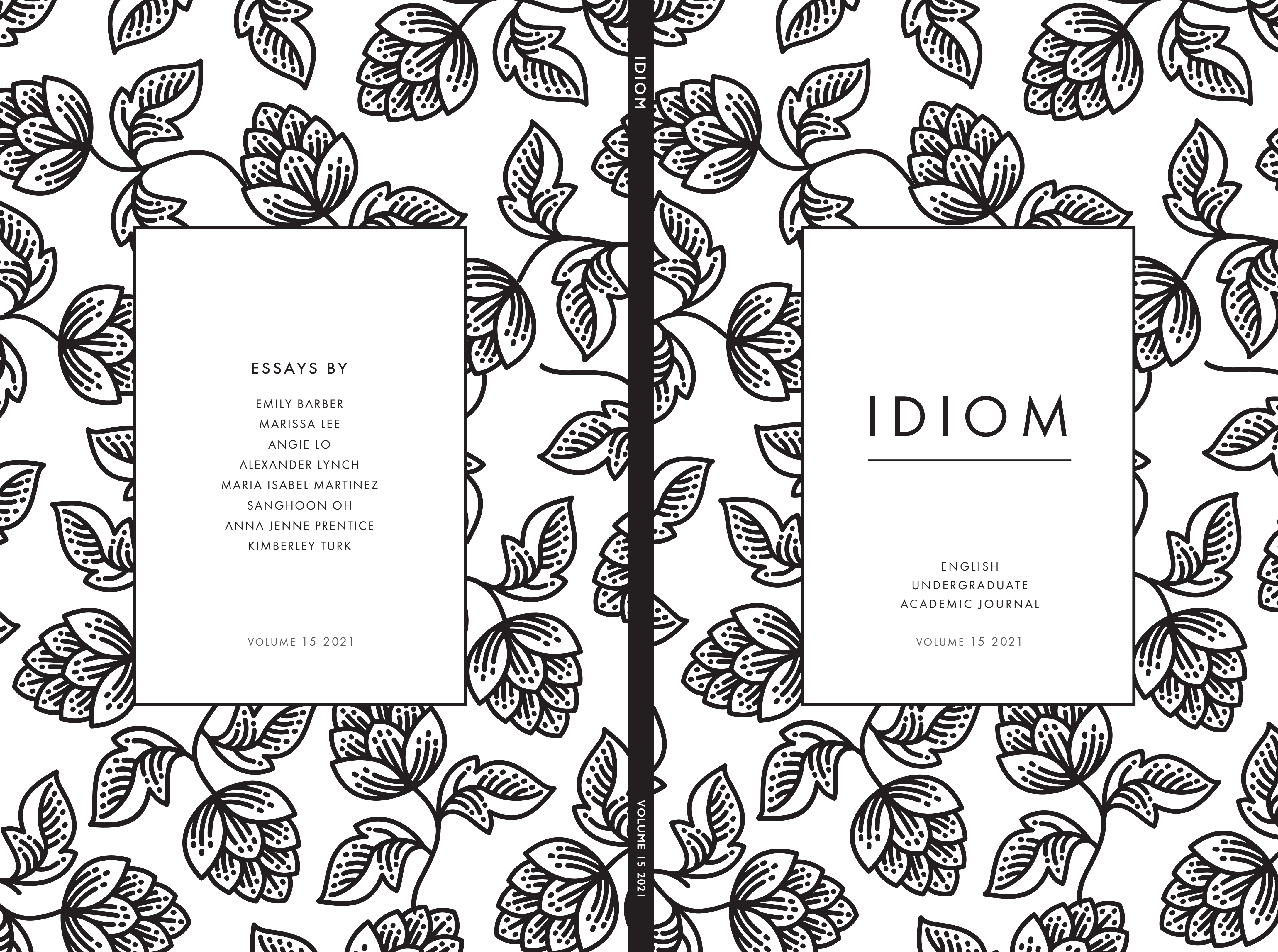
ESSAYS BY
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Tho. H. Shepherd

IDIOM

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at the University of Toronto

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EDITOR'S NOTE

IDIOM does not have an annual theme; our singular aim, as we announce on our first page, is to publish "exemplary literary criticism written by undergraduates at the University of Toronto," and that, I promise, we have done. However—to repurpose a Theodor Adorno quote that appears in the first essay in this volume—"consciousness must push towards unity," and so I have spent some time thinking about how our selections this year might be unified. How did it happen that these ideas found their way together on these pages? I have been an editor of this journal, but I have foremost been its reader. For all the care that our authors put into their readings, it would be a shame if I did not at least try to give one of my own.

Reflected by their order of appearance, the essays of Volume 15 address conflicts that define the human narrative. In our opening pieces, Alexander Lynch and Emily Barber discuss that classic, futile battle between man and nature. Mary Shelley's Elizabeth and Thomas Wharton's Byrne are models for a post-Romantic, post-technological co-existence with nature, they argue—a co-existence that is characterized by feelings of awe and inspiration rather than the impulse to create a "tidy wilderness," to use Alexander's ingenious phrase. Angie Lo is inspired by nature in her study of self-growth and natural metaphor in the sonnets of Shakespeare and Surrey. Angie muses on a thematic arc in the poems in which internal growth is stunted by attention to external reputation. This tension is not only symptomatic of the English Tudor court—Angie's keen analysis points to another timeless contest which pits man against society, a central concern of a majority of our selections. Kimberley Turk locates this archetypal conflict in twentieth-century Irish drama. She uncovers the Bakhtinian carnival in shows of physicality—dancing, looting, consumption—by working class characters, their only solace from the constricting ritualistic performance of national identity. Anna Jenne Prentice critiques the shortcomings of Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* in its portrayal of gender relations, finding that female characters are reduced to plot devices serving male actors. Marissa Lee highlights how the aural dimension of Marie Clements' dramatic retelling of the Hiroshima bombing amplifies Dene and Japanese voices over any "white noise." Sanghoon Oh debates conflicting meanings of primitivism as they pertain to African American identity in Zora Neale Hurston's modernist short story "Sweat," questioning the utility of the term altogether. These essays all have in common that they deal with conflicts within and between different social identities. Our closing article reminds that the only greater enemy to man than other men is his mortal self, fate. Maria Isabel Martinez tackles existential questions in her examination of Anne Carson's poetic treatment of the

divine. "[W]riting does not save the mortal," she beautifully concludes, "but it leaves us with some residue of divine knowledge, and this residue is 'not nothing.'"

Being in the midst of a great fight ourselves—one that combines the forces of nature, human relations, fate—my "reading" of our selections within recognizable narrative structures of conflict is perhaps unsurprising. But more than anything, what I wish for readers to take away from *IDIOM* is the unfailing genius of our student body, even—and especially—under the current circumstances. As Maria Isabel suggests, the power to create a "divine residue" is not solely a tool of the poet, but an ability of all writers, including the scholar. There is resilience in this scholarship—delicate yet enduring (much like the flowers that tattoo this volume's cover). If I had to give *IDIOM* a perennial theme, that would be it: Resilience, year after year.

I owe thanks to many people for helping produce this journal during a unique and difficult period. Thank you to *IDIOM*'s associate editors Delaney, Olivia, Kornelia, Tabeya, Sai, and Veronica; to our managing editor, Elaine; to our assistant editor-in-chief, Morgan; and to our deputy editor-in-chief, Julia. It is not easy being a student right now, and I am indebted to the editorial team for their hard work and diligence. Nor has it been easy for our professors—thanks also to Professor Keymer and Professor Visvis, *IDIOM*'s academic advisors, for their wise words and encouragement. Thank you to our talented graphic designer, Becky, and to Coach House for always beautifully executing her vision. I also want to acknowledge our generous college sponsors—Trinity, New, St. Michael's, and UC—for their continued support of our student-run initiative.

To our authors, thank you for your willingness to share your brilliance when it is needed most. This volume's essays were originally written for second-year survey classes, third-year special topics courses, and fourth-year seminars. They cover a wide historical and geographical ground, from English Renaissance sonnets to contemporary Indigenous literature. Our authors, besides being English scholars, have academic interests in an impressive array of subjects: they are students of philosophy and critical theory, economics and political science, physiology and molecular genetics. This is all to say that literature—of all kinds—is for everyone and that literary readings are only enriched by a more diverse audience. So: I give my final thanks to the discipline itself—one part of all our lives that, when all else fails, always persists in gifting us comfort, strength, and vision.

JOVANA PAJOVIĆ, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
April 2021

A "TIDY WILDERNESS": NATURE, THE GIGANTIC, AND (E)CO-EXISTENCE IN THOMAS WHARTON'S *ICEFIELDS*

Alexander Lynch

The natural environment is not only the setting of our communities, but also an entity with which we are always already in community. This duality, Alexander argues, demands that we develop principles for environmental interactions that acknowledge the environment as a member of our communities (with which we *ipso facto* must co-exist) while remaining sensitive to the unique status of the environment as an environing entity. Put another way, we must modify our conventional logics of co-existence, developed to inform solely (non-environing) humans' interactions with one another, to produce a new logic: one of *ecological co-existence*, or "(e)co-existence." To acknowledge the duality of the environment, Alexander argues, we must first deconstruct the dominant, "techno-scientific" ecology that re-presents the environment as "nature"—that is, as merely a setting for communities and a source of useable objects. To this end, Alexander draws on Heideggerian ecophilosophy to read Thomas Wharton's *Icefields*, a novel that follows the genesis, collapse, and supersession of techno-scientific ecology in the hands of amateur glaciologist Edward Byrne. As Alexander shows, Byrne's encounters with the Heideggerian "gigantic"—that which cannot be quantified as techno-scientific ecology demands—in the spatiotemporal immensity of the glacier he investigates induces in him an anxiety regarding the limitations of science that encourages him to take up a new mode of ecology: (e)co-existence. By examining Byrne's new comportment towards the environment, Alexander derives a provisional set of principles of (e)co-existence that acknowledge the unknowable totality of the environment and centre the safeguarding of environmental autopoiesis.

Alexander would like to thank Scott Herder and *IDIOM* editors Jovana Pajović, Tahsin Tabeya Amin Maansib, and Veronica Spada for their help with the revision of this essay, which was written for ENG252: Introduction to Canadian Literature.

Edward Byrne’s progression from glaciologist to glacier hermit is perhaps the most surprising reversal of Thomas Wharton’s *Icefields* (1995),[1] given Byrne’s overwhelming support of scientific ecology early in the novel. I argue that this reversal reflects the collapse and supersession of this mode of ecology. While initially qualitative, Byrne’s ecological approach becomes “technological” in the distinctly modern sense elucidated by Martin Heidegger in that Byrne’s approach discloses and engages with the real as always already ordered. In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger argues that modern technology has fundamentally altered the human relationship to the environment. Where humans formerly allowed the environment to reveal itself to us on its terms, we now “challeng[e]” it to reveal as “standing-reserve”; that is, as a collection of objects ordered for use (Heidegger, “Question” 20). For Heidegger, modern quantitative science of the kind Byrne practises founds this reductive approach to the environment by “entrap[ping]” and representing the environment as a “calculable coherence of [spatiotemporal] forces” to facilitate the rigorous ordering thereof (21). However, as Byrne’s representations of the environment, the sum of which I will refer to as “nature,”[2] come to rely on technological quantification, his encounters with the incalculably immense glacier—the “gigantic,” in Heideggerian terms (“Age” 135)—progressively expose the limits of his scientific method and, in turn, the unreality of all nature images. These revelations induce in Byrne what I call “scientific anxiety”: the disorienting, hence uncomfortable, awareness of the limits of science. That this anxiety ultimately impels Byrne to transcend technological thinking by *co-existing* with the glacier reveals the possibility and practice of a post-technological ecology.

Byrne’s memories of Kew Gardens, a favourite retreat during his early adulthood in London, exemplify the three key attributes of scientific and non-scientific nature images: the gardens are *deceptively real* in that they are *produced via ordering* to serve *human ends*. Crucially, Byrne remembers these gardens as a “tidy wilderness” (Wharton 17). This oxymoron is so striking that it seems sarcastic, but Byrne is sincere: he “[m]arvel[s]” at the flowers, which are “grown from the specimens collected by […] early scientist-ex-

[1] *Icefields* follows Byrne as he searches for an ice-locked angel-shaped entity he saw while trapped within a crevasse in the Arcturus glacier. His efforts to know the vast glacier primarily consist of glaciological surveys.

[2] All representations of the environment—scientific, poetic, visual-artistic, etc.—produce “nature images,” but this essay tracks the rise and fall of Byrne’s reductive techno-scientific (i.e., quantitative) nature image.

plorers of the Rockies" (17). The gardens are not a natural "wilderness," then, but a "tidy" arrangement of non-native plants. The gardens thus express the paradox of nature: they are a structured re-presentation of the environment by and for humans that purports to be a "realm of instantly compelling facts" about the environment (Morton, *Ecology* 123)—here, about plant growth and cohabitation patterns. The nurseryman "carr[ying] his tray of seedlings *reverently* down the aisle" further exposes this human-led ordering and suggests that the maintenance of this illusion is sacrosanct (Wharton 17, emphasis added). Indeed, that Byrne "env[ies]" the nurseryman signals his desire to join this "priesthood" (17). Of course, the physical orderliness of the environment offers particular pleasures: Byrne's leisurely garden strolls are facilitated—perhaps even demanded—by the arrangement of the plants into "long, well-tended rows" (17). In their sensitivity to constructedness, then, Byrne's recollections of the gardens reveal the human-utility-oriented environmental ordering in which nature consists.

Byrne's early botanical investigations refine this initial view of nature by employing pre-technological environmental cataloguing. Byrne's first dream after his fall into the crevasse exemplifies this non-quantitative approach and exposes its psycho-emotional appeal. Byrne "read the names that ran in orderly columns down the pages of his botanical notebook. Names of the flowers he had been collecting. [...] He walked among [his specimen boxes], he breathed and named, not knowing or caring if the scents matched the names he gave them" (6). Byrne's pleasurable engagement with the environment here requires its ordered re-presentation—by and in his notebook and boxes—as nature. Byrne's special exuberance, though, reveals the psycho-emotional value of naming. As Theodor Adorno notes, entities are disturbingly particular insofar as they are not subsumed under our general concepts, and entities therefore induce a compulsion to identify: "[t]hat which is differentiated," he writes, "appears as divergent, dissonant, negative, so long as consciousness must push towards unity according to its own format" (7). Byrne's naming attempts to resolve this dissonance by reformatting the environment: he names the flowers to claim them for the intelligible sphere of human affairs over and against their intrinsic unintelligibility. In fact, given that this is Byrne's first dream after his dangerous fall, he is no doubt particularly aware of the resistance of the environment to his will. Byrne's dream-naming, then, might be read as the fulfilment—

via conceptual means—of his frustrated wish for physical environmental control.[3] Finally, this dream exposes the unreality of the names Byrne uses to break down his environment into named objects within his nature image. That Byrne can disregard the flowers' "real names" (presumably indicated by their scents) dispels the illusion of a necessary signifier-signified connection: nature does not transparently express the environment.

Byrne's encounter with the angel destabilizes this qualitative approach, inducing the anxiety that impels his shift to technological thinking. Like any good scientist, Byrne first examines the angel's reportable qualities: "What would the orientation of this artifact be if he were not looking at it upside down? Had it fallen from above? Or seeped in from below? Did the ice encasing it cause a magnifying effect?" (Wharton 12). When faced with the unknown, Byrne returns to his scientific nature frame and asks questions that reinforce its assumptions—here, that every "artifact" can be totally cognized—rather than acknowledging the limitations of this frame. As Timothy Morton notes in his discussion of the alluring comfort of the scientific nature image, though, such searches for empirical immediacy in the face of extra-scientific counter-evidence have a "yearning quality, a feel of 'if only'" (*Ecology* 124). Byrne's frantic questioning thus reveals his desire for a totalizing science and centres the frustration of that desire. Still, Byrne's repudiation of his observation—"He laughed. It was absurd" (Wharton 13)—signals his return to the scientific nature image despite this complicating evidence.[4] At the same time, Byrne's (unscientific) baseless scoff—the dismissal of an entity not reducible to a knowable object—exposes his scientific anxiety, which constrains him to defend science at any cost here. Morton describes this disorienting anxiety thus: "I experience myself as a thing insofar as this thing [here, the angel] is no longer objectifiable" (*Dark* 78). Put another way, Byrne's encounter with the angel threatens his objectifying nature frame and, in turn, his unique superiority as a potentially all-knowing subject.

[3] See also Freud, who argues that dreams must be interpreted as fulfilling wishes unsatisfied in waking life (176–84).

[4] Cf. Hepburn, who argues that Byrne consistently "feels wonder [i.e., thinks the essentially extra-scientific extra-scientifically] without relinquishing his rationality" (76). As I suggest, though, the totalizing scientific frame mediating Byrne's early endeavours precludes the formation of the "wondrous" (i.e., that which can only be meaningfully thought extra-scientifically) as a distinct category and, hence, Byrne's contact with the wondrous as such. Instead, this totalizing frame reclaims and represents the extra-scientific as so many aberrations that remain within the scientific sphere insofar as they can be explained scientifically (here, as psychic phantoms).

To fully cognize (and thereby order) the angel so as to prove that science remains total in scope, Byrne refines his project of environmental mastery by developing a rigorously quantitative (i.e., technological) nature image. This approach neglects (still re-presenting) qualitative observations in favour of abstract matrices of numbers, thus more exactly satisfying the impulse to identify that Adorno describes. Of course, as Adorno also notes, "[S]cientivistic objectification tends, in unity with the quantifying tendency of all science since Descartes, to flatten out qualities" (27). The irony of this quantitative shift, then, is that it further distances Byrne from the entities he hopes to thereby know more intimately. This privileging of quantitative rigour explains Byrne's new centring of measuring instruments. "Nunatak," the chapter which focuses on his quantitative investigations, begins with a checklist: "Prismatic compass. Clinometre. Steel tape for baseline measures. Red paint for marking fixed stations. Byrne cracks open a new notebook" (Wharton 139). Whereas Byrne the botanist records his visual observations, Byrne the glaciologist records various measurements of environmental objects. Byrne later recognizes this new mediation of his experience: "*I always seem to have something in my hand.* […] *Something to hold between me and the cold, wet hide of the world*" (265–6). Here, Byrne admits that he understands the world as something monstrous ("*cold, wet hide*") from which he must shield himself. This admission suggests that Byrne's tool-led investigations encounter not the world, but sites of tool-mediated activity. Hence, technological Byrne encounters the environment as always already doubly mediated. The environment now discloses itself to Byrne as (and only insomuch it can be presented as) a "flat" coherence of quantifiables (i.e., techno-scientific nature) that permits only conceptual and/or physical *action upon it*.

Byrne's main quantitative experiment reveals the manifold modes of ordering intrinsic to his new, technological mode of environmental representation. Hoping to determine the melting rate of the glacier to predict when the angel will be released, Byrne "places one line of stones across the ice surface. […] Every week he returns and checks the alignment of the stones, with reference to painted boulders on the moraines. A table in his notebook slowly fills with numbers" (140). Byrne's re-ordering realizes the fantasy implicit in his envy for the nurseryman who orders Kew Gardens. By ordering the stones such that their standing is useful to him, Byrne asserts his ownership of the stones over and against their self-standing: he now *allows* them to stand as

they do. Byrne's physical transformation of his environment into nature (i.e., ordered objects) thus materializes his conceptual ordering thereof. Indeed, the contrasts between this scene and Byrne's naming dream reveal how his new approach develops the scientific project set out in that dream. Byrne's primary nature image now consists not of names recalling specific qualities (6), but numbers in a table. Moreover, since Byrne can now predict the glacier's flow mathematically while only returning once a week (139–40), his picture of nature becomes a world unto itself for him to inhabit. Byrne's desire to order his environment, then, impels him to develop a quantitative method to do so rigorously and universally, but this method re-presents environmental entities to him as (and only insofar as they are) physically and conceptually orderable within experiments themselves intended to produce scientific theories that, in turn, conceptually order even broader ranges of entities.

However, this new nature image is necessary for Byrne's transformative encounter with the gigantic in the spatiotemporal immensity of the glacier. The gigantic, Heidegger says, is not just very large: it is an entity whose incalculability—a "special quality" that "withdraw[s]" the entity from scientific representation—manifests at the moment of quantification ("Age" 135, 154). Only in and through Byrne's quantitative efforts, then, does the very large become the frustratingly gigantic, which frees Byrne to a different ecology in its resistance to his readied, techno-scientific one. Faced with carvings atop the glacier, Byrne realizes, "The images have been here for an unknown length of time, carved into rock the ice had only just scoured and withdrawn from. Not waiting for him to come close and squint at them through his magnifying lens" (Wharton 147). That the glacier connects humans across time emphasizes that it is too temporally immense to be contained by the methodology of any one observer, even the "rigorous" scientific frame. (Indeed, Byrne's squinting emphasizes his narrow view.) This uncomfortable awareness of the limitations of science is implicit in Byrne's response to later inquiries concerning the glacier: "[H]e looks vaguely embarrassed, uncomfortable […] —I haven't been up that far. I've never seen the icefield" (189). To Byrne's dismay, the spatial immensity of the glacier resists his attempts at entrapping it (i.e., representing it in full) quantitatively. That the glacier cannot be entrapped brings this act of entrapment into view by foregrounding its limits. Since techno-scientific nature is shown to entrap the environment as ordered, named, and quantified, this nature image is thus denaturalized. In fact, since

Byrne implicitly takes this nature image to be the most complete and accurate such image (hence his adoption thereof), all nature images are *a fortiori* exposed as incomplete and mediating representations of the environment rather than unmediated presentations of all that is.

Byrne's thus intensified anxiety concerning the limits of science sublates into a receptiveness to modes of environmental relation that repudiate techno-scientific nature in favour of a non-totalizing nature image that acknowledges—without attempting to entrap—that which exists beyond the sphere of the orderable. One of Byrne's later reflections on the ice-locked angel exemplifies this new appreciation of the extra-scientific: "*Immense pressure, coupled with extreme cold. Combining to produce hitherto unknown effects on matter. Or upon spirit*" (170). The first two sentences express Byrne's technological attitude in their use of technical language and the assumption of the totality of his particular frame (via the implicitly universal "*hitherto unknown*"). The abrupt "*Or*" of the third sentence, though, signals Byrne's shift to the extra-rational consideration of "*spirit*." This intellectual shift is foregrounded shortly thereafter: "*And when* [the angel] *melted out of the ice, would it then just sublimate back into metaphysical space, leaving human time and scientific measurement behind? If I could be there, observe it, at the moment of escape*" (171). Here, Byrne acknowledges a discernible space outside of nature ("*scientific measurement*") and his own existence ("*human time*"). As the second sentence suggests, Byrne hopes to think of the angel extra-scientifically so as to move beyond his reductive scientific frame, but he is uncertain of what this entails—the sentence lacks a "then" clause.

Byrne's intention to transcend this frame, however unsure, undergirds his new mode of relating to the environment, which I term "post-technological (e)co-existence." This mode has three main attributes: the repudiation of the techno-scientific nature image and its associated devices of control, an attentiveness to the modes of relation offered by the environment, and the safeguarding of environmental autopoiesis. The first attribute is exemplified by Byrne's progressive shift away from a totalizing scientific ecology. Byrne's account of a disappearing lake encapsulates this shift: "*As the glacier flows forward, its topography will inevitably change, and the lake will vanish. For that reason, its ephemerality, I see no reason to give this body of water a name. It will remain the ideal lake*" (150). As in his encounter with the angel, Byrne fuses scientific and unscientific behaviour here: while he begins by considering the geophysical

reasons for the formation of the lake, formally identifying it as a “*body of water*,” he does not progress beyond this basic scientific gesture. Byrne’s refusal to name is not a convenience: in the final sentence, Byrne suggests that the “*ideal lake*” is unnamed. Byrne’s refusal thus signals his renunciation of the framing devices he has heretofore used. Through this refusal, Byrne frees/protects this environmental entity from the techno-scientific nature image and its reductive framing: he does not reduce the lake to one name among the many in his catalogues.

In turn, Byrne attends to the modes of relation the environment offers him. Since he no longer relies on the (presumed universal) scientific nature frame for this relation, Byrne must adapt his approach depending on the entities he encounters; “[t]*o watch* [glacial ice] *flow*,” for instance, “*one must be patient*” (159). Here, Byrne discerns and accepts the imperative to slow his perception offered by the glacier. Whereas technological Byrne challenged the environment to disclose itself to him as useful, nameable, and quantifiable, Byrne’s post-technological approach, in Heideggerian terms, “thrust[s] aside” his “interpretative tendencies” to perceive “entities themselves *as* encountered of their own accord” (*Being* 96). Moreover, while technological thinking manipulates the environment to make it immediately accessible on human terms (as nature)—as with Byrne’s stone experiment—Byrne now resists this temptation and adjusts his manner of perception to match the speed at which the environment reveals itself.

By attending to these new modes of relation, Byrne harmonizes his own behaviour with his environment now understood as dynamic. Whereas Byrne spends the early pages of “Nunatak” busying himself with his experiments, he is now content to follow environmental autopoiesis. For instance, Byrne “watches for three days as an architectural wonder is created. The glacier groans, cracks, thunders, and rears up a cathedral” (Wharton 161). Instead of measuring these changes, Byrne simply “lies on his stomach and sketches in his notebook” (161). That Byrne perceives the ice structure to be a cathedral is critical: he now senses that the environment creates entities comparable to human creations while being completely separate from human influence. He recognizes the *dignity* of the environment; its autopoiesis is not an object of his idle (if amused) curiosity. Moreover, Byrne’s revelations have meaningfully reshaped his physical existence. While Byrne spends much of “Nunatak”

walking the glacier, he now, rather unscientifically, reclines, refusing to disrupt environmental motion. Byrne's mode of observation has also shifted dramatically. He has moved from the naming-cataloguing and quantifying of the environment to the more authentic—though not transparent—sketching thereof.

The novel's final scene reaffirms the falsity of nature and signals Byrne's desire to propagate his new ecology of co-existence. Byrne finds an orchid growing at the base of the glacier, in response to which "[h]is scientific understanding contracts. Orchids do not grow here. Nothing grows here" (273). This orchid invalidates these remnants of his natural-scientific convictions—something *does* grow here. In fact, that Byrne's "scientific understanding contracts" compromises whatever understanding remains because Byrne is now much more attentive to the (spatially conceived) limits of scientific knowing/representing. Moreover, it is implied—most obviously, by the "dented, punctured remains of a tin specimen box" whose contents nourish the orchid (273)—that this orchid is one of several flowers that Byrne lost during his fall into the crevasse. This scene suggests that just as the orchid, whose growth once more repudiates Byrne's techno-scientific ecology and recalls the growth of a new ecological frame, rises from the remains of a specimen box, a key tool in Byrne's early natural-scientific pursuits, (e)co-existence arises from the technological approach it supplants by way of the anxiety that is produced in the challenging—perhaps, puncturing—of that approach and that, in turn, challenges that approach. In other words, Byrne's encounter with the orchid summarizes his intellectual journey heretofore and anticipates a future ecology that breaks with his past approaches. Most importantly, though, Byrne shares his discovery with Kagami (274), a Japanese alpinist who plans to explore the icefields. Critically, Kagami has "a keen interest in glacial dynamics" and "once spent a night in a crevasse, on the Mer de Glace of Mont Blanc. Purely out of *scientific* curiosity" (268, emphasis added). Since Kagami resembles pre-turn (i.e., technological) Byrne, Byrne's sharing of the orchid seems an attempt to expose the limits of techno-science and thereby promote post-technological (e)co-existence. By showing Kagami, who presumably also believes that "[n]othing grows here" (273), the orchid, Byrne can induce the scientific anxiety that is resolved in the transcendence of techno-scientific ecology. In turn, this act of sharing ostensibly presages Byrne's wider circulation of his revelations.

In sum, Byrne’s natural-scientific method uniquely *reduces* his environment to nature, a deceptively real collection of objects to be conceptually and physically ordered for human ends. Though Byrne initially responds to the shortcomings of his scientific approach—revealed in his encounter with the extra-scientific angel—by employing new, quantitative techniques for entrapping the environment, his confrontations with the gigantic glacier reveal the insurmountable limits of all scientific ecologies. Byrne’s now inescapable anxiety regarding the coherence of science itself impels him to seek and enter into a new relationship to his environment that acknowledges and respects its unknowable totality and autopoiesis. Byrne’s arc is a source of hope: as his encounter with the orchid suggests, the contemporary dominance of techno-scientism is precisely that which lays open the path to post-technological (e)co-existence.

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NATURE: THE CATALYST FOR FEELING AND IMAGINATION IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Emily Barber

Fascinated with the wide range of landscapes found in Mary Shelley's quintessential novel, Emily traces the emotional and imaginative responses of characters in *Frankenstein* and maps them onto the ideologies of Romantic poets. What emerged was a deep divide in the impact of nature on the individual—some were inclined to mastery, others, to appreciation. But nature itself cannot be denied, for the natural world eludes those who seek to trespass its bounds. Indeed, the true monstrosity of *Frankenstein* is not the creature, but those actions conducive to upsetting the natural order.

Emily suggests that Shelley's unique perspective on nature is expressed through the character of Elizabeth, who though educated and aware of the poetic tradition, relies on no discernable poetic influence to voice her view on nature. Elizabeth's view of nature is both holistic and detail-oriented: capable of appreciating subliminal and picturesque landscapes while attending to the intricacies of the natural world.

Written for Professor Alan Bewell's ENG308: Romantic Literature course, this essay emerged out of Emily's enduring interest in *Frankenstein* and the opportunity to explore the effect of landscapes on interiority. Emily would like to thank Julia Mihevc, Veronica Spada, and Sai Rathakrishna for their thoughtful edits and helpful feedback that went into this essay.

True to the spirit of the Romantic period, Mary Shelley writes with evocative detail when describing nature in her novel *Frankenstein*. From the forbidding peak of Mont Blanc to the gold-tinted banks of the Rhine, Shelley subjects her characters to a formidable range of natural conditions as they grapple with the consequences of Victor Frankenstein's decidedly unnatural creation. Characters' responses to nature are as varied as the natural settings themselves: nature can be a source of healing or disquiet, of dazzling inspiration or deep contentment. Yet these responses are far from random: they often allude to Shelley's contemporaries—Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth—and these allusions correspond to the thoughts and feelings of specific characters. Or, ominously, nature can evoke no response at all. Both Victor and the creature suffer bouts of alienation from nature and society due to their unnatural deeds—but the creature's abject rejection by society makes this alienation permanent. In *Frankenstein*, nature is a catalyst for human feeling and imagination, eliciting emotional responses in characters that mirror their interior selves. These emotional responses frequently serve as Shelley's critique of the Romantic tendency to overreach the boundaries of nature. Accentuated by Shelley's vivid descriptions, nature emerges as an autonomous, sublime force, one that is impervious to human mastery and control. To be inspired by nature is conducive to a healthy emotional state, but to overreach or transgress the natural order is ultimately destructive.

Shelley introduces her characters' emotional responses to nature through Robert Walton's frame narrative. Walton's letters to his sister Margaret express his elation at the beauty of the Arctic and the possibilities it holds; yet despite his light-hearted reference to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Walton is unable to perceive how similar he is to Samuel Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. Walton delights over a cold northern breeze, claiming: "Inspirited by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent and vivid" (Shelley 49). Inspiration implies he is physically taking in the air, yet to be poetically "inspirited" in the context of Percy Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" and "Ode to the West Wind" is to make the world brighter and more animated—like the breath of autumn in "Ode to the West Wind" that sends a rush of colour and inspiration through "[a]utumn's being" (803). "Fervent" and "vivid" are ideal traits of Percy Shelley's aspiring poet; and indeed, Walton confesses to attempting to write poetry

(M. Shelley 51). While Walton's association with Percy Shelley is implicit, Mary Shelley is explicit in her association of Walton with the Ancient Mariner. The stark, barren landscape of the Arctic is a space of infinite possibility, one which Walton approaches with feelings "half pleasurable and half fearful" (55). Perhaps he is aware of the intensity in his language, for Walton plays his ardour off as a jest, saying, "I am going to unexplored regions, to 'the land of mist and snow;' but I shall kill no albatross" (55). Walton fails to realize that the act of killing the albatross is often seen as representing the senseless trespass of nature, which he will inevitably do if he continues heedlessly on his expedition. However, "the land of mist and snow" alludes to a moment in Coleridge's poem when the Mariner is still fascinated with nature's wonders but has not yet condemned himself to destruction. Shelley's use of this quotation establishes Walton's potential to represent a Romantic archetype of the overreaching poet, but she has not committed him to continue down this precarious path.

In Victor Frankenstein, the Romantic archetype of the overreaching poet is drastically fulfilled: Victor's initial fascination with the power of nature feeds his desire to surpass nature, to have control over the natural world. His description of seeing a "most violent and terrible thunder-storm" (69) as a teenager is complicated by his admission of "watching its progress with curiosity and delight" (69). However, it is not just the violence of the storm he enjoys, but its inexplicability. He is astonished by "a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak […] and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump" (69–70). Victor's description evokes a vivid, dramatic image, told with the breathless enthusiasm of someone witnessing a magic trick. The sheer power and scale of this "trick" of nature sends him searching for answers, hence his enthusiasm upon hearing M. Waldman's praise of the natural philosophers who "penetrate into the recesses of nature and shew how she works in her hiding places" (76). This statement is phrased almost violently, as it envisions the seeker exposing and subjugating nature. Victor's own aspirations of surpassing nature are thereby tied to a desire for power over its destructive forces. Waldman's articulation of science has a dangerous appeal to Victor's imagination, one that encourages a give-and-take relationship with nature, with a blatant disregard for consequences.

Victor's detachment from nature stems from his unhealthy obsession with attaining the sublime, manifested in Shelley's representation of the moon. In this context, sublime is that which inspires feelings of grandeur and awe, but it is of such magnificence so as to be ultimately unattainable. Shelley articulates the sublime through stark landscapes like Mont Blanc, but the moon is a particularly poignant manifestation. When Victor is immersed in the act of creation, he describes himself similarly to the natural philosophers so highly praised by M. Waldman: "[T]he moon gazed upon my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places" (82). Under the influence of the sublime as represented by the moon, Victor's lofty aspirations to create life circumvent the natural means of reproduction. Additionally, given that the creature is his alternative to female reproduction, it is notable that nature is described with a female pronoun. In Victor's quest for the sublime, the feminine and the natural world becomes exploited and overruled. Nature's inherent fertility and Shelley's explicit framing of nature as feminine are ignored in the search for the sublime, as Victor recalls that during his cultivation of unnatural life, "never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage" (83). Nature's fertility is disdained by Victor for his own creation, despite Victor's acknowledgement of nature's bountiful capacity to sustain and create. Victor, by his reckless creation of the creature, has irrevocably turned away from the possibility of natural life.

The creature's relation to the sublime is initially forced upon him, for unlike Victor, the creature has no say in his alienation from nature and society. The creature's response to nature is complex: Shelley identifies him with the sublime by linking descriptions of the moon and the eyes of the creature, and the creature is repeatedly repulsed by human society until he is driven to inhabit cold and sparse landscapes. However, the creature has a strong affinity for warm landscapes and temperate climes. Despite being built for regions hostile to life, the creature's natural inclination is towards lands that foster a nurturing environment. Created in the midst of Victor's obsession, Shelley establishes the creature as a physical manifestation of the sublime. The description of Victor witnessing "the dull yellow eye of the creature open" (85) and the "dim and yellow light of the moon" (85) is unerringly similar, especially considering prior associations of the moon with Victor's ecstasy of creation (82). The creature's own words bear out

this contrast between his physical and emotional side, for he relates: "I was better fitted [...] for the endurance of cold than heat. But my chief delights were the sight of flowers, the birds, and all the gay apparel of summer" (156). Despite Victor's intent in fashioning him as a formidable and hardy being designed to withstand more than humans, the creature prefers a gentler landscape. The creature's preference for moderate landscapes can also be interpreted in terms of altitude: rather than seeking heights upon which to look down on others, the creature prefers even grounds, where community and fellowship are more feasible. Even after he burns down the De Laceys' cottage out of sheer rage and grief, the warmth of a spring day causes the creature to feel "emotions of gentleness and pleasure, that had long appeared dead" (165). The creature's obvious love of nature makes his fall into misery all the more tragic: given no chance by society to cultivate his nurturing side, the creature does not have the opportunity to develop into an eloquent, caring individual.

One such individual in *Frankenstein* is Henry Clerval; Clerval's association with William Wordsworth in his joyful reactions to picturesque landscapes suggests Shelley's preference for an imagination that seeks to accommodate rather than surpass nature. Upon seeing the "picturesque" (180) banks of the Rhine, Clerval is profoundly moved, as he proclaims to Victor: "surely, the spirit that inhabits [...] this place has a soul more in harmony with man, than those who pile the glacier, or retire to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains" (181). Rather than viewing nature as being an empty vessel to deposit human wants, nature in Clerval's imaginative conception has an animating force of its own. The very idea of harmony suggests that Clerval conceives of nature as being equal, or at least capable of cohabitation, with humankind. Therefore, Clerval views the relationship between humanity and the natural world as one of peace rather than domination. Victor explains Clerval's love for nature as "ardour" (181), and quotes Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" in relation to Clerval. Victor relates that "the sounding cataract / Haunted like a passion" (181); altering the quotation to read "him" instead of "me" shifts the context to the second person and emphasizes Clerval's love for moderate, picturesque landscapes. Perhaps Victor's alteration is testimony to his own inability to love—for unlike Victor, Clerval's unselfish love for nature seeks to find a place for humankind in the natural world without plans of control. Like the other softening influ-

ence in Victor's life—Elizabeth—Clerval's response to nature provides an alternative narrative to the grasping and mastering impulse to which Walton is susceptible and by which Victor is overcome.

Elizabeth is a notable exception to Shelley's motif of assigning characters to a corresponding Romantic poet; however, she still has an emotional relation to nature, one that is more holistic and attentive than those of other characters. In one of her rare instances of dialogue, Elizabeth attempts to divert the despondent Victor with the view before them: "Observe [...] how the clouds which sometimes obscure, and sometimes rise above the dome of Mont Blanc, render this scene of beauty still more interesting" (216). Here, a subliminal, daunting view of a mountain is tempered by the movement of the clouds; that this sight intrigues Elizabeth suggests her reaction to nature is more balanced than Victor's. She does not see the grandeur of nature as an obstacle to overcome or control, but focuses instead on the beauty of the scene in its entirety. Yet Elizabeth's vision is also acute, for though she can appreciate a landscape, she takes the time to observe detail: "Look also at the innumerable fish that are swimming in the clean waters, where we can distinguish every pebble that lies at the bottom [...]. How happy and serene all nature appears" (216). Elizabeth's mention of "every" pebble is credit to her care for and attention to the intricacies of nature. Yet despite being well-versed in poetry (66), any opinion Elizabeth voices is wholly her own. Perhaps through Elizabeth, Shelley crafts a new Romantic sensitivity to nature: a gentler, more moderate reaction that appreciates all of nature in its intricate details. This view is nonetheless crushed by those who seek to impose their will on nature, for, like Clerval, Elizabeth meets her demise through Victor's actions.

Victor suffers bouts of alienation from nature, yet his pride prevents a total estrangement from the natural world. Victor's attitude toward nature echoes the brooding, Byronic heroes of the Romantic period—so convinced of their own superiority and righteousness that even their misery is a show of egotism. Victor's eloquence after William's death is palpable when he describes a "storm enlightened Jura with faint flashes; and another darkened and sometimes disclosed the Môle, a peaked mountain to the east of the lake" (102), echoing Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III." Like Childe Harold, Victor's ecstasy over nature trumps all other feelings, as his

grief over the death of his brother gives way to wallowing in melancholy. He professes immediately afterwards that "the noble war in the sky elevated [his] spirits" (103). Violence—the "war in the sky" that is the storm—is glorified as noble. Nature for Victor is commendable only in its moments of power and domination. When Walton fishes Victor out of the Arctic ice, Walton notes his double existence, the flip side being that glorious sights of nature seem "still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth [...] yet when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures" (61). Note the language of the divine that seeps into Walton's description of Victor's affected mannerisms: part of Victor still remains untouched by his deeds, despite all the suffering he has caused. Intriguingly, he has moments of awareness, of fear at the force he has blindly unleashed. For upon his wedding night, Victor relates: "I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber" (218). As previously established, the moon is linked with the creature and therefore with the sublime. Victor's panic is thus his denial that nature cannot be mastered by him; any attempts he makes to surpass the natural order inevitably end in disaster. In this respect, Victor is the ultimate flawed Romantic over-achiever, remaining blind to his monstrous pride up until his dying breath, convinced he can still exploit nature.

The creature is the ultimate wretched by-product of Victor's lofty goals. Crippled from the outset of his existence by the carelessness of Victor's imagination, his loss of feeling is all the more tragic for once having felt so much. When the creature commits murder with the bitter malice of rejection, he irrevocably alienates himself from nature. He relates to Victor, "[T]he labours I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring; all joy was but a mockery" (166). Turning away from the softness in the landscape and thus the softness in himself, the creature retreats into the stark and barren climes of Mont Blanc, embracing the sublime landscapes as he embraces the misery of his life. This is poignantly evoked in the manner of his proposed suicide. The creature tells Walton he intends to seek the North Pole, wherein he will "collect [his] funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame" (243). In this final deed the creature emulates the protagonists of "The Revolt of Islam" by Percy Shelley, serving as Mary Shelley's critique of the self-destructive ten-

dency of the Romantic over-achiever. For by trespassing the natural order by murder, the creature has truly become a monster. Despite his unnatural beginnings, the creature is still able to enjoy life up until the point when he turns against nature entirely. He describes himself as being "polluted by crimes" (244): the very diction the creature uses indicates the corruption of nature by his deeds.

Accordingly, Shelley's immediate audience for her cautionary tale is pointedly Romantic, judging by her tendency to subtly allude to—and sometimes, directly quote—her contemporaries. But her warning is applicable to any who—like Walton—may be too caught up in the ecstasy of experiencing nature. As demonstrated by the positive examples of Clerval and Elizabeth and by the warnings of Victor and the creature, any inspiration and solace that nature brings with its widely diverging landscapes must be tempered with a loving respect. While Clerval demonstrates this love in abundance with his ardour for the picturesque, I would submit that, through Elizabeth, Shelley puts forward a new way to view nature. Elizabeth appreciates the intricacies of the natural world with care rather than any intentions of mastery. But crucially, Elizabeth's perception of nature is also holistic: when she gazes upon Mont Blanc with Victor, she sees the landscape in its entirety as it is softened and framed by the clouds. To be able to see the sublime and the picturesque together is to embrace all of nature, rather than fixating on one at the expense of the other. For the natural world in all its bounty ultimately eludes and denies those who dare trespass its bounds.

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SO LONG AS EYES CAN SEE: EXPRESSIONS OF SOCIETAL LIMITATIONS ON GROWTH IN SURREY AND SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Angie Lo

This paper was written last year for ENG202: Introduction to British Literature I. In the course, Angie was introduced to works detailing the volatility of the Tudor court and the short-lived power and prestige that resulted. This influenced Angie's reading of Tudor poetry focusing on natural themes, as she considered potential connections that might lie between the transience of reputation and that of the seasons. This paper is the result of these considerations, discussing both nature and humanity in Surrey's "The soote season" and Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 as a commentary on personal growth influenced by the court. In both poems, various images of natural growth reflect aspects of cultivating or "growing," an external reputation attractive to aristocratic society, while the decline of nature in the midst of changed weather parallels reputation's vulnerability to the court's inconstant opinions. Both poets also illustrate how the internal growth of one's virtue, reflected in the poems' descriptions of people, are encroached on and inhibited by society's overwhelming attention to surface-level progress.

This paper also discusses the extensive use of form to reflect these concepts, with flowing quatrains and compressed couplets used to parallel growth (or lack thereof). Together, these interpretations shed light on how poets perceived courtly influence on the nature of progress in particular. Furthermore, they reveal how historical experiences at court are rendered more accessible through universal themes, and frame the sonnet form as a representation of the aristocratic climate of the era.

The pressures and conflicts of the court were major subjects in Tudor poetry. Being noblemen themselves, or writing for high-ranking patrons, many Tudor poets would have known of the volatile and repressive nature of aristocratic society. One poet, the politician Sir Thomas Wyatt, attacks the fickleness of courtiers in his poem "They flee from me," in which the speaker laments nobles' abandonment of him when he cannot keep up with their changing expectations. Meanwhile, his poem "Stand whoso list" describes how one's true character must be inhibited to gain approval from a shallow society: "[Who] is much known of other[s]," he writes, "of himself, alas, doth die unknown" (9–10). His contemporary Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, wrote likewise in "Martial, the things for to attain," describing the merits of obtaining personal virtue and self-fulfillment in the repressive court's absence. Surrey's "The soote season" and Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 also delve into this subject, though in a different manner. The previously mentioned poems describe the court's influence in a literal and explicit way, while focusing on an end result: portraying prestige and virtue as something attained, or to be attained. Meanwhile, Surrey and Shakespeare's sonnets present the subject in a more dynamic light, focusing instead on the process of growing towards virtue and prestige. The way they depict societal pressures is also less outright, instead drawing on more universal themes and images to do so.

"The soote season" describes the plentiful arrival of the new season's flora and fauna, then reveals the melancholy of the speaker in the midst of this abundance. Meanwhile, Sonnet 18 describes nature's vulnerability in summer, expressing the hope that the addressee's character will outlast such ephemerality. These descriptions are used by both poets to create parallels to personal growth, namely the external growth of one's social reputation and the internal growth of one's true character. In both poems, external growth is paralleled by growth in nature (quite literally, the "outer surroundings"); descriptions of its transience reflect how one's growing reputation is vulnerable to—and thus limited by—society's volatility. Internal growth is paralleled by descriptions of people, which, while imbued with depth, also contain depictions of neglect. This reveals how, despite its importance, the growth of one's character is indirectly restricted by others' overwhelming attention to reputation.

All of these ideas are enforced within the sonnet's formal compactness; the restricted nature of the verses on external and internal growth mimic the restrictions placed on growth itself. Through making these parallels, Surrey and Shakespeare artfully but effectively demonstrate how one's personal growth can be limited by societal views and values.

In both sonnets, Surrey and Shakespeare provide examples of natural growth—whether of buds, grass, or scales—that parallel the methods of cultivating an external image for others. For instance, Surrey's hill "clad" (2) with green while the buck grows a new "coat" (7) evokes imagery of acquiring new clothing, the bright colour and rich fur alluding to the luxurious style of the upper classes. Shakespeare, in describing the landscape becoming "untrimm'd" (8), a phrase meaning "stripped of gay apparel" (6), also ties courtly fashion in with summer growth. Another allusion to reputation is made when Surrey describes "the nightingale [...] sing[ing]" (3) and "turtle [...] [telling] her tale" (4). Musical and literary elements in these lines reflect the composition of poetry, then a common medium through which courtiers projected an admirable self-image. Both poets also emphasize societal encouragement of trends and appearance, comparing it to the bolstering of natural growth by outside forces. Surrey's "bud and bloom" (1) are brought forth by the fair weather of the "soote season" (1); the adjective soote, or "sweet," is a common description of one's attitude, perhaps alluding to the sweet reception given by others. Meanwhile, Shakespeare uses an "eye" (5) as a metaphor for the sun, implying a feeding of growth through others' visual attention. In this way, both poems' images of natural growth serve as metaphors for the growth of one's reputation, spurred on by a season of praise and approval. However, these metaphors also come with the awareness that seasons end; the aspects of one's external image, while attractive, are ultimately transient.

Indeed, though external growth is encouraged by society, it is also solely dependent on society; such growth is too superficial to be anchored to anything substantial or lasting. Status symbols such as fashion are not judged on deep-rooted morality or objective standards—they are instead entirely subjective, their praiseworthiness changing with common opinion. Surrey alludes to this shallowness with his many exam-

ples of new feathers, scales, and skin. All describe literal surface-level growth, and the ease with which animals "fling" (7) and "sling" (9) off old coats emphasizes their lack of anchoring. Meanwhile, Shakespeare's description of "winds […] shak[ing] the darling buds" (3) implies that their growth is fragile, lacking strong connections to deep roots or firm supports. As a result, such growth is ceased by no more than a change in the seasons. Surrey's mention of the "winter [being] worn" (12) reminds us it will return; the same sweet air causing the flowers to bloom will turn cold and become their "bale" (12). In the same way, Shakespeare's "eye of heaven" (5) which nourishes the buds' growth can harshly shine "too hot" (5) and cause the bud to wilt, or become "dimm'd" (6), ceasing to supply nourishment. Eventually such changes lead to the expiration of "summer's lease" (4), causing the "decline" (7) of fair growth. Just as nature is utterly dependent on the weather, so too is reputation dependent on society's praise; if the pleasant atmosphere parallels societal encouragement of external growth, its "changing course" (8) must then parallel a shift in societal values. As popular opinion constantly changes, the same individuals who bolstered one's efforts to better their status could then hotly degrade one or coldly cease to care. These efforts are left with no other supports to grow on; one's reputation, like the summer green, thus quickly decays. By comparing nature's dependence on the changing atmosphere to reputation's dependence on others' volatile actions, Surrey and Shakespeare demonstrate society's capability to stop and limit the external growth it once supported.

Both poets also discuss the internal growth of character through descriptions of people: that is, Surrey's narrator and Shakespeare's addressee. Internal growth is shown to be substantial and lasting, contrasting sharply with (or, as Shakespeare would have it, *incomparable* to) the fleeting summer of external growth. The substantiality of character is depicted in the last two lines of Surrey's poem, in which the narrator speaks of himself and his internal state for the first time: "And thus I see among these pleasant things, / Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs" (13–4). Here, the word "spring" has a double meaning, referring not only to the act of emerging from within but also to the physical body of water; its continuously flowing nature is symbolic of his endurance, while a spring's underground source implies a profound rooting of

his emotional state. Shakespeare depicts the lasting growth of character more plainly, quite literally describing his addressee as "eternal" (9). Meanwhile, the line "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st" (12) describes depth of character. "[G]row'st" also has a double meaning: it refers to the growth of the addressee (and his own internal character), but the word also means "grafted" ("grow, v."), implying a strong anchoring that contrasts with the superficiality of reputation. As well as describing character as profound, both poets also emphasize it as being free from society's changing opinions. The underground spring that Surrey's narrator possesses is buried far below the cold air of judgement, while Shakespeare's addressee has a summer of his own; his character doesn't need a fair atmosphere of validation to grow.

Despite being independent of society, internal growth is still dependent on the person and their efforts in cultivating it. Therein lies the rub: society takes advantage of that dependence, interfering with one's efforts when their power is weakened. This happens to Surrey's narrator, when he realizes that "each care decays" (14). "Care" can be synonymous with "distress"; that is, sitting among the "pleasant" (13) growth of nature, or the admirable outer image he has worked towards, he earns the peace of society's validation. However, "care" can also be synonymous with "lack of concern." In this case, he has spent so much time accumulating "pleasant things" (13) towards his reputation that he has neglected to care about growing his character (or, more specifically, his emotional well-being). By pressuring him to focus on only superficial things, society weakens the narrator's agency over his choices; thus, it limits his internal growth by preventing him from attending to it.

Shakespeare, conversely, is more optimistic about his addressee's agency, stating he will not "lose possession of that fair [he owns]" (10). This description of inner beauty implies he has already made efforts to grow substantially in character, and will continue to do so. Despite "wander[ing] in [Death's] shade" (11)—an allusion to inner growth being overshadowed by society's favouring of "deathly," or transient, external growth—he will not (unlike Surrey's narrator) allow it to affect his choices. However, Shakespeare's optimism is dashed in the last two lines: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives [this

poem], *and this gives life to thee*" (13–4; emphasis added). In these lines, the presence of society is only directly linked to the preservation of the *sonnet*; the addressee himself only endures if the poem—his projected image—endures as well. The addressee is then neglected for the subjective quality of his image in poetic form; no matter how hard he may have worked towards his moral character, it will not be remembered if common opinion deems the poem unworthy. In this way, society's superficial values ultimately limit internal growth. Although one's growth can flourish with enough willpower, the preservation of that growth is still restricted. By depicting societal encroachment on one's inner potential as soon as they lack agency, both poets show how norms and values can limit something even as profound as internal growth.

The concepts of external growth's transience and dependence on courtly society, as well as societal encroachment on internal growth, are amplified through Surrey's and Shakespeare's use of form. In both poems, personal growth is represented by a literal increase in the number of lines. The arrangement of themes within these lines parallel the ways in which society limits both external and internal growth. Both poems begin with lines focused on natural growth, which persist until the subject changes; how the poets choose to end these lines reflects the transience of external growth. Surrey's lines end with a reminder of "winter" (12), while Shakespeare's end with a statement on "nature's changing course" (8). Both these endings describe a change in the seasons, representative of societal volatility. Thus, a change in societal values literally ends the continuation, or growth, of lines on nature/reputation in such a way that is reflective of how it stops external growth in real life.

Both poets also formally reflect how societal values cause the rejection of internal progress in place of external progress. Surrey achieves this effect through his distribution of themes in the sonnet; his descriptions of nature grow continuously for twelve lines, literally limiting the number of lines left for self-reflection to two. The imbalance parallels how the speaker, spurred on by societal encouragement, puts so much effort into his reputation that he is left unable to improve his character. His neglect is also shown in the placement of the line "and thus I see"

(13). It is placed when the poem is nearly over, demonstrating that in fact he does not "see," or realize, that his character must be attended to until it is too late. Surrey takes advantage of the compressed final two lines to show the limitations of time, as the couplet placed after three quatrains reflects a sense of haste. This is reinforced further by the subject having only a half-line left to ruminate on his emotional state, showing a literal lack of capacity to grow past sorrow.

Shakespeare, again reflecting his optimism for his subject's internal growth, devotes more lines to it: six lines compared to eight for external growth. Although this is nearly a fifty-fifty split, there is still an imbalance due to the unevenness of the sonnet form. Had the poem consisted of four quatrains, the distribution would have been even: eight lines for both themes. No matter how strong society's pressures, his subject would have met that strength with an even match. However, the poem instead ends in a compressed couplet; that is, a premature cut-off of the lines' continuance and the subject's internal growth. What constitutes this final couplet is the conditional statement that his character endures only if others value its projection. No matter what the extent of his strength may be, the life and lines of the subject will end, and society (figuratively and literally) has the "last word" on whether his internal growth will be remembered. Because society cares only for the superficial, their fickle judgements place his remembrance—like the line distribution—in a precarious balance. In this way, Shakespeare emphasizes society's ability to limit, or "cut off," internal progress. Through formal limitations of the lines discussing these themes, both Surrey and Shakespeare reflect the societal limits on their subjects' personal growth.

Through their many parallels to images of growth in their sonnets, Surrey and Shakespeare artfully convey the societal repression of progress in an ever-changing court. Their focus on growth, a dynamic process, adds another layer of engagement to the subject of court, providing a new trajectory which they pull readers through. So too does their continuous depiction of aristocracy's pressures through image and metaphor; by drawing fully on familiar, universal concepts of nature and humanity, the sonnets remove distance from the historical experience and make the topic of courtly influence more accessible to readers.

Additionally, both poets masterfully reflect their depictions through the sonnet form, using increases and decreases in the progression of lines to parallel one's progression in aristocratic society. In this way, the English sonnet in itself becomes a representation of the courtly tensions of the period, where the quatrains' lengthened nature becomes the gaining of prestige through the court's support (and its inevitable end as values shift), and the following short couplet as the limiting of integrous preservation by the aristocracy's shallow values of wealth, trends, and power. Thus, it is not simply the sonnet's origins in Tudor England that make it a creation of the period. It is also in becoming an embodiment of its time that establishes the sonnet as a true innovation of the era.

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"A CRUDE MASK OF HAPPINESS": THE CARNIVALESQUE AND IRISH IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF O'CASEY AND FRIEL

Kimberley Turk

This paper was written for the seminar "Irish Drama: Fashioning Identity" and began as an exploration of religious obligation and personal sacrifice in twentieth-century Irish plays—particularly in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) and Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). It evolved into an analysis of the ways that Irish identity is "performed" in both plays—particularly in relation to the Mundy sisters in *Dancing* and the Clitheroe family in *Plough*, all of whom face societal pressures to act in accordance with community-produced ideals and gender roles. This essay examines both plays through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival, "a short time [when] life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom" (89). Kimberley argues that Bacchanalian release plays a vital role in sustaining individuality within conservative twentieth-century Irish society. It is through the liberating release of dancing, looting, and consumption that the individuals in Friel and O'Casey's plays are able to shed their preconceived performative roles and gather a temporary, but nonetheless liberating, sense of autonomy. Kimberley would like to thank Professor Philippa Sheppard for her insight during the initial stages of this essay, as well as her editors at *IDIOM* for all of their support and assistance throughout the editing process.

Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* and Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* both explore the roles that personal sacrifice and duty play in Irish identity, while examining the impact of these roles on the individual. O'Casey's play follows Nora and Jack Clitheroe and their tenement neighbours in a fictionalized account of the Easter Rising of 1916. A decade after the Rising, O'Casey's decision to question the efficacy of patriotism, particularly due to its effects on the lives of the poor, caused much controversy (Murray xxviii). Friel's play is set in County Donegal, in the summer of 1936, and depicts the lives of the Mundy family. In both plays, characters feel the pressure to *perform* and conform to Irish identity, as exemplified by Jack Clitheroe's performance of heroic masculinity as a soldier for the Irish Citizen Army in *Plough*, and the Mundy sisters' performance of Catholic customs and values in *Dancing*. This pressure is occasionally relieved through forms of Bacchanalian release, such as dancing, looting, and consumption. Reading these plays through Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque reveals how Bacchanalian release, through the chaos and festivities of celebration, allows characters to temporarily abandon personas that they have adopted due to social pressure and circumstance. Although the carnival is a traditionally exhibitionist experience, it reveals the interiority of the characters, creating a metanarrative on performativity within the context of the conservative social climate of Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century.

In O'Casey's play, the Clitheroes' poverty impacts all areas of their lives, including Nora's efforts to prevent her husband from joining the Easter Rising. In an attempt to show her individuality and display an air of sophistication, Nora decorates their flat with "*a picture of* The Sleeping Venus" and copies of "The Gleaners" and "The Angelus" (O'Casey 3). Yet, despite these embellishments, she is unable to hide the reality that their home is "*struggling for its life against the assaults of time*" (3). Nora desperately wants a life of contentment and love alongside her husband, Jack, and goes so far as to hide a letter announcing his promotion to commandant in the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). Due to her impoverished place in society, her agency is extremely limited and, as Jack is her sole provider of both economic and emotional support, she fears that his enlistment will bring them both to ruin. Her desire to keep Jack at home is motivated both by a genuine concern for her husband and also by her desire to maintain the small, but crucial, degree of stability that their marriage affords her. She pleads for her husband to abandon the ICA and stay

with his "little red-lipp'd Nora" (30). Instead, Jack retorts, "You deserve to be hurt… Any letter that comes to me for th' future take care that I get it… D'ye hear—take care that I get it!" (31). Nora's poverty and gender have left her with very little agency: her domestic life is the foremost outlet through which she can express her personal identity. Yet, Jack's duty to the nationalist cause ultimately leads to his death, leaving Nora a widow and further stripping her of her identity as a wife. No personal commitments—not even marital and familial ties—are greater than the cause; as Jack's ICA associates remark, "Ireland is greater than a mother" and "Ireland is greater than a wife" (53). These comparisons gender Ireland as female—a woman who needs saving—and in joining the ICA, Jack must demonstrate a willingness to perform a masculine protective role for the sake of Ireland. Jack's involvement in the ICA signals a shift whereby the personified Ireland overtakes Nora as the central female figure in his life. Eventually, he pays the ultimate price for his country by sacrificing himself—and destroying his wife.

However, Jack's motivations are brought into question as O'Casey highlights that vanity and a desire to uphold the performance of heroic masculinity are the motivating forces behind his drive to fight for his country. Even Nora recognizes the true motivations behind his actions when she angrily tells him: "Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you an' me yet… That's what's movin' you: because they've made an officer of you, you'll make a glorious cause of what you're doin'" (O'Casey 30). Nora acknowledges that his dedication to the nationalist cause is merely performative: it is only after he is made a commandant that he displays a strong desire to fight and a sense of duty to his country. He is more interested in upholding his personal image of bravery and masculinity than in any genuine ideological belief. However, after witnessing the violence of the Rising, he admits: "My beautiful, little Nora, I wish to God I'd never left you" (72). Captain Brennan then insults his masculinity, asking, "Why are you begging her to let you go? Are you afraid of her, or what? Break her hold on you, man, or go on up, an' sit on her lap!" (75). To this, Jack "*roughly loosens her grip and pushes her away from him*" in an attempt to reinstate his patriarchal authority over his wife (75). Brennan's expectation that Jack must dominate Nora emphasizes the hypermasculine environment perpetuated by the military. This scene reveals that Jack's desire to fight for Irish independence is rooted in his desire to perform his masculine identity publicly, rather than in an authentic belief or ideology. As Amanda Clarke suggests, "Jack's

desire to be part of the Irish Citizen army is based on his serious and problematic fascination with the visual spectacle of the military and his desire to don a uniform" (221). Joining the ICA is a way of publicly and dramatically asserting his masculine identity: he performs the role of heroic masculinity that his community sets out for him as a soldier within an institution that propagates nationalism through the use of public and dramatic visual displays of power. That the "spectacle of the military" is meta-theatrically enacted—on stage within a play—only further reinforces the extent to which Jack's dedication to the ICA is merely performative.

Brian Friel also explores the intersection between personal and national identity in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, in which the lives of the Mundy sisters—and most predominantly, Kate—are heavily influenced by the pressure to conform to and perform the social expectations of their community, and particularly the Catholic Church. Kate is "a national schoolteacher" at a local parish school "and a very proper woman" who enforces a strict adherence to Catholic values in her household (Friel 1). Although she does have a role outside of the home, it is one that is ultimately controlled by the male priests of the parish. The motivations behind Kate's desire for her sisters to uphold propriety are complex; while she does adhere to genuine Catholic beliefs, her desire to maintain her family's social standing and respectability, for fear of rejection from the community, also compels her. Kate's fear is compounded by the "shame brought on the household" by her nephew Michael, who was born "out of wedlock" (9). When her sisters fantasize about attending the upcoming dance at the Festival of Lughnasa, and begin to dance around their kitchen, Kate retorts: "Look at yourselves, will you! Just look at yourselves! Dancing at our time of day? That's for young people with no duties and no responsibility and nothing in their heads but pleasure… Do you want the whole countryside laughing at us?—women of our years?—mature women, *dancing*?" (13). What first appears to be an objection based on responsibility quickly turns into a desire to uphold and perform social conventions and norms within the community. Kate's objection is not to the act of dancing itself, but to the ways her sisters' performance defies the roles they are assigned within the Catholic narrative. Kate consistently acts as the enforcer of normative Christian gender roles in the Mundy cottage. As İmran Yelmiş writes:

> The desires and libidinous feelings of the sisters are tried to be repressed by Kate, the agent of the Church […]. Kate, who feels on her shoulders the burdens of responsibility towards the status quo as the sister of a priest […] feels responsible for instructing her sisters to know what is 'right' and to behave accordingly (158)

As a schoolteacher at the parish school, Kate possesses a level of agency that was uncommon for women in her social milieu. Being a representative of the Church, she is expected to embody the ideal Catholic woman, and to pass on these behaviours and beliefs to the children she instructs. By extension, her sisters must also conform to these social expectations in order to preserve her reputation. Thus, Kate's agency is predicated on her performance as an ideal Catholic woman, as well as her ability to implement a strict adherence to Catholic values and behaviours within the Mundy household.

Kate's agency as a schoolteacher is defined by her adherence to Catholic values as well as her complete rejection of pagan beliefs and practices. The community of Ballybeg leaves no room for transgression from social norms or for the pursuit of individuality: rather, all members must adhere to the community-produced ideal of being a "good" Christian member of society. The sisters are forced to forgo their individual desires or identities in favour of a nationalistic identity of Catholic Irish femininity as presented to them by their community. When Rose expresses her interest in the pagan harvest Festival of Lughnasa, Kate shouts back, "[T]hey're savages! I know those people from the back hills! I've taught them! Savages—that's what they are! And what pagan practices they have are no concern of ours—none whatever! It's a sorry day to hear talk like that in a Christian home, a Catholic home!" (Friel 17). Kate's blatant condemnation of the "pagans" who celebrate the Lughnasa festival reinforces the polarizing Christian dichotomy of good versus evil or righteousness versus sin in an attempt to solidify her family's identity as good, Christian Irishwomen. However, despite all the sacrifices that the sisters make in order to uphold their social standing in the community, Kate's realization that "hair cracks are appearing everywhere" and that "control is slipping away" eventually comes to fruition (35). Ultimately, their elder brother's "distinctive spiritual search" and his adoption of Ryangan spiritual beliefs and practices causes Kate to lose her job (60).

By the end of the summer, the Mundy family collapses, and it is partly due to the pressure they feel to live up to a community-produced standard of respectability. As with the Clitheroe family, torn apart due to Jack's involvement with the ICA and his untimely death, the Mundy family's dissolution results from Kate's strict adherence to the status quo of Irish Catholicism. As Laurie Brands Gagné suggests, "Kate is the tragic character in that it is the ruthlessness of her attempts to keep the family respectable and together that leads to the heartbreak of two of her sisters leaving home" (120). Despite this heartbreak, they do find a temporary, yet effective, respite from their societal pressures through the Bacchanalian release of *dancing*.

Both O'Casey and Friel demonstrate the importance of Bacchanalian release, as best exemplified through the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. In his book *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explains his concept of carnivalesque as a time of Bacchanalian celebration that facilitates a "temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom" (89). The carnival is a time of exuberance and release, when people engage in all forms of bodily pleasure such as sex and the consumption of food and alcohol. In literature, the carnivalesque provides characters with a release from the pressures of their everyday lives and adherence to the status quo, which often requires a suspension of personal desires. As O'Casey and Friel depict through the lives of the Clitheroe and Mundy families, life in Ireland throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century was highly regimented and structured by the dominance of the Catholic Church and conservatism, which included culturally imposed gender roles and responsibilities including heroic masculinity and the domesticity of women (Hussey 384). The pressure caused by these strict social expectations is only alleviated through carnivalesque festivities. Critics like Yelmiş have noted the presence of carnivalesque elements, particularly dancing, in Friel's play. While it is more explicitly featured in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, elements of the carnivalesque, such as looting and the consumption of food and alcohol, are also visible in the aftermath of the Easter Rising in *Plough*. In both plays, this form of release proves to be essential for sustaining individuals' vitality and personal identities, despite the social pressures of their communities.

In Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the Mundy sisters find a Bacchanalian release through dancing. Throughout the play, the sisters individually engage in dances and, in one scene, all participate in a pseudo-pagan dance circle together. Friel's stage directions portray the sisters dancing in a "*frantic dervish*," with Maggie "*breathing deeply, rapidly. Now her features become animated by a look of defiance, of aggression; a crude mask of happiness*" (Friel 21). In 1927, the Church denounced dancing for its association with sexual expression and immodest female dress, and dances were often restricted and regulated (Hussey 418). Thus, the connection between the sisters' frenzied movements and their defiance and aggression signifies that the dance is a form of sexual release for the sisters, which they are unable to enact in their strict, everyday lives. By dancing and using their bodies for enjoyment and pleasure, the Mundy sisters break from the status quo of conservative Catholic gender roles. Bakhtin writes that the carnival "coincided with the permission for meat, fat, and sexual intercourse [...] [that] was in sharp contrast with the stringencies of Lent which had preceded or were to follow" (89). As with the fasting of Lent, the sisters' entire existence is one of sacrifice and duty to uphold their community-produced ideals of propriety. They abstain from both bodily and emotional pleasures in most forms, yet the dance provides a temporary escape from this state of emotion and physical asceticism that is required by the Catholic Church. Similarly, Kate's dancing is described as "*a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion*" (22). This out-of-character dancing coincides with Bakhtin's depiction of the carnival as "a liberation of laughter and body" (89). Dancing allows Kate to exhibit the emotions that she otherwise is forced to repress in order to maintain her role as a representative of the Church; it is, in a way, an assertion of her individualism.

Significantly, the sisters' dancing occurs during the Lughnasa festival. For the people of Ballybeg, the pagan celebration of Lughnasa represents a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). When Michael looks back on the summer of 1936, he recalls his aunts' dancing as "floating on those sweet sounds, moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation" (Friel 71). The emphasis on isolation signifies the ability of dance to reinstate the sisters' individualism. They are no longer merely members of their community,

constrained by social obligations and hierarchies: they are individuals with wants and desires that fall outside of the pre-established social norms set out for them. They dance "with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement—as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak [...]. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary" (71). Here, Friel emphasizes the ability of the dance to break away from all constraints of society and the Church, even one of the most rudimentary aspects of civilization: language. The dance is an escapist act that takes them away from the obligations of modern society; as Yelmiş explains, their dancing provides a "sense of temporary relief from the burdens of the maintenance of the *status quo*" (155). The ritual of the dance coincides with the pagan celebration of Lughnasa because they are both a form of rebellion from the social order of the time; the Mundy sisters' dancing is both ritualistic and primitive, like the Lughnasa festival. Carnivalesque dance enables them to find a temporary sense of individualism in order to cope with the social obligations of their community-formed identities of Irish Catholicism.

Looting provides a similar form of escape from the destruction of the Easter Rising for the impoverished Irish in *The Plough and the Stars*. O'Casey portrays the Easter Rising not by focusing on the action of the Rising itself, but on its exacerbation of the hardships of tenement life. For the tenement community, there is more at stake than ideology: the Rising results in the further destruction of their already worn-down tenement homes. As a result, both Bessie and Jack ultimately lose their lives. Like the carnival, the Rising is a time when people are liberated "from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (Bakhtin 10). To find relief from the destitution of their everyday existence and the further destruction of the Rising, the tenement community turns to looting as a form of Bacchanalian release. The deprived state of the tenements ordinarily takes a toll on the physical and emotional health of the residents, such as Bessie Burgess, a poor street-fruit vendor, whose apartment has "*an unmistakable air of poverty bordering on destitution*" (O'Casey 78). O'Casey emphasizes that Bessie's face is "*hardened by toil, and a little coarsened by drink*," directly attributing her appearance to her economic hardship (19). During the Rising, however, Bessie speaks "*rapidly and excitedly*" about the looters: "They're breakin' into th' shops, theyre breakin' into th' shops! Smashin' the windows, battherin' n th' doors,

an' whippin' away everythin!" (64). The looting creates a break from the pressures of the characters' lives as they are able to temporarily indulge in the pleasures of both material goods and anarchy. Furthermore, the looting creates a bonding experience between the previously antagonistic Bessie and Mrs. Gogan, with the "*pride of a great joy illuminating their faces*" (70). For Bessie and Mrs. Gogan, the chaos of the looting provides a temporary escape from their poverty and oppression and allows them to revel in the excitement of the moment.

The carnivalesque is also evident in O'Casey's focus on the characters' excessive consumption of alcohol and the donning of costumes. Fluther Good, a local carpenter and tenement resident, participates in both of these behaviours in addition to the looting. At the end of the third act, he enters "*frenzied, wild-eyed, mad, roaring drunk. In his arms is an earthen half-gallon jar of whiskey; streaming from one of the pockets of his coat is the arm of a new tunic shirt; on his head is a woman's vivid blue hat with gold lacing, all of which he has looted*" (76). Fluther's indulgence in alcohol is another form of Bacchanalian release which provides him with a temporary reprieve from the realities of his life. Furthermore, his donning of a woman's hat reinforces the break from the gendered status quo that both his looting and drinking facilitate. The hat is a costume, representative of the process of renewal enabled "through change of costume and mask" during the carnival (Bakhtin 255). As opposed to Jack Clitheroe, who so strongly wishes to assert his masculinity by wearing the ICA military uniform, Fluther's ability to wear a women's hat shows how the gendered norms can be questioned, if only during the carnivalesque chaos of the Rising. This act, as a performative reversal of the status quo, undermines the idea that Irish Catholic social norms are anything more than a prolonged performance. As in Bakhtin's description of carnival, the "truth" provided by looting and the consumption of alcohol is "ephemeral" and "followed by the fears and oppressions of everyday life" (90). In the stage directions to the opening of Act Four, O'Casey signals that their time of carnival has ended: the scene is once again one of "*destitution*" and "*the glare of burning buildings in the town can be seen through the window*" (78). Fluther remarks on the death of "poor little Mollser," an impoverished local child, to which the Covey replies: "Sure she never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day an' night lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died!" (80).

The stage once again returns to the harsh realities of poverty and tenement life in 1916 Dublin. This instance of carnival emerges not in a moment of celebration but revolution: the chaotic festivities of carnival aid the characters in *Plough* in finding a brief respite from the extreme violence of the Rising, and allow for the possibility of a fleeting personal indulgence that is, temporarily, separate from their impoverished status.

Both Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* portray how in twentieth-century Ireland, the Irish were only able to defy the strict social norms of gender, class, and religion through the Bacchanalian release enabled by the carnival. Dancing enables the Mundy sisters to find a temporary escape from the strict gender norms and expectations of their Catholic community. Similarly, looting and consumption provide a break from the status quo for the impoverished tenement community in *Plough*. The carnival itself is a joyous time of revelry, costuming, and excess: it is by nature a performative celebration. Moreover, the liberating potential of the carnival is revealed through the performance of theatre itself, thereby complicating the relationship between internal and external manifestations of self. Friel and O'Casey do not present a permanent solution to the identity pressures facing members of conservative Irish society, but they do highlight the importance of finding some semblance of individuality, even if it is fleeting.

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“FASTER WITHOUT THEM”: HOW FEMALE AGENCY IS UNDERMINED IN CHERIE DIMALINE’S *THE MARROW THIEVES*

Anna Jenne Prentice

Upon discussing *The Marrow Thieves* in ENG353: Canadian Fiction, Anna was struck by the power of science fiction as a vehicle for the discussion of cultural trauma. The reconstruction of Indigenous commodification, exploitation, and assimilation into a futuristic dystopian world provides a compelling narrative as well as an effective form of commentary. However, despite the triumphs of Cherie Dimaline’s prose, Anna could not help but notice some inconsistencies in the gender politics of the novel. The novel’s female characters appeared as sexual beings, incapable of independent survival and reliant on male protection. This was a frustrating observation, as at first it appeared to undercut the progressive nature of the novel. However, Anna then began to question how cultural and gender politics can intersect or potentially oppose each other within the same work. Can a novel such as this generate an effective commentary whilst failing to encourage an adequate exploration of patriarchal norms? This essay seeks to examine the roles of women in this novel and fairly critique the gender disparities presented. The author of *The Marrow Thieves* has herself stated that the goal of this narrative is to speak directly to Indigenous youth and provide them a path to perseverance despite staggering suicide rates. This renders the denial of female empowerment or even survival in this novel a crucial topic of exploration.

Although the gender binary is a concept historically challenged by many Indigenous peoples, contemporary Canadian Indigenous literature is not immune to the conventions of gender persistent in Western society. Notions of the prescribed social roles of women seep into novels like Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*. Despite the fact that Dimaline's novel masterfully recharacterizes decades of mass trauma and cultural genocide in a compelling dystopian future, her vision falls short of empowering her female characters. Although some of these female characters are offered detailed backstories or spirited personalities, their contributions to the novel betray their overarching lack of impact on the narrative. Not only do the female characters in *The Marrow Thieves* lack the combat and survival tools of many of the male characters, but their options for action are largely constrained to conventionally feminine literary tropes: tragic death, self-sacrifice, and sexuality. The actions of these characters often have little impact on the plot, and the emotional impacts that these actions create are perverted either to further victimize the female characters or to provide character development for their male counterparts. Although *The Marrow Thieves* offers its female characters the guise of agency and influence in the form of knowledge and spirit, these characters fundamentally lack the ability to alter either the path of the narrative or that of their own lives beyond measures conventionally regarded in literature as feminine, rendering them dispensable beyond the tragic, character-building emotional impact they leave behind.

Initially, *The Marrow Thieves* appears to offer its female characters significant depth and agency. These characterizations are largely based on intangible traits, offering a sense of empowerment within these characters that will only later be undermined. For example, as soon as Rose enters the narrative, she is described as headstrong and independent, "the rebel waiting for the fight to be brought" (32) who is "all aggression out of the gate" (37). She is a potent figure, unafraid to challenge either Frenchie or Miig with a "dissenting voice" (32) or a "push [in the] chest" (38). Ostensibly, Rose is provided with all the necessary fire and pluck to be a true participant in this novel. RiRi's initial depiction shows a similar, though more childish, spirit. Even at her young age, she is "old enough to piss in the bush and swear" (21) and to "[demand] some space" and sleep in her own tent (27). Both of these girls are presented as capable and independent members of the group, each having "her own mind" (28). Minerva's presentation is demure, but, as the group elder, she is valued for her

knowledge. Although Frenchie originally fails to recognize her importance, stating that "mostly she watches" instead of participating and that working with her is "useless" (20), he quickly changes his mind upon discovering her knowledge of her people's language (38). The significance of this skill is huge in Frenchie's mind, as he holds even the one word he learns tightly "in [his] throat like a stone; a prayer" (39). This instantly imbues Minerva with incredible value to the group. She, like Rose and RiRi, seems to have incredible potential to exert her influence on the path of this novel in a meaningful way.

However, from the outset of *The Marrow Thieves*, the actions of its female characters are severely limited in the realm of survival and physical capability. Although Rose and RiRi are described as spirited, their depictions focus entirely on personality rather than physical power. Conversely, Dimaline describes the twins as having "wide shoulders and heavy hands" and notes that Chi-Boy is "taller than anyone else" (20–1). Attention is consistently drawn to their physicality, illuminating the disparity between their tangible strength and value and the incorporeal traits of the girls. This is significant as the larger narrative journey of this novel is, at its core, one of survival where physical capabilities and practical knowledge are intrinsically valued over personality or abstract knowledge. This distinction is explicitly shown in the impotence of Minerva and RiRi. They are treated largely as a burden to the group, being "relieved of their baggage" by the others who carry their equipment whenever the group needs "to make ground" (40). This may be considered fair for Minerva, the only elder present, but RiRi is similar in age to Slopper, who, despite having the "belly of a fifty-year-old diabetic," does not at any point require assistance during travel (21). It is clear here that RiRi is singled out as someone incapable of carrying her own weight in the group due not to her age, but to her gender.

Although Rose and Wab are not seen as physically incompetent, they are coded as incapable in moments of potential danger. On these occasions, the major concern is "keeping the girls safe" and "in sight at all times" (118). It is the men who hold the weapons and the men who flank the group in their "regular formation" (119). These female bodies quickly become something that the male characters protect as if they are precious objects or livestock. Similarly, information crucial to the group's survival tends to be safeguarded by male characters. When approaching the "other Indians," Miig trusts only

Frenchie and Chi-Boy with the plan, speaking to "the two of [them] alone" (118). Similarly, Miig trusts Frenchie to scout and suggests that "not everyone needs to know" that a new school is being built in the vicinity (108). So, although at camp the roles of hunting and homesteading are regularly swapped, the power structure of this group in its most critical moments is clearly patriarchal. Moreover, because the women present are not given adept physical or practical traits like tree-climbing or strength, they lack the necessary abilities to disrupt this power structure. Although these women may be treated as valuable to the group, they are not considered equal to the men; they are reduced to valuable commodities or cargo, limiting their options for action.

When the female characters in this novel *are* able to exert narrative impact, their actions are largely constrained to conventionally feminine literary tropes, one of which is tragic death. Specifically, the victimizing "sacrifice of the virgin" has a significant presence in this novel (Bouson 251). The death of RiRi fits neatly into this trope. She is a total victim; she dies silently and out-of-frame with no agency or pushback. Even in her final moments alive she appears lifeless as she "hung," "was being held," and "[was thrown]" (Dimaline 132–3). Her actions are not her own, and she is choked into silence; her utter oppression is the most impactful effect she is able to have. A parallel event occurs when Minerva is killed. She is shot as a prisoner: trapped, alone, and stripped of her hair and clothes to the point of being "barely recognized" by her friends (210). Although she does get a final moment of speech, it serves more to pacify than embolden; she chooses to sing "low, sweet words": a "travel song," the content of which is never established (210). Because these women are treated as essentially physically helpless, their deaths represent the bulk of their impact on the novel as a whole. Since they cannot effect change through physical action, they are reduced to doing so through tragic emotional impact.

Another trope within which the actions of women are constrained in *The Marrow Thieves* is that of self-sacrifice. Whether it be a sacrifice due to life-threatening circumstances or simply one of personal duty, "the cultural and literary idealization of female self-sacrifice" is a prominent and damaging literary motif (Bouson 251). In this novel, self-sacrifice is often characterized as the physical sacrifice of oneself to benefit the survival of the group. This physical defeat also highlights the distinction between the actions of female

characters—driven by their emotions—and the saviour-like actions of male characters in this survival narrative. Minerva, knowing the recruiters will soon find them, chooses to place herself in harm's way in order to protect the others. She places herself beneath the other group members both by physically remaining on the ground "down there" and by deciding that her death or capture is worth the freedom of the rest of the group (149). This inequality is further emphasized by the reactions of the others to this sacrifice. When Minerva is taken, the others respond by mourning, not by challenging her decision. However, when Frenchie does something similar and tests an electric fence himself, he is chastised by Miig, who impresses upon him that "no one is more important than anyone else" (58). The absence of opposition to Minerva's sacrifice characterizes her loss as one of necessity and duty to the group, a fate not shared by the male characters.

A similar sacrificial tone is used regarding the loss of Frenchie's mother. Although her death is not explicitly featured, it is treated as an obligatory sacrifice for the benefit of Frenchie's survival. In Frenchie's recounting of the event, his only words are: "Mom, well, Mom couldn't…" (176). Like the other women, she is coded as incapable—a maternal martyr sacrificed for the survival of her children. Rose also sacrifices herself due to familial obligation. When she makes the decision to leave the camp—one of her first truly independent choices—she is almost immediately guided back by the exciting events unfolding. This return is presented as hopeful, but it also acts to undermine Rose's independence and enforce her reliance on the group. This is further shown by Dimaline's choice of language; Rose jokes that it "would just be irresponsible" to allow the others to carry on without her (220). Although this comment is light and appears to draw attention to the responsibility Rose is offered within the group, it is also imbued with the idea of her duty to others; she feels she must stay instead of pursuing her individual aspirations. It is she who translates Minerva's final message on this matter: "Kiiwen […] you must always go home," suggesting that Rose should not explore an existence outside of her place, or home, in the group (211).

In terms of narrative composition, Dimaline's descriptions of the two older girls in the group, Rose and Wab, are largely focused on their romantic appeal, the only tool with which these characters can assert their value. Frenchie takes note of Chi-Boy's ability and leadership in the group, but

Wab's actions are depicted only within the context of her relationship with Chi-Boy. Frenchie's impression of Wab often focuses on Chi-Boy "[lingering] to touch her long hair as she slept," emphasizing the male gaze and affirming the paradigm of male agency and female objectification (110). Although Wab does demand narrative space with her "coming-to" story (80)—being the only woman to receive one—the tale is focused on her sexual victimization, adding to the "cultural—and historical—repetition of sexual violence against women" (Bouson 251). Instead of ending in a moment of action or hope, like the stories of Frenchie and Miig, it ends with her "[limping] home to her dumpster," barely able to escape "into the bush" (Dimaline 85).

Rose is also subject to reductive depiction. The narrative space devoted to her is predominantly focused on her physical appearance. Frenchie repeatedly observes her "round dark cheeks and loose curls," or the "shape of her body heat" (37). Moreover, Rose's interactions with others can only be viewed through Frenchie's biased gaze, such as the depiction of jealousy that "twisted and yanked" on his stomach when Rose speaks with Derrick (191). Although Rose's image in the novel is arguably distorted by the use of a first-person narrator who has a romantic interest in her, it remains true that her presence in the narrative is mostly limited to moments of intimacy between the two. This lack of independent representation renders her character somewhat incomplete beyond her use as a romantic interest, which conflicts with her being portrayed as rebellious in the opening description. The notion that these women are limited to their existence as sexual beings is further emphasized by their survival. Of the initial four women in the group, the only two who survive the novel are Rose and Wab. This cements the underlying suggestion that the value of female characters in this novel—their indispensability—is directly correlated with their value as intimate partners of the men around them.

In addition to physical frailty and reductive depictions of these female characters that undercut their agency, the power of women in this narrative is further undermined by the lack of impact their actions have on the overall story. In some instances, their choices are ablated, such as Rose being coerced into remaining in the group. In others, their actions simply lack influence. RiRi's death is an example of the latter. Because she is treated as a burden to the group, her death (and Minerva's absence) allows the group to "travel faster without" her (154). Her death does have a clear emotional impact, making the

world seem "dull," but it does not affect the overall journey of the group (139). Minerva's kidnapping and subsequent death provide a more nuanced example of how the effects of the female characters on the plot are curtailed. Throughout the novel, she is valued almost solely for her wisdom and knowledge of "the language," with many of her physical traits being actively disadvantageous to the group's survival (38). When she is eventually murdered, "the whole world [stops]" (211). Additionally, because "every dream Minerva had ever dreamed was in the language," she exerts a seemingly devastating destruction on the school where she is kept by burning it almost to the ground (172).

However, this compelling impact is then undermined. Minerva only manages to destroy one school, which by all appearances fails to weaken the recruiters or their system to a significant degree. She is also subsequently killed, preventing her from completing her narrative trajectory and damaging the school system as a whole. Instead, her supposedly rare and precious knowledge of "the language"—her value to the group and the narrative—becomes dispensable (38). By contrast, Isaac makes a miraculous return and is imbued with all of Minerva's supposedly unique power. Now, both the survival and cultural centres of the group have been overtaken by men, dismissing the female characters' value almost entirely. The result of these events is that, despite the novel suggesting during Minerva's final moments that "we all needed her," neither she nor RiRi are offered the ability to significantly impact the overall survival plot of the novel (210–1).

It is true that there is significant emotional impact resulting from the ordeals of female characters in this novel, but these potentially powerful moments are undermined by their use as a character-building device for male characters or the extreme disempowerment of the female characters involved. For example, RiRi's death seems designed to affect Frenchie. From the novel's outset, she is described as Frenchie's "chubby shadow," who "grew attached" to him as a small child (27). Because of RiRi's naive dependency, Frenchie naturally has the most to mourn upon her death. It is true that Minerva also mourns considerably, but she fails to process her grief or display significant growth. She is described as "catatonic" (140) and needs to be "spoon-fed" (139). Alternatively, readers can access Frenchie's interior, allowing them to observe his "physical pain […] where the loss lived" and his subsequent growth (139). Frenchie's pain becomes the most significant consequence of

RiRi's death, a pain that is only furthered by his choice to shoot her killer's accomplice. Because he "pulled the trigger," Frenchie must carry additional emotional weight after RiRi's death, separating his mourning process from that of the others (137). With this act, Frenchie is also given the opportunity to avenge RiRi's death, which makes that same closure impossible for Wab.

When Wab sees the man who betrayed her, resulting in her sexual abuse, it seems as though she has the opportunity to find either peace or revenge. However, instead of Wab being offered the opportunity to act, Frenchie is the one who eventually kills him and thus achieves catharsis. This robs Wab of any closure she might achieve, and the arc of her own narrative is stolen from her in this moment. Wab's "coming-to" story further becomes problematic in comparison to the stories of Miig and Frenchie. For the two male characters, their stories eventually reach some form of closure. Their parent or partner returns, which begins to heal the loss and trauma they incurred. For Wab, this closure is not permitted. So, if no narrative resolution is achieved, what is the purpose of graphically detailing Wab's trauma? Her coming-to story becomes not one of overcoming incredible suffering, but simply a detailed recounting of female victimization for the sake thereof, utterly disempowering her.

The final blow that demonstrates the dispensable nature of this novel's female characters is the heroic return of males who were previously thought to be deceased. Both Frenchie and Miig experience this. Upon finding the Indigenous resistance camp, Frenchie discovers that his father, long thought to be dead, has survived and is now a community leader. This offers Frenchie a moment of intense healing, allowing him to shed his traumatic "baggage" and feel "small again" (169). This miraculous survival and reestablishment of familial bonds is a privilege offered only to male characters and lies in sharp contrast to the fate of Minerva. As it has done over and over, the novel sets up the potential of her empowerment in the form of an extraordinary return. Minerva has survived her kidnapping and will soon be brought almost "right to [the others]" (201). The possibility of recovering her seems almost assured. However, instead of surviving, she suffers a tragic and unceremonious death. This missed opportunity for redemption essentially renders Minerva disposable in the narrative. Her death serves no real purpose; she is simply nonessential to the completion of the narrative.

Furthermore, men in this narrative are characterized as surviving on their own grit and merit; they persevere in the face of all odds. However, even when the whole community offers to assist in Minerva's rescue, she still cannot be recovered. Minerva's death also generates the narrative space for Isaac's survival. If it were not for the gap in knowledge left by her passing, Isaac's return, and his ability to "dream in Cree," would have served no purpose within the narrative (228). Miig, too, then, is permitted reunification with his lost family, but this joyful return lies directly at the cost of Minerva's death. In this novel, female characters are fundamentally denied these astonishing survival narratives, either as the survivor or the person with whom they reunite, with their deaths even contributing to the availability of these miracles for their male counterparts.

It is difficult to reconcile the progressive feats of *The Marrow Thieves* with its treatment of its female characters. It seems that, at every turn, the potential of these characters is undermined and undercut, leaving behind victimized and disempowered women who lack true agency and conform to many damaging literary tropes. Internalized misogyny is extremely prevalent among peoples devastated by a lack of access to resources, cultural genocide, and appalling violence at the hands of the settler communities; in these spaces, women and children are made to suffer. Although speculation about the novel's authorial context is just that—conjecture—it may provide a lens through which the gender imbalance can be compassionately viewed. There are clear and persistent failures in this novel to afford power to its female characters, but the root causes of these failures may lie far beyond what can be encapsulated in the text alone. All things considered, *The Marrow Thieves* offers a successful disassembly of Indigenous stereotypes and provides a fully realized narrator who extends far past reductive cultural representations. However, a critique of the extensive gender disparities present may be necessary to begin the process of acknowledging and repairing "women's cultural blindness to, and thus collusion with, their own victimization" (Bouson 251).

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SOUNDSCAPES AND THE DECENTRING OF WHITE NOISE IN MARIE CLEMENTS' *BURNING VISION*

Marissa Lee

Written for ENG371: Contemporary Indigenous Literatures, this essay explores Marie Clements' use of sound as a deconstructive tool in her play, *Burning Vision*. The paper examines the ways that Clements uses sound to decentre "white noise," and ultimately argues that Clements' multi-layered parallelism enacts a linguistic and thematic departure from colonial models of (re)historicization, as Clements reclaims these histories—colonial prospecting on Dene land, and the later bombing of Hiroshima—by revisioning them in a Dene image. The play's first movement features the prospecting LaBine brothers (historically recognized for "discovering" uranium at Great Bear Lake). This section tracks the brother's prospective disruption, as Clements augments the brothers' dialogue with Christian hymns and uncanny radio voices. Clements inverts this framing in Movement Four, wherein the Dene Seer takes the place of the prospecting brothers and their white noise, with no supplement necessary. In both movements, Clements employs careful dialogue choices to emphasize the connection and disparity between characters. In Movement One, character dialogues are separated by explosive interruptions, through which Clements acknowledges the fissures that these colonial events created between Dene and Japanese communities. Movement Four again reclaims these fragmented interactions through inversion. Instead of emphasizing their alienation, Indigenous and Japanese dialogues now echo and intertwine, framed cohesively by the enduring presence of the Dene Seer. Marissa would like to thank Professor Christina Turner and teaching assistant Apala Das for opening up these ideas in ENG371, and *IDIOM* editors Jovana Pajović, Morgan Beck, and Kornelia Drianovski for their feedback and encouragement.

In "Coming to You from the Indigenous Future," Danika Medak-Saltzman reflects on the ways that "science-fiction, fantasy, and horror narratives" have disappointed her in that "the only futures that have been imaginable" within them "have been those that leave intact, function to maintain, and further entrench settler colonial narratives of Indigenous absence and inconsequence" (141). Unfortunately, "this has even been the case in speculative genres where breaking with, questioning, and challenging convention is the expected norm" (141). While Marie Clements' *Burning Vision* is not a speculative fiction, existing scholarship on the play has observed that it is true to the aims of the genre. Specifically, Clements' surrealist retelling of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima achieves a "transcultural re-vision" of the historical relations between the play's White, Dene, and Japanese characters by configuring a new temporality, manipulating time and space such that the White colonial perspective is de-emphasized and Dene and Japanese characters are united outside of it (Whittaker 138). But Clements also uses *sound*, not only an altered temporality, to "re-vision" White-Indigenous-Japanese relations, with Whites—and their "white noise"—decentred. Clements creates both dialogue and disparity between the Dene, Japanese, and American characters in the play through sound, and more specifically, through the way soundscapes create a parallel between Movement One and Movement Four. In Movement One, Clements draws upon American colonial motifs of historicization, denaturalizing them as uncanny and unsettling, while in Movement Four, she rewrites these narratives from a Dene perspective. Clements achieves this parallelism through the use of disembodied and omnipresent voices at the beginning and end of each movement, intervals of sound that separate character dialogues, and, in the absence of these intervals, a set of mirrored "explosions" that allegorize the atomic bombing history that Clements reimagines. By centring a sound-based, Dene historicization of the atomic bombing, Clements unsettles colonial ways of knowing, telling, and recording history. Clements makes clear that there are layers to colonial histories that imperial narrators and narrative forms cannot provide; in her play, she ensures that these alternative histories are *heard*.

Clements frames Movement One in a way that emphasizes White, American historicization, though she ultimately disrupts this biased narration through the incorporation of ambiguous radio voices. The movement

opens with a set of stage directions that note "the sound of a radio dial gliding from frequency to frequency, creating different cultural tones and telling different stories. It is as if they are waiting on the radio waves, ready to be heard, and a sense of discovery is heightened" (Clements 7). The mention of a "sense of discovery" implies that "they" refers to a colonial audience, as these stage directions read like those of a typical, White-centred speculative fiction, a subgenre that foregrounds the discovery and saviour complex of its White protagonists. However, the suspenseful use of radio voices unsettles this promise of "discovery." As the US Radio Announcer covers the detonation of the atomic bomb, their announcements are fragmented and frantic, their voice constantly interrupted by the countdown (7–8). American soldiers at the bombing site "don't see anything," and the announcement ceases abruptly, before the explosion actually occurs (8). After the explosion of the bomb, the only sounds are "of radio waves and the static of dead airspace" and "the sound of the radio dial gliding from station to station. The radio dial stops and tunes in on the sound of two sets of loud footsteps walking over the space" (8). In "gliding from station to station," the US radio operators skip over other cultural frequencies, as they focus in on the "loud footsteps" of the radium-seeking LaBine brothers (8). In contrast, the non-White voices ("stations") are seen as "static of dead airspace" (8) in the colonial model, because within it, other perspectives and voices neither exist nor count.

Throughout Movement One, Clements emphasizes the disconnect between her White characters and her Dene and Japanese characters by placing disruptive intervals of sound between their dialogues. For example, the LaBine brothers and the Dene Widow are separated dialogically by "the sound of static as a phonograph needle goes round and round in the tracks of a record" (11). The sound of a record player is a motif that recurs throughout Movement One, but in this instance, the record player produces no music—only static noise. Yet another interruption separates Japanese Koji's dialogue from that of the White test-dummy Fat Man, with "the sound of a record player being put on a turntable" and "the sound of static as the needle goes round and round. Then…" the stage directions taper off into ellipses (16). Again, the record produces no song. Here, Clements levels a clever pun against this particular recording of history. Clearly, something is not working as it should; perhaps the (historical) record needs to be

cleaned. The introduction of song continues the work of these static interruptions, as it signals the shifting of perspectives from the LaBine brothers to Rose, a Métis woman. Before she speaks, "the sound of Hank Williams singing 'I Saw the Light'—a very Canadian rendition—fades in" (14). As indicated by Clements' stage directions, this song is an ironic insertion; the comment that it is "a very Canadian rendition" calls into question what really is Canadian, implicating Canada's colonial history. The song's lyrics ironically allude to this history: "I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin / I wouldn't let my dear Saviour in / Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night / Praise the Lord, I saw the light" (14). This Christian song hearkens back to the Christian missionary roots of discovery and colonial saviour complex, and also serves as a more concrete implication of colonialism than the previous radio static. While radio static indicates an issue with the historical record, Clements' insertion of a Christian song makes explicit that this disruption is specifically colonial. Through its inclusion, Clements seems to imply that the ones "wandering aimless" are the brothers, raiding a territory that does not belong to them (14).

There is one section in Movement One in which the characters' dialogues are not separated by sound, but their collisions across time and space create a similar effect to that of the atomic explosion Clements is reimagining. The explosive moment is sparked first when "[t]he TV flashes and shows [a] multicoloured test pattern with the head of an Indian chief" as "the high-pitched sound of The Dene Seer seer-singing continues through the following scene" (28). Then "Fat Man stops in his tracks" just as the LaBine brothers "finally rest on their discovery, [standing] staring up paralyzed with their find"—radium (28). In the same moment, "Koji opens his eyes and looks up at his death discovery" (28). We do not learn what this discovery is before "an atomic detonation lights up the space with fierce light," and "Fat Man, shaken, runs toward the TV and shuts it off," stopping the Dene Seer's song (28). Every character occupies a different time-space in this passage, through which Clements evokes the disconnect in each of these versions of the atomic bombing. Because it is not chronologically or spatially possible for these voices to be in communion with each other in a colonial framework, their collusion is chaotic and disjointed. The intersection of all of these voices results in the bomb-like explosion of incompatible worldviews. Clements' treatment of this intersection as

bomb-like implicates the prospecting project of White colonizers at the time. In doing so, she also calls attention to the ways that colonial narratives are carefully constructed to favour their colonial perspectives, and eliminate all others. Thus, Clements explodes this narrative by forcing it into contact with the less often acknowledged histories of the Dene and Japanese communities affected by this colonial project. After the chaos of this explosion, "the sound of a phonograph needle clunking down" draws the narrative back, and "I Saw the Light" starts again (24). In this instance, the lyrics are poignant: "I was a fool to wander astray / Straight is the gate and narrow is the way / Now I have traded the wrong for the right / Praise the Lord, I saw the Light" (24). As the song indicates, "straight is the gate and narrow is the way" and the collision of these dialogues together marks the point where the narrative "wander[s] astray" from the "real" history and becomes unintelligible in an American colonial prospective framework, which shapes Movement One.

In Movement Four, Clements co-opts the symbols and motifs of Movement One and reimagines them, this time through a Dene perspective with the Dene Seer acting as narrator—a contrast to Movement One's disembodied voices. Clements' replacement of the US radio voices with that of the Dene Seer actively centres Dene voices over the White voices that were central to Movement One. Movement Four also uses sound as a force of unison rather than a proponent of separation as in Movement One. Unlike these radio voices, the Dene Seer tells a story that is cohesive both in itself and within the movement's wider narrative. When the Dene Seer says, "I saw the future, and I was disturbed," the Widow "looks up at [Rose's pregnant] belly and then at Rose" immediately thereafter (95). Similarly, when the Dene Seer laments that his "voice grew hoarse with the sight of knowing that they would harm my people from the inside," the play immediately shifts perspectives, landing on the miner who "coughs and coughs" as "yellow comes from him" (96). Like the intervals of sound in Movement One, the Dene Seer's telling of his vision separates the dialogue of different characters; Rose, who is Métis, and the Dene widow, for example, are separated from the miner as the Dene Seer's vision stands between their dialogues. But, in integrating the elements of the Dene Seer's vision directly with the unfolding plot, Clements subtly brings all of these characters into union with each other, in contrast to her construction of Movement One.

This reimagining is contingent on the decentring of White figures. When the LaBine brothers are reintroduced in the play, this contingency becomes especially clear as dialogues come into direct contact with each other again, producing a reimagined explosion in parallel with Movement One. This explosion is again brought on by a collision of sounds, but the fact that it occurs right as the LaBine brothers appear indicates their disruption of the land and community that they are intruding on. Stage directions reintroduce the "the sound of very loud footsteps," the same footsteps that first signal the brothers' appearance in Movement One (100). As the stage directions note, "the following scene starts out slow and begins to escalate in fear as characters and worlds collide" (100). In this scene, sounds come to signify the different characters as their dialogues bleed together and "collide" (100). "The sound of the Geiger counter" represents the LaBine Brothers, "the sound of clocks" signifies the Radium Painter, "the sound of the miner coughing" of course denotes the miner, "the sound of a baby's heartbeat" incorporates a pregnant Rose into the narrative, and finally "the sound of radar beeps" implicates Fat Man (100–4). These sound intervals separate the dialogues of the different characters, but they also integrate them all into the story together. Instead of being sounds of a far-away technology—like Movement One's record player—these technological signals are directly associated with each of the characters whose dialogue the sounds precede. As the scene progresses, the sounds change, their escalation signalling the impending explosion. The Geiger counter now "clicks aggressively," getting "louder and louder" as the clocks start "ticking" and the sound of radar beeps "gets closer and closer" (102–5). As the scene ends, "they all look up" in unison, as "the sound of an explosion" ultimately brings them into contact (110). Much like in Movement One, this explosion is catalyzed by the intrusion of White characters when the LaBine Brother One and Fat Man are reincorporated into the scene. But while these White figures are present in Movement Four, their perspective is no longer the central one; rather, through both sound and language, they are portrayed as the uncanny citizens, intruders into a narrative that no longer belongs to them. The explosion, then, connects each of these characters in an allegory of the tragic and far-reaching consequences of the atomic bomb on each of their communities.

Ultimately, Movement Four ends as Movement One begins: with the presence of radio voices "gliding over voices that are calling their

loved ones home," this time broadcasting Slavey, Japanese, and Canadian announcements—importantly, in that order (113). Clements' ordering of these radio announcements is integral to the ethos of her retelling as it works to subtly highlight her prioritization of Indigenous voices over colonizer voices, unsettling the usual hierarchy that places exclusionary "Canadian" narratives at its peak. These "Canadian" narratives also often fail to acknowledge that the designation of "Canadian" is itself a misnomer: Canada did not belong to colonizers, but to Indigenous peoples, emphasized by Clements' placement. Additionally, naming Canadian announcements after the Japanese and Dene also evokes the dangerous and deathly role that Japanese uranium miners were forced to play in the prospecting projects of White colonizers, another perspective that colonial historicizations ignore. The radio dial "glid[es] over" this hierarchy of voices in the same way that Movement One's radio dial was "gliding from frequency to frequency," but this time, the play's different cultural "stations," or "frequencies," are acknowledged as embodied cultural voices. Additionally, the text names each community—Slavey, Japanese, and Canadian—directly, in its own section of the stage directions. In Clements' dramatis personae at the beginning of the play, however, many of the radio announcers are not named, and of the three at the end of Movement Four, only the Slavey Announcers are mentioned (3). Clements explains that the Slavey Announcers are "community members who broadcast in North America trying to find and reach out over the air to loved ones who are missing from them. In this case, a call and response from this world to the spirit world" (3). Clements' character notes remind audiences that, even in the face of her surreal re-vision of this tragic event, the real atomic bombing had devastating effects, and such radio broadcasts could very well be real. However, the fact that the play ends with radio announcements in three languages—Slavey, Japanese, and Canadian, in that order—emphasizes the way that Clements rewrites these communities as united in the play's last movement while still de-centring white (radio) noise by adding Canadian announcements last and omitting them from the character notes.

The last character to speak in the play is Koji the Grandson, who says, "[T]hey hear us and they are talking back in hope over time" (114). This Koji is connected to many of the play's characters—Rose and Koji, the Widow, the Widow's husband—and by having him speak last, Cle-

ments ends the play by emphasizing the connections between her characters rather than their juxtapositions, as she emphasized in Movement One. Specifically, Koji the Grandson is connected only to *Burning Vision*'s non-White characters. At this point, the play no longer incorporates the White characters into the narrative, and Clements has effectively decentred them from her retelling. As Robin Whittaker elaborates, "Clements's play attempts no less than the remapping of post-Hiroshima North America and the rehistoricization of its received narratives. Characters embody and exchange collective memories that work within and against received Western histories to form a matrix of dialogic conversations" (147). Through her use of sound as a structuring device, Clements incorporates Dene traditions into her rewriting of the historical past, reconceiving the event of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. In doing so, she creates a new history—and potentially opens up the possibility of a futurity—unmediated by the colonial narratives that have overtaken such tellings of history. In *Burning Vision*, Clements has created a re-vision, one that aligns with Medak-Saltzman's desire for alternate narratives precisely for its preservation of Indigenous traditions, and its decentring of white noise.

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BEYOND PRIMITIVISM: AMBIVALENCE IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S "SWEAT"

Sanghoon Oh

Originally written for ENG328: Modern Fiction, the following essay explores the possibilities and limitations of an anti-primitivist work in Zora Neale Hurston's short story "Sweat." By framing the work through its historical and literary context, "Sweat" appears impossibly as both a primitivist and anti-primitivist work: Hurston's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the primitivist binary between the "modern" and the "primitive" frames the work as primitivist, but the failure to satisfy primitivist expectations frames the work as equally anti-primitivist. Yet, this very tension between a primitivist and anti-primitivist reading of "Sweat" is what makes the work anti-primitivist. As a work that invites a primitivist reading while preventing clear and simple categorization, "Sweat" forces the reader to reconsider the very foundational categories of primitivism. The ambiguity and ambivalence of "Sweat" delegitimize primitivism as a mode of analysis, not through explicit opposition, but by showing its limitations in a work that it should be able to interpret.

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The notion of the "primitive" and its relation to the "modern" has played an important role in conceptualizing modernity. The complexity of the primitive-modern dichotomy becomes apparent when analyzing texts deemed "primitivist," like "Sweat," a short story by Zora Neale Hurston published in 1926 during the Harlem Renaissance in the little magazine *FIRE!!*. The story revolves around the marriage of Delia and Sykes, a Black married couple in central Florida. Delia is a washerwoman who has a fear of snakes, while Sykes is her abusive, adulterous husband. Sykes, in order to inherit Delia's house, hatches a plan to poison Delia with a rattlesnake, only for the snake to bite him in the neck. The story comes to an end with Sykes crying out for Delia's help while she waits for him to succumb to the poison. While there are many primitivist elements in the story, such as its use of racist tropes and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Hurston also subverts the expectations of a primitivist work in "Sweat" through her nuanced characterization and use of free indirect discourse. As such, "Sweat" appears both primitivist and anti-primitivist, an impossible position given that these two approaches are antithetical. One consequence of such ambivalence is the difficulty in categorizing "Sweat" as either primitivist or anti-primitivist; however, this same textual ambivalence shines a light on primitivism's limitations as a mode of understanding the world, and consequently, reveals the artificiality of its concepts.

Amidst the varied developments of the modernist era, the conception of the primitive and its associations saw numerous developments. The term "primitive" initially began as a neutral term denoting an original state (Cuddy-Keane et al. 162). As the period advanced, however, this neutrality became muddled: the primitive pertained to both a prior stage of civilization, a unique cultural form, and a universal, timeless state (Cuddy-Keane et al. 163; Etherington 19–20). Moreover, the term was further subdivided by differences in connotation. In its positive connotation, those deemed primitive were seen as pure and unsullied by the evils of "modern" civilization (Cuddy-Keane, et al. 165; Etherington 10). However, primitive equally carried a negative connotation, as those deemed primitive were seen as lacking in civility and higher cognitive capacities, incapable of further development (Cuddy-Keane, Melba, et al.165; Etherington 11). Universal throughout all conceptualizations of primitivism was the construction of an imaginary category: the Other. Primitivism relies on the existence and construction of

the Other—the primitive—in order for non-primitive White subjects to be considered modern (Pavloska 76; Etherington xii, 1–2, 6). From this view, primitivism acts as a totalizing lens to trap those deemed primitive in their state of primitiveness, as the mere act of questioning their modernity signalled their *non*-modernity. Yet, it was only through primitivist tropes that modernist authors at the time were able to preserve and depict non-traditional subjects deemed unworthy of representation in conventional modern modes, albeit in an aestheticized style (Pavloska xi). Thus, the primitive was a fluid category loaded with diverse connotations, some positive, some negative, but always in opposition to the modern.

In the United States, all of these varying associations of the primitive were affixed onto African Americans. Due to pre-existing conceptions about race, African Americans were seen as physical embodiments of the "primitive" (Cuddy-Keane et al. 166). In response to these primitivist tropes and their projections onto African Americans, a schism formed in the African American intelligentsia during the Harlem Renaissance. For some African American writers, like Alain Locke, the artificial construction of these primitivist tropes were a means of recreating a culture lost through enslavement. Locke envisioned that African Americans could create a connection with Africa vis-à-vis pre-existing primitivist tropes, just as European nations had defined their culture on a mythic common origin of Greek history (Pavloska 75–6; Etherington 41–2). Others, like W.E.B. Du Bois, felt the need to create an African American voice independent of these primitivist tropes, localized in the authentic lived experiences of the African American slave (Pavloska 76). The varying discourses surrounding primitivism raised questions for African Americans about how they should respond to their categorization, namely whether they should use the fictional category of the primitive to ground their own identities, or find an independent identity outside of these racist tropes.

The primitivist tropes that Hurston uses to characterize Sykes in "Sweat" embody the dual characterizations of the primitive. Sykes' violent and uncivil disposition represents the negative associations with the primitive. Sykes' long history of domestic violence (41) and infidelity with Bertha (42) alludes to "nineteenth-century association of blackness" and "unrestrained sexuality" (Pavloska xxi–xxii). Hurston's beast-like characterization

of Sykes is further emphasized when he is attacked by the snake; Sykes reacts with a "primitive instinct" (44) that makes him produce a "cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man possibly could express, without a recognizable human sound" (44). These animalistic points of reference perpetuate the idea of an unchanging, primal, and beastlike quality within Sykes. Notably, these descriptions emphasize the non-humanness of Sykes' voice with its similarities to various animals, thus othering Sykes. Also of note is the particular choice of comparing Sykes' cry to gorillas and chimpanzees; both animals are emblematic of racist categorization of Black people as sub-human, especially as these animals are like humans yet distinctly inhuman. Despite being able to recognize similarities between the primitive and the non-primitive, the primitive holds an intensity that is recognized as more animal than human, perpetuating the othering of those seen as primitive.

Likewise, Hurston describes Delia via primitivistic tropes, albeit of a different kind: Delia exhibits the positive connotations of the primitive as "pure and unsullied" (Cuddy-Keane et al. 163) through her endurance of Sykes' abuse. Rather than responding to Sykes' insults, Delia maintains "a triumphant indifference to all that he was and or did" (Hurston 41). However, Delia is deeply upset at the prospect of taking the sacrament in the same church as Sykes (43). While Delia can ignore Sykes' physical and verbal abuse, her distaste towards sharing sacrament with him characterizes her as deeply connected with her faith and the spiritual world over the physical world. Exhibiting the Christian doctrine of "turning the other cheek," Delia's indifference to the physical plays on the notion of the pure primitive common to the era. Thinkers at the time argued that the primitive held a unique connection to the non-physical world. For instance, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a popular ethnologist with modernist writers, argued that the primitive is capable of non-logocentric reasoning where dreams and reality collapse into one another (Pavloska xviii–xix). Likewise, Delia's ability to resist Sykes' abuse seems to hinge upon her unique connection to the spiritual, with her fierce protection of the sacrament as the ultimate preservation of that connection.

With Sykes playing on the tropes of the animalistic primitive and Delia playing on those of the pure primitive, the matrimony between Delia and

Sykes embodies a symbolic union between the diverse connotations of the primitive. In the same way that the primitive subject was defined as both a pure being and a violent savage, "[Delia] had brought love to the union and [Sykes] had brought a longing after flesh" (Hurston 41). Furthermore, the protean symbolism of the primitive as simultaneously violent and pure was susceptible to identification under a singular connotation, just as the matrimony of Delia and Sykes is equally vulnerable on account of Sykes' violent overpowering of Delia. As a result, the union between Delia and Sykes reads as a merged category which reflects this uncertain flexibility in the symbol of the primitive; Delia and Sykes characterize their marriage in the same way that the pure and the animalistic connotations coded the symbol of the primitive. As disparate as Delia and Sykes may be, their union is analogous to the modernist era's vision of a dichotomous category of the primitive.

Such a primitivist reading of the text, however, produces an incomplete understanding of these characters. Sykes as a symbol of animalistic and primal urges seems contrary to his character as a whole, particularly considering his insecurity over Delia being the breadwinner in their relationship. Sykes takes pride in his patriarchal position and the power over others that this position allots. When talking to his mistress Bertha, Sykes claims, "Sho' you kin have dat lil' ole house soon's Ah kin git dat 'oman outa dere. Everything b'longs tuh me an' you sho' kin have it. Ah sho' 'bominates uh skinny 'oman […]. You kin git *anything* you wants. Dis is *mah* town an' you sho' kin have it" (42). These lines makes clear that Sykes prides himself in the independence and power he has over others because of his financial status. Yet this is ironic given that Sykes relies on Delia's work as a washwoman to maintain his lifestyle. Sykes believes that he owns the house because he dominates Delia, but the only means of domination that Sykes has is purely physical. When he invokes this power over Delia by bringing home a rattlesnake, Syke reveals his deep resentment towards Delia: "Doan ast me tuh do nothin' fuh yuh. Goin' roun' trying' tuh be so damn asterperious" (43). While Sykes values the money and property gained as a result of Delia's labour, he considers the labour necessary to obtain these material goods to be "asterperious." If Sykes truly embodied the animalistic and uncivilized notions of the primitive, then he would not feel insecure about failing to satisfy traditional patriarchal roles, as his physical desires would be satisfied regardless. Moreover, in trying to get Delia to leave the

house on her own discretion with the introduction of the rattlesnake rather than resorting to violent means, Sykes exhibits very complex desires. His capacity for self-control and forethought, although limited, are antithetical to the animalistic notions of the primitive. Sykes' feelings of emasculation, as manifested by his resentment of Delia, reveal that he is highly conscious of his failure to meet patriarchal expectations. Sykes' desire to maintain his womanizer lifestyle while also despising Delia for her work in making said lifestyle possible shows that he is a far more complicated character than a simple figure of the primitive.

An analogous reading of Delia as a symbol of the pure primitive fails for the very same reason. Though devoted to her faith, she is the breadwinner of the couple, ceaselessly working to make her wage. Delia is known throughout her community for her continued work as a washwoman: "Hot or col', rain or shine, jes ez reg'lar ez de weeks roll roun' Delia carries 'em [laundry] an' fetches 'em on Sat'day" (41). Had Delia been entirely pure, she would be completely devoted to her faith, blind to other possibilities of salvation. Instead, Delia engages with the physical world, both by her work as a washwoman (41) and by her claim to material ownership of the house (43). The role of the physical in Delia's world cannot be understated. As Delia exclaims, "Sykes [...] Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin' for fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!" (40). Delia's physical labour is the foundation of her marriage to Sykes, but it is also a source of bitterness toward her husband and spurs retributive thinking (43). Hurston writes, "Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to the place where she would hope *anything* that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions" (44), indicating that she shares the same impious feelings that any person, primitive or otherwise, would have after fifteen years of domestic violence. Evidently, Delia, like Sykes, is a far more nuanced and complicated character than a reading through primitivist tropes would suggest.

Perhaps these characterizations of Delia and Sykes are an attempt by Hurston to portray a more realistic Black American experience. As previously mentioned, the use of a primitivist mode during the modernist era gave artists the freedom to capture non-traditional subjects. One can read Hurston's work in a similar subversive manner, where these primitivist

tropes are necessary in order to capture a marginalized subjectivity in a predominately White literary landscape. To portray African Americans as perfect beings would partake in a primitivist mode in effect, as it romanticizes those deemed primitive for their purity. Instead, by showing a more realistic depiction of an unhappy marriage, "Sweat" becomes a less idealized depiction of African American life, with its use of primitivist tropes a necessary vehicle for such representation. Still, such a project of realistic representation may for some readers be undermined by the mere use of those tropes, which still ask the reader to engage in the work through a primitivist lens, perpetuating the connotations attached to the category of the primitive.

The debate surrounding whether "Sweat" is a primitivist text is further complicated by Hurston's use of AAVE. "Sweat" was originally published during a period when dialect and alternative English, like AAVE, were both condemned and desired. Detractors argued that any deviation from Standard English presented a degeneration of the language from its beauty (North 22). AAVE was seen as especially deviant, capable of corrupting those exposed to stray further from Standard English (30). What constituted Standard English was left completely indeterminate, as George Sampson, author of *English for the English: A Chapter in National Education*, wrote in 1921 with complete sincerity: "There is no need to define Standard English speech. We know standard English when we hear it [...] without the aid of definition. Or, to put it another way, we know what is *not* standard English, and that is a sufficiently practical guide" (qtd in North 24; Crowley 207). Just as "modern" was considered a default defined in relation to the primitive, many had no problems defining Standard English according to what it was not.

In the context of "Sweat," AAVE is used by the characters in their dialogue, while the narration is in Standard English. This difference in language between the narration and dialogue produces a dichotomy whereby Standard English is used to maintain objectivity in the third person omniscient narrator's authoritative descriptions, while more subjective and stylistic elements of dialogue are presented through AAVE. The narrator maintains power and objectivity through the use of Standard English. In fact, the relationship between objectivity, Standard English, and narration is so entrenched that when a character makes an observation, the narrator

interjects to confirm its veracity in the story. For instance, when Delia says, "Don't think Ah'm gointuh be run 'way fum mah house neither [...] Mah cup is done run ovah," the narrator reaffirms that Delia "said this line with no signs of fear" (43), despite the sentiments being clear in her speech. The need for the narrator to reaffirm the internal reality of the character perpetuates the authoritative position of the narrator and Standard English in the mind of the reader. Rather than normalizing African American speech patterns, the characters' use of AAVE and the narrator's use of Standard English highlights the different authoritative positions between its users. This difference between objective-subjective descriptions of the world reinforces the pre-existing associations of Standard English as the sole, legitimate dialect to convey objectivity and, in turn, reinforces primitivist attitudes by othering African American experiences and dialect.

But this dichotomy between objectivity-narration-Standard English and subjectivity-dialogue-AAVE falls apart when considering the changes to the formal structure of the text. The free indirect discourse (FID) interspersed throughout the text becomes increasingly prominent as the story progresses, corresponding with heightened focalization from the perspective of Delia. By the time Delia watches Sykes succumb to snake venom, we see that "she saw him on his hands and knees as soon as *she* reached the door. He crept an inch or two toward her—all that he was able" (45, emphasis added). As the narration and Delia's perspective merge with the use of FID, the objective-subjective divide between the narrator and characters also begins to merge, creating an unclear boundary of reality between the two perspectives. FID produces an effect wherein Delia's experience is made more objective, such that it becomes increasingly difficult to see outside of her perspective in the story. Consequently, the authority of Standard English is undercut. In particular, this passage muddles the objective narration of the text to the point that a reader may begin to doubt the text, as it should be Sykes who is reaching for the door, not Delia. While this confusion of pronouns may be a typographic error, it could also be a loss of spatiality upon entering completely into Delia's subjectivity. Regardless of whether an error is present, the dichotomy between AAVE and Standard English describing African American experiences as "other" to White "objective" experiences breaks down throughout the story. The formal changes, especially through the use of FID, blur perspectives and claims to objectivity in Standard English.

Hurston's use of AAVE to undercut Standard English could be interpreted as a reaction against the primitivist attitudes of the time, but the historical context of its publication makes even this reading difficult. At the time of publication, people advocating in favour of non-Standard English saw AAVE use as an escape from the conventions of Standard English (North 32–3; Pavloska 76). Notably, AAVE was appropriated by many White authors to satisfy a market desire for exoticized texts (North 32–3). This gave rise to a whole genre of texts called dialect literature, in which White authors produced writings that mimicked AAVE (30–1). By writing parts of "Sweat" in AAVE, one may propose that Hurston reclaims AAVE from its associations with White American literature, rewriting a language tainted by racial stereotypes. The story acts as a model for readers to recognize that AAVE has value beyond its novelty in the exploitative writings of dialect literature, as it captures experiences beyond those ascribed in traditional modes and conventions. Not only is AAVE able to work against the negative associations of the primitive, but it is also able to counteract the exoticized and exploitative associations of AAVE. The problem, however, is that in producing such a text, Hurston continues to generate the demand for an exotic primitive text that gave rise to the genre of dialect literature. Just as Hurston's forerunner in the use of AAVE, Paul Laurence Dunbar, complained that readers would solely pay attention to his use of AAVE in his poetry (North 32), "Sweat" would have similarly been received by White readers as an exoticized text no different than a work written by a White author. With readers' expectations of AAVE as a gimmick, it is doubtful whether Hurston could ever fully subvert the categorization of African Americans as a primitive and exotic group in the minds of a White readership.

Significantly, the very failure to effectively categorize "Sweat" as either primitivist or anti-primitivist produces a secondary effect of degrading the foundational assumptions of primitivism itself. Using primitivist tropes and AAVE, "Sweat" invites a primitivist reading, drawing readers to its otherness and exotic qualities. While this could be seen as perpetuating the position of White experiences and Standard English as the norm, narratological inconsistencies in the text undercut this interpretation. However, due to the use of these primitivist tropes which link the text to racist connotations, it is also hard to read "Sweat" as an anti-primitivist text, as it reproduces primitivist conventions. All of this leaves the readers with an

incomplete understanding of the text, as they oscillate between these two mutually incompatible interpretations. Yet, through this oscillation, readers also become cognizant of the limitations of a primitivist analysis. The very impossibility of reading this text in a singular light reveals the incompleteness of the very categories of primitivism themselves. "Sweat" is thus a work that defies the totalizing nature of primitivism by inviting repeated interpretation from its ambivalence, pushing readers to incomplete readings, and by doing so, prompting them to question and abandon the foundational categories of primitivism. For if primitivism fails to analyze a text rife with primitivist tropes, what can it help to interpret with accuracy?

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DIVINE RESIDUE: CONVEYING THE IMMORTAL IN ANNE CARSON'S THEORY AND POETRY

Maria Isabel Martinez

This paper began with a curiosity about the ways Carson gestures to the divine, and led to finding a worthwhile line of inquiry in the concept of the "immortal." Originally, this paper was written for the course ENG486: Time and Mourning in Anne Carson's Poetry, taught by Professor Elizabeth Harvey. The seminar engaged with Carson's texts exclusively, and her writings alone proved sufficient material for unpacking the abundance of mysteries in Carson's poetry. Drawing on Carson's theoretical work in *Economy of the Unlost, Eros the Bittersweet*, and "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," this paper takes up the idea that the poet's task is to teach a version of life that many of us are excluded from knowing, but that immortal gods already know. Humans do not speak the "language of the gods" since humans and gods, by their essential nature, are incommensurable. However, Carson's texts present humans who may have accessed this language and made attempts at translating it for others. More specifically, this essay borrows from Carson's examination of Simonides of Keos and his epitaphs. The epitaph is a form which allows the deceased individual to live on in the imagination of the reader. The latter section of this paper examines how Carson herself is a poet with this ability. The essay examines "Stops," Carson's elegiac poems about her mother published in *Decreation*, in order to illustrate not only that death is not a final ending, but that poets possess a unique ability for reanimation.

Anne Carson's poetry straddles worlds. On one side is a world we know—the mortal world—while the other is the unseen and ever-present realm which constitutes the immortal world. We can only gesture to the immortal world; we never quite inhabit it. In this essay, the word "immortal" refers to a place beyond the realm of the living mortal. "Immortal" captures the unknown realm of "beyond life." There can be no certainty when depicting what we, as mortals, do not experience, yet Carson's various theoretical and poetic writings take up the attempt to depict the unseen realm from her mortal standpoint. This paper will trace that endeavour by beginning with Carson's theoretical writing on the "language of the gods" in *Eros the Bittersweet* in order to better situate the concept of "immortality." She writes about the linguistic difference in the way humans and gods speak of the Greek god Eros, which encapsulates a disparity in knowledge between a mortal being and an immortal being. In "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," which appears in the *Float* collection, Carson narrates the story of Joan of Arc. According to the historical record of Joan of Arc's trial, she attributed the voices that guided her to God; I understand Joan of Arc to be an example of a mortal who was able to access the "language of the gods" normally inaccessible to humans. Using Carson's theory in *Economy of the Unlost*, this paper will explore the concept of the poet as someone who reaches this "other side" of the immortal, and is able to bring back some residue of divine knowledge. In *Economy*, Carson writes about how the ancient Greek poet Simonides of Keos is a poet with such ability; his epitaphs are an exercise in going into the void of death in order to carry back some knowledge to the mortal side. Like Simonides, Carson is also such a poet: her elegiac poems about her mother in the "Stops" collection, which appear in *Decreation,* go into the negative of her mother's absence, reanimate her mother in the reader's imagination, and leave us with a different understanding of mortality than we had before. I will examine the poem "No Port Now" and situate it within the larger context of the "Stops" collection in order to elucidate how Carson achieves this act of reanimation through the absence of death. By coupling Carson's own theoretical texts with her poems, I encounter an illuminating insight: a poet and their poems can portray and consequently teach us something new about human life.

To begin, I will turn to Carson's theory on the god Eros in *Eros the Bittersweet* to better comprehend how Carson understands what lies on the immortal side. Carson traces the mechanism of "wings" found in traditional

Greek poetry in relation to falling in love, and leads us to Sokrates' myth of wings in Plato's *Phaedrus*. According to Sokrates, humans trade "the forms of ordinary life" (160) for love. In the chapter "What a Difference a Wing Makes," Carson examines this myth carefully and identifies how two lines reveal that Eros has two names, one for mortals and one for immortals: Eros and Pteros, respectively (161). Carson writes, "It is an old idea in Greek that the gods have their own language" (161). These two names for Eros point to the "difference between the language spoken by gods and that of men" (160). Humans and gods possess disparate knowledge about Eros and desire itself. The difference in the added "pt-" of "Pteros," is that the gods reason that Eros/desire "entails a 'wing-growing necessity'" in the desirer, whereas the human "Eros" simply names the god and his winged form (161). Carson acknowledges the confusing nature of this difference in naming and understanding what, exactly, the gods mean: "The translation is inept because the translator does not know what it means" (163). These two names for the god Eros amplify a critical difference in human and divine expression. The human understanding seems constrained by our necessarily finite view of the world. This view informs human language.

This difference in language between mortals and immortals begins with their incommensurability. Languages are born out of a culture's view of the world and, continuing with Carson's work on Greek gods and poets, "Gods evidently see reality differently" (*Eros* 162). The immortal god possesses a better vision of reality, and as Carson writes, "it is not surprising if their better version of the truth resists reduction to human measures" (*Eros* 162). Carson's use of the word "reduction" suggests that the gods, possessing immortality, exist above humans in the order of things. Their truth lives above ours. Why is this so? Immortality lends itself to a special view of life—it has the capacity to see both sides. Immortality is a divine experience that produces divine knowledge. This knowledge expresses itself in the language of gods, and naturally, this language would not translate perfectly into mortal language. Still, Carson and the individuals she writes about take up the attempt.

Before embarking on the project of translation, the translator must have access to the foreign language; which human possesses the ability to access the language of the gods? Joan of Arc is someone who was given access. In "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," Carson recounts the details of Joan

of Arc's trial. "Voice" was the term Joan ascribed to the way God guided her ("Variations"). The voices came to Joan of Arc when she was twelve years old. Carson writes: "All Joan's guidance, military and moral, came from a source she called 'voices.' All the blame of her trial was gathered up in this question, the nature of the voices" ("Variations"). The judges wanted to know the story of these voices, and no matter which way Joan of Arc tried to translate the nature of them, the judges were not satisfied.

The voices Joan of Arc heard transmitted divine knowledge that resisted translation into human language, and certainly into the language of the courts. Carson writes:

> During the trial Joan's judges returned again and again to this crux: they insisted on knowing the story of the voices. They wanted her to name, embody and describe them in ways they could understand, with recognizable religious imagery and emotions, in a conventional narrative that would be susceptible to conventional disproof. ("Variations")

The story of the voices was not a match for the legal proceedings, and Joan of Arc was condemned and burned at the stake. Her ability to hear God and her resistance to reducing this knowledge to human measures was punished. The stories of the voices "[did] not touch [the judges'] process" ("Variations"). An outcome of death did not seem to bother Joan; she and her voices were operating on a different plane of knowledge than the courts. What did Joan know about death that her judges failed to consider?

Unlike Joan of Arc, the epitaphic poet willingly participates in translating divine knowledge. The poet peers into the void of the absent individual as though they are present, and carries some residue of knowledge back to the existing moment through writing. The epitaph, a genre of poetry which memorializes the dead, is concerned with seeing what is absent (*Economy* 73); in death, both the individual and where they go are unseen. In order to write an epitaph, the poet goes into this absence so that he may see. Examining epitaphs written by Simonides, Carson identifies that he writes about what is *not* there. Simonides speaks in negatives. The negative, according to Carson, is a "linguistic resource whose power resides with the user of words"; to write

in negatives "requires the collusion of the present and the absent on the screen of the imagination" (*Economy* 102). The imagining mind becomes a critical tool for seeing both sides: in order to say or read a negative statement, one must hold both the positive image and the negative image. In this way, Carson writes, "[a negative] posits a fuller picture of reality than does a positive statement" (*Economy* 102). The epitaph is a genre of poetry with the ability to "negate the negating action of death" (*Economy* 106). In this sense, the epitaph is a double negative formulation.

I do not mean to argue that life and death happen in an epitaph; the individual is not "saved" or "brought back," but the epitaph manages to deny the absence brought about by death. The poet "perceives presence as absence and finds a way to turn the relation inside out" (*Economy* 106). The poet who writes epitaphs calls forth the absent individual into the present moment and triggers an act of reanimation in the mind of the reader. This reanimation reminds us that, with the help of memory, the mortal lives on in a kind of afterlife. Something of the absent person slips through a crack between realms. The poet makes this crack. According to Carson, Simonides knew something about reality that others did not, and he left readers with this knowledge through his poetry. Carson continues and suggests that "a person who speaks negatively can be said to command and display a more complete view of things than one who makes positive assertions" (*Economy* 102). Simonides is a person with this complete view. In fact, Carson declares that, "According to a venerable Greek tradition, the poet is σοφός ('wise') and his task is to see and to teach a vision of life from which the particularity of our ordinary experience ordinarily excludes us" (*Economy* 102). This task involves the fulfillment of two smaller tasks: that of seeing and that of teaching. In the chapter "Epitaphs" from *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson writes, "A poet's task is to carry the transaction forward, from those who can no longer speak to those who may yet read (and must yet die)" (75). The teaching, or carrying forward, is translation.

Anne Carson's own poetry performs this double negative, specifically when examining how the work negates the negative of her mother's death in *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera. Decreation* begins with a collection of poems titled "Stops" where the reader follows Carson and her mother's journey before her mother's passing. In "Stops," we read along as Carson goes back and forth between her mother's alive presence and absence through death. Her

mother dies and comes back (with the help of the reader's mind) in repetitive motions as we flip the pages. In each poem, the reader participates in the poet's double negative by holding the presence of absence "in the screen of the imagination" (*Economy* 102). In the first poem of the series, titled "Sleepchains," Carson's mother is still alive. Carson opens with a question: "Who can sleep when she— / hundreds of miles away" (*Decreation* 3). Suddenly we know that life still flows through this page, and a pre-emptive mourning haunts Carson to the point of causing her to lack sleep. The interrogative pronoun "who" gathers up all of humanity, for in fact, nobody could sleep with the death of their mother hanging over their head.

The title of the series "Stops," points its reader to notions of transit and the stops one makes while journeying towards a destination. Carson closes "Sleepchains" by writing: "Here we go mother on the shipless ocean [...] here we go" (*Decreation* 3). The statement is a negative one where in order to imagine a "shipless ocean," the reader must first imagine an ocean with ships, then an ocean lacking ships. The image of lack signals the absence of her mother's body, and the image of an ocean gestures to a vast unknown—that place where the dead go to die. Returning to journeys: Carson's mother is off to the "other side" of not-being, but the pronoun "we" indicates Carson is also travelling. Where is Carson off to?

The voyage goes on, and stops for a moment at the poem "No Port Now," a poem whose title also gestures to the notion of travel. The poem tells an enigmatic account of the selling of a house and, upon close examination, reveals Carson's endeavour to express her continuing relationship to her deceased mother. The poem reads as follows:

In the ancient struggle of breath against death, one more sleep given.
We took an offer on the house.
In the sum of the parts
where are the parts?
Silently (there) leaves and windows wait.
Our empty clothesline cuts the sloping night.
And making their lament for a lost apparel of celestial light
angels and detritus call out as they flow past our still latched gate. (*Decreation* 7)

The port, being a place ships use for loading or unloading, evokes the "shipless ocean" in "Sleepchains"; the sudden absence of a port signals a sudden death through the absence of a body. However, the first line of the poem reads: "In the ancient struggle of breath against death, one more sleep given." The individual who is to-be-dead has been given one more night of aliveness. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson writes about breath as consciousness; breath is spirit contained in the lungs (48). The mother who struggles with breath, with her life, is still living as this poem begins. Nevertheless, the negative looms over this single night of sleep, evidenced by the mise en page. This negative tells of an incoming disappearance and indicates Carson's grief embedded in every line. Moreover, the shape of the poem lends itself to a figure of breath, where the first line breathes out, and the second, third, and fourth lines breathe in. The structure of the poem continues in this motion of outward breath as the lines expand following the fourth line. This fourth line is significant: it is a short, constricted breath, and it calls attention to the absence. This line asks about what is missing and what lacks.

"No Port Now" is a negative statement which calls attention to the absence of the body by invoking the absence of Carson's childhood home. The statement asks the reader to hold both the negative and the positive in the "screen of [our] imagination" (*Economy 102*), by first picturing a port, then imagining it gone. The reader must also perform imagination regarding her unalive mother. Carson does not use the pronouns "she" or "her" at any point in this poem, but she does use "we" and the possessive adjective "our." Returning to "Sleepchains," where the "we" stood for Carson and her mother, the "we" and "our" in "No Port Now" suggests they are both present in this poem, and the domestic space of this house is inextricable from this relationship. The invocation of the childhood home calls forth a fragility, both of youth and of losing one's mother. Carson no longer has a material form on which to map this singular and formative relationship. The language she employs in "No Port Now" gives insight into how she conceives of this loss.

Although her mother is not explicitly mentioned in "No Port Now," this poem is an elegy. There is loss everywhere: the loss of a home; the "empty clothesline"; and "lost apparel." These negative images are tethered to the domestic space, a gendered space tied up with cultural conceptions of femininity, motherhood, and comfort of familial relations. We can infer that it is not just

the house that has been made a negative, but the mother's physical form. In the poem "Lines," which appears two poems before "No Port Now," Carson refers to her mother as the "love / of [her] life" (*Decreation* 5). What might it feel like for Carson to lose the love of her life? Examining "No Port Now" as elegiac, we turn to the elegiac couplet cradled within the final quatrain of the poem. Simonides' epitaphic poems are also constructed as elegiac couplets (*Economy* 89). On the elegiac couplet, Carson writes that it "resembles a pendulum: it moves out, moves back, by its own momentum, wasting nothing. Economy of breath in motion" (*Economy* 89). The couplet in lines six and seven of "No Port Now" rhymes "sloping night" with "celestial light," and moves in this pendulum motion. One could also read the shape of the poem, specifically lines one to five, as moving like "breath in motion" (*Economy* 89), as each line falls progressively shorter. The "night" in line six is an absence, it is a negative image; the "light" in line seven is presence. The present participle of "to slope" in "sloping night" gestures towards nightfall when the sun is setting, and embedded in this line is the idea that something else is also on its way out. Carson's mother has been given "one more sleep," but death is coming. In the second line of the couplet, "celestial light" is lamentation over the "lost apparel." The absence of night has now, in this second line, transformed itself into a presence. The pendulum swings. The line moves out towards the celestial, which conjures ideas of the divine and might be suggesting the dead do indeed cross over into a kind of immortality. On even closer examination, the pendulum motion occurs in this single line of verse between "lost apparel" and "celestial light," where the negative reappears in new form. The same reappearance takes place in an epitaph.

The final line of this poem artfully manages to gesture to this new form both explicitly and implicitly. The line reads, "angels and detritus call out as they flow past our still latched gate" (*Decreation* 7). Carson enacts the pendulum motion in the span of two sequential nouns and shortens the number of lines necessary to perform the elegy. "[A]ngels and detritus" follow the "celestial light" (*Decreation* 7), and these two nouns contain the absent presence of the decomposing matter of a body with the ever-present life of a memory. To Carson, however, this is no ordinary memory—it is an angel. An angel is an intermediary between the human and the divine, a hinge between realms. Hinges and latches both appear in this line and both nouns do the work of fastening. If the gate is "still latched" (*Decreation* 7) then the disparate realms

are still fastened, and Carson's mother may not be a complete lack. The word "still" signals the stillness of a dead body, but the addition of the gate that remains "latched" introduces an active verb, indicating a lingering presence.

Returning to the "language of the gods" and incommensurability, I must reiterate that humans are limited by mortality, no matter the reanimating power of a poem. Although the double negative and the epitaph do conjure a presence out of an absence, they do not bring Carson's mother back to life in "Stops." Carson does not save her mother, neither from dying, nor from having died. Indeed, Carson cautions her reader against these thoughts of saving the dead:

> The ancient epitaphic order, brought to perfection by Simonides, sets up a mimesis of exchange whose consolations are not only rhythmic and conceptual but something more. Salvation occurs, through the act of attention that forms stone into memory, leaving a residue of greater life. I am speaking subjectively. There is no evidence of salvation except a gold trace in the mind. But this trace convinces me that the beautiful economic motions of Simonides' epitaphic verse capture something essential to human language, to the give and take of being, to what saves us. (*Economy* 95)

Carson brings us to the idea of human language and the "give and take" of our way of being. The poet moves back and forth between the crack in the realms to bring back some residue, still the poet does not save the dead; she only looks into the void left by death to transmit a version of the reality of mortal existence.

Carson's writing enacts this transmission of a divine knowledge where death is not a complete stop. The port in "No Port Now" has sold, and Carson's mother has died, but our reading of this work and my writing of this essay have forced us into conjuring them back to the present moment. A poem about someone who has died does not gift that individual immortality. Simonides and Carson do not save the dead, and even Joan of Arc with God's voices could not save herself. The human dies and there is grief in that knowledge. Carson shows us the depth and range of mourning in her poems.

Still, the double negative and its negating power offers the mortal *something*. "Something" is a positive statement, so I will rephrase: writing does not save the mortal, but it leaves us with some residue of divine knowledge, and this residue is "not nothing" (*Economy* 99).

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