

IDIOM

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# INTRODUCTION

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Before I began my undergraduate career, there was another ESU Journal called *Perceptions* that dabbled in creative and academic writing. I had no idea it existed until I had brought my ideas about starting a journal to Vala Holmes, the Undergraduate Counselor, who showed me the copies of *Perceptions* on her shelves.

Here's to *Perceptions*. Hopefully we'll fare better than them.

We are fortunate to have a wealth of excellent creative writing publications on campus. But there seemed to be a definite void when it came to English academic writing. Yes – not the most thrilling observation. Perhaps I am revealing too much about myself. The idea of a journal was a persistent thought in my mind during my time as Chair of the ESU in my second and third years. I brought up the journal idea during my election speech for the position of Co-President for 2006-2007. I really did not know what I had gotten myself into. Starting a journal from scratch? Fortunately, I had a great team of people behind me.

I hope that *Idiom* will accomplish a number of goals:

1. To create an ESU Journal to showcase the academic talents of our undergraduates
2. To give undergraduates an idea of what good writing looks like on the undergraduate level
3. To create a sustainable tradition for the ESU to continue in years to come, allowing for more involvement in the English student community with the ESU

Why *Idiom*? We are told to avoid idioms in our academic writing. But, in a perverse way, the highly specialized academic writing we do is an idiom unto itself.



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*Continued*

Thank you to A.S.S.U., the Department of English, Trinity College, Victoria College, and University College for their support. Thank you to Professor Baird for being our Academic Advisor. Thank you to the Journal Committee for all their hard work. Thank you to Matthew Bednarski whom I had dragooned into doing all the technical work on *Idiom*.

And most of all, thank you to all the students who applied to *Idiom* or submitted their work.

Thank you, reader!

Christine Yao

Editor-in-Chief, 2006-2007

Co-President of the English Students' Union, 2006-2007

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# HUMANITY'S UNPROGRESSIVE CHANGE IN *WAITING FOR GODOT*

ANITA LI

(1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR ESSAY)



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Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is exemplary of the theatre of the absurd due to its emphasis on the absurdity of human existence through illogical situations and meaningless dialogue. Indeed, human nature possesses the characteristics of an absurdist play: one can see the world as a 'stage of the absurd' and its people as 'actors of the absurd.' This innate absurdity of humanity, rooted in meaningless ignorance and violence, is demonstrated throughout history, from the siege of Troy to the World Wars. The social commentary in *Waiting for Godot*, however, is not exclusive to any one historical event; the ambiguity of its setting facilitates the exploration of universal themes of humankind that transcend time, ethnicity, and locality. Estragon and Vladimir, the protagonists, are representative of the 'Everyman', and these characters inhabit a 'No Man's Land.' These elements of the play possess a universality to which all people can relate. Subtle changes

from Act I to Act II in Pozzo's sight, Lucky's sensibility, and a tree's growth illustrate a threefold cynical view of the mutable, yet unprogressive nature of humanity. People are naturally stubborn in their habits; this obstinacy leads to an imposition of their insular views on other subservient individuals; and despite being presented with opportunities to expand their knowledge, people seldom seize them.

Passions and desires govern lives to the extent that people become blind to other views. The change in Pozzo's eyesight from Act I to II illustrates this aspect of humanity in a literal sense. Pozzo enters the middle of Act I as an arrogant, self-assured slave master who makes his appearance known with a supercilious introduction: "I present myself: Pozzo" (15). He has complete command of the conversation when speaking to Vladimir and Estragon, who cower in his presence. These circumstances change drastically when Pozzo enters the middle of Act II—this time utterly blind and helpless (49). His initial demeanour is similar to the reckless confidence and faith that people often devote to a newly-discovered ideology. When people first begin to explore this ideology, they are impassioned by its novelty and preach its tenets, but are unfamiliar with what it truly entails. As time passes, individuals become increasingly consumed with their ideology and, therefore, blind to the beliefs of others. Pozzo's blindness is a literal manifestation of this inflexibility. In other words, human beings may assert their command over a situation, but as they become more possessed by one philosophy, they begin to disregard logic until their mindsets are ingrained in one view. Pozzo, however, does concede that he is blind by making the frank admission: "I am blind" (54). Although this concession appears to denote some progression, it is merely an acknowledgement of ignorance. Despite Pozzo's awareness that he is blind, he does not attempt to regain his sight. This

inaction is significant because it implies that humans are conscious of their ignorance, but are too apathetic to strive and enlighten themselves.

In direct contrast to Pozzo's predicament is that of his slave, Lucky. The latter conforms to Pozzo's will due to his subservience to his master's indoctrination. In Act I, Lucky is bound by a rope, controlled by a whip, and is only able to speak when given consent by Pozzo to do so (15). Although Lucky remains attached to the rope and whip in Act II, he is not restricted from speaking because Pozzo, now helpless and blind, no longer holds a position of authority over him. Despite this, Lucky has become incapable of speech (57). This master-slave dichotomy is a reflection of humankind's inclination to simultaneously dominate and obey each other. Dominant individuals may use force and brutality to impose their beliefs on the weak and impressionable, deterring the latter from vocalizing their opinions for fear of repercussions. Similar to the manner by which Lucky becomes mute in Act II, weak individuals are rendered unable to vocalize opposition to their oppressors out of fear, indifference, or conditioning. Like Lucky, the oppressed often submit to subjugation for a prolonged period before regaining their voices and expressing their protests.

Hope is not altogether lost in the play, however, and manifests itself in the form of leaves on a tree. A barren tree is part of the equally barren setting in Act I (6), but in Act II, four or five leaves appear (37). The growth of these leaves is symbolic of humanity's continuously renewed potential for growth. People may cause harm to themselves and society as a result of their ignorance, but time enables humanity to recover from insults, injuries, and hatreds, thereby allowing it to redeem itself. This redemption is possible by learning from past wrongs and seizing the opportunity for self-enlightenment. It is



only then that people can remove themselves from the depths of ignorance. This, however, does not occur in *Waiting for Godot*. In Act II, Vladimir observes the newly-formed leaves and has an exchange with Estragon that concludes with the former's remembrance of the tree and the latter's forgetfulness of it. This leads the characters into an argument that eventually diverts from the topic of the tree, and, therefore, both fail to appreciate the significance of its leaves (39). In spite of the many mistakes made by humanity, an equal number of opportunities for improvement present themselves in their stead. However, Vladimir and Estragon's disregard for the leaves implies that people will continue to make the same mistakes and wallow in a state of perpetual ignorance.

"It's never the same pus from one second to the next" (39). This ostensibly absurd statement made by Estragon in reference to his injured foot is paradoxically the most rational statement in the play. As feet are the foundation of the body, his injury alludes to a flaw in the foundation of human nature. Pus is the time that heals wounds, but ignorance reopens these wounds and creates new pus. Therefore, ignorance continually prolongs pain and delays recovery, and if ignorance is allowed to erode this foundation, humanity will fail to heal itself. In *Waiting for Godot* as well as in humanity, time merely elapses, but no progression is made with its passing. This cycle of ignorance begins with the fact that people are stubborn in their beliefs; their inclination to dominate others causes them to impose these beliefs on weaker individuals; and despite the many opportunities for knowledge at their disposal, people ultimately choose to remain in ignorance.

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## AUTHOR BIO

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DEATH, SEX AND AMERICAN  
NATIONALISM: JAMES BALDWIN  
AND LAUREN BERLANT

CLAIRE LAVILLE

(2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR ESSAY)

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To read James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* or Lauren Berlant's "Live Sex Acts" is to come face-to-face with death. These texts present death as ambivalent, multifaceted, and often seductive, linked as closely to physical disintegration as to political legibility. Fluctuations between lifelike and deathlike states become metaphors for the relationship between body and nation. In this essay, I will trace 'death' and the related tropes of historicity, confinement and sterility through Baldwin and Berlant's writing, with particular attention to the way 'life' and 'death' are redefined in queer contexts.

To die is to become historical, to be subsumed into an "archive of official memory" and thus made coherent and asexual (Berlant 56). As Giovanni comments, Americans believe that "with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place" (Baldwin 34). In *Giovanni's Room*, nothing stays "in its

place,” not even the dead. Giovanni is executed over and over, only to return, brooding and seductive, in the next chapter. The novel’s non-linear structure, as well as contributing to an overall sense of immobility, invites figurative readings of death and perhaps resurrection.

David feels the burden of history, remarking that his “ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (3). With this opening, Baldwin asserts his claim to a white protagonist and introduces his project of revisiting historical sites both physical and psychological. Europe allows David to confront his collective (racial) as well as personal (sexual) ancestry. As repressing “darker” aspects of colonial history helps uphold white America’s “official memory,” David’s repression of adolescent homosexual experiences helps him maintain an acceptable sense of self. By returning to the site of trauma, one imbues the dead past with life.

David’s “foreigner” status helps him learn about the power dynamics involved in historiography. After the murder, “Guillaume’s name [becomes] fantastically entangled with French history, French honour, and French glory, and very nearly [becomes], indeed, a symbol of French manhood” (150). Here Baldwin conflates Guillaume’s literal death with one of Berlant’s figurative deaths: “national heterosexuality” (Berlant 80). David’s response is that Guillaume “was just a disgusting old fairy. That’s *all* he was!” (Baldwin 150). On one level, this remark expresses David’s internalized homophobia and distaste for Guillaume’s debauched lifestyle. Yet on another level, it resuscitates Guillaume; it highlights Guillaume as living body, not Guillaume as dead, politicized abstraction. By merely speaking from the “live margin” from which Guillaume has crossed over (Berlant 80), David resists “paramnesia” – the

result of simplistic “image traces of political experience...that link [people] to other citizens and to patriotism” supplanting actual, individual memories (57).

American nationalist rhetoric associates liberty with privacy. Baldwin and Berlant first expose the limits of privacy protections, and then undermine the ideal of privacy by linking it to deathlike states. Berlant writes that “[d]ead citizenship...takes place in a privacy zone, and epitomizes an almost Edenic conjunction of act and identity, sacred and secular history” (59). The private realm becomes apolitical and complacent. The disgusting old fairy Jacques invokes Eden similarly, commenting that “[n]obody can stay” within its confines. David reflects that “life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it” (Baldwin 25); managing to do both is heroic. Evidently, in a culture that forcibly separates dead/private and live/public citizenry, one is given the choice of “forgetting” sexual diversity and thus being infantilized by the state (see Berlant 65), or “remembering” and being marginalized. There is no room for heroism. Yet Eden is *not* a privacy zone; it is a space where privacy is not a concern because sexual shame does not exist.

Of the criminalization of homosexuality in the U.S., Giovanni says, “If your countrymen think that privacy is a crime, so much the worse for your country” (Baldwin 81). “Privacy” is not a crime for all Americans, of course: the right to sexual privacy for married heterosexuals is enshrined in law (Berlant 59). Baldwin and Berlant suggest, however, that queers’ strides toward this particular civil liberty should be made with some trepidation. In trying to create a private realm for their relationship, David and Giovanni transform a bedroom into a tomb. Giovanni’s room is reminiscent of the graveyard that haunts David’s dreams as a child (Baldwin 11). It restricts David’s capacity to move or escape (e.g. 64), is shut off from

sunlight (85), and both the courtyard and the walls seem to be “encroaching” on their inhabitants (85, 114).

Surprisingly, David finds the privacy automatically afforded heterosexuals just as confining. Having “no one to watch, no penalties attached” to his relationship with Hella is their “undoing, for nothing is more unbearable, once one has it, than freedom” (5). Her “marvellously living body” reminds David of “the wind and the sea and of space and...the possibility of legitimate surrender” (120), yet is also described as a “strong, walled city” (123); she evokes expansive movement but hates trains and airplanes (120). Sue, too, carries the now-familiar metaphors of the “brick stone wall” (97) and the “prison house” (101). She is “disquietingly fluid – fluid without, however, being able to flow” (99). The women in David’s life, like the concept of privacy, provide only an illusion of freedom and vitality.

According to Berlant, privacy law is rooted in a concern over “proper and improper bodies” (58). This concern also manifests itself in a desire for cleanliness and purity. In the U.S., activists from Anthony Comstock (65) to Tipper Gore (72) have sought to cleanse the nation by remove “contaminants” such as sex and sexual violence from the media. Most of the time, the censored sex is queer or it problematizes racial and class categories; it is, in Berlant’s taxonomy, live sex. Obviously, censoring depictions of trauma does not bleach actual trauma from the national culture. In public policy, censorship allows complex social problems to be glossed over (e.g. 64, 74); in the media, it makes ‘deviance’ conspicuous, and all the more deviant, by its absence. Or, as Giovanni puts it, “People are full of dirty words. The only time they do not use them...is when they are describing something dirty” (Baldwin 81).

Baldwin’s characters’ relation to dirt and cleanliness reveals their willingness to practice “live” sexuality and identity-building. David’s first stirring of homosexual desire occurs

in the shower (6), a place of openness and play. But it is after they have sex, when Joey is “brown” and “sweaty,” that David regards him as “the most beautiful creature I had ever seen till then” (8). The next morning, David takes another shower, but this time it functions as a purgative. As this scenario illustrates, washing has multiple symbolic meanings. It can eliminate the shaming residue of the outside world, revealing one at his or her most authentic and most vulnerable. It can also act as bodily censorship.

Berlant points out a “wish to dissolve the body” among American censorship advocates (71). If the body cannot be eliminated altogether, it must be made translucent, with an obsessively sanitized and PG-rated ‘inside’ put on the ‘outside.’ Correspondingly, Americans become identical (i.e. bodiless) in David’s eyes: “they seemed incapable of age; they smelled of soap, which seemed indeed to be their preservative against the dangers and exigencies of any more intimate odour...” (Baldwin 90). Death motifs are overpowering, yet David senses a buried potential for liveness. “[B]eneath these faces...was power and sorrow, both unadmitted, unrealized, the power of inventors, the sorrow of the disconnected” (90). The sorrow of the disconnected is the painful but necessary separation of dead, inhospitable national ideals from live acts and identities (see Berlant 81). Gradually, Jacques (Baldwin 57) and Giovanni (141) teach David that he is the same as those other Americans, and that the desire to be “clean” at all times keeps him from fully experiencing life and love. With this comes the realization that Hella’s obsessive washing makes her “unaesthetic and unclean” (158), as does the sterility of the life she offers him.

Maintaining a strict dichotomy between ‘dirty’ body and ‘clean’ soul is another form of sterility and another way to make sex dead. As a consequence of societal and internalized homophobia, Baldwin’s characters sustain the illusion that it is

possible to have sex with the body without engaging mind, soul, or identity (e.g. 24). Jacques describes this kind of sex as “dead” because it lacks intimacy (56). It is also dead because it shields the soul from “any play or danger of representation, anxiety, improvisation, desire, or panic” (Berlant 72). It loses what Leo Bersani previously described as (live) sex’s ability to transform power relations otherwise assumed to be inevitable (70). Too late, David realizes that sex, even when confined to “dirty,” darkened five-minute intervals (e.g. Baldwin 57), always leaves a psychic residue. Giovanni’s face greets David in the mirror before the execution (167); the wind blows the evidence of their relationship back at David, even as he tries to rid himself of it (169).

Berlant describes “America’s promise to release its citizens from having a body to humiliate” as a promise that marginalizes queers and others with problematic bodies (71). In Giovanni’s Room, living abroad forces David to recognize his own body as at once “sacred” and “vile” (Baldwin 169) in its desires, both “assimilat[ed]” and “banish[ed]” with regard to American social norms (Berlant 80). In both works, the experience of non-normative sex allows individuals to live outside the trappings of nationalism, to resist all varieties of death.



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## AUTHOR BIO


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**CLAIRE LAVILLE** can often be spotted around campus selling textbooks and walking into trees.

A DEMAND FOR DYNAMIC  
DISCOURSE: JOYCE'S  
UNPACKING OF DUBLIN  
SOCIETY

ALEXANDER EASTWOOD

(3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR ESSAY)



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In *Dubliners*, James Joyce presents a realistic and disturbing vision of Irish society. Writing largely about the lower-middle class from which he sprang (Williams 54), Joyce attributes the utter “paralysis” (Joyce 1) of his characters to the interworkings of various forms of oppression. Indeed, Ireland possesses the unfortunate distinction of being England’s first colony. The effects of British military occupation have been so profoundly absorbed into Irish society that Joyce relegates the theme to a firm, sinister subtext rather than having it centrally examined. In Joyce’s Dublin, colonial socioeconomic conditions dictate that everything that is sacred is entirely debased by a chilling material reality. While the injection of Irish Nationalism into English culture sparks false hope in certain characters, particularly women, Joyce is quick to demonstrate that colonisation is enhanced by a slew of corrupt and oppressive homegrown forces; namely, the Catholic Church and a

bastardized patriarchal familial structure fuelled by rampant alcoholism and economic despair. The collapse of social order stems from the corrosion of gender relations, perversion of religion, and a failing economy. Joyce's stories hinge on the crucial premise that the real source of disempowerment leading to the Dubliners' demise is the introjection of oppressive hegemonic forces. Characters perpetuate paralysis within themselves and their children in a cycle that demands exploration. Joyce treats class, culture and gender in *Dubliners* as ordering social forces that work in unison to reinforce each other and maintain a stagnant, dysfunctional society whose instability is reflected in the form and syntax of the stories, and ultimately every character.

A formal analysis of *Dubliners* reveals how Joyce's structure complements the thematic fragmentation of social and moral order. The text is riddled with the use of ellipses. In "Two Gallants," for example, whole sections of Corley's narrative are sliced out and replaced with gaps. Dialogue about smoking cigars is cut off with ellipses followed by a snippet of information that he had at one point potentially impregnated the 'slavey' (Joyce 44). The reader is left to patch together an uncertain, incomplete plot sequence. We never gain full access to Corley's mind, and more importantly, neither does Lenahan. Joyce's use of ellipses, and the restricted view point of the character on which he focalizes, in this case Lenahan, forces active readership. Should the Irish be dissuaded from reflecting upon themselves in his "nicely polished looking glass," Joyce exclaimed regarding *Dubliners*, "the course of civilisation in Ireland" would be "retarded" (Fairhall 65). Clearly, ellipses catalyze engagement. It is important to note, however, that Joyce's tendency to focalize on male characters allows imbalanced access into male psychology. Perhaps Joyce was simply writing from his own experience, but even if the

dynamic is inadvertent, it risks fostering in the reader greater lenience or sympathy towards men than to women. Critic Florence Walzl claims Joyce constructs “prevailing masculine” narratives (Walzl 53). A prime example of the centrality of the male viewpoint is “The Dead,” a story in which the majority of the characters are women and yet we see them through the eyes of Gabriel. In contrast, “Eveline” focuses entirely on a woman, and yet we have no access into her mind; the story closes on a brick-like face that offers no “sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce 34). Our inability to connect with characters parallels the sense of alienation haunting the text. Trevor Williams argues that Joyce focuses on elements of his own social experience largely due to an attitude that the “petit-bourgeois” maintain paralysis out of “fear of committing any action” that could compromise their class status (Williams 54). Joyce’s fragmented structure alludes to their obtuseness.

Accordingly, Joyce links class to colonialism, presenting a society in which military occupation has induced poverty and anxiety to control one’s material surroundings. Corley goes to great lengths to procure money from an already disenfranchised woman, with seemingly no qualms as to the moral implications of his inactions. What James Fairhall dubs “the male Irish stress on the economic side of sexual relations” is, he notes, “by no means limited to lowlifes such as Joyce’s two gallants” (Fairhall 77). Married male characters face enormous pressure to provide for their families, often undermining themselves by spending what money they do earn on alcohol. In “Counterparts,” we witness Farrington’s attempt to drink off the sense of inferiority instilled by the micromanaging, presumably Protestant Mr. Alleyne. Farrington relies on alcohol for its cathartic effects and a false confidence that allows him to mock Alleyne. Yet Farrington’s encounter with the London woman betrays a permanent underlying sense of inferiority: he

is “swelled with fury” (Joyce 93), ultimately violently displacing his anger onto his son. Tom’s closing appeal to a Catholic god provides a contrast to Alleyne’s Protestantism and ties the end to the beginning. Joyce examines the disparity between Anglo and Irish cultures through the religious component of cultural domination.

Further, Joyce connects economic conditions under colonisation to the moral debasement of a society on which a corrupt Catholic Church still holds a white-knuckle grip. Joyce presents a Dublin stripped of anything sacred. Religion has become a business. Indeed, in “Grace,” Christ is dubbed a “taskmaster,” with whom Father Purdon suggests one should “set right” his “accounts” (174). Fiscal and religious conditions working in concert extend the notion of relationships as a business contract to the institution of marriage. Where the spiritual nature of communion with God is replaced by a sort of contract in the sphere of the church, marriage becomes a social contract often devoid of love. Arguably, marriage has always been foremost an institution, but that was never the premise under which the hegemony of traditional society operated. The narrator reveals in “A Mother” that Mrs. Kearney respects her husband in the same way she respects “the General Post Office”: both “secure and fixed” entities (139). Notably, she “appreciated his abstract value as a male,” indicating that she treats him symbolically as a useful object rather than an individual (139). Other characters reinforce her utilitarian approach to marriage. For example, Mrs. Mooney in “The Boarding House” allows her daughter to have pre-marital sex with Mr. Doran so that she can exploit Catholic convention and force them to marry. Yet Mrs. Mooney’s belief that a man can “have his moment of pleasure” (59) recklessly while “the girl has to bear the brunt” (60) is actually insightful. Joyce unpacks patriarchal relations and allows us to sympathize with Polly despite her mother’s

manipulation of Doran. Mrs. Kearney twists convention to her advantage, excusable because we see that she is working within the framework of a system that denies her real power.

The corruption and collapse of marriage as the foundation of society is related in large part to socioeconomic conditions. Walzl cites that for a century after the famines of the 1840s, the marriage rate was lower in Ireland than anywhere else in the West; it took a man an average of fifteen years to “achieve a modicum of security” (Walzl 33). As a result, social relations were disrupted, resulting in a large number of bachelors and spinsters (34), such as the aunts in “The Dead,” Nannie and Eliza in “The Sisters” or the alienated James Duffy in “A Painful Case.” The inferior social position of women presumably dictated for most that they marry. Indeed, Joyce’s female characters, such as Mrs. Kearney, often transparently admit economic motivation. The disintegration of traditional Catholic marriage demonstrates that colonisation has shaken Irish culture to its core.

Notably, Joyce reveals that Irish Nationalism lends female characters increased agency, despite its often gender essentialist symbolism. At the turn of the twentieth century, Irish Nationalism became, according to Bonnie Kime Scott, “a liberating cause for young women,” that increased their access to education and engagement with public society (Scott 29). While Joyce offers ample critique of nationalism in *Dubliners*, nationalist female characters such as Miss Ivors embody its more empowering aspects. Gabriel feels threatened by Miss Ivors’ critique of his assimilationist politics when he realizes that professionally they are on equal footing: “their careers had been parallel,” and he can only respond “lamely” (Joyce 188). In his anger, Gabriel deliberately dehumanizes her to assert male power by calling her gender into question and branding her “the girl or woman, or whatever she was” (191). As Irish culture is

debased, transformed or reintroduced, traditional gender roles are reconfigured. Joyce, like all Modern writers, must confront this process.

Joyce examines the effects of the corrosion of traditional gender roles on gender relations by positioning his characters within a discourse of privilege and oppression; this ultimately frames both genders as mutually destructive while admitting the systemic disadvantages that women face. Male characters consistently appear emasculated and hostile because they lack social or economic power. Little Chandler in “A Little Cloud” “blushes” (74) next to the Anglicised Gallaher then goes home to be scolded by his wife. Farrington reveals a darker insecurity when the embarrassment he feels over a perceived slight by a woman translates into child abuse. Even Gabriel, an educated, class-conscious, relatively gentle character develops a sharp edge when Lily and Miss Ivors fail to grant him a sense of superior respect. When Gretta tells him of Michael Furey, he feels absurdly threatened, even though Furey was a boy at the time she knew him. Gabriel betrays a sense of insecurity in his own manhood and sexuality. Tracey Schwarze posits that rather than presenting Victorian typologies, Joyce “creates women who refract them” (Schwarze 123). Gender essentialism is repeatedly subverted within the text as female characters of a variety of different dispositions are introduced. As women like Miss Ivors begin to assert power outside of the domestic sphere, and rigid gender roles are dismantled, men like Gabriel respond with confusion and indignation.

Indeed, *Dubliners* is a novel of failed connections. Men are shadowed by a subtext of impotence, homosexuality, paedophilia, and emotional immaturity that threads through characters like Corley, the “queer old jossler” (Joyce 18) in “The Encounter,” Mr. Duffy, and Father O’Rourke. While men are emasculated, women are consistently shown to be either

domineering matriarchs, such as Mrs. Kearney who orders her husband and “meek” daughter around (148), or extremely passive Aunt Julia types. A controlling mother asserts what little power she has in the one place that she can: the domestic sphere. Yet in so doing, she reproduces colonialist dynamics of forced dependency within the home, preventing her family from achieving a full maturity. Polly in “The Boarding House,” has her marriage passively arranged for her by her mother. Ironically, Ireland is traditionally treated symbolically as a woman. Joyce perhaps constructs a microcosm of Irish culture in the familial sphere in order to examine the parallel effects of British military occupation. Rod Mengham notes Joyce’s use of militaristic language, such as in “The Dead” where “bottles and decanters appear as *sentries* and *squads* in uniforms and *sashes* (Mengham 78).” He claims that the fragmented, non-linear structure of the novel reflects the inability of the Irish to demilitarize their society (82). It also reflects an inability to make unified progress.

Joyce’s characters subconsciously maintain the external socioeconomic and religious structures that control their lives, guarding what little power they are afforded. Attitudes towards the British seem to be dictated by social position. At first glance, the disparity between Miss Ivors’ nationalism and Gabriel’s rejection of it might defy such an argument. Yet, as previously noted, gender provides an added dimension that causes Miss Ivors to engage differently with ideology from Gabriel. He holds little disdain for the English, embracing aspects of their culture such as galoshes (Joyce 180). He even blurts out to Miss Ivors, “I’m sick of my own country!” (191). When she presses him on why, Gabriel is unable to respond, illustrating his introjection of colonialist mentality. Ultimately, assimilation to Anglo hegemony does not enhance one’s social power, but is actually an act of self-hatred. Gabriel’s inability



to love his culture distances him from his wife when he cannot share her nostalgia for rural Ireland (191) or *The Lass of Aughrim* (219). Walzl suggests that Joyce more often positions a female character as invested in convention and, regardless of nationalist tendencies, an ardent “supporter of... church and state, when it suited her purposes” (Walzl 46). Figures such as Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney substantiate her statement.

In countless stories, the oppressive conditions of colonialism are reproduced in the domestic sphere. In “Counterparts,” the narrator remarks that Mrs. Farrington “bullied her husband when he was sober and was bullied by him when he was drunk” (93). We witness the introjection of oppression and its cyclical nature. Joyce also puts husband and wife on equal footing for an instant, lambasting them both. Neither stands out as a capable parent, and presumably their children will inherit their behaviour. Indeed, Farrington’s workplace instils in him an urge to “revel in violence” (Joyce 86). He does so, however, against his own son, thus turning his rage inwards and further disempowering himself. Violence and alcohol offer the illusion of catharsis and escape when real escape is impossible. Ironically, Farrington’s wife is at church (93) when he returns home, underscoring not only the ineffectiveness of the church to squelch violence, but positioning it as a dangerous distraction. Similarly, Eveline embraces paralysis by choosing to stay in Ireland out of “duty” to God (33). Her irrational decision typifies an internalized sense of religious obligation to the church. Women in *Dubliners* are largely denied the heightened self-awareness of epiphany granted to many males in the novel (Scott 16), such as the boy in “Araby,” or James Duffy. Instead, women tend to sink back into paralysis, ostensibly ending a story in the same psychological state as when it began. Torchiana aptly notes that “the buried life is, after all, the pulsing subject of this book” (Torchiana 15).

In *Dubliners* Joyce addresses and reflects upon the world with which he is most familiar. The text stands as what one might glibly refer to as an act of “tough love.” Joyce presents Dublin’s lower-middle class, the nucleus of paralysis within a seriously damaged and damaging society. Tracing oppression to its root, he uncovers a mangled intersection of the forces ordering class, culture and gender. Joyce explicates an Irish society that is sagging under the weight of its own history. The family structure is imploding, yet his characters are too frozen, too paralysed, to fundamentally change their situation. Throughout *Dubliners* the question looms, to what extent are they even able to enact change? Joyce’s use of ellipses, shifting narrative perspective, and inconclusive plot sequences leave us disoriented. We remain unsure of how exactly he is ordering the text in much the same way that even his most educated characters fail to grasp the broad framework of their lives and society. Particularly, we witness the profound need for Joyce’s characters to be shaken from self-destructive cycles that have resulted from the internalization of oppressive forces. Attacked from all sides, characters are gutted and require a miracle, an epiphany, to change. Still, it is also clear that epiphanies cannot be forced, but rather emerge from within. Thus while we can understand and lament the debilitating structures that order the lives of many like Farrington and his family, we are ultimately left wishing for them the improbable gift of a chance at self-revelation. Against all odds, Joyce has answered his own prayer simply by writing it.

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THE FORMALISTIC CRADLE:  
STANLEY FISH, NEW CRITICISM,  
AND THE PRACTICAL  
EFFICACY OF INTERPRETIVE  
COMMUNITIES

TIMOTHY HARRISON

(3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR ESSAY)

In *The Trouble With Principle*, Stanley Fish writes, “When you come to the end of the anti-formalist road, what you have waiting for you is formalism” (294). Published in 1999, this statement is a succinct recapitulation of Fish’s intellectual trajectory, an ellipse which begins in quasi-formalist terrain, moves steadily into the theoretical and anti-formalist realms of reader-response theory, dismisses theory as an enterprise, and returns, with his most recent publication, to a largely formalistic consideration of John Milton. At once awkwardly circular and strangely pragmatic, this entire trajectory lies incipient in much of Fish’s work. For instance, in “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” an essay first published in 1976, the movement from an anti-formalist polemic to the recognition of theory’s limitations takes place in only seventeen pages. Moreover, this essay, which is emblematic of Fish’s shifting priorities, contains within it the seeds of his eventual return to the

“evidentiary procedures” (*Text* 177) of the formalism he insists he is abandoning. Although primarily concerned with denying formalism, “Interpreting the *Variorum*” is far from the radical text it pretends to be. Indeed, the very notion of “interpretive communities,” with which the essay concludes, represents nothing less than the first, infant steps back to the formalistic cradle from which Fish emerged. When read in the context of the trajectory outlined above, “Interpreting the *Variorum*” marks both the apex of Fish’s rebellion against formalism and the beginnings of a homeward journey.

The focus on formalism brought to bear in “Interpreting the *Variorum*” is symptomatic of Fish’s lifelong engagement with the discipline. Indeed, Fish was trained in the “explicatory techniques of the New Criticism” (Lodge 287)<sup>1</sup>, a discipline which “focuses on the formal properties of the literary text” and presents any given work of literature as “an object, a formal autonomous entity” (Rice 44). Terry Eagleton states that practitioners of New Criticism view the text “as a self-enclosed object, mysteriously intact in its own unique being,” and that, by extension, the text becomes “sever[ed] from both author and reader” (40-41). These are the very aspects of the discipline against which Fish reacts. Fish fights to open the text to temporality, arguing in 1967 that “the reading experience takes place in time” (*Surprised* 23), and stating more emphatically a decade later that a “timeless formalism” that focuses its attention upon “the spatial context of a page” and provides an analysis “unattached to anything but [its] own formal categories [is] quite literally, meaningless” (*Text* 71, 69, 84). Moreover, according to Fish, the text can no longer be cut off from the reader, who represents the very source of its meaning: it is only by way of “the activity of reading” that “meanings — experiential, not positivist — are created” (“Interpreting” 291). Yet the relationship between Fish and formalism is complex

<sup>1</sup> This training is more than merely circumstantial: in 1947, when Fish was a graduate student at Yale University, he assisted Cleanth Brooks (Beck 211).

and by no means just a simple matter of rejection: Fish's "affective stylistics" and the New Criticism's "close reading" are "surprisingly similar" (Murfin 121). As Steven Mailloux notes, "Through a vocabulary focused on a text's manipulation of readers, Fish was especially effective in extending and diversifying the formalist practices" (Murfin 121). Thus, while Fish rejects the notions of a spatially oriented, enclosed literary work, he maintains New Criticism's pedagogically sound methods of reading and analysis in his practical engagement with texts.

"Interpreting the *Variorum*" represents a departure from any such maintenance of New Critical practice. Paradoxically, however, its firm rejection of such practices also paves the way for their return. In this essay, Fish begins by promoting his "affective stylistics" in what is essentially a polemic against a formalism; he argues that the "structures available on the page ... should be the object of description" (291). He examines the ways in which the Milton *Variorum*'s contributors cannot agree upon the meanings of certain "interpretive cruxes," words or syntactical arrangements that are imbued with an impenetrable ambiguity. Such cruxes, argues Fish, such "moments of hesitation," are "crucial to the experience the verse provides" and tend to disappear beneath a "formalist analysis" that is "incapable of finding value in temporal phenomena" (293). Moreover, formalist analysis "will always point in as many directions as there are interpreters; that is, not only will it prove something, it will prove anything" (290). Earlier, in "What is Stylistics?"<sup>2</sup>, Fish elaborates on this point, lamenting "the absence in the work of the stylisticians of any connection between their descriptive and interpretive acts" (*Text* 93). Since Fish, in his promotion of "affective stylistics," attempts to unite description and interpretation by describing the interpretive, temporally dictated acts of readers, he assumes he

<sup>2</sup>Stylistics is the formal and objective study of style, and as such, is firmly located in the larger formalist movement.

has a superior position and is therefore justified in attacking the formalist methodology.

However, in “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” as Fish’s polemical attacks reach a nearly fevered pitch, he has an epiphany: if, as he had previously argued, there is no meaning “embedded or encoded in the text” (296), then “intention, form, and the shape of the reader’s experience are simply different ways of referring to (different perspectives on) the same interpretive act” (300). The critical enterprise, and by extension, the act of reading, are nothing more than interpretations. The “formal units” one finds on the page, regardless of whether one is practising formalism or affective stylistics, are “always a function of the interpretive model one brings to bear; they are not ‘in’ the text,” and are “verifiable” only by an “interpretive act” (299). What one notices in literature is merely “what has been *made* noticeable” (300), and this applies as much to Fish’s analyses as it does to the formalism he is rejecting. How, then, is Fish’s methodology in any way more efficacious than that practised by the formalists? The difference, Fish claims, separating him from his predecessors is simply the difference between “an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself” (301). As he recollects in an essay entitled “Interpreting ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*,’” “in the course of defending my procedures I have given up the right to declare them superior to the procedures I had been criticizing” (Text 176). Polemical stances, which “can only be justified by independent analysis,” are impossible to defend in a world where there is only interpretation. They are no longer permissible. Indeed, this new theoretical stance does not permit Fish “recourse to any evidentiary procedures,” and this rejection, he asserts, constitutes a “wholesale repudiation of formalism” (Text 177).



By stepping wholly into a theoretical realm, where the “brute fact status of the text” (“Afraid” 6) is no longer a viable concept, Fish effectively severs all ties with formalism. Indeed, by relinquishing any recourse to the text as a source for validation of one’s critical procedures, Fish dives headlong into the depths of the purely theoretical and opens the floodgates to what Henderson calls “audacious relativism” (129). Texts do not make readings; rather, the “interpretive strategies” one uses when reading “make” or “write” the text one reads (“Interpreting” 302). If such assertions bear any validity, then the formalist quest to discover textual meaning through “close reading” is pointless: it is impossible to step beyond the realm of interpretation and offer an unbiased judgment of the text, and, as such, any interpretation is as sound as the next. Shortly after “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” Fish claims that this new theory “relieves [him] of the obligation to be right (a standard that simply drops out) and demands only that [he] be interesting.” In short, the only advantage his “fiction” can claim over the “fictions” of formalism is that his is “liberating,” while the formalist’s is “constraining” (*Text* 180). However, this denial of the text, this enthusiastic foray into a relativistic no man’s land, does not mark the beginning of a new set of theories. Instead, although Fish would have been loath to admit it at the time, this denial marks the “end of the anti-formalist road” (*Trouble* 294). It represents the aforementioned apex of his intellectual trajectory. Indeed, only paragraphs later, “Interpreting the *Variorum*” begins the project of salvaging a reconstituted formalism — a formalism denuded of its pretensions, reined in on a stricter epistemic leash, but a formalism nonetheless.

The beginnings of this salvage project lie, of course, in the concept of “interpretive communities,” a concept which transposes the “brute fact” status of the text into

the registers of social construction and integrates Fish's interpretive relativity with a desire for standards of critical conduct. Interpretive communities are ostensibly brought in to explain "both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader," realities which seem to argue for a productive force "independent of and prior to interpretive acts" ("Interpreting" 302). The concept of interpretive communities, "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts" (304), explains how the critics of Milton's *Variorum* are unable to agree upon the meanings of certain phrases, and also how most people, when they encounter a stop sign, are able to agree upon its meaning. The divergent interpreters of Milton belong to different communities who "write" Milton's poetry in irreconcilable fashions; the agreement among the multitudes who read the word "stop" and derive from it a common interpretation stems from their common affiliation to a given community. Interpretive communities, Fish claims, "stand between" the "impossible ideal" of "perfect agreement" over the meaning of a text independent of interpretation and the "fear" of "interpretive anarchy" (304). In short, interpretive communities allow for a return to a qualified formalism.

Indeed, through the notion of interpretive communities, Fish is once more able to ground meaning in the text. He is able to do so in a way that avoids problematic claims to an objective correctness that necessarily demands an external, metaphysical observer capable of stepping beyond the realms of human experience and guaranteeing meaning. Fish sheds the cumbersome, unprovable workings of objectivity and embraces the doctrines of social construction. As Martin Stone summarizes, "the source of norms relevant to meaning is the community itself: somebody who does not behave ... as

the community does is in violation of one of its norms, and may justifiably be said to ‘misunderstand’ the relevant text” (57). Although meaning is still a matter of interpretation, it is anchored in the habits of given communities. As such, meaning is preserved from the abyss of total relativism by virtue of a move that eliminates “bits of philosophy (‘texts that are clear in and of themselves’) that we have no need for anyway” (Stone 58). Thus, the text as a unit containing meaning is reified in the latter segment of “Interpreting the *Variorum*” insofar as certain social formations normalize meaning and provide apparatuses for determining what constitutes a valid interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as Fish later claims, “There is no subjectivist element of reading,” because the reader is never “unique and private, but is always the product of categories of understanding that are his by virtue of his membership in a community of interpretation” (“Afraid” 11). Fish’s adoption of the notion of interpretive communities is not, of course, a return to the doctrines of formalism. Its presence in “Interpreting the *Variorum*” is, however, the first step along that particular path.

How does the detached, theoretical notion of interpretive communities allow Fish to traverse the path back to the reconstituted formalism so evident in *How Milton Works*? This question demands to be answered, especially considering that as late as 1989’s *Doing What Comes Naturally*, Fish is still trumpeting proclamations such as, “the abandonment of formalism — of the derivation of meaning from mechanically enumerable features — has always and already occurred” (87). The answer, I would suggest, lies in Fish’s use of the split between “theory” and “practice,” a split which appears throughout his work and is, although unmentioned, presupposed in “Interpreting the *Variorum*.” Indeed, this ternary essay slips from a defense of the practice of affective

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that these apparatuses are not static or definable. They will change over time, and will shift across disparate spectrums of readers — “each of us,” Fish notes, “is a member of not one but innumerable interpretive communities” (*Doing* 30) — but they will nonetheless provide some level of normative control.

stylistics to a theoretical abandonment of any practice rooted in text, and then on to a preparation for the grounds of practice through theory: the interplay of theory and practice as they relate to formalism dictates this essay's very structure.

Moreover, the concept of the interpretive community marks, as it were, the beginning of the end of Fish's theorizing. The conclusion of "Interpreting the *Variorum*," wherein Fish writes that the makeup of interpretive communities is of necessity unknowable and unprovable, is indicative of this new direction (305). Yet even as these communities of interpretation surpass the grounds of theory, they secure the grounds upon which formalism may be practised in intellectual security and the conviction provided by an assumed epistemic rigour. Anti-formalism, when taken to extremes, recreates formalism. As Fish writes:

At the end of the anti-formalist road ... you will find the meanings that are perspicuous for you, given your membership in what I have called an interpretive community, and so long as you inhabit that community ... those meanings will be immediately conveyed by public structures of language and image to which you and your peers can confidently point. (*Trouble* 295)

In other words, "interpretation is the only game in town" (*Text* 356), and so long as one's interpretive community concedes that formalism, or for that matter, any theoretical basis, is best, all subsequent criticism of such practices is null and void.

In Fish's later work, the very concept of a theory that could potentially undermine the workings of practice is itself undermined. Fish writes, "theory's project — the attempt to get above practice and lay bare the grounds of its possibility — is an impossible one" (*Doing* 156). This position is elaborated in a 2003 interview conducted by Jeffery Williams, wherein Fish outlines his view of the relationship between

theory and practice. He argues that if by theory one means “attaining to a perspective unattached to local and partisan concerns,” a perspective which would provide a “vantage point from which local and partisan concerns can be clarified and ordered,” then “the theory quest will always fail.” This failure is, however, “in no way disabling,” for in the absence of theory one can ground oneself “in and by the same everyday practices” that gave one “habitation” before the “fruitless quest” for theory was begun (Williams 27). This statement speaks to Fish’s own intellectual history, and specifically to his refusal of “evidentiary procedures” (Text 177) based upon the legitimacy of the text and to his eventual return in 2001 to a formalistic consideration of Milton. As Stone notes, “Fish is prepared to find not just practice unchanged, but practice regained through the right bit of theory” (58). Indeed, the trajectory of Fish’s thought mirrors this insight precisely.

An embryonic prototype for this trajectory is contained within “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” an essay which engages, rejects, and begins the reconstitution of formalistic principles. Furthermore, this essay’s ternary movement is constituted on a relation to both practice and theory as they relate to formalism. “Interpreting the *Variorum*” is revolutionary for a few pages, but is in fact far less radical than it pretends to be. Forever circling round the magnetic lure of formalism, Fish is able only to break free momentarily, and the twenty-one year progression from this ephemeral apex to a full-blooded return to formalistic practice is nothing more than a protraction and elongation of the thought encapsulated within “Interpreting the *Variorum*.”

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“HEAR THE SONG WE BRING”:  
DECONSTRUCTING THE  
COUNTRY HOUSE IN LEAPOR’S  
“CRUMBLE HALL”

ANGIE LIM

(3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR ESSAY)

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Traditionally, the country-house poem serves as a panegyric to a wealthy patron or friend through the noble depiction of an ideal household and its virtuous owners. The reader is assured that there is stability and order in country life through the preservation of an organized social structure through the mutual generosity and hospitality of the land-owning gentry and the servants and labourers. Hierarchies of power and class distinction are central to the representation of the country-house ideal, where the structured community of owners, guests, tenants, and servants exist in a harmonious microcosm voluntarily performing their respective duties. Ben Jonson’s poem “To Penshurst” celebrates Robert Sidney’s estate of Penshurst as an ideal of courtesy and aristocratic bounty by emphasizing the natural abundance of the landscape as a fundamental link to the generous hospitality of its owner. However, in “Crumble Hall,” Mary Leapor overturns the

conventions of the literary genre inaugurated by Jonson by shifting the focus into the domestic sphere of the “nether world” (108) inhabited by the servants and labourers who are responsible for the cleanliness and good order of the household. The voice Leapor constructs speaks as neither proprietor nor guest within the tradition of the genre, but as a female servant. In doing so, Leapor destabilizes the social order upheld in traditional country-house poems by thrusting the lives and labours of the servants into the forefront and placing the idealized hospitality of the nobility and emblematic abundance of the household into their hands. Leapor ironically departs from the tropes of country-house poetry established by Jonson: praising the hospitality of the estate owner and his family by way of praising the estate itself; portraying the pleasant interactions and exchanges between the inhabitants in the first-person singular of the poet; and alluding to the mythic and Edenic qualities of the landscape as a pastoralized retreat from the court and city. Instead she juxtaposes the real and the ideal with a tour of Crumble Hall through the eyes of a servant. By demystifying the lofty, epideictic tone and idealized vision of Ben Jonson’s encomium, Leapor revises traditional forms in “Crumble Hall” to mock the pretensions of the nobility from the perspective of the labouring class to which the poet herself identifies.

The celebratory tone exalting the physical beauty and charm of the country estate is sustained in Jonson’s direct address to the building itself. By paying tribute to the architecture and landscape of Penshurst, the poet is metonymically praising the Sidney family and their way of life. The reference to the estate as an “ancient pile” (5) suggests its natural and modest existence in the world, in opposition to the ostentatious displays of wealth—namely the *touch, marble, pillars, roof, lantern, stair, and courts*—observable in the “proud ambitious

heaps” (101) that Jonson detests. The privilege of the natural beauty of Penshurst over the ostentatious artifice of other mansions parallels Jonson’s concluding antithesis: “their lords have built, but thy lord dwells” (102). The newly ennobled lords must build their architecturally extravagant houses as symbols of their acquired wealth. On the other hand, the landed nobility dwells in their acquired estate, which is founded with historic tradition across successive generations. Accordingly, Jonson emphasizes Lord Sidney’s hospitality as not merely a pretension of his wealth and status, but as a genuine display of his good nature and virtue. Hospitality, William McClung claims, in the form of food and drink offered at Penshurst, “is the natural expression of the good will made possible by abundance, which is itself the reward of virtuous conduct and good estate management” (123). The plethora of meat dishes, fruit, beer, and wine made available to the guests convey the selfless generosity of the Lord. Jonson reveals his favourable opinion of Penshurst and its owner by glorifying both of their natural riches, and thus offers his panegyric as a model for the traditional country-house poem.

If Penshurst epitomizes the noble and idyllic country estate, Crumble Hall exemplifies the characteristics that Jonson ascertains Penshurst is *not* in his opening lines. The *horribly adorned* gargoyles, pillars, and chimney-pieces of Crumble Hall boast the ornamental and extravagant display of wealth criticized by Jonson. An underlying assumption of the country house is the value of utility over beauty (McClung 36). Yet Mira’s tour through the winding passages, up and down the many stairs of Crumble Hall creates a sense of inconvenience and inefficiency:

Would you go further?—Stay a little then:  
 Back through the passage—down the steps again;  
 Through yon dark room—be careful how you tread  
 Up these steep stairs,—or you may break your head. (94-7)

The parallel placement of caesurae dividing each of the lines also serves to evoke the disjointedness between the various networks within the house. While the unostentatious simplicity of Penshurst is an extension of Lord Sydney's virtuous nature, the architectural artifice of Crumble Hall is characteristically suggestive of its conspicuously absent proprietor. Leapor further contrasts Jonson's depiction of the ideal country house by allowing the reader a glimpse into the more obscure aspects of Crumble Hall. Instead of the natural beauty and simplicity of Penshurst, the focus turns to spiders, dust, mice, and objects that insinuate manual labour such as the "hated broom" (47), "drenching horns" (100), and "tattered plough" (101). A sense of domestic maintenance and constant upkeep is therefore infused into each of the poet's observations. The hospitality of the estate's owner is nevertheless conveyed, much like at Penshurst, in the form of "good old English fare" (19): "With tainted ven'son, and with hunted hare: / With humming beer her vats were wont to flow, / And ruddy nectar in her vaults to glow" (20-22). However, later in the poem the reader is "dragged" down into the "nether world" (108) along with the kitchen-maid, Mira, and is exposed to the toil and labour that goes into the preparation of the food and drink served above. The Lord of the estate, traditionally credited for the generous provisions offered to the guests, is nonexistent in Mira's world. He is instead replaced by the lower orders—who are directly responsible for the food and drink—to give the reader an alternative perspective. Leapor's intentional bathos undercuts the aristocratic values praised in conventional country-house poems. The bathetic effect manifests at various moments to create an almost comedic and deflationary tone:

Gay China bowls o'er the broad chimney shine,  
 Whose long description would be too sublime:  
 And much might of the tapestry be sung:  
 But we're content to say, "The Parlour's hung." (68-71)

Affirming the grandeur of a subject and then immediately denigrating it to a mere quasi-sentence resonates the same trivializing effect of the poem as a whole. The use of “we’re” also denotes the inclusion of the speaker who, along with the other servants, has no time to idle and reflect on the decorative artifacts of the house, but must continue with her domestic duties. Leapor reverses and reworks the standard conception of the country house set forth by Jonson to mock the self-serving obsequiousness of poets who write solely for patronage.

The social interactions that take place at Penshurst are dependent on the mutual obligations of the master, staff, and guests to fulfil their proper roles. As a guest himself, the poet perceives the harmonious social structure of Penshurst in the context of his own reception at the estate. His needs and wishes are graciously met without the expense or discomfort of any other persons. The speaker remarks on the paradisaic absence of hard labour or resentment as the necessary work is carried out with “no man’s groan” (46) and even the generous waiter is content to know that “below, he shall find plenty of meat” (70). The notion of mutual generosity between the welcomed guests and the host is also evident, as “no one [comes] empty-handed to salute” (49). The gift-bearing guests show their appreciation and respect for the generosity of the Lord and Lady. Ergo the implied mutual respect between all levels in the social hierarchy is made possible only through the observation of proper relationships and roles between the different classes of society. King James’ unexpected, but well-received, visit substantiates Penshurst’s worthiness in playing host to the highest of guests. The poet attributes the favourable reception of the King to Lady Sidney’s “high huswifery” (85), thus reaffirming Penshurst’s social order, in which all levels of the hierarchy contribute to the overall hospitality and luxury of the house. While Jonson is arguably aware of the class conscious social structure of

Penshurst, his careful portrayal of the classes above and below his own reinforce the idealized notion of the country house as a microcosmic natural hierarchy.

Leapor subverts the natural order by representing the lower orders conspicuously overlooked by Jonson. In the world below, the lament of Ursula to her servant husband, Roger, parodies romantic ideology and conventional images of love. By painting the picture of Ursula as a woman lamenting her fading beauty as a result of wifely devotion, Leapor satirizes the romantic notion of female labour performed for the love of men. Realistically, women of the labouring class don't work for love, but for pay. Therefore, Ursula not only performs her duties for the love of her husband, but also as a necessity for the guests of Penshurst. The comic speech further mocks the romantic ideal because Ursula does not use conventional elevated language, but rather, language that reflects her social standing: "I baste the mutton with a cheerful heart, / Because I know my Roger will have part" (148-9). Once again, a sense of duty interrupts the reflections of the servant as the boiling kettle forces Ursula back to the realities of domestic labour. Compared to the satisfied and grateful guests who dine at Penshurst, the guests at Crumble Hall gorge themselves to the point of sickness: "While the guests ravaged on the smoking store, / Till their stretched girdles would contain no more" (27-8). Their overindulgence also hints at their excruciating hunger and thirst as they wait at the table "gaping" and "a-dry" (129). Instead of the thoughtful and contented waiter serving the guests at Penshurst, surly *Gruffo* "turns a glaring eye" (127) fearing the "fierce crew" (129) who will soon ravage the provisions. The hostility and resentment between the staff and guests of Crumble Hall violate the idea of harmonious interaction emphasized in the archetypal country house. There are no Kings or Princes at Crumble Hall. Instead the reader

is presented with characters such as Biron, who “sleeps, with books encircled round” (90). But he is far from the meditative and philosophical student the speaker suggests because the many *dusty volumes* remain untouched by Biron. Leapor again mocks the pretensions to grandeur of the gentry and sets up a distinction between *seeming* and *being*. The speaker’s position as a servant enables her to see beyond the ostentations of the upper classes. In doing so, the hierarchy and social order reaffirmed by Jonson, is called in to question by Leapor.

The poet’s praise of the country estate’s fruitfulness incorporates the use of pastoral conventions alluding to the Golden Age of natural abundance and mythic visions of nymphs, satyrs, and Muses. In traditional Georgic representations of the Golden Age “Nature offers her plenty willingly” (Fowler 60). Hence, in the landscape surrounding Penshurst, “The painted partridge ... is willing to be killed” (29-20), “Fat, aged carps ... run into thy net” (33), and “Bright eels ... leap on land / Before the fisher, or into his hand” (37-8). The *sponte sua* motif, of fish yielding themselves to be caught and nature spontaneously providing for man, celebrates Penshurst as a self-contained Eden of inexhaustible and self-sufficient resources. Jonson creates a vital link between such idealized qualities inherent in the estate and an especially worthy owner. The estate’s natural economy is institutionally a result of the honourable contributions of many to the general benefit of all. “The blushing apricot and woolly peach” hanging the walls “that every child may reach” (43-4) is nature fulfilling its duty much like the inhabitants of Penshurst. Jonson’s representation of women also suggests that they are fruits of the estate, as *ripe daughters* offer themselves to their courtiers: “their ripe daughters whom they would commend / This way to husbands, and whose baskets bear / An emblem of themselves, in plum or pear” (54-6). Lady Sidney is also praised as being “fruitful”

(90), equivocating her fertility to the fruitfulness of the landscape. The idea of the natural world offering itself up to its masters suggests that each element finds fulfilment in their respective roles and have no desire to hold any other place in the socioeconomic hierarchy.

Leapor also depicts a utopian pastoral landscape surrounding Crumble Hall, inhabited by swains and mythical dryads. But unlike Jonson's Golden Age topos, Leapor utilizes the idealized pastoral tradition in her conclusion as an admonition to the threat of modern materialism. Instead of the dryads peacefully residing in the serene groves, they are heard "howling for their threatened shades" (166) as the owners of the estate clear the land for the addition of a new parlour. The idea of improvement and progress at the expense of the Edenic ideal signifies the ongoing antithesis between nature and artifice:

Shall these ignobly from their roots be torn,  
And perish shameful, as the abject thorn;  
While the slow car bears off their aged limbs,  
To clear the way for slopes, and modern whims;  
Where banished nature leaves a barren gloom,  
And awkward art supplies the vacant room? (173-8)

Far removed from the pastoralized microcosm of Penshurst, the owners of Crumble Hall violate the natural and ecological order through their superficial expansion of the house. Consequently, the "injured nymphs" (180) and "fairy-elves" (182)—expunged from their natural home—will continue to haunt the newly-built parlour. The poet's only direct address to the previously absent owner of Crumble Hall occurs ironically in the context of a petition to spare the emblematic grove before it is too late: "Then cease, Directo, stay thy desp'rate hand; / And let the grove, if not the parlour, stand" (185-6). Crumble Hall can never realize the ideal of aristocratic hospitality and mutual



generosity because of the insatiable exploitation of the land by its owner. By rejecting the notion of the estate as a harmonious and idyllic world, Leapor effectively overturns the social order on which it relies.

“Crumble Hall” is a country-house poem that achieves the opposite effect set out by Jonson’s traditional model. The source of Jonson’s praise and exaltation is the subject of Leapor’s mockery and deflation; what the former reaffirms, the latter subverts. The satirical shift of perspective challenges the cultural ideal fixed within the genre and instead of assuring stability and order in ancient customs and values, the discursive deviation from literary convention seeks to draw attention to the realities of a lesser known class of poets. There is a political dimension to how labouring-class poets like Leapor worked within and against conventional literary forms; in representing their relationship to nature and society, they are in essence demonstrating their differences from the more polite poets. By demystifying the artifices of refined poetry, labouring-class poets shed light on the fact that certain literary forms perpetuate an idealization of estate living that conscientiously ignores hardship and suffering—issues that can be voiced in “Mira’s” verse.

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SKIRT-CHASING THE  
 AMERICAN DREAM:  
 OTHERNESS, SEXUALITY, AND  
 MANIFEST DESTINY IN *LOLITA*  
 AND *PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT*

DEBORAH PERKINS-LEITMAN

(3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR ESSAY)

A surefire way to establish an unreliable narrator is to introduce him or her with a psychological diagnosis. American classics *Lolita* and *Portnoy's Complaint* both begin in this manner. In the case of *Lolita*, Nabokov assumes the suave and suspect voice of "John Ray Jr., PhD," who introduces alias Humbert Humbert's "Confessions of a White Widowed Male" with the suggestion that this text excoriates Humbert's demons and ends in "nothing less than a moral apotheosis" (5). *Portnoy's Complaint* begins, more succinctly but in a similar tone, with Dr. Spielvogel's diagnosis of what he terms "Portnoy's Complaint" – "A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature" (1). In both novels, the text following the introduction-diagnosis is set up as the narrator's confessional. It is up to the reader to determine the veracity of these confessions – and that of the

preceding diagnoses – in the web of psycho-sexual compulsion that follows.

In both novels, the narrator is an outsider to the mainstream American culture of which his sexual conquest or conquests are intimates. The sexual conquest of these women by outsiders lends insight into sexuality and its problems in American popular culture and society. Humbert and Portnoy's respective struggles to modify, appropriate, and possess the American woman are intimately linked to the notion of the American dream. This paper will examine alienation and otherness in Nabokov's *Lolita* and Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* as it is reflected in Humbert and Portnoy's shared sexual obsession with – and relentless pursuit of – the all-American girl.

It has been argued that Nabokov's *Lolita* is a reflection on the author's own changing perception of American life. In this interpretation, Lolita becomes America itself, a personified nation that Humbert tries to possess and cultivate before ultimately realizing that she has a right to self-determination and independence – that is to say, her own national identity (Haegert 779-780)<sup>1</sup>. This constructs Humbert's European "education" of Lolita as a violent cultural imposition, to which Lolita responds negatively: "She had entered my world, umber and black Humberland, with rash curiosity; she surveyed it with a shrug of amused distaste...To the wonderland I had to offer, my fool preferred the corniest movies, the most cloying of fudge" (166). Humbert is convinced that his "wonderland," the Lewis Carroll-inflected realm of his idealized European formative years, should appeal to his young charge. However, she, a thoroughly American product, prefers "the corniest movies" to Humbert's literature and poetry. Although this interpretation is true in part – Humbert does attempt to Europeanize Lolita and is met with the utmost resistance – it is also fundamentally flawed.

<sup>1</sup> Haegert explains it thus: "Humbert's ambivalent search for 'his' lost Lolita in the last third of the book enacts an émigré's quest for a truer vision of his host environment – an America no longer seen as a nubile nymphet in need of European refinement, but as an estimable independent spirit requiring (and deserving) a national identity of her own."

The problem with reading *Lolita* as a comment on Nabokov's changing view of America is that it presupposes a direct link between Nabokov's cultural perceptions and Humbert's psychosexuality. If Humbert's eventual realization – however postured it may be – is reflective of Nabokov's own changing perception of the new world, then the conclusion of the novel not only endorses the right of American children to enjoy Hollywood films and a typically carefree childhood, but legitimizes American pop culture itself as equal and comparable to the European literary canon.

While childhood itself is not called into question in *Lolita*, to suggest that the novel is ultimately uncritical of American culture is to miss the point. After all, it is not Humbert's literary background and culture that are in doubt, but Humbert's own literary scholarship. This is implied by subtle hints that Humbert pleads his case through literary misappropriations. For instance, Poe's poem "Annabel Lee" is used by Humbert to suggest that his pedophilia results from a childhood tragedy, and also to legitimize the statutory rape in which he engages. However, Poe's Annabel is a much-disputed figure whose very existence is questionable; Annabel Lee is not the stuff of pedophilic elegy, as Humbert constructs her to be. This can be seen in Nabokov's deviation from the original poem, whose first lines read, "It was many and many a year ago/ In a kingdom by the sea" (Poe, lines 1-2). In the Humbert-ized version, this kingdom becomes "a princedom by the sea."<sup>9</sup> This line variation suggests that Humbert's confessional – as distinct from Nabokov's opus itself – is of lesser literary pedigree than the original work by Edgar Allen Poe. Therefore, it is not European literature and culture itself that becomes irrelevant to contemporary America, but Humbert's literature and culture that are irrelevant to *Lolita*. Furthermore, *Lolita* herself is not so purely a product of vacuous pop culture as

Humbert would like to believe. Humbert himself admits, upon the narrative's conclusion, that he has underestimated Lolita, both intellectually and spiritually, and that it is perhaps the perverse nature of their relationship that prevents him from engaging her in lofty discussions of literature and art, or for that matter anything else that might lend insight into one's inner life:

My Lolita remarked: 'You know, what's so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own'; and it struck me...that I simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind and that quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile clichés, there was in her...dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me... for I often noticed that living as we did, she and I, in a world of total evil, we would become strangely embarrassed whenever I tried to discuss something ...she and a real healthy sweetheart...might have discussed. (284)

Because Humbert has deprived Lolita of her very childhood, he cannot engage in conversation “of a genuine kind” with her. Additionally, Humbert realizes – albeit in an egocentric manner – that Lolita does have an inner life beyond that of “awful juvenile clichés.” Thus, the binary between sophisticated Old Europe and vulgar Young America is exposed as false. After all, is it not Old Europe's representative who has vulgarized and bastardized both his own literary canon, and a young American girl? Humbert admits that he broke Lolita's life, but the crucial point that he misses, which the reader must observe, is that he cannot see Lolita. What he sees is not the girl herself, but a reflection of his desires – for nymphets, for “the secret of durable pigments,” that is, for eternal youth and the casting off of age (309). It is this yearning for immortality that he and America may share; he doesn't know Lolita herself, but the American myth of youth eternal is, in a way, his Lolita. Ironically, the tragic result of Humbert's savage quest for youth

eternal is that Lolita herself is both deprived of her youth and fated to an early death.

In *Portnoy's Complaint*, nympholepsy is replaced by what can best be termed shikselepsy. From a young age, Alexander Portnoy is fixated upon non-Jewish women, who represent both the exciting prospect of violating a sexual taboo, and the America from which Portnoy feels estranged. It is what Portnoy perceives as these girls' very normalcy, their inborn American-ness, that he finds so enticing.

Unlike Humbert Humbert, Portnoy is well-versed in American pop culture. Raised on American radio, but alien to the personalities represented therein, he fetishizes the gentile American lifestyle by peppering his praise of shiksese with references to popular radio programs (Gross 82):

"These people are the *Americans*, Doctor – like Henry Aldrich and Homer, like the Great Gildersleeve and his nephew LeRoy, like Corliss and Veronica, like 'Oogie Pringle' who gets to sing beneath Jane Powell's window in *A Date with Judy* – these are the people for whom Nat 'King' Cole sings every Christmastime, 'Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose...' An open fire, in *my* house? No, no, theirs are the noses whereof he speaks." (Roth 145)

The outward irony and condescension of Portnoy's rhapsody conceals a feeling of profound exclusion. In his prepubescent years, Portnoy skates on the same ice as these "Americans," but while he yearns for their attention, they seem oblivious to him: they bypass his house and his nose, just as Nat King Cole does on Christmas Eve. Portnoy voices a sentiment which is at once universal and specific to the ethno-religious minority's dilemma: exclusion as universally felt. However, to live in a society where popular culture's depiction of the home life diverges in every possible way from one's own home life is to feel this exclusion ever more acutely. Portnoy is inundated with radio broadcasts beaming from gentile America, and as a result



he yearns for it. This longing for the gentile life is intensified by the fact that Portnoy lives in a Jewish section of Newark, goes to a Jewish school, and has virtually no exposure to actual gentiles, except for those days when their high school football team beats his (Gross 83). As a result his alienation from the reality of gentile America, Portnoy idealizes the lifestyle: “America is a *shikse* nestling under your arm whispering love love love love love!” (Roth 146).

And yet, Portnoy’s first *shikse* falls short in a most unexpected manner. Kay Campbell, alias The Pumpkin, is seemingly perfect: “Artless, sweet-tempered, without a trace of morbidity or egoism – a thoroughly commendable and worthy human being” (216). Even in retrospect, Portnoy cannot help but marvel at her even temper, her ability to canvass door-to-door for their shared political ideals, and her adeptness at arguing without nervousness or agitation: “Unencumbered by the garbled syntax of the apocalypse or the ill-mannered vocabulary of desperation, without the perspiring upper lip, the constricted and air-hungry throat, the flush of loathing on her forehead, she may even have swayed half a dozen people in the country” (219). Her lack of a “vocabulary of desperation” is, in fact, a marker of her gentile nature; Portnoy knows the “vocabulary of desperation” from his father, whose career as an insurance salesman is held back by anti-Semitism in the work force. Portnoy, whether consciously or not, recalls his father going door-to-door, relegated, as a Jew, to the most dangerous – read: ethnically undesirable – neighbourhoods, in order to put food on the table. Kay has no such desperation in her cultural or familial memory. It is this trait of Kay’s, her ability to be self-assured without being conceited, that Portnoy admires – “Christ, yes, this was one of the great *shikses*” (219) – yet ultimately cannot cope with.

But is it merely Portnoy’s inability to handle Kay’s self-

confidence that marks the downfall of the relationship? The beginning of the end for Portnoy and Kay occurs during a pregnancy scare when the couple begins to envision a life together. Kay's response of "Why would I want to do a thing like that?" (230) to Portnoy's apparent joke, "And you'll convert, right?" is what finishes the relationship. Portnoy is hurt by her response, though he cannot understand why: he is, after all, ostensibly a secular humanist. Although Portnoy himself cannot fully confront this, he has carried the system of bedrock values given to him by his mother and tormentor with him into adulthood and his career as a civil rights attorney. The conflict between his past in Newark and his present in New York cannot be resolved through fully embracing or rejecting either paradigm. Portnoy's psychological reaction to Kay's rejection of his past suggests his resentment not only of Kay, but of American gentile culture:

"What do you mean *why* would you want to do a thing like that? Why do you think, you simpleton-goy! Go talk to your dog, ask him. Ask spot what *he* thinks, that four-legged genius. 'Want Kay-Kay to be a Jew, Spottie – huh, big fella, huh?' Just what the fuck makes you so self-satisfied, anyway?... That your father drives a station wagon made out of wood? What's your hotsy-totsy accomplishment in life, baby, that Doris Day snout?" (231)

Portnoy, though infatuated with gentiles, harbours the same resentment towards them for which he criticizes his elders. In asking what makes Kay so "self-satisfied," he is in fact addressing mainstream America; perhaps what he is asking is, why must he renounce his own tradition in order to be accepted by mainstream culture and his fellow intellectuals, while the idea of a member of the dominant culture changing instead is unthinkable? By not admitting to himself that the schism in his own thinking may not be entirely without relevance or merit, Portnoy blames Kay rather than examining

his own relation to her culture. In this and many other novels and films by Jewish-American artists, the shikse becomes part of the protagonist's quest to reconcile all that is missing or incongruent in his cultural identity and sense of history. Frederic Cople Jaher writes of the significance of Jewish-Gentile pairings in literature: "...depictions of Jewish male-Christian female liaisons become microcosmic representations of momentous issues of group and self survival and betrayal, of balancing anxieties and ambitions, and of bridging the past and present" (Cople Jaher 519).

Portnoy's next conquest is further evidence of his simultaneous resentment and veneration of WASP culture. Portnoy himself realizes that he is incapable of loving Sally Maulsby, not because of who she is, but because of her archetypal identity: "...there could never be any love in me for The Pilgrim. Intolerant of her frailties. Jealous of her accomplishments. No, not much room in there for love" (240). Portnoy's semi-successful struggle to get Sally Maulsby to fellate him is the sublimation of his hereditary resentment of what he sees as her ilk – a result of his father's professional struggles, in which his father's ethnicity kept him stymied in the lower ranks. He himself is aware of this vengeful impulse, and articulates it: "No, Sally Maulsby was just a nice thing a son once did for his dad. A little vengeance on Mr. Lindabury for all those nights and Sundays Jack Portnoy spent collecting down in the colored district" (241). To Alex Portnoy, Sally Maulsby is a living, breathing archetype. She is "The Pilgrim," one of those descendants of the Mayflower passengers, to whom America yielded its first fruits of promise – discounting, as Portnoy explicitly does in another infamous passage, the First Nations. Thus, when Portnoy refers to Sally Maulsby as "another gentle heart broken by me," (232) he refers to his own manifest destiny – the conquest of the American shikse.

The central romantic relationship in *Portnoy's Complaint* is the tortured one that exists between Portnoy and Mary Jane, alias The Monkey, so nicknamed for erotic activities featuring a banana. Interestingly, The Monkey reads like Lolita, had she reached adulthood. The Monkey is a lingerie model, a profession which recalls both Lolita's aspirations of being a Hollywood starlet and her brush with pornography chez Quilty. Like Lolita, The Monkey is the product of a debauched youth and an exploited adolescence. This makes her vulgar in a way that Portnoy finds at once alluring and abhorrent. The part of him that finds it abhorrent tries, like Humbert, to educate and elevate his "fallen" lady (Cohen 160). His attempts to cultivate The Monkey, in the form of reading poetry to her and giving her literature to read, are outwardly greeted with a measure of enthusiasm, but they ultimately fail. Is this because The Monkey is simply too ignorant to appreciate high culture, or is it because The Monkey looks to Portnoy for intellectual and spiritual elevation, but is greeted with animal lust? At any rate, The Monkey and Portnoy cannot sustain a relationship because they cannot fill the shoes of their much-vaunted archetypes. Portnoy is not the great educator and emancipator come to rescue The Monkey from a life of debauchery, and The Monkey is not Portnoy's Pygmalion. Portnoy wants his relationship with The Monkey to "put the id back in Yid, the oy back in goy" (Roth 209). This aphorism is as reductionist as the nickname The Monkey, which may have its origins in a specific sexual act, but resonates with Portnoy's dehumanizing condescension towards Mary Jane and his "bland, blonde" shiksas as a group. Perhaps *Portnoy's Complaint* is a novel not of ideas, but of people masquerading as ideas and coming up short as a result.

*Portnoy's Complaint* and *Lolita* are both novels about an outsider's obsession with, contempt for, and conquest of the all-American girl. Both Humbert Humbert and Alex

Portnoy are obsessive personalities whose manias ultimately result in nervous breakdowns and permanent psychological – and possibly physical – damage done to the objects of their obsession. However, the novels diverge importantly in one respect: their conclusions. *Lolita's* conclusion is contained, enigmatically, in both its introduction and its final pages; through close examination of both, we know that Humbert died of, essentially, a broken heart, and that Lolita died in childbed. Reparations cannot be made. The respective fates of *The Monkey* and Portnoy, however, are left undetermined. *Portnoy's Complaint* chronicles the first half of the psychoanalytic process – the part in which the subject of analysis tells his or her story without interjections or commentary. The second half is the analysis itself, hopefully leading to a breakthrough. Dr. Spielvogel defines Portnoy's *Complaint* as the inability to reconcile one's ethical and sexual impulses, but we, as readers, do not necessarily have to base our analysis upon this diagnosis. Portnoy, like his American dream girls, occupies a paradigm essential to American popular culture. But in leaving the end of the novel open, Philip Roth also leaves open the possibility that Portnoy and *The Monkey* may yet evolve past the realm of archetype. *Portnoy's Complaint* is perhaps the only Great American Novel to end with a punchline. This is both great fun and significant to the way one must approach the text: "So [said the doctor]. Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (274).

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# ALICE'S PHYSICAL GROWTH IN WONDERLAND: A JOURNEY OF SELF ACCEPTANCE

AMANPREET DHAMI

(4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ESSAY)



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Wonderland in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a society governed by artificial appearances, illogical growth and chaotic existence. Carroll juxtaposes the materiality of Wonderland to human society, which is built upon stable social conventions and inner depth. Upon entering the artificial world of Wonderland as a *human giant*, Alice is overcome with a childlike need to fit in and discover the mysterious world. Similarly, when Alice shrinks to an *acceptable* size she is consumed by the human fear of losing her selfhood. However, her quest for structure in Wonderland heightens as Alice alters her size to meet the expectations of each creature when she gains access to the caterpillar's mushroom, making both inner and physical stability impossible. Alice becomes trapped in a stage of "wandering" in which her identity is fragmented. Only when Alice rejects the illogical authority systems in Wonderland can she leave her dream world and



embody her true human size. Hence, the development of physical growth throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* comments on Alice's journey of self acceptance in a nonsensical environment that is contrary to spiritual growth.

In the opening of Carroll's novel, how Alice feels about her giant physical stature reflects her desire to discover Wonderland. In "Chapter II: The Pool of Tears," Alice is desperate to fit into her new surroundings, literally, but her absurd human size prohibits her from entering the "loveliest garden" she ever saw (Carroll 55). Alice's desperation to fit through the door demonstrates her childish curiosity to explore the whimsical garden of Wonderland. As an innocent child, she wants to be amused by learning about her new surroundings. However, Carroll comments on the perverseness of human attempts to fulfill societal conventions of body image when Alice becomes emotionally distressed because her absurd body cannot fit through the tiny door. Suddenly, Alice's physical body is frustratingly inappropriate because Wonderland does not define her vast size as the norm. Alice will desperately change her body in lieu of achieving her goal to reach the garden.

Ironically, Alice's desire to blend in within Wonderland is in tension with her effort to take on the role of the "anthropologist" who attempts to study the culture and inhabitants of the unreal garden (Kelly 15). To be a rational anthropologist, Alice must embrace the playful growth patterns of Wonderland. This tension between learning and idleness occurs in Chapter IV when Alice is suffocated in the tiny home of the Rabbit after she eats a cake that makes her enormous. Alice contemplates never having to learn a lesson again because her physical size has exceeded the dimensions of an adult: "'But then,' thought Alice, 'shall I NEVER get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman – but then – always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn't like THAT!'" (Carroll 76).

Alice is so bewildered by the expansion of her body that she tries to understand the implications of her physical growth on her moral development. Alice is excited because she thinks she will no longer age as people do in the human world. Yet, she is equally horrified by how she will mentally remain a little girl, eternally submitted to “lessons.” The anti-*bildungsroman* sentiment of Wonderland influences Alice such that she discards her moral conscience that advises her that “this sort of life” in which “there’s no room to grow up” (76) is unnatural, in exchange for a chance to satisfy her futile curiosities. Alice inadvertently chooses to abandon logical physical and moral development to decipher Carroll’s dream world. As a giant, Alice is a courageous risk-taker.

Accordingly, when Alice is small her inner vulnerabilities and fears are most prevalent. Her small size represents the second stage of her explorative mission when Alice naïvely suspends her selfhood to find the rules upon which Wonderland operates. As a giant, Alice was both physically and mentally intimidating to the Rabbit, Bill and Pat. In contrast, her tiny size now makes Alice an impressionable text for the Caterpillar because she is reduced to the artificial scale of Wonderland. Thus, the Caterpillar elicits fear in the tiny, troubled Alice when he asks her “Who are you?” (Carroll 89). By being “so many different sizes in a day” (84), Alice has lost the power to proclaim her identity to the Caterpillar, who towers over her from his mushroom throne. The sporadic physical growth that Alice has used to survive in Wonderland causes her to lose all sense of authority over her selfhood, literalised in her small stature. Thus, Carroll interrogates the human concept of a stable sense of identity when Alice feels “queer” (84) because she cannot “explain” herself to the Caterpillar (Kelly 26). The illogical growth patterns of Wonderland overwhelm Alice, rendering “silence” the only reassuring reply to the caterpillar’s daunting

question.

Yet the Caterpillar, like the other creatures, asks Alice who she is because her external appearance does not follow the shallow conventions of Wonderlandian identity. Since the external is all that matters in Wonderland, Alice seems peculiar to the other creatures as her outer appearance and name indicate little of who or what she represents. For example, the Mad Hatter is simply mad and sells hats, as the March Hare is a hare madly in heat (Hainer). However, the name *Alice* does not neatly correspond to any occupation or attribute. Consequently, these essentialist questions of self-identify frighten Alice because even according to the superficiality of Wonderland she is a murky void lacking purpose. Hereafter, Alice's journey in the fluid environment of Wonderland must shift into a quest to reassert control over her identity.

Alice maintains control over her physical transformations once she gains access to the caterpillar's mushroom, which remains permanently at her disposal. This instance marks a turning point in the book, since by gaining access to the mushroom she obtains the power to choose when and how she wants to change her physical appearance. Thus, in Chapter V when Alice is horrified by her serpent-like neck, she is relieved that she can readjust her body size to normal human standards by eating the mushroom:

*After a while she remembered that she still held the pieces of mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, nibbling first at one and then at the other, and growing sometimes taller and sometimes shorter, until she had succeeded in bringing herself down to her usual height. (Carroll 91)*

Alice begins to understand how to regulate her growth and to return back to her "usual size" by using the magical substance given to her by the Caterpillar. The mushroom regants Alice some agency so that she is no longer victimized by the

unfamiliar surroundings of Wonderland. For example, in Chapter I, Alice must proceed with caution when she stumbles on a transformative potion because she is unaware of where the bottle has come from. Afraid, she drinks the magical elixir while facing the risk of being poisoned (56). Fortunately, after meeting the Caterpillar, Alice may fearlessly delve into her explorations because she can safely change her size from a giant to a dwarf by happily “nibbling” on the mushroom.

Although the mushroom grants Alice authority over her physical growth, she only discovers the mushroom because the caterpillar reads Alice’s troubled mind. Alice’s conversation with the caterpillar after her recitation of “Old Father William” reveals her absolute submission to his domineering wisdom:

‘Not QUITE right, I’m afraid,’ said Alice, timidly; ‘some of the words have got altered.’  
 ‘It is wrong from beginning to end,’ said the Caterpillar decidedly, and there was silence for some minutes. (91)

When Alice recites the nursery rhyme “Old Father William,” it comes out “altered,” reflecting her altered selfhood. Alice believes that her knowledge of the rhyme is only partially tainted. However, the Caterpillar arrogantly tells her she is completely erroneous. Since the nursery rhyme symbolizes Alice’s inner identity, the Caterpillar boldly proclaims that Alice’s identity is “completely wrong from beginning to end.” Again the innocent little girl is rebuked and silenced by the Caterpillar. Her decision to change her physical appearance with mysterious liquids and cakes has caused Alice to unknowingly suspend all knowledge and values, which define her as “a little girl” named *Alice*. The Caterpillar uses his extrasensory perception to recognize that Alice is unaware of the impact Wonderland has had on her identity and accordingly puts her on the path towards self-discovery by giving her the mushroom

(Kelly 25). In the context of the *bildungsroman*, Alice's selfhood and confidence are shattered. Alice submits to the despotic caterpillar in order to regain the power to dictate her physical growth. This complete submission is a necessary stage for Alice to grow spiritually at the end of Carroll's novel.

Carroll literalizes Alice's forfeiture of her inner self-identity through her carefree attitude toward her illogical growth patterns in the second half of the book. Thus, Alice carelessly adjusts her size before entering the Duchess's house by shrinking herself to "nine inches" (Carroll 91) and grows up again to "about a foot high" (111) in Chapter VII to enter the garden. The mushroom puts Alice in thrall to a constant state of flux, in which her journey has no definable end or satisfying goal. Ironically, Alice rejects the lawless foundations of Wonderland in the superficial ceremony of the courtroom where Alice snaps out of her directionless journey and asserts her vibrant identity. Alice's conversation with the dormouse reveals this conclusion to her crisis of meaning:

'I wish you wouldn't squeeze so,' said the Dormouse, who was sitting next to her. 'I can hardly breathe.'  
 'I can't help it,' said Alice very *meekly*: 'I'm growing.'  
 'You've no right to grow here,' said the Dormouse.  
 'Don't talk *nonsense*,' said Alice more *boldly*: 'you know you're growing too.' (144)

Alice naturally grows back to her human size once she recognizes the law system is founded on fabricated evidence and arbitrary death sentences by the Queen. The vast speed of Alice's growth suffocates the dormouse because she literally squishes him, but figuratively Alice's ego attains depth and becomes unbearable for the flat dormouse. Her abrupt comeback to the dormouse's rude claim that growing is unjustifiable demonstrates a significant improvement in Alice's self confidence. Now she refuses to be abused by the

nonsensical inhabitants of Wonderland. Thus, the reversion to her human body represents Alice's dismissal of Wonderland's superficial growth patterns and shifting inner identities.

Hence, Alice's proclamation "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (154) belittles the material society of Wonderland. The renewed girl reclaims her unique identity and leaves the dream world to return to the human realm, conducive to learning and self development. Alice wakes up satisfied with who she is and in complete acceptance of her self. By the end of Carroll's *bildungsroman*, the initially curious and misguided Alice spiritually grows into an assertive young girl who accepts the inner complexities of human selfhood and who opposes the hollow ornamentation of Wonderland. Although the environment of Wonderland is contrary to the spiritual growth characteristic of the *bildungsroman*, Alice eventually overcomes the arbitrary system and learns that she needs to live a fulfilling life with a stable physical and spiritual identity.

Thus, in the end the development of Alice's physical growth reveals her acceptance of her vibrant identity and rejection of the material values of Wonderland. As a giant Alice is ready to give up her human body to explore the artificial landscapes of Carroll's world. However, her submission to the wayward growth patterns of Wonderland in consuming mysterious cakes and potions result in Alice's complete sacrifice of her stable inner identity. The small Alice is defenceless against the autocratic Caterpillar, such that he reads her fears about inconsistent selfhood and grants her the magic mushroom. Once Alice balances her physical growth with the mushroom and satisfies her desire to wander in Wonderland, she is ultimately disgusted by the arbitrary authority of the courtroom. Hence, Alice literally grows out of Wonderland without the use of magical substances to return to the human world of social rules and structure with a renewed strength that

accompanies her vibrant personality. Carroll uses his chaotic and artificial setting to advocate that meaningful human existence can only occur when one accepts oneself and ignores the pressures of the world.



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ENGLISHNESS IN *THE REMAINS  
OF THE DAY* AND *ENGLAND,  
ENGLAND*

CHLOE FLOWER

(4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ESSAY)

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In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and Julian Barnes's *England, England*, the cultural identity of "Englishness" is represented as a social and historical construct that is created to meet the particular needs and desires of individual characters. For Stevens, Englishness is comprised of the qualities of loyalty, restraint and self-effacement, all of which are woven into a broader cultural narrative of social stratification and benevolent paternalism out of which Stevens seeks existential justification for his wasted life. However, while both Ishiguro and Barnes represent Englishness as constructed, the texts differ insofar as Stevens understands this cultural identity to be intrinsic, whereas Sir Jack Pitman is keenly aware of its artifice. Sir Jack embraces the constructed nature of cultural identity and exploits the absence of an authentic or fundamental Englishness for commercial gain, producing a modern, simulated cultural identity based on

global market research and nostalgia for an England that does not exist. Despite the attempts of both Stevens and Sir Jack to sustain these cultural identities for the respective ends of self-justification and financial profit, Englishness is ultimately contested and complicated in both novels through the intrusions of private memory into publicly constructed history. The slippages and inconsistencies of memory reflect and resemble slippages in Englishness itself, laying bare its mechanisms. However, these texts resist moral simplification by examining the ways in which Englishness becomes a necessary fiction for Martha and Stevens to make life “more serious...and therefore bearable, if there is some larger context,” while simultaneously demonstrating the dangerous and insidious potential of “Englishness” for commercial exploitation and complicity in fascism (Barnes 243).

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens constructs his English identity by identifying the qualities of the “great butler” he aspires to be with the “greatness” of the English landscape itself, marked by “its sense of restraint” and “*lack* of obvious drama or spectacle” (28-9). This resemblance is made fully explicit when Stevens suggests that “butlers only truly exist in England,” the reason being that “Continental...are as a rule unable to control themselves in moments of strong emotion...In a word, ‘dignity’ is beyond such persons” (43). Though the word “dignity” in isolation appears to be a defensible principle in the structuring of one’s life, the context of Stevens’s discussion of this quality complicates its positive associations and suggests that it is involved in a more complex social structuring of “Englishness” than Stevens himself comprehends. This possibility emerges when Stevens posits that: “‘dignity’ has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional role he inhabits...the great butlers...will not be shaken out by external events, however

surprising, alarming or vexing” (42-3). This privileging of the butler’s ability to accept his place on the lower rungs of a rigidly stratified society at the expense of personal principle links the novel’s particular construction of Englishness to what Susie O’Brien calls a “coercive myth” of benevolent paternalism, wherein servants like Stevens are infantilized and compelled to entrust their lives to the direction of the “great men of the day” (791). Dignity, and by extension Englishness, is predicated on “surrendering the dictates of individual conscience” to those privileged by class stratification (O’Brien 790).

Stevens purports to fully endorse this form of social structuring, which he considers to be as endemic to Englishness as the physical landscape of the countryside, but the intrusion of his digressive private memories serves to contest both the intrinsic nature of Englishness as well as its value as an ordering principle for one’s life. One such memory is of his father’s death, occurring on the final evening of the conference Lord Darlington assembles to influence various governments to adopt the policy of Nazi appeasement. Private memory is portrayed alongside public history to demythologize the grandeur of the social hierarchy of Englishness. On this evening, Stevens takes a moment from his official duties to visit his sick and quickly deteriorating father. The final words of the elderly man to his son are: “I’m proud of you. A good son. I hope I’ve been a good father to you. I suppose I haven’t,” to which Stevens replies: “I’m afraid we’re extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning” (97). In a grotesque contortion of the idea of “dignity,” Stevens concludes that his ability to discharge his professional duties and fully inhabit the role of a butler even as his father declines affords him “a ‘dignity’ worthy of someone like [the great butler] Mr. Marshall...For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph”

(110). The insidious nature of the gathering at Darlington Hall creates further irony surrounding the “greatness” of what Stevens believes he has achieved by staying in character.

Such self-abnegation as demonstrated in this passage takes on graver ethical significance when contextualized within Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of “bad faith” or “mauvaise-foi.” Bad faith is in essence living a lie; in this case Stevens inhabits a professional role at the expense of his personal feelings, justifying his refusal to choose a different life in the name of the ideology of Englishness. Sartre argues that the “essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding...affirming truth within himself, denying it in his words, and denying that negation as such” (87). Stevens’s “possession of the truth” reveals itself in the intrusions of private memory that contest his construction of Englishness, most notably in the dismissal of the Jewish maids, while he simultaneously “denies in his words” the significance of what happens, referring to the incident as “extremely minor” and maintaining that he was right to leave all political matters to his betters (146). In this passage, the restraint that characterizes Stevens’s Englishness becomes a form of self-betrayal as his “every instinct opposed the idea of [the Jewish maids’] dismissal” (148). However, as he says to the outraged Miss Kenton: “our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer” (149).

The fact that Stevens “possesses the truth which he is hiding” is forcibly demonstrated in the way his language operates in this and later passages, where circumlocution and qualification obscure his complicity with Lord Darlington’s anti-Semitism. The dismissal is an “untypical incident” occurring during “an entirely insignificant few weeks,” with Stevens affirming that: “Jewish persons on my staff...were

never treated in any way differently on account of their race” (145-6). This memory, which Stevens asserts with “absolute authority,” precedes the direct dismissal of the Jewish women, demonstrating a slippage in memory and a narrative confusion that signal strategic manipulation on the part of Stevens in an attempt at self-justification in the guise of restraint and professionalism (145). Similar narrative confusion occurs at the end of the novel, when the accumulation of Stevens’s private memories leads him to question the foundations of Englishness on which he has based his life. In regarding his own inaction in contrast to Lord Darlington’s misguided action, Stevens approaches a direct admission of his bad faith: “At least he had the privilege of being able to say...that he made his own mistakes...I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?” (243). Stevens momentarily recognizes that Englishness is merely a narrative construct used to justify his wasted life and absolve him of the guilt of moral cowardice, ironically emphasized when he ultimately takes back this admission in a return to the principles of Englishness: “for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services” (244).

Like Ishiguro’s novel, Julian Barnes’s *England, England* is acutely conscious of the way Englishness is constructed to meet the needs or desires of a particular character, but unlike Stevens, Sir Jack Pitman both recognizes and revels in the artificiality of the cultural identity he creates and sells. In this text, Sir Jack constructs his particular formulation of English identity according to market principles. However, it is first necessary to contextualize the market demands that Sir Jack is supplying through the work of Jean Baudrillard in order to understand more specifically his brand of Englishness.

Baudrillard argues that the “obliteration of nature by culture” reverses the conventional belief that nature precedes culture; in other words, signs have taken precedence over things signified (1730). He links this development to the devastation of natural environments, arguing that we are left yearning for what we have killed, and “nostalgia assumes its full meaning” as more and more signs are created to simulate what has been lost (1730). Sir Jack picks up on this nostalgia for what has been destroyed when he considers: “that no pleasures were simple any more. The milkmaid and her swain no longer twirled the maypole while looking forward to a slice of cold mutton pie. Industrialization and the free market had long since disposed of them” (42). In a capitalist society, “natural” needs and desires are obscured by “hyper-real” needs stimulated by nostalgia for what is lost (Baudrillard 1740). Therefore, what Sir Jack is marketing is a simulacrum Englishness, a specious representation of England that marks the absence rather than existence of any authentic Englishness to replicate. In fact, the “Fifty Quintessences of Englishness” sold in his theme park are derived from a global market survey of “prospective purchasers of Quality Leisure” (86). Here we witness Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra,” as stereotypes of England with no apparent foundation, such as the robins in the snow, are created to meet preconceived images of Englishness. The notion of local English authenticity is thereby deconstructed by what Jerry Batson calls “placing the product correctly” (41). Englishness is a brand, and England, England “must sell [its] past to other nations” (41).

Despite the radically different construction of cultural identity in this text as opposed to the existential preoccupations of *The Remains of the Day*, Barnes’s novel parallels Ishiguro’s by using the infiltration of private memory to question and dismantle Englishness. The “England”

section of this novel demonstrates the way slippages and inconsistencies in private memory reflect slippages in the construction of Englishness through Martha Cochrane's primary metaphor of memory as "mirrors set in parallel," all memories being "a memory of a memory of a memory" (6). She notes that private memory is "like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself" (6). This function of private memory is demonstrated when, as a child, Martha copes with the tragedy of her father's departure by creating the narrative that "Daddy had gone off to find [the puzzle piece of] Nottinghamshire...Then he'd come back and all would be well again" (15). Martha's attempt to come to terms with abandonment through her memories of the puzzle reflects the broader ways in which Englishness is constructed by Sir Jack to meet particular needs or desires, albeit in a far more cynical fashion than Martha's. Here the miniaturized England of her puzzle must be restored, giving her father's absence a defensible and consoling purpose, whereas Sir Jack produces a hyper-real version of Englishness to cater to nostalgia for cultural authenticity, in turn meeting his own desire for profit. However, when Martha confronts her father as an adult, he has no recollection of her doing puzzles at all, revealing a critical slippage in their private memories (26). Martha is deprived of her consolation, as her father cannot verify the reassuring memory that would make her "present able to live with itself" (6).

The significance of private memory in the questioning of Englishness is more fully realized in Martha's episode with Dr. Johnson, the iconic English man of letters, whose artificial memories paradoxically work to puncture the hyper-real simulacrum of Englishness and approach an alternative version of reality through the authenticity of his suffering. The

slippage of private memory arises from the simple fact that he is an actor who assumes the memories and melancholia of Samuel Johnson, saying to Martha: “When I survey my past life...I discover nothing but a barren waste of time, with some disorders of body, and disturbances of the mind very close to madness” (215). However, as the interview continues, Martha begins to feel that she is in the presence of the “real” Dr. Johnson as she realizes that “his pain was authentic. And his pain was authentic because it came from authentic contact with the world...she saw a creature alone with itself, wincing at naked contact with the world” (223-4). In this image, Dr. Johnson is divested of the words that represent and mediate reality, left with the authenticity and “naked contact” of a pain impossible to represent, thereby thwarting the marketing of an Englishness comprised exclusively of representations.

The paradox presented in Dr. Johnson as a simulation of a historical figure who experiences authenticity in suffering is explored in Martha’s final examination in “Anglia” of that which is “artificial without being specious” (269). The world of Anglia is in many ways as simulated as that of England, England, as we see, for example in the presence of the American Jez Harris who “play[s] the yokel whenever some anthropologist...would turn up inadequately disguised as a tourist” (251). However, the moral tone in discussing such simulation is noticeably different, as demonstrated in the description of the faces of the children during the Fete, which express a “willing yet complex trust in reality...even when they disbelieved, they also believed” (273-4). This complicated attitude towards reality is emblematic of the new Englishness produced in Anglia, which is not the exploitative marketing of the hyper-real seen in Sir Jack’s theme park, but rather an acceptance of artifice and stereotypes such as letter-writing and “family evenings round the wireless” as a means of developing a communal sensibility



(262). People go to church “more from a need for regular society...than in order to receive spiritual advice” (271). In the absence of an authentic Englishness to revert to, these examples of artifice are consoling and give narrative cohesion to life, an idea summed up by Martha during her final visit to the church of St. Aldwyn as she contemplates the religiosity of the past: “I think there was something enviable about that otherwise unenviable world. Life is more serious, and therefore better, and therefore bearable, if there is some larger context” (243).

In the end, Martha’s conclusion that life must have some external context to make existence bearable renders Stevens’s narrative of Englishness immensely sympathetic. The intense pathos of the moment when Miss Kenton’s words provoke his admission that, “at that moment, my heart was breaking” leads the reader to wish that his narrative of English greatness might afford him the consolation of believing his wasted life justified (239). However, Mr. Cardinal’s question: “Aren’t you at all curious...shouldn’t you be concerned?” remains powerfully resonant, pointing to how dangerously porous the boundaries between artificial and specious Englishness are (222). Stevens’s Englishness may be as specious as Sir Jack’s cynical exploitation of cultural identity for commercial gain, being merely an attempt to justify his willful blindness and moral cowardice. The forms of Englishness in *The Remains of the Day* and *England, England* are questioned by intrusions of private memory in a manner that forces an examination of the needs or desires being met, though ultimately these constructions of cultural identity resist simple moral reduction, having the potential for both cynical exploitation and private consolation.

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## AUTHOR BIO


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# THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ECONOMICS IN *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

JUSTIN NORRIS

(4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ESSAY)



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For a novel concerned with the wild exploits of a young boy, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is remarkably preoccupied with financial matters. "It is a narrative about money," says Dennis Patrick Slattery, "or better, about the myth of money – divinity in dollars, a story of sacred cents" (29). This statement is, perhaps, only a half truth: *Huckleberry Finn* is a story of both the search for and escape from money and all that it represents. Taken more literally, it is a story of a vagrant child and a runaway slave floating down the Mississippi river on a lumber raft. Life on the raft exists in a space isolated from society, and by extension, from money. However, this isolation is frequently punctuated by adventurous episodes into river-towns and the exploitative schemes of the Duke and Dauphin, scenes that entrench Huck and Jim firmly into commercial and social realities. The anti-societal, 'natural' world of river life and the world of social, commercial, and financial considerations

constitute overlapping zones of meaning within the novel; the two worlds engage in a dialectical relationship throughout the narrative, especially within Huckleberry Finn himself. These two facets of the novel – which can be loosely identified with self and society, respectively – also intersect at another crucial juncture: the lumber raft. The raft represents forces that at various times are either societal or individualistic, inside or outside the economic sphere. Conflicting conceptions of the raft appear even within Huck’s own discourse. An examination of the raft’s historical, economic, and social significance illuminates this central conflict within the story and ultimately underscores the tragic nature of Huckleberry Finn, as a character caught in the crossfire of conflicting ideologies.

From the outset of the novel, money and finance appear as a major theme. Huck and Tom begin the story having recently gained “six thousand dollars apiece--all gold” (13). Huck comments on the physicality of the money, on the “sight” of the gold coins “piled up” (13), but the fortune is soon “put... out at interest”, fetching him “a dollar a day apiece all the year round” (13). By investing the money, Judge Thatcher places it into a wider system of economic inter-relationships, converting it from a physical pile of gold coins to an intangible number, generating interest. This early passage introduces in embryonic form many of the central problems of the novel. Huck’s fascination with the ‘sight’ of the money is immediately curtailed in the narrative by Judge Thatcher’s move to invest it; there is a quick transition from Huck’s personal perception to economic abstraction. Huck’s fortune links him to a wider system of economic activity, and while he seems mildly pleased with his newfound wealth, his discourse also reveals an underlying ambivalence: the dollar a day in interest is “more than a body could tell what to do with” (13). Huck’s relationship with the world of finance is often problematic,

and financial preoccupations seep into almost every facet of the novel. Judge Thatcher's economic activity is caricatured by Jim's "speculat'n", when his attempts to invest his money at interest and buy a wood-flat on credit results in bankruptcy (57). Even the religious preoccupations of southern society are open to economic interpretation, such as when Balum's Ass takes literally the preacher's admonishment that to "give to de po'" is to "len' to de Lord" (57). The imagery and terminology of 'speculat'n' dominate Huck's social world.

This early emphasis on economic activity directs us to examine the economic base of the frontier society along the Mississippi river. By the time *Huckleberry Finn* was composed, the geographic area surrounding the Mississippi River was experiencing an unprecedented period of economic growth driven largely by the lumber industry. During the late 1830s to early 1840s, when the novel is set,<sup>1</sup> this mighty economic engine was already developing. "There could hardly have been another instance", writes Charles Edward Russell, "where a commerce grew so swiftly to such colossal proportions...or where it played so important a part in determinative history" (10-11). The primary "agencies of the [western] settlement", according to Russell, "were the raft and the raftsman" (11). Log rafts enabled the "immense stands of white pine" in Wisconsin and Minnesota to travel down the larger tributaries of the Mississippi to local saw mills. (Anfinson 6-7). From here, the cut lumber could be assembled into large rafts, vessels which drifted with the Mississippi current to lumberyards downstream (Anfinson 7). These undertakings could be enormous: there is evidence for a raft in the early 20th century containing over 9 million board feet of lumber (Russell 335), and another with a surface area of approximately 391,500 square feet – almost seven football fields (Russell 334). Russell chronicles the growth of the industry from 1842, when "below

<sup>1</sup>The title page sets the novel as taking place "forty to fifty years ago." First published in 1884, this would place the events of the narrative in the period of 1834-1844.

the St. Croix there was hardly one mill that really deserved the name”, to the 1870s, when “135 saw mills between St. Paul and St. Louis” were in full operation (238). The growth of these saw mills had profound ramifications for the settlements along the Mississippi River: “[The Saw Mill] connected us by a chain of dollars with an expanding world...And the quarrel of its buzz-saws and snarl of its planers, toning the nerves of the whole community to a sense of importance, dulled the remote loneliness of the frontier” (Russell 96). The role of money as a link (or ‘chain’) to a wider community of economic relationships – something implied in the opening paragraphs of *Huckleberry Finn* – is made explicit here; the lumber industry also appears as a society-building force, something that dissolves the isolation of the remote western settlements and lends them social significance.

If *Huckleberry Finn* has a deep-rooted, if ambivalent, concern with money, and if lumber sawing and rafting is a primary economic force in the Mississippi River towns where the story takes place, what is the significance of Huck and Jim’s raft? Huck’s perspective of the raft is initially presented in economic terms. The first mention of a raft in the novel is Huck’s description of how “[t]he June rise used to be always luck” for him, since “as soon as that rise begins here comes...pieces of log rafts--sometimes a dozen logs together; so all you have to do is to catch them and sell them to the wood-yards and the sawmill” (43). A short while later, Huck and Pap find a section of log raft, and Huck criticizes his father for having to “shove right over to town and sell” instead of seeing “the day through, so as to catch more stuff”(45). Again, Huck views these rafts primarily as economic abstractions, as monetary equivalents, rather than as useful physical objects. His entrepreneurial spirit and appreciation of financial opportunity shows that, to a certain extent, he has accepted the capitalist ideals governing

the society around him.

However, his feelings towards the raft encompass a different set of attitudes as well. When Huck and Jim first discover the raft that will bear them down the Mississippi, Huck comments on the “nice pine planks” (61). This comment could signify an economic appraisal (the planks could bring a good price), but it also shows an appreciation of the raft’s physical usefulness. The statement indicates a return of Huck’s attention to concrete, specific objects, as opposed to economic abstractions; it is an appreciation of the raft as a raft. This appreciation introduces the other side of Huck’s attitude towards the raft and develops another perspective within the novel, one opposed to the commercial fixations of the river towns. If life in the town is dominated by ‘speculat’n’, life on the river is – at least on the surface – a completely different story. Once they have their own raft, Jim sets up a “wigwam”, or small wooden hut, to serve as a shelter (75). For the first time, the raft becomes a home, a shelter, rather than a source of revenue. During their journey down the river, the space on the raft becomes a kind of no-man’s land, outside the jurisdiction of social norms and mainstream values. Huck and Jim sleep during the day and run their raft at nights, and through this inversion of night and day the text offers a tantalizing conception of an inverted society, one that approaches a utopian state of nature: “[i]t was kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn’t ever feel like talking loud, and it warn’t often that we laughed--only a little kind of a low chuckle. We had mighty good weather as a general thing, and nothing ever happened to us at all--that night, nor the next, nor the next” (75). The syntactical repetition at the end of the sentence disrupts any fixed conception of time and creates a surreal, dream-like atmosphere. The raft is soon synonymous with being “free and safe” (134), a place both unfettered



and comfortably domestic. After escaping from the feuding Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, Huck and Jim decide that “there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” (134). This conception of the raft as a place of freedom from social limitations is confirmed by period sources as well. A raftsmen was on the “remote frontier line of the nation”, a place where a man could be “freed from the restraints of law, the gaze of his neighbors, and the habituated criticisms of a formal society” (Russell 105). His life “took him into a region of singular and almost surpassing beauty where...the solitude was of a suggestion solemnly regenerative, all the artifices of civilization being far away” (Russell 106). It is this ‘regenerative’ solitude that Huck and Jim briefly find.

However, there is a peculiar sort of paradox between these two different conceptions of the raft. On the one hand, it is a symbol of massive economic force, entrepreneurial spirit, and collective social development; on the other hand, it is a place outside the reaches of society, beyond ‘the artifices of civilization’, a virtual state of nature. This paradox is also an irreconcilable part of life on the raft. At various points, *Huckleberry Finn* critiques both social and anti-social tendencies. The novel loses no opportunity to satirize the conventions of society, whether through Jim’s ‘speculat’n’ or the comical depiction of the widow having to “tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals” before eating (14). However, the depiction of life outside of these conventions is no less problematic, in its own way. The life of Jim and Huck on the raft is in many ways parasitic on the society it attempts to escape and reliant on an external network of economic relationships. Their raft life does not transcend the economic order; it merely snubs a few of its rules. A central irony of their

situation is that the raft itself would not exist without the labor and capital of the lumber economy. This fact adds a hint of cynicism to the ‘natural’ lifestyle of Huck and Jim and raises doubts about its ultimate feasibility. This cynicism extends to the ‘borrowing’ practices of the two rafters as well. Huck casually notes how he would lift “a chicken that warn’t roosting comfortable” or “[borrow] a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind” (75). Huck and Jim’s humorous moral dilemma over these ‘borrowing’ practices again underscores their dependence on the economy they have distanced themselves from, and it also underscores their dependence on social ideologies to justify their activities. Huck and Jim negotiate an absurd compromise between Pap’s justification of theft and the widow’s strict prohibitions by purposefully avoiding only “crabapples and p’simmons” – two items they have no use for in the first place (75).

The competing claims of nature and society, self and community, economic denial and economic reality – all of which are symbolized by the lumber raft at various times – find their ultimate battleground within Huck Finn himself. Huck reaches a moral crisis once Jim is turned in as a runaway slave; he experiences a multitude of perspectives, riding a pendulum between the two sides of the conflict. He initially condemns the two “scoundrels” for betraying Jim “for forty dirty dollars”, implicitly scorning the idea that a runaway slave should be turned in for economic reasons (221). However, he is then troubled by a fear of “everlasting fire” for his role as an accomplice in Jim’s escape, feeling the pressure of the Christian ideology that he has generally rejected (222). The acceptance of this ideology, even temporarily, demonstrates the strength of Huck’s link to the social world, and it is noteworthy that his concerns here are also couched in economic terms: he berates himself for “stealing a poor old woman’s nigger” (222). We are

suddenly reminded that, to Huck, Jim is still a commodity: he is not a man, but an asset valued at eight hundred dollars belonging to another person (58). Ultimately, Huck makes the decision to side with Jim. However, he is not able to entirely reject the ideologies of southern slave society, only to (once again) negotiate a compromise with them by accepting their criticisms and acknowledging that he must “take up wickedness again” (222). He defies the conventional morality, but cannot reject its terms.

The ambivalence of *Huckleberry Finn* towards these dueling binaries contributes to an underlying cynicism within the novel. The social world, with all its hypocrisy, can never be entirely satisfactory; the ‘natural world’, with its utopian freedom, can never exist unsupported by a socio-economic base. In a certain sense, Huck Finn becomes the tragic victim of these competing philosophies. Just as he sacrifices his “old rags” and accepts the widow’s “new clothes” out of a desire to participate in Tom’s “band of robbers” (14), so he is continually torn between accepting and rejecting the social world around him. He can puncture the pretensions of society, but he also has a deep-rooted, pathetic longing to be included in certain social bonds. And even as he tries to reject the arguments of Christian/Southern culture, the ideological premises of that society have become hardwired into his nature. We know that as much as he intends to “light out for the Territory ahead of the rest” to avoid Aunt Sally’s attempts to “sivilize” him, he can never truly escape his emotional, ideological, and economic dependence on the social world (296). Like the lumber raft he rides for most of the story, and like the novel which bears his name, he participates in both sides of an irreconcilable divide.

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