's theme is still history, but in the personal form of the *bildungsroman*, he is no longer confined to the objective facts of independent history and is at liberty to disclose how the past is subject to the bias of self-reflection.

The theme of character development through one's formative years is symbolized in the poem's title, which prepares the foundation for the relation between the seed catalogue captions and the rest of the narrative. "Seed" represents the possibility for germination and an undisclosed future from a fixed set of initial conditions, while "catalogue" specifies that the description of that timeline will be presented through choice, which is the etymological root of the word itself ("Catalogue"). The plotting of the narrative, then, will be based purely on personal selection, and the privileged role of the speaker as author of his own life is immediately put into question. Furthermore, by beginning the poem with an excerpt from a seed catalogue, the speaker discloses the dual functions of the captions both as thematic and metafictional commentary.

The captions grow as seeds throughout the poem, spreading their roots through the surface layer and embedding themselves into the underlying self-reflexive interpretations. Superficially, the seed descriptions comment on the poem's subject matter and the introductory setting of the narrative as a rural farm suggest that the speaker would have been familiar with this type of horticultural literature as a child. Whether or not these captions are historically accurate is immaterial, as they are not reference markers to chronological time, but rhetorical

devices. For example, in Section 1, Caption No. 25 of the catalogue states, "*Virtue* is its own reward" (428). In this aphorism, the caption acts not only as a hyperbolic advertisement describing a certain type of bean, but through its reference to a human quality, it also invites the poem's thematic comparison to the human sphere. Furthermore, in the narrative immediately prior to the caption, the speaker says that "Into the dark of January / the seed catalogue bloomed / a winter proposition" (428). The catalogue is being described metaphorically, as it cannot bloom, but this "bloom" can be linked not only to the seeds themselves, but also to the child who is in the "bloom" of youth (428). The captions, however, like the notions of the past that they will also comment on, are flexible, and though they do not always appear related to the surrounding text, they are nevertheless grounded in the poem's topic of the development of a man. Caption No. 1248 states, "As *mankind* seems to have a *particular fondness for squash*," insisting that man is the ultimate appraiser of nature, just as he assumes a position from which to evaluate the past. The captions develop alongside the speaker's character, and later in the poem, a now numberless caption acts as an epigraph to §7, which describes "*Brome Grass*: 'No amount of cold will kill it. *Remains green* longer in the fall. *Flourishes under absolute neglect*'" (438). The statement is not only about the resiliency of the grass, but also of the speaker, who has grown significantly older, and who now appears to be describing the decline of his youth as he recounts a rather stereotypical drinking scene with the poet Al Purdy. The "bloom" of life has been replaced by a sturdier "grass," which is no longer a seed, but having successfully germinated, is presently characterized by its ability to survive the harsher conditions of life. The final part of the caption, "*Flourishes under absolute neglect*," is repeated later in the section (438-9), and now is integrated directly into the narrative. Where before there were boundaries between the captions and the narrative, through the transplantation of the caption into the body of the narrative, the distinctions between the two become muddled, which suggests their deeper intermingling below the surface level.

Along with their ability to penetrate into the narrative, the captions grow beyond the text and demonstrate how the structure of the poem itself can be used as metafictional commentary. The first caption, No. 176, propounds the relational predicament between present and past. Through the paradoxical statement, "This *new introduction, strictly speaking*, is in every respect a *thoroughbred*…of *highest pedigree* (427), the caption begs a postmodern question: how can anything be new yet still be defined primarily by its lineage? Would it not then merely be an alteration of the past? To reflect further his intent to modify supposedly totalized structures and edifices as well as to direct the reader's attention to his control over the poem's form, the speaker pre-emptively breaks the first line: "We took the storm windows / off [sic]" (427). By interrupting the line, the speaker demonstrates that the form of the poem is not static, that the breaks are not controlled by a detached poetical system, but are wilfully altered by the speaker, and that this narrative mode is a manipulation. The fragmentation continues throughout the poem through line breaks, indentations, and various types of lists and catalogues. In conjunction with the form, the speaker undermines the content to emphasize his authority over it, reminding the reader that, ultimately, he controls the story.

In the opening stanza, the speaker revises the narrative, saying, "Then it was spring. Or, no: [/] then winter was ending" (427). Ironically, by questioning his own recollection of the past, the speaker exposes the extent of his influence on it. For example, the speaker could have avoided this amendment by simply adding an objective weather report from that time, similar to the later passage where he states the exact geographical position of his "home place" (429). Instead, he corrects himself and his own perception over what is arguably an arbitrary point: if winter were ending, then spring would be beginning. The time between seasons is a transitional stage in nature, and one could take either position depending on one's perspective of the situation.

In a traditional narrative, the narrator would make a choice and just expect the reader's acceptance of what Andrew Gibson terms the "narrative contract" (91). In "Seed Catalogue," however, the speaker wants the reader to be consciously aware of the choices involved in the formation of his narrative and how he is challenging the traditional system of narration.

Continuing in the introductory section, the speaker demonstrates how, during the act of narrating the past, the idea of order is imposed onto seemingly disparate events. One stanza features a letter written to a seed catalogue detailing the writer's pleasure with the seed purchased for "Sweet Corn" and "Cabbage," while the subsequent stanza presents dialogue from the speaker's mother saying, "Did you wash your ears? / You could grow cabbages / in those ears" (428). By employing the same object of "cabbages" in dissimilar stanzaic forms, the speaker creates a narrative thread between two distinct episodes that have no obvious association with one another: the cabbages in the letter are physical, while the cabbages in the succeeding stanza are metaphorical. Furthermore, through the linking, the speaker is privileging the otherwise neutral letter about the seeds with the inherent importance of his mother's wisdom. This suggests that in the process of creating false connections in the past to produce a linear narrative, one can also fabricate the emotional importance of those experiences. By stressing how associations can be formed in the mind through an arbitrary object, especially during youth, the speaker is questioning the method of describing a subjective past from the supposedly objective perspective of the present. Here, a new paradigm is created, one where the subject/object split actually occurs within the individual: the subject remaining the same, but the subject's own history becoming the object from which he is split. Hutcheon explains this model in terms of postmodernism when she writes that "postmodernism [confronts] the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in the present" (*Poetics* 92). Furthermore, in *Towards a Postmodern Theory of*

Narrative, Andrew Gibson writes that "narrative 'cuts' fall in a material that could have been 'cut' otherwise and constitutes a 'world' beyond the narrative system itself…These 'events' [of the narrative] might be 'reconnected' otherwise" (76). The subject, despite observing his own past, is still caught in the traditional subject/object split, and, therefore, faces the same dislocation when he attempts to access the object and bridge the rift. In the case of personal history, the subject encounters the danger of creating false links between events, and, similarly perilous, impregnating an event with fictitious importance.

Attempting to separate artifice from fact in the same introductory section, the speaker again points out his privileged position when he describes a humorous experience with a horse. The speaker says, "This is what happened…You've got to understand this" (428), and then repeats the phrase verbatim in an entirely different situation, "This is what happened – at my mother's wake" (429). Not only is the speaker again relating two different events and their inherent emotional connotations, but he is also attempting to validate those events and to assure himself of the legitimacy of his own past. Despite emphasizing his authoritative position as the narrator, the speaker also casts doubt on his own recollection of the past, and, therefore, the narrative as a whole. To maintain his focus, then, throughout the poem the speaker asks himself, and consequently the reader, poignant questions that the *bildungsroman* would seek to answer: for example, why did the subject end up the way he did? The first of the speaker's explicit questions is, "*How do you grow a gardener?*" (429), in response to which he lists some vegetables qualified with abstract adjectives. For the speaker, however, the list, despite its specificity, does not answer the question, and he instead moves to the vague description of his mother's wake. Thus, the questions that the *bildungsroman*, by definition, implicitly poses cannot be resolved by a mere listing; the answers are more intricate and exist outside of precise logical systems.

Still in response to the question, now recounting his mother's wake, the speaker continues to repeat phrases and details from prior episodes. He says, "This is what happened…The horse was standing still" (429). This is the same horse from the anecdote that he told earlier, wherein he used the exact same expression, "This is what happened," which preceded another phrase from his mother, which he now also repeats: "Bring me / the radish seeds, my mother whispered" (428–29). Although the speaker has asked himself a specific question, he cannot provide a specific answer. He cannot provide a list of details, as the catalogue suggests, because the events do not stand apart as separate "seeds"; rather, they coalesce into a blurry mass of recollection, symbolizing how the human memory functions. Thus, to answer a question about one's own past from a removed perspective presumes logic and belies the nature of memory, which does not have a logical consistency. As the *bildungsroman* develops, the speaker produces more questions about how he grew to be the person he became. Each time the speaker attempts to respond to a question, he presents his answer in an altered form, suggesting that the form of each answer depends on what the question is asking, and that when dealing with the past, a fixed form is just as ineffective as a fixed answer.

To express another method by which he grew into his character, the speaker discloses how he learned certain "truths" or qualities that related to his development. Instead of recounting an event where someone explained a concept to him or how an act of kindness became symbolic for his idea of an emotion, the speaker narrates, in the second section, an anecdote about how his father tried to kill. The speaker relates the badger to the human realm in the same way that he did with the seed catalogue: through comparison. He says, "Every time the badger stood up, it looked like a little man" (430). After watching his father falter when attempting to kill the badger, the speaker extracts from the event how he came to his own personal definition of love, and he indents and italicizes his sudden realizations, one of which is

that "*Love is a standing up / to the loaded gun*" (430). As in this example, the speaker's other anecdotes and conclusions seem almost discordant; yet, they still answer the questions posed by the speaker and reveal how each identifying feature of a personal history is idiosyncratic, and, therefore, requires a different answer in a different form.

By examining the verity of one's memory, in combination with the formation of a linear narrative wherein certain events add up to equal a specific human, the speaker is symbolically portraying the rift between the subject of the poem and the object of his own history. Andrew Gibson further defines the split when he writes, "the subject/object distinction is already a choice. It is not value-free, and excludes other distinctions. The 'object' produced in representation must be understood as merely a certain position available for the existent" (86–87). Consequently, in the seed catalogue, as in a narrative, the writer chooses certain features to define the organic object; in the case of the seed captions in the poem, the writer has only been choosing positive aspects. Even though he describes only the positive qualities of the seeds, the negative qualities, though hidden, are nonetheless evoked. Similarly, in the narrative on which the captions are commenting, the speaker draws the reader's attention to the fact that he is making a choice about which events to include in the narrative. When an event is included in the narrative, one can call it a positive, as it is a contribution to the story. What the seed commentary draws into focus is that there are other events that occurred, which are not being described, that are negative shadows to the story and create a type of binary opposition. To create a symmetrical story, then, the speaker is required to balance these oppositions, even artificially.

This positive/negative dialectic is foregrounded in the "absence" catalogue in §4 (433). Here, the speaker fragments a question specifically concerned with his approach to narrating the past when he asks, "How do you grow a past / to live in" (433). The result is a list of what is not there, but the anaphora of "the absence of" contradicts the selections, so that one does not think of what is there (the positive results), but only of what is not there (the negative results). Through the act of negating an object in a narrative, then, the speaker can paradoxically give more credence to it, and, similarly, by disregarding a past event altogether, the speaker also draws attention to his act of choice. In the "absence of" list, the speaker discloses that one creates a past by choosing what to include, by putting oneself into a privileged position of assumed objectivity, and by deciding what does or does not comprise a past. The "absence of" list in this section, however, is like a caveat to the reader: for every negative, there is a positive, and for every positive, there is a negative, or for every event that is included in the construction of the narrative, there are also events that are specifically excluded. How, then, can one claim a history to be truthful if only certain episodes are presented?

In these self-reflexive inquiries about the narrative form in the long poem, the speaker undermines previous modes of linear narrative that assume an air of authenticity. He creates a present/past dialectic to coincide with the subject/object split, a division that asks how the present subject can portray the object of the past. The answer is that there is no clear demarcation in time, no objective point outside of time from which one can mark loci and create a linear equation. The more the speaker tries to answer the *bildungsroman* questions with this form of narrative answer, the more problematic his narrative becomes. After the "absence of" list, the speaker gets caught in another type of loop in §5 after creating a "do"/"die" conflict. Here, the self-reflexive oppositions become like a hall of mirrors, producing only endless reflections of two choices. With these varying and often deconstructing attempts at creating an objective personal history, the poem both challenges a narrative system that "catalogues" time into clear, delineated events and suggests that the form of the poem should somehow reflect the ambiguous nature of time. Even that

statement, however, is too restrictive, as it reveals how a writer can falsely believe that contemporary theory is somehow a break from the past. As Joseph M. Conte contends in *Unending Design: the Forms of Postmodern Poetry*, all of the types of narrative long poems "practiced by contemporary poets are adaptations or renovations of forms whose theoretical and structural underpinnings were set in previous periods" (26). He goes on to make significant arguments for the relationships between the contemporary poets who alter form to reflect content and the "Coleridgean theory of organic form" (26–30). Perhaps Kroetsch is again being reflexive, and is using the "organic" seed catalogue to direct the reader's attention to the theories about his alteration of the form of the long poem and the narrative construction of it.

The speaker of "Seed Catalogue" never proves able to balance the present with the past. In §9, he lists a series of options in a search for a definite answer, and says, "it is essential that we understand this matter," but the only result he finds is a reiteration of the beginning of the poem: "a terrible symmetry" (442, 429). This negative symmetry and repetition from beginning to end proves that narrative is circular rather than linear, turning back towards itself instead of to a different answer that exists outside of its own interior system. This also explains why the poem itself is left unrestricted with only a question for its conclusion (444). It is as if after attempting to answer the questions posed in his *bildungsroman*, the speaker wrote himself into a corner, and could only ask, "*Who was left?*" (444). The final question corresponds with Hutcheon's observation that "postmodernism remains fundamentally contradictory, offering only questions, never final answers" (*Poetics* 42). "Seed Catalogue," despite asking itself questions, never seeks to produce closure to those queries, but, rather, depicts how each question can be answered in a different way. Even the title of the poem is missing a definite or indefinite article to contain it, having no demonstrative to set it apart; it remains malleable in form, undefined, with blurring edges, in the same way that history presents itself to us.

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