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EDITOR’S NOTE

On behalf of the Editorial Board, it is my pleasure to present you with the 2011 volume of Idiom, an annual journal of exemplary scholarship in literary criticism written by undergraduate students at the University of Toronto.

The ratio between the amount of writing English students produce throughout their undergraduate careers and the number of venues in which they might showcase their written achievements is drastically disproportionate. Seldom are undergraduate essays seen beyond the eyes of professors, teaching assistants, and kind friends willing to proofread. Herein lies the perfect niche for Idiom, the only academic publication at University of Toronto dedicated to publishing the written work of talented English students deserving of exposure and readership.

In contrast to the past two years, during which Idiom welcomed literary criticism from all scholarly disciplines, this issue has defined the journal as a publication specific to courses offered by the Department of English. We hope this decision will further the formation of a community of English students at the University of Toronto—a community in which Idiom serves as the forum wherein ideas are discussed and texts are analyzed, allowing students to take part in a broader literary dialogue.

Idiom is currently in your hands thanks to the collective effort of dedicated and brilliant individuals. Primarily, the printing of this publication would not have been possible without our generous sponsors, and for the aesthetic appeal we are indebted to Shannon Garden-Smith. We heartily congratulate all of the authors whose work is included, and thank them for their effort and patience during the editing process. I would especially like to thank all members of the Editorial Board for their commitment and diligence—I am blessed to have worked with such a sharp and considerate team. Finally, this installment of Idiom would not be the same without our dedicated staff advisors, Professor Carol Percy and Dr. Vikki Visvis, who spent countless weeks editing and proofing drafts to ensure excellence. Their knowledge and advice
set a superior standard for future volumes and turned the publication process into an invaluable learning experience.

Stepping deep into the etymological territory of *idiom* and examining the Greek *idioma*, one can say that the objective of this journal parallels its eponymous definition: “to make one’s own.” The authors of these essays impose a critical eye upon a text, or set of texts, thereby making them their own. Indeed, the reading and editing done by the Editorial Board has allowed each piece to become our own as well. Whether using traditional or innovative techniques, each author has examined texts in fresh and enlightening ways, contributing to a greater dialogue of literary criticism. We welcome you, through your readership, to become an active participant.

Siobhan DaSilva, Editor-in-Chief
March 2011
SOCIAL SONGS: SOCIALIST POLITICS IN THE POETICS OF F. R. SCOTT AND A. M. KLEIN

Daniel Karasik

This essay compares the work of Canadian poets F. R. Scott and A. M. Klein by exploring the differing ways in which their socialist politics are given expression in their poems. A political motive, while it may serve as a useful impetus to writing a poem, may not in itself be enough to lead the poet to an evocation of the genuinely poetic, that which has the power to stir us most deeply. Through the analysis of two distinct poems, this essay develops the contention that it is Klein only who is able to transcend the momentariness of the political position from which he writes, employing a deeper, richer poetics.

Essay written for ENG 354.

I have always been interested in poetry, both as a reader and a writer of it, and have recently been interested in the craft- and community-oriented socialism of William Morris. Aside from the question of whether socialism is a viable political system, as a concept it seems to be a striking expression of basic human longings—to belong, to find meaningful work. To my mind, such interior territory is also the soil of poetry; this paper is my investigation of the ramifications of poetry and socialism sharing this kind of spiritual soil. I approached this paper the way I approach everything I write: in the spirit of exploration, of attempt. I wanted, in writing about poetry, to write as I would want my own poetry written about: carefully, searchingly.

It was a certain radical optimism, a belief in the basic goodness of the human spirit and in the sufficiency of nature to furnish the spiritual and material necessities of life, that gave the British Romantic poets of the nineteenth century, along with their near-contemporaries among the so-called Confederation poets in Canada (Archibald Lampman, Charles G. D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, among others), much of the matter and motive for their art. This optimism, qualified by political anger at the rapid intensifica-
tion of industrial capitalism to which the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries bore witness, found its development in the public sphere, both in Britain and in Canada, partly in the form of socialist thought, a political expression of spiritual discontent over the rapacity of modern social life. A direct effect of the rising legitimacy and the growing preponderance of the socialist worldview was the appearance of new works of literary art whose reason for existing was explicitly tied to socialism as a political cause. Not only did the writings of, for instance, William Morris in England and F. R. Scott in Canada reflect a political, historical situation (a claim one could reasonably defend with respect to any work of art), but these authors also appear to have sought to effect political change, to wake up the reader to a political reality, to stir her allegiances, however ambivalently. In this paper, I will address the means by which two contrasting Canadian modernist poets, F. R. Scott and A. M. Klein, engage with socialist themes in both the form and content of their poems “Mural” and “The Rocking Chair” respectively. I will develop the contention that in these particular examples it is Klein only who is able to transcend the momentariness of the political position from which he writes, employing a deeper, richer poetics. This finding suggests that a political motive, while it may serve as a useful impetus to writing a poem, may not in itself be enough to lead the poet to an evocation of the genuinely poetic, that which has the power to stir us most deeply.

F. R. Scott’s political and artistic commitments show him to have been interested in acting as an enabler, an agitator, a public leader. Not only was Scott co-founder with A. J. M. Smith of the McGill Fortnightly Review, an early hotbed of Canadian modernism;¹ he was also a key founding member of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, Canada’s first nationally significant socialist political party, serving eventually as its National Chairman. Also a practicing lawyer frequently in the public eye, in Scott we find the model of the poet as man of the world, or perhaps the man of the world as occasional poet, his artistry a kind of effluence, a spilling over, of the work that likely oc-

¹This is a laurel challenged by Brian Trehearne in his Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists, where he suggests that the Review was often less a “vehicle in which a number of brave young Modernists published their defiance of the Victorian literary scene” than a forum for sardonic undergraduate satire (Richards; Trehearne 233).
cupied the principal part of his time. It is tempting to see the man’s poetry as a commentary on that work and, more ambiguously, as an extension of it.

This impression is both confirmed and complicated by “Mural,” a poem that delimits in vivid detail the conditions of an imagined future or alternative world in which socialism as a comprehensive political system has taken hold; this world may be interpreted as either technological, communist utopia or sterile, totalitarian dystopia. This possible ambivalence, which seems genuinely to be a feature of the poem itself and not merely a judgment derived from indeterminate reading, precludes an interpretation of the poem as simple, simply tendentious agitprop. If the vision presented in “Mural” is a possible future, there is in the poem as much fear of that future as there is hunger for it. The poem opens with an image of abandonment: the time evoked is one “[w]hen shepherds cease to watch their flocks” (Scott line 1); the wisdom of the Psalmist, who designates the Judeo-Christian God as a benevolent and conscientious shepherd to the human flocks, is here apparently rendered obsolete. Here too is an ambivalence: have the flocks been abandoned to their doom, or have they rather become—still supposing, thanks to the strong echo of Psalm 23, those “flocks” to be figurative, to be human—self-sufficient, no longer needing divine guidance? The next two lines reveal that the flocks in question are, for the poem’s narrative purposes, indeed not human; they are rather quite literal: the word “shepherds,” the reader is given to understand, is meant to describe genuine pastoral rustics. However, like the “farmers” who appear in the poem’s third line, in the imagined world of the poem they have been torn from their traditional context, have abandoned their ancestral craft, in place of which they have occupied themselves with technological approaches to the goals of their abandoned work. The shepherds tend not sheep but “bacterial stocks” (2), practicing the husbandry of microorganisms; the farmers learn genetic engineering. Yet, the fruits of these mechanized labours are nevertheless “fresh and clean” (5); the archetypally stark and inhuman assembly line nevertheless produces “wormless fruits and vintaged wines” (12). The reader is left genuinely to wonder whether the “Eden air” (37) of this imagined world is laced with satire or is rather the pure air of a paradise earnestly wished for.

The impression of satire, or at any rate of less than perfect sincerity
on the poet’s part, is produced to some extent by the iambic tetrameter and regular AABBCC rhyme scheme that constitute the poem’s most conspicuous formal elements. Metrically and acoustically, “Mural” has much more in common with the nursery rhyme and the folk ballad than with the philosophical or political treatise, for which a fitter mode of expression could have been found in the more conversational, intellectually more sophisticated and varied iambic pentameter. The choice of a relatively unsophisticated metre, lacking the garnish of metrical substitutions (with the exceptions of the trochaic, triumphal “Then, on the Eden air, shall come” (37) and “Man shall arise from dialled feast” (51), both of which are moments of exaltation, annunciation), leads the adult reader, acquainted with irony, to question whether the poem is meant as a political address from an adult to other adults, or rather to highlight, through irony, the childishness of responding to political challenges with totalizing utopian solutions. The poem calls attention to the basic kinship between the political language of utopia and the lulling language of the nursery.

This interpretative indeterminacy in “Mural” goes deeper than its formal structure and has more unsettling implications, especially and emblematically in the question of vegetarianism. The imagined world of Scott’s poem is one where, as in the biblical Eden, “all the natural creatures roam / As pets within their zoo-like home” (31-2); man will eat “without the slaughter of a beast” (52), leaving his conscience “smooth as metal plate” (53), privileging him with a “stainless state” (54) and “bloodless background” (55). The argument from vegetarianism seems, on the surface, one of the few unqualified blessings of the reformed society Scott presents. Yet there remains a dark ambivalence here, in this case an ambivalence one side of which is constituted by what Scott omits. A clue is found in the poem’s final couplet, “All violence streamlined into zeal / For one colossal commonweal” (57-8). The violence here alluded to may well be the violence of pre-utopian life, when socialism still has yet to nullify the social inequalities that are the ostensible cause of violence; however, it may also nod towards the violence on which the socialist paradise is founded. A dark undercurrent of socialist thought, from the urban, technologically oriented socialism of Marx to the agrarian, Edenic, retrogressive socialism of William Morris, is the consistent assumption that the
current social order, industrial capitalism, is radically entrenched and will not be uprooted by anything less than violent revolution. Morris’ romantic and quite beautiful 1890 novella *News From Nowhere* parallels “Mural” insofar as both are works of art where the development of a political message or question is distinctly prior to the investigation of any more individual human concern; both lead the reader on a tour of a charming future society in which all work is pleasurable, all human need provided for, only to reveal that the formation of this ideal state has been accomplished through an extended period of bloodshed and reconstruction, which is cast by the author in noble hues. This violence is the flip side of the optimism inherent in the Romantic or socialist position, this the critical lie of omission, wherever it is omitted; and that it is omitted in “Mural,” with no alternative means of social change suggested, determines nothing, but provides one more reason for the reader to engage with the poem in an indeterminate way.

I contend that this indeterminacy ultimately does more to hold the reader at a distance than, on any essential level, to draw her in. The deep ambiguities of “Mural” create interest, but the limit of that interest is political. In occupying the reader with questions of interpretation, and particularly with the interpretation of a political fact, the poem ensures that the reader’s response is most likely to be primarily an intellectual one, not one that is deeply felt, that is visceral: the poem exempts itself from the class of non- or less-than-discursive experience in which instrumental music has pride of place. The tacit assumption is that the reader’s highest sphere of engagement, the questions and concerns for the addressing of which the reader turns to poetry and looks to art, is that of social organization—which is essentially political—and not more profoundly emotional or spiritual in nature. The limit of this poem is also the limit of the political system it propounds, and perhaps of any political system: it cannot provide a meaningful response to the problems of love, loss, suffering, desire, and death that preoccupy the human spirit. To reconcile the terms of these problems one turns to literature or religion; and so in discussing a poem, it may not be altogether unfair to fault that poem for stopping short of providing insight or reflection on the matters about which such insight can be found, outside of poetry secular or sacred, few places else.
A. M. Klein’s “The Rocking Chair” takes a different, more oblique approach to socialist themes. It may even seem initially not to be a poem representative of socialist thought at all. Klein’s aims in “The Rocking Chair,” seeking after what he describes in a letter to fellow poet Karl Shapiro as “ancient virtues” (Bennett and Brown 463), transcendent goods preserved and transmitted through the medium of folk culture, seem broadly humanistic. Critic D. M. R. Bentley, however, astutely suggests that Klein’s humanism is consonant with, and could well find a political extrapolation in, socialism: Bentley speaks of Klein’s “humanist (and socialistic) commitment to engaging all of us one with another, and with mankind as a whole” (Brenner; Bentley 56). This evocation of a fundamental equality among all people, obliquely approached, as I have mentioned, in a poem like “The Rocking Chair,” is reckoning not with the political trappings of socialism but with the underlying spiritual conditions that make socialism attractive to those who long for its widespread institution. Community, equality, a sense of belonging to instead of being alienated from a culture are among the motive forces that lend socialism its power to attract, and these are also the objects of Klein’s poetic gaze in “The Rocking Chair.”

“The Rocking Chair” is largely occupied with the description of the eponymous object; the poem’s first three stanzas begin with the word “It,” an “It” the referent of which the poet assumes we can deduce. This assumption, the basic faith in the reader indicated here, is emblematic of the formal and thematic complexity of Klein’s poem as a whole. Formally, the poem is characterized by an intricately wrought iambic pentameter, with an alexandrine or near-alexandrine line concluding each eight-line stanza, and an ABABCCDCD rhyme scheme, though near- and half-rhymes abound (“Quebec”/“clock” and “own”/“pins” (Klein lines 2, 4; 17, 19)). The rocking chair is a fertile metonym for tradition, continuity, a non-urban way of life with its own pace; indeed, the metonym is also a metronome, “rival[ing], in its cage, the mere stuttering clock” (4) to whose “time, the evenings are rolled away” (5). The development of this figure soon turns anthropomorphic: the chair has “a character of its own” (17) is “alive” (20), “individual” (20), “no less / an identity than those about it” (21). It is, of course, a symbol, but also one that is productive of a kind of double music: the poem’s music and its own. The chair is “like some
Anjou ballad, all refrain” (29) whose “music moves” (32) as it does; it is a rich symbol, overflowing with content for those who share its cultural context (albeit a context, French Canadian and presumably Catholic, that Klein himself interestingly does not share). The chair’s symbolic richness also derives from the fact that it stimulates the writing of poetry, the birthing of sophisticated song, namely Klein’s, a kind of song that contrasts sharply with its own.

This contrast obliges us to recognize that the poem we are reading is not, in the way the rocking chair itself is, an artifact of the described culture but the commentary of an outsider looking in; and we, therefore, perceive that there is a political quality to this looking. The sense of longing evoked for the way of life depicted in “The Rocking Chair” suggests that Klein is likely interested, perhaps deeply, in discovering alternatives to the isolation and mass forgetting of urban, industrial life. Socialism, or the rural communitarianism that “The Rocking Chair” describes, is one possible alternative; it is an alternative imbued by the poem with a sort of rosy glow; but that glow is qualified implicitly—that is, Klein stops short of apotheosizing the chair—by the complexity of the poem’s metrics and figurative language. The “literary” quality of the poem, its delight in form and figure, the playful surprises of its irregular enjambment, at every turn remind the reader that she is reading a poem and not a political tract given poetic form. It, therefore, asks her to engage with the writing in a way that has not merely the character of a referendum—that does not simply ask her to agree or disagree with a position, political or otherwise—but that encourages a varied, equally complex response to the pleasure of the language, the idealized vision of Quebecois folk culture (“this static folk” (25)), and the bittersweet recognition—here too is a kind of poetics of omission—that this traditional way of life might be irretrievably lost, or might never even have existed at all, in the purity of Klein’s evocation of it. Never does Klein’s complexity in “The Rocking Chair” manifest in abstruse diction or a self-conscious allusiveness; never does it seem to be “for its own sake”: it is always, it seems to me, employed for the sake of making an intellectually and poetically vigorous approach to a political question that is ultimately an individual, a spiritual question, the question of how one should live and live among others in the modern world.
It is a question that obviously preoccupies both Scott and Klein, for both the answer tends towards socialism, whether a technological Marxism or a traditional, communitarian ideal closer to the thinking of William Morris. Where Klein succeeds beyond Scott, to my mind, is in refusing to reduce poetry to that question, recognizing that no political idea can live as song unless transformed by inspiration. And inspiration necessarily complicates; what was intended is not exactly what results, and yet is poetry. Far be it for me to suggest that Scott’s “Mural” is devoid of complexity or complication, but I submit that that complexity is finally political more than poetic, social more than individual, about the state more than the heart, and by these priorities impoverished. Klein, working from similarly political subject matter, uses that matter instrumentally as a means of shedding light on those facets of human experience that are deepest and most primordial.

WORKS CITED


A ROSE AMONG CARROTS: READING METAPHOR IN TROLLOPE

Truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions.
—Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense”

Matthew Steinberg

Since metonymy is the device usually employed in the Victorian novel to achieve reality, does the use of metaphor in *Barchester Towers* to describe Madame Neroni undermine the story’s realism? This essay examines how Anthony Trollope’s use of metaphor acts upon the reader in order to create a character more vivid than a prosaic mode of description would allow. Additionally, Madame Neroni’s personal use of metaphor demonstrates how a fantastical character can be generated through performative utterances. Since metaphor relies on the reader to make symbolic connections in his or her own imagination, the metaphoric mode relies on a confidence in Trollope and in the reading practice of his novel. Essay written for ENG 325.

My own background in English literature falls on either side of the Victorian period—predominantly sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers as well as modernist texts. The close reading assignment that resulted in this essay was a great blessing, in many respects, because it forced me to examine microscopically a style of writing with which I was not familiar and for which I had no real predilection. Along with the other members of the Stanhope family, Madame Neroni seems to be a drastically different character from anyone else in Barchester Towers. Using theoretical material from class, along with my philosophical background, I set out to determine how the use of metaphor could possibly enhance the realism of the Victorian novel.

In his autobiography, Anthony Trollope describes the two kinds of confidences that a reader must have in the author: a confidence in facts and a confidence in vision—“[One confidence] tells you accurately what has been. The other suggests to you what may, or perhaps what must have been,
or what ought to have been. The former requires simple faith. The latter calls upon you to judge for yourself, and form your own conclusions” (129). On the next page, Trollope goes on to claim: “[I have] always written the exact truth as I saw it; and I have, I think, drawn my pictures correctly” (130). With this claim of truthfulness in mind, I would like to explore the use of metaphor in Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* as it is employed in the description of Madame Neroni as well as the metaphors employed by the character herself. The use of metaphoric language requires a confidence in the vision that Trollope outlines for his readers. However, does this vision problematically detract the reader’s confidence in the facts that Trollope so adamantly asserts he provides in the drawing of his pictures? I will argue that the use of metaphor as it relates to Madame Neroni’s character creates a vividly factual representation of a fantastical literary creature that, in turn, reinforces the reader’s confidence in both the vision of the narrative voice and the facts provided by the narrator.

In his article “The metaphoric and metonymic poles,” Roman Jakobson claims that metaphor and poetry characterize the schools of Romanticism and symbolism, while metonymy defines the realist mode. Metaphor relies on a relationship of similarity between two distinct terms. Moreover, it is only by being placed in a shared narrative context that otherwise different terms can form this relationship. Jakobson explains this principle as follows: “Similarity in meaning connects the symbols of a metala-""
as “[a] powerful spider that made wondrous webs, and could in no way live without catching flies” (Trollope 270), she is not, in fact, an arachnid, but rather a woman who constructs plots to capture men. The narrator’s use of metaphor to describe Madame Neroni creates the rich image of a spider-woman: “[S]he has no use for the victims when caught. She could not eat them matrimonially, as the young lady-spiders do whose webs are most frequently of their mothers’ weaving. Nor could she devour them by any escapade of a less legitimate description” (270). There is nothing necessarily similar between Madame Neroni and a spider, but through the narrator’s construction of a metaphoric image, the reader is invited to create, by way of a newfound similarity, a fantastical creature that only exists in his or her mind.

Later in the same scene the narrator suddenly transforms Madame Neroni, previously (or perhaps still) a spider, into a young boy who is tormenting a beetle on a stick: “Mr. Slope was madly in love, but hardly knew it. The signora spitted him, as a boy does a cockchafer on a cork, that she might enjoy the energetic agony of his gyrations. And she knew very well what she was doing” (271). Although the narrator employs a simile rather than a metaphor, the reader connects two dissimilar objects, and renders them similar in the same process as the one utilized by the classic metaphoric mode. Not only does this passage reassert the image of Mr. Slope as an entrapped inferior insect—once a fly and now a beetle—but it also demonstrates the power that the sadistic Madame Neroni has over her male captives, first as a calculating spider and then as a playful boy. The cogent images that are brought to life by these metaphors paint a much more informative and vivid depiction of Madame Neroni than the more prosaic phrasing used earlier in the scene. For example, the narrator states of Madame Neroni that “it was necessary to her to have some man at her feet. It was the one customary excitement of her life. She delighted in the exercise of power which this gave her” (271). The facts of Madame Neroni’s life are catalogued for the reader, but she does not come to life as energetically as she did in the previous sketches. The reason that the prosaic description fails to ignite the reader’s imagination lies in the very fact that it does not rely upon the reader’s imagination to construct the image; there is no imaginative labor involved.

The narrator continues to metamorphosize both Madame Neroni and Mr. Slope through metaphor, turning them into objects that are meant to guide the reader’s judgment. It is not accidental that the narrator describes the physical (and
implicitly psychological) disparity between the two by saying that “[h]er hand in his looked like a rose lying among carrots, and when he kissed it he looked as a cow might do on finding such a flower among her food,” or, similarly, that “[s]he was graceful as a couchant goddess, and, moreover, as self-possessed as Venus must have been when courting Adonis” (272). Madame Neroni is constructed literally, out of component parts, particularly from images that are sublime: a rose, a reclining (of course!) deity, and, finally, the goddess of beauty and love herself. These images relate the character to classical symbols, such as the rose, and equate her with figures from classical mythology. In the reader’s mind she becomes a figure of significance that is as eternal and extraordinary as the objects with which she has been brought into relationship. Conversely, Mr. Slope becomes a carrot and a cow, two terms that are linked by their ordinariness and their alliterative correspondence. A list of facts describing why Madame Neroni is remarkable and why Mr. Slope is plain cannot fully articulate the disparity between the two characters; only metaphor can illustrate the full impact of the narrator’s project, which is to navigate the reader towards a value judgment of the characters. It is in this manner that metaphors become performative utterances, which influence the reader’s assessment of the characters.

During the course of the novel, the force of the metaphor is not directed exclusively at the reader; the character of Madam Neroni also uses metaphor to articulate thoughts and to affect other characters. When a metaphor is verbally employed by one of the characters, the metaphor’s recipient is subjected to the cognitive process wherein parallels are drawn between two concepts in the reader’s mind. Furthermore, the utterance that constructs the metaphor is effective solely on the basis of the sender’s choice of words. Madame Neroni uses this rhetorical power on Mr. Slope while describing the fate of her written correspondence: “‘At any rate, I don’t throw them into a waste-paper basket. If destruction is their doomed lot, they perish worthily, and are burnt on a pyre, as Dido was of old. With a steel pen struck through them, of course,’ said she, ‘to make the simile more complete’” (272). By drawing a similarity between Dido’s self-immolation and her letters, Madam Neroni hopes not only to impart the tragic implications of her letters’ demise (love letters, if the Dido

1For a comprehensive study on the symbol of the rose, see Barbara Seward’s *The Symbolic Rose.*
reference is to be given its full weight), but also to fill Mr. Slope with a sense of her own gravitas and affect the way that he envisions her; she makes it very clear through her language that she is a rose among his carrots. Her own self-reflective statement about completing the simile only strengthens the self-aggrandizing implications of the utterance. It is as if she reveals her hand of cards to her partner and says, “I know what I am doing and I am not afraid to show you how I am doing it.” Part of what makes Madame Neroni a fantastical character is that she, much like the narrator, can generate language in a way that the novel’s more ordinary characters cannot. She can “make the simile more complete” because she is an exotic character who, throughout the novel, is able to generate action through her language; she not only generates metaphor but, as a character, is also generated through the narrator’s metaphors.

As Madam Neroni spins out her metaphors and creates a web of language and action, the narrator also spins out the metaphors that are used to describe Madame Neroni. Her descriptions continue to grow and spread outward from their point of origin. All of the action between Mr. Slope and Madame Neroni takes place in front of the ominous backdrop that the narrator painted earlier of the spider and the trapped fly, along with the boy and the pinned beetle. We are reintroduced to the beetle when we are told that “[a]ll this the signora understood, and felt much interest as she saw her cockchafer whirl round upon her pin” (275). The reader is reminded of the spider’s looming presence when the spider-woman image is again brought to the foreground during Mr. Slope’s confession of love: “He caught her hand and devoured it with kisses. Now she did not draw it from him, but sat there as he kissed it, looking at him with her great eyes, just as a great spider would look at a great fly that was quite securely caught” (278). The reader is forced to revisit the connective structures that were formed the first time that the spider/fly and the boy/beetle metaphors were employed, and in the process discovers that neither the characters nor the reader ever truly escaped Madame Neroni’s first metaphoric web.

Unlike metonymic descriptions that rely on contiguous relationships, metaphoric descriptions and statements rely on the receiver’s imagination to connect the linguistic symbols through their contingent similarities to each
other. After making this connection, the imagination then erases the connect-

ive structures, leading to a process that Jacques Derrida describes in his work

on metaphor in philosophy: “Simultaneously the first meaning and the first

displacement are […] forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed, and it

is taken for the proper meaning” (211). Therefore, in Derridean terminol-

ogy, once the metaphor is employed, it “hides and is hidden.” That is, in the

reader’s imagination, Madame Neroni is no longer merely spider-like; she liter-

ally becomes a spider in the same way that Mr. Slope literally becomes a fly.

The two distinct concepts employed by the metaphor are no longer symbols

but are, rather, facts of the narrative. With these facts in mind (since they were

connected and constructed in the reader’s mind anyway), the reader retains a

confidence in both the facts and the vision presented by the narrator. As such,

Trollope has successfully “written the exact truth as [he] saw it,” vividly draw-

ing the portrait of a fantastical character such as Madame Neroni—a character

who can only exist in the imagination.

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In his study of Melville’s story “Benito Cereno,” Nnolim describes two camps of scholarship: one that sees the slaves as a force of evil pitted against the pure good of Delano and Cereno, and another that reads the revolt as a “quest for human dignity and freedom” (Nnolim x). The former is a more obviously naïve interpretation, which ignores significant portions of Melville’s construction. However, the latter also seems to rob the story of much of its ambiguity, and necessarily struggles with its reading of the violent content of the mutiny. Much of the difficulty in reading “Benito Cereno” lies in its excess symbolism, so that no single reading seems to unify Melville’s intent. Sundquist’s study of the story as a sort of grotesque masquerade of the
artifice of master/slave relations presents us with this ambiguity more clearly by claiming that Melville, in his characterization of Babo, “pushed to the limit his readers’ capacity to discriminate between just political resistance and macabre terror—or rather to see their necessary fusion” (176). The difficulty in reading “Benito Cereno” is eased somewhat when we see the dualistic nature of its characters and symbols: they represent two things at once. The just political revolt is fused to acts of systematic violence in the same way the ship as a royal vessel is bound to its image as a theatre for abdicated command. Through a reading based on Hobbesian political principles, we can interpret the story as an exposure of the arbitrary nature of power, which does away with any appeal to a natural racial hierarchy but which simultaneously liberates and condemns the slaves. By doing away with this artifice of power, Melville unmask a natural equality, but one that is tempered by an ultimately pessimistic view of the bestial nature at the base of man, threatening to thrust itself up from below like the Malay pirates of Delano’s imagination.

At the bottom of Hobbes’ political theory in *Leviathan* is the idea of a sweeping, radical equality of all mankind, wherein the “weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger as himself” (Hobbes 82). And so no individual in the play for power or delectation is safe. From this assessment we can extrapolate that any dependence on supposedly natural hierarchies is necessarily based on a fallacy: our nature and social system are fundamentally un-hierarchal. By levelling the constructions of society, Hobbes opens up a yawning structural error in human relations:

> From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end [...] endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another. (83)

The basic model for human relations is this constant struggle, which is born out of equality. In the trial transcripts at the end of the story, we see that
Babo alludes to this equality in the ritual of the identification of the master’s skeleton: “The negro Babo took by succession each Spaniard forward, and asked him whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white’s [...] each Spaniard covered his face” (Melville 245). The artifice of the flesh is revealed to the Spanish, who cannot or do not wish to understand the implications of Babo’s exhibition. The slaves have turned the natural hierarchy on its head, and so unmasked its arbitrary nature. As Babo exposes the white bones, he undermines the legitimacy of the Spanish rule, revealing that underneath the flesh they are all the same and ultimately destabilizing the power structure.

A sense of equality is thus inaugurated by Melville’s non-discriminatory use of animal images. While the slaves are certainly described in animalistic terms—intermittently wolves, does, lions—the white crew is also organized under this metaphor. Benito Cereno is described as a “somnambulist” (173), a term reminiscent of the description of the white “noddy” just a few pages earlier, “a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, somnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea” (164). One white crewmember, “an old Barcelona tar” (196), is thought by Delano to be like a grizzly bear, who “instead of growling and biting, should simper and cast sheep’s eyes” (197). The ever oblivious Delano makes assumptions of a racial hierarchy while at the same time animalizing the slaves when he asks Don Benito if he has appointed the white crew as “shepherds to [his] flock of black sheep” (180). It is safe to assume the opposite of the greater part of Delano’s thoughts and assertions, and certainly here, as much as anywhere else, he is missing some all-important piece of the picture. When he sees a slave woman sleeping “like a doe in the shade of a woodland rock” as her “wide-awake fawn” attempts to breastfeeding, he becomes pleased and thinks with a smile: “There’s naked nature, now; pure tenderness and love” (198).

No statement could be further off the mark from the narrative’s assertions. The slave women, “unsophisticated as leopards; loving as doves,” are revealed later to have had a desire to torture to death “instead of simply killing, the Spaniards slain by command of the negro Babo” (252). The naïveté of Delano’s vision of “naked nature” is brought forward in Melville’s symbology.
Sundquist correctly sees the ship as a theatre in which the parasitic dialectic of slavery is played out. Babo, in his “elaborate minstrel charade” (Sundquist 154), is the primary subversive. Melville’s language suggests this theatricality throughout the story while Babo’s plot is impossible to separate from performance. One of the crew’s wealthy passengers is required to wear a costume of an “unconfined frock [...] of coarse woollen” over a garment of “what seemed the finest linen” (Melville 189). Additionally, Don Benito’s scabbard is described as “artificially stiffened” as if for use as a prop (258). Furthermore, the ship is rendered through Delano’s thoughts as containing a “living spectacle” that opens up upon its “sudden and complete disclosure” (166). Again, this is far from reality, as the disclosure of the ship is anything but sudden and complete. The opposite is true; the ship refuses to disclose anything right away as part of its participation in a masquerade of power. Within this concept of theatricality, the idea of the mask and of unmasking is central to the story’s assertions about human nature.

Before we begin to trace these images, it may be necessary to make some remarks on what has been termed the simultaneity of the story. In his analysis, Sundquist asserts that in “Benito Cereno,” Melville shows an awareness of antebellum tendencies in both proslavery and abolitionist rhetoric to “collapse history into timeless images of terror and damnation” (147). Each faction saw the other as existing simultaneously in the present with the horrors of the past. Thus, the expulsion of the Jews, the butchering of the Moors, and the Inquisition become acts that both extend in direct connection with one another and exist in a limbo of sustained evil in the present. Melville exploits this rhetorical trick through his narrative, which “replicates a crisis in temporality in which past, present and future, as in Delano’s moment of lucid perception, seem one” (143). This grounds the duality of Melville’s symbolic vocabulary, which expresses its meanings simultaneously. The San Domingo’s “true character” is a Spanish merchantman with a cargo of slaves, while, at the same time, it is also a frigate of the king’s navy, preserving “signs of a former state” as much as it is a slave-governed ship in the present tense narrative (164). The effect of Babo’s plot is to mask the ship with the appearance of the supposed hierarchy. Underneath the ship’s appearance as a slave ship is its original reality.
as a war ship. Running underneath the stage of the story, then, is the Hobbesian original state of war where “every man is enemy to every man” (Hobbes 84).

There are many images linked to the nodal point of the mask, all pointing towards what is below the deception at the true picture of humanity. The general picture is that of the mask of drama over reality, of the “appearance of despotic command” and its actual functional existence hidden beneath (Melville 258). However, a number of other instances are included, the first being the description of the stern-piece. The piece is carved with mythological and symbolic images, the central scene being a “dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked” (164). This carved image foreshadows the posture of Delano grappling with Babo and Benito Cereno on the Bachelor’s Delight, where he uses his right foot to “ground the prostrate negro” (232). Underneath the mask is a satyr, a combination of a man and an animal. We see similar hybrids throughout the story: the elderly slaves are described as “sphinx-like” (166) in reference to their calmness in the midst of the disarray of the ship, and in speaking to the sailor, who is earlier compared to a grizzly bear, Delano despairs of “getting into unembarrassed talk with such a centaur” (197). This scene presents a riddle that can be solved under a Hobbesian schema. Man is both human and bestial: he operates simultaneously on the plains of complex human principles and political structures as well as the animal struggle for survival. The idea of the mask itself is a superficial attempt at the unification of these conflicting aspects of human nature.

When the mask comes off, we invariably see this portrait of ambiguity. The motif appears again in the image of the ship’s figurehead, which is wrapped in a canvas, assumedly because it is under repair or because someone wanted to “decently hide its decay” (165). Beyond this mask, however, are the skeletal remains of the slave’s legal owner. The canvas acts as both a mask and burial shroud; it is something designed to hide death or, more specifically, to hide the acts of savage violence that have occurred on the ship. This grotesque parody of burial hides away the energies of violence and struggle. The naked white bones of Alexandro Aranda, which, as Babo shows us, could really be
anybody’s bones, stand in for the “proper figure-head” of Christopher Colum-
bus and so replace the symbolic leader or guiding principle of the theatre of
power (245). We are not offered white European benevolence and racial hierar-
chy, but the base of humanity—where all men are the same, and so equal, and
so enemies.

So the flesh, too, is artifice and a mask. Babo understands this when
he skins his master, proving that his master relied on the mask of his skin for
his assumedly natural power. Delano remarks to Cereno that Atufal has a
“royal spirit in him” (183). Babo takes the liberty to agree, claiming that Atufal
was once a king in Africa while Babo was a slave even to black men. This
universalizes the system of power, which is artifice everywhere: “A black man’s
slave was Babo, who now is the white’s” (183). Babo was the slave to both
black and white men, and so sees that there is no difference. He destroys the
system through his orchestrations, becoming both Atufal’s and Benito’s master.
At the same time, he recognizes the precariousness of his own position. The
chalked insignia “Follow your Leader” represents a sort of shorthand for the
transference of power: one revolts against one’s leader, then “the invader again
is in the like danger of another,” and so follows him (Hobbes 83).

The slave revolt has knowledge of this artifice. They participate in the
masquerade of master/slave relationships, but know that it is only play, know
that the only reality is superior muscular strength or secret machination. Atufal
wears heavy chains “though in a moment the chains could be dropped” (Mel-
ville 248). Delano’s complete comprehension occurs when he sees Babo trying
to murder Don Benito, having a vision of the slaves “with mask torn away,
flourishing hatchets and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt” (233). This is one
of Delano’s only real insights, but it does not penetrate quite deep enough. As
he makes this realization, he withdraws his hold on Don Benito in a gesture of
“infinite pity” and in almost the same move “smote Babo’s hand down, but his
own heart smote him harder” (233). In effect, he is still privileging the natural
hierarchy. All that is being unmasked is Delano’s naïve, paternalistic attitude to
the slaves, whom he characterizes as all being set to some pleasant tune and as
“too stupid” to operate the mechanisms of revolt that he only vaguely per-
ceives to be active (201). In fact, one of the main narrative functions Delano
serves is the voicing of superficial assertions based on race, feebly leaning on the imaginary structures of power in which he is of uncontested dominant “species” (201). He imagines that the whites are the “shrewder race,” and can hardly see them wanting to “apostatize from his very species” in leaguing with the slaves (212). The black slaves, by contrast, are pleasantly bound to “the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind,” and attach themselves to their masters based on their “indisputable” inferiority (212). This statement very easily loops back onto Delano himself, as within the limits of his consciousness, he is content with his imagined superiority. Only the bluntest gestures of insubordinate violence succeed in destabilizing the fictional hierarchy, and even then do not dislodge the notion completely.

Melville also expends energy in describing the ship’s deterioration or, more accurately, its return to nature. As he boards it, the ship seems to Delano like a “shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave” (166). This return to the deep is denoted in the intrusion of nature onto the ship, signalled by the “dark festoons of sea grass” sweeping over the tarnished name of the ship and the barnacles that adhere to the bottom (165). Elsewhere, Delano stands on the quarter gallery, contemplating the king’s officers that once stood at the same spot; he feels like someone alone on a prairie, and so watches the accumulated grass trail behind the ship and stares at the balustrade, which, “partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste” (199). This balustrade gives way, and Delano almost falls into the sea to which the ship itself is in the process of returning. Of course, on one level the ship’s corrosion mirrors the disintegration of the Spanish empire and of old European despotism. Sundquist makes note of this implication, and adds the level of the master/slave relation to it. However, this destruction also signals a return. We are made to see the violence of the revolt and the disintegration of the ship as having a direct correlation, and so we connect the ideas of violent struggle with a return to “the deep,” for which we can substitute the base or the bottom of human nature. Because all are aboard the same ship, its deterioration acts as a levelling process, wherein the further the struggle progresses, the more the artifice crumbles and the closer all involved get to approaching the
deep, to returning to their origins.

We see a similar process in the former officer quarters where since their death or in their being stripped of their positions through the revolt, “all the partionings had been thrown down, and the whole interior converted into one spacious marine hall” (210). Sundquist focuses his analysis on the so-called “play of the barber,” which takes place in this levelled space, and reveals it as a densely layered, minutely choreographed scene where Babo seems to revel in straining the appearance of power. Here, the threat of forceful abdication comes closest to the surface. The shaving scene mirrors, or reconstructs, the defleshing of the Alexandro Aranda but only in the form of a rehearsal. The content of Babo’s actions, though, is the same. In both cases he unmask the body. In one case, he does so literally; in the other case, he does so through the clear exposure of its potentiality.

During this “play of the barber,” Don Benito in his agitation accidentally unfurls the flag of Spain off the chair and onto the floor, something Delano immediately notes: “‘The castle and the lion,’ exclaimed Captain Delano—‘Why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. It’s well it’s only I, and not the King, that sees this’” (214). He directs a joke towards Babo, born out of his previously stated assumption that the slaves love bright colours and sights in general, stating it is “all one, I suppose, so the colors be gay”; this joke tickles Babo somewhat (214). Babo is, of course, laughing at the expense of Delano’s belief that matters of power and politics are so external to the slaves’ consciousness that they would not understand the meaning behind a flag. But the symbols on the flag of Spain provide a neat segue into Melville’s project. The castle and the lion are perfectly positioned on the general symbol of national representation. By flying them on the flag, there seems to be some tacit admission of the simultaneity of human nature, its political constructions and brute aggression. Melville picks up on this, and reveals it in a way that forces us to dwell on the comparison between the two symbols at the very peak of the tensions of power in the narrative. It is obviously not an accident that he describes the colour behind the castle as “blood-red” (214). If Delano were
able to view the flag as a pure image, as he accuses Babo of doing, he may have noticed this implication himself.

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ENDURING LOVE: THE ROLE OF NATURE IN PRESERVING FAMILY BONDS IN BALLADS BY MERWIN AND WORDSWORTH

Mathura Sabanayagam

This essay examines the symbolism of natural landscape in two ballads: W. S. Merwin’s “Ballad of John Cable and Three Gentlemen” and William Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven.” While Merwin’s poem centres on the dynamic forms of transformation in the natural world and how they mirror the journey of human existence, Wordsworth’s, in contrast, uses a singular natural setting to unite the worlds of life and death, in turn suggesting the circular continuity of existence. Both poems ultimately come to similar conclusions regarding death: far from diminishing the strength of family bonds built lovingly over a lifetime, death augments and affirms their power. Essay written for ENG 201.

For me, the process of both reading and writing about poetry has always been intensely personal. The two ballads I chose to discuss had strong emotional resonances for me and my family; having recently suffered the loss of one of my favourite uncles, I was able to identify clearly with the poets’ messages about the meanings of death, the possibility of rebirth, and the permanence of family bonds across the passage of time. What I found especially moving was each poem’s ability to unite the trauma of death with the simple, beautiful, and symbolically rich rhythms of the natural world, presenting a powerful means of psychologically grappling with loss.

Landscape often plays a critical role in shaping meaning within a poem. Natural spaces in particular carry great symbolic importance, whether they serve to represent human oneness with the earth or to lament the destructive forces of civilization. W. S. Merwin’s “Ballad of John Cable and Three Gentlemen” and William Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven” are both poems in which nature becomes deeply intertwined with facets of human existence.
Each poem centres thematically on a common question regarding the nature of death and the afterlife: given the fleeting nature of existence and the sheer pervasiveness of mortality within the human consciousness, how can we preserve family relationships across the diminishing boundaries of time? Does death represent the complete erasure of family bonds built lovingly over a lifetime? Drawing upon natural imagery, Merwin and Wordsworth both construct newly imagined visions of death and engage the critical issues of what it represents for the individual, for the family, and for humanity as a whole.

The title character of Merwin’s “Battle of John Cable” partakes in a symbolic confrontation with death, embodied in the figures of “three dark gentlemen” (Merwin line 14). Despite Cable’s repeated refusals to leave behind his earthly life, the three men eventually convince him to “come and keep company as far as the far side”—that is, to join them in the afterlife (86). In “We Are Seven,” the adult speaker recounts a conversation that he had with a young child, the little Maid. Though he repeatedly tells her that her family consists of only five children (Wordsworth line 36), as two of her siblings have already died, the Maid claims that together, she and her siblings still form a group of seven children (15, 30, 64, 68)—an indication of the power of familial love to transcend human mortality. Death, in Merwin’s poem, serves as a powerful regenerative force, one which diminishes family bonds in a spatial sense but reinforces them on a spiritual level. In contrast, Wordsworth portrays death as a means of both physical and spiritual unity within the family.

As is typical of the ballad form, both poems are structured around dialogue. In Merwin’s poem, dialogue serves a central narrative function; it is through the argumentative structure of the poem that Merwin illustrates the tensions of Cable’s relationship with his family. When Cable justifies his refusal to accompany the gentlemen, he does so by referring to the lingering commitments he has to his family. His responsibilities include “plowing” his sister’s “fallow” (Merwin 31, 33), “consoling” his “grieving” wife (38, 40), and comforting his mother who “cries all afternoon” (48). The overwhelmingly bleak diction reveals the grudgingly repetitive nature of Cable’s domestic life. Furthermore, every defining facet of Cable’s life is tied to a distinct physical setting; his sister is connected to the “fallow,” his mother to a place “up shore”
(47), and his own body to “the hollow Stream of Friday,” where it will eventually be buried (59). In identifying each family member with a unique setting, Merwin emphasizes the physical divisions between them, and he, in turn, suggests a sense of emotional distance.

The weakness of Cable’s familial connections further emerges through the argumentative structure of the dialogue. Each appeal Cable makes to return to his sister, wife, and mother is followed by an interjection from the three men; the repetition of the words “but Cable said” (25, 45, 53) and “they said” (33, 41, 49) powerfully disrupts the continuity of the poem’s narrative structure and points to the fragmented nature of Cable’s relationships. The natural landscape thus serves as both a physical and a psychological barrier to familial unity; its symbolism combines with the divisive effects of dialogue structure to diminish the strength of Cable’s family bonds during his mortal lifetime.

While Merwin uses fragmented dialogue to show the weakened state of family bonds during Cable’s lifetime, Wordsworth uses a unified dialogue structure to illustrate the enduring strength of these bonds. The dialogue is not shared equally between the adult and child; it is the Maid who speaks for the majority of the poem. For a long, sustained portion of the dialogue, she describes her everyday routine, speaking of how she “sings songs” (Wordsworth 44), “knits […] stockings” (41), and “hems” her “kerchief” (42) beside the “green” graves of her brother and sister (37). The continuous, uninterrupted narrative structure establishes a profound sense of nostalgia in the child’s tone, which calls attention to the emotional solace she finds in the memory of her siblings. The unequal dialogue partition is also significant in that it literally reflects the continuity of life itself from the Maid’s point of view. In all her innocence, she essentially blurs the life-death distinction, continuing to interact with her deceased siblings as though they were still alive. She integrates the memory of her siblings into her everyday routine, and, in this way, preserves family bonds across the dimensions of space and time. Therefore, Merwin and Wordsworth both interweave nature motifs with elements of dialogue to convey contrasting messages: Merwin depicts death as a means of effacing family bonds on earth, while Wordsworth emphasizes its capacity to unite families
both in physical space and on an emotional level.

One striking difference between “Ballad of John Cable” and “We Are Seven” lies in their respective use of dynamic and static natural landscapes. Merwin, in depicting Cable’s transition from mortal life to the afterlife, invokes the idea of a geographical journey across the vast landscape. “Ballad of John Cable” opens with an image of Cable approaching the wherry where the three gentlemen await him:

He that had come that morning,
One after the other,
Over seven hills,
Each of a new color,

Came now by the last tree,
By the red-colored valley (Merwin 1-6)

Merwin employs the antithetical elements “hills” and “valley” to represent death as a means of liberation. The “colored […] hills,” symbolic of the many and varied hardships Cable faced throughout his life, are sharply juxtaposed against the image of the valley, representative of the afterlife, in which Cable finds release from his earthly burdens. The spatial journey that Cable undertakes effectively mirrors his psychological transformation upon encountering death; Merwin uses the journey motif to draw a clear distinction between the difficulties of Cable’s present life and the blissful afterlife.

There also emerges a distinct pattern among the natural spaces associated with Cable’s family and past life. Whether it is his sister’s fallow where “weeds are alive” (29), the series of “seven hills” (3), or the “rank hollow” (92) where his body will eventually be buried, the landscapes are characterized by overwhelming bleakness and sterility. The static nature of the earthbound settings stands in sharp contrast to the dynamic motion of the river’s “shaking water” (85), which transports Cable to the next stage of life. This contrast between the imagery of stasis and kinesis and that of bleakness and renewal powerfully molds the poem’s ultimate conception of death. While earthly life
is defined by a sense of mechanistic repetition and stagnation, death is tied to notions of spiritual progression and, in turn, to personal freedom.

Interestingly, despite the sense of forward progression inherent in the concept of the journey, Merwin nonetheless incorporates the idea of life as a cycle in his poem. His recycling of rhyme words at the start and end of the work imposes a cyclical continuity onto the poem’s conception of a linear timescale for existence. Repeated rhyme words include those associated with Cable’s family—“father” (23, 86), “mother” (47, 88), and “fallow” (33, 90)—and with the Stream of Friday itself—“river” (7, 94), “sea” (8, 98), and “water” (11, 85, 99). The repetition of these rhyme words forges a powerful link between notions of death and family, suggesting the constancy of kinship bonds throughout the entire course of human existence. Hence, the poem’s narrative progression combines with the cyclical rhyme scheme to convey Merwin’s ultimate message: though we will inevitably pass through stages of life, death, and possibly rebirth, the bonds we form in our lifetimes cannot be effaced by our physical disappearance from the earth’s surface.

In contrast to Merwin, Wordsworth sets his poem within the limited space of the Maid’s cottage and churchyard—a decision that has profound repercussions on the poem’s vision of death. Familial unity in “We Are Seven” is achieved not through the motif of the journey but rather through the power of memory, which is displayed in the Maid’s simple ways of honouring her deceased siblings throughout her everyday routine. She recounts to the speaker how all her daily activities take place in the churchyard: “My stockings there I often knit / My kerchief there I hem / And there upon the ground I sit / And sing a song to them” (Wordsworth 41-44). The parallelism in the first two lines, combined with the alliterative ‘s’ in the words “sit,” “sing,” and “song,” show the orderly sense of progression in her life.

As the poem continues, the Maid recounts her life after her sister Jane’s death: “when the grass was dry / Together round her grave we played / My brother John and I” (54-56). Later in the poem, her brother passes away, at a time “when the ground was white with snow / And [she] could run and slide” (57-58). Wordsworth juxtaposes the dynamic changes of the season cycle with the strength of the siblings’ bond. Furthermore, the child relates that
“after sunset […] when it is light and fair,” she “eats her supper there” (45-46, 48). It is ironic that the night’s darkness is described as being “light.” By blending night and day, Wordsworth diminishes notions of temporality associated with day-night cycles and, in turn, suggests the permanence of the Maid’s love for her siblings. The churchyard thus becomes a medium of natural space that unites two critical elements: the brevity of mortal life and the constancy of family bonds. In depicting the Maid’s fidelity to the churchyard and her willingness to honour her siblings no matter how the earth transforms around her, Wordsworth depicts the strength of the siblings’ bond; their connection transcends the ephemeral nature of worldly existence. This marked connection contributes to another point of contrast between the two poems: Merwin introduces the concept of a journey across multiple landscapes in order to create a distinct sense of forward progression in his poem and to indicate Cable’s movement towards familial unity upon his death. Wordsworth, however, focuses on a single natural space and stresses that the power of memory alone can immortalize family bonds.

Most strikingly, both poems draw heavily upon liminal spaces in their symbolic treatment of the life-death boundary. In “Ballad of John Cable,” it is the Stream of Friday that serves as both the geographical and symbolic epicentre of the poem. The river is a markedly ambivalent symbol, simultaneously acting as the passageway to the afterlife and the site of Cable’s burial—at once, a symbol of natural beauty and decay. Merwin most powerfully associates the river with bleakness and death when he illustrates Cable’s fears of dying. When appealing to the three gentlemen to let him continue his life, Cable contrasts the physical magnificence of his living body—“the frame that was my devotion / And my blessing was” (Merwin 65-66)—with the diminished state it will reach upon death as a “poor thing, left in the dirt” (69). The religious connotations of the words “devotion” and “blessing” suggest the depth of Cable’s love for his body and life—he is both materially and spiritually attached to the worldly sphere of existence. By juxtaposing the language of consecration against the “poor,” decayed state of Cable’s body following burial, Merwin depicts death as a terrifyingly destructive force that brings an abrupt and definitive end to the life of a deeply complex human being.
Despite its haunting associations with death, the river serves as a unifying force within the family, bringing Cable “toward the feet of his father” (86). It is startlingly magnificent in the sheer expanse of its natural beauty. From the outset of the poem, Cable sees before him a “gray river / Wide as the sea” (7-8). Near the close, however, this word sequence is reversed: Cable is borne “on the wide river / Gray as the sea” (97-98). The simile “wide as the sea” suggests the river’s grandness and associates it with the unknown, which in turn casts an aura of mystery and uncertainty over it. However, the phrase “gray as the sea” substitutes a purely descriptive quality, colour, for size in the river’s description; this single-word shift dispels the river’s initial identification with the vast unknown, indicating Cable’s mastery of his fear of death. Moreover, by switching the adjectives “gray” and “wide,” Merwin suggests an element of interchangeability; the two qualities essentially become indistinguishable from each other and invoke Cable’s state of complete unity with his natural surroundings.

There is also the contrast between the “flags of white water” (99) and the image of “dark water” (11) earlier on in the poem. The symbolism of the colour white—with its associations to purity, good will, and innocence—here counteracts the haunting sense of mystery and uncertainty implied by the “darkness.” Merwin once again shows death as a source of spiritual enlightenment for Cable, resulting from Cable’s newfound unity with his father. The river thus functions in a powerfully liminal sense. With its simultaneous connotations of serenity and death and its role as crossing-place and burial site, it reconciles the central thematic tension of the poem. Merwin ultimately suggests that death dissolves family bonds in the earthly realm only to preserve them with renewed strength in a spiritual dimension.

While Merwin employs the river’s symbolism in his treatment of the life-death boundary, Wordsworth uses, as his liminal space, the churchyard where the Maid’s siblings are buried. The churchyard exhibits a twofold significance—not only is it situated at the physical boundary dividing the Maid from her deceased siblings, but it also represents the more potent metaphorical boundary bridging the realms of life and death. Upon discussing the location of her siblings’ burial, the Maid claims, “their graves are green, they may be
seen” (Wordsworth 37). Through the alliterative ‘g’ in the words “graves” and “green,” Wordsworth links the siblings’ deaths to ideas of fertility, growth, and renewal—a tribute to the power of familial love to transcend the boundaries of time and death. In addition, the “green”/“seen” internal rhyme indicates the unique depth of the love shared by the family. For the Maid, the mere visual presence of the graves powerfully affirms her siblings’ vitality. The child’s devotion does not stem from any rational, surface thought; rather, it is deeply rooted in the most basic level of her subconscious.

As the poem progresses, the Maid continues to describe her siblings’ burial: “twelve steps or more from my mother’s door / And they are side by side” (39-40). The “more”/“door” internal rhyme and assonance literally reinforces the closeness of the siblings’ graves to the child’s cottage; their spatial closeness mirrors their emotional intimacy. These sound devices, along with the alliterative ‘s,’ create euphony to convey the mental solace the Maid derives from her permanent physical connection to her siblings. Through her capacity to engage so deeply with her siblings in everyday life, the Maid effectively diminishes the rigidity of the life-death boundary between them—her siblings continue to live on indefinitely through the sole power of memory. Wordsworth uses the churchyard’s multifaceted symbolism to show the continuity of existence at all stages of life.

A crucial difference emerges between the river and churchyard. Merwin uses liminal landscape to augment the poem’s fundamental life-death tension. In harnessing the river’s dual symbolism—its role as both liberating pathway and burial ground—Merwin constructs a rigid boundary between the earth and the afterlife to advance the core idea of life as suffering and of death as an escape from one’s hardships. Wordsworth, however, celebrates existence in all the multiplicity of its stages. He uses liminal space to unite the worlds of life and death, and through the Maid’s ability to integrate her own life seamlessly with the memory of her siblings, it becomes clear that familial love has the power to withstand the forces of death and time.

By drawing upon various facets of nature’s symbolism, Merwin and Wordsworth illustrate the capacity of family bonds to conquer the passage of time. Merwin highlights the duality embodied in death: it is simultaneously
a destructive and liberating force that collapses kinship bonds in a physical, worldly sense only to reinforce them on a spiritual level. Wordsworth, in contrast, portrays death as a source of familial unity on all levels, both physical and spiritual. Both poets elegantly interweave concepts of nature, death, and family in their exploration of boundary spaces between the earth and the afterlife.

A critical question, however, remains unanswered: why should the poets use nature imagery, in particular, to construct their interpretations of existence? In establishing a link between nature and human conceptions of death, the poets implicitly suggest that death itself is an integral part of nature—an idea that presents a potent way of coping psychologically with the enigma of mortality. Death becomes an experience that simply merges with the ebb and flow of the ever-changing natural world, perfectly rational and complete in its existence. By thus weaving notions of death into a coherent symbolic framework, the poets ultimately pay tribute to the immense psychological power of poetry itself—its capacity to orient and to guide human beings in our quest to understand ourselves in relation to the world.

W O R K S  C I T E D


Maximilian Smith

This essay examines food and eating as central symbolic elements in C. S. Lewis’ The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and Paul Delarue’s “The Story of Grandmother.” By examining the manner in which these two authors weave food symbolism into their stories, it is possible to form broader conclusions about the didactic purpose of each work. How food is consumed, its quality, and the manner in which it is eaten all contribute to a broader metaphorical purpose. This essay is intended to illuminate how food symbolism contributes to characterization, the development of moralistic themes, and the wider tone of both Lewis’ and Delarue’s texts. Essay written for ENG 237.

Starving men may think much about food, but so do gluttons; the gorged, as well as the famished, like titillations.
—C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Upon reading C. S. Lewis’ The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and Paul Delarue’s “The Story of Grandmother,” I was immediately struck by the prevalence and effectiveness of food symbolism. Almost every mention of food and its consumption in both works is loaded with meaning, and I felt compelled to tease out that meaning. Given the quality of the texts and the immense skill of their authors, it was not difficult to find didactic intent; from there, it was only a matter of bringing the elements together.
C. S. Lewis exhibits a conspicuous interest in food throughout his novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He draws special attention to the preparation of food, to the Pevensie children’s desire for food, and to the circumstances under which various meals and morsels are consumed. In Narnia, food and the consumption thereof are intimately linked to one’s spiritual health and moral compass. Edmund’s spite and greed are exemplified by his acceptance of the Witch’s magical desserts, Aslan’s rejuvenating return to Narnia is celebrated with feasts, and great importance is given to the genesis of a meal. Is it wholesome and fresh, or was it generated by magical means? With whom is it being eaten? Lewis is certainly not alone in drawing attention to the symbolic importance of food. Indeed, from Macbeth’s fateful feast to Miss Havisham’s decaying wedding cake, symbolic food is scattered throughout literary history. However, Lewis’ preoccupation with food focuses primarily upon its function as an indicator of morality. We see similar attention to the didactic functions of food and eating, albeit in a much simpler form, in “The Story of Grandmother,” a folk tale recounted by Paul Delarue. Delarue bestows food with moral significance by introducing several kinds of implicative foods and by observing the characters’ interactions with each. A similar tactic is used by Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (henceforth simply *Lion*). In addition, the concept of spiritual corruption through consumption, which is raised by the little cat in Delarue’s story, is also central to the food metaphor in Lewis’ work. Despite great differences in the breadth and style of their two works, both Lewis and Delarue attempt to portray food in a similar manner and to put it to comparable moralistic uses.

Lewis and Delarue both draw a great deal of attention to different types of foods as well as their origins. “The Story of Grandmother” features two different categories of food, which are diametrically opposed in their nature and genesis. The bread and milk that the little girl’s mother instructs her to bring to her grandmother are naturally imbued with an innocent quality. It is notable that the hot loaf the girl delivers, translated from the French *époigne*, is described in Delarue’s footnotes as being “a small loaf of bread, usually made for children” (Delarue, *Borzoi* 230). That the bread is specifically referred to as *époigne* is indicative of the family’s simple means as well as the generosity with
which the bread is offered to the grandmother. At the very least, the nature of the époigne as a food normally “made for children” makes it a signifier of innocence. The “meat” and “bottle of wine” given to the little girl by the bzou, or werewolf, are naturally opposed to the bread and milk she carries. That they are, in fact, harvested from the grandmother during an act of murder and given to the girl under false pretences taints them with a sense of sin rather than innocence (“Story” 32). The deceit associated with these foods contrasts with the generosity of the mother’s gift. Moreover, far from being symbolic of innocence, the flesh and blood of the grandmother are explicitly portrayed by the little cat as having a corrupting influence: “A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her grandmother” (32). Thus, Delarue gives each subset of food its own symbolic relevance: the bread and milk signify innocence and generosity, while the so-called meat and wine represent corruption and deceit.

In Lion, Lewis also separates food into different moral and symbolic categories. Foods that are meant to be good and wholesome not only are described as such but also are clearly linked to nature. An entire chapter titled “A Day with the Beavers” centres around a meal that the children assist Mr. and Mrs. Beaver in preparing. The meal consists of fish and potatoes—foods that are simple, natural in origin, and honestly acquired. In fact, Lewis draws great attention to the fact that Mr. Beaver and Peter actually catch the fish that they are about to eat; the fish is specifically described as being “new-caught” (80). Conversely, the Turkish Delight that the White Witch presents to Edmund is unnatural and conjured by magic, as is her hot drink. Lewis even describes the food Edmund has eaten as being “bad magic food” (95), drawing attention to the relationship between its inorganic inception and its unwholesome nature. In Lion, as in “The Story of Grandmother,” the effect of the food upon the consumer is given moral significance. Just as the cat suggests that the flesh and blood of the grandmother will make the little girl a slut—that it will somehow steal her innocence—Edmund’s consumption of the Witch’s food is described by Mr. Beaver as having a similar effect: “[Edmund] had the look of one who had been with the Witch and eaten her food. You can always tell them if you’ve lived long in Narnia; something about their eyes” (95). Lewis and Delarue
place a great deal of importance on the type of food being eaten and on the moral alteration of its consumers. Reinvented as a moral symbol, food is given the power to alter and corrupt.

This is not to say that making a slut of the little girl and a liar of Edmund is as easy as conjuring a nasty breakfast. Delarue and Lewis are not solely interested in the food being consumed; they also investigate the reason for its consumption. Delarue implies that the little girl's mission to bring her grandmother food is an act of charity that the latter requires. Thus, when the former indulges in the rich foods that the bzou offers her, she is obviously not using sense, and, in fact, is being rather greedy. Why should she go all the way to her grandmother's house with bread and milk if her grandmother keeps meat and wine in her pantry? Furthermore, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of her grandmother even after the cat's not-so-subtle warning is suggestive of her moral waywardness. Aside from consuming indulgent food, the girl exhibits another immoral, or at least ill-informed, decision when she stops to pick up needles on the “Needles Road” (“Story” 32). Delarue's insistence on the girl's impulsiveness and naïveté—even though the bzou conspicuously tells her that he will be taking the opposite road (32), she thinks nothing of it—only strengthens the notion that her consumption of the meat and blood was intended to be read moralistically as an act of greed. The condemnation of the girl by both the cat and the author is not solely precipitated by the unwholesome quality of the food she consumes. It is the fact that she chooses to consume it despite its conspicuously immoral and indulgent nature, which corrupts her and makes her a “slut.”

Lewis delves into a far more detailed analysis of his characters' motivations for eating than Delarue, but this disparity is only natural given the breadth of Lion compared to “The Story of Grandmother.” In “A Day with the Beavers,” Lewis draws particular attention to the hunger of the Pevensie children. He stresses their great need for food. Thus, when they have eaten their nutritious and natural meal, they are satiated and content: “And when each person had got his (or her) cup of tea, each person shoved back his (or her) stool so as to be able to lean back against the wall and give a long sigh of contentment” (Lewis 82). The food has not had a negative effect on them, not
only because it is inherently wholesome, but also because their approach to the meal is wholesome as well. They consumed the food out of need, not out of want. Conversely, when Edmund eats the Witch’s Turkish Delight despite not having any great need of it, he is ill: “Edmund was already feeling uncomfortable from having eaten too many sweets” (44). Unlike the meal at the Beavers’ house, Edmund’s consumption of the Witch’s food was driven by greed—in fact, Lewis stresses that “the more he ate, the more he wanted to eat” (38).

Having eaten the food, not for subsistence but out of a consuming greed, Edmund becomes ill. However, he is also changed inwardly. As Mr. Beaver suggests, those who have eaten the Witch’s food are fundamentally corrupted. When Edmund thinks about the Witch’s promise of more Turkish Delight, he is compelled to lie to his siblings in order to get it (42). The Witch’s food also spoils his enjoyment of wholesome food, suggesting a fall from innocence: “[T]here’s nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food” (95). Thus, the bad magic food not only spoils Edmund and deprives him of the innocent joy of eating “good ordinary food”; his greedy decision to eat it in the first place also necessitates his fall from innocence.

Like the little girl who takes flesh and blood from the bzou and thus becomes a “slut,” Edmund takes Turkish Delight from the wicked Witch and becomes a liar. Food, endowed by Lewis and Delarue with moral symbolism and purpose, can either corrupt or revivify when consumed. Much can also be said about the reason it is eaten in the first place. Both the Turkish Delight and the flesh and blood of the grandmother, like the forbidden fruit of Eden, are symbols of sin and corruption. The Beavers’ and the mother’s food, on the other hand, are symbols of virtue and morality. Thus, when Turkish Delight and flesh and blood are eaten, when “good ordinary food” is abandoned for bad, sinful food, corruption takes hold. For Lewis and Delarue, food is a powerful motivator and a powerful corrupter, but on its own it holds no power of persuasion. It must be accepted from a tempter—a wicked witch, perhaps, or a terrible werewolf—to make the real fall from grace fully apparent. Thus, both food and interactions with food are necessary for the respective authors of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and “The Story of Grandmother” to achieve
their didactic goals of illuminating the benefit of virtue and the power and enticement of sin.

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“[A]S IF SHE WERE A PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE RIPPLING UPON A SCREEN”: PHALLOCENTRISM AND THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN MULVEY AND NABOKOV

Lana Dubinsky

This essay examines Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita through the lens of Laura Mulvey’s feminist film theory as outlined in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey suggests that mainstream Hollywood productions deny women the status of subject through the employment of gender stereotypes as well as the visual fragmentation of females. Drawing on Mulvey’s theory, this essay examines the ways in which Lolita not only explores the effect of phallocentric cinematic culture on the perception and self-perception of women but also demonstrates the ways in which a literary creation can employ cinematic methods. Essay written for ENG 280.

Is Nabokov’s text merely participating in the proliferation of phallocentric ideals by objectifying Lolita? Or, does the narrative simultaneously offer a critique of, perhaps even a remedy for, phallocentrism? These are the questions that fascinated me as, having recently discussed Mulvey in ENG 280, I flipped through the pages of Lolita. The idea of the camera manipulating the audience’s perception of a film reminded me of the way in which Humbert shapes the reader’s perception of Lolita. It was these connections that inspired the idea for this essay.

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey asserts that mainstream Hollywood film “reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established [phallocentric] interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (Mulvey 2182). She claims that Western patriarchal culture uses film as a way of
alleviating male anxiety toward the castration complex by objectifying females (2191). Despite belonging to the literary as opposed to the cinematic realm, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* also offers a critique of Western phallocentric culture and the way in which it manipulates the social perception of women. Furthermore, *Lolita* demonstrates that literature, much like the Hollywood films to which Mulvey alludes in her essay, can be used to propagate the traditional image of woman as “(passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man” (2191).

Just as the films that Mulvey describes revolve around an active male gaze and its passive female object, so too does *Lolita*. The novel follows Humbert’s active gaze and its objectification of the passive Dolores Haze. Humbert sees his beloved nymphet not as a unified whole but as a collection of fragments: “sunny thighs” (Nabokov 42), “fragile bare arms” (162), and “matted eyelashes” (64). He “suck[s] in every detail of her bright beauty” (39), but his gaze rarely, indeed if ever, shows us Lolita in her entirety. Even when Humbert first fixes his eyes on Lolita, he fragments his perception of her: “it was the same child—the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair” (39). Humbert’s gaze is strikingly similar to that of the camera, and consequently of the protagonist and spectator, in generic Hollywood movies—ones that propagate misogynistic archetypes of the heroic, active male and the frail, submissive female. According to Mulvey, through close-ups of different parts of the woman, the camera “destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative [and] gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude” (2187). Thus, the woman is reduced to an assortment of fragments, and so becomes a fragment or object herself. By viewing Lolita in this fashion, Humbert reduces her to an object. In fact, as he is fragmenting her body with his gaze, Humbert uses the object-pronoun “it” to refer to Lolita (“it was the same child”), thereby dehumanizing her and emphasizing the connection between his fragmenting gaze and her objectification (Nabokov 39).

Humbert, therefore, sees Lolita only as an abstraction, an ideal. He disregards her vulgarity and immaturity, focusing solely on elements of her physical appearance: “that silky shimmer above her temple grading into bright
brown hair [...] ‘The McCoo girl? Oh, she’s a fright. And mean. And lame. Nearly died of polio.’ ping. The glistening tracery of down on her forearm” (41). Humbert does not wish to see Lolita as anything but an idealized object. When his nymphet acts in a way that threatens his idealized image of her (that is, vulgarly or immaturity), Humbert forces her to conform to his ideal with “hours of blandishments, threats and promises” (147). In this way, Humbert denies Lolita a real identity, one outside of the identity he has imposed on her. His scopophilic, obsessive gaze thus determines, even forms, Lolita’s self. This is consistent with Mulvey’s theory; she claims that phallocentrism relies upon “the image of the castrated woman” (2182). Woman as lack “produces the phallus as a symbolic presence,” yet the female also represents the threat of castration—a source of intense anxiety for males (2182). Consequently, males try to alleviate their own apprehension by objectifying and abstracting women (2182). By rendering the woman a passive object, males distance themselves from the threat of castration, seemingly gaining control over it, and grant themselves a social status superior to that of the woman (2182, 2188).

Mulvey asserts that males choose to make the image of the female “into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star) […] fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (2188). In film—and as Nabokov’s Humbert demonstrates, in literature—this is achieved by the fragmentation that the male gaze imposes on the female image. However, this gaze is violent in nature, for it denies the woman the opportunity to form her own selfhood. In Lolita, Humbert’s scopophilia ultimately prevents him, and by extension the reader, from seeing Dolores Haze, the genuine, three-dimensional identity behind the abstraction that is Lolita. Dolores is essentially absent from the text just as realistic, active, meaning-making female identities are absent from Hollywood movies that eliminate these identities in favour of flat, misogynistic female stereotypes that perpetuate sexism and phallocentrism. Consequently, if a woman behaves in a way that threatens the idealized abstraction, as Lolita does, she poses a threat to the balance of power between men and women, once again signifying the possibility of symbolic castration—the loss of power.
Humbert faces this threat when Lolita grows more deceptive and manipulative, lying about her piano lessons and planning her escape. He realizes that he can no longer force Lolita to play the idealized, fetishistic role he has created for her, and so begins to view her as “demonic” (Nabokov 139), “nymphéan evil breathing through every pore of the fey child” (125). This shift in Humbert’s perception of Lolita mirrors the way that males, according to Mulvey, try to escape castration anxiety through the “re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir)” (2188). Mulvey argues that “pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (2188). Consistent with Mulvey’s ideas, when Lolita leaves Humbert for Quilty, Humbert’s gaze reconstructs Lolita as a betrayer whom he must pursue and capture. Although he finally acknowledges elements of her true personality, such as her manipulative nature, he uses these traits to construct yet another false archetypal image of Lolita, a femme fatale from a film noir. After failing to find and repossess her, Humbert becomes preoccupied with forgiving Lolita and blaming himself for the pain he has made her endure: “oh my poor, bruised child [...] I was despicable and brutal, and turpid” (Nabokov 284). Finally, Humbert realizes that what he “had madly possessed was not she, but [his] creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between [him] and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own” (62). He recognizes the damage his voyeurism, his fetishistic scopophilia, and his insistence on seeing Lolita only as “the great rosegray never-to-be-had” (264) have caused.

However, the reader has also played a part in harming Lolita. Like countless other literary texts, Nabokov’s novel resembles a film insofar as the narrator plays the role of a camera, deciding what the reader will and will not observe. Lolita is Humbert’s creation, and is told solely from his point of view. The reader sees only what Humbert sees, and is forced to participate in Humbert’s endeavours, particularly gazing at Lolita in a way that idealizes, fragments, and objectifies her. This relationship between the reader, the narr-
tor, and the narrative mirrors that of the spectator, camera, and film narrative, as described by Mulvey. Nabokov’s novel demonstrates that what Mulvey refers to as a “complex interaction of looks [...] specific to film” (2192) can in fact be found in a literary work. Just as a Hollywood film employs “identification processes and liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist [...] making [spectators] share his uneasy gaze” (2190), a text can use the narrator to shape the reader’s perception of female characters. By participating in Humbert’s relationship with Lolita, the reader plays the role of a pedophile, or more generally, of a pervert, for he too sees the pubescent Lolita in a sexualized way. Thus, Lolita blurs the line between reader and character and between reality and fiction.

Ultimately, the text suggests that we, too, are afflicted by Humbert’s perversion. Humbert’s attitude toward and relationship with Lolita adheres to the socially established norms concerning sexual differences and cross-gender interactions of Western phallocentric culture. Even the paedophilic nature of his attraction to her is reflective of Western phallocentric values. For, being with a youthful, attractive, vibrant child is the closest that Humbert can get to being with a female whose appearance matches that of the idealized heroine of a movie, a woman with an ageless face and body, a woman “outside […] time and space” (Mulvey 2187). Insofar as narrative cinema, and society in general, value or even fetishize youth and external beauty (particularly in relation to women), Western society is itself paedophilic.

Indeed, the novel establishes a connection between Humbert and Lolita’s relationship and narrative cinema as well as other forms of media. Lolita has “for the cinema a veritable passion” (Nabokov 170), and is constantly reading movie magazines and watching films: “We took in, voluptuously and indiscriminately, oh, I don’t know, one hundred and fifty or two hundred programs during that one year” (170). She displays a preference for the mainstream phallocentric Hollywood movies to which Mulvey refers in her essay, particularly ones about heroic men and weak, passive women (170). Lolita is especially fond of pictures in which “florid-faced, blue eyed rough-riders” save and win the affections of “prim pretty schoolteachers[s]” by enduring “a plethora of pain that would have hospitalized Hercules” and emerging with “nothing to
show but a rather becoming bruise on [a] bronzed cheek” (170). Not only does Lolita derive pleasure from watching such films, but she also tries to emulate the female characters she sees on the screen (171, 233, 136, 48). Referencing Lacan’s theory on the mirror stage, Mulvey asserts that spectators, particularly male spectators, identify with the active male protagonist and thereby share his violent, scopophilic gaze and adopt his phallocentric values (2185).

Mulvey does not delve into the effect that the film may potentially have on women; however, Lolita does. The films, like Humbert, dictate Lolita’s behaviour. She consistently tries to imitate on-screen ego ideals, “mimick[ing] limp prostration” (171), “mimick[ing] dismay” (233), and even “mimicking dread and relief” (136). As Humbert notes, Lolita tries to behave “as Hollywood teaches” (48). Thus, Humbert is not entirely to blame for Lolita’s lack of a true selfhood. What the novel implies is that females identify with their on-screen counterparts and therefore adopt their passive roles. Furthermore, by trying to emulate the behaviour of their favourite movie heroines, women are complicit in their conformity to the socially fabricated ideals of themselves. Moreover, even if a female were to identify with the male protagonist, she would share his gaze and so would still see the female body as a fetishized, sexualized, fragmented object.

Thus, both Humbert and Lolita are impacted by the patriarchal ideas that pervade narrative cinema. Their attitudes toward male-female relations and their relationship with one another are ultimately symptomatic of Western cinematic phallocentric culture. Advertisements and narrative cinema have taught Humbert to play the active role of the “enchanted hunter” and Lolita to adopt that of the “enchanted prey” (131). However, despite damage to her selfhood and self-awareness, Lolita eventually takes a more active role in the narrative by running away from Humbert and Quilty. She settles down, marries Dick, and begins building her own life and her own family. Despite still being the bearer of Humbert’s meaning, Lolita takes a step towards becoming the maker of her own meaning, consequently altering the balance of power between her and her male captors in her favour. In keeping with Mulvey’s ideas,……

\footnote{Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory proposes that an individual’s perceptions of selfhood are rooted in his identification with an external image of himself. This external reflection serves as an ideal with which the individual seeks to align himself.}
Lolita’s actions restore the threat of castration to the narrative and to Quilty’s and Humbert’s lives. Humbert, however, endeavours to escape castration anxiety by emulating the active male archetype of patriarchal film and culture; he decides to murder Quilty.

Although Humbert succeeds in killing Quilty, his attempts at doing so are largely ineffective and absurd. He describes his bullets as “slow, clumsy, [and] blind” (303), and when one of them misses Quilty and enters a rug instead, Humbert gets “the paralyzing impression that it ha[s] merely trickled in and might come out again” (297). The entire confrontation bears a striking resemblance to a dream Humbert has earlier in the narrative: “sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams [...] I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle” (47). The phallic imagery of the dream, as well as Humbert’s actual efforts, evokes the idea of castration. In accordance with Mulvey’s assertion that males harbour a perpetual fear of castration, we can interpret the dream as a manifestation of Humbert’s castration anxiety. The actual ineffectiveness of Humbert’s phallic weapon and his attempt to emulate a masculine ideal therefore suggest that he has been castrated. Mulvey uses the terms phallus and penis interchangeably in her essay, and so she generally refers to the idea of actual castration (2181). However, we can also view the phallus simply as the signifier of male power or dominance. Thus, Humbert’s incompetence is indicative of a loss of power or of an inherent lack thereof. It suggests that the phallus ultimately has no authority but that patriarchal culture socially establishes it as such. Women, then, are socially constructed to signify lack and inferiority. The novel also reveals that Quilty is practically impotent, making the ineffectual penis ridiculous as a symbol of power (298). The absurdity of the altercation between Humbert and Quilty (Quilty plays the piano and sings as Humbert shoots him) therefore mirrors the absurdity of the phallocentric ideas on which Western culture is predicated.

Thus, *Lolita* offers a critique of Western phallocentrism similar to the one found in Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Like Mulvey’s essay, the novel portrays mainstream Hollywood movies as harmful to Western culture’s accepted value system; they manipulate the male gaze and, by exten-
sion, the spectator’s gaze, rendering it violent, objectifying, and fragmenting. Mulvey’s theory enables the reader to see Nabokov’s narrative, in an original and insightful way, as a critique of patriarchy. However, the novel also expands on Mulvey’s ideas. It demonstrates that her conceptions can be extended to literature, in turn revealing the degree to which phallocentrism and misogyny are pervasive in Western culture. Furthermore, while Mulvey calls for the creation of “a new language of desire” (2184) and asserts that we must “free the look of the camera into its materiality [...] and the look of the audience into dialectics” (2192), *Lolita* offers two compatible alternatives: satire and inversion. Through satire, the narrative draws attention to the absurdity of phallocentric ideals. Through inversion, by turning the lens, or gaze, onto the male via Humbert and Quilty’s confrontation, *Lolita* demonstrates that the propagation of phallocentric beliefs, by narrative cinema and by Western society in general, has a negative impact on women and men. Quilty’s and Humbert’s perversion, by which we too are afflicted, ultimately gets Quilty killed and Humbert incarcerated. As their ludicrous attempts to imitate male film archetypes suggest, masculinity is just as much a social construct as passive, idealized femininity. Humbert’s real prison, like ours, is phallocentrism.

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MOVEMENTS BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EZRA POUND AND GERTRUDE STEIN

Joseph Constable

Henri Bergson’s ideas on the different ways in which time is experienced provides the framework on which this essay compares the Imagist works of Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*. Ultimately, both writers contest Bergson’s belief that language is not a tool that can be used to represent a true experience of the interior mind; through independent poetic techniques, both Pound and Stein attempt to dissipate the borderline between exterior and interior modes of expression. By employing Bergson’s conception of duration as a mode of comparison, this essay considers the extent to which each author successfully reinvents language as a communicatory medium, such that it comes to mirror the interior, psychological space. Essay written for ENG 348.

I am interested in how Pound and Stein exalt a distinctly modernist sense of individual experience through their poetic endeavours. Their engagement with stimuli that are of the everyday, the facile, and the banal produce artistic spaces which are anything but. Moreover, both writers are subject to the poetic struggle to translate their ideas into a contained work of art—one of the reasons why I wanted to address in detail the written theory and explanatory prose of both writers. When reading the poetic and the theoretical together, the task of the reader becomes to evaluate each poet’s respective success in attaining their self-formed objectives. Is the gap between the poet’s idea and the work that ends up on the page ultimately reconcilable?
The interior-exterior (duration-time) dichotomy that Bergson raises here is a marked aspect of Ezra Pound’s Imagist works and Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*. The “separation” that exists between data, objects, and subjects of the external world and the receptive consciousness of the individual is one that both writers seek to dissolve in their poetic renderings of the thing itself. In many ways, these two writers’ works rebel against Bergson’s fundamentals; for him, inner states, sensations, feelings, passions, and so on can never be transposed into quantitative form. In particular, language above all “alienates us from direct experience […] it carves our experiences into objects designated by words” (Guerlac 69). I want to ask how Pound and Stein seek to overcome this inherent predicament. Through methods that at times conflict and other times concur, they attempt to render a true and uninterrupted depiction of a moment, an instant, an “Image,” so that it disguises the intersection between the exterior and interior consciousness. In spite of Bergson’s problem with language—being for him a medium that impedes rather than accurately translates interior thought—both writers desire to counter this view through their various linguistic and stylistic techniques. As such, Pound and Stein are comparable in their want to reinvent and transcend the medium of language and its associated conventions. Both writers, however, inevitably encounter their own personal obstacles, as they struggle to unite the interior and the exterior, to attain successfully a “direct treatment of the ‘thing’” (Pound, “A Retrospect” 3) or to enable a true state of “talking and listening” (Stein, *Writings 1903-1932* 290).

The Imagist poems of Pound are equalled if not exceeded by accompanying theory concerning Imagism as an artistic movement. Pound wishes to refashion language in order to convey something as pure as an instantaneous moment in time, and his formulation of a distinct aesthetic is his first step in doing so. In “A Retrospect” his method is reductive, as he seeks to filter out any superfluous ornament, unnecessary adjective, and vague abstraction to engender an “Image” or a presentation of “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (4). Paradoxically, in order to capture and present such a complex and abstract thing, one that pertains to a “sense of sudden liberation” rather than restriction, the Imagist must confine his or her words to the
bare essentials of linguistic expression (4). For Pound, the way to close the gap between the representative image and the experience itself is by reducing it to its fundamentals, disallowing any peripheral expression that would encroach on the purity of the moment as encountered.

Stein’s *Tender Buttons* is a near antithesis of Pound’s approach. The sweeping flux of images that make up her writing points to a stream-of-consciousness mode of expression, as she actively records the subjects that surround her in everyday life. Dubnick accurately notes that “Stein came to terms with the chaotic nature of real experience […] the physical world is experienced as unique and immediate in each present moment as the consciousness receives data” (30). Stein does not submit the complex of a single subject to the rigorously reductive purification that characterizes Pound’s “Image.” Instead, she attempts to translate directly what Bergson calls the “homogenous milieu” of sensations that enter her consciousness onto the page (90). Stein says herself that “I had to feel anything and everything that for me was existing so intensely that I could put it down in writing as a thing in itself” (Stein, *Writings 1932-1946* 334). Ostensibly, Stein’s method enables a greater dissolution of the boundaries between interior and exterior perception than Pound’s: the free, random, and abstract quality of *Tender Buttons* reflects the way in which this data registers in the consciousness. In contrast, it seems that Pound’s “Image” tries to capture something that is beyond its own poetic recesses from the outset.

To explore the truth in this assertion, let us consider the following examples. Pound’s two-line poem (three lines if the title is included), “In a Station of the Metro,” adheres to a high Imagist aesthetic. The two ostensibly disparate images that are presented as “an equation […] in little splotches of colour” are layered on top of each other to form the concrete whole of the “Image” (Dennis 109):

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.
(“In a Station of the Metro” 53)
Here, Pound presents the witnessed moment in its purest form. As it visually breaks apart these two phrases, the syntactic irregularity effected by the semicolon forces the reader to make a connection solely based on the parallel positioning of the phrases on the page. Pound refuses to use simile with an unnecessary ornament such as “are like,” but like a painted picture, he attempts to render the image in its entirety. T. E. Hulme, a member and originator of the Imagist movement, views the reinvention of poetic verse that Pound exemplifies here as one that “appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes [...] it builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured always to influence him” (75). The visual significance of the “Image” is reinforced here; it becomes the Imagist’s task to render a seamless transition between the moment and its impression on the consciousness. Again, Bergson’s principles correspond in that art must free us from the limitations of time and represent a state of “real duration” by stopping time in an instant (Bergson 90).

Let us note, however, that Pound’s aesthetic reveals certain contradictions when taken out of the recesses of its own theoretical doctrine. As has just been noted, Hulme articulates the Imagist opposition to rhetoric of any form. Although Pound concurs when he states that the force of the Imagist work “will lie in its truth, its interpretative power [...] I mean that it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din,” the very nature of the Imagist aesthetic undermines this assertion, as in many ways the reader is asked to take the poet’s word as an infallible truth (Gage 39). The presumptive validity to Pound’s “Image” in “In a Station of the Metro” is a presupposed “truth” that is initially difficult to contend with due to the exclusion of any rhetorical techniques and the highly personal nature of the experience that the poem represents. Thus, the poem operates on two conflicting levels. On the one hand, the process of purification that Pound’s experience undergoes in order to form the final “Image” is liberated “from time limits and space limits” (“A Retrospect” 4). Pound renders the complexity of the instant within a singular whole that has it existing in both the exterior realm (as concretely indicated by the title “In a Station of the Metro”) and as an impression in the interior consciousness. It, therefore, merges the boundary between the external and internal through the amalga-
information of both representations under the unified label of the “Image.” On the other hand, the highly polished form and reductive technique that Pound utilizes is indicative of the meticulous rules and regulations that apply to the Imagist aesthetic, a process that is anything but natural. As much as Pound represents the movement from an exterior to an interior state in his Imagist poems, the poetic “truth” that he practices and perpetuates stands in the way of a seamless movement from one to the other.

Comparatively, Stein’s *Tender Buttons* achieves a greater sense of fluidity between the exterior and interior space. She not only reflects the movement between what Bergson calls the states of “time” and “duration,” but through her technique, she also mimics the movements of sensations within the consciousness itself. Gage notes that for Bergson, “the fundamental difference […] between external things and inner states is that external things are delimited from one another because they are implicitly juxtaposed in an ideal space. Inner states […] overflow into one another, interpenetrate, even as they succeed one another” (Gage 65). In *Tender Buttons*, although the starting point for Stein is usually a concrete external object, such as “A Red Hat,” “Roast Beef,” “A New Cup and Saucer,” the associations, sensations, and resemblances made with that object are permitted without limitation to blend and clash with one another within Stein’s consciousness and, by extension, on the page itself. In contrast to Pound, who advised the Imagist to “go in fear of abstractions,” Stein’s sentences return to the plastic facts of language. Her sentences brim with juxtaposed, intangible words and phrases, which fail to act as signifiers. Instead, they are used “as if they never had a history,” and are moulded in a seemingly random manner to achieve a direct reflection of interior processes (Weinstein 56).

In “A Piece of Coffee” we can see an example of this verbal collage:

> A single image is not splendor. Dirty is yellow. A sign of more is not mentioned. A piece of coffee is not a detainer. The resemblance to yellow is dirtier and distincter. The clean mixture is whiter and not coal color, never more coal color than altogether. (*Tender Buttons* 5)
The first sentence exemplifies Stein’s style. Although each poem in *Tender Buttons* is stimulated by a single subject, the resulting work on the page is multifarious in its content. Statement after statement and image after image are poured into a conglomerated mass, each agreeing, undermining, and intersecting with the next to result in what frequently appears as nonsense; as readers, we are unable to make logical sense of the poem. Stein opposes our expectations and frequently deploys incorrect grammar, non-sequiturs, and incoherent imagery so that we are forced to consider the words in themselves; as Shaughnessy notes, “the word” is indeed “the thing” (51). This is not to say that one cannot attempt to deduce meaning from these poems. In the given example, one could say that Stein considers the shades of yellow stains left by a stray piece of coffee; the coffee is like yellow but “dirtier and distincter,” whilst the actual piece of coffee is slightly lighter in colour than coal. Readings of this kind, however, are limited in their application. A satisfactory reading of the poem is not only difficult to reach, but this method in itself also detracts from the more potent and extensive linguistic experimentation that is at work here.

That Stein makes it so hard for us to obtain concrete interpretations from her work should lead us to alternative methods of analysis. The phonetic quality of *Tender Buttons* is crucial. For example, in “This is the Dress, Aider” the nonsensical words are best expressed vocally: “Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider stop the muncher, muncher munchers” (*Tender Buttons* 17). Any meaning that we can derive here is predominantly from a phonetic signifier, as Stein denies us the linguistic explanation that we expect when reading a word. Weinstein develops this idea, noting that “the melody of our everyday speech is obscured by its semantic carrier […] by removing meaning we attend to sound, and […] Stein is free to create melodies never before possible in English literature because she is liberated from word combinations that most resemble our ‘everyday music’” (65). The jumbled miscellany of word combinations to which Weinstein refers is mirrored in the interpenetrative sensations that exist in the inner states, as conceived by Bergson. By taking her stimuli from the ordered and delineated exterior world, Stein returns to the basic facts of language and sound, and in turn engenders
a free, almost primal discourse that mimics the movements of these sensations within the conscious mind.

The phonetic focus that we have just identified in Stein is also relevant to Pound. In his writings on Imagism, he speaks extensively about the significance of rhythmic structure, word shape, and other phonetic indicators. He states that the poet ought to “fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language, so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement” (“A Retrospect” 5). The defamiliarization of conventional semantic interpretation that Stein adopts is seen in half-measure here. Pound advocates a similar technique, in that he suggests the Imagist render the “Image” of the poem first in a foreign language in order to strip it down to a pure and essential form. Although “his vocabulary must of course be found in his native tongue,” the poet must take himself beyond mere exterior perception so that the sensations triggered by an experience are registered clearly in the consciousness (5). However, once again one gets the sense that Pound is only halfway there. Many of the techniques that he insists the practicing Imagist adopt certainly signal a path to truly capturing and rendering an instant in time; however, this poetic process itself stunts a natural flow from an exterior to interior state. For example, in “Liu Ch’ē” the single “Image” of “a wet leaf that clings to the threshold” is preceded by what seems to be a five line description of this “Image” (Selected Poems 49). As indicated by the colon, Pound represents in tandem an external experience and its corresponding internal impression. Whilst the poem may be concordant with the Imagist process, the effect is highly self-conscious, and lacks the free, uninterrupted movement that characterizes Tender Buttons.

As T. S. Eliot notes, Pound’s Imagism is “more critical rather than creative” (Tiffany 39). Although Pound’s intention was to communicate an instant of time in its purest form and in turn represent exterior experience in terms of interior impression, his poems are far too enmeshed within their accompanying doctrine for these aims to manifest. The underlying negativity pertaining to Pound’s Imagism (after all, he names his doctrine “A Few Don’ts”) is caused by the rigorous ensemble of rules that make up its foundations. Although Pound sought to depict the “Image” itself rather than a mere
illusion of it, he is prevented from achieving a natural representation of interior impression, as his approach is founded on carefully considered form and aesthetic artifice. In contrast, I see the absence of grammatical, structural, and linguistic rules in Stein’s *Tender Buttons* as factors that make for a more seamless link between outer and inner states of experience. The flurrying impressions that are stimulated by individual, external objects are characterized by an inconsistency and randomness that finds a context in Bergson’s writing on the nature of “duration.” Like Stein, he is aware that “our impressions are constantly changing, wrapping themselves around the external object, which is its cause” (Bergson 130). In contrast, Pound’s Imagist process appears idealistic; to render an instant in all its complexity in one single image is to misrepresent the true function of the conscious mind. Stein, on the other hand, demonstrates what Bergson calls the “confused multiplicity” of received impressions (87). Whilst the external subject remains a singular entity, its reception by the consciousness leads to a plurality of associations, sensations, and resemblances.

In spite of linguistic differences and varying success in achieving artistic goals, both Pound and Stein contest Bergson’s assertion that “language is not meant to convey all the delicate shades of inner states” (160). Although their poetry constitutes a significant reinvention of this medium, the struggle to reconcile the gulf between artistic perception and subsequent documentation of experience remains an issue for both poets under discussion. When we consider the fact that the written word can only ever be a representation of “pure duration,” Bergson’s problem with language has a lasting import.

**Works Cited**


AN ODOUR OF NARCISSUS

Robert DiPardo

This essay examines the Ovidian parallel that supplies the humour and the pathos of Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Visual and verbal allusions invest the tape-recorded voice of a young man with a tragic resemblance to Narcissus, while his aged listener bears a comic resemblance to Echo.

Essay written for ENG 341.

My first encounter with *Krapp’s Last Tape* and Beckett occurred in the fusty public library of Thorold, Ontario. I was a high school junior, and believed that I would write plays for a living. It is just as well that my first reading went no further than the opening stage directions: I had some growing up to do before I could stomach Beckett’s harrowing self-portrait. For the aspiring artist, the figure of Krapp looms like a bogeyman; he personifies arrogant mediocrity, the afflatus that fills the vacuum left behind by waning talent. Reading this play closely was, therefore, as much a personal exercise as an academic one.

The sorrows of old age are too commonplace to be tragic. Nonetheless, and despite his clowning, the eponymous old man of *Krapp’s Last Tape* remains a sorrowful figure. Here, as elsewhere, Beckett creates affecting drama out of refuse. Richest of the elements recycled is Ovid’s rendition of the Narcissus legend. Enumerating some of the play’s allusions will reveal how the drama is pathetic in its adherence to the classical tale while humorous in its divergences.

The action of *Krapp’s Last Tape* consists entirely of one man’s indulgence in narcissism. Like the bananas that he knows better than to eat, Krapp’s narcissism is a long and enduring habit. His craven excitement is that of an aged junkie as he sifts through his audio diary, giving voice to his dissipation—“ah! the little scoundrel!” (Beckett 4)—upon finding the desired spool. These
antics are played for laughs, and they emphasize the great difference in age between Beckett’s Krapp and Ovid’s Narcissus. This disparity makes their analogy seem ridiculous, and the play is funny so long as this is so. The mood deepens when the tape begins rolling, though not because a new side of Krapp is revealed, but rather because the depth of his vacuity is plumbed. Krapp listens to an earlier self talk about a still earlier self. Like his classical antecedent, Krapp literally loses himself in reflection. But Narcissus can only die once, and Beckett’s audience is witness not to a death but to a memorial.

One sees in Krapp’s discarded banana peels a wry allusion to the “yellow floure with milke white leaves” that marks the spot of Narcissus’ demise (Ovid 3.642). Beckett further sets the scene by approximating Ovid’s description of a shady pond where “trees did keepe the heate of Phoebus our” (3.514). Krapp’s den is likewise solitary, lit by a comfortless glare and surrounded by darkness. Taking the banana peels for an improvised funeral bouquet, the informed audience intuits that Beckett’s version of the legend begins after the death of Narcissus, a death recorded and played over on tape.

Ovid’s Narcissus is killed by an excess of passion, Beckett’s Krapp, roughly, by a lack of it. The thirty-nine-year-old who speaks on the tape is effectively dead in the manner of all forgotten people: whatever his book was about, the “[s]eventeen copies sold” are not likely to preserve his name (Beckett 10). While the tape is running, the patent mediocrity of the listener gives the lie to the pretensions of the speaker, so that the younger Krapp might almost be said to die of embarrassment. “Like gesture also dost thou make to everie becke of mine. / And as by moving of thy sweete and lovely lippes I weene, / Thou speakest words although mine eares conceive not what they beene” (3.579-80); so says Ovid’s Narcissus to his reflection. Narcissus’ interaction with his reflection is analogized by the silent Krapp, who pantomimes, and even mouths, the words as they are spoken by his younger self on the tape. The indispensable tape recorder makes it possible for the younger Krapp to address his older self, and the resultant telescoping of the two selves places the drama snugly, and tragically, within its classical framework.

Between the younger speaker and the older listener “[i]t is but even a little droppe” (3.564). Krapp shares his alcoholism and unfortunate weakness
for bananas with his thirty-nine-year-old and twenty-seven-year-old selves. When the recorded voice alludes to the light above his table and the surrounding darkness (Beckett 5), he describes the stage as though he were on it. Ovid is again cited in the way the nearness of the two selves proves mutually destructive. The dreams of youth confront the shattering reality of age, and the old man is left practically suicidal, “drowned in dreams and burning to be gone” (11). Both the legend and the play owe their dramatic power to the fateful encounter between Narcissus and his image, which echoes not only across the works but also within the play when, for a moment, desperate to see his world through other eyes, young Krapp in the punt becomes Narcissus by the poolside and begs his lover: “Let me in” (9). Beckett’s renowned pithiness finds a memorable example in these three syllables, bluntly expressing the hopeless desire for union with another self, the pursuit of which destroys Narcissus. That death, as said before, precedes the opening of Beckett’s play, so that the curtain reveals not the doomed youth but his solitary mourner.

Beckett lightens matters by casting Krapp as Echo, the girl whom Narcissus rejects. A disembodied voice, Echo, like Krapp, occupies the threshold between “being—or remaining” (7). The voice on the tape belongs to a dead man, and the man who listens can hardly be said to live either. Anticipating the human furniture of Beckett’s Endgame, Krapp is barely animate. So long have Krapp’s self-analyses been habitual that at the age of twenty-nine “[t]hese old [post-mortems] are merely preparatory to “a new...(hesitates)...retrospect” (6). The evident result of this infinite retrospection is Krapp’s diminished agency, represented by his allotment of “not more than four or five paces either way” in which to move onstage (3-4 stage direction). The severity of Krapp’s myopia, a reliable source of humour, shrinks his world even further. This apparent shrinkage makes Krapp like Narcissus’ pathetic admirer Echo, who pines away until she is nothing but a redundant voice. Krapp himself is temporarily disembodied when he slips into the darkness for more champagne, and each time his voice comes back mournful. But while night evidently draws “nigh-igh” (7), Krapp’s final dissolution into recorded sound remains an unseen prospect, since the ominous “Last” in the title could mean, in the British English of the play’s dialogue, either final or simply latest. By postponing Echo’s
traditional fate, Beckett makes Krapp’s identification with the rejected female less serious, preserving as best as possible its comic imputation of lost manhood.

*Krapp's Last Tape* is a work in which Beckett imagines a man who remembers himself to death and lives to grieve about it. An extended metaphor unites the piece, which recasts with considerable inventiveness an enduring legend. As recorded voice, Krapp is Narcissus; as listener and languishing mourner, he is Echo. The play begins with Narcissus already dead, but with the Beckettian twist, instead of a flower, the young man is transformed into fertil-izer, which is to say, Krapp. Krapp is, pathetically and humorously, just what his name implies—an odorous and undesirable remnant.

**Works Cited**


HISTORY AND ITS WAYS: 
EXAMINING FOUCALUT’S “THE ORDER 
OF DISCOURSE” IN ALEXIE’S “WHAT YOU 
PAWN I WILL REDEEM”

Julia Hori

This essay examines Michel Foucault’s interpretation of truth as paradigmatic, hierarchical, and conditional in his work “The Order of Discourse.” Through the employment of Foucault’s “truth discourse” in the context of Sherman Alexie’s short story “What You Pawn I Will Redeem”—which grapples with the signifiers of Native identity as both excluded from and reproduced by the dominant discourse—Alexie’s narrator, Jackson, is explored as a liminal figure who acts and speaks both inside and outside “the true.” Essay written for ENG 382.

I am interested in the ways in which Alexie’s story demonstrates a postmodern kind of self-fashioning; in co-opting the language of the dominant discourse, Jackson is able to subvert this dominance. However, it can be argued that Jackson is only marginally able to take control of his representation, one example of how Alexie’s story gives voice to anxieties surrounding the political efficacy of postmodern literary interventions. Because the story is (satirically) framed by Jackson’s chivalric claiming of honour, signified by the family regalia which alludes to postcolonial conceptions of reclaiming, the reader is forced to ask the question: does Jackson win? Furthermore, what is there to be won, bought, or stolen in the economy of power and identity?

According to Michel Foucault’s “The Order of Discourse,” institutions—or “discourses”—continuously mediate the conceptualization of “truth.” Foucault marks the ideological difference between speaking the truth and being “in the true”: “It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is ‘in the true’ only by obeying the rules of a discursive ‘policing,’ which one has to reactivate in each of one’s
discourses” (Foucault 219). The relationship between discourses is dialogic; in order for a subject, a theory, or an individual voice to enter “into the true,” it must compete for power and legitimacy in an immense web of relational meaning. To speak “in the true” is to speak in the dominant discourse. For Ferdinand Saussure, “in language there are only differences, without positive terms” (Saussure 972). In language, a sign locates its meaning in relation to all the other signs it is not, via a kind of negative meaning. Likewise, Foucault’s conception of discourse operates on an exclusionary model; we come to understand dominant discourse through a system of prohibitions or exclusions. Discourse exercises three modes of exclusion: forbidden speech or that which one cannot say, invalid speech or the speech of a “mad” person, and valid speech, which though not necessarily “true” is sustained by institution. Discourses are not only validated and controlled in societal institutions but also internalized at the level of the individual via self-regulation in the personal adherence to rules. Thus, the individual speech act contains within it a series of ideologically charged positions.

Sherman Alexie’s short story “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” illustrates Foucault’s hypothesis on the production of discourse, as it is “controlled, selected, organised and redistributed” in society (Foucault 213). Alexie situates his narrator, Jackson, outside of society, outside of the true, and inside the historically lesser discourse of the “madman” (211). As a homeless person outside of any authoritative discourse, Jackson may “speak the truth” about a range of discourses while having no claim to a community or institution of truth. Jackson can only identify himself by defining what he is not and where he does not belong through the employment of the hegemonic language that excludes and oppresses him. Jackson’s power lies in his ability to satirize and challenge through appropriation. He is acutely aware of the systems that govern the individual’s authority to speak; in order to validate his truths—or even just to make him visible—he mockingly co-opts the language of the dominant discourse of mass culture. Jackson’s appropriation and mimicry of these discourses explicates the stratifying forces of language at work in his conception of “homelessness,” whereby one may occupy a multiplicity of ideologically constructed spaces but may belong to or possess none.
Alexie’s work is preoccupied with competing systems of value and with the governing power structures that decide what is made visible or invisible, valid or invalid. Alexie’s unconventional protagonist in his outsider status offers, if not an alternative to dominant discourse, at least a closer examination of what those inside “the true” fail to see. In this way, Jackson possesses both sides of what Foucault perceives as mad speech in the inquiry into its paradigmatic shifts. In his relationship to the reader, Jackson addresses what Foucault refers to as the paradoxical truth of mad speech, where the madman is described in a curious triangulation with reason and madness:

His word may be considered null and void, having neither truth nor importance, worthless as evidence in law, inadmissible in the authentification of deeds or contracts [.....] On the other hand, strange powers not held by any other may be attributed to the madman’s speech: the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naivety what the others’ wisdom cannot perceive. (211)

The words of the mad person may be considered “inadmissible” or incapable, yet there is a certain mystifying power in them. This language, in defying or somehow escaping the norms of speech-prohibition, is capable of being elevated to a kind of sacred status, even if it is still outside the true. Likewise, Jackson willingly negates the validity of his voice, letting it fall “into the void” via statements such as “homeless Indians are everywhere in Seattle. We’re common and boring” (Alexie 170). Conversely, his narrative also takes into account the perception of the madman’s “strange powers” and “hidden truth[s]”: Jackson at one point remarks that “[w]e Indians are great storytellers, and liars and mythmakers” (170). This statement seems to conflate the three figures, reinforcing that all stories and all “truths” can only ever be paradoxical truths of a kind of superstitious quality when constructed outside of the dominant discourse, skirting on falsity and madness. This insider/outsider dichotomy is continually foregrounded in the story. Jackson is, in many senses, outside of society, but it is important to note the instances in which Jackson positions his
addressee, or reader, as an outsider to his story. He begins his story with an assumption as to the race, class, and intentions of his addressee; this unidentified figure is constructed from the very beginning of the text as part of dominant, white culture. He employs a kind of disclaimer, a revelation by way of negation: “but I’m not going to tell you my particular reasons for being homeless, because it’s my secret story, and Indians have to work hard to keep secrets from hungry white folks” (169). The foregrounding of the story’s omissions is a narrative device that reminds readers of their own outsider status. Layers of secrecy pervade the story and Jackson is given authority and subjectivity in his own enactment of the principles of exclusion.

The power of this discursive formation is such that it seeks to conceal its desire for power and instead steadies itself upon a claim to truth. Foucault writes: “True discourse, freed from desire and power by necessity of its form, cannot recognise the will to truth which pervades it; and the will to truth, having imposed itself on us for a very long time, is such that the truth it wants cannot fail to mask it” (214). This desire to conceal is in a way a self-fulfilling prophecy, for “true discourse” possesses its own mechanisms of authentication and reinforcement through masking. This would also be true to the institution of mass culture that controls, selects, organizes, and redistributes the procedures of several kinds of discrimination. For example, the conventions of stereotype, which function under the totalizing narratives (discourses) of race, class, gender, and sexuality, are pertinent to an evaluation of Alexie’s story. Jackson employs stereotype, a fiction of mass culture, but in contrast to its usual employment. Stereotype is designed to conceal its pervasive powers, to naturalize what is actually abstract, to stabilize what is highly unstable, and to depoliticize what is inherently political. Contrastingly, Jackson’s self-conscious narration draws close attention to the conventions and prohibitions of his speech. He uses stereotype as a kind of mask in which to critique the dominant yet mysterious institutions of cultural membership and history.

Throughout the story it is important for Jackson to know where Native people come from and what tribes they identify with. He expresses scepticism of those either unwilling to disclose or unsure of their origins: “I’m kind of suspicious of him, because he describes himself only as Plains Indian,
a generic term, and not by a specific tribe” (Alexie 170). However, Jackson also recognizes that to mass culture, all Native peoples are essentially the same; the dominant sphere of culture is likely to ignore the cultural differences between Aleut, Spokane, Yakama, and Duwamish peoples. Jackson counters the unifying, blanketing impulse of mass culture with sarcasm: “But it’s okay. Indians are everywhere” (195). In another instance, Officer Williams, a police officer and thus certainly a figure of dominant discourse, asks Jackson, however naively, to speak for all Native people and their “inherent” sense of humour: “You Indians. How the hell do you laugh so much?” (186). Jackson responds: “The two funniest tribes I’ve ever been around are Indians and Jews so I guess that says something about the inherent humour of genocide” (187). Jackson’s use of the word “inherent” as a unifier of Native populations and Jews as well as of humour and genocide is an ironic gesture of unification that professes its real historical manifestation, as opposed to its myth, lies in society’s “inherent” racial inequality. The ironic treatment of discursive constructions as “inherent” draws an explicit connection to Foucault’s method of historicizing paradigms. Discourse is not inherently formed but internalized and reproduced in ritual, refined by way of exclusionary principles through a process of differentiation that is neither “stable, nor constant, nor absolute” (Foucault 215).

Native identity has, historically, been a source of great ambivalence for the dominant discourse. The popular imagination and iconography of Native American identity can be seen as linked, “reinforced[,] and renewed by a whole strata of practices” that include the discourses of literature and popular culture (212). For example, early in the text Jackson acknowledges the likelihood of the dominant discourse to perceive him as representational of “the terrible fate of the noble savage,” a significant trope in James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (Alexie 170). This novel and its many film adaptations appear to have significantly informed mass culture’s “major narratives […] recounted repeated and varied” surrounding Native Americans as dually noble and violent, primitive yet infinitely clever by means of some mysterious inheritance (Foucault 214). Accordingly, one sees in Jackson’s statement, “I am a strong man, and I know that silence is the best way of dealing with white folks” (Alexie 171) undertones of Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest,
also a canonical film, in its construction of the silently empowered chief. This representation also contributes to the major narratives of Native American identity in mass culture. Alexie’s text, along with his self-conscious narrator, is doubtlessly familiar with these constructions as part of its intertextual identity; these tropes are employed to problematize and, in a sense, unmask. Jackson’s speech is often littered with cues that cite a variety of contradictory constructions of Native American identity. He alludes to himself and his addressee—“hungry white folks”—amidst a pervasive discourse of Native American identity as defined by unstable conceptions of origin and phenotype (169). Perhaps even more troubling is how the myth and iconography of the Native American in mass culture has remained, perhaps in subtler forms, and evolved in the era of post-colonial discourse. Jackson comments on the dichotomies that exist at the very surface of “Indian-ness” in his description of his friend Junior:

He’s good-looking, though, like he just stepped out of some ‘Don’t Litter the Earth’ public-service advertisement. He got those great big cheek-bones that are like planets, you know, with little moons orbiting around them. He gets me jealous, jealous, and jealous. If you put Junior and me next to each other, he’s the Before Columbus Arrived Indian, and I’m the After Columbus Arrived Indian. I am living proof of the damage that colonialism has done to us Skins. (171)

Jackson presents two types and eras of “Indian-ness” that exist simultaneously. But “Before Columbus” and “After Columbus” can be differentiated only through popular imagery and not “inherently.” This statement also problematizes the notion of postcoloniality as a clean break from colonial history. The notion that there are two eras of Native American phenotypes and identities suggests that the dominant narrative of history imposes linearity and causality where it cannot be found toward the means of providing a complete, unified structure with an origin and purposeful end. Alexie’s text actively resists this teleological trajectory. When speaking of history, Jackson offers yet another ironic omission: “But I’m not going to tell you how scared I sometimes get of history and its ways” (171).
The story begins with a time-sensitive problem—Jackson must find the money to buy back his family regalia from the pawnshop before the offer is revoked. The chapters are divided into hourly increments, emphasizing both the immediacy and the disorder of the events; the reader is initiated into a world of unsubstantiated wandering, into a random series of small, almost banal moments, which, however true and real, are often denied representation in traditional history. History is certainly a discourse of exclusionary principles. According to Foucault, there remain degrees of discourses. Some give rise to mere moments, while others are bound to reappear, to reinvent themselves, and to reoccur as valid (the distinction between true and false becoming obsolete) in the dominant discourse:

[T]here is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech-acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. We know them in our own cultural system: they are religious or juridical texts, but also those texts (curious ones, when we consider their status) which are called literary; and to certain extent, scientific texts. (Foucault 215)

This distinction, though it speaks broadly to the cycle of paradigm shifts, is quite significant to Jackson’s characterization of himself as constantly in erasure: “Piece by piece, I disappeared. And I’ve been disappearing ever since” (Alexie 120). Without a home, without a history, it would seem Jackson is continually situated in “the ordinary course of days and exchanges which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced” (Foucault 215). The story’s contagious disappearances also play with the myth of the disappearing Indian, quite common to early nineteenth-century American literature and not exclusive to Cooper’s *The Last of The Mohicans*, a trope dramatized within the narrative as
Jackson’s Native companions arbitrarily and unceremoniously disappear. It suggests that if you do not live inside the true, if you are homeless in one sense or more, you are liable not to exist at all. It is a natural process of exclusion; you will simply be omitted from the narrative when it comes time to write it all down. If you disappear, it is likely that no one will go looking for you. All that seems to exist in the immediacy of the present will fade away in this “gradation among discourses” (215). The disappearance of the Aleuts is particularly mysterious as it suggests that outside of the dominant discourse of history, entire groups and entire peoples can disappear without a trace, without even narrative closure: “I said farewell to the Aleuts and walked toward the pawnshop. I later heard the Aleuts had waded into the saltwater near Dock 47 and disappeared. Some Indians said the Aleuts walked on the water and headed north. Other Indians saw the Aleuts drown. I don’t know what happened to them” (Alexie 193).

Amidst the story’s disappearing acts, it is important to note what Foucault refers to as the curious authority of the literary text. The literary is a recognized discourse as relating to the dominant discourse and the dominant culture. Yet the literary function, particularly in avant-garde forms, is constantly challenging the limitations of its readership and its institutional value. It is a discourse able to comment on and critique itself perhaps far more readily than any other discourse. In fact, there are many instances in which the primary literary text not only willingly adapts to the commentary of the secondary text but also is overtaken by it: “Plenty of major texts become blurred and disappear, and sometimes commentaries move into the primary position” (Foucault 215). Thus, in the literary discourse, as shown in Alexie’s reinterpretation of popular tropes, one does not have to have read a work to be impacted by it. The discursive formation is a conversation to which no one can be fully oriented but must nevertheless respond. Foucault writes: “One and the same literary work can give rise simultaneously to very distinct types of discourse: the ‘Odyssey’ as a primary text is repeated, in the same period, in the translation by Bérard, in and in the endless ‘explications de texte,’ and in Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ (215). The literary work and its commentary are opened to a multiplicity of signification, yet the literary discourse retains its own forces of
prohibition. A text can never completely belie the conventions of the literary discourse. Likewise, regardless of how Jackson employs the tropes and practices of mass culture, even to their detriment, he nevertheless speaks in the language of the dominant discourse. Just as one can protest the order of reason only within the order of reason, the literary can challenge itself only within the literary discourse.

The authority of the literary discourse legitimizes Jackson’s outsider speech. Once written down as a character in a piece of fiction by the authorial powers vested in Alexie’s text, he can be allotted both insider and outsider status. Only in the open multiplicity of the text can this be realized. The authority of the literary discourse saves Jackson’s voice from existing solely in the mad discourse; it impels the reader to suspect that behind Jackson’s words “there is a secret or a treasure” (215). Jackson’s story belongs to him; he has the agency to keep secrets from his stated addressee and challenge dominant discourse. Yet his language can be located in relation to a catalogue of tropes and clichés that pervade institutions of mass culture. This suggests that regardless of how we seek to define ourselves, we must always define ourselves in relation to the dominant discourse in a ceaseless conversation of difference-making and exclusion.

WORKS CITED


SHAPING REALITY

Anna Hemmendinger

“Shaping Reality” is a sequential art response to Jim Woodring’s Weathercraft, a unique, illustrative literary experience—if wordless graphic novels fit into such categories. Created for ENG 235.

Our final essay assignment for ENG 235 was an invitation to explore critically one of the texts we had covered that semester. Studying the humanities at the university level often leads to an over-academic response to art—sometimes beneficial yet often limiting. But within the space of the graphic novel, not as whimsical a medium as one might think, and one as animated and entertaining as Weathercraft, it was a comfort to indulge in the more joyous aspects of postmodernist interpretation.
THIS YEAR, JIM WOODRING, CREATOR OF FRANK COMICS, PRODUCED THE GRAPHIC NOVEL WEATHERCRAFT.

WEATHERCRAFT’S PLOT PROVIDES A METAPHOR FOR THE READER’S EXPERIENCE: THE BENDING AND SHAPING OF REALITY.

MEET SOME OF WOODRING’S CREATIONS:

FRANK: THE AMNESIAC

BETTY AND VERONICA: MAGICAL CREATURES WHO GIVE THE NOVEL ITS TITLE

MANHOG: THE TORmented HERO OF WEATHERCRAFT

(whatever this is)

PLUS... WOODRING PROVIDES NO WORDS!

SO... WOODRING CREATED THIS INTRICATE IMAGINARY WORLD WITH LITTLE SEMBLANCE TO REALITY—A WORLD THAT WORKS ACCORDING TO ITS OWN LOGIC.

FOR EXAMPLE, BETTY AND VERONICA APPEAR TO BE WITCH-LIKE CREATURES WHO, THROUGH SOME SORT OF MAGIC, AFFECT THE ATMOSPHERE AND EVENTS IN THE UNIFACTOR.
MANHOG TOO IS AN AGENT OF CHANGE.

AFTER DESTROYING HIS EGO,

HE BECOMES ENLIGHTENED.

AND AFTER THIS EPIPHANY,

HE REALIZES HE CAN REFORM HIS SURROUNDINGS.

and therefore:

his reality!

and so...
Hemmendinger | Shaping Reality

All we are given is images like the former. Therefore just like Betty and Veronica and Manhog in Mastic City, we must create our own reality.

With all art or literature and therefore comics especially, we must translate two-dimensional symbols into...
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